

## KURDS

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Kurdistan — “land of the Kurds” — a fertile area rich in oil, chrome, copper, iron and lignite, occupies an expanse of land only slightly smaller than the state of Texas, but it cannot be found on standard maps today. For thousands of years, Kurds have inhabited the Zagros and Taurus mountains of eastern Anatolia, which span parts of present day Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Soviet Armenia. Kurdish attempts to assert political autonomy have been opposed — often violently — by the governments of surrounding countries.

Continuing clashes between the Kurds and the national powers have devastated and displaced their population. Deported and subjected to chemical warfare in Iraq, the Kurds have been especially hard hit in the 1980s. The assault on this ethnic group takes on cultural aspects in Syria and in Iran, where traditional clothing and holidays, such as the Newroz (New Year's Day), have been declared illegal.

In the hands of artists such as Shivan Perwer, Feqiye Teyra and Temo Ezzadin, the tambour — a traditional instrument with three sets of doubled strings — makes music that is perceived as a threat by the countries they fled. Said Gabari, a musician who resided in Syria, is said to have been blinded ten years ago as a result of his musical themes. Other renown Kurdish singers living in exile include Naser Razzazi, who performed for the Kurdish Newroz celebration sponsored by the D.C. chapter of the Kurdish National Congress, and Sherin, who employs nationalistic themes and exemplifies the prominent role

women have had throughout Kurdish history. The poetic message of the songs, sometimes strong, sometimes subtle, is dangerous rhetoric or high art according to the listener's perspective.

### CITATIONS AND FURTHER READINGS

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- Laber, Jeri & Lois Whiteman. 1988. *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Kurds of Turkey: A Helsinki Watch Report, March 1988*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
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- Woodson, LeRoy, Jr. 1975. We Who Face Death. *National Geographic*. 147(3):364-387.



*Wearing national dress, Kurds celebrate Newroz (New Year's) on March 24, 1990. These material, ceremonial and cultural expressions of ethnic identity are forbidden by governments seeking to assimilate or eliminate the Kurds. (Photo courtesy Kurdish National Congress)*

### SUGGESTED LISTENING

- Chants et Musiques du Kurdistan: Groupe Koma Zozan*. Arion ARN 33719.
- Kurdish Folk Music from Western Iran*. Recorded by Dieter and Nerthus Christensen. Ethnic Folkways Library FE 4301.
- Kurdish Folk Songs and Dances*. Recorded by Ralph S. Solecki. Ethnic Folkways Library FE 4469.
- Temo, Barde du Kurdistan: La tradition et l'exil*. Ocora. Radio France 588 573, MU 218.
- Feqiye Teyra. *Kurdistan 1988*. Gema GVL 31126.