

Emily Gengenbach

Interview: Laila Khoudeida

Location: Yazidi Community Center

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Interviewee: So, um, my name is Laila Khoudeida. Uh, what brought me to Nebraska is, uh, we didn't actually start with Nebraska when we were first, we settled and the us, uh, my family was resettled in Maryland. We spent about nine months to a year in Maryland. We had very unfortunate experience in Maryland because of the cultural shock. We didn't speak the language and it was very difficult. And my, my dad found out that he had a friend in Minnesota

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Interviewee: and, uh, he connected with him. And from there, we were able to, uh, move to Minnesota. We lived in Minnesota and, uh, and Morehead on that Fargo, Morehead border of North Dakota. We lived there for about, I want to say four or five years. And then we found out that their way is Yazidi here who had lived in the same refugee camps, where I had grown up. We lived in refugee camps in Syria for about, for nearly a decade. So when we found out that there was a few families here who had lived in the same refugee camp, we immediately wanted to be here with them. And then we moved to Lincoln and, uh, we've been here for about, I wanna say 10 years, 10, 12 years now in Lincoln.

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Interviewee: Um, when he first came to Nebraska, I noticed it was cold, but it wasn't as cold as Minnesota. So, um, it was a little bit nicer, but that wasn't, uh, That wasn't the thing that made me, uh, first aware. The first thing that made me aware it was these families that had lived in the

same refugee camps were actually living here and Lincoln, and I didn't want to be anywhere else because for the longest time, um, we were away from the and the Yazidi community. We, we, uh, We had been thrown into this society where, um, everything was just so difficult. We didn't understand the culture, we didn't understand the language. And so coming here and connecting with those same families from back home was, uh, the biggest thing for me.

Interviewee: So the Yazidi cultural center was established, uh, in 2017.

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Interviewee: Originally when the genocide happened. Back in August of 2014, the Yazidi cultural center was not even a thing because our focus was on the, um, on what was happening back home. Uh, we had people who had been trapped on, on Sinjar for days. Uh, the entire Yazidi community had been displaced and, uh, our main focus was to try to get them some support and relief. And then, um, two years later, We, we saw a need to help the community here and the U.S. um, because at the time there had been more and more Yazidi, these resettling and the U.S. and mainly in Lincoln, because we already have, um, a somewhat established community here. So people wanted to come and, uh, be with a community that they felt, um, familiar with. So when the community grew, we saw a need here for people to, uh, preserve our culture,

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Interviewee: our language and our identity, because that was something that was always, um, uh, that was something we always fought for back home. It's something that we had to always fight for, uh, because of the prosecutions and the long history of Wars. Um, and the most recent genocide encouraged us to even more, um, try to establish ourselves here in Lincoln. And because Lincoln is where. The largest population of Yazidi. It made sense to have a center here

to address some of the needs, um, in terms of preserving the language, age, the culture, and also providing, um, uh, services for self-sufficiency. Um, to, uh, learn about their rights here as American residents and eventually becoming citizens that English language classes, citizenship classes.

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Interviewee: so different programs that we serve here. They are the Yazidi cultural center they can call. They can walk into the center and, um, receive. Uh, support with anything that they need. Sometimes people walk in here and they just want somebody to read their letters. Um, sometimes they come here because they want to book their plane tickets. So just anything.

Interviewee: Um, that's a very good question. I don't remember. And because they didn't really keep track of our our records. My parents had to flee the war in Iraq, and my father actually left my, my mother back home in Iraq until he was able to find, um, his, some of his friends were actually, um, the ones who informed him of this refugee camp. That again, existed in an ??, which is now occupied by ISIS. Um, when my mother and my two oldest siblings came

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Interviewee: to join my father in Syria, we came to the refugee camps and, uh, we lived there for a year. We, um, a decade. I think it was about eight or nine years, um, experience as a, as a child. That's the thing is that I remember are actually not really, um, horrible because I, I, as a child, it, uh, It was more important for me to go hang out with my friends and, um, create our own, um, toys made out of mud and sticks and, uh, sleeping on the roof is something that I will always remember because, um, I would watch the stars and the moon while falling asleep. And these are some of the good memories I had. I also remember, uh, some of the unfortunate

things that happened in the refugee camps. Um, there were camps that would burn down. I remember two of our neighbors actually died.

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Interviewee: Um, and they were two very young, um, beautiful girls that, um, that burned because, uh, they, they died because their, their tent burned down. And then also, um, many times we didn't have much to eat. And I remember my parents talking about these adult things, uh, for example, what were we were going to have the next day and how the bread that we would usually get from the bakery was filled with bugs. And I remember, um, I imagined these bugs entering my stomach and trying to eat, eat my stomach. So these are some of the things I remember. And then, um, the school was about 45 minutes away. So we had to walk very long distance to get to the school because it wasn't inside the camp complex. Sometimes they provided buses, but other times they didn't and, um, when, when we walked to the school, it was usually very

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Interviewee: hot and dry. Um, and, uh, the schools we, we, um, where sometimes the teachers, weren't very nice. I'm not saying all of them. Weren't very nice, but a lot of the times, um, when I compare the schools here to what I experienced, um, And the schools in Syria is, uh, you have more freedom to speak your mind because you're not afraid of your teacher, but, um, but over there I was, I was afraid to speak my mind. And, uh, I remember one time we had a, if class to, to learn the Koran. Which we shouldn't, we shouldn't have, we should have had the right to say, no, we don't want to, but, um, sometimes we had to sit there and sit through the class. And I remember one time I told the teacher that I don't want to stay here. Um, he came

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Interviewee: up to me and he just slapped me across my face. And then he told me to get out of the class. But, um, when I look back at those experiences, it makes me feel proud that I actually did something very simple, but it makes me feel, feel good about that decision that I made.

Interviewee: Um, so through the Yazidi cultural center, we, we were providing, uh, Kurmanji classes. We had an instructor here who was, um, teaching, uh, the Yazidi children, the alphabets, and, uh, the different words and, um, sentences and the language. In general, we don't have a curriculum. We don't have a way of preserving our language. I think it's, it's mainly up to the families to prove, preserve their, their language. For example, in my family, uh, because both of my parents are still living, they don't speak English at home,

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Interviewee: so we are forced to speak our own language and the children, their grandkids in the home. Of course. Um, yeah. They have to speak with their grandparents and their language. And that's how come they're able to see they'll speak and, uh, Kurmanji language. And, um, the same goes for most of the community here. We don't have, um, we don't have a way of keeping the language unless we bring in more efforts to create a curriculum and to, um, to get more funding to continue to teach through these classes, the Kurmanji language. And it's when, when you talk about that language, it's not just the language, it, um, it includes your culture. It includes the holidays that you're celebrating. It includes, um, the traditions and the rituals. It includes all of these things and that, that makes up, uh, your identity and your identity as a Yazidi person. It's not just a language, it's all of these other things that

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Interviewee: are combined.

Interviewee: So we ha we've had a very successful advocacy, um, group because, uh, because of that advocacy work that we've done over the past, uh, five years, I believe that's the reason why, uh, the world is more aware of who the Yazidi are. Um, most of the countries around the world have recoginzed the Yazidi genocide it's because we made efforts to make that happen through, um, Nadia is, um, initiative, which was founded. Uh, by, by our advocacy group, uh, and YAZADA and Nadia, uh, are, um, a big part of why, uh, the world now recognizes the Yazdidi and, uh, the Yazidi genocide. So, um, locally, we've also gone out to speak at different churches, different, um, universities.

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Interviewee: And the high schools we have, um, Afterschool programs for Yazidi youth at the different high schools. So we are making efforts to continue to do that, but I think it will take, um, the younger Yazidi generation to keep that going and to, um, make that, um, make those efforts even a stronger, stronger goal for them because, um, Essentially for them and for the Yazidi community to survive, we would need to teach our, um, the younger generation that you know, that this happened, but we have a way of preventing it in the future. And, um, I would like to see the community follow the Jewish peoples, the Jewish communities, example of, uh, coming out of their genocide successfully and educating. Um, our, our younger generation and, um, encouraging them to, uh, to continue with their education and to become

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Interviewee: advocates for the community.

Interviewee: So the Yazidi community has, um, especially after the genocide, they are, um, They are now everywhere we have Yazidi and, uh, in Australia we have a Yazidi community in Canada. We have, um, a community here in the U.S. and uh, the second largest community to,

um, is actually in Europe, right next to Iraq. The second largest one is in Europe. And so, uh, because, um, even though in our spread around the world, we still have, uh, those strong connections because we are still a small community. Uh, we, we are about a million worldwide and, um, people have those, um, connections with each other

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Interviewee: and, um, We also have through through YAZADA. We also have our teams around the world. We have three centers in Iraq, one and Sandra went in Baghdad and then one in the Kurdistan region. Um, we have teams in Australia, Canada. We have advocates, Canada, and then Europe, the UK and Germany and Sweden. And this is how we are able to maintain that the, that relationship and, uh, try to collaborate when we're making efforts to help the Yazidi community.

Interviewee: Yes. Yes. But, uh, wherever they're at, they will have also learned the language of that country. So, so like in Europe they either speak, um, German. Um, most of them speak English, um, same thing with Canada and Australia. But, um, when we communicate with each other, it's usually in the

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Interviewee: Kurmanji language.

Interviewee: Um, I would hope that I think the only way we can keep the Yazidi identity is if we don't abando, our Homeland. I know people are desperate to get out of, uh, the middle East because of their situation. And I don't blame them. I would want the same thing for myself if I was in their situation. But I think for the older generation, Some of them want to go back home. Some of them have already returned to Sinjar and they would like to see , um, uh, be re rebuilt.

Uh, they would like it to, to, to see it free of persecution and genocide. They were, they would like it to be, uh, protected by the Yazidis themselves so that, um, So that in the future, they have a group or those responsible for protecting them

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Interviewee: that they have a trust in those people, that they will not be abandoned again. So, um, you have, you have different generations within the community that need different things. So for example, the younger generation, um, their goal is to someday, um, go abroad and study, for example, have more opportunities to better their futures. And they know that if they go back to Sinjar, especially at this point, they will not, um, have a future for themselves. But, um, like I said, for, for the older generation, for example, people, my dad's age, I think they would want to go back to Sinjar and, um, take care of their tobacco fields. Like they used to. And it's something that was very important for them. My parents talk about it, even now, they, their dream is to go back home someday and, uh, take care of the tobacco field and, um, live life the way it used to be a simple, innocent way of living.

17:05

Interviewee: Absolutely. We already have casualties Sinjar. There was a Yazidi, uh, house that was, uh, Um, actually targeted by the Turkish airstrikes, ??, and, um, yeah, it's very concerning for the community because again, we have thousands and thousands of people who have returned to live in Sinjar. And, um, I think we were, we were we're anticipating something like this to happen when, um, when the Turkish military entered Syria, because we are right on the border of Syria. Um, Right next to ???. And, uh, when, when that happened, um, I remember my dad calling his sister who is now in Sinjar and asking about the situation there. And they're, um, they're very concerned about their safety.



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Interviewee: Um, I haven't been confronted a whole lot, but I am an advocate for, uh, For refugees because I was a refugee at some point myself, and I know that, uh, uh, millions of refugees are living in and, um, very poor conditions. And I think if they had the opportunities, the kind of opportunities that we have here, I think they would better our communities here. They would better this country because they come with a lot of, um, a lot of experience, a lot of the knowledge and, um, I would like to see people supporting, especially those who come from the war zones. I think, uh, when, when we help them, they only, um, add better things to our lives here.

Interviewee: So just as a, as a person I've always been passionate about helping my community,

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Interviewee: even before 2014, even before the genocide happened, I've always, uh, had a vision of, uh, somehow, um, helping my community. And, uh, when the genocide happened, I felt obligated because, um, that was, uh, Just from my experience of living in refugee camps and just hearing my parents talk about our long history of, uh, of being persecuted by, by our neighbors and by, uh, the government. Yeah. It was just, um, to see the center finally becomes something possible, was, uh, was, uh, uh, a big goal for me. Um, I remember one time I was sitting at work, just researching grants and I came across a grant and I was like, you know, let's apply for this grant and see where, where it goes.

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Interviewee: And so I reached out to Max Graves, who is the executive director of the center for legal immigration. And, uh, we agreed. To apply for this grant. And, um, when it got approved, it was the, the greatest news for me, because I felt, I felt like I had accomplished something. So, um, it has affected me on a personal level. Well, when I see that there is a center that serves my own community and it's not just my own community. It's anybody that walks into the center. We, uh, we know we don't deny services to anyone, but it has always been my dream to see something like this happen for my own community. Um, and it's among, uh, hundreds of other, um, organizations and centers for other communities. So to be able to see that, um, that's something is there for, for the community is, is a big, big, uh, big deal for me.

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Interviewee: Um, I would hope to see the community grow, um, or the center to grow into something bigger, something that serves, uh, the community in different ways, not just their basic needs. I would like to see the center to become like a temple someday. Where people can come here for their religious, um, celebrations and, uh, attend their holiday events and, uh, to have scholars come in, uh, you know, um, to hold large conferences for people to come to the center and talk about the Yazidi history and genocide, and, uh, just a much, I have a bigger vision for the center and I. We are looking and working, uh, for that to happen someday.

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Interviewee: Um, so there is, uh, different groups in the community. You have the group who was resettled back in the 1990s, and then you have the group, um, that is currently, still coming in as a, so the first group was mainly refugees who came from Syria. And then you have, um, the, the second wave of immigrants, it's mainly, uh, is mainly the interpreters who come with special visas. The situation was different for each group when they were first resettled, um, for, for my family and the group that came during that time from Syria, it was much more difficult

because our parents did not speak the language. We were not aware of, uh, the culture here. It was a, um, we had. We went through a major cultural shock. Um, and then are the younger kids,

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Interviewee: um, kind of forgot their language because they immediately, when, uh, were entered into schools and they went to school full time. So there's that generational gap between the parents and the younger children. And then you have the, the other group that co that came with special visas. They already speak the language and they are aware of the culture here because of their experience with working with the U.S. military. So when they come here, they're kind of at a better place than we were. And, um, I would like to see them use their language and their experience in a way that will help their community, uh, grow. And be successful. And I think, um, to prevent some of the issues that take place in the community, um, for example, we have a younger kids who are involved in the juvenile justice system. I would like to see more, Yazidis become

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Interviewee: educated about those things and what kind of things will get them into trouble. Just becoming familiar with the legal system here. I think will prevent some of the issues that we see

Interviewee: Established in 2014, following the genocide immediately. It was in response to the genocide, actually we, um, so in August of 2014, I, I still had a brother who was living in Iraq and, uh, it's it. Wasn't just my brother. I have, um, Extended family members, my aunts and uncles still living in Iraq. And it wasn't just them. It was the entire Yazidi community that had been targeted for genocide by ISIS. So, um, when, when that happened, we, uh, formed a

group and it was the entire Yazidi community that, um, that helped during that time because, uh, we were in the state of shock

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Interviewee: and disbelief. And the news that was coming from Iraq was, was unbelievable. And we knew that it had happened in the past, and this was just a, another genocide that was going to take place. But now we have social media to, um, to create that awareness about what was happening in the community. So, um, that YAZADA was created. In August, actually of 2014, I mean really following the genocide because, uh, we were meeting with the U.S. state department and many different representatives and, uh, and the government that had wanted to follow up with people who had gone there to advocate for their community. And it wasn't just, uh, the YAZADA group. Again, it was the entire Yazidi community and we had hundreds of Yazidi standing in front of the white house. And, uh, we were holding a peaceful demonstration.

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Interviewee: So, um, the, the efforts kind of continued and, uh, some people actually lost their jobs because we were in DC for, uh, for a long period of time for, for many, it was a week and a week was long enough for them to lose their jobs. So, um, again, going back to your question. You, you wanted to know how the efforts as, or myself as a social worker, how that took place? Um, I would join any efforts that would help my community, but at the time it wasn't just me. It was like the entire community felt obligated to do something. Um, and, uh, it was, uh, just coming back. We knew that we couldn't stop there. So I continued to join the YAZADA group to, um, to continue our efforts, to help the community.

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Interviewee: I come from a country where women don't have a lot of rights, but I think it depends on each family. And I feel like. In the Yazidi community. I feel like there is more acceptance of change and people are, have more freedom, especially women. I feel like they do have more freedom compared with, um, some of the other women that I've seen come from the middle East. Uh, we already see women driving, uh, learning the language, uh, and, uh, Pursuing their education and, um, being part of this community that they were never exposed to before when they were living in Sinjar. So, um, I think most of the Yazidi men are proud to see the woman succeed and become leaders in their community. Uh, we have many survivors

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Interviewee: who were captured by ISIS. And after they escaped, um, a lot of the Yazidi men are very supportive of them. Uh, the large majority of the community is supportive of these survivors and they encourage them to, uh, to go on and continue their advocacy work. Um, they've gotten married to Yazidi man, um, they've been accepted back in the community, but again, it depends on each family of how, how they perceive that. So before the, uh, most part, I think they, they, they would like to see the women succeed and become leaders and they, um, they encourage them to do that.

Interviewee: I'm actually surprised at how well ahead, a lot of the, uh, especially the women are. They, they come here.

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Interviewee: Um, as soon as they get resettled, they are very motivated to, uh, to continue their education. And it's something I, I am, uh, pleasantly surprised because, um, Well, I'm not, I shouldn't say I'm surprised. I think if they had the opportunity to do that back home, they would.

So they come in, they're very hungry for, for education and for, uh, becoming successful. And, um, that, that's something that I feel like we're only better the community.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, is that different? So that's different than how you experienced it. People like the younger generation is. More ready to embark on that vision.

Interviewee: So the younger generation, um, especially with the new arrivals and I shouldn't say new because they've almost been here five years now, but they are a more, they seem more ready to, um, to start their lives here. Because when we first resettled, I remember I was

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Interviewee: depressed because I was taken away from my community and, um, It was just a very, very depressing sometimes times for me. And I think that would have been the case for a lot of the, um, the people that had been resettled back in the 1990s, because, um, again, of, uh, the, the, the men in the household did not speak the language. And then there was no way for them to, uh, to be able to lead. The house, the household and this new community and the new country. So we were not as prepared. So, um, it it's, I feel like it's easier for the new, new not just the new generation, but the new group of people that, um, that have been resettled. I feel like they're more ready to just start their lives in the new country.

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Interviewee: I actually learned my most of my English in Minnesota because, um, there were no Yazidi living there. Uh, so. When I went to school, I only spoke English. And, uh, when I came back home, I would speak in English with my siblings, but with my parents, it was my native language. And I think during those five years is when I learned most of the English language. So when, when we actually came here, um, to join the rest of the Yazidi community here in Lincoln,

I was, um, I had already, uh, I don't want to say perfect, but I had already, um, learned the English language in a way that was where I was able to get by very well.

Interviewee: When you compare Lincoln, when I compare Lincoln to other places, I feel like Lincoln is a very diverse, um, city. You have a, you have your Yazidi, you have Kurds, you have Muslims and Mexicans and Asians.

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Interviewee: You have people from all different ethnicities and backgrounds here right here in Lincoln. So, uh, for the most part, I think they're welcomed by the Lincoln community. Um, but that's not to say that you don't come across situations where people are. Where people come off as racist. And I've experienced that myself when I've taken my mother, for example, to Walmart, one time we walked by this older lady who was in a wheelchair and I was speaking to my mother and our native language. And we walked by this older lady and she, she turned around and, uh, was, uh, was like, um, you should speak English because this is a America. And so that was, uh,

Interviewer: what did you say to her? Did you say anything?

Interviewee: The time I ignored it, but it happened again one time when we were inside super saver, the cashier person

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Interviewee: was, uh, saying somethings that were, um, what is disturbing for me and, uh, for my son and my nephew to hear, because he said, we take all these immigrants for granted. When they come to our country and, uh, I just kind of went off on him and I said, uh, you, you

have no idea what we've been through. Uh, and, um, this was actually after the genocide happened. And, uh, so. I was just a very, it was very sad to see him say something like that because I, um, I felt sorry for him because I was like, I'm thinking if this person had gone through the same experience that we did to try to, um, to survive all those years and to be able to make it here and to be good citizens, I think we are good citizens for the most part. Um, I looked at this person as being very sheltered and not understanding what is happening

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Interviewee: outside of his comfort zone. So, um, I just looked at him and I said, I feel sorry for, for you, because you don't know what, um, what, and I pointed to my mom what she has been gone, what she has gone through, um, and that her people are actually facing genocide as you make these racist comments and, um, He didn't seem to want to accept that he didn't, he just kind of wanted it to get our groceries and be done with it. And I think that happened because my mother dresses differently. She still dresses in her traditional clothes. And I've noticed that when, when I'm with her, um, and it doesn't always happen. Sometimes people love the way she's dressed, but yeah, other times, and, um, it's usually more people, um, Uh, being, uh, kind of welcoming that, that difference in the dress code, but sometimes

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Interviewee: it happens where people don't appreciate it because they generalize things and they think she's, um, she, they don't know who the Yazidi are. So they kind of, uh, think of this person as being Muslim because she's wearing a scarf and she has a long dress on. So I think educating people is important, especially when you hear those kinds of comments. Um, I would like to see less of that happen, not just for my community, but for, for any refugees that come here.



Interviewee: Germany a few times. I don't, uh, I don't go to meet with the refugees. There is just to go see my family, but I did go back to Iraq and I went on to visit the people who had, um, gone back to live in Sinjar. And then also, um, to you see some of our projects on the ground. And I think that was a good experience to see, because when you go and you

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Interviewee: see the product of your work, you are kind of encouraged to continue because you know that there are thousands of people, depending on the work, that kind of simple things that you are doing here.

Interviewer: Can you give us an example of the projects that you've done when I was there at the time?

Interviewee: Uh, we had, we had, um, smaller projects. We, we started with a psychosocial support program to help the survivors. And, um, I was there in our center when, uh, the survivors would come and, uh, our documentation team would interview them and take their testimonies. And, uh, it was very depressing to see what they had gone through. Um, and then other times there were children coming into the center and, uh, Just, uh, wanting, uh, their basic needs. Uh, when I was there, when we visited Sinjar we, um, distributed chickens

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Interviewee: and, uh, it was a, it was a different thing, but I think, uh, for, for those families who had been living in Sinjar, that was, uh, that was, that was very helpful for them because

Interviewer: Baby chickens? You mean little chickens?

Interviewee: We had like thousands of chickens that we distributed to the families there. Um, and they, they could benefit from these chickens, um, by getting eggs from them and by having meals from these chickens. And, uh, it was very, I was just very heartwarming to see these children run towards you and, um, take their chickens home. That was just a very small project compared to what we do now, because now we, um, We have grants that help with, um, um, we have funds that help with small businesses and the Sinjar region and, uh, many, many other, um, ways of helping the community there.

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Interviewee: Oh my God. Um, I think. I don't know what other people have told you, but I think it's,

Interviewer: it's, it's a range that we're not going to change and there was a way to change. So, yeah.

Interviewee: Well, I think if we say we're not going to change, we're going to face very many challenges because we've already seen it in the community. Um, this is an issue that, um, that affects almost every community, every family, actually, especially those who have been here. For a long time. They, so the children have developed relationships with non Yazidis, and, uh, I think the heads of the household need to be more educated about that. They cannot be strict with their children. They have to be more flexible. Um, I would say for the most part, kids Yazidis are fixed flexible when it comes to different things, but when it comes to intermarrying,

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Interviewee: um, uh, That's still not, has been, uh, very well accepted in the community. I think the idea is to try to, um, keep the Yazidi identity as pure as possible, but that is, that's not

possible. We have seen it. It's not going to continue this way. I think, uh, we have to be smart about how we deal with this issue because, uh, we are. We have women in the community who have, um, who have, um, left the community to, to, um, to basically fulfill their personal needs rather than to, um, make the community happy. And for me, when I look at that, that's, that's a loss because we have lost another person. And if we could accept those people back in the community, I think, uh, whether we like it or not, it's going to continue

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Interviewee: to happen. So we need to find a way to handle those kinds of situations in a way where, where both sides are happy. You're still being part of your community and you're still helping the community and grow. And, uh, you're still preserving your language, but you're also fulfilling your personal needs outside of the community. And, um, it's just an issue that, uh, That is not discussed in the community, but it's something that happens. And I just feel like, um, it's going to, to affect more and more people and the community. And if it doesn't, uh, if it's not addressed, I think it will be, it will be a big challenge in the future.

Interviewee: So let's, let's look at the example of the survivors who, um, Who come back with, uh, who actually make that risk

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Interviewee: to, um, to escape from ISIS captivity. They come back into the community and there was this, um, this, uh, commotion I want to call it. That happened where, um, half of the community was against these women to bring back their kids who were born out of rape. And the other half was, uh, Accepting of their decision to bring up, to bring back their children with them. So you have different opinions in the community, even when it comes to situations that happen here locally, where, um, where people make decisions that are not very well, um,

approved by the rest of the community. And when I say the rest of the community, um, I had, I had a few friends, um, And I was for the decision of these woman to come back and, uh, and to, to be free. And what they decide to do with their children

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Interviewee: who were born out of rape. But then I also had friends who did not want to have anything to do with that conversation because their idea and the way they looked at the situation was that this woman's brothers were killed by ISIS. Their fathers were killed by ISIS. Their homes were destroyed by ISIS. These children are going to grow up. Um, Supporting ISIS ideology someday. And I can understand their point of view, but I'm just like that. There's other situations that have been here locally, where we kind of have a difference in opinion. So you, you have people who like got it both ways, but I do agree that when it comes to the situations here that, um, People who have been here long enough to see that those things are going to happen. Inevitably is there, they seem to accept it more than those who haven't seen that, who haven't gone through that experience.

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Interviewee: And, um, I would, I don't know. I would just like to, I've been through that experience the process and I've seen it in the community and, um, even my own family was very strict in the beginning. But now they see it happening and they have no control over it. So the community needs to come up with a way to deal with it and to handle those kinds of situations.

Interviewee: It all comes down to a personal decision. You either, um, you either choose what you want to do with your personal life, or, um, there is not a formal way of. Going about, about that.

Interviewee: Yes, we have the spiritual council, um, that kinds of, that kind of makes decisions when it comes

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Interviewee: to, um, major issues within the Yazidi religion. But I think, um, I think that when, when you have been away from your Homeland for so long that you don't, um, those, the decisions they make don't align with your lifestyle abroad. So, so the decision is that that are made by the spirit. So council, um, is important, but it doesn't really applied to the lifestyle outside of Iraq for for many reasons. So we do have a spiritual council that makes decisions, those bigger decisions that are related to the Yazidi religion. But, um, I, I personally don't see it as being very effective. I would like to see it, to see the spiritual counsel be more involved in their community

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Interviewee: and their communities need, and to be educated about what is happening with their community outside of Iraq, so that they are able to address the needs of the Yazidi community, the whole, because, um, we still depend on that spiritual counsel to, to lead us, but we want them to lead us in a way that will make the community more successful.

Interviewee: Um, so the Yazidi. The way I describe them is that they are a very small minority that, uh, originates, uh, from the middle East, they have a long persecution of, uh, of, uh, the long history of prosecutions and, and morals. Um, I think for the most part, Yazidi community is a very peaceful community. We have never Um, declared war against, um, any, any other communities surrounding us and, and

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Interviewee: in our Homeland, um, I, we don't have the kind of power to, to, uh, to declare war against any other communities, but I think for the most part, um, your Yazidis are knowing as victims of genocide. So when, when you, I bet you, if you research on genocide, Yazidis will come up on, on your list as a people who have suffered from multiple genocides and their history. And, um, we have a very beautiful culture. We have, uh, A beautiful language. And, um, we have different holidays that we celebrate. We have a holiday in spring that we celebrate, which is the renewal of, of earth. And we celebrate that. We celebrate that exact thing. Um, they, Yazidi are not even supposed to have a weddings and the month of April, because we feel that that month is a month of.

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Interviewee: The renewal of earth and nothing is more beautiful than that. Um, and then we have another holiday which is coming up here in December, which is the winter holiday where Yazidi's fast forward three days. And, um, and then, um, the fourth days, so we, we hold, um, a celebration. So, um, back in our Homeland, these all were, uh, Holidays and traditions that, that were practiced, uh, with the very details where, uh, ?? would come from the ??, uh, temple and they would visit the villages. But that doesn't, uh, that hasn't been happening recently because of the genocide. So we have many, many beautiful things about the Yazidi religion, the Yazidi culture, and, um, Again, the primary language spoken by Kurmanji, but we also have Yazidi's ??

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Interviewee:who speak Arabic because of where they grew up. Um, let's see, what else about the Yazidis?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, football is a big deal here. Um, I think back home soccer is a popular sport, but here it's football. And, um, I remember just a few weekends ago I was driving with my mother and, um, There were groups of people crossing the street and they will, are dressed in red. And my mother was questioning what that was about and the way I explained it to her is, do you remember when people made the pilgrimage to ?? and how important that was for people? This is that same kind of thing for, uh, the Lincoln, uh, Citizens when, when, when football season comes around,

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Interviewee: it's like making that pilgrimage to ?? for them. It's, uh, it's a very big, uh, event that happens. So, yeah, and I love how people are just crazy about it.