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# SINGING BELONGING: A KOREAN DIASPORA WOMEN'S CHOIR AS A CULTURAL PRACTICE AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING IN AUSTRIA

## ABSTRACT

*As a site of diasporic cultural practice and community care, the article examines the Vienna Korean Women's Choir (VKWC) founded in 2007 by first-generation Korean migrant women in Austria. Drawing on participant observation (2017–2024) and interviews conducted in 2024–2025, this qualitative study explores how sustained choir participation enables migrant women to negotiate ageing, gendered care responsibilities, and belonging.*

*The choir is found to function as a gendered third space where informal care ethics are enacted through dense interpersonal relationships. Combining Korean art songs with Western classical works, the VKWC sustains cultural memory while fostering meaningful ageing. Performances in nursing homes and cultural venues constitute everyday cultural diplomacy, permitting members to reposition themselves from former migrant labourers to active cultural agents.*

**KEYWORDS:** Korean diaspora in Austria, women's choir, care ethics, meaningful ageing

## Prepevanje pripadnosti: zbor korejskih žensk iz diaspore kot kulturna praksa in gradnja skupnosti v Avstriji

## IZVLEČEK

*Članek obravnava Dunajski korejski ženski zbor (Vienna Korean Women's Choir, VKWC), ki so ga leta 2007 ustanovile korejske migrantke prve generacije v Avstriji*

*kot prostor diasporične kulturne prakse in skupnostne skrbi. Na podlagi opazovanja z udeležbo (2017–2024) in intervjujev, izvedenih v letih 2024–2025, kvalitativna raziskava analizira, kako dolgotrajno sodelovanje v zboru migrantkam omogoča soočanje s staranjem, spolno zaznamovanimi skrbstvenimi odgovornostmi in vprašanji pripadnosti.*

*Ugotovitve kažejo, da zbor deluje kot spolno zaznamovan tretji prostor, v katerem se etika neformalne skrbi udejanja skozi gosto mrežo medosebnih odnosov. S povezovanjem korejskih umetnih pesmi in zahodnih klasičnih del VKWC ohranja kulturni spomin in spodbuja smiselno staranje. Nastopi v domovih za starejše in kulturnih prizoriščih predstavljajo obliko vsakdanje kulturne diplomacije, prek katere se članice iz nekdanjih migrantskih delavk preoblikujejo v aktivne kulturne akterke.*

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** korejska diaspora v Avstriji, ženski zbor, etika skrbi, smiselno staranje

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Korean migration to Austria has historically been characterised by its transient nature. It has primarily consisted of students who came for artistic or academic purposes and typically returned to South Korea after completing their degrees. However, a significant demographic turning point occurred in the early 1970s through organised labour migration. The arrival of 50 Korean nurses on 27 August 1972, followed by a further 50 on 31 May 1973, marked the start of a Korean diaspora settling in Vienna (Yun 2017; Yun 2025). These women, many of whom married and established permanent roots, transformed the community from a temporary student population into a stable ethnic minority. In the ensuing decades, the community continued to grow and diversify. Aside from the nurse cohort, later waves of migration brought students, company employees, artists, and spouses of Austrian citizens to Vienna, gradually expanding the community's occupational and generational range (Yun 2025: 154). A considerable institutional milestone came in 2012 when the Korea Kulturhaus was established, which provided the diaspora with a permanent communal home and a focal point for its developing network of organisations. As documented in Yun (2025: 156), the Korean community in Austria has expanded to encompass approximately 20 known organisations (professional associations, cultural clubs, educational

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institutions, social groups). According to the Overseas Koreans Agency, today the community numbers around 3,000 individuals (permanent residents, regular residents, international students, naturalised citizens).

Against this historical backdrop, the Vienna Korean Women's Choir (VKWC) was officially founded in April 2007. The choir was a grassroots movement initiated by the mentioned former nurses – now senior members of the diaspora – who wanted to enhance their quality of life through music and engage in a meaningful social service. As the members navigated the challenges of ageing in a foreign land, the choir became more than a mere musical ensemble and acted as a valued social anchor providing what the members describe as vitality and healing.

Despite the significance of such grassroots organisations, the Korean diaspora in Austria remains an under-researched field in migration studies. Existing scholarship has largely focused on diplomatic relations (e.g., Verein der Koreaner in Österreich 2012), family and migration (e.g., Hartmann 2009) and religious institutions (e.g., Pokorny and Sung 2018), yet little attention has been paid to the intersection of gender, ageing and cultural practice in this particular community (e.g., Kim 2022; Yun 2025). An attempt is made in this article to fill the described gap by providing in-depth ethnographic analysis of the VKWC. The central inquiry is guided by three main research questions. First, how does the collective act of singing function as a form of embodied cultural memory that sustains a sense of Korean identity across borders? Second, in which ways does the choir serve as an informal, gendered support network that addresses the needs of senior migrant women outside of formal institutional frameworks? Finally, how do the choir's public outreach activities constitute a form of everyday cultural diplomacy from below?

It is argued in this article that the VKWC functions not only as a cultural ensemble, but as a gendered, grassroots infrastructure of care – that is, a set of informal yet reliable practices via which members support each other in everyday life. Through this infrastructure, ageing migrant women actively negotiate belonging, memory, and social recognition. The methodological framework is rooted in a multi-method ethnographic approach conducted over several years. Data were collected through participant observation at public performances between 2017 and 2024, with interviews and documentary analysis performed between November 2024 and July 2025, allowing for a longitudinal perspective on the choir's evolution. The study draws on narrative and semi-structured interviews with four choir members and one conductor, including those who were present upon the choir's inception. Given the small and ageing nature of the founding cohort, these interviewees represent a significant proportion of the choir's core

members. These qualitative data are supplemented by an extensive analysis of documentary materials, including meeting minutes, performance reports, and commemorative booklets.

The aims of the study is to contribute to ongoing debates in Diaspora, Gender and Cultural Studies by highlighting ageing, care, and informal cultural labour among migrant communities. By moving beyond macro-level sociological analyses of migration, the study shows the importance of small-scale, everyday cultural practices in sustaining diasporic life. Dominant narratives that often frame ageing migrants via the lens of dependency or vulnerability are thereby challenged. Instead, the VKWC reveals how senior women utilise their professional backgrounds in care to establish self-directed networks of mutual support and meaningful ageing. Moreover, the concept of cultural diplomacy from below developed in this paper offers a novel perspective on how minoritised communities negotiate visibility and recognition within a host society through grassroots artistic engagement.

## **2 Theoretical Framework: Diaspora, Belonging, and Cultural Practice**

In this section, the theoretical framework for interpreting the ethnographic data of the Vienna Korean Women's Choir (VKWC) is established. To understand the choir's significance, one must go beyond a view of music as mere aesthetic entertainment and instead position it at the intersection of transnationalism, embodied memory, and gendered social care.

### **2.1 Diaspora, Transnational Cultural Practice, and Music**

The concept of diaspora is foundational to the present study. Traditionally, diaspora studies often concentrated on the trauma of displacement or the longing for a lost homeland – a tendency scholars such as Clifford (1994) have critiqued. In this article, a contemporary perspective is adopted, emphasising transnational cultural practice whereby maintaining heritage is an active, ongoing process sustained with everyday engagement. Stuart Hall's (1990: 222) influential framework of cultural identity posits that diasporic identities are not fixed essences but positions which are continually produced via representation and cultural practice. Hall (1990: 223–225) distinguishes two modes of cultural identity: one based in a shared history and a collective "one true self", while the other acknowledges the ruptures and discontinuities inherent in the diasporic experience. For the Korean women of the VKWC, both dimensions are at play: their shared history as migrant nurses provides a stable cultural foundation, while

their decades-long residence in Austria has inevitably transformed their sense of Korean identity. Complementing this, Avtar Brah's (1996) concept of "homing desire" offers a crucial distinction between the desire for a mythical homeland and the actual process of making home in the place of one's settlement. The VKWC embodies this distinction: the longing expressed through Korean art songs is not a literal desire to return, but a culturally constitutive practice that anchors identity in the present. In this article, the VKWC is approached as a diasporic formation in which belonging is enacted through repeated cultural practices rather than articulated via explicit narratives of homeland or return. The described perspective aligns with Vertovec's (2009) understanding of transnationalism as a set of sustained, cross-border social relations and practices that shape the everyday lives of migrants. For the Korean women in Vienna, the homeland is not just a geographical memory, but a cultural space actively recreated through collective action.

Drawing on social theories of music, in this article singing is treated as a social practice which actively constructs community rather than just reflecting it. Christopher Small's concept of musicking (Small 1998) is relevant here, suggesting that the meaning of music lies in the totality of the social relationships established during the musical act – encompassing not only the performers but also the audience, the venue, and the broader social context. In the context of the VKWC, the focus is on the embodiment of memory and identity: how the physical act of singing in the mother tongue allows members to recall and reinforce their cultural belonging. The vibration of the voice and synchronisation of breathing during choral practice create a tangible sense of we-ness, providing a structured environment for regular interaction and mutual reliance. Further, as DeNora (2000) argues, music functions as a technology of the self, a resource that individuals and groups actively use to regulate emotion, construct identity, and organise social life. For the VKWC, the weekly rehearsal is therefore not merely a musical exercise but rather is a social ritual in which members actively construct and reconstruct their diasporic identities. In the case of the VKWC, the choir serves as a sonic archive through which cultural capital is preserved and transmitted across generations of the diaspora. By synthesising Hall's (1990) theory of cultural identity, Brah's (1996) homing desire, and Small's (1998) musicking, this section establishes that the choir's significance is not found in the music itself, but in the ongoing social and cultural work it performs for its members.

## **2.2 Gendered Migration, Care, and Meaningful Ageing**

For this study, a framework that specifically addresses the intersection of gendered migration, care, and ageing is needed. Since the VKWC is composed

almost exclusively of women, many of whom migrated as professional nurses in the 1970s, their experience is fundamentally gendered. Their professional background in the care sector informs their current capacity for communal organisation and mutual support. To understand the choir's significance for its members' later lives, the article draws on feminist gerontology and critical ageing studies. Sarah Lamb's (2017) critique of "successful aging" as largely a Western, neoliberal obsession is particularly relevant here. Lamb states that dominant models of successful ageing tend to valorise individual productivity, independence, and self-management, in turn marginalising those whose ageing does not conform to these norms – including elderly migrants navigating structural exclusions in a foreign country. A deliberate move away from such normative frameworks is made in this article. Accordingly, meaningful ageing is not treated as a normative ideal to be achieved, and instead as an emic process via which members themselves articulate purpose, social value, and well-being in later life. The mentioned emic approach allows for a culturally grounded understanding of how these women define a good old age on their own terms, rooted in their specific histories as Korean migrants and former care professionals. The ethics of care, as developed by Carol Gilligan (1982) and expanded by Joan Tronto (1993), provides the moral dimension of this framework. Gilligan's relational ethics, grounded in webs of interdependence rather than abstract principles, resonates deeply with the VKWC's communal practices. Tronto's political extension of care ethics further reveals how the informal care enacted within the choir constitutes not just a private virtue but a socially and politically significant practice. In the absence of traditional extended family structures in the diaspora, the choir functions as an informal care network that sustains well-being collectively. By engaging in active cultural production, these women challenge dominant narratives that often characterise elderly migrants as passive or dependent, asserting instead their role as active agents of care and culture.

### 2.3 Everyday Cultural Diplomacy from Below

The third theoretical pillar of the present study is the concept of everyday cultural diplomacy from below. To situate this concept, it is first necessary to engage with the broader field of cultural diplomacy and its critiques. Ang, Isar and Mar (2015: 365) identify a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the field: a persistent conflation of cultural diplomacy *stricto sensu* – defined as an essentially interest-driven governmental practice – and cultural relations, which tends to be driven by ideals and is practised mainly by non-state actors. As they argue, the most effective and meaningful forms of intercultural exchange are frequently not those orchestrated by governments in the name of the national interest, but those that arise organically from people-to-people contact, mutual learning, and shared

vulnerability (Ang et al. 2015: 377). It is precisely this distinction that underpins the analytical framework of this study. The VKWC operates entirely outside the apparatus of state-led cultural diplomacy. It receives no governmental mandate and serves no explicit national agenda. Yet its activities – performing Korean art songs for Austrian nursing home residents, organising charity concerts in Viennese churches, appearing in prestigious public venues – constitute a sustained and meaningful form of intercultural engagement. Therefore, in this article the term everyday cultural diplomacy from below is proposed to capture this grassroots, relational and non-instrumental character. The term ‘from below’ stresses the agency of minoritised actors – in this case, senior migrant women – who negotiate visibility and recognition in the host society not through official channels but through the persistent engagement of cultural practice. Unlike top-down models premised on the projection of national images, the VKWC’s diplomacy is based on shared human experience: the vulnerability of ageing, the longing for belonging, and the universal language of music. Such an approach resonates with Ang et al.’s (2015: 377) call for a more ethnographic perspective on cultural diplomacy, one that attends to the on-the-ground processes of relationship-building rather than measurable policy impacts. In the sections that follow, the concept of everyday cultural diplomacy from below is applied to the empirical data. Still, its theoretical foundations are established here. Subsequent sections will refer to this framework without repeating its conceptual elaboration.

By synthesising these three theoretical pillars – diasporic cultural practice and musicking, gendered care and meaningful ageing, and everyday cultural diplomacy from below – the article provides a lens via which to analyse the VKWC. It moves from the macro-level of diasporic theory to the micro-level of embodied musical practice, ultimately connecting these to the broader social issues of gendered care and intercultural relations in contemporary Europe.

### **3 Ethnographic Context and Research Design**

This section details the methodological framework and particular ethnographic setting of the study. To capture the multifaceted nature of the Vienna Korean Women’s Choir (VKWC), a qualitative, multi-method ethnographic approach was employed, permitting a deep longitudinal engagement with the community.

#### **3.1 Ethnographic Methods: In-depth Interviews, Participant Observation, and Documentary Materials**

The study employed a qualitative, multi-method ethnographic research design based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis.

At the time of the research (2024), approximately 25 members were actively participating in the choir's rehearsals and performances (Korean.at 2024). Five semi-structured interviews were performed with four women – one who continues to be an active singer and advisor (Interviewee 1), one who actively participates in both the choir and the Korean Literature-Friends-Club (Interviewee 3), two who are no longer active in the choir (Interviewees 4 and 5) – and one former conductor (Interviewee 2), focusing on migration histories, choir participation, and experiences of ageing and care. Interviews were conducted in Korean after informed consent was provided. To ensure the integrity of the data, interviews were audio-recorded where possible. For the analysis, relevant excerpts were translated into English and combined with field notes taken during informal interactions. The data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis, informed by sociological and feminist approaches to care, culture, and everyday belonging. Table 1 provides an overview of the interview participants, interview dates, and locations.

**Table 1: Interviewees, Interview Dates and Interview Locations.**

| Interviewee | Date       | Location                   | Role                                                                 | Field note                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------|------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1)          | 22.11.2024 | in a coffee house          | founding member, active singer, and advisor for the choir            | First 30 minutes: Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 3 together. Interviewee 3 left to pick up her grandchild; Interviewee 1 remained with the author for over 1 hour |
|             | 19.12.2024 | a restaurant near her home |                                                                      | 2 hours, including a meal                                                                                                                                        |
|             | 06.01.2025 | Kulturhaus                 |                                                                      | About 30 minutes, with two choir members responsible for the archives                                                                                            |
| 2)          | 12.02.2025 | Online                     | Former conductor                                                     | About 40 minutes                                                                                                                                                 |
|             | 13.02.2025 | Online                     |                                                                      | by email                                                                                                                                                         |
| 3)          | 19.11.2024 | in a coffee house          | founding member, active in the choir and the Literature-Friends-Club | About 1 hour                                                                                                                                                     |
|             | 22.11.2024 | in a coffee house          |                                                                      | About 30 minutes with Interviewee 1                                                                                                                              |
| 4)          | 10.12.2024 | at her home                | founding member (no longer active)                                   | About 30 minutes                                                                                                                                                 |
| 5)          | 29.07.2025 | at her shop                | founding member (no longer active)                                   | About 30 minutes                                                                                                                                                 |

These interviews provided the study with critical life-history data, especially regarding members' experiences as migrant nurses and their motivations for founding the choir.

Participant observation complemented these narratives and was conducted over 8 years (2017–2024). This involved attending public performances, which allowed for a direct analysis of the group's musicking practices (Small 1998) and internal social dynamics.

The study further draws on analysis of documentary materials totalling 100 pages, including meeting minutes, reports, and concert programmes from the 9th and 10th anniversary performances.

### **3.2 The Vienna Korean Women's Choir: Formation and Membership**

The VKWC was officially established in April 2007 in Vienna, Austria. Its formation was a community-driven initiative by Korean women who had settled in Vienna since the 1970s, many of whom arrived as part of the organised labour migration of nurses. While the choir's membership was initially almost exclusively composed of these former health professionals, it later expanded to include other Korean residents. Today, the choir remains a significant institution within the approximately 3,000-strong Korean community in Austria. According to an event announcement on Korean.at (2024), the online platform serving the Korean community in Austria, around 25 members were actively participating in the choir's performances and regular rehearsals. The membership is characterised by its senior demographic, with many founding members now over the age of 70, which influences the choir's dual focus on musical excellence and mutual support.

### **3.3 Researcher Positionality and Ethical Considerations**

In this section, the researcher's relationship to the field site and the ethical measures taken during the study are addressed. Given the researcher's background and connection to the broader Korean community in Austria, a reflexive approach to researcher positionality is employed. The researcher's position as an insider within the community facilitated trust and provided nuanced access to the choir's social dynamics, yet the author maintained a critical distance through rigorous ethnographic documentation.

Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the anonymity of interviewees, were strictly adhered to. For instance, while detailed narratives of Interviewees 1 and 2 are shared to provide depth, their identities remain anonymised to protect their privacy within the small, interconnected diaspora community. The objective was to faithfully and ethically represent the

experiences and voices of the choir members, assuring their contributions were documented with respect and academic integrity.

To ensure the integrity of the choir's natural practice environment, the author adopted a non-intrusive approach to participant observation. Recognising that the author's presence as a non-member during rehearsals might disrupt the group's focus or internal dynamics, the author deliberately refrained from being in the rehearsal room. Instead, the author remained on the floor below, listening to the collective sound of their voices while reviewing archival documents and meeting minutes. Formal interviews were conducted only with those who had provided prior informed consent, and the author's active observation of the choir as a whole was primarily focused on their public performances.

As part of the ethnographic context, informal conversations and interviews revealed that the primary reasons for members being absent from rehearsals were deeply tied to the realities of ageing and gendered family roles. Members frequently cited medical appointments necessitated by ageing or the responsibility of caring for grandchildren as the main factors preventing their attendance. These observations provide crucial context for understanding the choir not just as a musical group, but as a community of senior migrant women navigating the competing demands of health, family, and personal fulfilment.

## **4 Singing, Repertoire, and Embodied Cultural Memory**

### **4.1 The Genesis of Harmony: From Domestic Spaces to Public Stages**

The Vienna Korean Women's Choir (VKWC) originated in domestic singing practices that gradually transformed personal nostalgia into a shared cultural expression. In the early 2000s, before it was officially founded in 2007, Korean women – many of whom had come to Austria as nurses in the 1970s – gathered in domestic settings to sing together. These gatherings often centred around a karaoke machine, giving a rare respite from the rigorous demands of their professional lives in Austrian hospitals and the challenges of raising families in a foreign culture. Interviewee 5 recalled: "Singing together at Interviewee 1's house – that became the seed of the VKWC". When the choir was officially established in April 2007, it brought these private voices into the public sphere, signalling a new era in which Korean migrant women sought to define their identity through their contributions as cultural practitioners.

### **4.2 Strategic Hybridity in Repertoire: Balancing Two Worlds**

The VKWC's repertoire is a sophisticated manifestation of strategic hybridity, carefully curated to bridge the gap between the members' Korean heritage and

their lived reality in Vienna. The repertoire typically has three pillars: Gagok (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture), a genre that emerged in the 1920s setting Korean poetry to music; *Minyo* (Ibid.), traditional folk songs transmitted orally through the generations; and Western classical compositions, including German Lieder. Korean art songs like *Gohyang-ui Bom* (Spring in My Hometown) or *Arirang* serve as the emotional core of the choir. For women who have spent over 40 years away from their birthplace, these songs are not simply melodies; they are linguistic and emotional vessels that carry the memory of Korea.

Among the choir's repertoire, Spring in My Hometown holds a particularly sacred place. The lyrics evoke the landscape of childhood hometowns, including peach blossoms and colourful villages, and refer to *My hometown*, allowing members to symbolically return to that formative space each time they sing. For the VKWC members, it signifies not only a longing for their physical birthplace in Korea but also for a lost childhood and a time of innocence that cannot be recovered. Through collective performance, the choir transforms these memories into a shared, lived experience. Such emotional resonance was consistently expressed across all the interviews: members described how singing these songs brings them to tears, and that these moments are filled with thoughts of the family they left behind in Korea (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 2 2025; Interviewee 3 2024; Interviewee 4 2024; Interviewee 5 2025). The researcher's own participant observation confirmed this: as someone who has also experienced the emotional weight of diasporic life, the researcher found these moments of collective mourning and remembrance deeply affecting, underscoring the validity of the members' accounts.

The inclusion of Western classical music demonstrates the choir's intentional integration into the host society. Performing Mozart or Schubert in the heart of Vienna allows members to assert belonging within the Austrian cultural landscape, signalling that they are not merely eternal foreigners but residents who have mastered aspects of high culture while maintaining their ethnic roots. This dual repertoire enables the choir to address two audiences at once: offering comfort and nostalgia to the Korean diaspora while earning recognition and respect from the Austrian public. In this way, the VKWC practises a form of everyday cultural diplomacy from below.

#### 4.3 Singing as Embodied Cultural Memory

One of the most profound aspects of the VKWC's practice is the concept of embodied cultural memory. For ageing migrants, memory is not just mental: it is physical. While performing Korean folk songs, the choir members enact a physical retrieval of cultural identity. The rhythmic patterns of *Minyo* are deeply

ingrained in their bodily memory, dating back to childhood in Korea. Vocalising these rhythms in Vienna allows them to manifest their heritage in the present, creating continuity between the young women who first arrived as migrant nurses in 1972 and the senior citizens they have become. This embodied practice fosters resilience and social cohesion. The harmony they strive for in the choir symbolises their navigation of a transnational life – a blending of personal histories, cultural memory, and collective identity into a shared, harmonious sound. Two founding members articulated this dynamic quite vividly: they had assumed that the songs of their childhood had faded from memory, buried beneath decades of demanding hospital work, but singing together in the choir brought those memories flooding back (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 3 2024).

#### **4.4 The Social Soundscape: Resilience and Care through Musicking**

The VKWC serves as a vital social soundscape fostering emotional resilience and mutual care. Drawing on Small's (1998) concept of musicking, weekly rehearsals are as significant for the members as public performances. These sessions provide a structured environment where women exchange news, share health advice, and support one another through the challenges of ageing and bereavement. The choir functions as an informal support network mediated through music. Members describe a sense of healing and vitality derived from singing as a collective. Preparing for concerts offers purpose and accomplishment, countering potential stagnation in later life. As one member actively involved in both the choir and the Korean Literature-Friends-Club observed, the choir serves to confirm that one is not alone – it is a space where members reassure one another that they are still present in each other's lives, much like the literary club does (Interviewee 3 2024).

The VKWC's public performances, including visits to Austrian nursing homes and charity concerts, further contribute to meaningful ageing. By bringing joy to others, members transform their roles from recipients of care to providers of cultural care. During nursing home visits, the researcher consistently witnessed Austrian residents clapping, swaying to the rhythm, and humming along – clear evidence of an emotional connection via music. The choir's long-term impact as a form of cultural diplomacy from below is evident in the continued demand for performances, its ongoing relationships with care institutions, and repeated invitations to community settings.

#### **4.5 Challenges Facing the Diasporic Voice**

As the VKWC approaches its third decade, it faces considerable challenges associated with the ageing of its founding members. Regular rehearsals and public

performances are increasingly physically demanding for those now in their mid-to late seventies. Simultaneously, the gradual decline in new membership among younger generations raises concerns about long-term sustainability. The described generational gap is driven by structural barriers: the Monday afternoon rehearsal schedule conflicts with younger women's work commitments, and the geographical location in Donauinsel demands over 3 hours, including travel time. These concerns were voiced repeatedly throughout the fieldwork in both formal interviews and informal encounters. Interviewee 1, one of the choir's most dedicated founding members, raised the issue of ageing membership and the lack of new recruits on multiple occasions beyond the formal interview setting. Upon learning of the researcher's own brief experience as a university choir member, she actively encouraged the researcher to join the VKWC – a gesture that itself speaks to the urgency members feel about renewal (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 1 2025). Despite these challenges, the VKWC's legacy is firmly anchored in the cultural capital it has generated, functioning as a living record of the Korean diaspora in Austria and showing that the community is not simply a demographic presence but a vibrant, culturally active community.

## **5 Community-building, Gender, and the Ethics of Care**

### **5.1 Constructing a Gendered Third Space: Beyond Labor and Domesticity**

In migration studies, the concept of *Third Space* refers to a social realm that exists beyond the domestic sphere (first space) and the formal workplace (second space). In this context, the Third Space is not merely symbolic and instead functions as a materially and socially sustained site of everyday practice. For members of the VKWC, this space is profoundly gendered and historically situated. Most founding members belong to the pioneering cohort of Korean nurses who came to Austria in the 1970s. For decades, their identities were defined by the second space of Austrian hospitals – where they provided professional care – and the first space of the home, managing transnational family responsibilities. Upon retirement, many encountered the risk of social isolation and role loss. The VKWC emerged as a strategic response, offering a space where these women could reclaim agency as cultural subjects rather than solely as labourers or caregivers.

Building on the choir's embodied cultural memory and musical repertoire (section 4), this study frames the VKWC through the ethics of care developed by Carol Gilligan and expanded by Joan Tronto. Gilligan (1982) emphasises a form of moral reasoning historically associated with women, rooted in webs of relationships and responsibilities rather than abstract rules, while Tronto

situates care as a democratic practice requiring recognition of others' needs and competent response. Tronto (1993: 126) notes that "the ethic of care is a practice, rather than a set of rules or principles ...", stressing that care's moral qualities emerge from lived experience. The VKWC exemplifies this approach by transforming weekly musical and communal activity into an ethical practice where members engage in mutual emotional and social support as active agents rather than passive recipients.

The choir thus functions as more than a musical ensemble. It represents a caring community that challenges the patriarchal norms often found in ethnic organisations. Unlike religious or family-oriented groups with fixed roles, the VKWC maintains a horizontal structure focused on shared artistic and emotional labour. The conductor (Interviewee 2) reflected on the choir's founding performance: "That first concert brought the Korean community in Vienna together – it was a moment when we realised we could be united through our own culture". This gendered Third space facilitates a transition from clinical to aesthetic and communal care, validating the lived experiences of migrant women and demonstrating how collective relational practices strengthen resilience in the face of ageing and migration. The following section explores how this ethos of care extends beyond the choir itself into the broader Korean community in Vienna.

## 5.2 A Web of Relationships: Integrating Clinical Expertise into Communal Care

The VKWC's ethics of care extends beyond rehearsals into the broader Korean community, forming an informal social safety net. Members perceive their identity as inherently relational, whereby attending to the needs of vulnerable individuals is a moral imperative. As Tronto (1993: 126) argues, "To be a morally good person requires ... that a person strives to meet the demands of caring ...", highlighting that ethical life is inseparable from the practical demands of care. The mentioned perspective illuminates how VKWC members' outreach to elderly Koreans constitutes both a moral and a communal practice. This is evident in their proactive outreach to older community members living alone, often overlooked by both the host welfare system and fragmented diaspora families.

The choir's support synthesises cultural intimacy and professional expertise. Through the preparation and sharing of traditional foods such as *kimchi* and *banchan* (side dishes), members provide sensory anchors that offer emotional stability and a sense of home. Simultaneously, retired nurses leverage their professional capital by interpreting for Koreans (both young and elderly) who are not fluent in German, conveying language and clinical nuances, and helping them navigate the complexities of the Austrian healthcare system. Such outreach

extends beyond the choir itself into the wider Korean community in Vienna. Interviewee 3, who serves as an officer of the Korean Nurses Association in Austria, described how she regularly visits and cares for elderly Koreans in poor health who live alone and are at risk of social isolation (Interviewee 3 2024). She noted that her Catholic faith provides an additional motivational framework for this voluntary work, lending her caregiving activities a sense of spiritual meaning and moral obligation that exceeds professional duty (Interviewee 3 2024).

This form of instrumental and competent care is an example of Joan Tronto's (2013) concept of *caring with* in practice – a form of lateral solidarity where care is enacted collectively rather than hierarchically. The choir's internal solidarity becomes a collective resource for the community. Professional skills once applied in Austrian hospitals are reclaimed as gifts of care, reducing the likelihood of isolation. The VKWC thereby reveals how gendered expertise and relational labour intersect to sustain both cultural and social well-being within the diaspora.

### **5.3 Gendered Realities: The Double Burden of Ageing and Grandchild Care**

However, this ethics of care practised by the VKWC does not exist in a vacuum. Even in their retirement years, VKWC members navigate what sociologists term the double burden of care. While the choir offers personal fulfilment and a site of social engagement, participation is negotiated against persistent domestic expectations. As noted in section 3.3, absences are primarily due to ageing-related health issues and responsibilities for grandchild care. This participation gap highlights a clear intersectional challenge of age, class and gender. The Monday afternoon rehearsal schedule structurally excludes younger generations of the diaspora who are active in the workforce. In addition, the significant time investment required – exceeding 3 hours given the Donauinsel rehearsal site's remote location – acts as a deterrent for women balancing multiple roles. For many younger mothers in the community, the conflict between choir participation and the need to be there when their children come home reflects the persistent pressure of gendered family labour.

A gendered paradox is apparent here: though retired from their formal nursing roles, these women's informal family labour remains indispensable. First-generation grandmothers in Korean-Austrian families often provide childcare, enabling the second generation's careers. Rooted in Confucian relational values, this grandmother labour sustains family stability, but it imposes both physical and emotional strain on women managing the vulnerabilities of advanced age.

From Gilligan's (1982: 32) perspective of care as "a web of relationships that is sustained by a process of communication", this tension shows the challenge

of balancing care for the self and care for others. Choir rehearsals represent a sacred time – a manifestation of their Third Space and a deliberate act of resistance against becoming totally absorbed into their domestic roles. Attending rehearsals despite exhaustion or family demands asserts their right to a Third Space where identity is not defined solely by utility. Absences due to grandchildren's schedules reflect the unidirectional nature of this care whereby younger generations are prioritised over the cultural and social well-being of the elderly.

Ageing itself adds complexity: frequent medical appointments require managing what members describe as their failing bodies while simultaneously sustaining the vital bodies of their grandchildren. The VKWC becomes a site of collective resilience in which such struggles are shared and validated. By framing absences as negotiated survival rather than a lack of commitment, the choir fosters an environment that acknowledges the structural inequalities of gendered ageing. The ensemble thus acts as a space where the double burden is rendered visible and mitigated through shared solidarity. The described dynamic is perhaps best illustrated by the experience of Interviewee 1, a founding member who has held a leadership position in the choir from its inception until the present day. Despite repeatedly expressing a wish to step down from her role, she has continued because so many of her fellow members are frequently absent due to grandchild care commitments. Her sense of responsibility to the group – the feeling that someone must hold the choir together – has kept her in the post far beyond her original intentions (Interviewee 1 2024). Her account encapsulates the paradox at the heart of this section: the very care obligations that pull members away from the choir are at the same time the force that binds its most committed members ever more tightly to it.

#### **5.4 Professional Identity and the Aesthetics of Care: Cultural Diplomacy from Below**

Notwithstanding these constraints, the longevity and success of the VKWC is inseparable from the professional background of its core members. Most founding members were trained nurses, a factor that shapes the choir's organisational culture and aesthetics of care. The discipline, punctuality and responsibility instilled in Austrian hospitals have been repurposed for artistic and social coordination, exemplifying a form of capital transfer from professional labour to communal practice. The decision to extend the choir's performances beyond the Korean community into Austrian nursing homes was not incidental but instead deeply rooted in this shared professional history. Members recalled that during their years of hospital work, they frequently encountered elderly Austrian patients who were profoundly lonely, and this experience left a lasting impression (Interviewee

1 2024; Interviewee 3 2024; Interviewee 4 2024). The impulse to perform for nursing home residents therefore emerged organically from a collective memory of caregiving. Moreover, members consistently framed these outreach performances as an act of giving back: they reflected that upon first arriving in Austria as young migrant nurses Austrian society supported them in both visible and invisible ways, helping them to settle and build their lives (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 3 2024; Interviewee 4 2024). The choir's public performances are hence understood not merely as a cultural display, but as reciprocal care – a form of everyday cultural diplomacy from below in which the boundaries between artistic practice, professional identity and ethical obligation dissolve into a single, sustained act of communal generosity.

This manifests as clinical precision in harmony: the rigour once applied to life-saving tasks is redirected to perfecting choral scores and coordinating complex performance schedules. For these women, the choir is not passive leisure but a secondary arena of professionalised passion. Their lifelong identity as caregivers remains central, but in the choir this care is transformed into a self-directed gift of art and empathy. How this professional identity translates into specific repertoire choices and intercultural encounters with Austrian audiences is examined in detail in section 6.

## **6 Intercultural Encounters and Everyday Cultural Diplomacy**

### **6.1 Reconceptualising Cultural Diplomacy: The Grassroots Perspective**

Traditional discourse in international relations has long defined cultural diplomacy as a state-led, top-down strategy designed to project soft power and enhance national prestige. Yet, the activities of the Vienna Korean Women's Choir (VKWC) call for a reconceptualisation of this term. As theorised in section 2.3, this research employs the framework of everyday cultural diplomacy from below, which focuses on the informal, relational and decentralised cultural exchanges initiated by minoritised groups within their host societies. For the VKWC, cultural diplomacy is not an abstract geopolitical goal and is instead a lived practice of intercultural encounter rooted in the shared physical and emotional space of Vienna. This grassroots diplomacy is driven by the proactive labour of senior migrant women who, via their performances, negotiate their visibility and recognition in Austria. Such a shift from state-centric to person-centric diplomacy highlights the agency of migrants in shaping the social fabric of their host country. Importantly, this diplomatic function was not initially self-conscious. In the choir's early years,

members understood their outreach performances simply as acts of sharing and gratitude, not as cultural diplomacy in any formal sense. It was only as the number of public performances grew, media coverage increased, and – crucially – as the South Korean government awarded the choir a commendation that explicitly used the term cultural diplomacy, that members began to consciously understand their activities in those terms (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 3 2024). This trajectory from unreflective practice to recognised diplomatic agency illustrates precisely what is meant by cultural diplomacy from below: it originates in lived experience and community need, and only subsequently acquires the political recognition that validates it.

## 6.2 The Sonic Bridge: Repertoire as a Tool for Intercultural Recognition

The choice of repertoire within the VKWC's public performances serves as a sophisticated tool for building a sonic bridge between Korean heritage and Austrian tradition. In their intercultural encounters such as charity concerts at local churches or performances in public squares, the choir strategically balances Korean *Gagok* and *Minyo* with Western classical pieces and German *Lieder*. The inclusion of a Western repertoire was a deliberate decision made by the conductor from the choir's earliest days, driven initially by a consideration for members from multicultural families – Korean nurses who had married non-Korean partners and whose households straddled two musical traditions (Interviewee 2 2024). As the choir's public profile rose and performances beyond the Korean community became more frequent, this mixed repertoire evolved naturally into a broader intercultural strategy. By performing Mozart or Schubert, the choir signals their mastery of and respect for Austrian high culture, thereby earning the cultural legitimacy required to be heard. Once this bridge was established, the introduction of Korean music performs a complementary function: it introduces the otherness of Korean culture in a way that is accessible and emotionally resonant. When the choir performs *Arirang* or *Gohyang-ui Bom*, they share a universal human emotion – longing for home and a sense of roots – creating a space of intercultural recognition where the Austrian audience can identify with the emotional landscape of the performers.

## 6.3 Encounters in Spaces of Vulnerability: Performing at Nursing Homes

One of the most significant sites of the VKWC's everyday diplomacy is the Austrian nursing home. These performances represent a unique intersection of migration, ageing and care. As discussed in section 5.4, many choir members

previously worked as nurses in these very institutions. Returning to these spaces as performers constitutes a symbolic re-entry that subverts the traditional power dynamics of care. In these encounters, the choir provides aesthetic and emotional care to Austrian elderly, many of whom encounter their own forms of social isolation. During these visits, the emotional impact was palpable. The author consistently observed Austrian residents – many with limited mobility – clapping their hands, swaying their shoulders to the rhythm, and even humming along with the melodies. After the concert, choir members would leave the stage to personally greet each resident, wishing them a joyful Christmas. In these moments, several elderly audience members were observed quietly wiping tears away. What is particularly striking is that this emotional exchange flows in both directions. Both the conductor and choir members consistently noted that despite the VKWC not being a professional ensemble, the depth of feeling with which the elderly Austrian audiences receive their performances never fails to move the performers themselves in return (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 2 2025; Interviewee 5 2025). For the conductor, this sustained commitment to outreach performance is further grounded in religious conviction: she described the continuation of these concerts as part of her sense of Christian calling, understanding her role not simply as a musical director but as someone responding to a vocation of service (Interviewee 2 2025). In this reciprocal dynamic, the perceived boundaries between migrant and host, or Korean and Austrian, dissolve into a shared social soundscape. The vulnerability of ageing becomes the common ground upon which a new, inclusive community emerges via song.

#### **6.4 Spatiality and Institutional Belonging**

The evolution of the VKWC's rehearsal and performance spaces provides a spatial narrative of the Korean diaspora's institutional settlement in Vienna. In its early years, the choir relied on a local Korean church. However, following the establishment of the Korea Kulturhaus in May 2012 the choir moved its weekly rehearsals to this dedicated communal site. It is important to note that the Korea Kulturhaus is not a state-run cultural institute, nor should it be confused with the Korea Kulturzentrum, which is a governmental institution funded and operated by the South Korean state. The Korea Kulturhaus is, by contrast, a self-organised community space that emerged from the collective initiative and ongoing financial contributions of Koreans living in Austria (Korea Kulturhaus Österreich 2022). This distinction is analytically significant: as a grassroots institution sustained by the diaspora itself, the Korea Kulturhaus exemplifies the same logic of self-organised, non-state cultural agency that characterises the VKWC's everyday cultural diplomacy from below. By paying rent to the Korea Kulturhaus, the choir

contributes directly to the building's financial maintenance, fostering a sense of collective ownership and assuring that the diaspora has a permanent, community-owned institutional home in the city. The choice of performance venues further illustrates the choir's philosophy of cultural reciprocity. For their regular concerts, the VKWC consistently rents the Ehrbar Saal, a historic and prestigious concert hall in Vienna. Although the rental costs are substantial, the choir insists on this venue to make sure its performances remain open and accessible to the general public. According to a founding member (Interviewee 1 2024), this is a conscious decision to give back to the host society; the members believe that since they received substantial help from the local Viennese community in the early years after settling here, providing high-quality musical experiences in a professional setting is a way of expressing their gratitude. The financial sustainability is maintained through a combination of active sponsorships from Korean businesses in Austria, regular membership dues, and special donations.

## 6.5 Sustainability and Long-term Demand

The effectiveness of the VKWC's cultural diplomacy is best shown by its sustainability and ongoing demand from the host society. A critical ethnographic finding is that the choir's visits to nursing homes are not isolated events initiated just by the choir. Members recently reported that their performance schedule for these institutions is already being booked well into the future. Such long-term demand proves that the Austrian community finds these encounters to be valuable and meaningful. In social capital theory, this represents the successful creation of bridging social capital – links that connect different social groups and foster mutual trust. The fact that Austrian institutions proactively invite the choir back year after year suggests that the VKWC has successfully integrated itself into the local care infrastructure of Vienna. The longevity of these relationships reinforces the choir's role as an essential cultural institution that adds to the social well-being of the city. Still, the choir's internal sustainability presents a more complex picture. All interviewees openly expressed being concerned about the difficulty of maintaining the ensemble in the future, citing the ageing core membership and the structural barriers that prevent younger Korean women from joining (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 2 2025; Interviewee 3 2024). The researcher's own observation of recruitment announcements posted on Korean community websites confirms that new member drives have been conducted on multiple occasions with limited success. It appears unlikely that any future iteration of the choir will have a noticeably younger average age than the present one: the demands of working life make sustained participation unrealistic for most younger women. The choir's current adaptive strategy – inviting Korean music students and young

vocal performers to make guest appearances at major concerts – points to a probable future model in which a small core of older dedicated members is periodically supplemented by younger performers at public events. Indeed, recent concerts have already featured special appearances by conservatory students specialising in voice. The researcher, who intends to join the choir after retiring from academic life, finds in this trajectory a personal resonance that mirrors the broader sociological pattern: full participation in diasporic cultural life often becomes possible only in later life, when professional obligations recede.

## **6.6 Voices as Instruments of Peace and Belonging**

Building on their professional and relational expertise discussed in section 5, the VKWC translates these assets into a powerful form of intercultural engagement. Through their everyday cultural diplomacy from below, the choir members have transformed from being silent labourers into vocal citizens. Such a transformation is not merely metaphorical. Many of the founding members, having married and settled permanently in Austria, have taken Austrian citizenship, and with it a strong sense of identity as Viennese residents rather than temporary migrants (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 3 2024; Interviewee 5 2025). It is precisely this dual rootedness – in Korean cultural heritage and in Viennese civic life – that makes their cultural diplomacy so distinctive and so effective. They do not perform as guests or visitors, but as neighbours, as members of the city, giving back to the community they have helped to build over five decades. In an era of increasing global migration and social fragmentation, the VKWC provides a hopeful model of how cultural practice can foster belonging and resilience. Their performances remind us that cultural diplomacy is most effective when rooted in empathy, shared vulnerability, and the persistent labour of local communities. By singing together across cultural and linguistic divides, the women of the VKWC have not only preserved their own roots but have also helped the city of Vienna grow into a more inclusive and harmonious home.

## **7 Discussion**

### **7.1 Reclaiming Agency: From Migrant Labourers to Cultural Subjects**

The findings of this study provide a significant counter-narrative to the traditional sociological depiction of first-generation migrant women as passive or purely labour-oriented subjects. For the members of the Vienna Korean Women's Choir, the transition from their professional lives as nurses to their current roles as choral singers represents a profound reclamation of agency. In the 1970s, their

presence in Austria was defined by their utility within the clinical infrastructure of the host state. However, through the musicking practices within the choir these women have successfully shifted their identity from objects of labour to subjects of culture. This suggests that for senior migrant women cultural participation is not a peripheral hobby but a central strategy for maintaining a sense of self and social relevance in a transnational context.

## 7.2 The Ethics of Care and the Communal Table

A central theme of this discussion is the rise of a lateral ethics of care that functions as an informal social safety net. This study's ethnographic observations at the Korea Kulturhaus offer concrete evidence of this care in action. As noted in Yun (2025), the Korea Kulturhaus serves as a vital hub for overlapping communal activities. The author frequently observed that after the Korean Literature-Friends-Club in Austria (*munuhoe*) meetings concluded on Monday mornings, members would transition into the afternoon choir rehearsals. Crucially, the interval between these two activities was filled with the collective sharing of home-prepared lunches.

The act of sharing a meal before the singing begins is a profound manifestation of Carol Gilligan's web of relationships. These shared lunches act as a communal table, facilitating the exchange of emotional support, health advice and cultural knowledge, thus reinforcing belonging among elderly migrants. The choir, therefore, does not exist in a vacuum but forms part of a continuous cycle of social care that starts with literary discussion and culminates in choral harmony. This seamless transition between different forms of cultural labour highlights the resilience of the first-generation cohort who use the Korea Kulturhaus as a space for holistic well-being.

## 7.3 Cultural Diplomacy from Below: Reciprocity and Spatial Belonging

The spatial and performative activities of the VKWC offer a new perspective on cultural diplomacy. Unlike top-down initiatives, the choir's everyday cultural diplomacy from below is built on the principle of reciprocity. The decision to perform at the prestigious Ehrbar Saal and the commitment to nursing home visits – with schedules already extending into the future – show a desire to 'give back' to the host society. This sense of gratitude for the help received during their early years of settlement transforms their musical practice into a form of relational diplomacy.

The spatial move to the Korea Kulturhaus in 2012 further underscores this sense of belonging. By paying rent, the choir contributes to the financial main-

tenance of the diaspora's institutional home. Further, by occupying public and prestigious spaces like the Ehrbar Saal the choir members perform their right to the city. They are no longer guests in Vienna; they are active contributors to its cultural soundscape. The emotional connection witnessed during performances – the non-verbal synchronisation with the Austrian audience – proves that music serves as a sonic bridge that can mitigate the otherness of the migrant experience.

#### **7.4 Challenges of Sustainability and the Legacy of the Nurse Cohort**

Despite the choir's successes, the discussion must address the inevitable challenges of sustainability. The ageing of the founding nurse cohort poses a structural threat to the group's future. The physical decline of members coupled with declining membership among younger generations suggests that the VKWC is at a critical juncture. Still, the institutional memory they have created – documented through the presented research – serves as a vital cultural archive for the Korean community in Austria.

The financial model of the choir, which balances member dues with support from Korean corporate sponsors, provides a template for other diasporic organisations. Nevertheless, the true legacy of the VKWC lies in its professionalisation of community. The standards of excellence they have set in their performances and their meticulous organisational structure are a direct reflection of their professional history. Even as the membership evolves, the aesthetics of care established by the pioneers will remain a guiding principle.

#### **7.5 Theoretical and Policy Implications**

Finally, this study holds broader implications for social science research and immigrant policy. Theoretically, it expands the Ethics of Care into the realm of migration studies, showing how care labour can be transformed into cultural capital. Practically, it suggests that host societies should recognise and support grassroots ethnic organisations not simply as cultural clubs, but as vital providers of social and emotional welfare. For the city of Vienna, the VKWC is an asset that promotes social cohesion and intercultural understanding. The story of the VKWC is a powerful reminder that integration is not a one-way street of assimilation, but a multidirectional process of singing together where the unique melodies of the diaspora enrich the overall harmony of the host city.

## 8 Conclusion

### 8.1 Summary of Research Findings

The research has explored the multifaceted role of the Vienna Korean Women's Choir (VKWC) as a site of resilience, community-building and everyday cultural diplomacy. Building on the professional and relational expertise discussed in section 5, the article examined the lives of first-generation Korean migrant nurses who settled in Austria in the 1970s. The findings demonstrate that choral singing is far more than a leisure activity.

For these women, musicking serves as a profound mechanism for reclaiming agency in their retirement years. The transition from professional care labour in Austrian hospitals to the aesthetic care performed through the choir represents a significant identity shift – from being invisible workers to becoming visible cultural subjects.

The ethnographic data revealed that the choir functions as an informal social safety net, operationalising a lateral ethics of care. Consistent with Gilligan's (1982) web of relationships, members provide each other with emotional and instrumental support, ranging from medical interpretation to the communal sharing of food at the Korea Kulturhaus. Moreover, the choir's outreach to the Austrian public, notably through performances at nursing homes and prestigious venues like the Ehrbar Saal, constitutes a form of everyday cultural diplomacy from below. Built on reciprocity and shared human vulnerability, this grassroots diplomacy has successfully bridged the cultural gap between the Korean diaspora and the Austrian host society, fostering a sense of mutual belonging that persists into the present and the foreseeable future.

### 8.2 Academic and Practical Contributions

The present study makes several key contributions to the fields of migration studies, gerontology, and the sociology of music. The research reveals that senior migrants can transform relational labour into cultural and social capital, offering both theoretical insights and practical models for meaningful ageing. Practically, the VKWC serves as a blueprint for how grassroots organisations can mitigate the isolation of senior citizens while simultaneously performing cultural diplomacy. For policymakers in Vienna and beyond, this study underscores the importance of supporting such organisations as vital components of a city's social and cultural infrastructure.

### 8.3 Research Limitations

Despite its depth, this study has certain limitations. First, as a qualitative ethnography focused on a specific nurse cohort, the findings may not be universally generalisable to all migrant groups or even to younger generations of the Korean diaspora whose migration motivations and professional backgrounds differ. Second, while the researcher maintained a critical distance as an insider, the study is inherently rooted in a specific cultural and linguistic context, which may limit its application to non-Asian diasporas. Finally, the research chiefly captures the perspectives of active choir members; those who have already left the choir due to extreme health decline or other barriers were more difficult to reach, potentially creating a survivor bias in the narrative of resilience.

### 8.4 Future Prospects and Final Reflections

The VKWC's future is at a critical juncture. As the founding members slowly enter their 80s, the choir faces the inevitable challenge of generational transition. Future research should focus on how the institutional memory of these pioneers can be transmitted to the second and third generations of Korean-Austrians. Comparative studies of the VKWC and other senior migrant choirs in Europe could also provide deeper insights into how different host societies influence the formation of such caring communities.

In conclusion, the story of the Vienna Korean Women's Choir is a powerful testament to the enduring human spirit. These women, who once navigated the silence of a foreign land and the rigours of hospital wards, have found their collective voice. Their journey from the 1970s to the present is a song of resilience – a melody that harmonises the past and the future, the personal and the political, and the Korean and the Austrian. As they continue to rehearse and perform, they remind us that integration is not about the erasure of one's roots, but about the courage to sing one's own song in a new home, creating a richer, more diverse harmony for all. Their legacy is not just the music they make, but the web of care they have woven, demonstrating that shared cultural practice fosters enduring community and care.

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