



The Islamic State and its Treatment of ‘Out-Groups’: A Comparative Analysis

Drawing on internal Islamic State documents, theological treatises and other lines of evidence, this paper presents a comparative analysis of the Islamic State’s treatment of three religious groups- the Yezidis, Christians and Shi’a- utilising the analytical framework of in-group/out-group dynamics and how they relate to the Islamic State’s extremist worldview. The paper shows that despite the Islamic State’s hostility to the general mass of ‘out-group’ of ‘disbelievers,’ there is not necessarily a monolithic ‘out-group’ but rather different types with some being deemed even worse than others. This differentiation then has implications for the group’s policies towards different religious groups, especially on the question of identity-based crimes such as persecution and genocide.

AYMENN JAWAD AL-TAMIMI



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Introduction: The Islamic State and Defining the Extremist Worldview

Few external observers would disagree on characterising the Islamic State as an 'extremist' group as a matter of intuition and instinct, but what exactly does it mean to make such a characterisation? Analysis of this question is partly relevant because the Islamic State firmly rejects the notion that it is 'extremist,' and instead defines itself as following a middle path between the laxity of "Murji'ites" and the excesses of "Hārijites."¹ Both of these designations refer to adherents of trends that emerged in the early years of Islamic history.² It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss those trends in depth, but the key point to note here is that for the Islamic State, "Murji'ites" are essentially those seen as having deviated from the correct path in compromising on principles and beliefs, especially in the necessity of takfir (declaring someone or a group of people to be disbelievers) on certain groups that claim adherence to Islam, whereas the "Hārijites" are seen as "extremists" in the other direction with a tendency to excessive takfir.

These sorts of distinctions that the Islamic State makes in defining itself have practical relevance and are not merely matters of theory, as the group has gone after those it has perceived as being extremist rivals. For example, in West Africa, the group's official affiliate (the West Africa "wilāya"/"province") has repeatedly clashed with a group that was led by Abu Bakr Shekau, who served as the former leader of the Islamic State's West Africa province but was subsequently removed. The West Africa affiliate launched a major offensive against Shekau's group- dubbed "Hārijites" and "the people of extremism"- in the Sambisa forest region in 2021, largely taking control of the region and securing the defection of a number of members of Shekau's group.³ The Islamic State celebrated this offensive as a proof that the organisations has remained since its founding "a middle path between the "Hārijites" and the Murji'ites on the prophetic methodology."

There is thus the need for a concrete understanding of what constitutes 'extremism' or an extremist worldview. In the existing literature, problems have arisen in defining extremism, often marred by relativism and the political context in which the literature is written. For instance, there has been a tendency to equate extremism with mere political radicalism in the sense of calls for revolutionary action and overhauls of the existing political and social system, but there is no single accepted political system in the world, and what would constitute a radical change in one place would not necessarily be seen as such elsewhere. In other words, it is not sufficient to deem the Islamic State as extremist simply because it calls for the eventual replacement of all existing political systems in the world with its concept of a "caliphate on the prophetic methodology," concisely defined as a system of rule in which the ruler- the caliph- is chosen through a process of consultation among those qualified to choose the caliph, and rules in an absolute sense by "God's law" that is embodied in the legal rulings of Islam.

1 "This is our 'aqīda and this is our manhaj," al-Himma Library, p. 3.

2 For a historical study of Murji'ites, see e.g. Saleh Said Agha, "A viewpoint of the Murji'a in the Umayyad period: evolution through application," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 1997), pp. 1-42. In brief, Murji'ites are seen as adherents of the concept of *Irjā'*, which is a word that means "postponement." In the negative sense, *Irjā'* is portrayed as the notion that judgement on a person's faith is ultimately left to God, that faith is not tied with deeds, and that a declaration of faith alone is an obstacle to being declared a disbeliever. On Hārijism, see Nelly Lahoud, "The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction," (Hurst, London, 2010), pp. 57-96.

3 Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Report in Islamic State's al-Naba' Newsletter on Destroying Abu Bakr Shekau's Group," [aymennjawad.org](https://aymennjawad.org/2021/07/report-in-islamic-state-al-naba-newsletter-on), July 2, 2021 (accessed here: <https://aymennjawad.org/2021/07/report-in-islamic-state-al-naba-newsletter-on>).



Rather, this summation of the Islamic State's political manifesto needs to be placed in a broader context. A useful framework in which to view this call for action and which allows us to formulate more clearly why the Islamic State is extremist is the two interlinked dichotomies of the in-group versus the out-group and the crisis versus the solution: dichotomies based on the concepts of identity and providing certainty about how the world works (i.e. a system of meaning).⁴

It is normal for individuals to define themselves by one or more characterisations that may be shared by other individuals, which can form the basis of one or more in-group identities as opposed to other individuals who do not share those characteristics (out-groups). Some familiar examples include notions of citizenship, nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation and political affiliation. It can also be normal for members of in-groups to compete with each other: one example being how political parties might compete with each other for votes in a democratic system. While such competition may be intense and involve some personal animosity, it need not be inherently so. It is perfectly possible, for example, for candidates of different parties to compete against each other without the need for hostility.

However, in some cases, an in-group identity may be defined in such a way that its existence and continuation is premised on the idea of never-ending hostility to the out-group. This hostile dichotomy is in turn linked to the dichotomy of a crisis and solution. That is, the in-group versus out-group dynamic is tied to a problem that faces the in-group and is caused by the out-group, which must be resolved through a solution that entails hostile action against the out-group. This hostile action might be simple spite, separation and enmity, but in more severe cases entails violence. It is in this sort of framework that an extremist worldview should be understood.

It can be seen how this conception of extremism fits the case of the Islamic State. Membership of the Islamic State constitutes an in-group of some sort, but the Islamic State also claims to represent the interests of a broader in-group that it defines in various ways, even as it seems to acknowledge that only a minority of people from that broader in-group will ever join the ranks of the Islamic State in the sense of becoming actual members. Designations of that broader in-group include simply "the Muslims" and the "camp of faith." This conception of the in-group is set against a broader out-group that can be defined as those the Islamic State does not perceive as being Muslims for various reasons. In other words, those who adhere to "disbelief" (Arabic: *kufr*) in its various forms. This out-group is presented through designations such as the "camp of disbelief," "the group of the disbelievers" and the like.

The relation between these groups is presented as one of inherent hostility, taking on an eternal, cosmic dimension that goes back to the beginning of the world, as the in-group represents the cause of truth (Arabic: *haqq*) and the out-group represents the cause of falsehood (Arabic: *bāṭil*). This outlook was made clear in a speech by the group's former leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi from September 2017,⁵ in which he outlined how Satan (*Iblis*) refused to prostrate before Adam as God had commanded, and while Satan gained respite from God's reckoning, he vowed always to be lying in wait for Adam and his descendants, seeking to lure them away from the true path. As Baghdadi then elaborated: "From that time, the spark of the conflict between truth and falsehood

4 This discussion draws in particular on J.M. Berger, *Extremism*, (MIT Press, 2018) and Haroro J. Ingram, "Deciphering the Siren Call of Militant Islamist Propaganda," ICCT, September 2016 (accessed here: <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2016/09/ICCT-Ingram-Deciphering-the-Siren-Call-of-Militant-Islamist-Propaganda-September2016.pdf>).

5 "Your Lord has sufficed as guide and helper," *al-Naba'* issue 99, pp. 8-11 (September 2017).

has been lit, and creation in its entirety has been divided into two groups with no third besides them: the group of the believers and the group of the disbelievers.”

Thus, even the mere existence of the camp of the disbelievers (the out-group) is portrayed as some crisis facing the believing in-group, as it is seen as inherently at odds with the in-group and always scheming against it. This crisis is seen as having become particularly acute today, as the Muslim populations are divided according to nation-states ruled by people the Islamic State deems to be disbelievers and representing the interests of other disbelievers. This is to be contrasted with the Islamic State’s solution to this problem: namely, uniting Muslims as a single entity in the form of a caliphate, and then working to subjugate the entire world under its dominion. It is therefore necessary for the in-group to be hostile towards the out-group, not only in the form of simple enmity, but also in the form of violent action embodied in jihad in order to realise the vision of the caliphate.

Thus, there is a remarkably simple system of meaning for understanding the world, and one in which its adherents are given certainty about how the world works. If the in-group adopts the correct posture towards the out-group and pursues the solution prescribed by the Islamic State, it will ultimately realise success. If the in-group deviates and gives up on the solution, it will experience degradation and humiliation.⁶ Any apparent setbacks, meanwhile, are simply explained as an act of God’s testing of the believers to purify their ranks and steer them to the ultimate final victory that will come- which only entails steadfastness and persistence on the path, no matter how intense the hardships might appear to be.⁷

However, while there is this basic system of meaning that highlights the conflict between belief and disbelief, it is also true that the out-group is not necessarily seen as a monolith. Certainly, all types of disbelievers are seen as ultimately hostile to the in-group, necessitating hostility to them, but some types of disbelievers are seen as worse than others. This has practical implications for the Islamic State in terms of according priority to fighting certain out-groups, and how the Islamic State should deal with those out-groups. It is analysis of these distinctions that constitutes the burden of this paper, and it is hoped that illumination of these distinctions will help prosecutors to understand better whether Islamic State policies evidence international crimes, notably identity-based crimes such as persecution and genocide. From the outset, it should be emphasised that these policies are intimately linked to the group’s ideology.

This paper will specifically examine how the Islamic State views and has dealt with three different religious groups: the Yezidis, Christians and Shi’a. Each of these groups is representative of a specific kind of out-group from the Islamic State’s perspective, and accordingly the policies for dealing with each of them differ to a certain extent, in particular on the status of adult males as opposed to the status of women and children. This paper will analyse each group one-by-one.

6 For a representative example of this line of thinking, see “Jihad is jihad oh people of Ethiopia,” *al-Naba’* issue 394, p. 3 (June 8, 2023), which explains that whereas the first generations of Muslims followed the path of the Prophet and waged jihad against the disbelievers and thus attained success and conquest, later generations deviated from this path and thus God imposed the disbelievers on them. The editorial urges Muslims in Ethiopia protesting mosque demolitions to adopt this worldview and wage jihad.

7 E.g. “This is what God and His Messenger have promised us,” *al-Naba’* issue 53, pp. 8-9 (transcript of a speech by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi); “Glad tidings for those who endure,” *al-Naba’* issue 159, p. 8, December 6, 2018.

The methodology of this paper primarily relies on internal documents, literature and propaganda produced by the Islamic State itself in order to elucidate the group's positions on these religious groups. This is to ensure that the information on the Islamic State's positions in theory and practice is as reliable as possible. While new interviews could have been conducted with members of these religious groups, in general it was not felt that those interviews would have added new information beyond what can already be concluded and inferred from internal documents, literature and propaganda, and already existing interview data from prior reports. Interview data from prior reports are drawn upon when the other primary source data do not provide a wholly clear picture.

THE YEZIDIS: PLAIN ORIGINAL DISBELIEVERS

The Islamic State's treatment of the Yezidis- an ethno-religious community whose primary homeland has been the Sinjar area of west Ninawa province in Iraq near the border with Syria- attracted worldwide attention in 2014, as the group's seizure of Mosul and other towns in Ninawa province provided an ample basis for the group to move on the poorly defended Sinjar area. The group's treatment of the Yezidi community was most recently recognised by Germany's Bundestag in January 2023 as genocide.⁸ Five years prior to this recognition, the Armenian parliament had recognised the Islamic State's policies towards Yezidis as genocide.⁹

What then was the view of the Islamic State of this community as an out-group and could its approach based on that view constitute genocide? To answer this question, there is a considerable amount of literature and documents from the Islamic State itself on the matter. The Islamic State broadly categorises out-group into two types of disbelievers: "original disbelievers" and "apostates." Original disbelievers are people who were originally born in a religion outside of Islam, while apostates are people who are considered to have entered into Islam but have then left the religion, whether by openly declaring their abandonment of the religion or through espousing ideas that are deemed so deviant and heretical as to take the one who professes them outside of Islam, even if that person claims to be a Muslim.

In turn however, "original disbelievers" are divided into two types: the "People of the Book" (i.e. followers of previous scriptures considered to have been revealed but corrupted, and thus entailing Jews and Christians at least) and disbelievers outside this framework. In the Islamic State's propaganda and literature, the view of the Yezidis is an unambiguous one: they constitute original disbelievers of the latter type. Indeed, the Islamic State's Research and Fatwa-Issuing Department (Arabic: *Diwān al-Buḥūt wa al-Iftā'*), which was created following the announcement of the Caliphate on 29 June 2014, was very quick to make clear the group's ruling on the Yezidis as the Islamic State moved on the Sinjar area. Its eleventh fatwa, dated to August 9, 2014, and signed by the head of the department at the time (the Bahraini cleric Turki Bin'ali),¹⁰ dealt with the question of whether the Yezidis constitute original disbelievers or apostates as follows (the ruling is quoted in full):

8 "Bundesag erkennt IS-Verbrechen an Jesiden als Völkermord," Bundestag, January 19, 2023 (accessed here: <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2023/kw03-de-jesiden-927032>).

9 "Armenia recognizes IS massacres of Yezidis as Genocide," Eurasianet, January 23, 2018 (<https://eurasianet.org/armenia-recognizes-is-massacres-of-yezidis-as-genocide>)

10 Fatwa no. 11 issued by *Diwān al-Buḥūt wa al-Iftā'*, August 9, 2014.

“The Yezidis are original disbelievers, and not of the People of Book. They do not have the doubt of a book, but rather they are idolaters. As for what some contemporary studies have opined in claiming that their origin is Islamic, this has not been established through an authentic record of evidence. Even if we were to suppose for the sake of argument that this origin has been proven, in this case they have nonetheless converted from apostasy and heresy to idolatry, and the predominant opinion among the people of knowledge is that the one who moves from a lower religion to a higher religion undergoes that conversion.

The Yezidis are unlike the Rafidites [Shi’a],¹¹ for the Rafidites claim affiliation with Islam and articulate the contracting of it, while committing a number of its nullifiers.¹² Therefore, the latter are apostates. As for the Yezidis, they do not claim affiliation with Islam anyway, and they do not articulate the contracting of it, but rather they claim to be an ancient religion.

The fact that the Yezidis have some rituals that resemble the rituals of the Muslims is not something that influences the ruling on them, as many paths and religions- whether heavenly or earthly in origin- have ritual resembling the rituals of the Muslims, but that has not led us to ascribing these paths and religions to apostasy.

Therefore, we consider that the rulings of the original disbelievers are to be applied to this idolatrous sect, as one expects them to be clarified from the books of the jurisprudence. And God knows best.”

Before dealing with the practical consequences of this opinion, a couple of clarifications should be made. First, “they do not have the doubt of a book” here means that the Islamic State does not consider the Yezidis to have what might be considered to be a previously revealed sacred book from God like the Torah and Gospel, such that they could be considered People of the Book and not like other original disbelievers. Second, “they do not articulate the contracting of it [Islam],” means that the Yezidis do not make the Islamic declaration of faith (the šahāda), such that they could be dealt with as though they have entered into Islam.

YEZIDI MEN AND OLDER BOYS: CONVERSION OR DEATH

As a result of this ruling, Yezidis are ultimately not allowed to be afforded toleration as Yezidis under the Islamic State, and thus have no rights to life or property under its authority. Since the Islamic State’s ambitions are ultimately global, one of the Islamic State’s logical end goals would be ending the existence of the Yezidi community as a community with its own Yezidi identity and religion throughout the world, or at least in areas over which the Islamic State holds power. This properly fits the definition of genocide in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, where genocide was defined as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”¹³

So what practically does the Islamic State’s genocidal approach mean? For the men and older boys (pubescent and older) of the Yezidi community in particular, there are only two choices

11 “Rafidites” is a derogatory term for Shi’a partly based on their supposed ‘rejection’ of true Islam (at least in the Islamic State’s eyes).

12 “Nullifiers of Islam” (Arabic: nawāqid al-Islam) is a concept first formulated by Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, according to whom certain pronouncements, actions and opinions will ‘nullify’ one’s Islam and therefore take that person outside the faith. The concept of the nullifiers serves as an important basis for takfir and was taught by the Islamic State to new recruits as part of its basic course on Islamic monotheism. See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “Islamic State Training Camp Textbook: “Course in Monotheism”- Complete Text, Translation and Analysis,” [aymennjawad.org](https://aymennjawad.org/17633/islamic-state-training-camp-textbook-course-in), July 26, 2015 (<https://aymennjawad.org/17633/islamic-state-training-camp-textbook-course-in>). On the relationship between Wahhabi theology and the Islamic State, see Cole Bunzel, “From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State,” Brookings, March 2015 (<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>)

13 “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” United Nations General Assembly, December 9, 1948.

that face them: conversion to Islam or death. Indeed, there are a number of reports attesting to mass executions of Yezidi men and boys over the age of 12. For example, in their demographic documentation of the Islamic State's attack on the Yezidi village of Kojo (/Kocho), Sareta Ashraph and Valeria Cetorelli noted that the Islamic State commander who led the group's entry into the village had the village's remaining Yezidi population of 1200 people gathered in the village school, with the women and children kept upstairs and the men and adolescent boys kept downstairs.¹⁴ The men and adolescent boys, who did not convert to Islam, were subsequently removed from the school in contingents, and it would appear that the majority of them were executed by gunfire in different locations.¹⁵

In contrast, if Yezidis convert to Islam, then they are supposed to be afforded protection as Muslims. Indeed, it would seem that some Yezidis opted for this path when the Islamic State took control of the Sinjar area, and the group advertised what were effectively forced conversions in a video release from its "Wilāyat Ninawa" ("Ninawa province") media office, entitled "Entry of hundreds of the Yezidis into Islam."¹⁶ The opening of the video contains a description of the Yezidis, stating from the outset that they are a "sect of the original disbelievers." The description includes some familiar charges against the Yezidis by outsiders, most notably the claim that they worship Satan, though it should be noted that this claim by itself does not make the Yezidis worse in the eyes of the Islamic State than other original disbelievers who are not considered People of the Book.

Speaking from inside the Sinjar area, an Islamic State fighter is asked about how the group dealt with the Yezidis of Sinjar, in response to which he says:

"We invited the Yezidis to Islam before the conquest of Sinjar and before the conquest of Tel Afar, in exchange for which they would have security and we would provide them everything they need as far as we can. But they insisted on fighting us. This is what I have seen with my own eye, so this is their state of affairs in the mountain. But here I give you glad tidings that there are many families who have converted to Islam and I have met with them, including women, children and elderly, and they are joyful about entering into Islam, and they have said: "You have come late.""¹⁷

Asked also about his message to the Yezidis who had not yet converted to Islam and were remaining on Mount Sinjar, he said:

"We advise and indeed implore the Yezidis to come down from the mountain and to convert to Islam. First, in order to be kept away from the Hellfire in the Hereafter. Second, if they remain on the mountain, they will die of hunger and thirst. As for the help of the Western and Crusader states, this is a lie. Every day they say: help us. Hours later they say: they have died because of such-and-such. This is so if they stay on the mountain, which is not in their interest. But if they come down from the mountain and convert to Islam, this is in their interest. First, we will offer them everything they need, we will secure their life for them, indeed we will defend them, and we will be killed for them as we will not allow anyone to

14 Valeria Cetorelli and Sareta Ashraph, "A demographic documentation of ISIS's attack on the Yazidi village of Kocho," LSE Middle East Centre Report, June 2019, pp. 9-18 (https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/report/a-demographic-documentation-of-isis-attack-on-the-yazidi-village-of-kocho/Cetorelli_Demographic_documentation_ISIS_attack.pdf)

15 Ibid.

16 "Entry of hundreds of Yezidis into Islam," Wilāyat Ninawa Media Office, August 2014.

17 Ibid.

approach them, and they will live a good and happy life with refuge, housing, residency, and other aspects of livelihood. If they enter Sinjar or any other town after converting to Islam, we will defend them and offer them all the help they need.”¹⁸

The rest of the video consists of a busload of Yezidi men who are taught the declaration of faith, thereby becoming Muslims, in addition to being taught the ritual of Muslim prayer. Speaking in Arabic and Kurdish, some “former” Yezidis declare their joy about entering into Islam, claim they are being treated justly and advise the other Yezidis to do the same.

In religious terms, the Islamic State justifies its approach in the video as being in accordance with a saying (ḥadīth) attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, who, according to two collections of ḥadīths generally deemed the most reliable in Sunni Islam (Bukhari and Muslim), said: “I have been commanded to fight the people until they testify that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, establish prayer and give zakat. If they do that, they have guaranteed from me security for their blood and wealth except in what concerns the right of Islam,¹⁹ and their reckoning is upon God Almighty.” It also portrays its actions as not driven by some cruelty for its own sake but rather as part of a divinely-mandated mission to bring people out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of Islam. Regardless of this Islamic State gloss, however, the group’s approach still amounts to an effective choice of conversion or death for Yezidi men and older boys, which constitutes a crime of genocide.

It should also be noted that a declared conversion to Islam did not necessarily ensure full protection against other forms of abuse at the hands of the organisation. For example, the UN has documented that some Yezidis who declared conversion to Islam and were allowed to live with their families were settled in villages in the Tel Afar area that had been previously inhabited by Shi’a Turkmen. Yet rather than being left alone, these converted Yezidis were forced to engage in labour for the Islamic State, building tunnels and performing agricultural work without a salary.²⁰ In addition, in some instances the group may have doubted the sincerity of conversions and thus executed some Yezidi men and older boys who had declared conversion. The UN reports that in April-May 2015, the group emptied out three villages inhabited by Yezidis who had declared conversion to Islam, separating the men and older boys from their families.²¹ These men and older boys have subsequently not been heard from again. Unfortunately, no internal documents or propaganda items have been unearthed that could attest to their fate, but it is reasonable to suppose that the group had decided that they were really still Yezidis at heart and thus merited death.

YOUNGER YEZIDI BOYS: RECRUITED INTO ISLAMIC STATE

For the Yezidi boys younger than twelve but older than seven, it would appear that the group primarily took them to be ‘re-educated’ and brought up as Muslims, bringing them into the system of the training camps and preparing them to become future fighters for the group.

18 Ibid.

19 That is, if, for example, the person commits a crime for which Islam mandates the death penalty, then being a Muslim is no protection for that person against the death penalty.

20 “A Call for Accountability and Protection: Yezidi Survivors of Atrocities Committed by ISIL,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq- Human Rights Office (August 2016), pp. 4-12 (https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMIRReport12Aug2016_en.pdf).

21 ““They came to destroy”: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” Human Rights Council, 32nd session, Agenda Item 4 (June 15, 2016), p. 9 (https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A_HRC_32_CRP2_en.pdf).

Here, no internal documents or literature have been surfaced to attest to these practices, but they are documented in reports by the UN and elsewhere.²²

Moreover, there is an Islamic State propaganda video that attests to its recruitment of Yazidi boys into the training camps and use of them as military personnel. The video is entitled “So follow their guidance” and was released by the Wilāyat Ninawa media office in February 2017.²³ The theme of the video is to highlight how those who were previously ‘astray’ have seen the path of truth and thus joined the Islamic State and became ‘guided’, eventually serving as suicide bombers for the group. Thus, among those documented are former members of Syrian “apostate” insurgent factions and an Iraqi who used to be a Sufi (another trend deemed heretical and “apostate” by the Islamic State). Around 17:30 minutes or so into the video, the narrator then describes how God has made human nature naturally “sound” (i.e. that it would be naturally inclined to correct monotheism/Islam and ethics), with the implication being that it is the upbringing of the child that can make him/her a disbeliever. The narrator then continues, with apparent scenes of Yazidi boys receiving lessons in Islam and participating in training camp sessions:

“So here are the Yazidis, about whose fate the hireling media bleated, since they were turned over by the grace of God alone to the Islamic State, as the Šari‘ī schools were opened for them, calling to the methodology and guidance of truth. So God blessed them with guidance and entry into Islam, and they rejected what they used to worship besides Him, and the Exalted granted them a further blessing, in that He made them mujahidin in the ranks of their brothers, and He caused the hastening of those of them who hastened to perform martyrdom operations. How excellent they are thanks to God, who bestowed them as arrows in the quiver of Islam.”

The video then features the testimony of two Yazidi boys who carried out a suicide bombing for the Islamic State: one dubbed Abu Yūsuf al-Sinjarī/Amjad al-Sinjarī (implying he is from Sinjar), and the other called As‘ad/Abu Ḥaṭṭāb. Both boys speak in Kurdish, further suggesting they were in fact originally Yazidis. Abu Yūsuf explains how they used to “worship Satan” and were initially living “in Jahiliya [pre-Islamic ignorance] and did not think of halal or haram [what is permissible and what is forbidden according to Islam].” They then saw the difference between the Islamic State and the Yazidis, in that in the case of the latter, they would not punish the offspring of a high-rank member of the community for fornication, whereas the Islamic State would consistently apply the hadd punishment mandated by God.

On seeing the Islamic State, they entered a Šari‘ī institute where they studied Islamic doctrine, and then they were taken to a training camp in Syria, and after the camp course, they gave allegiance to the Islamic State’s caliph and transferred to the “Anas bin al-Naḍr Battalion” (a battalion named after a companion of the Prophet, renowned for his bravery and his willingness to die fighting). Abu Yūsuf then says that he and his brother enlisted in the registers of would-be “martyrdom operatives.” He then adds: “Exalted be god, we want to plunge into the enemies of God and carry out [the martyrdom operation] among them, even if they are our parents.” This

22 e.g. Jennifer Bell, “Kidnapped by ISIS, brainwashed and turned into a child soldier: a Yazidi’s story,” *al-Arabiya*, April 14, 2021 (accessed here: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/04/14/Kidnapped-by-ISIS-brainwashed-and-turned-into-a-child-soldier-A-Yazidi-s-story->); and ““They came to destroy”: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” p. 19.

23 “New video message from the Islamic State. So from their guidance take an example- Wilāyat Nīnawā,” *Jihadology*, February 14, 2017 (<https://jihadology.net/2017/02/14/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-so-from-their-guidance-take-an-example-wilayat-ninawa/>). All translations from the video are my own.

highlights how the Islamic State sought to break all links for young Yezidi boys with the religion and community of their upbringing, to the point of turning them actively against the Yezidi religion and community and inculcating the same genocidal mindset.

THE TAKING OF SABĪ: A FURTHER ASPECT OF GENOCIDE

While the men and adolescent boys faced an effective choice of conversion or death, the Yezidi women and girls aged nine and above²⁴ who did not surrender in conversion to Islam faced a fate that perhaps horrified the world even more: namely, enslavement, which would allow for these women and girls to be exploited for domestic and/or sexual purposes by their owners. The Islamic State produced a substantial amount of literature justifying this practice, which only makes sense if the group were actually engaging in enslavement of these women and members had questions on how to deal with their female slaves. Other documentary evidence also attests to the practice of buying, selling and transfer of female slaves among members of the Islamic State. Conversely, there is no evidence to suggest that the wider Muslim populations who lived under the Islamic State were intended to be given access to these female slaves.

The immediate justification for this practice of taking Yezidi women as captive is the concept of sabī. According to a treatise discussing rulings and issues associated with the concept of sabī and issued by the “Research and Studies Office”²⁵ of the Islamic State,²⁶ sabī is defined as taking the women and children of a “warring people” as captives, while the Arabic term asr is applied to taking men of such people as prisoners or captives.²⁷ The book also explains that while sabī is technically distinct from the actual practice of enslavement following captivity (Arabic: *istirqāq*), in practice the former has become synonymous with captivity and enslavement at the same time for both women and children.²⁸ The woman who is taken captive and enslaved is thus known as sabīya, while the plural is sabāya.

It should be noted that the term “warring people” here applies to any original disbelievers who are considered to be “at war” with the Islamic State in the sense that they do not have a pact of protection with the group. It has already been noted that for the Yezidis, there is no entitlement to any toleration under the Islamic State as a community preserving its religion and identity, and thus the Yezidis, so long as they do not convert to Islam, are considered “warring people” of the original disbelievers. Hence, their women have no protection against enslavement except in two circumstances: (i) they convert to Islam prior to being taken captive

24 As documented by the UN, it would appear that the age of nine was the minimum age at which a Yezidi girl might be sold separately, whereas those below the age of nine would be moved and transferred together with their mothers. See ““They came to destroy”: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” pp. 9-18. However, no internal Islamic State documents or literature attest to this distinction by age.

25 The successor body to the *Diwān al-Buḥūt wa al-Iftā'*, which in late 2014 was renamed the *Hay'at al-Buḥūt wa al-Iftā'* and then the Office of Research and Studies in 2015. While this name change might suggest that the institution had been ‘downgraded’ in its authority, the institution in fact retained its same functions.

26 “Sabī: Rulings and Issues,” Office of Research and Studies (al-Himma Library, 2nd printing, July-August 2015), pp. 4-5.

27 Theoretically, as alluded to in the treatise, there is the possibility for men of the original disbelievers to be taken captive and enslaved, including those men who are not of the People of the Book, since scholars offered differing views on the matter. It is also theoretically possible for such men to be held for ransom. Yet the treatise does not take a firm view on the matter, and there is no evidence for enslavement of Yezidi men by the Islamic State, or for their being held for ransom. Rather the choice applied to Yezidi men was two-fold between conversion and death.

28 “Sabī: Rulings and Issues,” pp. 4-5. Yezidi male children who were initially captured however generally appear to have been taken to be re-educated and brought up as Muslims, rather than confined to slavery with the females. See e.g. Jennifer Bell, “Kidnapped by ISIS, brainwashed and turned into a child soldier: a Yazidi’s story,” *al-Arabiya*, April 14, 2021 (accessed here: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/04/14/Kidnapped-by-ISIS-brainwashed-and-turned-into-a-child-soldier-A-Yazidi-s-story>).

and enslaved, in which case they would be afforded protection as Muslims, or (ii) the “Imam” (i.e. the Caliph) makes a decision that the women should not be enslaved but rather should be dealt with ‘benevolently’ or held as captives for ransom only.²⁹ It is likely that the desire to protect the women and children from enslavement partly prompted some Yezidi families to declare conversion to Islam to gain protection as Muslims. Conversely, there is no evidence that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made exceptional allowances for Yezidi women not to be enslaved or only held for ransom.

Some evidence suggests that the security guarantee that was supposed to be afforded for the Yezidi families who declared conversion to Islam was not always adhered to. In 2019, “Abu Muslim al-Iraqi” - a person who claimed that he had once served as an amni (security official) in the Islamic State- published testimony of his experiences inside the Islamic State,³⁰ and there is strong reason to believe in the authenticity of the accounts he has published and that he is who he says he is. According to Abu Muslim, the Islamic State made clear that the men who converted to Islam would be spared and that their women who converted would not be taken as sabāya. This pact was supposedly guaranteed by al-Hajj Abdullah, who would later become the caliph Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi who succeeded Baghdadi following the latter’s death in 2019. These Yezidis who converted were allowed to reside in the village of Kojo. Later on, per his testimony, most of the original sabāya in had fled from Islamic State hands, and the prices for them had increased, and thus there supposedly arose a pressing need for more sabāya. Thus, in one instance by order of Baghdadi’s Iraq deputy al-Hajj Mu’tazz, a unit was formed in which Abu Muslim participated, and a Yezidi family was taken from Kojo, ostensibly to return to its original village. However, on return to the village, the family’s seven daughters were taken and distributed as sabāya to a select group of people who had agreed on the act. While complaints were raised to the Islamic State’s judiciary system about the matter, those who were questioned about the matter simply noted they had acted on the order of al-Hajj Mu’tazz, and so they were not held accountable.

Internal documents also point to the practice of distribution, sale and ownership of sabāya among Islamic State members and their families. Most notably, a set of directives issued by the Delegated Committee³¹ in August-September 2015 made clear that the sabāya were not to be sold to the “masses” (meaning the general population living under Islamic State) or to their original families, such that the one who did sell a sabāya to such parties would have the entire sum of the sale confiscated.³² This indicates that the group only intended for sabāya to be circulated among its own members and their families. Moreover, personnel rosters were often kept in order to track living and deceased members’ personal and familial circumstances, which would be important in determining the salaries and payments to which members or their families were entitled. Some of these rosters keep a note of whether members had any sabāya and children of sabāya, since the addition of such members to one’s family would entitle the member to a larger salary.³³

29 E.g. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

30 Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “Opposition to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: The Testimony of a Former Amni,” [aymennjawad.org](https://aymennjawad.org/22715/opposition-to-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-the-testimony), May 21, 2019 (accessed here: <https://aymennjawad.org/22715/opposition-to-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-the-testimony>).

31 A committee authorised by the Islamic State’s caliph to oversee the functioning of the group’s departments and sectors.

32 See Specimen 25J in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents,” [aymennjawad.org](https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/09/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-2) (accessed here: <https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/09/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-2>).

33 See e.g. Specimens 40Q and 40R in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents,” [aymennjawad.org](https://aymennjawad.org/2017/08/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-3) (accessed here: <https://aymennjawad.org/2017/08/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-3>). The documents list

One document attests to two administrative bodies of the Islamic State involved in the trafficking and treatment of sabāya: one being the Department of War Spoils and Booty (Diwān al-Ġanā'im wa al-Fay') and the other being the Department of Judiciary and Grievances (Diwān al-Qaḍā' wa al-Mazālim).³⁴ The former, it would seem, was the initial body under whose authority the sabāya would initially come and would regulate the initial distributions and divisions, while the latter authorised and regulated all transactions involving distribution and transfer of sabāya among Islamic State members. The same documentary evidence also attests to women's ownership of enslaved Yezidi women and girls. These women would almost certainly have been spouses of Islamic State members.

Besides this evidence attesting to the distribution and circulation of sabāya, the group's literature justifying the enslavement also detailed regulations on the treatment of the sabāya in the possession of Islamic State members.³⁵ This literature sanctioned using sabāya for sexual relations outside the bond of marriage- in other words, sanctioned rape. But this sexual exploitation was not without its own limits: for instance, if the slave-woman was actually owned by the wife in the household of an Islamic State member, then the latter would not be allowed to have sexual relations with the woman, as she would be considered the possession of the wife and thus not lawful to the husband.³⁶ Similarly, if a sabīya were owned by two or more people, then it would not be permitted to have sex with her, as it would only be permitted in the event of one individual's having complete ownership of her.³⁷ Moreover, whereas it was permitted to have intercourse with the virgin enslaved woman immediately after taking possession of her, one would have to ensure the womb of the widow or divorcee is empty, which would mean not lying carnally with her if she were already pregnant and waiting until after she has given birth, or otherwise waiting for her to have a period in the event of her not being pregnant.³⁸

The benefits that the Islamic State ascribed to the practice of enslavement should also be viewed within the framework of genocidal thinking, since those benefits were seen as contributing to the elimination of disbelief/idolatry and growth of Islam. In other words, as noted, slavery was seen as another practice that would contribute to wiping out the Yezidi community. These ideas are most apparent in the Research and Fatwa-Issuing Commission pamphlet entitled: "Among the points of wisdom of the Creator in sabī and istirqāq."³⁹ The pamphlet listed benefits of enslavement including (i) spreading of Islamic monotheism in that the enslaved women would be in an environment conducive to an eventual conversion to Islam, (ii) glorification of Islam and Muslims and the humiliation of disbelief and disbelievers, and (iii) increasing the numbers of Muslims through the enslaved women's becoming pregnant and bearing children in their sexual relations with their masters, since in Islam religion is considered to transmit through the paternal line, and thus a child born to an Islamic State member and a Yezidi enslaved woman would be considered Muslim.⁴⁰

personnel who had been killed fighting in a primarily Caucasian unit called the Qadisiya Battalion. That said, none of the personnel on those lists are recorded as owning sabāya or children of sabāya.

34 Ibid., Specimens 44B and 44C.

35 e.g. "Question and Answer on Sabī and Slaves," al-Himma Library (October-November 2014).

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 "Among the points of wisdom of the Creator in sabī and istirqāq," Research and Fatwa-Issuing Commission, (undated, but perhaps late 2014 or early 2015).

40 Ibid., pp. 4-14.

In summary then, it can be seen that the Islamic State's approach to the Yezidi community is one of genocide, as it is predicated on destroying a religious community that cannot be tolerated. This destruction comes about through the choice of conversion or death for the men and older boys, and the imposition of enslavement on the women and girls who do not initially convert, with the result of such enslavement being that either the women and girls will eventually convert to Islam or they will die out along with their disbelief. Preferably for the Islamic State, these enslaved women and girls will bear children through sexual relations with their owners, and these children will be Muslim and not Yezidi. Yezidi male children meanwhile are eventually taken away to be brought up as Muslims.

THE CHRISTIANS: 'TOLERATED' ORIGINAL DISBELIEVERS

As alluded to in the preceding section, the Islamic State distinguishes original disbelievers among the out-group in terms of plain original disbelievers and 'People of the Book.' Although there have been disagreements among Islamic scholars and authorities as to how wide the net of 'People of the Book' should extend, there is no disagreement among them that Jews and Christians come under this category. The Islamic State similarly adopts this view, and thus some kind of 'toleration' can be afforded to Jews and Christians under its caliphate, whereby they would be classified as *ḍimmi* (Arabic: *ahl al-ḍimma*). Effectively, a three-way choice is supposed to be offered to them: conversion to Islam, subjugation as *ḍimmi* whose status is essentially that of second-class citizens, or death. The traditional Qur'anic basis for imposing this three-way choice is 9:29 (the twenty-ninth verse of the ninth chapter, called *Sūrat al-Tawba* - "The Chapter of Repentance"), which is worth quoting in full:

"Fight those who do not believe in God or the Last Day and do not prohibit what God and His Messenger have prohibited, and do not profess the religion of truth, from among those who have been given the book, until they give the *jizya* by hand, subdued as they are."

Of course, there are no known Jewish populations who have come under the Islamic State's rule,⁴¹ and it would seem that the organisation does not expect Jews worldwide will convert to Islam or accept coming under its rule as *ḍimmi*. Thus, the group put out a call recently for its members and supporters worldwide to kill Jews wherever they can do so.⁴² However, in the case of the Christians, there are real examples of where Christian communities have come under the group's rule: most notably, in the Ninawa area of Iraq (Mosul and its environs) and parts of central and eastern Syria (Raqqā and the greater Homs desert area extending across central and eastern Syria).

Thus, in the Raqqā area in February 2014 prior to the announcement of the Caliphate, what was then the Islamic State in Iraq and al-*Ṣām* (the predecessor to the Islamic State) announced the imposition of a *ḍimmi* pact on the Christians residing under its rule,⁴³ which quotes Qur'an 9:29 and is presented as a pact of "security for their lives, wealth, children and the rest of their descendants in *Wilāyat al-Raqqā*," granted by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (though it would appear that the signing of the pact was done on his behalf by someone else, whose signature

41 Only handfuls of Jews likely remain in Iraq and Syria at most. See e.g. Salam Faraj and Sarah Benhaida, "On Passover 2021, Iraq's Jewish community dwindles to fewer than five," AFP, March 28, 2021 (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/on-passover-2021-iraqs-jewish-community-dwindles-to-fewer-than-five/>) and "Jews in Islamic countries, Syria," Jewish Virtual Library (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-syria>), which estimates a population of just four as of 2022.

42 "Kill the Jews," *al-Naba'* issue 376, p. 3, February 2, 2023.

43 Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham's *dhimmi* pact for the Christians of Raqqā province," Syria Comment, February 26, 2014 (accessed here: <https://aymennjawad.org/14472/the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-ash-sham-dhimmi>).

is deliberately obscured in the pact). At that point, the Islamic State had largely consolidated its control over the province, expelling rival Syrian insurgent factions and besieging isolated military bases held by the Syrian government, which the group would then overrun in the summer of that year.

The *ḍimmi* pact continues by outlining that the Christians' churches should not be destroyed or harmed, nor should their wealth or lives be harmed, nor should they be compelled to follow Islam. Yet the pact also specifies numerous regulations that underline the second-class status in subjugation. These restrictive measures include a prohibition on renovation of churches or monasteries, a prohibition on displaying the Cross or Christian scriptures on the roads or in the markets of Muslims, prohibiting the use of sound amplifiers for performance of prayers and other rituals, a prohibition on making Muslims listen to the recitation of their books or the sounds of their bells, not engaging in any Christian rituals outside their churches, a prohibition on blasphemy against Islam. Most importantly, the *ḍimmi* pact is made conditional on every adult male paying a poll tax (*jizya*) in two instalments per year. This tax is set in gold dinars (with each dinar defined as 4.25 grams pure gold equivalent), with the "wealthy" required to pay four dinars per year, those of average wealth status required to pay two dinars per year, and the poor required to pay one dinar per year. Besides this *jizya* tax, Christians were also liable to pay the *ʿuṣr* tax (a 10% tax) in the event of bringing goods from outside the borders of the Islamic State for the purpose of business. If the Christians did not wish to abide by the pact, then there would be no pact for them, and they would be dealt with as the "people of war and stubborn enmity" - effectively a license for the Islamic State to kill them and seize their property.

Other regions in which it is known or likely that the *ḍimmi* pact was imposed include the town of al-Qaryatayn in the Homs desert and Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zūr province. The town of al-Qaryatayn was overrun by the Islamic State in summer 2015 as part of its wider offensive in the region that also saw the group capture Palmyra. After capturing al-Qaryatayn, the group publicised in its propaganda a document issued in the name of the Department of Judiciary and Grievances,⁴⁴ which replicates the *ḍimmi* pact imposed in Raqqa in February 2014. While the imposition of such a pact was not similarly advertised for Dayr al-Zūr province (which was mostly overrun by the Islamic State in 2014, with the exception of part of Dayr al-Zūr city and nearby military bases held by the Syrian government), an interview published in November 2020 with the group's head of covert operations units in the al-Ḥayr (Dayr al-Zūr) region of Syria quotes the interviewee - identified only as Abu Mansur al-Ansari - as saying that when the Islamic State ruled, one could remember how the "Muslims and *ḍimmis* would traverse the steppes and towns night and day in security for their lives and wealth."⁴⁵ This suggests that some Christians were residing in areas of the group's control in the province.

Conversely, in Iraq, there is no evidence that any Christian populations decided to remain under the Islamic State as *ḍimmis*. Instead, it would appear that the group decided to make an exception to the threefold choice, giving the Christians in the Ninawa area in particular the opportunity to leave the Islamic State's territory. This is attested in a document issued in the name of the judiciary department in July 2014,⁴⁶ in which it is stated that the heads of the

44 "Establishment of God's ruling on the Christians of the town of al-Qaryatayn," Wilāyat Dimašq Media Office, August 2015.

45 "Interview with Shaykh Abu Mansur al-Ansari (may God protect him): amir of the covert units in al-Khayr in Wilāyat al-Šām," al-Naba' issue 261, pp. 9-11.

46 Specimen S in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents," aymennjawad.org (accessed here: <https://aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents>)

Christian community failed to attend an appointment with the Islamic State on the group's status, but the caliph had decided to give them a deadline by which to evacuate the Islamic State's territory.

There was, however, an implicit catch in this permission to depart: the property of the departing Christians would be confiscated. The confiscation of Christian property in the Ninawa area is attested in other documents. For example, some documents recovered by Rukmini Callimachi of the New York Times detail rental contracts whereby the Islamic State would rent out land 'owned' by its "Real Estate and Land-Tax Department" (Diwān al-ʿAqārāt wa al-Ḥarāj) to locals for the purpose of farming in exchange for rental fees or a percentage of the farmer's harvest.⁴⁷ Some of these lands are listed as having previously been owned by the Mar Behnam monastery, which was also previously renting out lands to some locals. In effect, the same arrangements as before were continuing, only now the Islamic State had confiscated these lands. Similarly, houses owned by Christians who had left would have been confiscated by the group, potentially to be rented out to locals.

As noted, when Christians do not have a 'pact' with the Islamic State, then their status is that of "warring" original disbelievers, just like the Yezidis. This makes property liable to confiscation and for the men of the community to be subject to the choice of conversion or death. It also makes the women and children liable to being enslaved after being taken captive. Yet it has been seen that it is not mandatory for the Islamic State to follow these paths when it captures Christians. Those taken prisoner can be offered benevolence or held for ransom only, and it would appear that the group generally decided on this latter option for any Christians it took captive in Iraq and Syria. This is most notable in the case of Christian hostages taken in the Khabur valley region of northeast Syria in early 2015. The hostages refused calls for their conversion, and were instead held for ransom.⁴⁸ The hostages were then released around a year later in exchange for sums of money paid in ransom- money that was raised in part through Assyrian/Syriac Christian diaspora fundraising.⁴⁹

The more brutal reality of the Islamic State's approach towards Christians who are deemed as being "at war" is to be found in Africa, where the group routinely boasts of attacks and massacres it carries out against Christians, emphasising the Christian identity of the victims of its attacks. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the group boasted in January 2023 of a bomb attack on a church in the eastern Beni region, which resulted in "dozens of disbelieving Christians being killed and wounded," intended as a message of defiance against the "Congolese forces and their allies."⁵⁰ Similarly, in June 2022, the group released an infographic on its operations in Mozambique over the course of 17 days, killing "23 disbelieving Christians," burning more than 250 homes and nine churches, and displacing more than 11,000 Christians from their villages.⁵¹ There are many other examples of this conduct that could be documented from Africa going by the group's official propaganda alone.

47 These documents were reviewed as part of the author's work on the "ISIS Files" project of George Washington University's Program on Extremism. See ISIS Files 07_000537 and ISIS Files 07_000542 cited in Devorah Margolin et al., "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to the Islamic State's Governance Strategy," George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2021, pp. 22 and 52. Accessed here: <https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/downloads/765371328?locale=en>.

48 Lori Hinnant, "Ransomed: The Freeing of 226 Christians from Islamic State," Associated Press, December 2, 2016 (accessed here: <https://www.ap.org/explore/a-savage-legacy/ransomed-the-freeing-of-226-christians-from-islamic-state.html>).

49 Ibid.

50 "Dozens of killed and wounded from among the disbelieving Christians in an explosion carried out by the soldiers of the Caliphate inside a church in the Beni region in eastern Congo," Wilāyat Wasṭ Ifrīqiya, January 15, 2023.

51 "Operations of the soldiers of the Caliphate in Wilāyat Mozambique," al-Naba' issue 344, p. 12.



Theoretically, Christian communities can be afforded 'toleration' in the form of a 'protection pact,' but this pact imposes numerous restrictions on freedom of worship and other rights, and is in truth tantamount in this day and age to mafia-type extortion. Outside this limited 'tolerance,' the group has engaged in crimes of unlawful killings, massacres and kidnappings against Christians, as well as confiscation of Christian property.

THE SHI'A: INELIGIBLE IN-GROUP

Despite the group's atrocities against Yezidis and Christians, these original disbelievers within the out-group are not in fact the worst sort of out-group in the eyes of the Islamic State. The worst disbelievers are the so-called "apostates," among whom the Shi'a are numbered. The apostates can be classed as an ineligible in-group because they are deemed to have been at some point part of the in-group but have since gone outside its fold and become part of the out-group.⁵² Thus, apostasy is deemed worse than original disbelief, since it is considered a greater evil to have known the truth, professed adherence to it and then abandoned it, than to have not known the truth at all. In its basic outline of its creed, the Islamic State makes clear that since apostasy is a greater evil than original disbelief, then fighting the apostates has greater priority than the original disbelievers: "The disbelief of apostasy is worse by consensus than original disbelief, thus fighting the apostates is of greater priority in our view than fighting the original disbeliever."⁵³ This sort of approach is justified partly by historical precedent, in particular the "apostasy wars" that were waged in the Arabian Peninsula by the Prophet's first successor and caliph Abu Bakr following the former's death. These wars- waged against Arabs who were deemed to have apostasised- were given more immediate priority over the wars with the Christian Byzantines and the Zoroastrian Persians (original disbelievers).

However, it would seem that not all members of the Islamic State had a clear idea of the group's official conception of Shi'a as apostates rather than original disbelievers. It is possible that some members adopted an intuitive line of reasoning that since most Shi'a today are not new converts to their faith but rather have been born in succeeding generations to parents who were Shi'a, then they become original disbelievers rather than apostates. To address this notion, the Islamic State's Office of Research and Studies published a treatise entitled "Ruling of the Shari'a on the Shi'a Sects," outlining the reasons why various sects of the Shi'a should be considered apostates and not original disbelievers.⁵⁴ This paper will not regurgitate the treatise's reasoning in depth, but simply note the crux of the treatise's argument. Per the treatise's reasoning, by claiming affiliation with Islam but committing "nullifiers" of Islam (e.g. disparagement of the Prophet's companions such as his wife Aisha, and alleged deification of humans), the people of the Shi'a sects are apostates, even if they were born to Shi'a parents and prior generations of Shi'a and thus were never raised as Sunni Muslims. The claiming of affiliation with Islam as the key aspect of apostasy is the reason why the sole exception in this treatise is made for some members of the Druze community who identify as Druze but do not claim to be Muslims- such Druze in this case are considered original disbelievers and not apostates.⁵⁵

The same treatise also makes clear that the distinction between apostates and original disbelievers is not some academic exercise, but rather has real practical consequences. If the

52 For discussion of the concept of the ineligible in-group, see JM Berger, "A Paler Shade of White: Identity and In-Group Critique in James Mason's Siege," RESOLVE Network, April 2021, p. 20 (accessed here: https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2022-05/RSVE_REMVE_Berger_April%202021_1_.pdf).

53 "This is our 'aqida and this is our manhaj," p. 5.

54 "Ruling of the Shari'a on the Shi'a Sects," Office of Research and Studies, (undated, but probably 2014-2015).

55 Ibid., p. 4.

Shi'a are incorrectly regarded as original disbelievers, then there are many false inferences that can be drawn, according to the treatise.⁵⁶ The most notable supposed false inferences include (i) that they cannot be forcibly compelled to Islam, (ii) that it may be possible to treat them as *ḍimmis*, (iii) that it is permissible to enslave their men, (iv) that their captives can be held for ransom or be shown benevolence as a matter of choice, and (v) that it is impermissible to kill the person among them who proclaims acceptance of Islam after power is gained over him/her.

In other words, like the Yezidis, the Shi'a do not have rights of property and life as Shi'a under the Islamic State, but their options are also more limited than those of the Yezidis. If the Islamic State gains power over Shi'a communities, then the latter do not have the option of declared conversion to Sunni Islam as a means of protecting themselves. Rather, it appears that the repentance of a person from among the Shi'a is only accepted before the Islamic State has gained power over that said person.

In this regard, the Islamic State has claimed and advertised as its own a few individuals who had originally been Shi'a and then declared renunciation of their original faith and their conversion to Sunni Islam outside the Islamic State's areas of territorial control. Perhaps the most well-known example is that of Man Haron Monis, who had been born an Iranian Shi'i but declared on his website that he used to be a "Rafidi" (Rafidite) but was now a Muslim, while also announcing his allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He then carried out an attack on a café in Sydney, and was subsequently eulogised in the Islamic State's English-language magazine *Dabiq*, which praised his "repentance" and hailed him as a "mujāhid in the path of Allah,"⁵⁷ though it also acknowledged that he had acted alone and had not coordinated with the group. Even so, his renunciation of his prior faith and his declared allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were sufficient for the group to count him as one of their own. In contrast with Monis who had never travelled to the Islamic State in Iraq or Syria, the *al-Naba'* newsletter published the story of an Islamic State 'martyr' known as Abu 'Azzām of Ahwaz (i.e. originally from the Ahwaz region of western Iran).⁵⁸ According to the biography, he converted from Shi'i Islam to Sunni Islam, renouncing his past life and heading on a perilous journey through Iran and Turkey to join the Islamic State in Syria, where he died fighting.

Yet it seems most implausible that masses of Shi'a are somehow going to renounce their faith willingly before the Islamic State gains power over them, and so the only options facing Shi'a communities and military personnel under attack from the Islamic State are to fight or flee, as capture will mean certain death for the men at least. Perhaps the most ghastly testament to this reality is the Camp Speicher massacre of Iraqi air cadets near Tikrit in June 2014, celebrated by the Islamic State as a "slaughter of the Rafidites" and a massacre overseen by its senior official Abū al-Muġīra al-Qaḥṭānī, who was subsequently dispatched by the group to Libya where he was killed.⁵⁹ In cases where Shi'a have fled areas seized by the Islamic State, there is no doubt that the group has systematically worked to erase traces of their presence, destroying Shi'a shrines and places of worship and confiscating Shi'a lands and homes. Just as the group confiscated lands of the Mar Behnam monastery to rent out to locals under its rule,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵⁷ *Dabiq* issue 6, al-Hayat Media Centre (December 2014-January 2015), pp. 1-5.

⁵⁸ "Ḥaydara Ahwāz (Abu 'Azzām)," *al-Naba'* issue 12, p. 6, January 5, 2016.

⁵⁹ "The noble amir Abū al-Muġīra al-Qaḥṭānī: steadfastness until death," *al-Naba'* issue 24, pp. 8-9.

so documents recovered by Callimachi also show how the Islamic State confiscated lands in Ninawa that had belonged to Shi'a, and then rented them out.⁶⁰

However, a somewhat more complex issue is the Islamic State's treatment of Shi'a women and children. While the earlier mentioned treatise makes clear that Shi'a men who are captured must be killed, it does not say that deeming it permissible to enslave Shi'a women and children is a false inference. This is because the question of whether it is permissible to enslave the women and children of the apostates is somewhat complicated. The Islamic State literature on the matter acknowledges that Islamic scholars to whom it lends credence have differing views on the issue. For example, Ibn Taymiyya- one of the scholars whom the group most likes to quote- is quoted in the group's treatise on issues of enslavement as inclining to the permissibility of enslavement of apostate women.⁶¹

Nonetheless, the treatise prefers to side with what it sees as the "pronouncement of the majority": namely, that it is not permissible to enslave the apostate woman, because to do so would be tantamount to allowing people to remain in apostasy- an approach the group views as contradicting the force of the ḥadīth attributed to Muhammad: "Whoever changes his[/her] religion, kill him[/her]."⁶² Thus, since the Shi'a are deemed apostates, then by this logic it should not be permissible to enslave their women, but rather the choice they face should be the same as that facing the men: conversion to Islam (before power is gained over them) or death. The treatise makes clear that this choice it believes should face the apostate woman.⁶³

Yet an apparent Islamic State document would seem to contradict this view. Specifically, an alleged fatwa of the "Fatwa-Issuing Centre" of the "Wilāyat al-Raqqa," which states that it is permissible to enslave the women of the Shi'a.⁶⁴ There are reasons however to doubt whether this document should be given any weight as evidence for enslavement of Shi'a women. First, at the time when this document first appeared (autumn 2015, when compilation and analysis of internal Islamic State documents were still relatively new enterprises), the researcher Cole Bunzel had suggested that this fatwa and others put out in the name of this "Fatwa-Issuing Centre" could have just been the work of a lower-level functionary, who gave what he thought to be condensed versions of the rulings of the greater commission/office. Stylistically, the language of the other fatwas attributed to this centre could support that conclusion. In such a case it is possible that the writer simply erred and committed the fallacy of supposing the Shi'a to be original disbelievers rather than apostates.

Alternatively, however, we may just suppose that the fatwa and other such fatwas attributed to this "Fatwa-Issuing Centre" are forgeries on the grounds of error in content and style, as well as the fact that no other corroborating evidence has emerged for the existence of "fatwa-issuing centres" in the Islamic State's provinces. Indeed, the existence of such centres and the authenticity of the documents were denied to this author by the Telegram contact for "Knowledge Heritage Foundation"- a body of dissenters-turned-defectors from the Islamic

⁶⁰ These documents were reviewed as part of the author's work on the "ISIS Files" project of George Washington University's Program on Extremism. See Margolin et al, "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to the Islamic State's Governance Strategy," pp. 22 and 52.

⁶¹ "Sabi: Rulings and Issues," p. 21.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Archivist: Unseen Islamic State Fatwas on Jihad and Sabaya," *Jihadology*, September 25, 2015 (accessed here: <https://aymennjawad.org/17879/the-archivist-unseen-islamic-state-fatwas-on>).

State and their supporters.⁶⁵ Some of these dissenters-turned-defectors had originally been linked to the Office of Research and Studies, and the Foundation published the complete archive of works of the office.

Despite the Office of Research and Studies' literature that would suggest it is not permissible to enslave Shi'a women, there is testimony of some Shi'a Turkmen women from the Tel Afar area who say that they were taken captive and subjected to forced marriages and sexual abuse by members of the Islamic State, and it seems difficult to dismiss this testimony.⁶⁶ It is possible, for instance, that the Islamic State decided to deal with Shi'a women taken captive outside the formal frameworks in which the Yezidi women were dealt with. That is, they may not have been handed over to the war spoils department and the judiciary to be trafficked and bought and sold in transactions among fighters, but they faced an ordeal tantamount to enslavement and sexual abuse in being forcibly married off to Islamic State fighters.

It should also be noted that in the end, the Office of Research and Studies' view on the permissibility of enslaving apostate/Shi'a women is only an inclination towards a viewpoint it believes to be the majority among scholars, and not an absolute pronouncement that it is forbidden to enslave them. For if it had adopted an absolute pronouncement and clear view on the impermissibility of enslaving Shi'a women, why was that not stated in the treatise on the Shi'a sects? Amid such lack of firmness and clarity, it is plausible to see how members of the group may have decided it was acceptable to force Shi'a women into some kind of slavery, even if there were no formalised procedures as existed for Yezidi women.

Regardless of whether the fate of the Shi'a women who fell into the group's hands was execution or forced marriages, it is clear that as is the case with the group's treatment of the Yezidis, the group's policies towards Shi'a should also be understood in the framework of genocide, as they are all based on ending the existence of the Shi'a as Shi'a, who are not to be afforded any toleration as apostates. The only effective way for them to save their lives is to convert to Sunni Islam before the Islamic State should gain power over them.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the Islamic State's approaches towards three different groups of those who are or are deemed by it to be non-Muslim, and has highlighted not only the differences that exist according to the specific categorisation of the disbeliever, but also the commonalities. Ultimately, the Islamic State's behaviour towards all three groups is representative of the group's extremist mindset in dealing with them, as the organisation believes that communities of original disbelievers outside the framework of the People of the Book (in our case study, the Yezidis) and communities of apostates (in our case study, the Shi'a) should ultimately be wiped out as they cannot be tolerated under its state project that intends to rule the entire world.

The Christians, by contrast, are allowed to exist as Christians under the Islamic State, but it is in a framework of second-class status and humiliating subjugation, still rooted in hostility to Christians and their religion and intended to remind the out-group of the in-group's

⁶⁵ Conversation, 2020.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Lizzie Porter, "Ordeal continues for Turkmen women kidnapped by ISIS," *The National News*, August 12, 2019 (accessed here: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/ordeal-continues-for-shiite-turkmen-women-kidnapped-by-isis-1.897568>).



supremacy over it. This can hardly be seen as tolerance in the modern sense of having equal rights under the law and fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect. With regards to all three groups, there is evidence of Islamic State war crimes in the form of unlawful killings, kidnappings, enslavement and violations of property rights.

This comparative analysis should also serve as a guide for understanding how the Islamic State might deal with other communities it deems non-Muslims, such as remaining Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, who like the Yezidis will be deemed original disbelievers outside the framework of the People of the Book and thus the targets for international crimes, including genocide.



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