Check for updates

Article

Journal of Social Archaeology
2020, Vol. 20(1) 3–25
© The Author(s) 2019
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/1469605319884137
journals.sagepub.com/home/jsa
SAGE

The Islamic State's destruction of Yezidi heritage: Responses, resilience and reconstruction after genocide

Benjamin Isakhan
Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, Australia;
Department of Politics and International Relations,
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Sofya Shahab
Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, Australia

Abstract
After conquering large swathes of northern Iraq, the Islamic State undertook an aggressive genocidal campaign against the Yezidi people in which they not only executed and enslaved thousands of innocent civilians, but also damaged or destroyed several key Yezidi temples and shrines. Drawing on a small sample of in-depth semi-structured interviews with Yezidi men and women from two regions conquered by the Islamic State, this article documents the effect this wave of persecution has had on these Yezidi individuals. It finds that the attacks by the Islamic State on Yezidis and their heritage sites have caused considerable suffering among the community, in part because of their

Corresponding author:
Benjamin Isakhan, Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, Burwood Campus, 221 Burwood Highway, Melbourne, Victoria 3125, Australia.
Email: Benjamin.isakhan@deakin.edu.au

inability to practise their intangible religious rituals and customs. However, the Yezidi people have also demonstrated remarkable resistance and resilience to the Islamic State genocide in terms of returning to their ancient homelands, reconstructing their heritage sites and the re-emergence of their intangible religious heritage practices. The article concludes by noting that the new insights gleaned from these interviews are a step towards better understanding the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage in the wake of conflict, genocide and mass heritage destruction.

Keywords
Yezidis, Islamic State, genocide, heritage destruction, intangible heritage, religious heritage, resilience

Introduction

When the militant jihadist network known as the 'Islamic State' (IS) swept across northern Iraq in mid-2014, they shattered a fragile cultural and religious mosaic. After conquering key cities such as Mosul, the IS unleashed a cataclysmic wave of both genocidal pogroms and iconoclastic campaigns against several of the most vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities of northern Iraq, such as the Yezidis, Christians, Shia Shabaks and others. In terms of human suffering, the IS targeted these minority communities, executing thousands and dumping their bodies in mass graves, kidnapping women to be used as sex slaves and forcing many thousands more to flee for their lives. In terms of heritage destruction, the IS undertook a systematic iconoclastic programme which saw the razing of countless cultural and religious sites. Aside from their globally publicised attacks on sites such as the Mosul Museum or archaeological sites like Nineveh and Nimrud, the IS also actively targeted the sites most sacred to various minority communities: Yezidi temples, Christian churches and Shia shrines were systematically desecrated and destroyed.

Not surprisingly, a whole body of recent scholarship has sought to analyse and interpret various aspects of the heritage destruction unleashed by the IS. These have included: the failure of state bodies and multinational agencies to effectively respond to, and mitigate against, such destruction (Al Quntar and Daniels, 2016; Brodie, 2015); efforts to interpret the complex religious and ideological doctrine that underpins the virulent iconoclasm of the IS (Harmanşah, 2015; Isakhan and Zarandona, 2018); the role of heritage destruction in indoctrinating new recruits and binding them to the IS cause (Campion, 2017; Shahab and Isakhan, 2018); the extent to which the targeting of specific heritage sites formed part of their broader genocidal pogroms against besieged minorities (Bevan, 2016 [2006]; Isakhan, 2018); the IS attacks on heritage sites as a proxy for their rejection of 'western' imperialism and the vast symbolic nation building campaigns of

various dictatorial regimes (de Cesari, 2015); the IS use of social media to present their heritage destruction as dramatic spectacles to local, regional and global audiences (Cunliffe and Curini, 2018; Smith et al., 2016); and the extent to which heritage reconstruction across Syria and Iraq can be utilised as part of a broader post-conflict peacebuilding process (Isakhan and Meskell, 2019; Lostal and Cunliffe, 2016).

While the merits of each of the studies outlined above must be acknowledged in any nuanced account of the heritage destruction perpetrated by the IS, the extant literature has focused exclusively on the IS destruction of tangible heritage sites, with virtually no mention of the impact this destruction may have had on the intangible religious rituals and practices of the people associated with the myriad sites targeted by the IS. Nor does the above literature examine how the targeted communities have understood and interpreted the destruction of their heritage, the profound losses they have endured or their efforts to reconstruct and reclaim their heritage. This article addresses these lacunae by presenting the results of six in-depth semi-structured interviews with Yezidi men and women from two regions conquered by the IS (Sinjar and Bashiqa). It concentrates on the IS destruction of Yezidi shrines, temples and other sites (tangible heritage) and the extent to which this has had two specific consequences for the community: a temporary but profound inability to perform key religious rituals and practices (intangible heritage); and the subsequent emergence of youth-led resistance and resilience to the IS via the reconstruction of heritage sites and the re-emergence of their intangible practices. To do so, the article begins with a discussion of the interface between tangible and intangible heritage, with particular reference to the role that tangible heritage sites play in sustaining and re-making the practices and rituals that constitute the intangible heritage of a people. The article proceeds to offer some background information about the Yezidi people, their religion, their tangible and intangible heritage and their historical persecution at the hands of various forces. It then focuses on the interviewees' attitudes towards the genocidal campaign and heritage destruction unleashed by the IS and documents the effect this has had on their ability to perform their religious rituals and practices, as well as shaping their attitudes and efforts to return to their ancient homelands and to rebuild their heritage sites. The article concludes by noting that the case of the Yezidi people of northern Iraq sheds new light on the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage in the wake of conflict, genocide and mass heritage destruction.

Tangible and intangible heritage

The overwhelming majority of international charters and conventions regarding heritage and its protection have emphasised tangible heritage, most notably cultural property in the form of monuments and sites (Ahmad, 2006: 295). While these definitions have been expanded to include natural as well as human-made structures or areas, the focus has primarily been on material manifestations of

culture. In the Venice Charter, tangible heritage is privileged via the aim to 'preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument' (ICOMOS, 1964: Article 9). As such, these monuments are valued for their 'archaeological, architectural, historic or ethnographical' value, as perceived by experts and asserted by national and international institutions (ICOMOS, 1965: Article 3:1). As a result, 'the issue of cultural heritage became intrinsically linked to issues of values and such values highly profiled the physical attributes' of a culture (Munjeri, 2004: 13). The most obvious example of the privileging of material sites over other forms of culture is the UNESCO World Heritage List, which has been criticised for its Eurocentrism and the highly politicised process of inscribing sites (Cleere, 1996; Meskell, 2015; Scholze, 2008). More to the point, the World Heritage List has been accused of emphasising 'monumentality' over a broader understanding of the role that heritage, both tangible and intangible, plays in the complex and divergent ways in which culture is continually contested and renegotiated (De Cesari, 2019; Eriksen, 2001; Labadi, 2013; Meskell, 2018). As one specific example, Peutz has demonstrated how the global attention paid to UNESCO heritage sites can come at the cost of concerns over the fate of local forms of intangible heritage such as language and poetry (Peutz, 2018).

However, since the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Heritage, a greater emphasis has been placed on recognising cultural rituals and practices which lack physical form. Part of this increasing attention on intangible heritage stems from an acknowledgement that tangible and intangible cultures are enmeshed within one another: 'intangible heritage must be seen as the larger framework within which tangible heritage takes on its shape and significance. It is the critical tool through which communities and societies define their archive of relationships between cultural values and cultural valuables' (Appadurai, 2002: 12). This is possible because 'places are always far more than points or locations, because they have distinctive meaning and values for persons. Personal and cultural identity is bound up with place' (Tilley, 1994: 15). In other words, the importance of a specific site to a given community often lies as much in the intangible rituals, ceremonies and practices performed at the site, as in the site's historical, aesthetic or scientific 'value' (Kearney, 2009; Munjeri, 2009; Verkaaik, 2014). While much has been written about the importance of recognising the intangible elements of culture (Pocock et al., 2015; Smith and Akagawa, 2009), others have pointed out various limitations embedded in the existing convention (Kurin, 2004; Stefano, 2012). As one example, some have argued that the existing approaches to neither tangible nor intangible heritage are well suited to the complex and nuanced role that religious heritage plays in the lives of the devout. Here, Byrne has demonstrated how both the tangible and intangible religious heritage of Asia – including Buddhist, Islamic and Christian – are often excluded from preservation efforts despite the significance of religion to the people of the region (Byrne, 2014).

Despite such concerns, the fact that tangible heritage sites embody a host of intangible practices that are central to the identity of a given community can make such sites a target in conflict; a means of undermining, defeating or even obliterating an opponent's culture (Herscher, 2010; Viejo-Rose and Sørensen, 2015). In its worst iterations, the destruction of tangible heritage sites can mean that a given community is unable to practise its intangible heritage – including specific rituals, ceremonies, artistic performances and artisanal skills – leading to the loss of their culture and the erasure of a way of life (Meharg, 2001). As some have argued, attacks on human beings, heritage sites and intangible cultures ought to be viewed as indistinguishable moments of 'cultural cleansing', an attempt to wipe out the people, places and practices of a community (Bevan, 2016 [2006]; Mitchell, 2016). However, others have questioned whether the degradation of tangible and intangible heritage – by either gradual decay or deliberate destruction – ought to be viewed as an inherently negative phenomenon in which the cultures of the past are irretrievably lost. Such scholars propose a more dynamic view of heritage which accepts entropy and damage as both inevitable and as part of a process of cultural renewal via which communities renegotiate and reconstitute their heritage and their identity (DeSilvey, 2006, 2017; Holtorf, 2015, 2018). As some recent scholarship has shown, post-disaster heritage preservation and reconstruction efforts by the international community can obfuscate the dynamic ways in which local populations interpret their heritage, its destruction and reconstruction, as well as their efforts to re-make heritage and identity after tragedy (Dewi, 2017; Rico, 2014, 2016). In some cases, acknowledging the loss of heritage – by commemorating it or by reconstructing and preserving it – can play a role in mediating conflict, in helping to overcome collective trauma, in re-appropriating the suffering and in building a peaceful future (Giblin, 2014; Logan and Reeves, 2009; Meskell & Scheermeyer, 2008; Winter, 2007).

Methods, limitations and ethics

This article draws on a small sample of six in-depth semi-structured interviews with Yezidi men and women from Iraq.[1] These interviews form part of a larger project examining heritage, its destruction and reconstruction in Syria and Iraq in the context of the ongoing conflicts. To date, the study has collected 51 interviews with Syrians and Iraqis representing a broad geographic spread across the two countries, as well as gender, religious and ethnic diversity. The six Yezidi respondents are indicative of this diversity. They come from two significant Yezidi enclaves that were conquered by the IS in 2014 and where the bulk of the destruction of Yezidi heritage sites took place: Sinjar (2) and Bashiqa (4). In addition, while half of the participants had returned to their hometown after the defeat of the IS, others remained internally displaced in Dohuk in Iraqi-Kurdistan (1) or had emigrated to 'western' countries such as the US (1) and Germany (1). The study also included both male (4) and female (2) participants.

There are two significant and inter-connected limitations concerning the methodology outlined above which must be briefly acknowledged here. The first is the fact that due to the devastating violence that continues to ravage Syria and Iraq, doing comprehensive fieldwork inside either country proved very difficult. Although the researchers were able to conduct some in-person interviews inside Iraq and in neighbouring states with high numbers of Syrian and Iraqi refugees and migrants (Jordan and Lebanon), as well as with those who had migrated further afield, several of the interviews were conducted 'at a distance' via phone/Skype. However, such qualitative interpretations at a distance remain a vital tool in any robust attempt to understand the magnitude and effect of the horrors unleashed by the IS against the people of Syria and Iraq (Navest et al., 2016; Shahab and Isakhan, 2018). As Robben has demonstrated, such analysis requires that the researchers employ an 'ethnographic imagination' which itself requires a 'leap of analytic and interpretive faith ... to explain phenomena that cannot be studied directly through ethnographic fieldwork' (Robben, 2010: 3). This first problem of access and distance led to a second limitation: the small sample size of only six Yezidis. Such a study cannot claim to be equivalent to either the rich qualitative data generated from the long-term immersion of traditional anthropological research or the aggregate representative quantitative data produced by large-*n* surveys. Instead, this study relies on small-*n* in-depth semi-structured interviews which remain among few significant methods for collecting primary data about people's lived experiences of conflict at a distance. These interviews were expressly designed to yield an array of qualitative insights into the complex relationship between the Yezidi people, their heritage and its destruction and reconstruction.

However, given that each of the respondents had witnessed and continued to endure (directly or indirectly) a tumultuous period of Iraqi history, this study presented the researchers with several distinct ethical challenges. First, there is the ethics of two 'western'-based academics – neither of whom are of Yezidi background or faith – speaking on behalf of and about the Yezidi people. Scholars such as Said and Spivak have cautioned that foreign academics who seek to speak for the subaltern 'other' run the risk of perpetuating their oppression (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). However, to not speak also raises ethical questions: for scholars to remain silent when the communities s/he studies have endured genocide and iconoclastic violence eschews the responsibilities and obligations the scholar holds to such communities (Falla, 1994). As several anthropological works have pointed out, once an academic has engaged with such a community, they have an ethical duty to report their findings as accurately and sensitively as possible while remaining cognizant of their own inherent connection to the community and their plight (Herzfeld, 2009; Scheper-Hughes, 1992). Second, there are distinct ethical challenges implicit in how foreign scholars report on the divergent and complex ways in which these communities experience periods of violence and destruction. These include the researchers' obligations and responsibilities to accurately represent the views of their interlocutors whilst avoiding the temptation to glorify the

violence, to make martyrs of the victims or to seek to shock the audience (Daniel, 1996; Meskell and Pels, 2005; Schmidt and Schroder, 2001). The scholar is also presented with the dilemma of wanting to remain impartial but inevitably taking sides with the victims and thereby challenging notions of objectivity and dispassionate observation (Kunnath, 2013). Third, the western 'expert' must also be careful, in foreign contexts, not to 'classify everything old as heritage and to then pass judgment on human interactions with "heritage" according to whether in our terms they degrade it, obliviate it, or preserve it' (Byrne, 2014: 13). Conversely, to argue that there is or ought to be an 'Asian' (or for that matter a 'Middle Eastern' or 'Islamic' or 'Iraqi' or 'Yezidi') approach to cultural property and its value or destruction runs the significant risk of bifurcating 'the east and west via essentialist constructions of "culture"' and 'a discourse of "difference"' (Winter, 2014: 124) (see also: De Cesari, 2010). While remaining cognisant of the tensions implict in these ethical dilemmas, this article strives to live up to the obligation of allowing the six Yezidi respondents to shape – rather than be shaped by – the study. It eschews a positivist position of claiming objectivity or to present the facts 'as they are' and does not make judgements about the actual or perceived 'value' of specific heritage sites to the Yezidi people. That is, the researchers did not start with *a priori* assumptions about how the six Yezidis would interpret the destruction of their heritage, but instead provided a platform for them to express their own experiences of the role that heritage can and does play in their identity. This article seeks not to speak for them, but to allow them to speak; to give them some small agency in narrating the suffering they have endured.

The Yezidis: Religion, heritage and persecution

Northern Iraq serves as the spiritual and physical homeland of the Yezidi people. Although the precise origins of the Yezidi people and their religion are somewhat opaque, the historical record indicates that from the 12th century CE, a relatively small and isolated community began to follow the teachings of a Sufi mystic known as Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir (Allison, 2001). At some point, they set up their spiritual headquarters in the Lalish Valley of northern Iraq where an iconic temple was erected that is said to house the mausoleum of Sheikh Adi (Açıkyıldız, 2009). Lalish remains the epicentre of the Yezidi faith to this day, with the devout making regular pilgrimages to the town to participate in the religion's most sacred rituals and festivals. Over time, another significant Yezidi community emerged around Mount Sinjar in the west of the Nineveh province of Iraq, close to the Syrian border. Ethnically and linguistically most Yezidis are considered to be Kurds although some speak Arabic and claim an Arab ethnicity, while others claim that Yezidis are an ethnically distinct group descending from ancient Mesopotamian civilisations (Asatrian and Arakelova, 2014; Maisel, 2017).

Despite its likely origins in the teachings of a Sufi mystic, Yezidism gradually emerged as a unique religion distinct from Islam, incorporating elements of

different local pre-Islamic religions and customs (Kreyenbroek, 1995). One key example is the cult of the Peacock Angel, which appears to have pre-dated the arrival of Sheikh Adi in northern Iraq. In Yezidi belief, the Peacock Angel is the mediator between God and the Yezidi people, a demiurge that controls the material world on behalf of God, but is at the same time an aspect of God (Asatrian and Arakelova, 2014). It is also important to note that the Peacock Angel is understood to have been an angel that fell to earth and transformed into the colourful bird. Another key symbol of Yezidism is that of the serpent – often rendered in black – because the Yezidi believe that this animal helped humanity to survive the Flood when it used its body to seal a leak in Noah's Ark (Açıkyıldız, 2010: 159–160). The worship of a fallen angel and a serpent is highly controversial in the three Abrahamic faiths because they are associated with the story of Lucifer and, as such, the Yezidis have often been mistaken for 'devil worshippers' (Açıkyıldız, 2010: 1–2).

As with many other groups, the tangible heritage sites of the Yezidi people play a central role in their community and religious identity. Their principal heritage sites include the mausoleums of key saints as well as various smaller temples and shrines that are scattered across the landscape where Yezidis reside. Situated mainly in rural areas and on top of hills 'to separate them from public spaces', these sacred sites play an important role in underscoring Yezidi identity; they are places for community and religious ritual, sacred and public gatherings and for collective worship of the divine (Açıkyıldız, 2010: 202). Yezidi temples can be identified by their canonical domes that represent the rays of the sun; many also bear depictions of the peacock and/or the serpent on their façade.

Yezidism is a religion of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy (Langer, 2010). This means that Yezidism places less emphasis on conforming to specific beliefs and more on participation in certain intangible religious rituals and adherence to specific behaviours (Kreyenbroek, 1995: 18). Key to Yezidi identity is therefore the practise of various religious festivals and pilgrimages; the religion cannot grow or survive without these rituals, and the rituals cannot exist without the sites in which they are practised (Maisel, 2017: 121–122). Virtually every significant Yezidi shrine and temple hosts some form of annual pilgrimage or festival (Açıkyıldız, 2009). The festivals and pilgrimages are a time when the community comes together in order to celebrate the saintly figure enshrined at the site. Days before the event, locals engage in a ritualised cleansing of the shrine in which the community helps to clean and repair the site (Maisel, 2017: 57). The festivals that follow are generally a mix of serious religious rituals such as formal processions, recitals of traditional poems, animal sacrifices and other religious ceremonies; as well as more light-hearted activities such as communal feasts, concerts with dancing, markets and traditional games. Such festivals and pilgrimages also play an important socio-political role. They foster ties between the religious heartland of the Yezidi faith and the periphery, with many travelling from as far away as Europe to participate in the festivities. They enable the leaders to come together to make key political and economic decisions. They serve as an opportunity to resolve any outstanding

disputes under the guidance of religious leaders. And they serve as a key social event for young Yezidi people who not only meet old and new friends, but also engage in wooing one another and identifying suitable partners in a safe and friendly environment.

Under strict interpretations of Islamic law, the followers of syncretic religions such as that of the Yezidis are considered *kafir* (non-believer) and the further confusion over their status as 'devil worshippers' has meant that Yezidis have often been perceived as following a blasphemous and heretical cult. This has led to waves of persecution over the centuries; many Yezidis claim that they had endured as many as 72 genocides or massacres prior to the onset of the Iraq war of 2003 (this was brought up, without prompt, in three of the interviews: IN014, IN015 and IN028). Although the precise details and number of these earlier genocides are difficult to verify, there are records dating back at least as far as the mid-13th century, which tell of atrocities against the Yezidis at the hands of various forces – Arabs, Kurds, Persians and Ottomans. These include their forced conversion to Islam, massacres of those who resisted, the abduction of Yezidi women and the deliberate destruction and defacement of their religious shrines and monuments (Fuccaro, 1999a; Guest, 2010 [1993]: 134–140). In the early 20th century, the Yezidis actively resisted both colonial rule and integration into the newly formed Iraqi state, leading to renewed waves of persecution (Fuccaro, 1997, 1999b). Under the Baath regime, the Yezidis suffered under the 'Arabization' (*ta'rib*) campaign in which thousands of non-Arab Iraqi citizens were forcibly relocated to the so-called 'collective villages' (*mujammas*), often newly created townships where the state could monitor their transformation into good Arab citizens (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, 2003 [1987]: 187–190). Finally, following the US-led Iraq War of 2003, the Yezidi people were targeted by various militant actors as part of the sectarian violence that erupted from 2006. In 2007, the physical and ideological forebearers of the IS, known then as the Islamic State in Iraq, set off several truck bombs in two Yezidi villages near Mount Sinjar, leaving 500 dead and at least 350 wounded. The incident had a profound effect on the Yezidi community, with many choosing to stop visiting their holy shrines or attending important religious ceremonies in the belief that such sites would be targeted (Rubin, 2007).

The IS attacks on the Yezidis: Genocide and heritage destruction

Despite this long history of persecution at the hands of various forces, nothing could have prepared the Yezidi community for the horrors unleased by the IS in mid-2014. When the IS swept through Sinjar and other Yezidi enclaves across Sheikhan, thousands of Yezidis were slaughtered in a matter of days (Cetorelli et. al., 2016). Tens of thousands fled their homes in fear, many ending up trapped on Mount Sinjar without food, water or weapons – including up to 25,000

children. Many of the most vulnerable – children, the elderly and the disabled – perished from hunger and dehydration in the scorching 50° heat (UNAMI/OHCHR, 2014).

Those Yezidis who were left behind were rounded up and systematically separated into four distinct groups: men, older or less attractive women, boys and physically attractive young women and girls. Each group suffered distinct and systematic violations at the hands of the IS. Yezidi men were taken to IS courts where they were forced to convert to Islam. Those who refused – and even many who accepted – were tortured and executed, their bodies dumped in mass graves (OHCHR, 2015; UNAMI/OHCHR, 2014). Older or less attractive women suffered a similar fate. After Sinjar was re-taken in November 2015 by Iraqi and Kurdish forces, six mass graves were unearthed containing the bodies of at least 200 women aged between 40 and 80 (BBC, 2015). Yezidi boys were sent to Islamist training schools where they were forcibly converted and indoctrinated in jihadist Islam before being sent out to the front lines to fight for the IS (UNHRC, 2016). Finally, the physically attractive young women and girls were taken as sex slaves. According to a report commissioned by the United Nations in 2016, as many as 3200 Yezidi women – including girls as young as 6 – were taken into slavery, forced into marriages and raped (UNHRC, 2016). Those deemed to be the most attractive were given as 'gifts' to senior IS leaders or married off to IS fighters, and the remainder were repeatedly sold at public auctions in IS strongholds such as Mosul and Raqqa where men gathered to inspect and then bid on them (OHCHR, 2015; UNAMI/OHCHR, 2014). A June 2016 report from the UN Human Rights Council stated categorically that: 'ISIS has committed, and continues to commit, the crime of genocide, as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes, against the Yezidis' (UNHRC, 2016: 1).

In addition to the violence against the Yezidi people, the IS undertook an aggressive campaign to cleanse the region of the physical manifestations of the Yezidi community as a whole – including their many heritage sites. Once the IS had cleared the Sinjar region of Yezidis, they hoisted their black flag over key buildings and marked the Yezidi houses to distinguish them from those belonging to Muslims. Many of these houses were later 'looted, and some were destroyed or severely damaged' (UNHRC, 2016: 19). They also damaged or destroyed the many sacred shrines and temples of the Yezidis as they swept through Sinjar and its surrounding villages. Among the many Yezidi sites damaged or destroyed by the IS were: the shrine of Sheikh Hassan in Gabara; the shrine of Malak Fakhraddin in Sikeeniya; the shrine of Sheikh Abdul Qader in Hayali; the shrine of Sheikh Abdul Aziz in Majnonia; the shrine of Ismaeel Bek in Qandil; the shrines of Mahma Rashan and Amadin, both in Solagh; and the Baate shrine in Babire with its seven canonical spires (RASHID, 2019; Rudaw, 2017a; UNHRC, 2016: 19). In one particularly abhorrent incident, the IS executed 14 elderly men inside the shrine of Sheikh Mand in the village of Jiddala at the foot of Mount Sinjar before blowing up the shrine with the bodies still inside (UNAMI/OHCHR, 2014: 15).

In the villages of Bashiqa and Bahzani in the Sheikhan district, the IS undertook a systematic campaign to erase virtually the entire legacy of Yezidi life. Between August 2014 and November 2016, the IS damaged or destroyed at least 16 Yezidi sites across the two villages. This included the 14th-century shrines of Sheikh Bakir and Sheikh Babik, as well as the 'Three Domes' monument in the centre of Bashiqa which housed the shrines of Sheikh Muhammad, Sitt Habibi and Sitt Hecici. Also in Bashiqa, the damage included the Pir Bub shrine, the Sheikh Hassan shrine which was bulldozed and the Malak Miran shrine which was blown to rubble by the IS (ASOR, 2016: 93–145, 2017: 62–64; RASHID, 2019; Reuters, 2017a, 2017b). According to Yezidi belief, Malak Miran (or Angel Miran) is believed to be the angel who saved the Biblical prophet Abraham from King Nimrod's furnace. The Yezidi hold an annual festival in September to commemorate Miran's role in saving Abraham. Not stopping at shrines and temples, the IS also destroyed other Yezidi sites in the villages. For example, a statue dedicated to Ezidi Mirza, a 17th-century Yezidi military hero, was all but destroyed. Also targeted were the 13th-century Yezidi cemeteries in both Bashiqa and Bahzani, including the desecration of tombstones and the smashing open of graves (ASOR, 2016: 93–145).

Despite the mass human and heritage suffering unleashed by the IS against the Yezidi people of northern Iraq, few studies have considered the impact this has had on their tangible and intangible heritage, and none have included interviews which document their complex responses to this phenomenon. Understandably, the bulk of the extant scholarly literature has focused on the gendered nature of the genocide against the Yezidi, focusing specifically on the forced sexual slavery of thousands of Yezidi women. This has included comparative studies which contrast the suffering of Yezidi women with those of women who endured earlier waves of genocide in the Middle East (Marczak, 2018); the IS's selective interpretation of Islamist doctrine to justify the taking of female slaves (Nicolaus and Yuce, 2017); and the ongoing suffering of Yezidi women now living in refugee camps in the Kurdish Region of northern Iraq in terms of how they deal with trauma and the challenges of integrating into their new communities (Dulz, 2016). However, others have argued that this emphasis on Yezidi women's suffering not only reproduces patriarchal and Orientalist discourses of the female Yezidi victim, but also obfuscates the very real suffering of Yezidi men, children and the women who were not taken into sexual slavery (Buffon and Allison, 2016). Others have sought to examine the possible domestic and international legal mechanisms for prosecuting members of the IS for their crimes against the Yezidis (Hechler, 2017; Schaack, 2018) and the extent to which these actions meet the various legal definitions of genocide (Dakhil et al., 2017). Of the few studies which have examined the destruction of Yezidi heritage and its consequences for the Yezidi people, the focus has been on documenting the destruction undertaken by the IS, the complex relationships between heritage destruction and genocide and the ways in which such destruction disrupts pilgrimage practices and the links between the Yezidi homeland and the diaspora (Al-Marashi, 2017; Isakhan

et al., 2019; RASHID, 2019). The remainder of this article therefore seeks to document the responses of the six Yezidi interviewees, examining their perceptions of the destruction of their heritage, the subsequent temporary rupture of their intangible religious practices and the role this has played in shaping their attitudes to displacement, return and reconstruction.

Yezidi responses: Genocide, displacement and the rupture of intangible heritage

Not surprisingly, all six of the respondents discussed their reactions to the destruction of Yezidi temples and shrines across northern Iraq. For many, the destruction was viewed as an integral component of the broader genocidal campaign undertaken by the IS against the Yezidi people. One Yezidi woman from Bashiqa put it succinctly: '[The shrines] have been destroyed so as to destroy what is left of our identity and Yezidism' (IN030). Another respondent provided a more detailed account of the links between the destruction of tangible heritage and the persecution of the Yezidi people. He stated:

> The vast majority of the shrines in the area [Sinjar] that were accessible to ISIS were blown up and burned and destroyed completely. This is part of their cultural genocide. They wanted to erase everything that connected us to our culture and heritage because Sinjar is an ancestral homeland for the Yezidi people. And ISIS knew exactly what they were doing. They raped the women, they traumatized the community, they forcefully converted them to Islam so people will lose their faith. And also, they blew up their religious places and shrines so they have no place of worship . . . the community interpreted the loss of their shrines as part of genocide. (IN014)

However, what is more relevant for our purposes is the extent to which the interviewees focused not so much on the genocidal campaign of the IS against Yezidi people or their heritage sites, but that this destruction also had profound effects on the ability of the Yezidi people to practice many of their intangible religious rituals and practices traditionally performed at the now destroyed sites. As one respondent, a Yezidi woman from Bashiqa, put it:

> Yes our shrines and the churches have been destroyed and that left a big scar in our hearts. Before ISIS we did not have parks we just had the shrines so in that place we could find our mental and psychological rest. We the Yezidis consider it the link between God and us, we leave our wishes there and it was also a place for lovers and friends to meet each other. So when it was destroyed we were affected a lot. It holds a lot of nice memories like the religious ceremonies where we would gather and have beautiful parties there . . . In there the Yezidi bury their dead and visit their dead. Also, it is the place of their prayers to God. As well as a place to gather the people and to make the special ceremonies for the Yezidis. The shrines are all of that

> to the Yezidis, so imagine the negative effect its destruction will leave on the community. (IN028)

These negative effects for the Yezidi community were elaborated upon by several other respondents, including the very specific ways in which the IS destruction of Yezidi sacred sites had effectively limited the ability of the community to practice its religious ceremonies and festivals. One interviewee, a Yezidi man from both Sinjar and Sheikhan, expressed it as:

> From August 2014 until now, most Yezidis are not practising their normal festivals or religious practises. So it has been destroyed . . . ISIS thought that Yezidis were devil worshippers and non-Muslims. They thought that if they destroyed the Yezidi shrines then they would not be able to practise their religion and will forget their religion. They won't have a place to practise their religion in. This was systematic and very organised by ISIS – to destroy the most important things for a community, the religious places and holy places. So, if you want to destroy a community you have to focus on the most important things for that community. For the Yezidis, religious identity is the most important. So, if they destroyed the shrines, they will destroy generations now and the ones coming after. (IN015)

Other respondents expressed similar concerns about the effect that the destruction of Yezidi heritage sites and their associated religious rituals and practices would have by creating a chasm between Yezidi traditions as exemplified by the older members of the community, and the younger generation who would grow up without access to these same sites and customs. As one respondent put it:

> [Especially] elderly people think that this is devastating because their religious heritage and their shrines have been destroyed, because they used to frequently visit, to pray, and also each shrine had an annual event . . . That has all gone. Some of the community members think it will never be the same. They will never have these festivals again. Because the future of the region is uncertain because of the conflict . . . The feeling of losing their shrines, and all these festivals and all this heritage, all these ceremonies. For religious Yezidi people, they think it is now the end of the faith. If you don't have shrines, if you don't have places to worship . . . the children are growing up in the last three years knowing nothing about their religion, their heritage, their culture. (IN014)

This sense of a profound break between the traditions of the past and future generations of Yezidis was also evident in the ways that respondents discussed the mass exodus of the bulk of the Yezidi population from their ancient homelands since the IS onslaught of mid-2014. Thousands became internally displaced, fleeing to other parts of Iraq such as the neighbouring Kurdish Region where most lived in makeshift camps; others crossed borders and became refugees in neighbouring countries such as Turkey; and many fled further afield to seek asylum or migrate to

Europe, the US, Canada or Australia (Dulz, 2016; Higel, 2016; IOM, 2018). For the six interviewees, and despite half of them now living away from their traditional homelands, such a mass exodus of a small minority also threatens the survival of the Yezidi religion and its unique rituals and practices.

Several respondents focused specifically on the plight of the Yezidis who had become internally displaced and refugees. As one Yezidi interviewee put it, Yezidis cannot go back because 'there is no protection of minorities in Iraq . . . [and] the Yezidis don't trust many of the forces there' but 'If they don't go back, how can they practise their religion?' (IN015). Another respondent gave more concrete examples of how life in refugee camps had significantly undermined the ability of the Yezidis to practise their religion. As he put it:

> When a lot of Yezidis were displaced – the vast majority of them were displaced into refugee camps – the Yezidi people then had no way of practising their religion and their culture and their religious holidays and so on. Those days were like we had lost our culture. Because there was no way to practise our religion . . . [in the refugee camps] many of the children and young people were starting to forget about their identity. Unfortunately, it is very hard when you are no longer in your homeland and when everything has been destroyed. The priority for you and your family becomes survival. You want to survive, you want to feed your family. Everything else comes second: education and culture and all that. (IN014)

Another respondent spoke more specifically about Yezidis who had migrated out of the Middle East and the challenges this posed to the performance of traditional Yezidi rituals. As he put it:

> Another problem is that a very big number of Yezidis have immigrated to western countries. And this is another way that Yezidi culture is being destroyed. Especially the children because they are not getting enough information about their religion. They will forget their religion . . . So it's not only by destroying the places that our culture is being destroyed – also by our people when they leave the country because they can no longer practise their culture, religion and traditions. (IN015)

The above responses indicate that, for these six Yezidis at least, the IS attacks on Yezidi heritage sites were perceived as a key component of the broader genocidal campaign against the Yezidi people. However, the destruction of the various Yezidi shrines was lamented less for the perceived 'value' of the site itself and more because it symbolised a rupture with the intangible religious heritage of the Yezidi people. Further compounding this rupture was the fact that the IS onslaught across northern Iraq led to a mass exodus of Yezidi people from their traditional homelands, creating further barriers to their ability to perform their traditional religious practices. This rupture was therefore perceived to have ramifications for the past (a rupture of cultural memories), the present (a rupture in the ability to practise religious rituals and festivals) and future (a rupture in the ability

of the older generation to pass on the traditions to the youth) of the Yezidi people. Therefore, in the eyes of the six respondents the targeting of Yezidi people, the destruction of their holy sites and their flight from northern Iraq constituted a watershed moment that threatened the very existence of the Yezidi people and their traditional religious practices.

Yezidi Resilience: Return, reconstruction and re-emergence

However, the six interviewees also revealed the remarkable resilience of the Yezidi people via their discussions of the return of some Yezidis to their homelands, the reconstruction of their heritage sites and the re-emergence of their intangible religious practices. Many Yezidis have in fact been able to return to areas around Sinjar and Bashiqa after they were liberated from the IS. Demonstrating the significance of tangible heritage sites to the Yezidi people and their traditional religious practices, several community-driven heritage reconstruction projects have since been launched in which bands of Yezidi volunteers – mostly young people – came together to restore their towns and to reconstruct their sacred spaces. In the village of Snuny (in the Sinjar area), a group of Yezidi young people returned and began painting over the graffiti left behind by the IS, replacing them with colourful murals and messages of hope (Nawzad, 2018). In the small Yezidi village of Babire (Sinjar), the community took such efforts a step further by starting a fundraising campaign in order to reconstruct the Baate shrine with its iconic seven spires. In February 2017, the local Yezidis celebrated the reopening of the site by praying at the site and performing other religious rituals (prayers and ceremonies) as well as hosting a small festival that included traditional drums and flute (AFP, 2018). As one local Yezidi man commented at the time: 'By rebuilding the shrine, we want to send a message that we survived and won't abandon our faith' (Rudaw, 2017a).

Similar efforts were undertaken by the Yezidi communities around Bashiqa and Bahzani. For example, from August 2017, after some members of the Yezidi community had returned to the village of Bashiqa, they set about raising funds and then rebuilding several significant temples and shrines. One such site was the Malak Miran shrine which took over two months to complete; at night, the band of volunteers would pray in the ruins by candlelight (Reuters, 2017a, 2017b). Another shrine restored by the volunteers was the Sheikh Hassan shrine. One local Yezidi man who worked on restoring the site stated: 'Let ISIS see with their eyes that we repaired it in even a more beautiful way. Our domes are always beautiful, but it has become more attractive than before. Let them know we do not die' (Rudaw, 2017b).

Three respondents had returned to Bashiqa and were directly involved in these local heritage reconstruction efforts in the town. As one Yezidi woman put it: 'We in Bashiqa returned after its liberation and we did not rely on the government, we cleaned it by ourselves and brought electricity and water . . . But what kept us calm/peaceful is we returned and rebuilt our shrines again' (IN030). Another respondent described his involvement in the clean-up of Bashiqa and the reconstruction of

several key Yezidi heritage sites and the critical role this played in motivating exiled Yezidis to return to their hometown. He states:

> After Bashiqa's liberation from ISIS this group of students . . . decided to reach Bashiqa to start cleaning and start bringing hope to Bashiqa citizens because the situation there was horrible and it was scary for people to find their houses had been destroyed and everything taken . . . [We] gathered many young people like all the youth of Bashiqa who are above 12 years old and less than 30. We started funding ourselves from our pocket money . . . to buy tools, to buy trees, to buy paint, everything we need, then to pay for a mini-van to drive everyone to Bashiqa to start working there for holidays [weekends]. Then we started working to clean the rubbish, to clean the streets, to paint the walls and hide the ISIS marks . . . and these slogans of ISIS . . . [We cleaned] different places including the shrines . . . I also helped on a project documenting the shrines that had been destroyed . . . We went anytime we had a chance to clean and renovate together and come back. We wanted to encourage people to come back and to give them spirit to motivate them for that by cleaning the city. And this thing encouraged people to come back to Bashiqa, many of them came back. (IN029)

Beyond the fact that the cleaning and restoration of Yezidi towns and heritage sites had facilitated the return of Yezidi people to their traditional villages, the reconstruction also saw a return of the intangible religious rituals and practices of the Yezidi people. This is especially true of traditional festivals which were held at each site after it had been reconstructed. As one Yezidi man from Bashiqa put it:

> What the community of Bashiqa did is to start building these shrines again as a message to Islamic State we are still here and we will still resist. So the shrines in Bashiqa have been built by the donation of the people of Bashiqa not by the government or any NGOs. So the people of Bashiqa raise money, raise funds and they are starting to build shrines one by one and they start celebrating in the completion of any new shrine in a kind of festival where you can find all the community . . . So some people asked them: 'why are you building a shrine before the houses?' . . . If you build the shrine you are building a place or a thing for the whole town and for the whole people. Because the shrine belongs to everybody in Bashiqa and not to a specific person in particular. That's why you can see all the people cooperate together to build the shrines first to say that Bashiqa still belongs to minorities or Yezidis . . . And in the end of the work we made a festival. (IN027)

In returning to their traditional homelands and reconstructing their heritage sites, the Yezidi people have demonstrated remarkable resistance and resilience in the face of the genocide perpetrated by the IS. It is worth noting that these reconstruction efforts played a part in encouraging other members of the community to return, thereby reducing the impact of the Yezidi exodus from northern Iraq. Together, the fledgling communities not only restored their religious sites but re-engaged in

intangible religious practices in the form of traditional music, festivals and rituals. Perhaps most importantly, such initiatives were largely grass-roots youth-led co-operative efforts to not only document the destruction, but to clean and reconstruct their heritage sites and spread messages of hope. This comes despite the legitimate concerns of elderly Yezidi people that their heritage and identity would not be passed down to future generations given the atrocities of the IS.

Conclusion

The advance of the IS across large swathes of northern Iraq in mid-2014 was a climacteric moment for the country's small Yezidi population. The IS not only enacted horrific genocidal violence against the Yezidi people, causing many to flee, they also undertook an aggressive iconoclastic programme in which they targeted key Yezidi temples, shrines and other religious and historical sites. For the Yezidi people, as well as many other communities, the importance of a heritage site goes well beyond its aesthetic or architectural value, to its function as a site for the intangible – a location in which the Yezidi perform the unique set of religious rituals and practices that underpin their identity, connecting them to the divine, to their ancestors and to each other. This article has therefore shed new light on the horrors endured by the Yezidi community by examining the extent to which the genocide and heritage destruction perpetrated by the IS had profound consequences for the intangible heritage of the Yezidi people. The interviews reveal how the destruction of Yezidi heritage dramatically undermined the ability of the community to perform these traditional religious customs and that this threatened to rupture the Yezidi way of life by preventing the community from passing on its unique culture from one generation to another. However, the Yezidi people have also shown remarkable resistance and resilience in the face of the IS genocide by returning to their traditional homelands, by reconstructing their heritage sites and by re-engaging in their intangible cultural and religious practices. The fact that such cultural renewal has been led by grass-roots and youth-led movements offers one of few positive signs for the future of this beleaguered minority. This study therefore has implications beyond the case study of the Yezidi people of contemporary Iraq. Further research is urgently needed to analyse and interpret the relationships between genocide, heritage destruction, the disruption of intangible heritage and processes of return, reconstruction and re-emergence in divergent contexts and for different communities. Such research would therefore be a small step in the ongoing process of developing appropriate analytical tools and policy responses to mitigate against, and understand the consequences of, the destruction of the tangible and intangible heritage of a community during conflict.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the hard work and enthusiasm of several colleagues who helped collate some of the materials presented and analysed in this article: Ahmed Hassin, Taghreed Jamal Al-Deen and Antonio Zarandona. We are also grateful for the

support of the Alfred Deakin Institute at Deakin University Australia, and acknowledge the insightful comments and suggestions of the three anonymous reviewers and the editor of this journal.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The Australian Department of Defence and the Australian Research Council's Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE120100315). The views expressed in this article do not reflect those of Defence or Government policy.

Note

1. The interviews were collected in accordance with the ethical standards of the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee, Australia. Informed consent was obtained for all participants, who remain anonymous and non-identifiable.

Cited interviews

IN014. Interviewed via Phone/Skype from Philadelphia (US) to Houston (US), November 2017. Male Yezidi from Sinjar (Iraq). Now living in Houston (US).

IN015. Interviewed via Phone/Skype from Melbourne (Australia) to Berlin (Germany), November 2017. Male Yezidi from Sinjar/Sheikhan (Iraq). Now living in Berlin (Germany).

IN027. Interviewed via Phone/Skype from Amman (Jordan) to Dohuk (Iraqi Kurdistan), June 2018. Male Yezidi from Bashiqa (Iraq). Now living in Dohuk (Iraqi Kurdistan).

IN028. Interviewed via Phone/Skype from Amman (Jordan) to Bashiqa (Iraq), July 2018. Female Yezidi from Bashiqa (Iraq). Now living in Bashiqa (Iraq).

IN029. Interviewed via Phone/Skype from Amman (Jordan) to Bashiqa (Iraq), July 2018. Male Yezidi from Bashiqa (Iraq). Now living in Bashiqa (Iraq).

IN030. Interviewed via Phone/Skype from Amman (Jordan) to Bashiqa (Iraq), September 2018. Female Yezidi from Bashiqa (Iraq). Now living in Bashiqa (Iraq).

References

Açıkyıldız B (2009) The sanctuary of Sheikh Adi at Lalish: Centre of pilgrimage of the Yezidis. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72(2): 301–333.

Açıkyıldız B (2010) *The Yezidis: The History of a Community, Culture and Religion*. London: IB Tauris.

AFP (2018) Iraqi Yazidis celebrate restoration of temple destroyed by IS. *AFP News Agency*, 12 January.

Ahmad Y (2006) The scope and definitions of heritage: From tangible to intangible. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12(3): 292–300.

Allison C (2001) *The Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan*. London: Curzon Press.

Al-Marashi I (2017) The impact of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's campaign on Yezidi religious structures and pilgrimage practices. In: Leppakari M and Griffin K (eds) *Pilgrimage and Tourism to Holy Cities: Ideological and Management Perspectives*. Boston: CAB International Press, pp.144–155.

Al Quntar S and Daniels B (2016) Responses to the destruction of Syrian cultural heritage: A critical review of current efforts. *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 5(2): 381–397.

Appadurai A (2002) Cultural diversity: A conceptual platform. In: Stenou K (ed) *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. Paris: UNESCO, pp.9–16.

Asatrian G and Arakelova V (2014) *The Religion of the Peacock Angel. The Yezidis and Their Spirit World*. New York: Routledge.

ASOR (2016) ASOR cultural heritage initiatives: Planning for safeguarding heritage sites in Syria and Iraq. *Weekly Report 119-120*, 16–30 November 2016.

ASOR (2017) ASOR cultural heritage initiatives: Planning for safeguarding heritage sites in Syria and Iraq. *Monthly Report – Appendices*, February 2017.

BBC (2015) IS blamed for mass Yazidi grave found near Sinjar, Iraq. *BBC News*, 28 November.

Bevan R (2016 [2006]) *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*. London: Reaktion Books.

Brodie N (2015) Syria and its regional neighbors: A case of cultural property protection policy failure? *International Journal of Cultural Property* 22(2&3): 317–335.

Buffon V and Allison C (2016) The gendering of victimhood: Western media and the Sinjar genocide. *Kurdish Studies* 4(2): 176–196.

Byrne D (2014) *Counterheritage: Critical Perspectives on Heritage Conservation in Asia*. New York: Routledge.

Campion K (2017) Blast through the past: Terrorist attacks on art and antiquities as a reconquest of the modern Jihadi identity. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11(1): 26–39.

Cetorelli V, Sasson I, Shabila N, et al. (2016) ISIS' Yazidi genocide: Demographic evidence of the killings and kidnapping. *Foreign Affairs*, June 8.

Cleere H (1996) The concept of 'Outstanding Universal Value' in the World Heritage Convention. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 1(4): 227–233.

Cunliffe E and Curini L (2018) ISIS and heritage destruction: A sentiment analysis. *Antiquity* 92(364): 1094–1111.

Dakhil V, Borda AZ and Murray ARJ (2017) 'Calling ISIL atrocities against the Yezidis by their rightful name': Do they constitute the crime of genocide? *Human Rights Law Review* 17(2): 261–283.

Daniel EV (1996) *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

De Cesari C (2010) World Heritage and mosaic universalism: A view from Palestine. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 10(3): 299–324.

De Cesari C (2015) Post-colonial ruins: Archaeologies of political violence and IS. *Anthropology Today* 31(6): 22–26.

De Cesari C (2019) *Heritage and the Cultural Struggle for Palestine*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

DeSilvey CO (2006) Observed decay: Telling stories with mutable things. *Journal of Material Culture* 11(3): 318–338.

DeSilvey CO (2017) *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dewi C (2017) Rethinking architectural heritage conservation in post-disaster context. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23(6): 587–600.

Dulz I (2016) The displacement of the Yezidis after the rise of ISIS in Northern Iraq. *Kurdish Studies* 4(2): 131–147.

Eriksen TH (2001) Between universalism and relativism: A critique of the UNESCO concept of culture. In: Cowan J, Dembour M-B and Wilson R (eds) *Culture and Rights. Anthropological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.127–148.

Falla R (1994) *Massacres in the Jungle, Ixcan, Guatemala, 1975–1982*. Howland J (trans) San Francisco, CA: Westview.

Farouk-Sluglett M and Sluglett P (2003 [1987]) *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*. London: IB Tauris.

Fuccaro N (1997) Ethnicity, state formation, and conscription in postcolonial Iraq: The case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29(4): 559–580.

Fuccaro N (1999a) Communalism and the state in Iraq: The Yazidi Kurds, c.1869–1940. *Middle Eastern Studies* 35(2): 1–26.

Fuccaro N (1999b) *The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq*. London: IB Tauris.

Giblin J (2014) Post-conflict heritage: Symbolic healing and cultural renewal. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20(5): 500–518.

Guest J (2010 [1993]) *Survival Amongst the Kurds: A History of the Yezidis*. London: Routledge.

Harmanşah Ö (2015) ISIS, heritage, and the spectacles of destruction in the global media. *Near Eastern Archaeology* 78(3): 170–177.

Hechler S (2017) Prosecuting Islamic State members for sexual and gender-based crimes committed against Yazidi women and girls. *Cardozo Journal of International and Comparative Law* 25(3): 595–624.

Herscher A (2010) *Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Herzfeld M (2009) *Evicted from Eternity: The Restructuring of Modern Rome*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Higel L (2016) Iraq's displacement crisis: Security and protection. *Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and Minority Rights Group International*, March.

Holtorf C (2015) Averting loss aversion in cultural heritage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21(4): 405–421.

Holtorf C (2018) Embracing change: How cultural resilience is increased through cultural heritage. *World Archaeology* 50(4): 639–650.

ICOMOS (1964) International charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites. *The Venice Charter 1964*, Venice, Italy, 25–31 May.

ICOMOS (1965) Report on the constitutive assembly, Warsaw, Poland, 21–22 June.

IOM (2018) Iraq displacement crisis, *International Organization for Migration*, Baghdad, Iraq, October.

Isakhan B (2018). The Islamic State attacks on Shia holy sites and the 'Shrine Protection Narrative': Threats to sacred space as a mobilization frame. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. doi: 10.1080/09546553.2017.1398741.

Isakhan B and Meskell L (2019) UNESCO's project to 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul': Iraqi and Syrian opinion on heritage reconstruction after the Islamic State. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25(11): 1189–1204.

Isakhan B and Zarandona A (2018) Layers of religious and political iconoclasm under the Islamic State: Symbolic sectarianism and pre-monotheistic iconoclasm. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24(1): 1–16.

Isakhan B, Zarandona A and Al-Deen T (2019) Cultural cleansing and iconoclasm under the Islamic State: Attacks on Yezidis and Christians and their Heritage. In: Oruc F (ed) *Sites of Pluralism: Community Politics in the Middle East*. London: Hurst, pp.181–194.

Kearney A (2009) Intangible cultural heritage: Global awareness and local interest. In: Smith L and Akagawa N (eds) *Intangible Heritage*. London: Routledge, pp.209–226.

Kreyenbroek P (1995) *Yezidism: Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.

Kunnath GJ (2013) Anthropology's ethical dilemmas: Reflections from the Maoist fields of India. *Current Anthropology* 54(6): 740–751.

Kurin R (2004) Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: A critical appraisal. *Museum International* 56(1–2): 66–77.

Labadi S (2013) *UNESCO, Cultural Heritage and Outstanding Universal Value*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira.

Langer R (2010) Yezidism between scholarly literature and actual practice: From 'Heterodox' Islam and 'Syncretism' to the formation of a transnational Yezidi 'Orthodoxy'. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37(3): 393–403.

Logan W and Reeves K (eds) (2009) *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'*. London: Routledge.

Lostal M and Cunliffe E (2016) Cultural heritage that heals: Factoring in cultural heritage discourses in the Syrian peacebuilding process. *The Historic Environment: Policy and Practice* 7(2–3): 248–259.

Maisel S (2017) *Yezidis in Syria: Identity Building Among a Double Minority*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.

Marczak N (2018) A century apart: The genocidal enslavement of Armenian and Yazidi women. In: Connellan M and Frohlich C (eds) *A Gendered Lens for Genocide Prevention*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.133–162.

Meharg SJ (2001) Identicide and cultural cannibalism: Warfare's appetite for symbolic place. *Peace Research Journal* 33(3): 89–98.

Meskell L (2015) Gridlock: UNESCO, global conflict and failed ambitions. *World Archaeology* 47(2): 225–238.

Meskell L (2018) *A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Meskell L and Pels P (eds) (2005) *Embedding Ethics*. London: Berg.

Meskell L and Scheermeyer C (2008) Heritage as therapy: Set pieces from the New South Africa. *Journal of Material Culture* 13(2): 153–173.

Mitchell W (2016) *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Munjeri D (2004) Tangible and intangible heritage: From difference to convergence. *Museum International* 56(1–2): 12–20.

Munjeri D (2009) Following the length and breadth of the roots: Some dimensions of intangible heritage. In: Smith L and Akagawa N (eds) *Intangible Heritage*. London: Routledge, pp.131–150.

Navest A, de Koning M and Moors A (2016) Chatting about marriage with female migrants to Syria. *Anthropology Today* 32(2): 22–25.

Nawzad K (2018) Yezidi activists paint over IS graffiti, promote education and hope. *Kurdistan 24*, 6 July.

Nicolaus P and Yuce S (2017) Sex-slavery: One aspect of the Yezidi genocide. *Iran and the Caucasus* 21(2): 196–229.

OHCHR (2015) Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, March 13.

Peutz N (2018) *Islands of Heritage: Conservation and Transformation in Yemen*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Pocock C, Collett D and Baulch L (2015) Assessing stories before sites: Identifying the tangible from the intangible. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21(10): 962–982.

RASHID (2019) *Destroying the Soul of the Yazidis: Cultural Heritage Destruction During the Islamic State's Genocide Against the Yazidis*. Munich: RASHID International, Yazda and the EAMENA Project.

Reuters (2017a) Ezidis Rebuild Shrine Destroyed by Islamic State. *NRT Media*, 8 August.

Reuters (2017b) Long wait for captive Yazidis' return spent rebuilding shrine in Bashiqa. *The Baghdad Post*, 10 August.

Rico T (2014) The limits of a 'heritage at risk' framework: The construction of post-disaster cultural heritage in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 14(2): 157–176.

Rico T (2016) *Constructing Destruction: Heritage Narratives in the Tsunami City*. New York: Routledge.

Robben A (ed) (2010) *Iraq at a Distance: What Anthropologists Can Teach Us About the War*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Rubin A (2007) Persecuted Sect in Iraq Avoids its Shrine. *New York Times*, October 13.

Rudaw (2017a) Yezidi town marks rebuilding of shrine destroyed by ISIS. *Rudaw English*, 15 February.

Rudaw (2017b) Let ISIS see we do not die: Yezidis repair their temples. *Rudaw English*, 4 June.

Said E (1978) *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.

Schaack BV (2018) The Iraq investigative team and prospects for justice for the Yazidi genocide. *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 16(1): 113–139.

Scheper-Hughes N (1992) *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Schmidt BE and Schroder IW (eds) (2001) *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict*. London: Routledge.

Scholze M (2008) Arrested heritage: The politics of inscription into the UNESCO World Heritage List: The case of Agadez in Niger. *Journal of Material Culture* 13(2): 215–231.

Shahab S and Isakhan B (2018) The ritualization of heritage destruction under the Islamic State. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 18(2): 212–233.

Smith C, Burke H, de Leiuen C, et al. (2016) The Islamic State's symbolic war: Da'esh's socially mediated terrorism as a threat to cultural heritage. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 16(2): 164–188.

Smith L and Akagawa N (eds) (2009) *Intangible Heritage*. London: Routledge.

Spivak GC (1988) Can the subaltern speak? In Nelson C and Grossbery L (eds) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp.271–313.

Stefano M (2012) Reconfiguring the framework: Adopting an ecomuseological approach for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. In: Stefano et al. (eds) *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Woodbridge, VA: Boydell and Brewer, pp.223–238.

Tilley CY (1994) *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*. Oxford: Berg.

UNAMI/OHCHR (2014) Report on the protection of civilians in the armed conflict in Iraq. *United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, Baghdad, 6 July–10 September.

UNHRC (2016) 'They Came to Destroy': ISIS crimes against the Yazidis. *United Nations Human Rights Council*, *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, *Independent International Commission of Inquiry*. Report: A/HRC/32/CRP.2, 15 June 2016.

Verkaaik O (ed) (2014) *Religious Architecture: Anthropological Perspectives*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Viejo-Rose D and Stig Sørensen M (2015) Cultural heritage and armed conflict: New questions for an old relationship. In: Waterton E and Watson S (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.281–296.

Winter T (2007) *Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism: Culture, Politics and Development at Angkor*. London: Routledge.

Winter, T (2014) Beyond Eurocentrism? Heritage conservation and the politics of difference. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20(2): 123–137.

Author biographies

Benjamin Isakhan is associate professor of Politics and Policy Studies and Founding Director of 'POLIS', a research network for Politics and International Relations in the Alfred Deakin Institute at Deakin University, Australia. He is also adjunct senior research associate in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Sofya Shahab is a doctoral candidate in the Alfred Deakin Institute at Deakin University, Australia. Her research focuses on the weaponisation of affect through the destruction of heritage by the Islamic State.