

Khudaida Oral History Interview Transcript

February 24, 2023

Seth: Where did you grow up, and what was your family like?

Khudaida: My name is Khudaida. I was born in 1994 in Sinjar City, Dogrey Village. Growing up, my family and I depended on agriculture as a livelihood.

Seth: Before the genocide in 2014, what was life like for you and other Yazidis living in your community in Iraq?

Khudaida: Before the genocide in 2014, life was very hard for me and other Yazidis living in my community. Members of the Yazidi religion were victims of violence before 2014 because we lived in a very violent context. Non-Yazidis were racist towards us and hated us because we followed a different religion. And we experienced a lot of horrible events because we had a different religion. There is a lot of structural and cultural violence around Sinjar,¹ like racism and a need to live.

Seth: In your opinion, what does it mean to be a Yazidi? What are the most important aspects of your Yazidi identity?

Khudaida: In terms of what it means to me to be a Yazidi, I think we are Yazidis as a nation and as a religion too.

Seth: What are the main misconceptions that non-Yazidis have about the Yazidi people and religion?

Khudaida: Some of the misconceptions are that Yazidis practice Satanism and that we do not like to coexist with members of other religions. There are a lot of stereotypes about us. All of these things took place before 2014, not now. The dynamic has changed after 2014. Some of the Shia sects have become victims of the Islamic State (IS), like the Yazidis, and for this reason, there is a rapprochement between them against the Sunni sect.²

¹ “Sinjar” refers to the Sinjar District of northern Iraq, which, along with the nearby Sheikhan District, constitutes the historical homeland of the Yazidi people. “Sinjar” also refers to the town of Sinjar, which serves as the district’s capital and was largely destroyed during the 2014 genocide.

² It is important to note that Yazidis are not Shia Muslims, and that the persecution that IS inflicted on both groups was not the same. For instance, IS targeted Yazidi women and girls for sexual enslavement while Shia women and girls were not enslaved. However, the persecution that both groups experienced was similar, with Yazidi and Shia civilians being murdered and their places of worship bombed, among other examples.

Seth: Did you experience IS' genocide in 2014? If so, would you feel comfortable with describing your experiences during that time?

Khudaida: Yes, I am comfortable sharing my experiences in the genocide.

Seth: Where were you living when the genocide began?

Khudaida: When IS attacked Sinjar, we fled to the Kurdistan region. My nephew fell from the car on the way. And when we arrived in Kurdistan, the security controllers obstructed our mission because we did not say we were Kurds. When we arrived in Erbil, the capital, we went to the Kurdish Ministry of Health and asked for help. They did not help us and laughed at us because we did not say we were Kurds.

We went to the hospital and did tests for my nephew. The doctors said that he had cancer in his arms. The Samaritan's Purse organization³ helped us to do surgery, but he died. It is one story of our genocide, but there are more.

Now, I am working as a peace activist. Maybe I can say many things, but they are the hardest stories to tell and they cannot say what is in their heart.

Seth: Were there people who stayed behind in your town? If so, what happened to them?

Khudaida: My cousin was kidnapped by IS and now lives in Canada. Because of the painful events, my father committed suicide in Erbil, and my grandfather died of a heart attack in the same month that my nephew died of cancer. I tried to emigrate from Iraq and go to Germany, but I was imprisoned in Turkey, and I went back to complete my studies and became a peace activist.

Seth: What do you do as a peace activist?

Khudaida: During my work as a peace activist, I do online research on coexistence, peace, cohesion, democracy, and teacher training programs.

Seth: What has life been like for Yazidis in Iraq after the genocide?

Khudaida: Life has been very difficult for Yazidis after the genocide. There is marginalization, structural and moral violence against us, a dead democratic culture, emigration, displacement, no hope, no dignity, extremism against us, and the victims' bones are in the nude, sitting in the open

³ Samaritan's Purse is an American Evangelical Christian organization that provides humanitarian aid to populations impacted by war, disasters, and other serious events.

air. There is forced militarization, living conditions are not easy... they clearly benefit from suffering.

Seth: Why did IS commit genocide against the Yazidis? What justifications did they give to support their atrocities?

Khudaida: IS committed genocide against us due to hatred against our religion, the geopolitical situation, and natural resources.

Seth: In your opinion, is the genocide still ongoing? If so, why?

Khudaida: The Yazidi genocide is ongoing because of a lack of political awareness and the conflict between the two international poles.⁴

Seth: How long have Yazidis been persecuted for their religion? Is IS' genocide part of a pattern of historical persecution against Yazidis?

Khudaida: The genocide was an expression of many people's hatred of us. Religious texts justify violence against us, as well as violence against Christians and Jews. I have some Christian friends, and they agree with what I said.

Seth: After IS' atrocities in 2014, what has been done to rebuild Yazidi towns, infrastructure, and communities?

Khudaida: The Iraqi and Kurdish governments haven't taken any steps to help us rebuild. Some international organizations have made some efforts to help, but it is not enough.

Seth: What can non-Yazidis do to best help the Yazidi people in Iraq and around the world?

Khudaida: Great question. They can help with transitional and transformative justice, compensation, accountability for perpetrators, trust, friendship with non-peoples, defense of the Yazidis, supporting Yazidi youth, and advocacy in Sinjar, among other things.

Seth: Those are all the questions I have. Thank you so much for sharing your story with me.

Khudaida: You are welcome, I wish you success in your work.

⁴ Khudaida is referring to the International Relations concept of "bipolarity," which refers to when two states exert the most power and influence over other states in the world. He does not clarify which states are "the two international poles." It is possible that he could be referring to the United States and Russia, which were the two dominant powers during the Cold War and continue to compete in today's world.