

# Centre for Public Culture and Ideas

## Gold Coast Public Culture Colloquium

### **The Cultural and Historical Destruction of Iraq: Implications for Social Cohesion and Democracy**

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With the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003 came the deliberate destruction and blatant negligence of the occupying forces, having immediate ramifications for the nation's rich cultural and historical landscape. In addition, Iraqi civilians targeted the cultural history of their nation with wanton looting and arson, as well as systematic attacks on sites of archaeological or ethno-religious significance. More recently, the Shia and Kurdish dominated Iraqi Government have organised the "Committee for Removing Symbols of the Saddam Era" and plan to purge the state of its Sunni dominated past. This paper argues that the destruction of Iraq's cultural history has played a part in eroding the national identity that many of these symbols and institutions were designed to promulgate. In turn, this has contributed to the rise of ethno/religious sectarianism in Iraq and has particular implications for the nation's fledgling democratic order.

Dr Benjamin Isakhan is a Research Fellow with the Griffith University Islamic Research Unit, part of the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance at Griffith University. Ben is the author of *The Democratic History of Iraq: Culture, Politics and Discourse* (Ashgate, 2010) and the co-editor (with Stephen Stockwell) of *The Secret History of Democracy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and *The Edinburgh Companion to the History of Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011). In addition, Ben has authored several publications including a book chapter in *Islam and the Australian News Media* (Melbourne University Press, 2010) as well as articles in *Middle East Policy*, the *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, *Global Media Journal*, *Australian Journalism Review*, *Media/Culture*, *Transformations* and the *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*.

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**Thursday 15 October 2009**  
**10:00am - 12:00pm**  
**Morning tea provided**  
**G23\_3.01 (Multimedia Building, GC)**

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