

Ahmed Oral History Interview Transcript

August 22, 2022

Ahmed: As a Yazidi community, we have been subjected to 74 genocides.¹ We were around 100 million people before [the genocides began]. The time period between one genocide and another was 100 years, [sometimes] 15 years, 10 years, or just one year. We came to be fewer people in the world. We've stayed around one to three million people in the whole world.

As a community, we haven't found a peaceful region [in which] to live. We haven't found a geographic land [where we can] live in Iraq, Syria, or Turkey. We hope to find that geographic area in Europe. We also hope that the situation will get better in Iraq because I'm living in Iraq right now. I'm living in a tent. I have been living here for eight years, since 2014.

In general, we cannot explain who Yazidis are. The Yazidis believe in God. [Our religion] is not like what other groups of people say about [us]. These people heard about Yazidis in the wrong way. We believe in God, and we believe that God is present in everything. So, we respect every religion, not just Yazidis. [We respect] Jews, Muslims, or any other religion. We respect them, but we can't let another person from another religion join us. We are not the same as the Jews, Catholics, Muslims, or other religions in the world. We are alone in this case, we are the only religion that doesn't let other people join us. Year by year, we [Yazidis] have been subjected to disappear.² Do you understand me? This is the most important word that I say in this interview, we have been forced to disappear as a religion. And, we need help as a Yazidi community here in Iraq and also in Europe.

Seth: Are there any non-governmental organizations, Yazidi-run or otherwise, that you've worked with that you recommend? Are there any sorts of specific places that you think people can go to donate money, volunteer, or help out?

Ahmed: Yeah. [There are] the Yazda organization and the Yazidi Documentary Organization,³ I think. These two organizations work on [researching] the mass graves, the people who were killed by the Islamic State (IS), and all of the things [that] I just said to you. But, the first Yazidi genocide happened a long time ago. The first genocide didn't happen in 2014. It was never recorded in writing or on video. Those devices didn't exist in the past, such as video, cameras, or

¹ According to Yazidi tradition, the 2014 Yazidi Genocide is counted as the 74th genocide against the Yazidi people, who have been persecuted for centuries by Muslim groups because of their religion.

² By "disappear," Ahmed means "extermination." This is tied to the centuries of persecution and genocide that Yazidis have endured throughout their history.

³ Yazda is a global Yazidi nonprofit organization that provides humanitarian aid to Yazidi refugees in Iraq and Syria. It also performs advocacy work about and research on the 2014 genocide. I have not been able to verify the existence of a "Yazidi Documentary Organization." Ahmed is possibly referring to a nonprofit with a different name.

audio recordings. Instead, the only thing that existed was pain, and the only person who had the ability to control the place [the areas where Yazidis lived] had the ability to control the documentation [of those early genocides] as well. So, they⁴ didn't write about the Yazidis in the right way. They were trying to discredit what the Yazidis [had] faced before. But now, some outside organizations, like Yazda and the Yazidi Documentary Organization, record [this persecution]. Also, the UN came to Iraq, and you know about Nadia Murad.⁵ She came to Iraq, documented the mass graves, and wrote about everything relating to [the 2014] genocide. But, not everything has been documented. We still need help from other organizations.

Seth: In your opinion, what's the most important part of being a Yazidi?

Ahmed: To be a Yazidi person, the special thing is to believe in God. It's rule number one. We also believe in peace. We don't want to make war or kill people or do bad things to others. We help other people from other religions in the Yazidi community. Being a Yazidi is a great thing because it's special. It's not like other religions; you can't join another religion, especially when someone forces you to join that religion. You know about IS: they tried to destroy us, but we still fight on because our religion is special, and, as I said, we can't invite other people into our religion. So, it's special, it's something that depends on blood. The Yazidis have pure blood. That's a special thing, because according to science, the Yazidi religion comes [from] Earth, and we have that blood. That's why it's special.

Seth: What is the nature of God in Yazidism? What special role does God play in the universe and with the Yazidi people?

Ahmed: We believe in God, and we believe that God exists in everything. We have to respect everything that shows us that God exists. We believe that God appears in nature, like the Sun. We also believe that the power of the Earth came from God's power. It exists because of God. The universe also exists because of God. There is a power that controls everything in the world and the universe, so we think that is the power of God. We also believe that God exists in our hearts and souls. So, our beliefs may seem similar to other religions, but the thing is that it's different.

I don't know what religion you are, but I think you also believe in God. We respect every religion, and we think that you also believe in God, but in a different way. We respect the way that you believe in God. We don't mind if somebody prays next to us to God [in their own way]. You are a human, and you have the things that depend on your way of prayer. You have the right, the human right, to pray in your way, and we also have that right. So, we don't get angry

⁴ By "they," Ahmed most likely means historical Muslim rulers and scholars.

⁵ Nadia Murad is a survivor of the 2014 genocide and a prominent human rights activist. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for her advocacy against the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

when you come and pray next to us. We don't need to cause problems for anybody. We love peace and [want] to find an area for us to live in. So, it's no big deal if you're Jewish or Catholic or any other religion. You are a human, and we see people in this way.

Seth: What are the main misconceptions that non-Yazidis have about the Yazidi people and their religion? How would you correct their assumptions?

Ahmed: Non-Yazidi people think that we believe in something that is not good.⁶ But, that's incorrect. We believe in God as you believe in Him, but in a different way. So, it's a big misconception that we believe in something evil, but it's not correct. In our philosophy, we believe in God and we think that He sent Seven Angels to the world.⁷ We also believe in the First One; he is called Tawusi Melek.⁸ He is the leader of the Seven Angels. God gave them the divine message to establish on Earth and to control the world. So, we believe in God, and we believe in humanity too. You have the right to pray in your own religion, and we have to respect that. As Yazidis, we respect you, even if you are from any religion or if you have no religion at all. We respect you as a human.

So, where is the bad thing in this philosophy? I don't know. At some point, non-Yazidis tried to not tell the truth about Yazidis to make problems for us. We are also few as a people, so when somebody publishes something that is not true about Yazidis on the Internet and you read it, you will think, "Oh, Yazidism is not a good religion." You will not want to speak to Yazidi people or do business with them. You will say, "This religion is bad," but your information [about Yazidis] will be bad because it is from the Internet. It is not true. When you talk with a Yazidi, or come to live inside the Yazidi community, you will see the truth. Foreign organizations come to Iraq to see the Yazidi community's situation, and it is a very difficult situation.

But, the truth is that we respect you as a human, and we believe in God in our way because we have a right to believe in that way. Humanity is the first thing that we have to focus on in the world, to live with each other. We fight each other to show who is better or stronger, and [Yazidis] don't want something like this because we are few. We were 100 million people before [the genocides began]. We want to make the place where we lived before [the Sinjar and

⁶ By "something that is not good," Ahmed's response alludes to a traditional Yazidi taboo against mentioning or saying words associated with the Devil. Muslims have falsely accused the Yazidis of "devil worship" for centuries, which has led to them enduring persecution from Muslim neighbors and rulers. This taboo against the Devil is, in part, a reflection of this painful history.

⁷ God in Yazidism is a monotheistic, omnipotent, and omnipresent force. However, He is not active in earthly affairs. He created the Seven Angels to manage His affairs on Earth and interact with humanity.

⁸ Tawusi Melek, known in English as "the Peacock Angel," is a manifestation of the Divine and the leader of God's Seven Angels. Veneration for Tawusi Melek is at the center of the Yazidi religion.

Sheikhan Districts of northern Iraq]⁹ peaceful, and we respect the other people living there. But, in the past, the other people who were living there fought us and made us a minority, year by year, until we numbered around one to two million people around the world.

Seth: Thank you for sharing that. The following questions are going to be a bit more personal. They're going to deal with your life and the 2014 genocide, if you experienced it. So, if there's any question that you don't feel comfortable with or prepared to answer, you don't have to.

Ahmed: No, it's okay, we need to document these things because we are few as Yazidis. We are beginning to face the danger of disappearing [from the world]. Some members of my community live in New York, Syria, Iraq, Germany, Italy, and Australia. We are about to disappear. So, we need help, we need to document everything about our community, and your questions are good for us.

The Yazidi Genocide [occurred] on August 3, 2014. People watched videos and searched about it then, but after the videos and documents that people saw [in 2014], the world is not interested in the Yazidi community in a genuine way. They just help a little bit, not completely. Our girls, women, and people are still in some [refugee] camps [and in IS captivity].¹⁰ We don't know anything about [where these captives are]. They need just some money to be brought back to Iraq from IS.

The Yazidi community has also been forcibly displaced from Sinjar to Turkey, Kurdistan, and Syria. Some of us have tried to live in Europe, but we didn't do that in the past. We just wanted to live in peace. So, when IS came and we were subjected to killing and forced displacement, girls and children were killed. Many of our people have been killed, and girls have been forced into something inhumane. IS raped the girls. They also hit them and killed them, sold girls from one person to another... They did some sexual things to our girls and women during the genocide. The world has to commit to searching and learning about these things in a better way. It's not enough to send organizations to document these things. I think that the world needs to save [Yazidism] because it's the oldest religion on Earth.¹¹ We know that, but some others don't think about that, [even though] it's the truth.

After IS came, we were forcibly displaced and killed. We don't know [what happened to] some [Yazidi] people who lived in Syria, so it's hard to talk about that, but we have to talk about it.

⁹ The Sinjar and Sheikhan Districts of northern Iraq constitute the Yazidi people's ancestral homeland. The term "Sinjar" also refers to the town of the same name, which serves as the district's capital and was largely destroyed during the 2014 genocide.

¹⁰ During the 2014 genocide, Yazidi women and girls were abducted by IS fighters and sold into sexual slavery. Approximately 3,000 women and children remain in IS captivity.

¹¹ According to Yazidi tradition, Yazidism is the oldest religion on Earth. The Yazidi calendar is nearly 7,000 years old; April 2023 marks the beginning of the year 6773 on the Yazidi calendar.

These things are a disgrace on the face of the world because we live in a modern world. I don't know if the world will make plans to save us or our people [in captivity].

[Some] Yazidi children from the genocide in 2014 are still with IS.¹² They taught them to use their weapons, and who knows, maybe 20 years later, or around this number of years, they'll come back and make trouble in another country [other than] Iraq or Syria. IS sold humans, girls, and children. They destroyed our temples. They tried to make the Yazidi religion disappear from Sinjar, but we fought and didn't let that become true. We faced that and still live as Yazidis.

We didn't prepare ourselves to face this [genocide] because we believe in peace. I think that if our community gets some weapons from the UN, the US, or another country that supports us, and if we make some rules around our religion... I don't know, maybe those things will help a little bit when we face these situations. So, we need help to save our community, because our people are coming to Europe right now. There are a lot of people coming to Europe in legal and illegal ways. They are trying to find a peaceful place to live in. We don't know if Europeans will welcome our religion or want to help us in our country [Iraq]. I don't know which is the better choice. The genocide was so hard, and we don't know what happened to around 5,000 of our people. They were killed and sold, and I don't know, maybe our girls live in another country. We don't know anything about them. When little babies were born, IS [captured] and sold them to other countries. We don't know anything about where they are. So, we need a network around the world to know where our people and children are.

Also, old men from ages 70 to 80 were killed during the genocide. There was no water or food to eat [on Mount] Sinjar.¹³ There were just three or four places to find water. Our community died because there was no food or water. There was a community of 100 people, from children to old men, who died because there was no food or water. In 2014, there were a lot of things to record that: cameras and satellite networks. I think the UN also watched the genocide and supported our community during it to not let people die. But, they didn't move seriously to solve that problem when the genocide began on August 3, 2014. After that, they tried to help us, but we wished to have some serious support during the genocide.

You know about the village of Kocho.¹⁴ If I am correct, the world knew about the people there, but it didn't move in a serious way to solve that issue until our community had been killed. So,

¹² During the genocide, IS kidnapped thousands of Yazidi boys, forcibly converting them to Islam and training them to become jihadists.

¹³ Here, "Sinjar" refers to Mount Sinjar, which marks the highest point of the Sinjar Mountains. The Sinjar Mountains border the town of the same name and are religiously significant to Yazidis. They have served as a refuge for Yazidis fleeing persecution in the past.

¹⁴ On August 3, 2014, IS occupied the Yazidi village of Kocho in northern Iraq. An IS commander told the Yazidi community that they had three days to convert to Islam. On August 15, IS fighters separated Yazidi men and teenage boys from women and children. The Yazidi men and teens were executed in mass graves, while the women and children were abducted and sold into sexual slavery, trained to become jihadists, or executed.

we are asking about this: why didn't the world move to solve that problem? [The Kocho Massacre] lasted for four days or maybe more, perhaps around 10 days, I think. I don't know the right number of days. Our government and the United States, and maybe other countries such as Turkey, knew about that situation, but they didn't move to solve that problem. We are asking: what is the next thing that the world will do to save us as a religion? The world isn't [saving us] as humans, because I'm living in a tent, okay? There are around 15,000 people living in tents like me, and the situation is very bad. We are asking for people to support all of us in a serious way, not just helping individuals in our community. This will not save the religion from disappearing. And believe me, after 100 years, maybe, our religion will become smaller. Fewer people will remain if another genocide or war happens. We face this fact. We need some decision from the world to tell the others not to fight the Yazidi people, because [we] want to live in peace. [Yazidis] will not make war with another religion or community. We just want to live on the Earth in a peaceful way. We need to send this message to the world [so it can] save us.

Seth: What was life like for you and other people in your community in Iraq before 2014? Where did you grow up and what was life like there?

Ahmed: This is a great question. Before the genocide in 2014, [Yazidis] were subjected to some issues, but [these were] not as big [as the] genocide. In terms of my life before the genocide, as well as [those of] other people in the Yazidi community, we went to school as kids and studied. Our lives were simple. We didn't make problems with other religions. We didn't know about issues like, "This is a Muslim, this is a Yazidi, this is a Jew, this is a Catholic." We didn't focus on these things; we just lived in peace, worked, and studied. I also played football. It was a simple life then, you can imagine. It was the simplest life.

So, life was good for the Yazidi community before the 2014 genocide, as well as for other groups. In Sinjar, you will find three houses.¹⁵ The middle one was for Yazidis, and on one side were Muslims, and on the other side were Catholics or some other religions. They [members of other religions] lived with each other. We didn't have any problems living with other religions at that time. Life was simple and beautiful before 2014, but after that, things became difficult. Maybe we can't go back and live with the other communities in the same way that we did before.

Seth: When IS attacked in 2014, what do you remember about where you were at the time, what you were doing, and how that unfolded for you?

¹⁵ This metaphor demonstrates how different religious communities in the Sinjar District lived (and continue to live) separately, albeit in close proximity to each other.

Ahmed: When IS came and attacked us, I didn't see a lot because I was living in the north [of Mount Sinjar]. We lived next to Syria. The PKK's¹⁶ military was in Syria, and IS didn't easily find a way to attack us or come close to us in my village. We just ran away to the mountain, Mount Sinjar, and we stayed there for one night. Then, in the morning, we came back and went to Syria with the support of the PKK and our family who lived there who knew how to use weapons. We walked for about 40 kilometers. I don't know the exact number, but we went from Sinjar to Syria by walking on foot. It was a big distance, and we got hungry and didn't find water to drink. I saw the people who came from Sinjar and a far village, which IS attacked before [targeting] us [in the north]. They said, "Our family has been killed. We left from our family." They were in shock because their family was killed... They came with us to Syria.

I heard some stories during our trip from the mountain to Syria. I met some people whose food had been destroyed.¹⁷ Their hands were bleeding. Their situation was very bad. I don't know how to explain that, but maybe many people around the world know about this story. But, I didn't have the same experiences as those who lived in other villages, such as Kocho or Sinjar. I was living in a northern village, known as *Hiteen* in Arabic and *Dugure* in Kurdish. [My family and I] lived there, and it was close to Syria. It was easy for us to arrive in Syria by foot [from Dugure], but we went to the mountain for one night and then we went ahead to Syria.

Seth: What was the name of the far village that IS attacked from which you met people fleeing? Do you remember the name of the place that they were coming from?

Ahmed: Yeah, the first one was called *Gir Zerik* in our language. It was the first Yazidi village that IS attacked, maybe at 1 a.m. in the morning. They [the Yazidis of Gir Zerik] fought until their weapons finished;¹⁸ they fought IS for one hour, maybe a little bit more, and then IS attacked them and killed a large number of them. And then, they came to Kocho and Qahtani and other villages until they came to all of our villages. The only village that remained was my village. As people who lived in that village, we were very lucky, because it was close to Syria and the PKK military. So, it was not [tactically] good for IS to control my village. In some ways, we just went ahead and arrived in Syria in a safe way. All of my community, survivors of IS during the 2014 genocide, came from my village to Syria and then to Kurdistan. On the first day, they came to Kurdistan directly. They came to our village and then to Rabia¹⁹ and then to

¹⁶ The PKK, or the "Kurdistan Workers' Party" in English, is a Kurdish left-wing political organization located in Turkey and northern Iraq. It has fought a guerilla war against Turkey since 1978, aiming to achieve autonomy and greater rights for Kurds living in the country.

¹⁷ It is possible that Ahmed is referring to IS' destruction of Yazidi farmland during the genocide, which erased the livelihood and property of many families.

¹⁸ This could mean that the Yazidis of Gir Zerik fought until their weapons ran out of ammo, jammed, or overheated.

¹⁹ Rabia is a town located in northwestern Iraq that is next to the Syrian border.

Kurdistan. Then, during the next few days, they came to Syria and then to Kurdistan. In these two ways, my community [of] survivors came to Kurdistan.

We have to tell the truth about everything because it is important to talk about everything [that happened during the genocide]. There were some people during the genocide, including Muslims, who helped our community to escape to safe places and then arrive in Kurdistan. There was contact between our community and a guy from the Muslim Salvation Army in Mosul²⁰ and other places, such as the Shammar people.²¹ [Some] other Muslim people helped us, but very few people could help, because IS didn't let anyone help our community. If they knew that somebody helped us, they would go ahead directly and kill that Muslim. So, we have to tell everything in the right way. We have to say thank you to some people who helped the Yazidi community during that situation. It was a difficult situation; not everybody could have made the decision to help other religions then. There were some people from some villages who made the decision to help people from the Yazidi community, to save them and bring them to Kurdistan. We love that there are some people who know about the [Yazidi] community's humanity. We are happy about those stories.

But, it is very, very difficult, because our neighbors from Sinjar will attack us if we say, in fact, that our neighbors from the other community, non-Yazidis, attacked us when IS came. They helped IS kill my community. This is a fact. At this moment, there is nobody investigating that... They didn't bring them [the neighbors who collaborated with IS] to the authorities to ask them, "Why did you do that? You were the neighbors of the Yazidi community and you did that. Why?" Some of them live in Europe. Some of them live in Syria, and I don't know where the others live. They have to face the law, and the law should ask them, "Why did you do that? Instead of helping your community or your neighbors, you helped a military force from the outside kill your community, your people, even if they were from [another] religion."

Because of this, our community believes that if they go to Europe, they will not be able to live in a peaceful place. I don't know if this is the right decision or not, but maybe they will find some way to live in peace. We also hope to find peace in Iraq in the coming years, but we're not sure about that, because there are a lot of military groups and parties in Sinjar now. You can't guess what the situation is. When you come to Sinjar, you might say, "Oh, it's good, it's safe," and tomorrow, you will see a different situation. So, you can't tell the [Yazidi] people that the situation in Sinjar is good or bad. We don't know what the situation is, it's just difficult.

Seth: Did you have any family members or relatives who were killed or captured by IS? Or did they, like most of Dugure's residents, escape as well?

²⁰ Mosul is the second-largest city in Iraq and is the largest city in the north of the country.

²¹ Ahmed refers to the Shammar tribe, which is an Arab tribe whose members live across the Middle East. It is one of the largest Arab tribes in Iraq. It denounced IS and its interpretation of Islam, helping Yazidis escape from IS.

Ahmed: No, my relatives and family are good. They managed to escape safely. [Before the 2014 genocide], we were living with each other as a family. [Yazidis] don't live like Europeans: when somebody reaches 18 or 20 years, they live by themselves. We live with each other, and we survived as a family when IS came. In our philosophy, we think that every single Yazidi from any family *is* our family because we are a religion that cannot let anybody from the non-Yazidi community join us. So, every single one [of us] who got attacked or forced into the genocide and was killed was a member of our family. It does not depend on whether my [immediate] family is okay or not, whether they survived or not; it depends on our religion. But, my parents, my family, and my relatives are good. They are living in good health and they are living here in a tent with me... But we see every single person from the Yazidi community as our family.

Seth: Did IS give a rationale or justification behind their crimes? Why did IS do what they did?

Ahmed: There's more than one reason for why IS [attacked us]. The first depends on our government. They did not give us the support to survive or come to safety [during the 2014 genocide]. The military didn't fight IS in the right way. They opened the way that IS used to come through and kill Yazidis.²² IS thinks that Yazidis believe in bad things and are *kuffar* [infidels], but we are not like that.

[Our beliefs] are not the main reason [why IS attacked us], in my opinion. As a religion, there are not many of us living in Iraq. So, when IS [carried out their genocide], they were sure that there would be no [retribution] from other countries that would attack them because they killed Yazidi people. We didn't have the power to stop IS, and the other communities were not ready to support us to stop IS from committing crimes against us. I think about these reasons and focus on this question: why did IS only kill Yazidis as a community and not kill other religions as a community?

[There were] Catholics who lived in Mosul. When IS came to Mosul, they told the Catholics that they had two options: they would pay money to stay alive, or they would [be deported] to another place. IS did not [commit genocide] against them, they just let them go in a safe way. But when IS came to Sinjar and found the Yazidi community, they just killed them, subjected them to rape, and sold them. Everything that you can imagine that does not happen in this modern world, IS made happen to the Yazidi community. So, the question is, if Yazidis believe in God in a different way, why did IS attack them? The only answer that I can find is that there was no power or support from another country that would make IS say, "Oh, we can't attack the

²² During the summer of 2014, Iraqi army units in northern Iraq collapsed during IS' advance, leaving key cities such as Mosul ripe for conquest. In the early morning of August 3, 2014, Kurdish forces who were tasked with defending Yazidi villages in the Sinjar District unexpectedly withdrew from their positions. They left Yazidi populations with no protection from IS.

Yazidi community because another country would support [the Yazidis], make war on us, and stop us.” So, this is the only answer that I focus on.

Yazidi people live in the modern world. You can find out if the Yazidi community believes in God or not. You just invited me to this interview and I am telling you that we love to live in peace in a peaceful place. We just love peace and want to make peace, not war, not killing, not anything. We just love to stay in a safe mood with our neighbors, even if they are from another religion. You cannot believe that we do not believe in God or are *kuffar*, since you are living in the modern world. In 2014, there were videos and reports about the Yazidis, documents that you could search [online] and find a lot of answers. You could come to Lalish²³ and ask the Yazidi people directly about what they believe in. They would say, “We believe in God, and we love to live in peace, we don’t have a problem with you.” They would invite you to eat and drink water, and if you needed something else, they would help you, and then you would go back to your home safely. So, what are the bad things that made IS decide to attack the Yazidis? [The fact that] IS’ leadership taught that Yazidis are *kuffar* is one main reason, and another reason is that when IS decided to attack Yazidis and kill them, they were 100% sure that there was no power or support from other countries to stop them from making that conflict with us. We didn’t have a military, and we didn’t have anything to fight IS with. We just fought them for two hours and then our weapons were finished. So, you can imagine the situation because of these two reasons.

Seth: After IS’ genocide in 2014, what has been done to rebuild Sinjar and other communities that have been lost? What is the current situation of the Yazidi people?

Ahmed: As for the current situation, our people think that they cannot live in Sinjar in a peaceful way because there are many political parties there. You can’t imagine the situation in Sinjar. If you go to one village, you will find a political party, and if you go to another village, you will find another party. You will have to make deals with the first party and then make deals with the second party. If these parties do not give you an agreement to rebuild [homes and infrastructure] in Sinjar, you can’t build there. Sinjar is a strategic place, and you don’t know if the Kurdish government controls it, if the Iraqi government controls it, or if another government controls it, including political parties.

In short, the current situation is that people live in tents. I am living in a tent. I have lived here for eight years. I want to go back to Sinjar and live in peace, as I did before [the genocide], but I can’t because there are a lot of political parties. That’s reason one. Reason two is that there are no good steps from the government to rebuild Sinjar. About 70% of it has been destroyed. There has been no organization in the world that has been rebuilding in Sinjar. So, it has been rebuilding itself alone. We need support from many other organizations and countries to build in

²³ Lalish Temple is located in the Sheikhan District of northern Iraq and is the holiest site in Yazidism. It is believed to contain the tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, who is the most important saint in the Yazidi religion.

Sinjar. And even when we are rebuilding in Sinjar, the [Yazidi] people don't trust anybody anymore. We believe that if we go back to Sinjar and live there, we will be attacked or have another genocide forced upon us. There are no decisions that the government has made that tell the military not to let anyone hurt, hate, or kill a Yazidi. [Someone needs] to save us, we're a special religion in our country. There are no [laws that protect Yazidis as a religious minority].

So, the current situation for the Yazidis is very bad. You have a dream to go back and live [in Sinjar], but you can't, so imagine that. You are [trapped while] living in your own country, in your own community. You are just waiting, waiting, [asking,] what will happen in this strategic place, Sinjar? Who will control it? The Kurds, Iraqis, Turks, PKK, or maybe Iranians? You don't know which military will control Sinjar in the coming years.

Right now, some members of my community are living in Sinjar. The situation is slightly safe; they work on rebuilding step-by-step, small steps, not great steps. They are doing what they can do in Sinjar, but step-by-step. They can't change everything in one step. They need around five to ten years to rebuild in Sinjar. The people from different religions who were also living in Sinjar don't know whether they can live with Yazidis, and Yazidis don't know if they can live with other religions in Sinjar anymore because they don't trust each other. We think that if our community completely comes back to Sinjar, and if the other communities completely come back to Sinjar, and if we live there as before 2014, the other religions or our community will make some problems if we know that someone from these other religions or our neighbors killed someone from our community [during the 2014 genocide]. How will we trust them? You can't trust them as a community. So, the situation is that [jihadist] organizations came to Sinjar, the government tried to solve the issue, but there's no [substantial] decision because [Sinjar] is a strategic place, and outside forces also exist in Sinjar.

The situation in Sinjar is not good, but it's not as difficult as it was in 2014. Many parties control villages and places in Sinjar, and many members of our community live there. They [also] opened the mass graves [in Sinjar]; they documented [evidence of the genocide] there. As a community, the Yazidis cannot go to Sinjar to work. You can't live with your family in a safe place. Every single day, you will imagine, "What if another force makes a problem in Sinjar, or if we're forced to endure another attack? Who is the most powerful group that controls Sinjar?" We don't know [the answers] to that. These questions exist in the minds of all Yazidi people who live there. And we live in tents. We don't know what is next. We can't rebuild our homes, we can't rebuild anything. We are just watching our dreams disappear around us.

I just finished college. I graduated with [a degree in] electrical engineering and work with some activist organizations and countries. But it is still not enough to make the decision if I can stay here in [Iraqi] Kurdistan or go to Europe. We don't know about that, so I decided to stay for two more years and watch the situation [unfold]. If the situation gets better, I will stay in Iraq. If the

situation does not get better, I will head to another country. It's not a good choice to go to another country, but it's the only choice that I can make. As a Yazidi, I can't go to Sinjar and rebuild my home in this situation. I have to be sure that there won't be another attack. I have to be sure about the [political] party that controls Sinjar. If I go there, I would need to deal with the parties or [find out] if my neighbors are good or not. I have to be sure of these things in order to make the decision to rebuild my home.

Seth: Thank you for everything you've shared with me. I appreciate your time.

Ahmed: You are welcome, and I appreciate your questions. Your questions are good for documenting the Yazidis' problems and religion as a community. We need that.