

Behind the Greatest Fortune and Misfortunes:
The Aftermath of ISIL and Responses to the Destruction

Mona Elsaai
RUMI FORUM

Disclaimer:

The views and opinions expressed in this research are those of the author and do not reflect the official opinions or positions of the Rumi Forum, its members, or its inspiration. Any content provided in this research was not sponsored by any religious or ethnic group, organization, nation-state government, company, or individual. The prescriptions made in this publication and the facts presented therein are not meant to detract from the political neutrality of the Rumi Forum and are incorporated only insofar as the integrity of that political neutrality is not compromised. The reader is encouraged to arrive at his or her own conclusions and interact first hand with sources and information presented in this research. The reader is also encouraged to understand that the views presented hereafter are those of the author and fellow collaborators and that the condition of facts presented is complex, dynamic, and ever-changing. Thank you for your assistance in acknowledging and helping to preserve the political neutrality of the Rumi Forum while allowing it to support the research of its interns.

Behind the Greatest Fortune and Misfortunes:
The Aftermath of ISIL and Responses to the Destruction

Table of Contents

Preface

Abstract

Section 1: Shedding Light on Qur’anic Prescriptions Pertaining to Religious Freedom

Introduction

- 1.1.Regarding the Qur’an
- 1.2.The Qur’an’s Orientation Toward Violence
- 1.3.The Qur’an’s Orientation Toward Religious Freedom
- 1.4.Praxis
- 1.5.Reconciling Religious Prescriptions with Political Decisions

Section 2: Contextualizing the Condition of Diversity, Sacred spaces and Heritage sites in the Levant and Elsewhere

Introduction

- 2.1. The Condition of Coexistence in Islamic empires from East to West
- 2.2. Destruction and Persecution
 - 2.2.1. Jews
 - 2.2.2. Christians
 - 2.2.3. Yazidi
 - 2.2.4. Sufi and Sectarian Coreligionists
- 2.3. Statistics
- 2.4. Behind the Greatest Fortune and Misfortunes

Section 3: International and Homegrown Reconstruction Efforts

Introduction

- 3.1. Local and International reconstruction efforts
- 3.2. Contrasting stakes and motives
- 3.3. Fear of the Fundamentalist undercurrent and plausible Approaches

Section 4: Expansion and Limitations

Introduction

- 4.1. Extending Olive Branches
- 4.2. Limitations

- 4.2.1. Prioritization
- 4.2.2. Fragmented Power Structures
- 4.2.3. State Failures
- 4.2.4. The *Desire* to Do Good Always Outweighs the *Capacity* to Do

Good

- 4.2.5. Differentiated Investment and Return Potential
- 4.3. Where to Go from Here

Conclusion

Preface

In the aftermath of one of- if not the most- brutal religiously homogenizing regimes of the twenty-first century international and homegrown efforts are springing up in Syria and Iraq to regenerate the multi-religious landscape of the Levant. This research aims to address the exclusivist and pluralist theological interpretations of Islam and compare the historical conditions of sacred spaces and heritage sites in Syria and Iraq during regimes partial to a given interpretation. It will highlight local and international reconstruction initiatives of sacred spaces in former ISIS strongholds and comment on the nature, range, limitations, and future of such efforts. It will combine specific examples and initiatives with general themes to offer readers a full picture of homegrown and internationally-led reconstruction efforts, stakes, and motives.

The author's interest in this subject was sparked upon reading of efforts in which Iraqi natives cleaned and restored the worship spaces of their coreligionists to reinvigorate a live and prosperous pluralist community. The author was taken back by several things but largely the desire to restore the sacred spaces of religious minorities as well as the ideological and material conditions required for a prosperous coexistence. One of the most endearing aspects of such multifaceted efforts was the reality that natives are actively involved in their own future and their desire is ideologically rooted in religion as well as socially and culturally rooted in the rich history of the Levant. The indigeneity of the desire for religious pluralism and freedom is a refreshing departure from the mainstream displays of ISIL's extremist inculcation of young children and branding the Middle East as a region opposed to the values that give rise to those virtues.

Exploring ISIL's inheritance of the extremist worldview, this paper finds it important to shed light on the Quran's orientation toward religious freedom and pluralism. Given the spatial limitations of any paper this research will restrict its analysis to a few Quranic *Surahs* (chapters) and verses. The theological expectation versus the implemented realities will both clash and align when the paper navigates the political, social, and religious condition of Islamic empires from the Levant to Andalusia during various historical periods. Themes derived from this

analysis will reveal if and in what ways ISIL's reign and persecution represented a departure from historical precedent by institutionalizing extremism through ISIL's version of "state" sponsored channels. After framing the style and magnitude of persecution and destruction carried out by ISIL, the paper comments on the nature and range of reconstruction efforts taking place to restore sacred spaces and worship sites. It will then compare trends and criticisms of international and homegrown initiatives on a number of factors, such as what the efforts hope to accomplish and the composition of the task forces. It will conclude by exploring the potential and limitations for expanding such efforts into much needed spaces given the expanse of ISIL's destruction and the fear of real or potential extremist backlash.

The author of this research is very passionate about the virtues to which reconstruction efforts, task forces, and volunteers have committed themselves to restoring and shares the hope that religious pluralism and freedom will once again become markers of life in the Levant never again to be eradicated by extremists or ill-meaning political forces.

Abstract

The purpose of the research is to comment on reconstruction projects that promote values of religious freedom and exercise in former ISIL-controlled areas- more specifically Iraq. This paper does not advance a particular if-then clause; instead it aims to comment on the nature of the projects in terms of their purpose, the composition of their task forces, and the goals to be accomplished as well as the limitations endured. Reconstruction projects are most broadly differentiated by 1) whether they are homegrown or international, which influences 2) the composition of their task forces, which in turn influences the 3) nature and scope of their goals and purpose. Furthermore, 4) the faith community participating in or affected by the reconstruction or for which these efforts are being carried out influences the composition of the task force, the purpose of the project, and the outreach it aims to have in terms of whether or not a religious minority is willing to participate in the reconstruction projects of another religious group. Through a comprehensive analysis of these factors through particular and general examples the paper intends to come up with trends that describe the current state and future of reconstruction efforts. To paint it broadly, the overarching theme of the paper is to present reconstruction projects, distinguish between these efforts among religious minorities victimized by ISIL, highlight important factors related to the current state and future of such projects, and affirm the normative values that give rise to religious freedom. The information in this paper is presented in such a way that guides the reader to develop trends simultaneously alongside the author and to help the reader understand the factors that explain these trends.

Section 1: Shedding Light on Qur’anic Prescriptions Pertaining to Religious Freedom

The paper begins by exploring interpretations of the Qur’an’s position on religious freedom by proceeding through an analysis of *Surah at-Tawbah* (Chapter of Repudiation) and *Surah al-Kafirun* (Chapter of The Disbelievers). These Surahs were intentionally selected as a representative body of prescriptions on the subject of religious freedom. *Surah at-Tawbah* was selected because it is cited in the West by fear-mongering, Islamophobic campaigns and in the Orient by terrorist groups to advertise Islam as “the religion of the sword”¹. *Surah al-Kafirun* was selected because its entire context is encapsulated in a few verses and it contains universal claims to humanity without being burdened by historical conditions or allegorical stories. Furthermore, the Surahs are adequate representatives of the structure of the Quran distinguished by site of revelation and universal versus transient, and historically contained or conditioned themes. While the decision to forfeit information from *ijtihad*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *qiyas* and a discussion of *jihad* was done with a heavy heart it maintains the importance of the Qur’an as the ultimate, and absolute guide in Islam to which all other sources are inferior². It is inevitable that scholars and adherents of the faith will disagree on interpretations of the Qur’an but none disagree about the status of the Qur’an. It is also important to confront the claims of an extremist ideology that purports to be rooted in God’s guidance or constitution using only the Qur’an because it is the only source to which extremist ideologies allegedly subscribe.

1.1. Regarding the Qur’an

A number of characteristic things regarding the Qur’an are worth mentioning. Said Nursi [d.1960] best encapsulated the applicability of the Qur’an in his characterization of it as absolute but not universal, meaning that the Qur’an is the absolute authority on everything in Islam but it does not intend for every verse (*ayah*) to be applied indiscriminately and universally³. The Qur’an contains themes that are certainly meant to universally withstand the test of time, but it is important to remember that many occurrences and prescriptions are historically conditioned and therefore transient. It is structured such that the experience of the Prophet at Mecca and Medina are reflected in the Meccan and Medinan Surahs in a manner consistent with the historically conditioned nature of the events and the treatment received by the prophet at the hands of his torturers and helpers (*El-Ansar*) at the respective sites⁴. In fact, “Surah” means “chapter”, so no verse can be interpreted in isolation and it must be understood that verses belong to a broader context of circumstances that deal with the Prophet, his contemporaries, and the relationship he

¹ World Islamic Front, “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders,” *Al- Quds al-Arabi*, February 23, 1998. <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>

² *Ijtihad* are sources of personal reasoning conducted by jurists, scholars, or even inhabitants of Islamic societies. The *hadith* or *Sunna* is the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions that has been verified through the Islamic practice of *usul* and passed down orally and/or documented. *Fiqh* is Islamic jurisprudence, and *qiyas* is a form of syllogistic reasoning that applies principles of logic to innovative, and dynamic scenarios not explicitly presented in theological sources. *jihad* is multifaceted: greater *jihad* refers to the reflexive and introspective purification of the soul, and lesser *jihad* is the pursuit of military expeditions in the name of religion.

³ Said Bediüzzaman Nursi, *Münazarat* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Yayınevi, 1998),70.

⁴ Devin Stewart, Lecture to Author, September 2019.

shared with adversaries who threatened his self-preservation and tortured his followers. Moreover, the pronouns used by the narrator in different Surahs and even in verses (*ayat*) of the same Surah are inconsistent and are a generous point of discussion in epistemological and contextual analysis of the texts, so it is possible the narrator changes throughout the Qur'an⁵. This is most striking in accounts where the pronoun changes from "I", which maintains the authority of a single God to "We", which might imply a collective human and/or supernatural phenomenon inclusion as advocates or co-signatories of a prescription in a monotheistic religion. This paper comments on the instructions or endorsements of a general, unknown narrator or narrators hereafter referred to as the "narrator" rather than personifying the Qur'an or openly attributing verses to God.

1.2. The Qur'an's Orientation Toward Violence

Fethullah Gülen and other scholars have emphasized that the default condition in Islam is "peace"⁶. Although "Islam" means "to surrender" it does not request that its adherents surrender to individuals of other faiths to secure peace or vice-versa. Rather the Qur'an generously endorses a human condition characterized by mutual trust and respect consolidated through acts of diplomacy, integrity, and promise-keeping as a way of maintaining relationships among coreligionists and individuals of different faiths, tribes, and other sociological categories. Through Ali's example during his battle with Mu'awiya, albeit a coreligionist, one sees that when negotiation was presented to Ali as an option even mid-battle in the face of a clear victory for his army diplomacy and arbitration were preferred to war⁷. In their work, *Dialogue in Islam*, Ahmet Kurucan and Mustafa Erol note that of 114 Surahs in the Qur'an only three pointedly deal with retribution and violence while most others explicitly or allegorically endorse coexistence and religious freedom⁸. Even throughout the three Surahs that deal heavily with the subject the narrator maintains a strict and narrow orientation toward violence that is predicated on a number of conditions. There are strict Qur'anic provisions on the circumstances under which persons can commit acts of retribution, in addition to when and against whom retribution is sought. This paper uses the term retribution to demonstrate meaningful consistency with instructions and moral perspectives found in the Qur'an regarding acts of violence.

To offer insight into a few restrictions this paper offers analysis of a few verses. First, the narrator implores the reader to make enemies out of individual persons who have offensively been wrong or unjust but not against an entire faith community, or even a faith. Scholars commonly point to the example of the Prophet maintaining amicable relationships with some

⁵ This statement is not meant to challenge the belief that the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by God. Rather it is meant to briefly explore the uses of different pronouns in the deliverance of messages through revelations and the possibility that some prescriptions are singular while others suggest a collective, perhaps even mortal and/or supernatural inclusive authority.

⁶ Ahmet Kurucan and Mustafa Kasim Erol, *Dialogue in Islam: Qur'an- Sunnah-History* (London: Dialogue Society, 2012), 39-41.

⁷ Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, September 2019.

⁸ Erol and Kurucan, *Dialogue*, 51.

Jewish tribes and not others to underpin that social dynamics and discriminatory treatment cannot be made on the basis of religion but on the assessment of each individual or tribe's actions.⁹ Second, many modern moral and legal arguments regarding self-preservation inherit the instructions of some Qur'anic verses as it pertains to this subject. "*Drive them out from where they drove you out,*" instructs the narrator (2:191). Given that "drove" takes on the past tense and "drive" takes on the present tense only a defensive response is permissible. The narrator also states, "*if they turn on you, then... take none of them as an ally or supporter*" (4:89). The condition for such hostility maintains that the assaulting party must have first been assaulted which suggests a circumstance that maintains the importance of chronology. Further scrutiny of Qur'anic verses demonstrate that defensive strategies can only be committed against the same person(s) that have wronged the individual and an individual who may have formerly been an adversary but is not actively hostile cannot be harmed. Third, if no understanding, trust, or treaty was violated the prescriptions of Qur'anic verses are inaccessible for justifying retribution. The historical context behind *Surah at-Tawbah* relays an account of hypocrites (*munafiqs*) who gave and withdrew their support at climactic events during the advent of Islam that compromised the self-preservation of the allies to whom they lied. This course of events reveals there was an agreement that was unilaterally betrayed, a fatal lie was told, and an action manifesting that lie put individuals in more danger than they might have otherwise been. Surrounding verses taken in broader context entrust that if there is no understanding, trust, or treaty was violated one has no grounds on which to exercise hostility. Fourth, justice is discussed in terms of retribution and in relation to forgiveness. One is even encouraged to make amends with someone who may have harmed him in the past. "*And He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes; God loves the just,*" confirms the narrator (60:8).

One might wonder how restrictive Qur'anic instructions are in praxis if an individual, tribe, or government is afforded its own faculties to evaluate whether or not an adversary is presently hostile. This question cannot be explored without inquiring what entails hostility and-more central to this paper- if religious difference is just cause for retribution. To answer this question consider *Surah at-Tawbah*, from which verses were appropriated by *fatwa* of the World Islamic Front and signed by infamous extremists like Osama Bin Laden.¹⁰ "*They please you with their tongues, but their hearts are against you and most of them are lawbreakers... How evil their actions are!*" asserts the narrator (9:8-11). Even when the word "tongue" is taken to mean speech the narrator's reference to additional corporeal forms and unlawful actions proves that speech alone is not valid ground for retribution (9:8-11). The speech referred to in the *Surah* carries the status of a lie or verbal betrayal and can pertain to the expression of belief, disbelief, blasphemy or otherwise but it is not punishable if it is not manifested by actions that cause harm

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42-3.

¹⁰World Islamic Front, "Jihad."

or violate the law. To a western audience such an interpretation may mirror the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brandenburg vs. Ohio* (1969), which affirmed that hate speech and the freedom to assemble were deemed constitutional insofar as they did not incite "imminent danger". When scrutinized, the broader content of Quranic verses shows that intention and physical expressions of disagreement, such as acts of worship that represent adherence to another faith, also do not give cause for retribution.

1.3. The Qur'an's Orientation Toward Religious Freedom

Although *Surah at-Tawbah* contains calls to action, *Surah al-Kafirun* is a call to inaction. *Surah al-Kafirun* is not combative. It is not argumentative. Yet, it is not concessionary. No acts of violence, coercion, or persuasion are directed toward a religious other and the narrator confirms that coexistence does not mandate consensus (109:1-6). In verses 109:4-5 the narrator speaks to a prudent realization that a condition of differences exercised in the form of religious freedom and uninterrupted by violence or proselytizing campaigns will, and should continue to exist.

...the persecution of people solely for their embrace of a different faith defies the will of God because there is and will continue to be a divinely ordained variation in religious affiliation.

Therefore, religious difference and religious freedom are the will of God. Other verses confirm this position. To extend that position to a logical conclusion, the persecution of people solely for their embrace of a different faith defies the will of God because there is and will continue to be divinely ordained variation in religious affiliation. In *Surah al-Mai'dah* the narrator requests, if not demands, patience for God to reveal an explanation and instructs all inquiring people on the subject not to take matters into their own hands to i) eliminate these differences and ii) explain them (5:48).

"We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about" (5:48).

In sum, verses addressing difference of faith endorse that Muslims i) accept and respect that not all persons will share their faith ii) live acceptingly and compassionately with the differences iii) explore other faiths and beliefs with respect in an attempt to foster mutual

understanding and iv) willingly wait until God explains why people have differed¹¹. “*If God so willed, He would have made you all one people,*” asserts the narrator in another Surah (16:93). Furthermore, the narrator concedes that no earthly being has the intercessory ability to interfere or reconcile individuals on religious grounds (10:99).

To extend a profound but very plausible criticism of *Surah al-Kafirun* this paper introduces the work of Thomas Paine. In his work, *Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine’s skepticism and by some measures even mockery of religious tolerance contains several parallels to *Surah al-Kafirun*. Paine was well acquainted with the Qur’an and his position on religious freedom and coexistence mirrors the pragmatism of *Surah al-Kafirun*¹². To say that *Surah al-Kafirun* contains verses that gesture to love or emulate “love thy neighbor” (assuming one’s neighbor represents a sociological “other”) is an extrapolation this paper is not willing to make. Although normative in its own right, *Surah al-Kafirun* is for all intents and purposes a realistic rather than romantic or loving social compromise.

The nature of Paine’s own practical attitudes on relevant subjects ostensibly reveals why his verbiage, opinions, and form parallel the Qur’anic Surah. Neither Paine nor the Qur’anic narrator are opposed to the exercise of sincere tolerance, i.e. a social dynamic grounded in equality exercised toward a religious other on religious grounds. However, both recognize that sincere tolerance is a phenomenon without a reality as long as individuals are ideologically discordant. To subscribe to a condition of equality on religious grounds, an individual must forfeit the superiority he entrusts to his religious beliefs that binds him to his faith. In other words, an egalitarian religious tolerance invalidates the reason someone subscribes to a faith he is understandably unwilling to surrender. Tolerance also carries the notion that one party has the tacit or explicit right to grant another party the “Liberty of Conscience” despite the absolute reality that men cannot grant each other the freedom to believe, and the freedom to choose what to believe¹³. Paine argues against interaction and interference with the religious other because like the narrator of *Surah al-Kafirun* he resolves that as long as individuals subscribe to different beliefs they have no access to channels of persuasion (109:4-6)¹⁴. To highlight the parallels, Paine’s assertions are placed adjacent to Qur’anic verses that showcase the same verbiage, opinion, and/or form.

“If he believes not as thou believest, it is a proof that thou believest not as he believeth”¹⁵
Q 109:2-3 I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship
Q 109:4-5 And I shall not worship that Nor worship ye that which I worship

¹¹ Ibrahim Anli, Meeting with Author, February 2, 2021.

¹² Vincent Cornell, Lecture to Author, December 14, 2019.

¹³ Thomas Paine, “Rights of Man,” in *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, ed. William M. Van der Wyde (New Rochelle: Thomas Paine National Historical Association, 1925), 95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

“Mine thine own concerns”¹⁶

Q 109:6 Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.

Although *Surah al-Kafirun* contains no romantic ideations of love, equality, and tolerance as one understands these concepts through a modern framework it is certainly a testament to religious freedom. It is certainly true that a condition of non-violence is “not good enough”. While the Quranic narrator resolves that a pluralist reality is best navigated by refraining from interactions and interference *about* religion there are no prescriptions against interactions among people of different faiths that do not deal with religious matters. Despite the absence of religious ordinances for love there are ordinances for respect, freedoms, and coexistence that can in turn breed love. Interfaith coexistence or engagement should be grounded in “dialogue between people of different faiths, not specifically dialogue about faiths”.¹⁷ Even when conservatively or pragmatically rather than romantically interpreted, *Surah al-Kafirun* can still be hailed as social compromise dedicated to establishing religious freedom and confirming that coexistence does not require consensus, warfare, or proselytizing campaigns¹⁸.

1.4. Praxis

Kurucan and Erol put forth a position that supports an understanding of the human condition (*fitra*) as one that seeks pluralist, interfaith or intercommunal coexistence. However, this paper subscribes to a conservative and less metaphysical view that even if coexistence is not a religious requirement it is a reality recognized in the Qur’an. Verses discuss patterns and behaviors of social dynamics that support religious freedom and recognize that coexistence is not predicated on and does not mandate consensus (109:1-6). This paper employs a modernist approach to religious free exercise to argue Muslims and non-Muslims residing in a polity have a moral obligation to work together to legitimize and respect their shared existence. While some argue that treaty-making and social contracts are acts of diplomacy that take place between entrusted leaders or institutions of government there is no explicit Qur’anic restriction on individual persons engaging in social or civic diplomacy on behalf of themselves or as far as their authority extends¹⁹.

In the extremist worldview non-Muslims are ineligible for relationships of social and political union and Muslims who engage in such practice commit treason against their religion²⁰. There is no concept of an “Islamic State” authorized in the Qur’an because it does not contain-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Erol and Kurucan, *Dialogue in Islam*, 21.

¹⁸ Juan Cole, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires* (New York: Nation Books, 2018).; Ibrahim Anli, Meeting with Author, February 9, 2021.

¹⁹ Andrew F. March, “Islamic Foundations for a Social Contract in Non-Muslim Liberal Democracies,” *The American Political Science Review* 101, no.2 (May 2007): 237.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

much less endorse- the idea of political exercise and guardianship of theology²¹. Such a notion is a historical construct that often derives itself from illusions of the so-called Golden Age of Islam rudimentarily characterized by the spread of religion through conquest. According to classical jurists and the extremist worldview, there are features of a Muslim state and requirements of a religious adherent that must be maintained for either to claim legitimacy. Classical jurists maintain that an Islamic state must (1) consist of a majority Muslim population and (2) accept and apply shari'a law²². The Islamic state is further characterized by its requirement to protect and serve the public interest, and defend Islam and its adherents against adversaries²³. Concisely put, the pursuit of shari'a law requires the Islamic state preserve Muslim life and nourish it with the means to partake in moral pursuits. There are certainly versions of such an operation that place less or no emphasis on shari'a, such as the Ottoman sultanates "Circle of Equity" or "Circle of Justice"²⁴. However, according to a generous fraction of earlier jurists, fundamentalist and extremist- supported interpretations a state unequivocally forfeits all legitimacy when it fails to provide its citizenry with the means to pursue the Divine. Ibn-Taymiyyah [d.1328] and Sayyid Qutb [d.1966] feel a Muslim is religiously obligated to rebel against a government that does not meet the criteria or that sees itself as a temporal entity independent of God²⁵. This school of thought even feels governance extends beyond national and state-lines as Muslims are meant to be united as an *ummah* under the governance of a righteous leader and God's constitution, hence the initiative to restore the caliphate at the height of ISIL²⁶ power. While fundamentalist Islamic legal, ethical, and political doctrines have struggled to accept Muslim citizenship in non-Islamic states extremist ideologies reject the plausibility of such a citizenship²⁷. This rejection is rooted in the reality that Muslim citizens in non-Muslims states have to operate within the institutions and mechanisms established by human actors to pursue a non-shar'ia- or in the extremist perception non-Islamic- social, economic, or political "good" that can by definition never be moral. The perception of "good" and the worldly expedients for achieving it are seen as being incompatible with the righteous path (*al-sirat al mustaquim*). Khaled Abou El-Fadl offers another feature of the political application of extremist ideology. He explains that Salafist and Wahhabist orientation of Islam typically emphasizes perpetuating the adversity or oppression of

²¹ Paine, *Rights of Man*, 95.; Cole, *Muhammad*, 87.

²² Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Place of Ethical Obligations in Islamic Law," *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* 4, no.1 (June 2005):26-9.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ The term that defines the relationship between the state and its various actors, including but not limited to the citizenry, the defense force, and the clergy/religious institutions under the Ottoman Empire. Each actor has a defined responsibility to another actor or sector of society such that the actions of a given sector are reciprocated by the actions of another allowing the state to fulfill the needs of its citizens and maintain a functional, and harmonious society. Roxani Margariti, Lecture to Author, March, 2018.

²⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Cedar Rapids: The Mother Mosque Foundation, 1981).

²⁶ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant also known as ISIS, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, during different territorial gains and power transitions during its politically visible reign given its transnational expansion. For more on the nomenclature and development of ISIS consult *The ISIS Files | Inside the Islamic State in Mosul: A Snapshot of the Logic & Banality of Evil*

²⁷ March, "Islamic Foundations," 239-40.

a particular group of persons as a condition that guarantees the future success of Islam, as defined by extremists²⁸. So, project of justifying the plausibility of Muslim citizenship in a polity characterized by pluralism and religious freedom is further complicated by the reality that Muslims are required to operate under a social contract with others who have no obligation to obey shari'a law and who they cannot antagonize or oppress²⁹. To add insult to injury the contract can be used to pursue a goal that is un-Islamic or by some accounts even anti-Islamic.

While ISIL inherits some of the foundations set forth by al-Qaeda plus modern and pre-modern fathers of jihad it is radical and rogue in its own right. For example, it has even been condemned by al-Qaeda for campaigns of violence against children, sectarian coreligionists and other initiatives³⁰. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that although this is a foundational synopsis of the school of thought from which ISIL derives itself its ideology and campaigns are still unprecedented, nuanced, and multifaceted but far beyond the scope of this paper.

1.5. Reconciling Religious Prescriptions with Political Decisions

Even eliminating matters of which verses are superior to others and under what realities a belief in the Qur'an presupposes that if one can believe *Surah at-Tawbah* there is no reason why *Surah al-Kaifrun* is less legitimate. At this crossroads one must decide how to perceive his reality because the conditions of the reality inform which verses are at the forefront of one's experience. One needs to ask himself, "Under what conditions is it appropriate for me to consider myself an enemy of this person and this person an enemy of mine?" The Qur'an certainly informs this decision but it is at this point that a political, not religious, decision has to be made. Times of war and times of peace are both humanely decided, so how one interprets his reality affects how he interprets the Quran and vice versa. This leads to a self-fulfilling problem that sees de-facto realities become realities based on how one evaluates his circumstances and what he believes his faith says about those circumstances. Because the Qur'an excludes religious differences as justifiable ground on which someone can be classified an enemy the conditions on which a state of war are declared are political³¹. So to judge how a coreligionist or adherent of a different faith has wronged God falls outside the jurisdiction of a human being. This is because 1) because God needs nothing of the human beings he created and 2) one of the tenets of Islam is the oneness of God, so no one can share God's authorities or faculties (*tawhid*)³². For someone to operate under the pretense that he can undertake such a task reduces all parties involved to a Hobbesian state of nature in which each man is his own adjudicator and arbitrator. Consequently, not only is it a primitive regression from a modern, Eurocentric perspective but it is also anti-Islamic. Unlike its Abrahamic counterparts Islam is unique in that Prophet Mohammad was

²⁸Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

²⁹ March, "Islamic Foundations," 240.

³⁰ Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author. November, 2019.

³¹ Erol and Kurucan, *Dialogue in Islam*, 53-8.

³² *tawhid* is the Islamic tenet that affirms the oneness of God and emphasizes the monotheism of Islam. It asserts, "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet".

both prophet and “Constantine”, so there are political dimensions and infrastructures often associated with the practice of the religion³³. There is a tendency to condemn the political contributions of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad but the application of Islam is about affirming the equal faculties and capabilities of human beings while securing and equipping that condition of equality with just channels for arbitration that lie with God³⁴.

When reconciling religious prescriptions with political decisions it is clear that what political de-facto or genuine realities demand and what religion demands are in fact distinguishable. Religion does not ask one to interpret himself in terms of his adversity and it does not ask him to interpret his moral adversities on points of religious differences. It is true that religion might not ask one to interpret himself in terms of his capacity for love and tolerance but it does mandate that he value himself in terms of how just he is because “*God loves the just*” (60:8).

“[Believers], do not allow your oaths in God’s name to hinder you from doing good, being mindful in everything of God and making peace between people” (2:224).

Note from the author

As the reader proceeds through the paper he might notice that it begins to orbit around political and policy questions rather than theological ones. The purpose of presenting a theological framework was to ground an affirmation of the normative values of Islam on the topic of coexistence and religious freedom in a methodological analysis of the Qur’an with some-hopefully- original commentary to demonstrate how ISIL’s ideology represents a departure from an epistemological dissection and interpretation of Quranic verses. Rather than force the reader to accept the conclusion that ISIL’s values are a misrepresentation of Islam without offering a theological framework in which to ground that claim, this paper found it important to present a body of evidence that engages a reader’s potential counterarguments and brings to the surface points the reader might not have considered. This is valuable because even though it is true that ISIL represents a departure from Islamic values one must consider how and use the resource from which ISIL claims to derive its ideology to challenge its claims. As the reader transitions into the next phase of the paper he / she should also note that the theological foundation was established in order to be launched into and contrasted with the praxis, or the unfortunate reality that ISIL manifested during its reign. Without devoting some time to the theological dimension this paper would acquiescently forfeit the profound contrast it hopes to make regarding how starkly ISIL misrepresents the Qur’anic values it purportedly honors. Commenting exclusively on ISIL’s religio-political ideology without addressing the theological dimension leaves ISIL’s ideology systematically unchallenged in this paper, and perhaps even more dangerously in the mind of the reader. The interpretive analysis developed throughout this paper is a drop in an ocean of literature on the subject, but its position in this paper is meant to

³³ Vincent Cornell, Lecture to Author, October, 2019.

³⁴ Abou Al Fadl, *Search for Beauty*, 76, 345-50.; March, “Islamic Foundations,” 237-40.

1) speak to a designated audience and 2) combine the theological and political and policy dimensions of this paper in an original way to generate even greater support for religious freedom and coexistence. As this paper enters new dimensions and engages new questions on the subject of religious freedom the reader is encouraged to understand and mentally position the preceding sections holistically.

Section 2: Contextualizing the Condition of Diversity, Sacred Spaces and Heritage Sites in the Levant and Elsewhere

The condition of coexistence in Islamic empires in the East and the West is as diverse as the diversity it contained. Not only did Islamic empires exercise coexistence differently but the circumstances of different regions within the same empire were characterized by varying demographics, styles of conquests, and symbolic importance. This section aims to develop a brief but telling image about the nature and contributions of pluralism throughout Islamic history using examples from a number of empires. This image will be compared with the persecution of Christian, Yazidi, Sufi, and to a lesser degree Jewish communities and destruction of religious spaces during the reign of ISIL. To relate the effect of the destruction the research will cite statistics from research efforts done by the Jewish Heritage International Council, UNESCO, and other resources regarding the condition of spaces and monuments that represent religious diversity and freedom. Finally, it will compare the concentrated benefits of religious homogenization enjoyed by a selective few loyal to the ISIL regime with the diffuse, but notable benefits widely enjoyed by polities during eras of coexistence.

2.1. The Condition of Coexistence in Islamic Empires from East to West

Interfaith contact was a daily engagement of many Christian, Judaic, and Muslims. Engagement with the religious other was not a practice limited to a few religious deviants but a commonplace activity of Muslims in political and intellectual social circles, as well as in casual contexts. The participation of non-Muslims in Muslim majority government was one of the features of life in Cordoba and Aleppo among other places. For example, Jewish scholar Maimonides was voluntarily in the service of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi³⁵. Interfaith contact was also a feature of scenes of taverns and loose mores described by documenting contemporaries and in accounts like the Cairo Gheniza³⁶. It was also a feature of commercial experiences at sites like Aleppo, Damascus, and Baghdad that bridged the East and the West and established themselves as an outlet for the cross-fertilization of culture, craftsmanship, and trade. Storefronts were often located immediately outside hotels for commercial travelers and these hotels (*fanadiq*) often contained worship spaces or monastery rooms to accommodate the religious

³⁵ Roxani Margariti, Lecture to Author, October, 2018.

³⁶ S.D. Goitein. *A Mediterranean Society the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).; Usama ibn Munqidh, *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*, ed. Paul M. Cobb (United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited, 2008).

diversity passing through the city³⁷. Ostensibly the existence of these spaces implies that businessmen and travelers maintained different religious customs and practices than the populous by which they were surrounded, but nonetheless spaces of worship unaffiliated with hotels (*fanadiq*) were established and constantly built for native religious minorities as well. Conclusively, conducting business with the religious other was permissible (with the exception of some prohibited items or quotas) and supported to the extent of religious accommodation³⁸. Ironically enough people of different religious backgrounds also interacted during circumstances in which they were affirming their faiths. The Crusades is certainly an example of this but an even more benign example is the interfaith contact on journeys of pilgrimage to Mecca, saints' shrines or burials, and Sufi shrines. Such journeys could take months, if not years to complete so that practice of meeting new people, coreligionists and otherwise, characterized one's journey.

This paper moves to briefly address the condition during the Crusades because it is usurped to mythologize political motivations of extremists and because the bulk of the Crusades takes place in the Levant, which is the regional focus of this paper. The Crusades forces one to contend with realities that nullify the ideological motivations that gave rise to the campaign because ad-hoc alliances were formed among religiously discordant leaders and communities, and religious others served as mercenaries in the armies that claimed to be fighting in the name of religion³⁹. Documenting his journey to pilgrimage Ibn Jubayar [d.1217] understands the Franks broadly as group of individuals dedicated to Satanic and hedonistic human experience without any redeeming qualities⁴⁰. Others, like native Syrian historian and Crusades contemporary Usama Ibn Munqidh [d.1188] approach the subject of the religious other on a case-by-case basis, evaluating the social context and the individuals involved⁴¹. Given that Ibn Jubayar was in a state of heightened religious observance one sees that the perception of the religious other is colored by the experience of the documenting individual⁴². In short, neither account can unequivocally be declared the objective attitude toward coexistence and different religious communities but several themes present themselves. Contemporaries of the Middle Age and Crusader period offer contentions views of interfaith contact, but it is important to note that attitudes regarding interfaith dynamics were differentiated by the regional nativity of individuals belonging to Abrahamic faiths versus the import of Frankish Christians⁴³. Therefore, hostility directed at a religious other was determined by the regional affiliation of the Christian and less on grounds of theological religious difference. This hostility was in effect because of the political

³⁷ Niall Christie, "Reconstructing Life in Medieval Alexandria from Eighth/Fourteenth Century Waqf Document," *Mamluk Studies Review* III, no. 2 (2004): 164-5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Roxani Maragariti, Lecture to Author, September, 2018.

⁴⁰ Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr : Being the Chronicle of a Mediaeval Spanish Moor Concerning His Journey to the Egypt of Saladin, the Holy Cities of Arabia, Baghdad the City of the Caliphs, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, and the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, ed. and trans. R.J.C. Broadhurst (United Kingdom: Goodword Books, 2016).

⁴¹ Ibn Munqidh, *Book of Contemplation*.

⁴² Ibn Jubayr, *Travels*.

⁴³ Roxani Maragariti, Lecture to Author, October, 2018.

appropriation of religion to launch a crusade in the Levant⁴⁴. In short, hatreds were not purely religious, if religious at all. The Levant inherits the former Umayyad dynasty that institutionalized elitism on the basis of religion and ethnic heritage, so there were many dimensions against which superiority was sought or conflict was waged given the regional heritage. Therefore hatreds were historical constructs that spoke to shifting power dynamics, political ambitions, and channeling the energy and resources invested into intrafaith conflict outward onto a religious other for territorial gain⁴⁵. In the case of the crusades and other military engagements campaigns were launched for the purpose of engaging the loyalty and resources of clients, disrupting regional alliances among potentially powerful allies, acquiring loot, livestock, and slaves, weakening enemies by depleting resources, and helping young princes gain valuable command experience in addition to fighting on ideological grounds⁴⁶. Importantly, many scholars reject the idea that a religious minority was passively engaged with a religious majority and support the idea that the two entities were actively engaged with one another in bilateral exchanges that transformed both their identities and realities⁴⁷. In other words, identities and realities were not developed against cultural contact but as a response to it.

To contrast the example of a Muslim majority interacting with a Christian minority in the Levant consider the example of a Christian majority and a Muslim minority. Majority and minority as used here are restricted to mean population, not power, restricted to modern nation-state lines. One sees that the historiography of Muslim Spain addresses the influence of the transplantation of an Arabian faith as well as Arab and Berber dynasties to the Iberian Peninsula, which had itself inherited the Romans and the Visigoths prior to the arrival of the Muslims. Here Christians learned Arabic and Muslims participated in religious street processions for Christian holidays and ate lard-containing sweets⁴⁸. On the subject of Muslim Spain, Americo Castro advanced a hypothesis called “La Convivencia” which proposes that interfaith communities lived willingly in peace, more or less⁴⁹. However just as realities can introduce contradictions that favorably reflect coexistence they can also demonstrate the opposite. Many acts of violence perpetrated by an individual or collectivity are conscious and intended responses to coexistence. In the absence of an existential “other” one would not need to employ violence, so the exercise of violence by definition mandates that an “other” exist toward whom the violence is perpetrated. Not only is violence a feature of coexistence but coexistence is a prerequisite for the exercise of violence because it produces the grievances that purportedly

⁴⁴“Medieval Sourcebook: Urban II (1088-1099) Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095, Five Versions of the Speech,” Fordham University, accessed February 3, 2021, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/urban2-5vers.asp>

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Brian A. Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050-1614*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 124.; Roxani Margariti, Lecture to Author, October, 2018.

⁴⁷ Américo Castro. “The Historical ‘WE.’” In *An Idea of History: Selected Essays of Americo Castro*, ed. Gilman, Stephen and Edmund L. King (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977).; Vincent Cornell, Lecture to Author, November, 2019.

⁴⁸ Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom*, 110.

⁴⁹ Américo Castro. “The Historical ‘WE.’”

justify violence and therefore conceives acts of violence. This is the relationship between violence and coexistence that reveal the shortcomings of Castro's hypothesis. David Nirenberg explains, "Convivencia was predicated upon violence; it was not its peaceful antithesis. Violence drew its meaning from coexistence, not in opposition to it"⁵⁰. Nirenberg's understanding of coexistence is the same understanding to which Christians subscribe in the legend of Santiago Matamoros, Poema del Cid, and the Reconquista in which the only appropriate form of coexistence with the existential "other" is characterized by a conscious effort to eradicate it from one's existential realm. For Muslims it is the same understanding that justifies the branding of politically opportunistic military expeditions as a jihad.

Yet, the "other"- understood largely in terms of religion given its featured importance in the pre-modern life- was not subjected to the whims and whips of his despiser as was the case during ISIL's terror. Dhimmi status afforded People of the Book and employed in vast stretches

... the reality of coexistence in Islamic societies of the Levant, Andalusia, Anatolia, and elsewhere moderated between extreme understandings of coexistence as phased out and interrupted violence against an existential other and a principled egalitarian, religious and ethnic pluralism.

of Islamic Empires from Andalusia to Anatolia has been hailed as a pre-modern form of tolerance. This status protected religious minorities from unlawful theft and confiscation of their possessions as well as unfounded impulses and grounds on which others could seek their persecution⁵¹. In fact, coreligionists of Muslim-majority governments could be and were punished for failures to honor dhimmi status and the protections it afforded⁵². Nonetheless criticism of dhimmi status as legal reinforcement of non-Muslim as secondary citizen status is certainly valid because it was still the case that Muslims were a privileged and special class of citizens⁵³. Tolerance afforded to dhimmis was not entirely a principled, ideological execution of ideal religious behavior. Tolerance was exercised in part because of its pragmatic value. One indication of this is that tolerance was breached on several occasions when rulers felt it was no longer pragmatic to adhere to the religious ideal. The paper proceeds to offer a number of examples. In practice there were sociocultural barriers to the entry of non-Muslims to government, and those who did enter were always the targets of suspicion and plots to be accused of treason or driven out of office⁵⁴. Consequently, while Jews and Christians were

⁵⁰ David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 245.

⁵¹ Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press/Associated University Presses, 2002)

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude.*; Ibrahim Anli, Meeting with Author, February 2, 2021.

⁵⁴ Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude*, 86-9.

sometimes able to hold high office their positions could also come at the price of their lives. Militant Christians who openly defied the government in Cordoba were fiercely persecuted and their persecution could be so severe and extend to the entire religious community such that the martyrs were seen as rogues who put their community in danger⁵⁵. Crucifixion was used as quintessential punishment and as a spectacle that mocked the execution of Christ⁵⁶. At times crucifixion was not intended as bodily punishment if offenders were beheaded before, but it was an assertion of power and a display of the consequences to the broader community to deter prospective offenses. This profound and blasphemous mockery of the crucifixion sharply contrasts the visual of Muslims participating alongside Christians during the latter's holiday processions and consuming lard-containing sweets. Fiction would also have one believe that conversion to Islam was always voluntarily decided by individuals who were attracted to the moral and ideological superiority of the religion, except in the case of communities subjected to the law of conquerors (*anwatan*)⁵⁷. However, the reality is that conversion was also pursued for pragmatic purposes by people who wished to access the legal status afforded to Muslims⁵⁸. Conversion for pragmatic purposes indicates that there must have been a great disparity in the legal status and lifestyle of Muslims and non-Muslims to the extent that people desired to forfeit their original religious affiliation to access a different legal status. For these reasons and others one recognizes that the reality of coexistence in Islamic societies of the Levant, Andalusia, Anatolia, and elsewhere moderated between extreme understandings of coexistence as phased out and interrupted violence against an existential other and a principled egalitarian, religious and ethnic pluralism.

It is true that some features of life in those societies are imitated by ISIL, such as the raw, gruesome, and daily displays of punishment in Raqqa to discourage dissenters or conversions compelled by a desire to qualify for social mobility and a given legal status. However, the recurring theme in Islamic societies was that peaceful coexistence and persecution were phases of an administration, regime, or empire. Neither was the absolute state of existence. It is also important to remember that circumstances were created not in the absence of but because of the bilateral engagement of actors in the religious minority and majority. Through its uninterrupted and indiscriminate persecution of religious minorities, ISIL actually represents a bleak departure from the circumstantial and chaptered style of coexistence formerly practiced in Islamic societies. It is true that ISIL's reign was short-lived, so ostensibly it could have lost its revolutionary fervor and tempered out to adopt phases of coexistence and persecution that

⁵⁵ Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom*, 113.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ The law of conquerors, or the right of conquest, is not unique to pre-modern Islamic societies and has been applied differently by its respective pre-modern empires. It is most often associated with war spoils, taxation, land ownership, and it may or may not include the right to convert or enslave conquered individuals. The Arabic term *anwatan* implies the land was conquered by force as opposed to by peaceful means, *salman*. Historically, Islamic conquests traditionally offer *salman* before resorting to *anwatan*, and kingdoms that peacefully submit are offered a different legal status, taxation, and protection against conversion and enslavement.

⁵⁸ Vincent Cornell, Lecture to Author, November, 2019.

emulate its regional predecessors but ISIL showed no signs of stopping. Uninterrupted genocide was never the precedent in Islamic society and it is everyone's hope that ISIL's reign has not set a new precedent because it was the exception not the rule.

2.2. Destruction and Persecution

2.2.1 Jews

By the time ISIL had gained control in Syria and Iraq much of what was left of regional Judaic history was just that-history. The population of Jews was previously attenuated by campaigns in the 20th century and the creation of the state of Israel⁵⁹. For example, in 20th century Iraq the persecution of Jews was most often justified on grounds of espionage and treason, especially after the creation of Israel⁶⁰. Many storefronts once operated and homes once inhabited by Jews were already in possession of Muslims or other religious minorities, soon to be confiscated, and the infrastructure of many synagogues was already beyond repair by the time ISIL was a politically viable and compelling force. While there weren't formidable communities ISIL could eradicate it still targeted and vandalized, discriminately and indiscriminately, monuments of Jewish heritage and worship. This is particularly true of Jewish cemeteries and most notably the marauding and destruction of the tomb of Hebrew prophet Jonah and prophet Nahum⁶¹.

2.2.2 Christians

Most of the Christians residing in the Levant were of Assyrian and Mesopotamian heritage rather than Western imports but after centuries of ancestral legacies in the Levant fled or were driven out of their homes in favor of more dependable political conditions. One only needs to go back as far as the Ba'athist regime to see that ISIL's homogenization campaigns were not the first time this religious minority was targeted but they were subject to some of the most fatal massacres during the ISIL regime. As People of the Book Christians were given three courses of action 1) accept their status and taxation as second class citizens under ISIL's version of dhimmi status 2) convert or 3) be killed⁶². In effect, those who chose to keep their religious affiliation continually lived in fear of changing conditions, directives, and the actions of rogue and ultra-puritanical ISIL members whose impulses could not be controlled by centralized, bureaucratic

⁵⁹Robert Philpot, "Iraq's Jewish sites almost all ruined beyond repair, new heritage report finds," *The Times of Israel*, June 5, 2020,

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/iraqs-jewish-sites-almost-all-ruined-beyond-repair-new-heritage-report-finds/>; Ibrahim Anli, Lecture to Author, February 9, 2021.

⁶⁰ Philpot, "Iraq's Jewish sites."

⁶¹ Levi Clancy, "The Prophet Nahum, the Assyrians of Alqosh, and the Kurdistan Region," *The Times of Israel*, January 5, 2021.

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-prophet-nahum-the-assyrians-of-alqosh-and-the-kurdistan-region/>

⁶² Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "An Internal Report on Islamic State 'Repentance' Policies in Iraq," *Pundicity: Informed Opinion & Review*, July 9, 2019.

<http://www.aymennjawad.org/22914/an-internal-report-on-islamic-state-repentance>

instruction. The inconsistent treatment of Christians under ISIL's grip was also true for other religious minorities and varied depending on the locality and the whims or personal judgment of extremists⁶³. At the height of its power ISIL leadership issued a declaration allowing Christians 48 hours to exist ISIL borders, but the short amount of time and the logistical barriers to prepare to leave behind the life one had built shows no mercy for the religious minority even if it gave members an opportunity to flee⁶⁴. Even the areas of Iraq and Syria that were theoretically accessible for relocation could have fallen under ISIL rule any next day, so Christians had to seek refuge beyond regional proximity in Turkey, Lebanon, and other nation-states. Other acts of persecution include opening fire and massacring actively praying worshippers, looting, and vandalizing Churches with slanderous or blasphemous graffiti.

2.2.3. Yazidis

The persecution of Yazidi communities' rests on their interpretation of the story of the fallen angel who in his disobedience of God and failure to prostrate before the prophet Adam becomes the devil in traditional Muslim interpretation. In the Yazidi interpretation this figure, the Peacock King (*Melek Taus*), is hailed as loyal for refusing to prostrate before anyone but God. Because the two interpretations have found no reconciliation Yazidis are labeled "devil worshippers" and the "original disbelievers"⁶⁵. "The story we use to explain the core of our faith and everything we think of as good about the Yazidi religion is the same story others use to justify genocide against us," writes ISIL sexual violence survivor, Yazidi activist, and Nobel Prize co-recipient Nadia Murad⁶⁶. The rich history contained in shrines and cultural sites containing symbols related to *Melek Taus* and incorporating elements of Abrahamic and ancient Mesopotamian faiths were destroyed by ISIL in Northern Iraq on accounts of polytheism and idolatry. Any destruction is certainly lamentable but this destruction is even more lamentable given that Yazidis are a class of people indigenous and endemic to the region, so their presence and monuments of faith and cultural contribution were exclusive to the region. Yazidis are an ethnoreligious group that has long endured hardship for its livelihood in Northern Iraq but ISIL intensified these hardships, raped Yazidi women, and initiated a genocide against the community. In theory, Yazidis were given the choice to convert or be killed⁶⁷. The extremist groups trafficked women and young girls and sold them as servants and sex slaves, such a harrowing account is documented by Nadia Murad in her autobiography, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against the Islamic State*. She writes:

At some point, there was rape and nothing else. This becomes your normal day. You don't know who is going to open the door next to attack you, just that it will happen and that tomorrow

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, *The ISIS Files | The Islamic State's Real Estate Department: Documents and Analysis* (D.C: The George Washington University Program on Extremism, 2020), 11.

⁶⁵ Devin Stewart, Lecture to Author, October, 2019.

⁶⁶ Nadia Murad, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against the Islamic State* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2017), 28.

⁶⁷ al-Tamimi, "An Internal Report."

might be worse... There is only rape and the numbness that comes with accepting that this is now your life. Fear was better. With fear, there is assumption that what is happening isn't normal⁶⁸.

Yazidi men, and elderly women who were undesirable for slavery were killed often without the opportunity to convert and certainly without the opportunity to access dhimmi status given Christians⁶⁹. Young boys were taken or abducted to train as ISIL fighters. *The ISIS Files* displays documents for the collection, or handing over of children of boys as young as seven that mimics the devşirme institute by the Ottoman Empire but is even more anachronistic and ethically reputable given the modern framework in which it occurred⁷⁰. While it is true that ISIL fighters had access to channels of social mobility and income that was denied the general populous reminiscent of the Janissary there was still a strict hierarchy and a disproportionate distribution of these kickbacks that favored natives who voluntarily enlisted and foreign fighters⁷¹.

While Yazidis did not have to contend with the fear of being recognized as a legitimate, ISIL-protected religious minority one day and a persecuted minority the other like Christians they were forced to live in constant fear of persecution. Yazidi victims of rape are forced to raise their children fatherless and even without the support of the communities to which they wish to return. Women have to struggle with the responsibility of a child and psychologically with memories of the rape that conceived the child. Many women must orphan their children to find acceptance within their original communities because the Yazidi community does not recognize children fathered by non-Yazidi men⁷². For this reason and many others, the number of children orphaned by ISIL is another remarkable feature of the aftermath. To this day Yazidis struggle psychologically with the memory of their abusers and suicidal idealization has become a feature of daily life in addition to material concerns such as securing employment and shelter⁷³.

⁶⁸ Murad, *The Last Girl*, 186.

⁶⁹ al-Tamimi, *Real Estate*, 11.

⁷⁰ The devşirme was the Ottoman Empire's practice of conscripting young boys from the Balkans for service in the Janissary, the empire's elite fighting force until its dissolution in the 19th century. Yeniçeri, meaning "New People", emphasizes the profound changes to which children levied by the devşirme were forcefully subjected. They were torn away from their birth families and culturally, linguistically, and religiously reincarnated as new people instructed to devote their lives to the sultan.

⁷¹ Mark Townsend, "Inside the Islamic State's capital: Red Bull-drinking jihadists, hungry civilians, crucifixions and air strikes," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/30/raqqa-isis-capital-crucifixions-civilians-suffer-jihadis-red-bull>; Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, November, 2019.

⁷² Jane Arraf, "A Yazidi Survivor's Struggle Shows the Pain that Endures After ISIS Attack," *National Public Radio News*, August 8, 2020.

<https://www.npr.org/2020/08/08/898972162/a-yazidi-survivors-struggle-shows-the-pain-that-endures-after-isis-attack>

⁷³ *Ibid.*

2.2.4 Sufis and Sectarian Muslims

Hopefully Section 1 has demonstrated that ISIL's interpretation of the Qur'an is not so much literal as it is wrong, but for the sake of simplifying matters many identify ISIL's interpretation of Islam as "literal". Therefore, among other things, it opposes Sufism on grounds that stem from its advocacy of a personal, non-institutionalized, and alternative path to God that incorporates esoteric rituals and symbols⁷⁴. Like other mystic traditions Sufism takes on a regional flavor but to paint it with a very broad brush the Sufi way emphasizes moral conduct rather than formalistic behavior or memorized knowledge⁷⁵. Sufism also breeds its unique version of "sainthood" which inspires the creation of many shrines and memorial sites⁷⁶. Sufism also emphasizes the duality of God in a way that lends more support for an understanding of God as loving and merciful rather than wrathful and enacting⁷⁷. While ISIL is not unique in its condemnation of Sufis or even destruction of Sufi shrines (one sees the same circumstance in state-sponsored campaigns in Saudi Arabia and ultra-puritanical initiatives in Northern Africa and elsewhere) it is relevant here to bring attention to its persecution of coreligionists. This persecution goes beyond Sunni coreligionists and extends to Shi'ite sects and even more horrifically to the children born to those religious denominations as ISIL massacred Shi'ite children even to the point of condemnation by extremist powerhouse al-Qaeda⁷⁸. The Shi'ite sects include but are not limited to Twelver Shi'ites, and Alawis. The belief structure of Shi'ism also relies on symbols, select earthly figures with an exclusive connection to the Divine, and a celebration of these individuals through shrines and rituals. In this way, the destruction of Sufi shrines and Shi'ite shrines and monuments are opposed on the same ground that no earthly figure, besides perhaps the Prophet Muhammad, can be celebrated but not enshrined. Shi'ite sects were purportedly targeted on purely religious grounds but ISIL's political projects and the power vacuum it inherited after the marginalization of Sunni Muslims from a politically and socially advantaged status after the fall of Saddam Hussein shows a thirst for politically motivated revenge. The Alawis are less numerous than the Twelver Shi'ites but they share the religious denomination of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, so the transnational expansion of what was formerly the Islamic State in Iraq at one point in its development demanded an opposition to everything for which the Syrian leader and his government stood.

Unlike Christians and Yazidis, Sunni "apostates" and Sufi or Shi'ite coreligionists were given the opportunity to repent, but this in theory was more merciful than in practice⁷⁹. Directives regarding repentance were inconsistently enforced among ISIL ranks and across localities and constantly changing such that some who repented became disqualified from

⁷⁴ Rukmini Callimachi, "To the World, They Are Muslims. To ISIS, Sufis Are Heretics," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/world/middleeast/sufi-muslims-isis-sinai.html>

⁷⁵ Cornell Vincent, Lecture to Author, October, 2019.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, September, 2019.

⁷⁸ Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, November, 2019.

⁷⁹ Al Tamimi, *Real Estate*, 11.

protection. Furthermore, there was always suspicion surrounding individuals who repented and in many cases they still became victims of slaughter. This was especially true for individuals who had served the former government, which further confirms the political rather than religious preoccupations of ISIL⁸⁰. Suspicions and disobediences against ISIL manifested themselves in daily presentations of gruesome beatings, beheadings, crucifixions, and other forms of cruel and unusual punishment in the city square of Raqqa and other localities in which all inhabitants, even children, were mandated to come and observe⁸¹. Even Sunni mosques, like the Great Umayyad Mosque in Aleppo built shortly after the advent of Islam and the Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul were not safe from ISIL's terror. No one and nothing was safe.

The grounds on which ISIL declared coreligionists, Jews, Christians, Shi'ites, Yazidis and other groups ineligible for social union might not appear as plentiful as the number of lives it destroyed. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that because the "other" is a socially and historically conditioned construct the criteria by which one qualifies as the "other" can be as simple, limited or multifaceted and expansive as the creator chooses. This research is by no

Ironically enough in trying to emulate its understanding of an Islamic past, ISIL emulated the marauding Mongols under Hulagu Khan in their massacring, unforgiving, and indiscriminate style of destruction. Once again, the Euphrates was filled with tears, ink, and debris of centuries old intellectual, cultural, and spiritual developments

means a complete account of all individuals, or groups who have suffered at the hands of ISIL. The severity and type of persecution of religious minorities and coreligionists varied on a number of grounds but there are recurring themes. Entities or organizations have differently operationalized and applied the term "genocide" to the actions of ISIL. Interestingly enough the UN has resolved that only Yazidis were the targets of genocide and while it is certainly in poor taste to qualify one persecution as worse than another the directives issued against Yazidis were the least unforgiving⁸². Nonetheless, ISIL has committed horrific actions against these communities and the things they hold dear whether it be in the form of personal possessions and homes to centuries old monuments and sacred spaces.

In addition to destroying physical spaces saturated in history, value, and faith ISIL has also taken the intellectual property of these communities and that of the entire international community through its destruction of archeological sites, as well as libraries and "madrasa" style

⁸⁰ Al-Tamimi, "An Internal Report."

⁸¹ Townsend, "Inside the Islamic State's capital."

⁸² "Mass Violence and Genocide by the Islamic State/Daesh in Iraq and Syria," *The University of Minnesota: Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, accessed February 9, 2021.

<https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/mass-violence-and-genocide-islamic-state-daesh-iraq-and-syria>

offshoots of sacred spaces. Ironically enough in trying to emulate its understanding of an Islamic past, ISIL emulated the marauding Mongols under Hulagu Khan in their massacring, unforgiving, and indiscriminate style of destruction. Once again, the Euphrates was filled with tears, ink, and debris of centuries old intellectual, cultural, and spiritual developments.

2.3. Statistics

The desire is to reflect the destruction and tragedies not in terms of their number but in terms of the morally erroneous inhumanity which it was executed. More important than the number of worship sites that have suffered at the hands of ISIL is the sheer reality that this form of persecution was occurring and spanned all ISIL-held localities in Syria and Iraq. If the reader is interested in supplementing the qualified description of ISIL's destruction with a quantitative understanding consider work done by UNESCO, JHIC in collaboration with the American Oriental School, ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives, and reports issued by Antiquities Departments in Syria and Iraq. The work done by these sources is distinguished on a number of factors, such as what infrastructures it addresses (religious v. cultural v. both) and the extent to which it qualifies the severity of the destruction according to the respective research's operationalization. In the event the reader accesses these sources please note that ISIL is not entirely responsible for the condition of some of these spaces as they have been victims of time and other historical hostilities, this is especially true of Jewish spaces, but ISIL is largely responsible for destroying them to the point of depravity and perhaps even no return⁸³. To offer a sweeping image of the 68 sites of Jewish heritage analyzed in Iraq 90% were operationalized as unrecoverable, 53% of 38 sites in Syria were deemed unrecoverable, and the remaining percentages mostly represent sites in poor condition⁸⁴. The state of Churches is more forgiving, ostensibly because they were not equally enduring targets of persecution during the 20th century but nonetheless many of them have been destroyed. Yazidi and Sufi shrines, which are stylistically and infrastructure more intimate and less demanding than common worship sites, were easily and widely destroyed by ISIL although precise accounts of their numbers and locations are much more difficult to find. Additionally, the reader should keep in mind that not all sacred spaces were destroyed in calculated and intentional displays of persecution as some were destroyed by indiscriminate bombings, conflict, and airstrikes launched by SARG, Russia, and international efforts⁸⁵. This presents its own challenges and implications. Michael Danti and collaborators note that the inability to assign actors to their destruction "may be lowering inhibitions over the direct targeting of cultural assets and in the future will likely complicate assigning responsibility"⁸⁶. Readers with a quantitative interest in the matter should certainly

⁸³ Philpot, "Iraq's Jewish sites."

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Michael D. Danti, *et al.*, "ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives(CHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq," *NEA-PSHSS-14-001*, Weekly Report 71–72 (December 9–22, 2015):1.

<https://en.unesco.org/syrian-observatory/sites/syrian-observatory/files/reports/ASOR-CHI-weekly-report-71%E2%80%9372r.pdf>

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

explore the matter further but the author's decision to limit the discussion is an intentional decision to channel the reader's humanity and compassion more than achieve an astonishment or empathy that rests on numbers.

2.4. Behind the Greatest Fortune and Misfortunes

The persecutory campaigns achieved the ideological goals of homogenizing the population and attenuating the memory of so-called non-Islamic achievements but they also served a material purpose. Persecution and confiscation proved to be valuable sources of generating wealth for ISIL, which had become the wealthiest terrorist organization in history. This fortune was the product of so many misfortunes suffered by victims of ISIL's terror. ISIL's fortune is famously known to come from black market activity, human trafficking, ransom, and oil sales in the amount of three million US dollars a week⁸⁷. The land, homes and possessions of dissenters and targeted groups were given to ISIL members and the wealth generated from was distributed to serve ISIL's agenda, or as ISIL would purport, "the best interest of all Muslims"⁸⁸. In effect, the definition of who qualified as Muslim under ISIL's agenda was so restrictive that much of the wealth became kickbacks to be enjoyed by those among ISIL's ranks. It should be remembered that ISIL controlled employment opportunities and determined incomes as it saw fit, so even when inhabitants could access employment opportunities they were always limited monetarily by no fault of their own. Accounts have claimed that a standard, nuclear family was surviving off of less than thirteen US cents a day⁸⁹. To make matters worse, the economic disparities were visible to those living under ISIL rule. Foreign fighters and wives were offered the most reimbursement such that they could afford imported goods, natives within ISIL's ranks were given enough to live comfortably, and everyone else who fell outside of these categories had barely enough to get by, if anything at all⁹⁰. To paint a quick picture, ISIL fighters in Raqqa were importing foreign energy drinks while some inhabitants were living off less than one meal a day⁹¹. The standard of living for so many reached such depravity that circumstances compelled individuals to enter ISIL ranks for income and social mobility rather than out of an ideological attraction to the cause⁹². In other words, while ISIL has claimed to distribute its war spoils and wealth according to Islamic instruction it is undeniably true that in effect wealth was concentrated and used to achieve and maintain loyalty, especially among those whose loyalties could be the most fleeting⁹³. The sheer reality of ISIL and the political turbulence not only caused natives to flee in search of better lives but it deterred investment, scholarship, and the creation of new employment opportunities that benefit all persons and strata. Even presently there is understandable hesitation surrounding efforts to renew and rebuild former ISIL

⁸⁷ Townsend, "Inside the Islamic State's capital."

⁸⁸ Al-Tamimi, *Real Estate*, 10.

⁸⁹ Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, November, 2019.

⁹⁰ Townsend, "Inside the Islamic State's capital."

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, November, 2019.

⁹³ Townsend, "Inside the Islamic State's capital"; al-Tamimi, *Real Estate*, 10-4.

strongholds because what can take months or even years to build can easily be destroyed by clandestine extremist efforts- which are very much a reality- in seconds.

It would be extremely bold and erroneous to take the position that select groups in modern governments of Muslim majority countries or within historical Islamic societies did not have exclusive access to streams of income and social mobility reinforced by structures of hierarchy and elitism. Certainly, hierarchy and elitism would have no force without diversity, so these structures were responses to diversity that institutionalize the theme of prioritizing the livelihood of a select class of people even if they do not share the same motivations and devastating effects experienced during ISIL's rule. One of the predominant criticisms of the Umayyad dynasty is its elitism of an ethnic group that more or less became its own socioeconomic class by virtue of the advantages it enjoyed. The Berbers living under the Umayyad dynasty and its extension under *taifa* kings in Morocco and Spain were barred from entry to specific employment opportunities to the extent that their resentment conjured an ethnic political force in the form of the Almoravids and later a defacto ethnic, ideological political force in the form of the Almohads that overturned much of Umayyad rule⁹⁴. Sex slavery and concubines were also a feature of Islamic dynasties, but the treatment and the social status these women could access was relatively promising given the historical time period and compared to their counterparts in non-Islamic empires such that the influence of female relatives, mothers, and concubines of male power brokers manifested a political period now recognized as the Sultanate of Women during the Ottoman Empire⁹⁵. It was also markedly influential elsewhere in the Islamic world but to a lesser degree⁹⁶. Furthermore, the Janissary corps instituted in the 14th century under the Ottoman Empire had privileges reserved to them that remained unshared by the general populous until the 17th century⁹⁷. More recently, the revolution in Syria that inherited the Arab Spring is commentary enough on the corruption committed by Bashar al-Assad and his cronies, and likewise is Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist administration elevation of Sunni Muslims in government and other sectors of society at the expense of the rank and social mobility of Shi'ite Muslims. There are certainly other historical examples but the ones offered are meant to cover a variety of historical periods in a number of regional contexts. Now that this paper has transparently addressed genuine criticisms of societies and governments that at least claim to be Islamic it can move to discuss departures from the hierarchy, kickbacks, and concentrated distribution of wealth and spoils.

When political responses to diversity did not prioritize a select group such that this prioritization eclipsed the welfare of the population at large, wonderful, lasting, and timeless achievements were secured during these periods. This paper does not intend to advance the trite

⁹⁴ Allen James Fromherz, *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2012), 124,130,170.

⁹⁵ Murat Iyigun, "Lessons from the Ottoman Harem on Culture, Religion, and Wars," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 61, no.4 (July 2013).

⁹⁶ Roxani Margariti, Lecture to Author, April 2019.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

affirmation that diversity is inherently good but there are numerous examples that academically speak to the benefits of diversity. The Levant was filled with caravans carrying individuals of different ethnic and spiritual backgrounds to destinations for pilgrimage, spiritual awakening, trade, and scholarship. The eclecticism of faiths present integrated customs and was catered to by commercial ventures, such as the consumption of wine taken up by Christians and Jews, that would have otherwise been much less profitable. Niche and general commercial needs and luxuries were met with the development of trade routes that brought Venetian, Indian, Frankish, and other transcontinental goods and traders to cities like Baghdad and Aleppo. Trade routes and caravan travel required the establishment of treaties to protect travelers from pirating gangs and opportunistic tribes, which in turn made diplomacy a feature of everyday life. Diplomacy bred economic and political stability which itself bred more financial and intellectual investment into the region and allowed for even more economic opportunity. The financial welfare of individuals allowed them to become patrons of academia and art, so they sponsored projects that revealed scientific, mathematical, medical and other knowledge to which the entire world is indebted. An endearing and well-cited example is the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, in which polymaths and scholars of different faiths from all over the region collaborated on intellectual projects and produced the most abundant and scholarly body of work present at the time⁹⁸. So much scholarship rested in Baghdad that when the Mongols ransacked the city in 1258 the Tigris-Euphrates river system turned black with the ink of the books that found their way into the river⁹⁹. The wealth of knowledge encapsulated in libraries such as those in Baghdad, Alexandria, and Cordoba was unparalleled and unchallenged by kingdoms, Islamic or otherwise, that chose to define themselves in spite of their diversity rather than by it. This is evidenced by a comparison of Muslim Andalusia and the Christian Kingdoms of Norther Spain, and even more generally all of Europe¹⁰⁰. "So numerous were the private libraries [in the Muslim world] that one writer has estimated that, as of 1200, there were more books in private hands in the Moslem world than in all libraries, public and private, of western Europe, " writes Michael Harris¹⁰¹.

In sum, the achievements of diversity were felt across the spectrum. Unfortunately, accounts of economic prosperity per capita were difficult to find, verify, and contextualize for comparison with modern economic structures. Nonetheless in the absence of uninterrupted persecution, diversity worked to produce intellectual, social, and economic benefits. Not only did ISIL's rule not add to any of these benefits but it attenuated them and destroyed testaments to the achievements they bred in the form of art, architecture, fertile land, etc. The resolution to revive the diversity of the Levant hopes to secure achievement and prosperity and promises spiritual gratification through devotion to a morally good cause.

⁹⁸ Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, September 2019.

⁹⁹ Michael H. Harris, *History of Libraries in the Western World* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press,1999), 85.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Section 3: Highlighting local & International reconstruction efforts of sacred spaces and opportunities for prosperity in former ISIL strongholds.

This section highlights local and international reconstruction efforts of sacred spaces in former ISIL strongholds. This section will comment on the nature and range of efforts planned and underway to ensure the free exercise of religion and engage in a brief, supplemental discussion on improving the general livelihood of religious minorities through employment opportunities and the like by emphasizing the value of tangible and symbolic efforts to uplift morale and ensure a diverse, prosperous community. It will contrast the stakes and motives of international and homegrown initiatives based on what the efforts hope to accomplish and mention challenges and risks of attempting to rebuild an interfaith community in spite of the clandestine and even transparent efforts of the Salafist undercurrent that remains from the ISIL regime. The research has no expectations of a causal relationship between a factor and an outcome, and does not boast a prognosis but is focused on presenting specific and general examples to come up with trends across a number of factors. To remind the reader, these factors are: 1) homegrown or international 2) composition of the task force 3) nature and scope of the goals and 4) faith community involved or affected.

3.1 Local and International Efforts

The fatal and highly-inclusive persecution carried out by ISIL against every religious minority reduced the condition of many worship spaces and heritage sites to rubble, so many communities demand the attention of reconstruction efforts. The information in this paper is presented in such a way that guides the reader to piece together trends while helping the reader understand the reasons why these trends exist and the factors that give rise to them. As promised in the abstract, this paper limits itself to four factors that both explain trends and for which trends can be developed. Regarding the Jewish community, there are strong advocates in academia and the diaspora demanding attention for the preservation of Jewish heritage in Syria and Iraq. Local endeavors are differentiated by their desire to transform this heritage into a message to draw Jewish communities back to the area. This project has been the work of scholars such as Iraqi lecturer and historian Omar Mohammad who had anonymously published socio-political commentary against the ISIL regime at the height of its power. By looking back on the history of Mosul, Professor Mohammad wants to demonstrate that Mosul can again be home to a live, prosperous Jewish community and that diversity is not just an anachronism. "Diversity alone is not enough if there is no inclusion... Inclusion requires us to bring back the Jewish story and accept it as part of our own," explains the professor¹⁰². The initiative has of yet been limited to academic circles and remains largely about maintaining the structural symbols and memories of

¹⁰² David Ian Klein, "As Mosul recovers from ISIS rule, a native of the city is fighting to revive its Jewish past," *Forward*, December 1, 2020, <https://forward.com/news/world/459303/one-man-is-fighting-to-record-mosuls-jewish-past-as-it-recovers-from-isis/>

Jewish heritage because it has not yet achieved the support required to develop contemporary Jewish communities in the area. Still, Professor Mohammad and others who share his initiative interpret their efforts as part of a larger project that envisions a pluralism that exceeds tolerance and mandates a healthy codependence on other faith communities in a manner that is indispensable to the social fabric of the region. Regarding his efforts Mohammed willed, “It takes time, it will take effort, it takes guts and it takes courage, but it’s happening.”¹⁰³ One notable on

International efforts fill a void by institutionalizing projects, protections, and legalities that bottom-up homegrown initiatives would otherwise have a difficult time funding and achieving

the ground effort manifesting a living heritage for the community is the reconstruction of Prophet Nahum’s tomb- a former pilgrimage site for many of the region’s Jews- in Northern Iraq with the support of the diaspora, international governments and the Assyrian church, which shares a religious connection to the tomb¹⁰⁴. Nonetheless, there is of course the concession on his part and the likes of those involved in these efforts that the reality of a lively Jewish community may not be plausible in the near future but it is nonetheless worth working toward. This is especially true given the Jewish community’s inclination to immigrate or remain in the state of Israel but it is compounded by the fact that very few Jews have generational ties to that area anymore because of the earlier persecutions in the twentieth century. Very few Jews were neighbors or friends of contemporary Iraqis after the mid-twentieth century, so they experience their relationship to the region in this post-ISIL context very differently from their Christian counterparts. The sheer fact alone that they would be living in the aftermath of ISIL makes the whole prospect even less appealing, at least until Iraq and areas of Syria recuperate the losses they suffered under ISIL. Contrastingly, Syrian and Iraqi Christians, prior to their eviction in 2014, were neighbors, coworkers or business associates, and close friends of contemporary Muslims and regional inhabitants so they have more direct and intimate ties to the area because the homes that were confiscated were their homes and the churches that were destroyed were their frequented places of worship. The nature of these ties is distinguished by the type of efforts that deal with the respective communities. Efforts pertaining to the Jewish community remain confined to scholarly circles and have not yet spilled over into the general public. Moreover, efforts surrounding the Yazidi community have hit the ground running and manifested task forces but support and participants are recruited largely from within the community. The distrust of help recruited from the out-group and the fierce independence of the community is understandable given the historical persecution of Yazidis, particularly those who identify as a subset of the Kurds, time and time again throughout the last two centuries. It is also a feature of the social structure to which Yazidis

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Uriel Levy, “The Miracle of the Tomb of Prophet Nahum,” *Davar: Workers, Society, and Economy in Israel*, August 29, 2020. <https://en.davar1.co.il/244830/>

subscribe, characterized by pre-modern qualifications for kinship and the esoteric knowledge and belief structure required to restore sacred spaces with which Yazidis are of course the most familiar. This is not to say that non-Yazidi actors have not contributed to the community's reconstruction effort but just to highlight that most actors are Yazidis. Activist Nadia Murad has collaborated with ALIPH Foundation to restore Sinjar temple and with USAID to provide a proper, consecrated burial site to Yazidi victims of ISIL massacres once mutilated or thrown into mass graves¹⁰⁵. This initiative is saturated with sorrow and religious significance given the religious ritual and significance of death and proper burial. Another Yazidi force fully funded and furnished by community members is actively reconstructing heritage sites in Bashiqa and a number of other efforts of similar scope and size are cropping up in former areas inhabited by Yazidis¹⁰⁶. Contrastingly, efforts surrounding the Christian community have received diffuse support from a variety of regional actors in the form of grassroots initiatives. At the height of ISIL's territorial power only 2000 Christian families remained in mainland Iraq and the number continued to dwindle¹⁰⁷. As of yet less than a hundred families have returned, but one initiative welcoming them back is called Arms of Mosul (*Sawaed al-Museliya*) and was co-founded by a gentleman named Mohammad Essam. Arms of Mosul incorporates and oversees volunteer efforts to welcome and encourage Christian families back to the region by restoring and cleaning churches, removing slanderous and blasphemous language from the city's walls and markings on formerly Christian homes, in addition to providing emergency services¹⁰⁸. Certainly the question of how and toward which communities volunteers should dedicate time and funds cycles has crossed the minds of natives. It is natural to question whether it is more important to restore mosques and Muslim-homes before or while simultaneously reconstructing sacred spaces of a non-coreligionist. For example, one could wonder why the reconstruction of persecuted Sufi or Shi'ite spaces was not made a priority. There are certainly many logistical barriers and mainstream hostilities against these coreligionists that impede progress toward such projects. However the decision to focus on the restoration of churches sends a conscious message that the free exercise of an entirely independent religion and the freedom to assemble in religious spaces characterize an ideal society worth working toward. In his correspondence with media outlets

¹⁰⁵ "Nadia's Initiative is Rehabilitating Malack Sheikh Hassan Temple in Sinjar," Nadia's Initiative, accessed March 9, 2021,

<https://www.nadiainitiative.org/news/nadias-initiative-rehabilitates-malack-sheikh-hassan-temple-in-sinjar.>;

"Yazidis Bury 104 Victims of Kocho Massacre," Nadia's Initiative, accessed March 9, 2021,

<https://www.nadiainitiative.org/news/yazidis-bury-104-victims-of-kocho-massacre>

¹⁰⁶ Sofya Shahab, "Young Yazidis in Iraq rebuild their shattered communities through heritage," *Institute of Development Studies*, August 12, 2020,

<https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/young-yazidis-in-iraq-rebuild-their-shattered-communities-through-heritage/>

¹⁰⁷ Campbell MacDiarmid, "'I will cry if I see the Pope': the last Christian in Mosul's Old City on what the pontiff's visit means to Iraq," *The Telegraph*, March 6, 2021,

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/03/06/will-cry-see-pope-says-last-christian-mosuls-old-city/>

¹⁰⁸ Abdullah Rashid, "Volunteers want Christians to return to Mosul, where Islamic State once ruled," *Reuters*, November 3, 2020,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/iraq-mosul-church-int/volunteers-want-christians-to-return-to-mosul-where-islamic-state-once-ruled-idUSKBN27J1PR?edition-redirect=in>

Essam explains that their efforts are intended to tell Christian families, “Come back, Mosul is not complete without you”¹⁰⁹. While their reach lacks the bureaucracy and resources necessary to institutionalize fair hiring practices and a curriculum that works to benefit all religious communities, individual members of Arms of Mosul are doing what they can in terms of their own reach and the reach of others within their network to ensure hiring practices impartial to religious affiliations so that Christians can secure employment, and to offer themselves as a symbol of hope and pluralism to reverse the radicalization inculcated by ISIL. The institutionalization of such directives is more conspicuous, and likely more easily achieved by nation-state involvement and international pressure collaborating with the current Iraqi government to reverse the radicalization of society through education and reduce the need for other governments to accommodate and provide for persecuted religious minorities now residing in Lebanon, Turkey, and other nation-states by providing them with pockets of opportunity to return to their original homes. This can be achieved by providing employment opportunities through job growth, equipping religious minorities with legally binding formalities that offer them job security and protection, and subsidizing small business projects that allow them to employ more people within their community. While reparations in the form of monetary payments to persons or families have not been explored or offered, there are many ways the international community is working alongside the Iraqi government to pay it back and hopefully even pay it forward. Huge fractions of the population can be educated through a standardized curriculum instituted top-down rather than relying on the fragmented application of a non-homogenized curriculum delivered by philanthropic actors or groups. Markedly important heritage sites can and have been restored by the efforts furnished with experts and funding from all over the globe. UNESCO pioneered project “Revive the spirit of Mosul” aims to restore Islamic and non-Islamic heritage sites, reverse ISIL’s inculcation through education, and reinvigorate scholarship, scientific learning, innovation, and investment in the city. So international efforts fill a void by institutionalizing projects, protections, and legalities that bottom-up homegrown initiatives would otherwise have a difficult time funding and achieving. The status of the UN as an international organization allows it to bring in legitimate support by state-actors, among the likes of Italy, UAE, and France, all of which have expressed a politically impartial interest in preserving cultural heritage sites through UN task forces. However, nation-states have also interacted with the subject through other channels that tend to be politically motivated, such as Russia and its corporations lending their support to Bashar al-Assad’s regime through an investment of monetary and human capital on the subject of Syrian reconstruction. Nation-states that reject participation with NGOs, foundations, and international organizations often seek to consolidate the strength of the stakeholder to whom they are lending their support in hopes of concentrating the benefits of their investment in the hands of actors who are most aligned with their political interests. This is particularly true of countries that try to limit the number of collaborators with whom they strike deals in order to reduce the number of actors to which they must hold themselves accountable and who are most interested in reconstruction as it pertains to

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

economic revenue and an expanded tax base for the political power players they support. The Russian example sparks concerns about the stakes and motives of Russia's orientation on the subject of reconstruction to be further discussed in Section 3.2. A more benign example is USAID, a division of the US government, working alongside Yazidi leaders and advocates under the direction of the ever-prominent Nadia Murad to reconstruct temples, improve infrastructure, build schools, and generate culturally compatible opportunities for Yazidi women to make a living. The United Kingdom has also adapted the approach of USAID through its very own Department for International Development through direct diplomacy with the Iraqi government and its respective task forces to revitalize the economy, build hospitals, and assist displaced persons in the post- ISIL transition. It remains important to recognize that nation-states that collaborate with one another under the watchful eye of regulated diplomatic infrastructures like the UN, or who collaborate with local and abroad initiatives, organizations, and foundations tend to be more concerned with reconstruction for the sake of reconstruction rather than reconstruction for the sake of consolidating power or elevating one community or powerbroker above another. Nonetheless, it is also true that a country can interfere in many ways, so contributing to a politically impartial project does not disqualify it from accusations of harboring political motives in a different region, among a different community, or toward a different power player. For example, speculations have swirled that the government of the United Kingdom has contributed monetary support to religious organizations with an eye on reconstruction insofar as it concerns only the marginalized Christian population. This mimics criticism of Russia's interest in reconstruction as being divided along religious lines and the desire to elevate the standing of one religious community above that of another¹¹⁰. Chechnya has also been subjected to the same accusations but in terms of its preferential support for Muslim reconstruction projects. Chechnya's contributions are markedly "Muslim"- for lack of a better word- because they focus on the reconstruction of mosques, most notably the Great Mosque of Aleppo, and its religiously significant export of sheep to Syria for Ramadan¹¹¹. While this is certainly a valid criticism it is also nonetheless true that even though the religious majority was victimized under ISIL, religious minorities are the most destitute of homegrown resources and are therefore ostensibly the most in need of international attention. This paper is firmly of the position that all communities under ISIL suffered but it is not blind to resource scarcity or the logistical limitations that make one community a larger beneficiary than another, at least for the time being. This is as true of international efforts as it is of homegrown efforts, which must narrow their scope for a number of reasons discussed in Section 4.2 in order to be able to 1) furnish their goals and 2) accomplish their goals.

¹¹⁰ Leonid Issaev, and Serafim Yuriev, "The Christian Dimension of Russia's Middle East Policy," *Alsharq Forum* (March, 2017) :5,8-9.

¹¹¹ "Seeking to Improve Muslim Ties, Russia Forcing Chechens to Finance Syria's Reconstruction," *Haaretz*, July 18,2017,

<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/russia-forcing-chechens-to-finance-syria-s-reconstruction-1.5430737>

Now, one arrives at the question of individual actors. One can think of the likes of Nadia Murad, and more recently the Pope's historic visit to Iraq in March 2021 on the subject of the extinction of Christian communities, the preservation of that heritage, and the rebirth of an active, and prosperous dynamic for Christians in the region. This paper maintains the conservative position that individual actors are extremely limited in their capacity to enact change, at least relative to how much of it is needed across topographies that span borders. Individual actors are only as relevant as the force of the community or the institution behind them. Needless to say second to a deity the Pope is the highest authority within the catholic institution, so his actions represent the orientation of the Church. Even prior to the Pope's visit there was certainly a concession on the clergy and the people's part that a nominal or symbolic alliance to the cause is not enough, there need to be actors that can do something in order for reconstruction to rebirth multi-religious communities. "The [Catholic] Church will never abandon Iraq, but the people can only take so much. They need to be able to see a future for their children," said the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Erbil in a 2020 statement¹¹². Nadia Murad might have remained a so-called poster child for ISIL victims and sex slavery if she was not dedicated to empowering her community and empowering her own person through the force of that strengthened and emboldened community. Essentially, the visibility of individual actors is meant to draw more international attention and in effect presence in the region that can actually contribute funding and outsource human capital for reconstruction projects, such as the case of USAID. The hope is certainly that international interference will be benign and work for the Iraqi and Syrian people rather than through alliances that work against them but there is always a level of opacity that forces one to be acquiesce to the need for international help.

In sum, several trends can be observed across four factors: 1) international or homegrown, 2) composition of task forces, 3) nature and scope of goals, and 4) faith community involved or affected. There are both local and international task forces working toward reconstruction, and both are indispensable for different reasons. Local initiatives represent the community's innate interests and motivations on the subject, and international efforts institutionalize the reach and provide funding and expertise that homegrown initiatives cannot always supply. Both local and international task forces have preferential motives or prioritize a subset of ISIL victims due to resource scarcity or emotional proximity, and some but not all efforts are politically partial and lend support to a given regime. Finally, individual actors are only as powerful as the force of the institution or community that backs them and in effect work to concentrate more international exports into the region because a nominal/symbolic alliance to the cause is simply not enough.

¹¹² Emily Judd, "Iraq Christians fear future holds 'total extinction,' ISIS resurgence," *Al-Arabiya News*, February 23, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2020/02/23/Iraq-Christians-fear-future-holds-total-extinction-ISIS-resurgence>

3.2. Contrasting stakes and motives

The fragmented power sharing structures that exist in Syria and Iraq means that reconstruction efforts need to constantly readjust their strategies in adequate ways based on the regional limitations imposed by different stakeholders. In effect this means that the reach of volunteer groups can be disrupted by conditions from locality to locality, especially in Syria where more stakeholders operate as politically visible entities. This turn imposes inevitable limitations on the stakes these initiatives can achieve and of which they are realistically aware. UNESCO and foundations such as the Carter Center have commented on the implications of US sanctions on humanitarian efforts in Syria that overcomplicate the import of NGO and other foundations' help in such efforts. While the inaccessibility to international help is certainly not ideal it maintains the reality that the effort to restore the multi-religious landscape of the Levant has grown out of an innate desire of the Iraqi populous to restore the interfaith fabric of society. Although the work of homegrown volunteers has received global attention and appraise the effort remains funded and furnished by locals of Mosul and the greater surrounding area. Participants maintain that the international community has a responsibility to recognize that the desire for religious freedom and diversity is not a product of international or western pressure as much as a desire to restore the rich interfaith history of Mosul and the greater region.

As people who are forced to live and contend with their personal legacies and their realities in the aftermath of ISIL the first-hand involvement of natives is a point of special pride for Arms of Mosul's Mohammad Essam¹¹³. It is also a point of special pride for the task force reinvigorating communal Yazidi spaces in Bashiqa¹¹⁴.

... the effort to restore the multi-religious landscape of the Levant has grown out of an innate desire of the Iraqi populous to restore the interfaith fabric of society

Fascinatingly, perhaps to the point of irony, is that ISIL and other extremists would also take pride on points of nativity and rejecting Western import but each actor advances a different concept of what is native to Mosul, to the Levant, and to the practice of Islam. While certain rejections of "the West" can erroneously paint the general populous and even Islam as incompatible with democracy and its accompanying freedoms it is the case here that the opposite is true and that native actors take pride in this truth.

Moreover, the structures to which international and homegrown efforts devote their effort says a lot about what they hope to accomplish. Critics and skeptics of UNESCO-led international

¹¹³ Rashid, "Volunteers want Christians to return to Mosul."

¹¹⁴ Shahab, "Young Yazidis."

initiatives, the global community, and the antiquities departments of respective governments have an accused them of only harboring a predominant interest in preserving the cultural heritage of sites in Syria and Iraq as they focus their attention on archaeological sites among the likes of Nimrud and Palmyra. In 2015 after the destruction of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra Italy proposed combining the efforts of a team of parliamentary police and civilian experts under the banner of the “Blue Helmets for Culture”, which is heralded as the world’s first emergency task force for culture¹¹⁵. In 2016 the UAE and France also expressed interest in preserving cultural heritage during armed conflict on diplomatic stages worldwide¹¹⁶. Even homegrown task forces face some form of that accusation but it tends to take on the tone of a well-intentioned question. Local efforts to restore Yazidi temples and communal ritual and worship spaces in Northern Iraq have been asked about their decision to reconstruct these spaces rather than homes or infrastructure needed to meet the communities basic needs. To this inquiry, one participant responded, “ if you build the shrine, you are building a place [...] for the whole town and for the whole people. Because the shrine belongs to everybody in Bashiqa and not to a specific person [...]. That’s why you can see all the people cooperate together to build the shrines first”¹¹⁷. Although accusations and resentment over the prioritization of cultural heritage above human life are not baseless they ignore the fact that some projects are inherently limited in their scope because of the actors who take them on. For example, it makes sense that the antiquities department would be concerned with restoring museums, libraries, and heritage sites while another department would address more pressing matters on the subject of housing and human rights. Although not in response to but perhaps in anticipation of some of these criticisms the Director General of UNESCO issued a number of statements that speak to the goals of UNESCO’s involvement and attenuate apprehensions of Western savior complexes, fears of colonialism, or other ulterior motives. One very revealing statement asserts,

“‘Reviving Mosul’ is not only about reconstructing heritage sites, it is about empowering the population as agents of change involved in the process of rebuilding their city through culture and education. It is with a strong message... that an inclusive, cohesive and equitable society is in the future that Iraqis deserve, that the “Revive the spirit of Mosul” Flagship Initiative was born”¹¹⁸.

Homegrown initiatives perhaps more conspicuously demonstrate concern for pressing matters, such as the confiscated or vandalized homes and religious sites of persecuted minorities. In effect, their efforts appear more dedicated to ensuring a diverse future created by native actors

¹¹⁵ Paulo Foradori, “Blue Helmets for Culture,” *Oxford Research Group*, May 16,2017, <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/blue-helmets-for-culture>

¹¹⁶ Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga, “A historic resolution to protect cultural heritage,” in *Culture: The Bedrock of Peace*, *The UNESCO Courier* (October-December 2017).

¹¹⁷ Shahab, “Young Yazidis.”

¹¹⁸ “Revive the Spirit of Mosul,” UNESCO, accessed February 13,2021, <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/baghdad/revivemosul>

characterized by freedom and understanding rather than to preserving cultural symbols and monuments of a diverse past. It is hard not to find the practice of native agents conducting their affairs in the interest of actively pressing and dynamic problems across faith communities endearing but there are other factors to be considered. Homegrown initiatives can incorporate more of the general populous from all strata for several reasons. Firstly, these initiatives are run by people belonging to the community who already have existing ties with other natives as neighbors, friends, business partners, mosque frequenters, and so forth. Secondly, homegrown initiatives focus their efforts on projects that are open to all levels of education and socioeconomic standing. For example, it does not take a team of college educated individuals to clean a church or cover up graffiti but it does require a team of archeological experts to reverse the damage done to centuries old heritage sites and monuments. In other words, international initiatives remain inaccessible to most members of society without the academic or other qualifications necessary to have a seat at the table. For this reason, UNESCO pioneered and internationally funded directives rely on select teams of native experts but are forced to exclude swaths of the population from actively rebuilding their own reality at least until these experts trickle down directives into the broader population. It should also be noted that the “Revive the spirit of Mosul” initiatives recruit expert help by crowdsourcing submissions for reconstruction projects from Iraq and all over the world, so expert teams are composed of both natives and non-natives. The scope of homegrown projects might be a natural consequence of their strained funding but it nonetheless works in their favor to uplift the general morale of the entire community and welcome anyone to be a part of their efforts. This paper might agree with the illusion that homegrown initiatives are concerned with the future whereas the focus of the international community is on the past if it was not for the fact that many projects are multifaceted and aim to address a number of concerns either simultaneously or at different points in the project’s development. It is the case that any one effort often intends to combine symbolic, material, cultural, and religious, and educational concerns in a multifaceted and multidisciplinary approach. In the case of “Revive the Spirit of Mosul” the project is concerned with “heritage”, “education”, and “cultural life”¹¹⁹. Arms of Mosul is involved in restoring and presenting symbols of pluralism and hope but it also hosts an emergency fund aimed at providing for the tangible needs of Christians returning to the region¹²⁰. Generally, most efforts aim to provide channels for people to achieve post-materialist, spiritual and moral gratification as well as material gratification to uplift morale and ensure a diverse, prosperous community.

Another problem that presents itself with international involvement in the region is the skepticism surrounding either the entire subject of international help or perhaps distrust of particular nation-state governments.

Whether or not speculations regarding power brokers in the region and those involved in reconstruction efforts are founded does not take away from the fact that international involvement is indispensable.

This regional theme has been appropriated by extremists but is nonetheless warranted by the personal experience of many populations. It is easy to imagine communities that have suffered so much for so long on a global stage accepting international involvement without harboring hesitation. For over six years now the ongoing failure to attend to the basic needs of the Yazidi community in which unemployment and suicide rates are exceptionally high presents very valid criticisms of the international community. More or less, there is a general aura of acquiescence to accept the help of power brokers like the UAE, Germany, The European Union, and Russia but this does not mean that individuals do not harbor doubt and even resentment over the ulterior motives of these power brokers. Russia stands to benefit from investing in reconstruction projects by gaining exclusive access to Syrian resources, and committing Russian exports and labor almost to the point of blatant exclusion for Syrian actors participating in the development of Syria's new era¹²¹. Furthermore, Russia has publically aligned itself with the controversial Bashar al- Assad, against whose administration Syrians have been engaged in a civil war for a decade, so its support would go through state-sponsored channels and lend legitimacy and power to al- Assad's government¹²². An additional side effect is the fall of regions controlled by non-state actors into al-Assad's hands. Russia has also expressed a desire to restore refugees, mostly Christian, presence in Syria, but these motives are branded self-serving as they try to create pockets of support in religiously monolithic areas of the Middle East. Putin has recognized that Muslims alike suffered under ISIL and publically committed Russia to helping Muslims and Jews but his words are not corroborated by Russia's actions¹²³. Prominent Russian political and religious figures' branding their intervention in former ISIL territories as a "holy war" emphasizes the mythologized, crusader-style mentality that seeks to protect Christianity against another religion with disregard for Muslim victims of ISIL who host a non-extremist understanding of Islam¹²⁴. Even Muslim-majority nation-states such as the UAE, and Chechnya who do not need to foster the support of a different faith are accused of attempting to push their own interpretation of Islam to gain traction for their political agendas or improve their standing with the international community. For example, advocating for an interpretation of Islam that is compatible with democratic ideals reduces suspicion of Muslim majority nation-states for state-sponsored breeding of ultra-puritanical ideologies or terrorists as has been the case for Saudi Arabia for decades now. Perhaps, those actors claim a responsibility to rebuild the Levant in order to be acknowledged as important power players for future conflicts and they have certainly admitted responsibility on benign and moral grounds. Proximal nation-states and even those further from the Levant have been accused of trying to re-export individuals who fled ISIL back to their home states. Germany, which has taken in many Yazidis, has rejected Russia and other actors' proposition that the benefits of funding and participating in reconstruction outweigh

¹²¹ Samuel Ramani, "Russia's Eye on Syrian Reconstruction," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 31, 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78261>

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Issaev, and Serafim, "The Christian Dimension," 5,8-9.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

the costs of accommodating refugee and migrant populations from the Levant, but that does not mean it has not been subjected to the same accusation. Although Lebanon has not been credited as a major contributor of reconstruction projects its support for restoring Muslim refugees back to their homes in neighboring countries or preferentially accepting Christian refugees reveals its concern not to tip the demographic scales in favor of an increasingly Muslim political agenda. Turkey has also expressed issue with the incoming number of refugees, both Muslim and otherwise, that spilled over from ISIL controlled borders. Whether or not speculations regarding power brokers in the region and those involved in reconstruction efforts are founded does not take away from the fact that international involvement is indispensable. As mentioned in the previous section the institutionalization and legal means for securing freedoms and financial opportunity for persecuted minorities can be standardized across localities and better achieved by nation-state involvement and international pressure collaborating with the current Iraqi government.

3.3. Fear of the Fundamentalist Undercurrent and Plausible Approaches

Understandably the fear of the Salafist undercurrent and non-combatant violence aimed at maintaining the failures of the state keeps people apprehensive about rebuilding Iraqi strongholds and even some places in Syria. Volunteers must be prepared to be humbled by the possibility that the hard work they invest can be undone in seconds by clandestine, or semi-clandestine radical reactionaries. This possibility characterized the fear of reconstructing the tomb of Nahum, for example, in Northern Iraq¹²⁵. As was customary during ISIL's reign a mosque, or church that took years or even decades to build could be detonated in seconds or demolished by a day's work. According to Professor Carrie Wickham the goal of extremists is to expose the failures of government in as many ways as possible but particularly as it relates to security. Extremists want to show that if they can access or attack the most important person or thing in one's government or community then nothing and no one is safe. To make matters worse they also want to show that not enough structures exist to restore safety or in many cases hold people accountable. Some natives' accounts express greater fear of non-combatant violence after ISIL's fall than during its rule as a consequence of its daily but simultaneously sporadic attacks on government officials, and communal spaces. For communities that lived through daily beheadings, hangings, and otherwise general terror this fear remains both very rational and very real, so understandably there is hesitation to align oneself so openly with the goal of reviving the multi-religious landscape because it is diametrically opposed extremists' agenda. The fear is exceptionally daunting given a shift in non-combatant violence that sees organized, multi-person efforts with traceable directives or a "paper trail" transform into attacks orchestrated by individuals on impulse without even so much as an indication. Fortunately, this is side effect of ISIL's fall from political visibility and its shapeshifting oscillations back into and out of

¹²⁵ Clancy, "The Prophet Nahum."

clandestine operations, but unfortunately people live in very uncertain conditions. The only thing of which they are certain is that they could one day be victims of non-combatant violence.

While there is agreement in scholarly circles that the Salafist undercurrent in Islam cannot be written off as some marginalized and convoluted interpretation of Islam given all the support it has acquired it is important to remember the conditions that have manifested this support. These conditions are characterized by state failures, corruption, destitution or the inability to obtain a lifestyle compatible with one's earnings and education, law enforcement brutality, proxy wars, and warped gender dynamics. One of the best known examples of conditions that furnish recruits for terrorist groups is the monetary incentive presented to impoverished families for the purchase of young boys to be enlisted in training and reeducation programs that force them into extremism¹²⁶. Now consider a less extreme example. Interestingly locals have commented that waste management in their localities was better under ISIL than under their nation-state's government, so even seemingly trivial aspects of daily life occupy the attention of natives and reveal the failure of governments to properly and consistently act in the interest of its people. Something seemingly so small on which the likes of ISIL and the Muslim Brotherhood campaign for support and that is ostensibly much easier to resolve than erecting new buildings and roads or furnishing a life for children orphaned by ISIL continues to be neglected by governments. So many, although certainly not all, of the conditions that gave rise to the Islamic State continue to exist and many people will continue to seek alternate channels to make sense of their means and to understand their – in many cases warranted- dissatisfaction with the government and their circumstances in extremists' religious terms. The conditions present for recruitment into extremist circles are present far and wide in a number of countries across the globe but what distinguishes the Levant are the consequences of the institutionalized presence of extremists and the establishment of a government that serves them. This means that ISIL uniquely possessed the means to institutionalize the inculcation of adults and young children, punishment for how people spoke or dressed, the radicalization of mosques, channels for the gratification of vices, and so much more. Unlike other terrorist projects that tend to be touch- and- go whispers with individuals already flirting with societal marginalization or occasionally the general population, ISIL had contact with everyone inside of its borders and it controlled who one spoke to, what he spoke about, and what he saw, so its propaganda and the agenda it served was more powerful. There is a very obvious need to correct for all these failures and promise freedom and financial security through institutionalized channels that people will learn to trust with time after uninterrupted delivery of their promises. In the aftermath of 9/11 and more recently ISIL many academics- Anne Spechard to name one- and former extremists have commented extensively about the nature of a curriculum or reeducation strategy that prevents radicalization but many of these prescriptions demand resources that have not yet been fully furnished by governments in Syria and Iraq. However political prescriptions, especially

¹²⁶ "Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges," Human Rights Watch, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/17/afghanistan-taliban-child-soldier-recruitment-surges>

those directed at nation-state governments, fall outside the intentions of this project. Nevertheless, it remains harshly critical of governments' inability to learn from lessons of the past and perform functions such as waste management more diligently because inhabitants take notice and if they have to ask themselves what the purpose of their government is chances are there is already a political force brewing to replace it.

Still, there are some prescriptions this research is willing to make. Regenerating the multi-religious landscape of the Levant requires the continued courage of men and women who are more impassioned by what they can accomplish rather than enthralled by fear or the fear of failure. It requires an orientation toward the past that is still forward looking and secure in the prosperous legacy it will inherit and it requires that people see the good in other people irrespective of their religious affiliation. At the same time, it demands that individuals acknowledge and respond according to their limitations, so individuals must acknowledge that

... by reading the Qur'an for oneself an individual removes the power of others to interpret it for him in a way that decontextualizes Qur'anic prescriptions to justify a political agenda.

the condition of their existence is divinely ordained for coexistence. They must remember that the means of arbitration on this subject fall outside any mortal's reach. It requires them to understand that there is no political theology in Islam but any political application of Islam intending to emulate the Prophet Muhammad is about reinstating equality among men rather than detracting from this condition¹²⁷. In sum, it requires an orientation toward coexistence that teaches self-reflexivity rather than absolutism.¹²⁸ Some have taken self-reflexivity to mean doubt but this paper is of the opinion it more intimately means curiosity. Naturally, everyone needs to have a sense of security in what he believes but he must also maintain a healthy curiosity that reminds him that he does not have all the answers and is not the absolute authority on matters. Ozcan Keles and Ismail Mesut Sezgin describe self-reflexivity as "the teaching that while people can believe that their religion represents 'the Truth', their access to it is defined by their own limitations"¹²⁹. The natural consequence of self-reflexivity is that anyone who can be consulted on the matter is also a victim of his own limitations, so even when individuals seek the counsel of others they do not expunge the limitations that restrict them from adopting an absolutist, or extremist world view. Crowdsourcing and seeking counsel provides the opportunity to collaborate on conclusions but it also combines each participant's limitations in ways that never afford the opportunity for any individual or group to claim absolute authority on theological matters.

¹²⁷ Abou Al Fadl, *Search for Beauty*, 76, 345-50.; March, "Islamic Foundations," 237-40.

¹²⁸ Keles, Ozcan and Ismail Mesut Sezgin, *A Hizmet Approach to Rooting Out Violent Extremism* (London: The Centre for Hizmet Studies, 2015), 27.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

This paper is also of the opinion that having been subjected to the brutality of ISIL and other regimes that appropriated religion, individuals should have a propensity to interact first-hand with primary sources, especially the Qur'an, so that they can arrive at their own conclusions. To be clear this paper does not advocate that individuals do not seek counsel or rely purely on their own faculties, but by reading the Qur'an for oneself an individual removes the power of others to interpret it for him in a way that decontextualizes Qur'anic prescriptions to justify a political agenda. When individuals have historically interacted with theological texts for themselves without the smoke and mirrors of a mediating figure that would have originally interpreted the text for them, whether that be a cardinal or imam, they have diluted the power of religion and so-called religious figures in political matters such that religious matters and political matters become more distinguishable. This transition is not without its own consequences and criticisms branding it as the western import of "separation of church and state" certainly makes it more banal and difficult for natives to support but the democratization of reading and interpreting religious texts can lead to very promising introspection that rejects false claims about religion and dilutes the appeal of extremist ideology. This democratization relies on the literacy of a population, which can present its own problems especially if education is non-compulsory or inaccessible to a certain sex or socioeconomic status. Luckily, existing initiatives are already aiming to correct for these and other deficiencies in education¹³⁰.

The first step is teaching people not to hate and even accept one another as equally limited in their access to divine truth. If and when this acceptance breeds a relational dynamic that engages the love and appreciation of both parties for one another then they can both conduct themselves in each other's service. Interacting with religious texts first-hand will certainly breed a strong and healthy opportunity for religious groups to recognize and understand where and how their faiths overlap whether it be on points of belief, commonly shared religious figures, or sites. This is evidenced in The Assyrian Church's realization that Christians and Jews share a religious connection to Prophet Nahum, and by Muslims and Jews who acknowledge that they share the Prophet Jonah and a responsibility to restore his tomb. Homegrown initiatives are a testament to this dynamic and they stand firmly in their message to the broader community that without each other, without their differences, they will never be the same. Hopefully in the future no religious community is in the service of another in the form of rebuilding lives and sacred spaces but rather in the service of expanding communities and making them even more prosperous.

Section 4: Expansion and Limitations

The scarcity of resources, human capital, and limited international and NGO funding in the region renders it impossible to reverse all the destruction done under ISIL. In addition to those factors there are logistical barriers that plague reconstruction efforts either from branching out or from systematic application throughout a state's borders. The fragmented power shared by

¹³⁰ UNESCO, "Revive the Spirit of Mosul."

various non-state actors in Syria and the autonomous Kurdish region of Northern Iraq are excellent examples of regional differences that differentiate the plausibility and success of reconstruction projects. Furthermore, even areas that are internationally recognized as well within the grip of state actors are still riddled with failures that make it challenging to pursue reconstruction without the dedicated efforts of locally sourced volunteers. This section explores the current and future potential for expanding reconstruction projects in the region.

4.1. Extending Olive Branches

Certainly actors involved in reconstruction envision a future where no marks of ISIL can be found. It is precisely in the destruction that ISIL has left its legacy, but it remains impossible for many disillusioned natives and well-meaning academics to imagine restoring everything ISIL destroyed to its original condition. There are lists upon lists of Christian, Sunni, and Shi'ite sites destroyed by ISIL, so one can imagine the list becomes longer when taking into account less known sacred spaces belonging to Sufi and Yazidi worshippers. Furthermore, there is validity to the argument that cultural sites like Nimrud and the Temple of Bel can never be restored to reflect their condition before ISIL. Yet, this does not detract from the reality that many actors want to extend olive branches to more members of the same community or to more communities. Of course that desire is tempered by logistics and harsh realities as well as the fact that many underway reconstruction projects are nascent, so expansion is out of the question for many actors. Nonetheless, many in the Christian and Jewish diaspora who are either ISIL refugees or have generational ties to the region are lobbying international actors and NGOs to take on the reconstruction of more sites of religious and cultural importance. Each diaspora is predominantly interested in spaces associated with its own faith tradition, but sometimes the sacred spaces of different faiths overlap as in the case of the tomb of Prophet Nahum¹³¹. The geographical and emotional proximity of Israel to Syria and even Iraq generates a strong rabbinic and civic interest from Israeli Jews to restore Judaic heritage in the Levant¹³². This interest is frequently documented in Israel-based or Jewish-authored media outlets and is often met with support and donations from the extended diaspora in a manner that seems consistent with support for preserving Jewish heritage elsewhere. The Christian diaspora's orientation toward reconstruction is generally limited to Assyrians and some fellow Catholic, Chaldean, and Orthodox counterparts but generally falls off the radar outside of these two populations¹³³. Bids and lobbying efforts do not easily or even always translate into results but they help the international community understand the cultural, emotional, and religious significance communities place on sites. Drawing attention to sites not already on the radar of some actors roots an interest that would not otherwise exist so that those actors can plan to allocate funding for more projects in the future. Even homegrown initiatives lament not being able to do more, committing themselves to helping other religious communities at the expense of their coreligionists, or vice-versa¹³⁴. Such

¹³¹ Clancy, "the Prophet Nahum."

¹³² Levy, "The Miracle of the Tomb.;" Clancy, "the Prophet Nahum."

¹³³ Judd, "Iraq Christians.;" Campbell, "'I will cry'"; Ibrahim Anli, Lecture to Author, March 2, 2021.

¹³⁴ Mohammad Essam, Email Correspondence with Author, March 4, 2021.

considerations are questions of priority and less a matter of indifference, disinterest, or even hostility within and across communities. Arms of Mosul co-founder revealed that prioritization is necessary because of the ideological legacy ISIL forced upon Sunni Muslim communities in particular from which they must redeem themselves¹³⁵. The decision to help a religious other even before helping a coreligionist sends an intentional message that pluralism and freedom are valued aspects of social and religious life among Muslims¹³⁶. Yazidis are ostensibly more internally focused for a number of reasons previously mentioned in Section 3.1. This is not to say that the community would not extend olive branches if it were able but after suffering heavily at the hands of ISIL there are not many resources for Yazidis to commit to other communities. In fact, there is not even a lot of human capital the community can commit as a result of the suicide rates driven by psychological trauma and poor health of many of its members¹³⁷. Nevertheless, Yazidis remain a self-sufficient community because many efforts to reconstruct Yazidi worship spaces are initiated and furnished by young Yazidis, one example being the effort in Bashiqah¹³⁸.

To avoid any miscommunication this paper would like to remind the reader that any diaspora or homegrown religious community's reasons for being inwardly or outwardly oriented are understandable and commendable. If the reader has been left with the impression that only the Muslim community is concerned with the reconstruction efforts of other communities, please remember that all projects take on questions of priority. The Sunni Muslim community might feel an added sense of responsibility to sectarian coreligionists and other religious groups because ISIL claimed the same religion and many Sunni Muslims recount horrific or even mild instances of ways they were forced to interact with the religious other for self-preservation or social mobility that leave their hearts broken and their consciences bruised¹³⁹. Even without the force of guilt many Muslims want to conduct themselves in a way compatible with what they consider "true Islam" or interpretations of Islam presented in Section 1. This paper agrees that the Sunni Muslim community has the largest responsibility to restoring the multi-religious landscape of the Levant. It is important that responsibility not be branded a burden for Sunni Muslims and for many the real challenge arrives when they must balance the interests of their

Sunni Muslims must play a balancing act that tends to the needs of their coreligionists during some phases of reconstruction to establish a social context that is not just symbolically or structurally in favor of religious diversity but also ideologically in favor of a multi-religious landscape.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Arraf, "A Yazidi Survivor's Struggle."

¹³⁸ Shabab, "Young Yazidis."

¹³⁹ Anne Spechard, "Eyewitness Accounts From Recent Defectors From Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit," *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*, December 1, 2015.

<https://www.icsve.org/eyewitness-accounts-from-recent-defectors-from-islamic-state-why-they-joined-what-they-saw-why-they-quit/>

own community, itself a victim of ISIL, and those of other communities. It is important that extending olive branches and devoting oneself to religious pluralism not be done at the expense of one's own religious community. Even a good moral and social cause can fragment the Sunni Muslim community and breed an ideological resentment that existing extremists can magnify or that milder but nonetheless dangerous sociopolitical forces can manipulate to divide the community.

Although it occurred across sectarian lines, perhaps the most well-known and recent example was the Ba'athist administration's preferential treatment of Sunni Muslims relative to their Shi'ite counterparts in all sectors of society. When that political and social dynamic was overturned in favor of a predominately Shi'ite government Sunni Muslim resentment found its way into an extremist ideology and terrorist group that would come to be known as ISIL¹⁴⁰. So, one can imagine that the prioritization of any sectarian or faith community has resounding consequences that can exacerbate extremism within the region rather than contribute to de-radicalization. As admirable as extending olive branches to other religious communities may be Sunni Muslims must play a balancing act that tends to the needs of their coreligionists during some phases of reconstruction to establish a social context that is not just symbolically or structurally in favor of religious diversity but also ideologically in favor of a multi-religious landscape.

4.2. Limitations

The desire and limitations that present themselves on the subject of expansion present several themes. The condition of scarcity of time, money, and human capital is always present, so to indulge the reader on economic matters that impact social units as small as families to as large as countries all over the world would not be very revealing for the regional interest of this paper. Instead this section dedicates itself to commenting on limitations that are unique to the Levant.

4.2.1. Prioritization

Religious communities must prioritize either their own members or the members of another religious community. Each religious community views the responsibility it shares to itself and to other religious communities differently as colored by its experience before and during ISIL, and its resources. Prioritization may be the consequence of resource scarcity but it can also be the result of social dynamics that emphasize kinship in pre-modern or modern ways. The priority of the Yazidi community is expanded on in Section 3.1, and the priority of Jewish-backed and Sunni Muslim-led initiatives is discussed in Section 4.1.

4.2.2. Fragmented Power Structures

The fragmented power sharing structures that exist in Syria and Iraq mean that international and homegrown actors need to constantly readjust their strategies in adequate ways

¹⁴⁰ Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, November 2019.

based on the regional limitations imposed by different stakeholders. One such limitation could be the import of materials or even human capital into certain regions that are subjected to international sanctions or to which few will willingly brave due to high rates of non-combatant violence or other conditions¹⁴¹. In effect this means that the reach of these volunteer groups can be disrupted by conditions from locality to locality, especially in Syria where more stakeholders operate as politically visible entities. Therefore, volunteer groups can be politically restricted to a given locality even if they have the resources to expand their efforts. The Carter Center publishes a weekly report that outlines the geographical territory held by different power brokers in Syria¹⁴². More than anything the weekly publishing schedule should highlight just how precarious and dynamic the circumstance is among different actors. This fragmentation is further complicated by the support and involvement of other actors that do not host their own borders. As mentioned previously, Russia is one example of a government that has lent its support to Bashar al-Assad but does not have its own borders in the same way Turkish forces do in pockets of Syria¹⁴³. The same complications and style of involvement extends to some non-nation-state actors as well. For more on various power brokers and the distribution of their territory this paper recommends the work of the Carter Center.

4.2.3. State Failures

Turning one's attention strictly to state-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq one observes that governments in these territories lack accountable, institutionalized channels for protecting their citizens and infrastructures from non-combatant violence. Clandestine attacks carried out by extremists against government personnel and in which innocent citizens are implicated are daily features of life in prominent Iraqi cities¹⁴⁴. Failures also extend to the state's inability to meet the basic needs of its citizens as evidenced by the housing crisis, high unemployment rates for any work at all much less work compatible with one's educational or other qualifications, clean water, emergency funding, and food distribution to poorer citizens¹⁴⁵. The number and severity of the failures is compounded by problems related to repatriating refugees, reversing ISIL's inculcation of adults and children, and finding suitable homes and sustainable solutions for children orphaned by ISIL¹⁴⁶. The state's inability to adequately respond to such issues compels it to concentrate its efforts on meeting its citizens' basic needs before it can consider their spiritual needs or reviving the multi-religious landscape. At least one would hope this is where the government would pool its resources if not in reconstruction efforts, but there is always the

¹⁴¹ "U.S and European Sanctions on Syria," *The Carter Center* (September, 2020).; "Navigating Humanitarian Exceptions to Sanctions Against Syria: Challenges and Recommendations," *The Carter Center* (October 2020).

¹⁴² "Conflict Mapping Reports," *The Carter Center*, last modified April 30, 2021.

https://www.cartercenter.org/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict-resolution.html

¹⁴³ The Carter Center, "Conflict Mapping Reports.;" Ramani, "Russia's Eye on Syrian Reconstruction."

¹⁴⁴ Garret Nada, "The U.S. and the Aftermath of ISIS," *The Woodrow Wilson Center*, December 17, 2020.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/us-and-aftermath-isis>

¹⁴⁵ Townsend, "Inside the Islamic State's capital."

¹⁴⁶ Arraf, "A Yazidi Survivor's Struggle."

chance that an administration is more concerned with providing for cronies and concentrating wealth within certain hands. Perhaps the failure of a state to provide for its citizens is a consequence of corruption.

However, governments are not entirely indifferent to the circumstances within their borders because there are departments working either alone or with international collaboration to restore cultural heritage in the form of buildings, literary, artistic, and scholarly achievement as well as religious sites¹⁴⁷. Antiquities and education departments of a state or locality tend to be the most aligned with the interests of the international community, and are therefore under the most pressure to perform because they are obligated by the financial investment of international organizations or other nation-states. In a certain way, this allows the state to contribute more to restoring cultural and spiritual heritage than it otherwise would have been able to if it were left to its own devices with all the other problems that require its attention. However, it also reveals the saddening possibility that without the pressure of the international community state governments would be less inclined and capable of meeting the cultural as well as the material needs of their citizens. It also leaves much to be feared about the condition of Syria and Iraq should the international community lose interest and withdraw funding or support in the region for reconstruction and heritage projects.

Furthermore, state failures force civic diplomacy and activism to fill the void the state cannot or will not fill. This is not so much a consequence as it is a side effect that can have consequences. State failures place an added sense of responsibility on volunteer groups and force efforts to be more “grassroots” in nature but efforts sourced purely from the civic population destitute of government support cannot systematically institutionalize changes they might hope to achieve. Therefore, bottom-up homegrown initiatives might 1) lack the channels needed for institutional changes due to state failures or 2) be denied existing channels if the state relies on civic diplomacy and activism rather than taking accountability.

4.2.4. The *Desire* to Do Good Always Outweighs the *Capacity* to Do Good

Assume that local, bottom-up initiatives are limited by nothing other than their human capital and that their monetary resources cannot be used to recruit more human capital. Even if all other challenges are eliminated it remains true that an individual is restricted to one spatial and temporal context at any given time. In other words, an individual or task force’s efforts and attention can only be divided among so many projects in so many localities. This limitation is evidenced in the scope of efforts taken up by volunteers in groups like Arms of Mosul, which spatially restricts its project to Mosul. This is also evidenced by the reconstruction of Yazidi shrines taken up by smaller subsets of the Yazidi communities and replicated in Bashiqa, Sinjar, and other localities. Even if those groups have the desire to do more for their communities or others there is only so much they can do as locally sourced volunteer groups without the

¹⁴⁷ UNESCO, “Revive the Spirit of Mosul.”

systematic reach of institutions and in some cases even organizations. The initiatives must rely on their networking skills within the community to furnish support, donations, and recruits for their project. The nature of this network also defines what the initiative will be able to achieve, a subject that was discussed in Section 3.2. So, the network defines 1) how much the project will be able to achieve and 2) the nature of what it will be able to achieve. The network of individuals working in the same vein as professor Omar Mohammed is much more restricted than the network enjoyed by Arms of Mosul, which reveals a proximal reason why the latter was able to breathe new life into old spaces while the former still hopes to achieve results of the same magnitude. The ideological and philanthropic reach of bottom-up initiatives rests on the visibility of these groups in society and the willingness of others to support the cause, but this presents a problem. The visibility of these groups is limited by what the efforts can accomplish, which is limited by the number of volunteers. It also rests on the hope that persons and reconstruction efforts will be protected from non-combatant violence and extremist backlash. If the extremist undercurrent destroys every visible testament of these volunteers' accomplishments, individuals will be discouraged from engaging in new projects for fear of their lives and a helplessness over what they can accomplish. Without others' willingness to support a cause any project loses the potential to become increasingly visible to other members of society it wants to recruit, so it becomes a vicious cycle of trying to figure out how to accomplish more with fewer participants until those accomplishments grab the attention of others who wish to volunteer. There are challenges to how far reaching in scope and geography homegrown initiatives can be, so it would be difficult to imagine that any one initiative would exist across several cities, much less an entire region. Instead, the trend appears to be that similar, replicated initiatives spearheaded by local members of each respective locality crop up in different places. This application accelerates the cause of some localities before others and breeds various success rates, leadership, and strategies. It is for this reason that local, bottom-up initiatives can only be applied systematically across small areas and fractions of the population, if at all. It is also for this reason that international and government involvement is indispensable for institutionalizing projects, protections, and legalities as highlighted in Section 3.1.

4.2.5. Differentiated Investment and Return Potential

Internationally backed and locally sourced initiatives, with the exception of Iraqi Kurdistan and a few other outliers, tend to be concentrated in cities like Mosul, Aleppo, Baghdad, and Damascus. Many of these cities characterized the description of Islamic empires set against the backdrop of the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Crusader period in Section 2.1. It is true that these places house the most numerous testaments to economic opportunity, scholarship, civilization, religious pluralism, and ethnic diversity. UNESCO's operational guidelines for selecting heritage sites includes a criterion that a site(s) belong to "a civilization" or "a cultural tradition"¹⁴⁸. The article "a" implies singularity but the chances for becoming an internationally

¹⁴⁸Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (Paris :UNESCO,2012),30.

recognized site ostensibly improve if a site is shared by multiple faith or ethnic communities because its importance is heightened, so cultural crossroads are cause for more attention. Other international agencies, non-profits, and foundations have a similar focus. UNESCO's guidelines assert an interest in sites that "transcend national boundaries and be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity¹⁴⁹." Nonetheless some spaces that need reconstructing do not transcend national boundaries, but that makes them no less important to niche communities and their future generations. In fact, vast topographies that were subject to ISIL terror are not on the radar for reconstruction¹⁵⁰. There is no argument that cities are worth reconstructing, and monetarily interested native and non-native actors recognize that apart from cultivating fertile land for agriculture the best economic return comes from investing in large cities. The differentiated interest in some areas and not others, which is impacted by the precariousness of borders and fragmented power sharing structures, concentrates the funding and the benefits of investment in some places and not others. As a consequence, populations will disproportionately experience the benefits of reconstruction across various sectors in society, such as "Reviving the Spirit of Mosul"'s education and cultural life benefits. Not only does this present problems for historically neglected areas like Iraqi Kurdistan but it presents problems for the citizens of ISIL's former capital Raqqa, which is not chalked up to the same investment and return potential as Mosul, Aleppo, etc. It is natural for international actors without sincere emotional concern for Syria and Iraq's populations to downplay concern for areas that do not benefit it economically, historically, or culturally but it is important to remember that concentrating the wealth and benefits of a country is not an honorable goal. It is also a goal that will worsen rather than quench the economic disparities that sometimes draw people to extremist ideologies for social mobility or spiritual justification for one's economic standing¹⁵¹. In Raqqa, home to some of the most nefarious acts of ISIL, this is a special point of concern due to the daily beheadings and public torture that inform the world view of young boys and girls that grew up at the height of ISIL's power¹⁵². As a result, historically neglected areas and their populations continue to be neglected and localities that recently suffered under just ISIL will also be neglected. This neglect presents problems for both the former and the latter, but the former is a testament to how a history of neglect can continuously attenuate interest in reviving a population and send it into a continuous cycle of neglect from which it cannot recover. In other words, not focusing efforts on non-historically neglected spaces sets a dangerous precedent that these places have nothing to offer and the lack of investment ensures that they will continue to have nothing to offer. In the event a future conflict wreaks havoc and destruction, areas neglected during this reconstruction period and their respective populations will continue to warrant but perhaps not receive the attention required to improve their increasingly unfortunate condition. This reality will be justified by the precedent of neglect and the erroneous decision that these areas have nothing worth salvaging. Therefore, it is important to more evenly distribute the attention of

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24

¹⁵⁰ The Carter Center, "Conflict Mapping Reports."

¹⁵¹ Carrie Wickham, Lecture to Author, November, 2019.

¹⁵² Townsend, "Inside the Islamic State's capital."

reconstruction efforts on places not currently on the radar to prevent establishing such a dangerous precedent and lending legitimacy to the idea that these areas do not contribute to the nation or the global community.

4.3. Where to Go from Here

Political prescriptions fall outside the intention of this project, so fragmented power sharing structures, state failures and disproportionate international interest aside, on the grassroots level the question remains, “Are we doing enough?”. The answer is always “yes” and “no”. One cannot imagine the courage of men and women who risk their lives for religious pluralism to rebuild their communities in light of all the regional challenges and fear of the Salafist undercurrent as being “not enough”. “I think of the young Muslim volunteers of Mosul, who helped to repair churches and monasteries, building fraternal friendships on the rubble of hatred,” exalted father Olivier Popquillon¹⁵³. But such optimism is humbled by the pessimism- or perhaps more appropriately realism- of the few remaining Christians and other religious minorities who feel like strangers in their ancestral lands after what they endured under ISIL¹⁵⁴. While there is still much to be done, the time available to revive the Levant’s multi-religious landscape is a more daunting and unforgiving opponent than the quantity of spaces that need to be reconstructed. Each passing day is a day that Jewish and Christian communities lose endearing memories of personal or generational experiences in the Levant and, consequently, lose a reason to return. Each passing day is a day that another Yazidi takes his or her own life. Each passing day allows the legacy of ISIL and its destruction to live visibly and emotionally in the experiences of natives. Each passing day is a missed opportunity to enrich the Levant with legacies of a prosperous past and a legacy of an even more prosperous future. Each passing day is a day that a child might not grow up with a neighbor or schoolmate of different religious faith, so it becomes a missed opportunity for a child to live and learn how to live in a religiously diverse community. Coexistence is a learned experience that must be lived, so without the pluralism required for coexistence it can only be taught as a phenomenon with no reality. Reality is where coexistence finds meaning and, in turn, gives meaning to peoples’ lives by affording them the opportunity to be curious, think, and love outside themselves. So the answer to the question “Are we doing enough” is “yes”, but the answer to the question, “Should we be doing more?” is also “yes”. The more pockets of pluralism that are established in the Levant, the more children and adults will be exposed to people of different faiths and learn how to engage their self-reflectivity and religious teachings in encounters that bilaterally improve their moral, spiritual, and social experience. Reconstruction projects and this paper demonstrate that it is not in acts of magnanimity that ideal social dynamics are achieved but in knowing that the person to whom you are in service is deserving of your service and is your equal in his/her access to divine truth and in the love and capacity to be in your service should you ever need him/her one day.

¹⁵³ MacDiarmid, “the last Christian in Mosul's Old City.”

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Exploring the ideology of ISIL and the responses to its destruction this paper began by shedding light on pluralism. The paper explored interpretations of the Qur'an's position on religious freedom by proceeding through an analysis of Surah at-Tawbah (Chapter of Repudiation) and Surah al-Kafirun (Chapter of The Disbelievers) and tried to make references and analogies to Western examples to contextualize the Qur'an's prescriptions to an audience that may not be familiar. The paper resolved that the Qur'an does not advocate a political theology. The narrator also maintains a strict and narrow orientation toward retribution that is predicated on a number of conditions, but otherwise advocates for forgiveness and peace (Q 2:224, 60:8). Lastly, religious pluralism and coexistence are divinely ordained (Q 5:48,16:93, 10:99). This theological framework was launched into praxis when the paper explored the extremist worldview and the condition of sacred spaces in Islamic empires from east to west set across the backdrop of the Umayyad caliphate and its extension into Muslim Spain, as well as the Abbasid, and Crusader period. The uninterrupted persecution against sectarian coreligionists, Christian, Jewish, and Yazidi communities carried out by ISIL was contrasted with the transparent, and even sometimes gruesome, condition of coexistence in former Islamic empires to show that ISIL was a departure from the political practice of Islam rather than an inheritor of that legacy. The paper rejected the persecution and lack of pluralism on moral grounds and also offered insight into the concentrated benefits of religious homogenization enjoyed by a selective few loyal to the ISIL regime relative to the diffuse, but notable benefits widely enjoyed by polities during eras of coexistence to make another case for why pluralism is important. Taking into account the persecution and destruction carried out by ISIL, the paper commented on the nature and range of efforts underway to reconstruct sacred spaces and contribute to restoring and creating a new era of cultural heritage, most notably in UNESCO-led international efforts and a number of homegrown efforts cropping up in pockets of Iraq. It then compared the stakes and motives of international and homegrown initiatives based on what the efforts hoped to accomplish and discussed the risks of reviving the Levant's multi-religious landscape in the face of real and potential extremist backlash. The potential and limitations for expanding these efforts into much needed spaces given the expanse of ISIL's destruction was discussed in the final section, which revealed that rather than any one initiative expanding multiple cities, several smaller, replicated initiatives led by local members of each respective locality characterize reconstruction efforts.

Albeit with limitations, this paper has established meaningful trends as it relates to the future of homegrown and international reconstruction projects and their potential for interstate and transnational expansion into former ISIL-plagued regions. In sum, the paper presented reconstruction projects and distinguished them across several different factors 1) homegrown or international 2) composition of the task force 3) nature and scope of the goals and 4) religious minorities involved to showcase trends that paint not a broad a picture but a bigger picture of these ongoing efforts in the Levant. It has determined that homegrown projects tend to focus on

restoring existing infrastructure, whereas international efforts can use more copious funds to rebuild destroyed infrastructure or erect entirely new sacred spaces. Furthermore, international efforts possess the capacity to work alongside the nation-state governments to institutionalize and homogenize their efforts whereas homegrown efforts are more limited in their reach and ability to institutionalize change through formal channels, especially political ones. The task forces for homegrown projects are most often composed of well-meaning volunteers who wish to play an active role in rebuilding their future whereas international projects recruit individuals of a given professional background or set of qualifications from both the affected area and abroad. To the point of religious groups, one discovers that each religious group participates in reconstruction projects either on behalf of its own religious group or that of another differently for reasons that are fleshed out in greater detail for each religious minority discussed.

The research tied in analytical overtones with an opaquely opinioned undercurrent in a way that manifests support for reconstruction projects and a pluralist interpretation of Islam. Hopefully it has recognized its limitations in each respective section and honored its scope to be politically aware but not prescriptive. The choice to focus on qualitative rather than quantitative aspects of the research is a gesture to 1) the fact that many resources that already exist on the subject which perform that function and 2) to channel the readers' humanity and compassion more than achieve an astonishment or empathy that rests on numbers and statistics. More than anything the research wants to encourage readers to explore and interact first hand with more sources on the subject and arrive at their own conclusions, especially on theological grounds. If God willing (*Inshallah*) readers are inspired by the way ISIL survivors are actively playing a role in reviving their communities to make future eras in the Levant increasingly prosperous and symbolically and ideologically compatible with religious freedom and pluralism. If God willing (*Inshallah*) task forces working on reconstruction projects will succeed in their goals and never again will individuals have to suffer destruction and respond to its aftermath.

Bibliography

Arraf, Jane. "A Yazidi Survivor's Struggle Shows the Pain that Endures After ISIS Attack."

National Public Radio News, August 8, 2020.

<https://www.npr.org/2020/08/08/898972162/a-yazidi-survivors-struggle-shows-the-pain-that-endures-after-isis-attack>

Callimachi, Rukmini. "To the World, They Are Muslims. To ISIS, Sufis Are Heretics." *The New York Times*, November 25, 2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/world/middleeast/sufi-muslims-isis-sinai.html>

Issaev, Leonid and Serafim Yuriev. "The Christian Dimension of Russia's Middle East Policy," *Alsharq Forum* (March, 2017): 1-11.

Castro, Américo. "The Historical 'WE.'" In *An Idea of History: Selected Essays of Americo Castro*, edited by Stephen Gilman and Edmund L. King, 313-334. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977.

Catlos, Brian. *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050-1614*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Christie, Niall. "Reconstructing Life in Medieval Alexandria from Eighth/Fourteenth Century Waqf Document." *Mamluk Studies Review* III, no. 2 (2004): 163-90.

Clancy, Levi. "The Prophet Nahum, the Assyrians of Alqosh, and the Kurdistan Region." *The Times of Israel*, January 5, 2021.

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-prophet-nahum-the-assyrians-of-alqosh-and-the-kurdistan-region/>

Cole, Juan. *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires*. New York: Nation Books, 2018.

Danti, Michael D., Allison Cuneo, Amr Al-Azm, Susan Penacho, Marina Gabriel, Kyra Kaercher, and Jamie O'Connell. "ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives(CHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq." *NEA-PSHSS-14-001*, Weekly Report 71–72 (December 9–22, 2015):1-81.

<https://en.unesco.org/syrian-observatory/sites/syrian-observatory/files/reports/ASOR-CHE-weekly-report-71%E2%80%9372r.pdf>

About El Fadl, Khaled. *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

About El Fadl, Khaled. "The Place of Ethical Obligations in Islamic Law." *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* 4, no.1 (June 2005):1-40.

Erol, Mustafa and Kurucan, Ahmet. *Dialogue in Islam: Qur'an- Sunnah-History*. London: Dialogue Society, 2012.

Fiankan-Bokonga, Catherine. "A historic resolution to protect cultural heritage." In *Culture: The Bedrock of Peace*, *The UNESCO Courier* (October-December 2017).

Foradori, Paulo. "Blue Helmets for Culture." *Oxford Research Group*, May 16, 2017.

<https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/blue-helmets-for-culture>

Fordham University. "Medieval Sourcebook: Urban II (1088-1099) Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095, Five Versions of the Speech." Accessed February 3, 2021.

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/urban2-5vers.asp>

Fromherz, James Allen. *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2012.

Goitein, S. D. *A Mediterranean society the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Harris, Michael H. *History of Libraries in the Western World*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1999.

Human Rights Watch. "Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges." Accessed March 9, 2021.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/17/afghanistan-taliban-child-soldier-recruitment-surges>

Issaev, Leonid and Serafim Yuriev. "The Christian Dimension of Russia's Middle East Policy." *Alsharq Forum* (March, 2017): 1-11.

Iyigun, Murat. "Lessons from the Ottoman Harem on Culture, Religion, and Wars." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 61, no.4 (July 2013):693-730.

Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr : Being the Chronicle of a Mediaeval Spanish Moor Concerning His Journey to the Egypt of Saladin, the Holy Cities of Arabia, Baghdad the City of the Caliphs, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, and the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*. Edited and Translated by R.J.C. Broadhurst. United Kingdom: Goodword Books, 2016.

Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (Paris:UNESCO,2012).

Judd, Emily. "Iraq Christians fear future holds 'total extinction,' ISIS resurgence." *Al-Arabiya News*, February 23,2020.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2020/02/23/Iraq-Christians-fear-future-holds-total-extinction-ISIS-resurgence>

Keles, Ozcan and Ismail Mesut Sezgin, *A Hizmet Approach to Rooting Out Violent Extremism*. London: The Centre for Hizmet Studies, 2015.

Klein, David Ian. "As Mosul recovers from ISIS rule, a native of the city is fighting to revive its Jewish past." *Forward*, December 1, 2020.

<https://forward.com/news/world/459303/one-man-is-fighting-to-record-mosuls-jewish-past-as-it-recovers-from-isis/>

Levy, Uriel. "The Miracle of the Tomb of Prophet Nahum." *Davar: Workers, Society, and Economy in Israel*. August 29, 2020. <https://en.davar1.co.il/244830/>

MacDiarmid, Campbell. "I will cry if I see the Pope': the last Christian in Mosul's Old City on what the pontiff's visit means to Iraq." *The Telegraph*, March 6, 2021.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/03/06/will-cry-see-pope-says-last-christian-mosuls-old-city/>

March, Andrew F. "Islamic Foundations for a Social Contract in Non-Muslim Liberal Democracies." *The American Political Science Review* 101, no.2 (May 2007): 235–52.

Ibn Munqidh, Usama. *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*, edited by Paul M. Cobb. United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited, 2008.

Murad, Nadia. *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against the Islamic State*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2017.

Nada, Garret. "The U.S. and the Aftermath of ISIS." *The Woodrow Wilson Center*. December 17, 2020. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/us-and-aftermath-isis>

Nadia's Initiative. "Nadia's Initiative is Rehabilitating Malack Sheikh Hassan Temple in Sinjar."

Accessed March 9,2021.

[https://www.nadiasinitiative.org/news/nadias-initiative-rehabilitates-malack-sheikh-hassan-temple-in-sinjar.](https://www.nadiasinitiative.org/news/nadias-initiative-rehabilitates-malack-sheikh-hassan-temple-in-sinjar;);

Nadia's Initiative. "Yazidis Bury 104 Victims of Kocho Massacre." Accessed March

9,2021.<https://www.nadiasinitiative.org/news/yazidis-bury-104-victims-of-kocho-massacre>

"Navigating Humanitarian Exceptions to Sanctions Against Syria: Challenges and Recommendations." *The Carter Center* (October 2020):1-22.

Nirenberg, David. *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Nursi, Said Bediüzzaman. *Münazarat*. Istanbul: Yeni Asya Yayınevi,1998.

Paine, Thomas. "Rights of Man". In *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, edited by William M. Van der Wyde. New Rochelle: Thomas Paine National Historical Association, 1925.

Philpot, Robert. "Iraq's Jewish sites almost all ruined beyond repair, new heritage report finds." *The Times of Israel*, June 5,2020.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/iraqs-jewish-sites-almost-all-ruined-beyond-repair-new-heritage-report-finds/>

The Qur'an. Translated by M.A.S Abdel Haleem. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Qutb, Sayyid. *Milestones*. Cedar Rapids: The Mother Mosque Foundation, 1981.

Ramani, Samuel. "Russia's Eye on Syrian Reconstruction." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 31, 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78261>

Rashid, Abdullah. "Volunteers want Christians to return to Mosul, where Islamic State once ruled." *Reuters*, November 3, 2020.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/iraq-mosul-church-int/volunteers-want-christians-to-return-to-mosul-where-islamic-state-once-ruled-idUSKBN27J1PR?edition-redirect=in>

"Seeking to Improve Muslim Ties, Russia Forcing Chechens to Finance Syria's Reconstruction." *Haaretz*. July 18, 2017.
<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/russia-forcing-chechens-to-finance-syria-s-reconstruction-1.5430737>

Shahab, Sofya. "Young Yazidis in Iraq rebuild their shattered communities through heritage." *Institute of Development Studies*. August 12, 2020. <https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/young-yazidis-in-iraq-rebuild-their-shattered-communities-through-heritage/>

Spechard, Anne. "Eyewitness Accounts From Recent Defectors From Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*. December 1, 2015.
<https://www.icsve.org/eyewitness-accounts-from-recent-defectors-from-islamic-state-why-they-joined-what-they-saw-why-they-quit/>

al-Tamimi, Aymenn Jawad. "An Internal Report on Islamic State 'Repentance' Policies in Iraq." *Pundicity: Informed Opinion & Review*, July 9, 2019.
<http://www.aymennjawad.org/22914/an-internal-report-on-islamic-state-repentance>

al-Tamimi. Aymenn Jawad. *The ISIS Files| The Islamic State's Real Estate Department: Documents and Analysis*. D.C: The George Washington University Program on Extremism, 2020.

Townsend, Mark. "Inside the Islamic State's capital: Red Bull-drinking jihadists, hungry civilians, crucifixions and air strikes." *The Gaurdian*, November 30,2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/30/raqqa-isis-capital-crucifixions-civilians-suffer-jihadis-red-bull>

UNESCO. "Revive the Spirit of Mosul." Accessed February 13,2021.

<https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/baghdad/revivemosul>

The University of Minnesota: Holocaust and Genocide Studies. "Mass Violence and Genocide by the Islamic State/Daesh in Iraq and Syria." Accessed February 9,2021.

<https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/mass-violence-and-genocide-islamic-statedaesh-iraq-and-syria>

"U.S and European Sanctions on Syria." *The Carter Center* (September, 2020): 1-30.

World Islamic Front. "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders." *Al- Quds al-Arabi*, February 23, 1998.

<https://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>