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Abstract of paper to be presented at the conference.

For details of the conference programme go to www.iraqistudies.org

Speaker: Caecilia Pieri, EHESS, Paris and Amman Ahlia University

Title: Baghdad's modern built heritage: Questions about the memory

Abstract:

Between 1920 and 1960, the built expansion of Baghdad, in parallel to the national construction, is an emblematic example of successful hybridization of cross-cultural references which are not a blind mimicry of the West but a creative reinterpretation of European patterns or vocabulary. This composite urban space has been witnessing a continuum which was, at the same time and at the same level, diversity, continuity, and also, beyond the invention of a new urban morphology, a renewal of urban practices.

Threatened by the current situation, it can be seen as a metaphor of the destiny of the city since it has become the theatre of concomitant phenomenon: against continuity, the atomization of Baghdad centre as a series of cropping new fortresses; against diversity, forced sectarian homogeneity; and eventually, against daily life, exodus and gradual abandon of many houses.

Since any urban context is the product but also the producer of collective memories, behaviours and projects, the topic of the built heritage, far from being a specialized one, addresses a central problem currently in Iraq: collective identity, which has to be defined as a prerequisite before any successful reconstruction