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Terrorism and the Arts

Practices and Critiques in Contemporary Cultural Production

Edited by Jonathan Harris

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Contents

List of Figures vii
List of Contributors x

Introduction: Figure / Trauma / Terror 1
JONATHAN HARRIS

1 The Migrant Image: Fear of 'Replacement' and the Resurgence of White Nationalism 24
DORA APEL

2 Facing Franco's Terror: Visual Arts and the Fate of Memory 41
PAULA BARREIRO LÓPEZ

3 A Transgenerational Reparation for the Damage of Torture Through Drawing Dreams and Performance 58
MARISA CORNEJO

4 After Mosul: The Cultural and Political Economy of Destruction and Reconstruction 81
ANTHONY DOWNEY

5 'They Make a Desert and They Call It Peace': States of Terror and Contemporary Artistic Response in the Middle East 106
JONATHAN HARRIS

6 Re-Inscriptions of Terror and Terrorism Since Mallarmé: Wassily Kandinsky and Gerhard Richter 121
LEWIS JOHNSON

7 Harold Pinter and State Terrorism 140
ALEKSANDAR SASHA DUNDJEROVIĆ

Stern, Steve J. 2013. *El nuevo dilema pos-Auschwitz desde América Latina: Arte y sociedad a partir de la llamadas guerras sucias*. Chile: Universidad Diego Portales/University of Wisconsin-Madison.
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4 After Mosul

The Cultural and Political Economy of Destruction and Reconstruction

Anthony Downey

On March 28, 2018, the Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz unveiled *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, an installation for the Fourth Plinth project in London's Trafalgar Square. Consisting of tin packaging from 10,500 cans of Iraqi date syrup, this monumental work engaged with a number of issues, not least the wholesale decimation of the date production industry in Iraq following years of sanctions and conflict.[1] On a personal level, the tins of date syrup evoked wistful memories of Rakowitz's grandfather Nissim Isaac David, who, following his exile from Iraq in 1946, set up an import/export business—which included the importation of dates from his home country—on Long Island in New York City.[2] The narrative of modern-day conflict and historical displacement, reified here through the commerce of dates and the symbolism associated with their packaging, bears plaintive testimony to a contentious history of forced migration, topographical dislocation, precarious resettlement, and the usurpation of cultural and natural diversity. In a broader geopolitical context, *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist* discloses an incendiary chronicle of invasion and neocolonial conflict that continues to undermine the social, political, economic, cultural, and historical fabric of Iraq (4.1, 4.2, 4.3).

This abiding sense of destructiveness and annihilation is central to the formal elements of *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, which depicts a lamassu—a winged bull that traditionally acted as a protective deity—that had stood sentry since approximately 700 BC at the entrance to the Nergal Gate in the former Assyrian city of Nineveh, not far from what is modern-day Mosul in northern Iraq. In February 2015, the deity was destroyed by the then rampant forces of the self-styled Islamic State (IS), hereafter referred to as Daesh, alongside numerous artifacts in the Mosul Museum—the latter, in terms of its collection of cultural artifacts, being second only to the renowned National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad.[3] Produced by Daesh and transmitted via news and social media outlets on February 26, 2015, a global audience learned of this destruction through the carefully timed release of an apparently *ad hoc* video. In it we witness a number of lamassus being destroyed, including the one that Rakowitz based his original designs on. Reproduced in its full original size, and unveiled during the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis since World War II, Rakowitz has referred to his deity as a "ghost of the original," or "a placeholder for those human lives that cannot be reconstructed, that are still searching for sanctuary."[4] In its manifestation as a contemporary cultural artifact and the double of a now destroyed artifact, this life-size sculpture is an all too timely, if spectral, manifestation of the trauma surrounding recent forms of cultural deracination, regional

upheaval, and inescapable destruction. The degree to which trauma is often associated with displacement and uncanny returns is a pertinent reminder of how the repressed event—the original violence associated with a traumatic episode—is often negotiated through associative (largely substitutive) objects and narratives. Rather than offering us a reassuring space or artifact upon which to defer consideration of that originary trauma, however, Rakowitz's intervention speaks directly to the contemporary, anxiety-laden moment of imminent and ongoing cultural annihilation, sectarian brutality, internecine warfare, and neocolonial exploitation. Cumulatively, at the time of writing, these contiguous physical violations and cultural desecrations continue to threaten (and have effected) the obliteration of entire communities, ethnic groups, and cultural legacies across the Middle East, nowhere more than in modern-day Iraq and Syria.

In what follows, I will examine the ramifications of Rakowitz's installation, alongside another project that engaged with the destruction of the lamassus in Mosul, specifically Hiwa K's *The Bell Project* (2014–2015), and how they both relate to the political and visual economy of cultural destruction and reconstruction in modern-day Iraq. I will focus, to begin with, on what were, at least initially, considered to be indiscriminate acts of iconoclasm, transmitted in February 2015 by Daesh, and the degree to which—as news and social media would have us believe—they were actually borne of extremist ideologies. The performance of destruction for a global, digitally connected audience, as we will see, discloses substantially more about the politics of conflict and cultural destruction in modern-day Iraq than the observable iconoclastic tendencies of Daesh. Today, base iconoclasm, in all its destructive infamy, is indelibly imbricated within a digital system of iconographic, if not iconic, image production, and this needs to be more fully considered in relation to how such images are disseminated and consumed by global audiences in a post-digital age. Who are these images of destruction made for and who benefits from them? What, furthermore, do these transmitted images effectively (rather than ostensibly) tell us now about the economy of cultural destruction and reconstruction in a country that has long been subjected to military interventions, short- and long-term occupations, the historical and arbitrary division of provinces and territories, civil and national conflict, and the ignoble international rituals associated with human rights legislation and political accountability?[5]

The destruction of, *inter alia*, a lamassu in Northern Iraq and its subsequent reconstruction as an emblem and actual artifact in both Rakowitz's and Hiwa K's projects not only reveals the precarious regional state of the cultural artifacts in the Middle East today but also offers a significant critical juncture through which we can more fully recognize the extent to which cultural practices engage with and redefine how we understand the global politics of cultural destruction and reconstruction. *The Bell Project*, in a manner similar to Rakowitz's *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, raises imperative questions about how the turmoil that was unleashed across Iraq following the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 substantively and inescapably prepared the ground for the cultural destruction visited upon Mosul in 2015. In effect, these two projects make evident, in their reconstitution of base metals (tin and spent materiel, respectively) into cultural artifacts, the base consideration of materiality—in the forms of resources extracted from the country—that continues to underwrite the visual economy and political logic of cultural destruction and reconstruction in Iraq today.

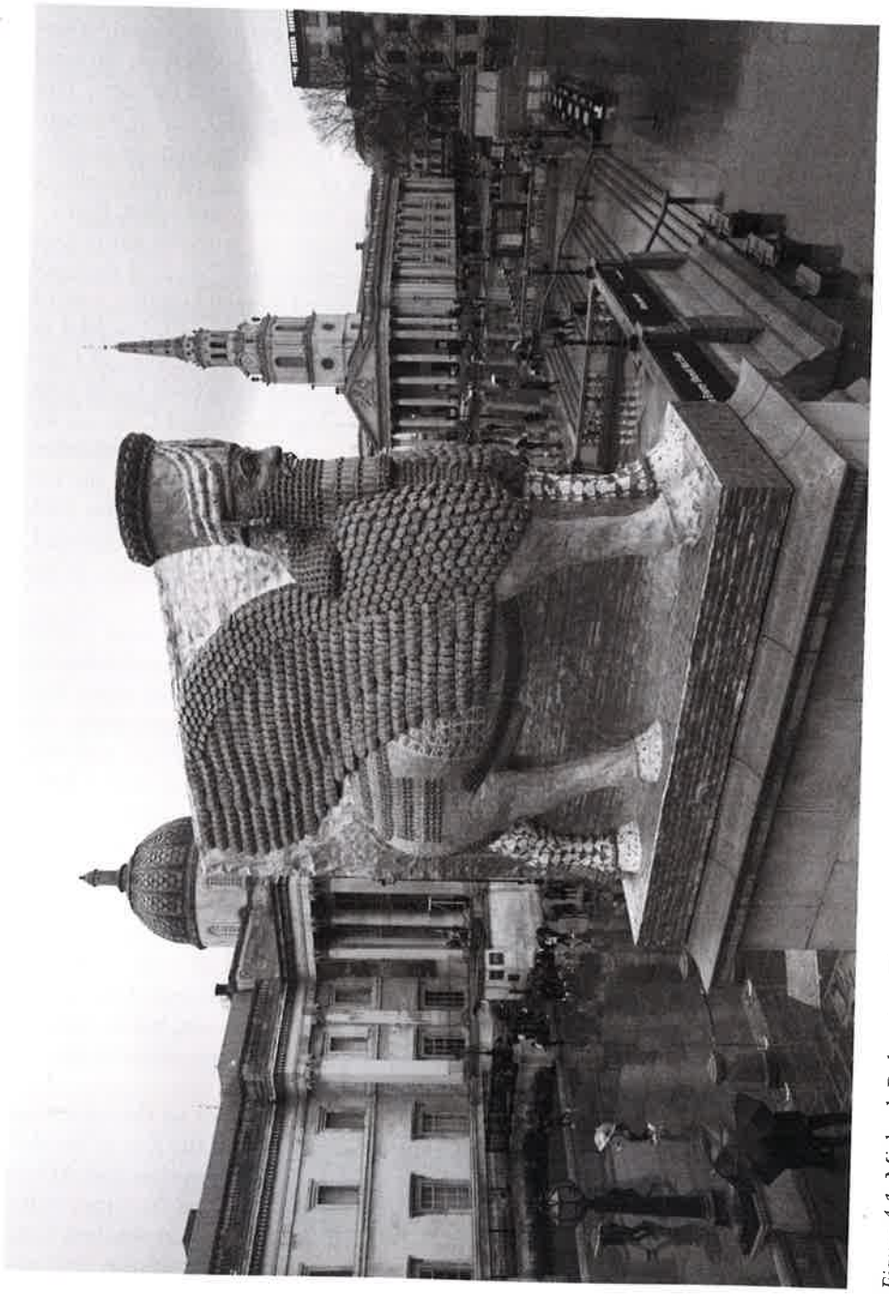

Figure 4.1 Michael Rakowitz, *The Invisible Enemy*, 2018 02, Michael Rakowitz, *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, commissioned for Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth, 2018.

Source: Caroline Teo and Gautier DeBlonde, Courtesy of the Mayor of London

"We were ordered by our prophet to take down idols and destroy them": The Economies of Cultural Destruction

On July 21, 2017, following three years of occupation by the forces of Daesh (who had taken over the city June 10, 2014), Iraqi forces reclaimed control of Mosul.[6] During that time, Daesh had committed atrocities that involved the abduction, torture, enslavement, and mass murder of thousands of civilians in and around the city.[7] The persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, alongside the rape and sale of women, including children, into sex trafficking, was curtailed by a large-scale offensive against Daesh that nevertheless resulted in the estimated deaths of a further 40,000 civilians in Mosul.[8] The cumulative physical destruction during this time, including that of cultural artifacts and monuments, was likewise all-encompassing, with the entire Old City of Mosul—including the Great Mosque of al-Nuri—destroyed.[9] Acts of destruction, of which there were many, included the aforementioned winged lamassu, one of two that stood guard at the Nergal Gate in the ancient city of Nineveh. Located in the northern sector of the Acropolis walls that surrounded Nineveh, the Nergal Gate is one of fifteen that encircled Mosul.[10] Several of these would have been faced with stone colossi, or lamassus, and of the two lamassus guarding the Nergal Gate (as we witnessed in the video released on February 26, 2015), it was the one to the right that was destroyed by Daesh militants armed with a jackhammer. The lamassu to the left of the gate, already missing its upper half (which was apparently taken in the 19th century and broken down for its lime deposits), seems to have been largely ignored, but two further lamassus, both less well preserved than those standing sentry at the gate, were for the most part destroyed.

The specific trauma associated with the damage wrought upon the most extant lamassu of this quartet involved both its original destruction at the hands of militants and the ensuing, all too enduring, images of it being destroyed. While the exact date upon which the destruction took place at the Nergal Gate remains uncertain, the video of the lamassu being destroyed was transmitted on February 26, 2015, and was, thereafter, picked up by multiple media outlets and amplified by social media links. The first part of this video was largely concerned with the destruction of artifacts in the museum in Mosul, some of which later turned out to be gypsum casts of sculptures and reliefs mostly held, for safe-keeping, in the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad since 2003. The viral visual spectacle of destruction that resulted when the original footage was disseminated through social media and other networked systems of communication captured considerable global attention, for a period of time at least.[11] With the exception of the perpetrators, it seems very few people witnessed the actual destruction of the lamassu and the nearby artifacts in Mosul's museum, but its recording and digital dissemination—not to mention avid consumption—ensured that it became an iconic image of an iconoclastic event, so to speak.

The video of the destruction in Mosul, released three years prior to the unveiling of Rakowitz's project in Trafalgar Square, begins with a verse from the Koran on idol worship and is followed by an admonishing lecture of sorts on Assyrian and Akkadian polytheism, the latter used as the ostensible reason for destroying the supposedly idolatrous statues.[12] Standing in the museum, with various artifacts surrounding him, an unnamed man in a black skullcap issues a running commentary on the destruction: "These statues and idols, these artefacts," he says, "if God has ordered its [*sic*] removal, they became worthless to us even if they are worth billions of dollars."[13] The

destroyed sculptures in the museum originated from Hatra, a Roman period city situated in the desert to the south of Mosul that would later be destroyed in 2015, and a collection of Assyrian artifacts from Nineveh that had been gathered from surrounding sites, such as Khorsabad and Balawat.[14] While the iconoclastic acts depicted in this footage ensured its notoriety and subsequent widespread dissemination, the video also revealed a far more complex story than the *de facto* destruction of priceless artifacts. First, the five-minute film in question was made with a specific digital audience in mind, one connected by social media and other networked systems of communication. It is notable, for one, that the footage has been "branded" with the black flag of Daesh, further reinforcing its trademark insignia, and that it comes complete with its own soundtrack of Koranic recitals and first-hand commentary on the unfolding devastation. For added effect, and for anyone unsure of what is actually happening, the footage is slowed down in some parts to give an additional temporal dimension to the performative elements of destruction. The relatively improvised, handheld camera footage is further focused on and framed by the activities of a few militants as they destroy numerous objects. The restrictive framing, concentrating the viewer's attention further, adds to the sense of immediacy and, thereafter, seems to confirm the raw

Figure 4.2 Michael Rakowitz, *The Invisible Enemy*, 2018 036, Michael Rakowitz, *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, commissioned for Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth, 2018.

Source: Caroline Teo and Gautier DeBlonde, Courtesy of the Mayor of London

authenticity of the footage in question—the latter being, for some at least, a crucial element in any decision concerning the broadcast of such material via international media outlets.

The subsequent take up of this video by news media and its upload to blogs, social media outlets, and various online newsfeeds ensured not just the viral infamy associated with the acts themselves but also served to acknowledge the formal considerations that Daesh applied to the aesthetics of producing the video. This was a strategic and far from unsophisticated form of image production in its own right, in which we see statue after statue being toppled or pulverized. It becomes increasingly notable, during this relatively short video, that digital images of this stage-managed demolition were intended to reach the widest possible audience and—bearing in mind the demands involved in a twenty-four-hour non-stop news cycle and the imperatives of the ratings metrics deployed by commercially driven global media outlets—in the full knowledge that it would serve to scandalize, in particular, a Western audience. Western news outlets, and the networked systems of communication that underwrite social media outlets, could, in short, not ignore this footage, none of which is to say that audiences in the Middle East were not equally scandalized by Daesh's actions. Rather, it is to note the level of sophistication in the choice of subject matter—designed to cause maximum offense—and how the style of the film was designed to ritualistically perform an atrocity and, thereafter, appeal directly to a (suitably shocked) Western audience. Even if Western media outlets were to pause and investigate further the more covert reasons behind the production of these images (which, as we will see, had less to do with ideology and more to do with profit), they were already circulating in the so-called blogosphere and were, thereafter, newsworthy as images in their own right.[15] This digitized spectacle, alongside its apparently improvised, cinéma vérité–like aesthetic, ensured that the footage was widely transmitted.[16] In affective terms, the slowed down images also increased the emotive sense of irredeemable damage that comes with an all too direct underlying message: Daesh not only controls Mosul and its neighboring environments in a military sense but also holds sway over its cultural artifacts and heritage, not to mention its people and their fate.

A series of interconnected questions emerge here, not least how the content of this video—the event of iconoclastic destruction being pursued in the apparent name of a puritanical, aniconic ideology that prohibits imagistic depiction of sentient beings, including the Prophet Muhammad—and its formal components (including the use of a handheld camera, shaky footage, expeditious editing, rousing soundtrack, compressed framing, and slow-motion techniques) would suggest that we need to more fully consider its intended audience: Who exactly was this video made for? In releasing this deceptively improvised and yet highly stylized five-minute video, Daesh were not only appealing to and thereafter exploiting the networks that underwrite social and digital news media, they were also sending a clear message of their own military, cultural, and religious ascendancy.[17] If we have garnered this much power in such a short space of time, this video implies, then surely our caliphate is eminently achievable, if not historically inevitable. On a simplistic level, it is a display of force that is directed to the West and, contiguously, a show of omnipotence directed to Daesh's militant followers. This video is a public relations ploy in all but name, but it also carries, crucially, a number of other meanings that tend to obscure a less obvious, but no less important, reason behind the destruction of these artifacts: Unlike other

objects that were sold for profits to support Daesh's activities, the objects we see destroyed in this now infamous video were deemed either too unwieldy to transport or were arguably too well known to sell through the so-called black market. This latter point, among others, has been forcibly made throughout Helga Turka's comprehensive volume, *The Destruction of Cultural Property as a Weapon of War: ISIS in Syria and Iraq* (2017), where she noted a number of occasionally conflicting motivations behind the release of such images and their subsequent distribution through digital means:

> Throughout its campaign of destruction in Iraq and Syria, ISIS has undoubtedly pulverised priceless artefacts, but it does not do so indiscriminately. Indeed, ISIS appears to destroy items that are too large to transport (e.g., buildings or heavy statues) or too difficult to sell on the black market (e.g., items that have already been registered with the authorities and are easily detectable by international law enforcement). Those items that cannot be sold on the black market to finance their campaign are sacrificed and carefully videotaped to show followers and sympathisers ISIS' might and ideology, and simultaneously prove to it enemies their powerlessness.[18]

The advanced technologies of digital image production employed by Daesh for the dissemination of images have an economic underpinning that is intimately linked to the trade and sale of looted cultural artifacts. There is, to return to my earlier point, a form of systemic complicity at work here: The trade in artifacts (icons) by Daesh and the trade in images (iconography) by Western media are intimately entangled, with the latter indisputably creating a market for the former.[19] The "spectacle" of destruction (its performative gesturalism, its widespread dissemination, and the opprobrium directed toward it) is an example of an advanced form of image production that serves multiple manifest purposes, not least the flagrant announcement that Daesh at that point controlled vast swaths of western Iraq and eastern Syria, the region's natural resources (including, of course, oil production), and, significantly, its cultural property. Despite the avowed religious and ideological intentions detailed in the Mosul video, it appears that—to the then upper echelons of Daesh, in particular—the financial value of such objects *did* matter and that their illicit resale on international markets was fueling and financing the expansion of Daesh's genocidal intent. This looting and trafficking of artifacts was, in effect, implementing three interrelated goals: Raising money for Daesh's war on those it considered non-believers or "inferior," disclosing its ascendancy in the most brutal of terms, and denuding an entire population across Syria and Iraq of their cultural heritage. We should also observe here yet another relatively covert reason for such widespread destruction: It ensured that, after the destruction in Mosul, no one could definitively say what had been destroyed and what had been looted for resale.[20]

The politics of cultural destruction, recorded and relayed through digital means for widespread dissemination (and concomitant condemnation), was not an act fueled by a misplaced form of aniconism that was in turn paraded under the banner of ideological extremism; rather, it was a carefully rehearsed and strategically deployed series of iconoclastic events that reveal a fundamental economic necessity and series of financial calculations about what was and what was not to be destroyed. Daesh effectively "curated" cultural forms of destruction—and what remained thereafter was largely

Figure 4.3 Michael Rakowitz, *The Invisible Enemy*, 2018 033, Michael Rakowitz, *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, commissioned for Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth, 2018.

Source: Caroline Teo and Gautier DeBlonde, Courtesy of the Mayor of London

for sale to Western outlets and collectors. In a far-reaching article published in 2016, *The New York Times* noted that the traffic in looted cultural objects was in part enabled by applications such as WhatsApp, where photographs of such objects could be briefly uploaded for potential purchasers. The same article quoted a report by the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies that observed that the main buyers for looted objects were, and presumably remain so to this day, customers in the U.S. and Europe. The report continues, "The main buyers are, ironically, history enthusiasts and art aficionados in the United States and Europe—representatives of the Western societies which I.S. has pledged to destroy."[21] Consciously or unconsciously, Western buyers for artifacts plundered by Daesh were financing the destruction of an entire cultural heritage, for one, and the annihilation, if not genocide, of entire communities. Just as some institutions and largely anonymous individuals in the West consumed the spoils of Daesh's campaign, in the form of the looted icons, audiences consumed the images and iconography of cultural destruction via social and digital media outlets. Under cover of the manifest symbolism of iconoclasm, in conjunction with its undoubted violence and a culturally defined economy of image production, there was an equally efficient latent system of image exchange at work. There was a partially concealed message in both image economies that belied the news headlines and social media feeds: Whereas broadcasted images showed members of Daesh apparently engaged in indiscriminate acts of destruction in Mosul, Palmyra, and other cities in Northern Iraq and Syria, these infractions were being committed

with the full knowledge that they would be not only broadcast, via unquestioning media outlets, but would also potentially raise the prices for such looted works. The timing of the release of videos, as noted by Robert Fisk, was in part associated with a calculated effort on Daesh's behalf to ensure that the price of cultural artifacts from, say, Mosul or Palmyra increased over time. Quoting the Lebanese-French archaeologist Joanne Farchakh, Fisk further observes that the dramatization of destruction over a matter of days or weeks ensures that prices increase on the international antiquities markets. "Isis is in the antiquities business," Fisk writes, "and Isis is manipulating the world in its dramas of destruction."[22]

In a report delivered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on September 29, 2015, seven months after the release of the Mosul video, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counter Threat Finance and Sanctions, Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, Andrew Keller, observed that Daesh had "amassed wealth at an unprecedented pace for a terrorist organization . . . over $1 billion in 2014 alone."[23] These monies, Keller noted, were not from donors as such but from natural resources, including revenue from oil sales, extortion/taxation, and the plundering of other natural resources under its control. And core to that plunder was the appropriation and sale of antiquities. Observing that there were, in late 2015, over 5,000 archaeological sites located in Daesh-controlled territory, Keller argued that "ISIL has encouraged the looting of archaeological sites for two purposes: making money and erasing the cultural heritage of Iraq and Syria."[24] He based his assertion on a previous raid carried out by U.S. Special Forces on the Syrian compound of Abu Sayyaf, the so-called head of Daesh's antiquities division. Documents obtained in this raid demonstrated, Keller argued, "that ISIL is well-organized to traffic in looted antiquities, that it devotes considerable administrative and logistical resources to this activity, and, most importantly, that it profits from this activity."[25] These activities need to be put into further context, inasmuch as the information garnered from the original raid on Abu Sayyaf's compound pointed to the fact that Daesh was making a considerable amount of money not only from the looting and resale of artifacts but also from taxing the act and proceeds of looting. Keller continued:

> They authorize certain individuals to excavate and supervise the excavation of artefacts in ISIL-controlled territory, and in some cases to detain anyone searching for artefacts without the prior approval of the Diwan of Natural Resources. Documents uncovered from the Abu Sayyaf raid confirm that ISIL is collecting a 20 percent "khums tax" on the proceeds of looting, which the group has enforced across the territory it controls.[26]

The plundering of cultural artifacts was effectively franchised to local looters and rendered taxable as a result. It was, in sum, a business, and Daesh not only outsourced its practice of looting but also outsourced images of destruction to social and news media outlets for global dissemination. To the extent that these images undoubtedly alerted various authorities to the cultural decimation that was being orchestrated by Daesh, and that in some cases provoked interventions that ameliorated (but did necessarily stop) further destruction, there was less progress made in halting the actual trade in artifacts that was fueling the performance and choreography of cultural annihilation in the first place. Daesh's symbiotic business plan, so to speak, was based on the notion that scarcity equals increased value. This supply and demand model, in

turn, was actively abetted by a system of social and news media that, in a post-digital age, is irredeemably entwined with the aggressively competitive economy of image production, dissemination, and consumption that motivates digital media platforms and the venture capitalist models of so-called big tech companies in Silicon Valley. Arguably, it is the unchecked, unedited, unbridled, user-friendly model of image production that substantiates social media and other networked sites of communication and that gives rise to the proliferation, if not production, of images of atrocity in the first place. Why else produce such images if not for viral consumption? Add to this the algorithmic bias of sites such as YouTube, which have been proven to direct viewers to more extremist material, and we have an all too productive, and opaque, *mise en abyme* of networked communications for Daesh and its followers to covertly and overtly operate within with relative impunity.[27]

The fact that Daesh had its own committed antiquities division, alongside an entire outfit dedicated to determining what sites were to be destroyed or preserved—the so-called *Kata'ib Taswiyya* (settlement battalions), who would select targets for demolition—belies the widely circulated images of ideological and seemingly indiscriminate destruction we saw in Mosul and throughout the region. Judging from this, and other evidence, it would appear that the aims behind the destruction in Mosul were pervasively financial, in the first instance, and that the ideological throat-clearing we witness in many of the propaganda videos was precisely that: A form of lip service that fully exploited—and was in turn amplified by—the predilections and biases of social and news media.[28] It seems that the neocolonial image of the intractable, atavistic, extremist, havoc-wreaking, and iconoclastic Arab or extremist devotee of Islam can still skewer, if not fatally obstruct, how we understand events in the Middle East.

"Weapons from most of the countries come here; they all come back to me": The Geopolitics of Cultural Restitution

I earlier noted that Rakowitz's *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist* refuses any sense of reassuring replication or duplication of a now destroyed artifact—his lamassu is not meant to replace or reconstitute that which has been destroyed. To interpret the work in redemptive, if not restitutive, terms is to deny how it confirms, despite it physical presence, the extent to which the cultural heritage of Iraq, in particular, is and has been under siege for some time now, its lamassus long since transported to the Louvre, the British Museum, the pergamonmuseum in Berlin, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, to name but a few of the more obvious public institutions that currently house extensive collections of artifacts from the region.[29] The history of cultural appropriation and the traffic in cultural artifacts, needless to say, did not begin in Mosul in 2015. On the contrary, the ontology of such acts has a long and disreputable history that remains contiguous with colonial and neocolonial ventures. The illegal trade in looted artifacts from the Middle East and elsewhere, as well as their subsequent sale to Western institutions and private individuals, is a historical feature of a cultural economy that Daesh was all too aware of and eager to exploit with their far from aniconic approach to looting and their understanding of how social and news media operate in a post-digital age no longer dazzled by advances in imaging technologies. While the plundering, resale, and destruction of artifacts are often historically coterminous with one another, the events leading up to Mosul need to be

contextualized within more recent events in Iraq's recent history, not least the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) and the so-called first Gulf War (1991), both of which remain indelibly related not only to one another but also to the inevitable rise of Daesh. These cataclysmic events, and their historical consequences and legacies of upheaval, come together in Hiwa K's *The Bell Project* (2014–2015), where, as we will see, the aftermath of war and conflict in the 1980s and, crucially, 2003 not only gave impetus to the formation of Daesh and its violent ascendancy but also effectively paved the way for what happened in Mosul a decade or so later (4.4, 4.5, 4.6).

The starting point for Hiwa K's *The Bell Project*—which is composed of two distinct elements, a two-channel HD video installation, *Nazhad and the Bell Making* (2007–2015), and a bronze bell secured in a wooden frame—was research he undertook into, respectively, the Iran–Iraq War and a scrapyard in Northern Iraq.[30] The owner of the scrapyard, the eponymous Nazhad, is an entrepreneur who was born in a settlement south of Sulaymaniyah in Kurdistan, not far from where the artist was born in 1975. Recalling the origins of the work in question, Hiwa K has recounted how, in 2007, he was researching the countless mines that remained in the mountains between Iraq and Iran, the latter being the hazardous and explosive residue of the eight-year pyrrhic war the two countries had fought in the 1980s.[31] Through the artist's research, he discovered that many of the deactivated mines would end up in Nazhad's scrapyard, where, after the precious metals were extruded from the spent ordnance, metal ingots would be produced for sale in countries such as China. In the film, we see how Nazhad turned the skills learned in the aftermath of the Iran–Iraq War toward deactivating armaments and recycling other residue from the two successive Gulf Wars (1991 and 2003) and, more recently, the remnants of the conflict with Daesh.

Through practical, often dangerous, experience Nazhad accumulated a significant body of knowledge about both the composition of various metals (metallurgy) and weaponry.[32] At several points in the video, he displays his encyclopedic knowledge of the armaments in his scrapyard as he casually picks through 11 mm shells, 12 mm shells, 152 mm shells, and bullets from a heavy machine gun, a so-called Dashka (or DShK), which was produced in the former Soviet Union. At one juncture in the video, Nazhad observes that "weapons from most of the countries come here; they all come back to me" and comments that over forty countries are represented in his scrapyard through their sales of weapons to both Iran and Iraq, including, to name but a few, the United States, Italy, Germany, Japan, China, and Turkey. Presiding over a veritable index of conflict in Iraq, Nazhad is the *de facto* archivist of a military-industrial complex that has come to define, and consistently undermine, the geopolitics of the region. A narrative of upheaval that includes repeated invasion, war, civil conflict, revolt, the tactic of so-called shock and awe warfare deployed by U.S. forces in 2003, and the ensuing onslaught of Daesh is present here in synecdochic form—its parts signifying the trajectory of violence by proxy that has underwritten Iraqi history since at least the Anglo–Iraqi War of 1941.

Focusing as it does on the materialization of the bell that lies at the center of the project, this film also discloses the genesis of Hiwa K's intervention in this cycle of destruction. For the actual bell to be made, the artist needed three hundred kilograms of bronze, and the material was sourced from the smelted metal that Nazhad produced as ingots in his scrapyard. This metal, once checked for purity, was thereafter shipped to a foundry in Crema, in northern Italy, where it was molded into a bell

with a strike tone of B-flat minor (a chord that consists of the notes B-flat, D, and F).[33] Given that Nazhad had already verified that ordnance from the ongoing conflict with Daesh that was present in his scrapyard, it is feasible that some of this would have subsequently found its way into the construction of the actual bell in Crema. As the artist relates in the accompanying notes to *The Bell Project*, the manufacture of a church bell from the metal waste of the Iran–Iraq War, along with other conflicts in Iraq (including the ongoing campaigns against Daesh), effectively reverses a historical process—prevalent throughout medieval times and until at least World War I—that saw bells being melted into weapons and cannons.[34] The materiel deployed by Daesh, having found its way to Nazhad's scrapyard, could have also found its way into Hiwa K's resurrected bell. The origin of this materiel/material is further complicated by the fact that a significant number of the armaments used by Daesh, following the fall of Mosul in 2015, were captured from retreating Iraqi forces, who had been in receipt of weapons from the U.S. army.[35] This would suggest that the metallurgic makeup of the bell in question chronicles a number of stages in the economy of these armaments, ranging from the original U.S.-produced weapons that were allocated to Iraqi forces to those that were subsequently sequestered by Daesh and then those that were decommissioned and smelted down by Nazhad. All of these stages coalesced and were extruded into ingots for a foundry in Crema, Italy, and, for now at least, are compounded in a bell that is capable of ringing out a strike tone chord of B-flat minor rather than, somewhat pointedly, the percussive punch of a bomb or the high-velocity sonic boom of a bullet.

During the subsequent production process in Crema, the artist observed how news broke, in February 2015, of the serial attacks by Daesh on artifacts in the Mosul Museum and the surrounding city. He affirmed how, having seen the video, he became aware of the scale of destruction being wrought upon Mosul, a city three hundred kilometers northeast of his own birthplace in Sulaymaniyah. Of the many objects destroyed in the city, a number stand out because of their historical stature and presence in this notorious video, as discussed earlier, specifically the lamassu that stood at

Figure 4.4 Hiwa K, *The Bell Project* 1000, Hiwa K, *The Bell Project*, 2007–2015.
Source: Hiwa K, Courtesy of KOW Berlin

Figure 4.5 Hiwa K, *The Bell Project* 1000, Hiwa K, *The Bell Project*, 2007–2015.
Source: Hiwa K, Courtesy of KOW Berlin

Figure 4.6 Hiwa K, *The Bell Project* 1000, Hiwa K, *The Bell Project*, 2007–2015.
Source: Hiwa K, Courtesy of KOW Berlin

the Nergal Gate in Nineveh. Traditionally, bells would be adorned with religious iconography, but, as Hiwa K relates, his bell is emblazoned on its "waist" with an image of the destroyed lamassu of Nineveh. As we watch the bell mould being removed in the film, the lamassu motif seems to be in the process of being unearthed (which is fitting given that it was originally reburied following its excavation in 1849 by Sir Austen Henry Layard), its reappearance allegorically reversing the instances of destruction then being wrought by Daesh across northern Iraq and parts of northern Syria.[36] The artist explains:

> I was thinking about the whole market for oil and weapons and how ISIS are involved in that trade, especially in the looting and trade of artefacts, so I used

some of the insignia from various objects that were being destroyed by ISIS at the time I was making the bell.[37]

It is not only the symbolism of the lamassu that is registered here but also the conversion of materiel formerly associated with acts of destruction—including the Iran–Iraq War, the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, and the equally ferocious campaign of Daesh—and its reconstitution in the form of a bell, the latter being variously associated with worship, time-keeping, diurnal order, liberty, commemoration, impending strife, harmony, musicality, and, of course, death. The various states of destruction (whether brought about by internationally supplied ordnance, sequestered weapons, or the jackhammers of iconoclasts) and reconstitution (be it of the metallurgical makeup of a bell or the motifs of destroyed artifacts) are rendered fluid in *The Bell Project*, their liquidity literalized in the smelting process and their states of de- and re-materialization testament to, in part, the historical endurance of cultural artifacts and symbols. More ominously, however, *The Bell Project* symbolically references the conflicts leading up to the emergence of Daesh. To the extent that the Iran–Iraq War brought about further instability in the region, it was the ensuing 2003 invasion of Iraq that effected a profound nationwide splintering along ethnic and religious grounds. It was this series of ruptures that enabled Daesh to gain a significant foothold in the country, and, while some debate still exists, it has been widely and compellingly argued—not least by one of the architects of the invasion, Tony Blair, who was the prime minister of the UK at the time—that the fateful decision in 2003 to invade Iraq, followed by the ineptness and perhaps willful mismanagement of the occupation thereafter, incontrovertibly resulted in Daesh's inauspicious rise.[38]

To see a direct connection between these two events is to countenance more than just the catastrophe that engulfed Iraq during this period (and that continues to define its historical, social, political, economic, and cultural realities today); it is to also investigate the degree to which the events of 2003 led inexorably to the destruction of Mosul in 2015. The U.S.-led invasion of 2003 set a precedent, with regard to the widespread looting and further entrenchment of a global market for plundered artifacts, that was an effective dress rehearsal for the events we witnessed in 2015 and thereafter. The recent systematic erasure of Iraqi cultural diversity began not in Mosul, or Palmyra, or Hatra, but in Baghdad in 2003 and, more precisely, in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of the country. This proposition is given substantive corroboration in a volume first published in 2010, which has since turned out to be one of the most exhaustive indictments of Western-led interventions in Iraq.[39] Throughout *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq: Why Museums Were Looted, Libraries Burned and Academics Murdered*, a detailed and disheartening account emerges of the looting of museums, the burning of libraries, the evisceration of cultural institutions, and the unparalleled assassinations of intellectuals across Iraq from 2003 onward. However, this is not intended to be a litany of depressing facts but an acute indictment of historical folly: The plunder witnessed in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq was not an inevitable aftereffect or, indeed, side effect of military incompetence and negligence (which would at least offer a partial degree of mitigation by virtue of blithe idiocy), but rather the direct consequence of policies that actively disregarded the imperative of protecting cultural landmarks. Although the U.S.-led coalition forces had prepared a list of twenty key sites in need of immediate protection, with the National Museum of Iraq being first on the list, the only one that received such protection was the Ministry of Oil.[40] The other museum to be looted at the time, in what we now must view as a dress rehearsal for events in 2015, was the Museum of Mosul, which had remained closed as it underwent renovation only to be subsequently occupied by Daesh upon its arrival in the city in June 2014.[41]

In terms of cultural destruction, despoliation, and restitution, the reaction to the looting and resale of artifacts in 2015 has been slow in coming and rarely fit for the purpose, but this was also the case in 2003. The International Council of Museums (ICM), for example, has released an increasing number of so-called Red Lists for Syria (in 2013) and Iraq (in 2015), both of which detail the daunting scale of the problem at hand and the continued dangers of historical inaction.[42] Interestingly, the 2015 report on Iraq was an update of a previous Red List that was issued in the wake of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of the country. To note these dubious milestones, alongside their all too durable continuities, is to further underscore how the market for looted cultural artifacts from Iraq was initially exacerbated by the breakdown of law and order that resulted after the 2003 invasion of the country and how these events, directly and indirectly, laid the groundwork for more recent examples of mass plundering by Daesh and its variously enfranchised (and duly taxed) looters.

The prioritization of the strategic and the economic over and above the cultural and social in 2003 not only left a country profoundly bereft of the very artifacts and cultural heritage that are needed to give nations a coherent, albeit contested, sense of communality and historical purchase but also rendered it susceptible to the further fracture and future loss of its cultural heritage. Social and political stability begets cultural continuity, and culture in Iraq, from its looted museums to its burned libraries and willful and invariably unprosecuted murders of intellectuals and academics, was effectively annihilated—a term that broaches no nuance of a quick or even mid-term recovery.[43] The targeted assassination of over five hundred intellectuals, lawyers, artists, and academics in Iraq following the invasion of the country in 2003, as detailed throughout *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq*, as well as the concomitant flight into exile of countless more, remains one of the most sobering and disreputable events in what has become an unmitigated disaster for the people of Iraq.[44] The events in Mosul and elsewhere, in this context, are merely the latest iteration in a reprehensible roll call of short-term interventionism, profound political mismanagement, historical disregard, and hasty and singularly ill-conceived military withdrawal from Iraq, not to mention the international level of legislative abjuration when it comes to fully considering the fundamental importance of cultural heritage in the fostering of communities in Iraq. This negligence was iconoclasm by default, and the legacy accompanying the abandonment of the National Museum of Iraq, its subsequent looting, and the aftermath of destruction, both material and immaterial, is still ricocheting around Iraq and the Middle East today, not least when we look at the scarred ruins of Mosul, Palmyra, Hatra, and other destroyed cities.

What Is Left *After* Mosul?

One of the inevitable historical aftermaths of the destruction in 2003—apart from the unleashing of forces that have yet to fully abate—was Mosul in 2015 and the

ensuing devastation of large swaths of the region on the basis of ethnic, cultural, tribal, political, and religious affiliations. In understanding what occurred in Mosul as an aftereffect of the war and invasion of Iraq in 2003, however, it is crucial that we also observe the sheer mendacity behind the intervening processes in that continuum of destruction: The rationale behind the invasion of the country was not to rid it of a dictator as such and offer the stabilizing hand of "democracy" to its people, it was to reduce the nation and its people to a de-culturalized and deracinated serf state and, thereafter, realign its economic activities with the demands of a neoliberal, global economy based on the servitude of marginalized and largely expendable subpopulations. To suggest as much is to acknowledge an all too credible argument put forward in, for one, Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*, where she perspicaciously details the extent to which the ascendancy of neoliberal doctrine was central not only to the "shock and awe" inspired invasion of Iraq but also to an insidious form of "disaster capitalism."[45] While the didactic ascendancy of neoliberalism at all costs has been central to U.S. foreign policy since at least the 1950s, it was fundamental to U.S. economic and political dogma following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The dominance of neoliberal policy was assured under the then stewardship of Paul Bremer, the short-lived, but no less catastrophic, presidential envoy to Iraq (from May 2003 until June 2004). It was Bremer, as Klein observes, who issued the infamous Order Number 1 on May 16, 2003, that essentially dissolved the entire former Iraqi army—under the guise of the de-Ba'athification of the Iraqi army and civil service—and sowed the seeds of insurgency and internecine conflicts that continue to this day. Customs duties were abolished, alongside import tariffs, and Iraqi industry and manufacturing—already reeling from years of sanctions—collapsed, alongside, as noted earlier, the market for dates and their export. As part of these new policies, to highlight one particularly egregious example, investors could take one hundred percent of profits made in Iraq back to their home countries without reinvesting any of it in the country of extraction. Crucially, the issuing of Order Number 1, alongside Order Number 2 (which specified the exact entities to be dissolved), unleashed the factions that were to, in a relatively short time, mutate into Daesh and thereafter give rise to forms of cultural destruction that were unprecedented, even in the atrocious aftermath of the 2003 invasion.[46]

Within this neoliberal, global political economy, images of conflict need to be monetized and circulated in an economy of meaning based on commercial value. A significant part of that value is not so much financial as it is ideological: The Middle East, adumbrated as a homogeneous entity, can only be seen, under this image-based economy, through the self-serving manufacture of conflict and threat—how else could anyone plausibly justify an invasion and the establishment of "order"? Such concerns, voiced in the wake of Daesh's emergence across the region, remind us that colonial paradigms are not only far from defunct but also all too easily resuscitated through an evolving neocolonial preoccupation with topics such as an (apparently) irresolvable form of atavistic conflict brought about by an equally irredeemable strain of dogmatic extremism that has been long directed toward the Middle East. The one singular—and most effective—way to produce atavistic conflict and dogmatic extremism and thereafter maintain it, as we now know and knew then, was to prosecute a large-scale invasion of an entire country and ensure the immiseration of its population. And images, in their deployment as the digitized, networked harbingers of threat and terrorism emanating from the region, played a foundational and rationalizing part in that process.

There remains a systemic complicity at work in the production and consumption of iconoclastic images from the Middle East: The trade in artifacts (icons) and the trade in images (iconography) found a locus of sorts in acts of apparently wanton demolition (iconoclasm)—which turned out to be anything but—that distracted us from the sinuous political economies that historically underwrite destruction and reconstruction in the region. The restitution—be it in the form of an actual object or its replica—of an icon through cultural practices, as I argued earlier, supports a critical apparatus for understanding if not ultimately deconstructing these all too durable processes. The two cultural interventions by Rakowitz and Hiwa K offer a significant means to more fully recognize this and, critically, to determine how cultural artifacts and activities—in the moment where they visualize the operative logic of such processes—redefine how we understand the affiliations that exist amid the apparently discrete, but all too integrally supportive, ontologies of digital media, networked systems of communication, cultural destruction, and neoliberal economic policies.

The cultural economy of destruction and reconstruction is, in sum, a political economy, and through considering it via the prism of iconoclasm and the remaking of destroyed artifacts and demolished edifices, we can also more readily address other, no less important, concerns associated with the politics of cultural diversity and the rights of minorities under international law. The despoilment, looting, and resale of cultural artifacts in Iraq from 2003 onward, readily disclosed throughout both Rakowitz's and Hiwa K's projects, should, by way of further research and critical engagement, alert us to a core belief espoused in UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, specifically articles 1 and 4: The effective and sustainable relationship between cultural diversity and human rights is a *sine qua non* element in the continued well-being of a population and should be considered as such, nowhere more so than in the face of cultural despoliation, rampant iconoclasm, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.[47] In a 2015 article for *The Guardian*, a journalist quoted Kino Gabriel, a leader of the Syriac Military Council, as saying, "In [*sic*] front of something like this, we are speechless. . . . Murder of people and destruction is not enough, so even our civilisation and the culture of our people is being destroyed."[48] Following the publication of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199, issued on February 12, 2015, which sought to condemn Daesh's destruction of cultural monuments as *de facto* war crimes (and render them accordingly punishable as such), UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova branded cultural destruction "a form of cultural cleansing," drawing on the indictment inherent in the phrase "ethnic cleansing" and reminding us of the arguments made throughout *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq* when it was first published in 2010. Bokova, addressing the UN General Assembly in New York on May 28, 2015, observed that

> [t]he deliberate destruction of cultural heritage is a war crime—it is used as a tactic of war, in a strategy of cultural cleansing that calls on us to review and renew the means by which we wish to respond and to defeat violent extremism.[49]

The nomenclature of genocide and ethnic cleansing, not to mention the fact of death, and its elision within the terminology of cultural destruction should likewise alert us

here to another far from resolved concern.[50] If we trace the release of videos from Daesh, beginning in Mosul in February 2015, then again in March 2015 (when we saw the demolition of Nimrud), the destruction of Hatra (seen in videos released in March 2015) and, in August 2015, the leveling of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra and the further efforts to demolish the entire city throughout that year, we can identify a timeline that mirrors the full gamut of the atrocities that were inflicted on the residents of Mosul and other communities across the wider region throughout that same period. The question that remains here was whether the videos being released were also serving another clandestine purpose: To further displace Western media attention onto more easily digestible atrocities concerning objects—artifacts—that could be more readily processed and thereafter ignored, rather than focus on the actual subjects, such as the abandoned residents of Mosul, who could not leave following its capture, and the Yazidis, who, fleeing Sinjar following the fall of Mosul, found themselves trapped in a mountainous region facing summary execution by Daesh if they returned to their homeland or, if they stayed in the mountains, death by starvation.[51] For all too many, there was no *after* Mosul, in the sense that the traumatic legacy of the events that occurred in the city will no doubt resonate across Iraq and the broader region for many years to come.

Notes

1. In the 1970s and '80s, the date industry in Iraq was the second largest after oil production, eventually producing, by 2000, over 1,000,000 tonnes per annum; however, by 2007—during what was then the height of civil conflict in the country—this output amounted to less than 350,000 tonnes and has since been struggling to regain its former economic importance. There have since been several efforts to restore this industry to its earlier levels of output, as outlined in a United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) report of 2011. See Independent Evaluation Report (Iraq) Rehabilitation of the Date Palm Sector. UNIDO Project Number FB/IRQ/07/003. For fuller details, see here: www.unido.org/sites/default/files/2012-03/Iraq%20dates%20evaluation%20report%20final_120214_0.pdf [accessed February 1, 2019].
2. In 2006, the artist opened Davisons & Co. in a storefront on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn to import Iraqi dates. For further details, see the artist's website and the work *RETURN*, 2004–. See www.michaelrakowitz.com/return/ [accessed March 21, 2017].
3. There is a significant degree of controversy over how best to refer to the so-called Islamic State group. Originating as a jihadist militant group in thrall to a fundamentalist, Salafi doctrine of Sunni Islam, it has been variously referred to as The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The group has made it known that it prefers the nomenclature Islamic State (IS), but throughout the Arab world it is often referred to pejoratively as Daesh, a term that has no meaning as such but does resemble the Arabic word "Daes," which is often used to refer to "one who crushes (or tramples down) something underfoot." Throughout this chapter, I have opted for the term "Daesh," as it is in popular use across the Arab world. For further discussion of Daesh's emergence, its preferred nomenclature, and its various incarnations to date, see Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, Regan Arts, 2015; Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, Ecco/HarperCollins Publishers, 2016; Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of the Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*, Verso, 2015.
4. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-43565870. In March 2018, it was estimated that 2,297 migrants had died in the Mediterranean. While this represented a nominal decrease from the previous year (3,139), it is estimated that the proportion of deaths per crossing has been rising since 2018. For full figures and references, see https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean [accessed January 27, 2019].

5. Putting to one side the arbitrariness of the Sykes–Picot Agreement, covertly drawn up—with the active connivance of the Russian Empire—between the United Kingdom and France in 1916, the Kingdom of Iraq was not formally granted full independence by Britain until 1932, which in turn prompted a series of coups and countercoups among its many tribal affiliations. The Anglo–Iraqi War of 1941 saw the United Kingdom invade Iraq to quell such coups and reinstate its then preferred government. Military occupation thereafter continued until 1947, although the UK still had air bases in the country until 1954. From 1958 onward, following yet another coup, the Ba'ath party emerged as the single biggest political force in the country. The movement came under the control of General Saddam Hussein, as he was then known, who ascended to the presidency and assumed control of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), giving him, in turn, supreme power over Iraq. There followed a catastrophic war with Iran (1980–1988), during which Iraq received support from the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and most Arab countries (all of whom sought to isolate Iran and restore the autocratic rule of Shah Pahlavi), and an equally ruinous invasion of Kuwait (1990). This was in turn followed by military intervention by coalition forces (in the first Gulf War in 1991) and an all-out invasion—by an allied force led by the United States and Great Britain—in 2003. Since then, Iraq has endured internecine violence on an unprecedented level, felt the full force of the Syrian civil war (2011–), and been overrun by the forces of Daesh and, as of 2018, was still struggling to deal with an estimated 14,000 to 18,000 militants spread across Iraq and Syria. The latter figures are courtesy of the UN Secretary General António Guterres and published in a report released on February 1, 2018. See "Eighth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat," February 1, 2018. Available here: https://undocs.org/S/2019/103 [accessed December 12, 2018]. For an extensive and accessible account of Iraqi history since the period of the British Mandate in the 1920s, see Phebe Marr and Ibrahim Al-Marashi, *The Modern History of Iraq*, Routledge, 4th ed., 2017.
6. By late 2015, an immense swath of western Iraq and eastern Syria, with a population estimate of 2.8 to 8 million people, was under the effective control of Daesh. Prior to this invasion of the city, Mosul's population was approaching 2,000,000 people, the majority of which were Arabs.
7. On August 3, 2014, as part of the same advance that brought Mosul under its control, Daesh militants captured Sinjar in northern Iraq (twenty-five kilometers to the west of Mosul). Sinjar was a largely Kurdish-controlled area inhabited by Yazidis, an endogamous ethnic group whose demographic includes present-day Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Daesh subjected the community to what has since been internationally recognized as a campaign of genocide. See "They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis," a report published on June 15, 2016, by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR), which documents the genocide of the Yazidis by the forces of Daesh and other crimes against humanity. The report opens with the following unequivocal statement: "ISIS has committed the crime of genocide as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidis, thousands of whom are held captive in the Syrian Arab Republic where they are subjected to almost *unimaginable horrors*" (emphasis added). The full report can be read here: www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf [accessed June 19, 2016]. The issue of how the international community can *ex post facto* respond to the atrocities perpetrated by Daesh in Syria and Iraq has become all the more urgent following the dwindling influence and dissipation of the militant group that, at the time of writing (February 2019), was largely confined to the village of Baghouz in eastern Syrian. For a report that focuses on the crime of genocide as perpetuated by Daesh and the recognition of the crime by several international institutions and states, see Pieter Omtzigt and Ewelina U. Ochab, "Bringing Daesh to Justice: What the International Community Can Do," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 21:1 (2019), pp. 71–82.
8. See Patrick Coburn, "The Massacre of Mosul: 40,000 Feared Dead in Battle to Take Back City from ISIS as Scale of Civilian Casualties Revealed," The Independent, Wednesday, July 19, 2017. Available here: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/mosul-massacre-battle-isis-iraq-city-civilian-casualties-killed-deaths-fighting-forces-islamic-state-a7848781.html [accessed July 22, 2017]. It was further estimated that almost

1,000,000 people were displaced as a result of the city's liberation. See "Humanitarian Situation Dire in 'Liberated' Mosul." Available here: www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/humanitarian-situation-dire-liberated-mosul-170710070230074.html [accessed June 12, 2018].

9. Speaking on July 4, 2014—a month after Daesh took control of Mosul—to a congregation at the Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself caliph of Daesh and called on Muslims worldwide to support him and a so-called Islamic caliphate.
10. Until 612 BC, when it was sacked by a Babylonian alliance, Nineveh was the largest city in the world. The lamassus in question, which could weigh up to 30,000 kilograms, were commissioned and installed by King Sennacherib (705–681 BC), who is credited with making Nineveh one of the most important and resplendent cities of the ancient world.
11. The shifting media attention was attenuated by the sheer scale of destruction that started in Mosul in February 2015. This was only the beginning of a pattern of cultural despoilment that was to see, in March 2015, the demolition of Nimrud, an Assyrian city that dated from the 13th century BC. The video depicting the destruction of Nimrud was not released until April 2015, one month after the iconoclastic events that took place there. This would suggest that the destruction at the Nergal Gate may have occurred any time after the capture of the city—on June 10, 2014—but before the release of the video on February 26, 2015. Reports of the destruction of Hatra were also released in March 2015, while in August 2015, six months after the video of events in Mosul was released, Daesh destroyed the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, which was accompanied by a concerted effort to demolish the entire city. For a comprehensive account of this litany of destruction, see Helga Turka, *The Destruction of Cultural Property as a Weapon of War: ISIS in Syria and Iraq*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, *passim*.
12. This information and the following quote are cited from Kareen Shaheen, "ISIS Fighters Destroy Ancient Artefacts at Mosul Museum." Available here: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/26/isis-fighters-destroy-ancient-artefacts-mosul-museum-iraq.
13. The impromptu historian, warming to his subject, continues:

    > These ruins that are behind me, they are idols and statues that people in the past used to worship instead of Allah. The so-called Assyrians and Akkadians and others looked to gods for war, agriculture and rain to whom they offered sacrifices. . . . The Prophet Mohammed took down idols with his bare hands when he went into Mecca. We were ordered by our prophet to take down idols and destroy them, and the companions of the prophet did this after this time, when they conquered countries.

    This translation has been sourced from an in-depth, two-part document by Christopher Jones, released on the website Gates of Nineveh in the days following the video's online posting. The document usefully details the exact constitution of the various statues, along with the physical makeup and location of each lamassu. See https://gatesofnineveh.wordpress.com/2015/02/27/assessing-the-damage-at-the-mosul-museum-part-1-the-assyrian-artifacts/ [accessed 28 June, 2016].
14. For further information on the destroyed statues provenance, see https://gatesofnineveh.wordpress.com/2015/02/27/assessing-the-damage-at-the-mosul-museum-part-1-the-assyrian-artifacts/. The provenance details noted here are drawn from that article and a further one, published on March 3, 2015, which is available here: https://gatesofnineveh.wordpress.com/2015/03/03/assessing-the-damage-at-the-mosul-museum-part-2-the-sculptures-from-hatra/.
15. This point, among others, is taken up by Suzi Mirgani when she notes

    > how terrorist organizations, with the aid of information and communication technologies, no longer have to court media networks, but publicize their own messages, resulting in the globalization of their ideologies and an increase in the quantity and quality of their cultural production. In a perverse reversal, corporate news networks, in their constant search for content, publicize terrorist activities, and sensationalize these stories as part of their profit-maximizing operations.

    See Suzi Mirgani, "Spectacles of Terror: Media and the Cultural Production of Terrorism," in Nele Lenze, Charlotte Schriwer, Subaidah Abdul Jali, eds., *Media in the Middle East: Activism, Politics, and Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 107–142; pp. 108–109.

16. There is an interesting counterpoint to be had here with the work of Rabih Mroué, a central figure in post-civil war Beirut's avant-garde scene and a leading practitioner in defining how digital and social media are used under the conditions of conflict. Discussing the Syrian civil war in particular, and the *cinéma vérité*-like aesthetic deployed by activists, he observed similarities between the video recordings coming out of the Syrian revolution and the pared back manifesto deployed by the Dogme 95 organization in Denmark. He notes that, for the latter, there is an instruction that you should not use a tripod, for example, but for the Syrians shooting images of violence, "it's not a choice—it's still very, very, difficult to use a tripod to record their reality." Mroué continues:

    > And there is another issue in Dogme 95, where it stipulates that you should not record violent scenes, or weapons, because they don't want to fake these things. So it's not necessary to use them. For the Syrians, they add to this dictate insofar as the violent scenes being recorded are actually for real and the stipulation is also correct—do not record violence—insofar as the weapon could kill them and the scene of killing is thereafter real. There is no attempt to fake death here—it is all too real.

    See "Lost in Narration: Rabih Mroué in Conversation with Anthony Downey," *Ibraaz*, January 5, 2012. Available here: www.ibraaz.org/interviews/11 [accessed January 28, 2019].
17. In a show of apparent religious and ethnic ascendancy, the program of genocide directed toward the Yazidis by Daesh was coterminous with a "forced conversion" program to the form of Sunni Islam practiced by the militants.
18. Helga Turka, *The Destruction of Cultural Property as a Weapon of War: ISIS in Syria and Iraq*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 48.
19. Turka also notes the performative elements at work in Daesh's propaganda: "First, the destruction is not a collateral effect of the armed conflict, but rather a well thought-out *performance*, with sophisticated means of image production" (emphasis added), Helga Turka, *The Destruction of Cultural Property as a Weapon of War: ISIS in Syria and Iraq*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 4.
20. This point was made by Robert Fisk, "ISIS Profits From Destruction of Antiquities by Selling Relics to Dealers—And Then Blowing up the Buildings They Come From to Conceal the Evidence of Looting," *The Independent*, September 3, 2015. See www.independent.co.uk/voices/isis-profits-from-destruction- of-antiquities-by-selling-relics-to-dealers-and-then-blowing-up-the-10483421.html [accessed June 22, 2018]. Fisk quotes the Lebanese-French archaeologist Joanne Farchakh, who observes that "[a]ntiquities from Palmyra are already on sale in London," and that

    > [t]here are Syrian and Iraqi objects taken by Isis that are already in Europe . . . the destruction [of sites such as Mosul] hides the income of Daesh [Isis] and it is selling these things before it is destroying the temples that housed them . . . then afterwards it destroys the site and the destruction is meant to hide the level of theft. It destroys the evidence.

21. See Steven Lee Myers and Nicholas Kulish, "'Broken System' Allows ISIS to Profit from Looted Antiquities," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2016. Available here: www.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/world/europe/iraq-syria-antiquities-islamic-state.html [accessed June 12, 2018].
22. See Fisk, op cit. www.independent.co.uk/voices/isis-profits-from-destruction- of-antiquities-by-selling-relics-to-dealers-and-then-blowing-up-the-10483421.html [accessed June 22, 2018].
23. Andrew Keller, "Documenting ISIL's Antiquities Trafficking: The Looting and Destruction of Iraqi and Syrian Cultural Heritage: What We Know and What Can Be Done." Available here: https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/eb/rls/rm/2015/247610.htm [accessed December 17, 2018].
24. Keller, ibid., *passim*. In his presentation to the museum, Keller further observed that

    > Abu Sayyaf's personal involvement in the antiquities trade is even clearer given the wide assortment of actual artifacts that were found in his physical possession and recovered during the raid. The cache comprised an assortment of archaeological artifacts and fragments, historical objects, modern/contemporary items, and replica or faked antiquities.

25. Keller, ibid., *passim*. In an article published in *The New York Times* in June 2015, a journalist had previously outlined the aftermath of a Delta Force—an elite special mission unit of the United States Army—commando raid in May 2015 that brought to light a number of interconnected facts about Daesh and their overarching motivations behind a string of iconoclastic events. Focusing largely on the intelligence gathered on the leader of Daesh, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and the extent of his networks and whereabouts, the article noted that the group was inextricably involved in exploiting not only natural resources but also the antiquities looted from the numerous archaeological sites that were then under their control. See Eric Schmidt, "A Raid on ISIS Yields a Trove of Intelligence," *The New York Times*, June 8, 2015. Available here: www.nytimes.com/2015/06/09/world/middleeast/us-raid-in-syria-uncovers-details-on-isis-leadership-and-finances.html [accessed December 17, 2018].
26. Keller, ibid., *passim*.
27. In an era of so-called post-truth and fake news, YouTube has been criticized for its use of an algorithm that encourages readers to visit sites that promote conspiracy theories and extremist material. See Jack Nicas, "How YouTube Drives People to the Internet's Darkest Corners," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 7, 2018. Available here: www.wsj. com/articles/how-youtube-drives-viewers-to-the-internets- darkest-corners-1518020478?utm_content=bufferf25b7&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer [accessed June 25, 2018]. For a fuller discussion of these issues in the context of cultural practice, see Anthony Downey, "Transposing the Vernacular: Moving Images in the Work of Akram Zaatari," *New Art Exchange*, Nottingham, 2018, pp. 3–19.
28. It is important to note here that although Daesh raised considerable amounts of money through the looting and resale of cultural artifacts, it was also funded by Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The current political conflict between Qatar and the KSA notwithstanding, they both financed Daesh at some point, admittedly for different and often inconsistent reasons (largely to do with the spectrum of aggression the militant group advocated toward Shia Muslims and their support for a Salafi-inspired caliphate). For a nuanced account of who funded what, whom, and why, see Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "Qatar Is a U.S. Ally. They Also Knowingly Abet Terrorism. What's Going On?," October 6, 2014, *The New Republic*. Available here: https://newrepublic.com/article/119705/why-does-qatar- support-known-terrorists [accessed February 12, 2019]; and Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "Saudi Funding of ISIS," *The Washington Institute*, June 23, 2014. Available here: www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-funding-of-isis [accessed February 12, 2019]. The funding of Daesh by Qatar was one of several reasons given by the Saudi government for its original and ongoing attempts to politically and economically isolate Qatar. For one of the most extraordinary accounts of the other reasons behind these hostilities, including the ransoming of a Qatari hunting party captured in Iraq's Muthanna Province, see Robert F. Worth's essay "Kidnapped Royalty Become Pawns in Iran's Deadly Plot," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2018. Available here: www.nytimes.com/2018/03/14/magazine/how-a-ransom-for-royal-falconers-reshaped-the-middle-east.html [accessed March 18, 2018].
29. There is an extended and important discussion to be had here around how museums, with respect to their collections, governance, planning, exhibitions, future development, and communications, effect a program of decolonization. See *Decolonizing Museums*, 2015, published online by Internationale, available as PDF here: www.internationaleonline.org/media/files/02-decolonisingmuseums-1.pdf [accessed June 12, 2018].
30. The following paragraphs are largely drawn from a series of conversations conducted between myself and the artist in Berlin in February and November 2016, respectively, and a chapter on Hiwa K's artistic practice included in Anthony Downey, ed., *Don't Shrink Me to the Size of a Bullet: The Works of Hiwa K*, Buchhandlung Walther König, 2017, pp. 9–38.
31. The war between Iran and Iraq lasted eight years—from September 22, 1980, when Iraq invaded Iran, until a UN-brokered cease-fire on August 20, 1988—and began in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution in Iran, which saw the overthrow of Shah Pahlavi in 1979. It is estimated that over one million Iranian and Iraqi soldiers died as a result, with some estimates suggesting twice that amount. It is difficult to get full figures of civilian casualties on both sides, but Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimates that between 50,000 and 100,000 Kurdish people were killed during the so-called Anfāl campaign waged by Iraq from 1986 until 1989, including an estimated 5,000 civilian deaths in Halabja following the infamous chemical attack there. The Halabja attack, which resulted in the deaths of between 3,200 and 5,000 people and injuries to 10,000 more, is still historically recognized as the single most devastating use of poison gas on a civilian population. For fuller details, see the HRW report published in July 1993: www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/. For fuller details of the Iran–Iraq War, see Efraim Karsh, *The Iran–Iraq War, 1980–1988*, Osprey Publishing, 2002.

32. Some of the armaments were brought to Nazhad by individuals who could not deactivate them, which was left to him to do despite the fact that he was wounded in 2003 while dismantling the bullets from a DShK machine gun, which are highly volatile. Nazhad was also the victim of a land mine during the Iran–Iraq War, which left him with a pronounced limp.
33. For more on the bell's metallurgical structure and tone, see "Performative Resonances: Hiwa K in Conversation with Anthony Downey and Amal Khalaf," in T. Brayshaw, A. Fenemore and N. Witts, eds., *The Twenty-First Century Performance Reader*, Routledge, 2019, pp. 245–256 (originally published 2015).
34. See *Don't Shrink Me to the Size of a Bullet: The Works of Hiwa K*, op cit., pp. 213–214.
35. Adding further ignominy to this sorry state of affairs, it has been pointed out that Daesh made specific use of these captured weapons in propaganda films posted to social media. See Cassandra Vinograd, "ISIS Shows Off Its American-Made M16 Rifles," *NBC News*, September 1, 2015. Available here: https:// www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/isis-shows-u-s--made-weapons-n419371 [accessed January 15, 2018]. Vinograd also states that following the fall of Mosul, 2,300 U.S.-made Humvee vehicles were ceded by Iraqi forces to Daesh. My citation of this news report was sourced from an extensive corollary report, first published in December 2017. Compiled by the organization Conflict Armament Research, this important document chronicles the result of more than three years of field investigation into Islamic State supply chains. Detailing more than 40,000 items recovered from Daesh between 2014 and 2017, including U.S.-made rifles, the full report, "Weapons of the Islamic State," is available here: www.conflictarm.com/reports/weapons-of-the-islamic-state/ [accessed January 15, 2018].
36. See https://gatesofnineveh.wordpress.com/2015/02/27/assessing-the-damage-at-the-mosul-museum-part-1-the-assyrian-artifacts/ [accessed 28 June, 2016], where the following is explained:

    > The gate and its lamassu were first excavated by Sir Austen Henry Layard in 1849 but then re-buried. The left lamassu (seen above behind the ISIS narrator) was uncovered again sometime before 1892, and a local man paid an Ottoman official for the top half of it, cut it off and broken [*sic*] down over a fire in order to extract lime. The right lamassu remained buried until 1941 when heavy rains eroded the soil around the gate and exposed the two statues. The gate was later reconstructed around them and they have remained on display ever since.

37. See *Don't Shrink Me to the Size of a Bullet: The Works of Hiwa K*, op cit., pp. 213–214.
38. See Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, "Tony Blair Says Iraq War Helped Give Rise to ISIS," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2015. Available here: www.nytimes.com/2015/10/26/world/europe/tony-blair-says-iraq-war-helped-give-rise-to-isis.html [accessed November 11, 2018]. See also Hal Brands and Peter Feaver, "Was the Rise of ISIS Inevitable?," *Survival*, 59:3 (2017), pp. 7–54. In this article, Brands and Feaver offer one of the more insightful and focused studies on the inevitability or otherwise of Daesh's ascendancy, convincingly arguing that

    > [f]irst and foremost, the rise of ISIS was indeed an avertable tragedy. Had US policymakers made different but nevertheless plausible choices at one or more of several key junctures, ISIS probably would not have emerged as the full-blown threat it ultimately became.

    Apart from the 2003 invasion, the authors also highlight fundamental miscalculations that allowed for the expansion and dominance of Daesh, including "the US political disengagement from and military drawdown in Iraq in 2010–11) . . . [and] the

decision not to intervene more robustly in the Syrian civil war between 2011 and 2013." A core element in Brands and Feaver's analysis also points to the fateful decision, in late 2013–early 2014 "not to strangle ISIS in its cradle by taking military action before it conquered much of western Iraq and swooped down upon Mosul." See Brands and Feaver, pp. 8–9.

39. See Raymond W. Baker, Shereem T. Ismael and Tareq Y. Ismael, eds., *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq: Why Museums Were Looted, Libraries Burned and Academics Murdered* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). This volume is one of the more important accounts of the profoundly far-reaching implications of not only destroying cultural artifacts but also the long-term effects upon the intellectual life of a country.
40. In the wake of these ignominious events, three White House cultural advisers, appointed by George W. Bush, resigned. Martin Sullivan, chair of the administration's Advisory Committee on Cultural Property for eight years, told Reuters news agency that "[i]t didn't have to happen" and was preventable. The other two resignations were by Richard S. Lanier and Gary Vikan. For a fuller report, see "US Experts Resign over Iraq Looting," *BBC*, April 18, 2003. Available here: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/2958009.stm [accessed June 14, 2018].
41. Rakowitz's *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist* began as an idea in 2007, with a project that examined the looting of artifacts from the National Museum of Iraq in 2003 and the whereabouts of those still missing. For full details, see www.michaelrakowitz.com/the-invisible-enemy-should-not-exist [accessed June 27, 2017].
42. Reported in Steven Lee Myers and Nicholas Kulish, "'Broken System' Allows ISIS to Profit From Looted Antiquities," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2016.
43. This sentence and the one that follows draw upon my research for an earlier essay, published in 2016. See Anthony Downey, "Future Imperfect: Critical Propositions and Institutional Realities in the Middle East," in Downey, ed., *Future Imperfect: Contemporary Art Practices and Cultural Institutions in the Middle East*, Sternberg Press, 2016, pp. 15–46; p. 25.
44. See Dirk Adriaensens, "Killing the Intellectual Class: Academics as Targets," in *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq*, op cit., pp. 119–148.
45. See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, Penguin, 2007, *passim*. Similar arguments are made in Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, MIT Press, 2015, pp. 142–150. See also Patricia Ventura, "Biopower and Operation Iraqi (Governing thought) Freedom," in *Neoliberal Culture: Living with American Neoliberalism*, Ashgate Publishing, 2012, pp. 107–134. The connections between neoliberal economic policy and human rights abuses are likewise significant elements in David Harvey's volume *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, 2005, *passim*.
46. For a complete list of Bremer's edicts, see https://web.archive.org/web/20100206084411/www.cpa-iraq.org/ regulations/.
47. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was published on November 2, 2001. Article 1 is titled "Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity," while Article 4 is titled "Human rights as guarantees of cultural diversity." The issues of cultural diversity and human rights are indelibly interlinked from the outset of these documents. For the full text, see http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.
48. Kareen Shaheen, "ISIS Fighters Destroy Ancient Artefacts at Mosul Museum." Available here: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/26/isis-fighters-destroy-ancient-artefacts-mosul-museum-iraq.
49. For a full report of Bokova's speech to the UN General Assembly, see https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1287/. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199, issued on February 12, 2015, can be accessed here https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232164.
50. This nomenclature is a feature of a recent report, *Cultural Genocide and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, authored by Edward C. Luck, J. Paul Getty Trust Occasional Papers In Cultural Heritage Policy, No. 2: 2018. Available here: www.getty.edu/publications/pdfs/CulturalGenocide_Luck.pdf [accessed November 23, 2018].

51. Reporting from Al-Shikhan in Iraq, 50 kilometers to the north of Mosul, Mohammed A Salih and Wladimir van Wilgenburg captured the predicament of Yazidis who found themselves trapped on Mount Sinjar from early August 2014, facing either death through starvation and dehydration or death by Daesh militants, in the title of their article "Iraqi Yazidis: 'If We Move They Will Kill Us,'" August 5, 2014. Available here: www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/iraqi-yazidis-if-move-they-will-kill-us-20148513656188206.html [accessed June, 14, 2018].