Transcript: Heritage challenges in Najaf and Kufa in Iraq - a conversation with Dr Ali Naji

Mehiyar 0:00 Welcome to the Nahrein Network podcast series. We're here today with Dr. Ali Naji from Kufa University who has just completed a Nahrein Network British Institute for the Study of Iraq scholarship, UCL University College London. Hello, Dr. Ali, how are you?

Ali Naji 0:17 Hello, Dr Mehiyar. Nice to talk to you and talk to the audience about this scholarship.

Mehiyar 0:24 Could you tell us first about what you do? The position you have in Kufa University?

Ali Naji 0:29 I am an assistant professor at civil engineering department in Kufa University. I'm working on structural engineering, my speciality since 2000, where I got my PhD from University of Baghdad. But my interest and heritage and cultural heritage and post types tangible and intangible heritage started to increase day by day. Let me say, since 2003, when the Iraq regime change and a lot of things, new things for Iraqi people that started to attract their interest. And one of them is the heritage and how to keep the heritage of Iraq.

Mehiyar 1:14 You're an engineer by training.

Ali Naji 1:16 Yes, I am civil engineer. And my specialty is personal engineering.

Mehiyar 1:21 And you said that after 2003, you're increasingly interested in culture heritage in Iraq, what kind of work have you done since then, in the country?

Ali Naji 1:32 I am living in the city of Najaf, and maybe it is well known for many people around the world. It is a heritage city. And there is a very important monument inside the historic part of the city, which is the shrine of Imam Ali. In the beginning, let me say honestly, that I, some people invited me to present or to make some drawings for this building, because as you know, everything was lost from the governmental authorities and also other authorities. So I started with my students to document the shrine buildings, which were at that time, there is no even one map for this important building. But later, my interest improved, let me say like that developed for more or higher stage, not to think about how to keep the stone but how to keep the cultural value of the stone. And this is when we I talk during the interview and more details.

Mehiyar 2:40 What do you mean by stones? Are you talking about the physical heritage? A

li Naji 2:44 Yes, exactly. Stones, I mean, there's the physical heritage or the building itself.

Mehiyar 2:50 In your, in your research has been to find ways of looking both at tangible and intangible heritage.

Ali Naji 2:56 Yes, exactly. Because if we, if we just look to the physical material without shedding the light about the value of this material. For example, the beginning, as you know, a lot of people came to visit the city, millions of people came every year, and maybe several millions and one day, or a couple of days visit this place or this small place inside the historic part of the city. The main question at that time is why we do not demolish the new build the new building, because this building was built 400 years ago? This is now the nowaday building belongs to the same style the same finishing the same material from 100 to 400 years ago, and at that time, maybe 1000s of people came to the city, but now we have millions of people come to the city. So, the question always why we do not demolish this building and build a very large one to make available area for worship for those millions of people. And

maybe I can say also in the beginning, I am thinking in the same way that all the buildings should have a function and the function is make a space which is comfortable for people to do what they want to do. For example, for this building, to do worship, but later when I for example, go more in depth in the cultural heritage and what was kept by all generations for us, for example, like values and something like that and the values are related 100% to the for example style of building to the third type of finishing or for example that all doors and windows and the calligraphy and everything and I found that I should have two objectives for any one engineer or not engineer should think in two ways how to make space for millions of people. And the same time how to keep the things which which which are valuable for the people for the identity of those people, at the same time. So this is really the challenge for anyone working in this field. As you know, maybe the several hundreds years ago, there was some say problems or fighting between two main pirates at that time, which is the Ottoman Empire and also the Safawi Empire. We say, in history, we read them. For example, dark times, and there are good times there are peace and some years between the two empires. And sometimes there are battles and problems between them. And when I read the history of the holy shrines in Iraq, the majority of construction done in the past, it was in this peace period between those empires. So, this is the fact how those buildings was built in the past, as an engineer, as you now see from my statements, I am talking about history. And maybe later I will talk about maybe the architecture and later I will talk about the cultural value and so on or the social context. In the beginning, I am thinking just an engineer. So just think how to make those bricks and the mortar and the walls, how to keep them stand for, let me say, the coming 100 years. But just think, in that way, how to analyze the structure, how to make the structure this also fracture, can the stand, for example, last explosions, which happens many times in the city in the past 10 years, or, for example, the wind load, or the lord of millions of people, and so on. Thinking that way, which is the engineering mind. But as I said, later, I found myself having to invest in those things, for example, the history of the place, the value of the place, because you cannot think, just in this physical thing without merging those other fields, with the same idea, because this place, I can say, this place is a good example for multidisciplinary fields to study it from different directions. Because if you study it from one direction, or one view, I think you'll destroy other angles of view, for example, the history, the value and so on.

Mehiyar 7:58 The significant amount of culture, infrastructure, buildings have been torn down since 2003. And there's been a number of important buildings that have been replaced transformed. What do people think about what's happening in Najaf, particularly in relation to some of these historic buildings?

Ali Naji 8:19 Yes, the problem is, sometimes, let me say, the heritage of people, especially in Iraq, it's not the health of anyone. If it is exist, you don't feel it. But if you lost it in one time, you will feel that you lose a very important thing. And this hadn't happened many times. For example, let me say that a part of the Old City was demolished since the 80s. During the past regime, the idea at that time to build an open space and a new project named Medina was in the city of pilgrims. But for example, at that time, the bulldozer came and demolish all the city with all all the buildings that we say like that. The important building the beautiful buildings, the old buildings, all of them, the houses, schools, mosques, everything. The problem is without also any documentation of those buildings in this part or this area. Later, after 2003. The people feel this great, or this huge losses, they lost this, for example, 20 years ago or less. Now, for example, when someone wants to write about Madrasa, our home, or our home school, which was in this demolished part of the city. They tried to, for example, to searching in books on something like that, or some description of the building or what is written in the walls and so on, because there is no documentation. I am afraid that maybe 20 years later when we don't tell that this will happen. When we lose, for example, many things inside this, also the coming generation will ask where's the documentation, drawings and so on, and maybe found the SET statement, or

where, and this is the problem. So now the people that didn't feel what what are happening every day to the city, because they're living in it. But maybe later, when many things will be gone; unfortunately, they feel that what they lost, Mehiyar 10:31 Would you identify the situation in Najaf as an emergency situation when it comes to the protection documentation of these very important buildings?

Ali Naji 10:41 Yes, but there are problems in Najaf, let me say, honestly, is that me say it is harder than Mosul for example. Even right now, you are seeing maybe all international interest about Mosul and what happened by ISIS at the Mosul. But it is very clear, why because you have an enemy, and the enemy came and destroy your history and your heritage, and you can get, for example, help from all the international globe. But in our case, the problem we are destroying our heritage, by our hands that we say like that, those new construction, new projects, buildings in new hotels, high buildings, higher than the dome of the shrine, and so on. Those are not built by enemy and many people said, for example, in the city or outside the city, let us develop our city. Why you are stopping us? Why you are making limitations for ...for us to make the city is better and better? What about, for example, Mecca and Medina, those two cities are also holy cities, and everything was destroyed, and no one talk and no one have objection at that time. And now they can, for example, give a place or space for millions of pilgrims and so on. What about them? So this is our problem. This is our literacy heart problem. How to make this happen, the good interest and attract the international help like what happened and most of this has not happened for Najaf unfortunately.

Mehiyar 12:27 Is the Mecca model, if you like the destruction that we've seen in Mecca, something that is often spoken about in Najaf, amongst the heritage community there is it's something that is seen as negative to Najaf itself? I mean, you've you've mentioned it as a case study. Aren't people knowledgeable, but what's happened in Mecca? And is it something that frightens the authorities, the heritage community academics in Najaf, I mean, what kind of conversations are happening in relation to that case study in Najaf?

Ali Naji 13:02 Yes, let me say that we have two directions or two views for what happened in Mecca and Medina as well with a view of the specialist, this is one and the view of ordinary or the public or the people who are not specialist, the view of the specialist all of them mentioned that Mecca and Medina as a negative. I wrote a lot what happened on the Islamic web and also international world and journals and scientific articles that would happen in Mecca and Medina is the negative example for the old cities or the heritage cities, because when you finish everything, you just read the history in the books, there is no any sign of the history of testimony and study; for example, as all the places or almost and something where there are memories of those for example, let me say that the people at that time the early Muslims for example, or the Prophet himself and so on. But the other for example, or not, as you know, the interest and heritage for public museum non specialist, it needs the people living in an open minded way and also the level is which is higher than the level of humanity there is no problems of humanity. Unfortunately, our people in the Middle East are living in the same way like the people in the West or the people in the East. They are suffering from many things important for them, for example, the daily life, the food, the health and so on. Those type of people, you cannot talk talk with them about out the heritage and the importance of heritage and so on, because they have a priority in their life, they while they're thinking in how to solve their problems, and later, as you see now, the wars everywhere in Syria, Yemen etc, and the unsettled political situation in many places. So, it is it is difficult say to them and have interest in heritage, but in my view, they are living good way, I think they will care about those things. They will think about the importance of those of those; for example, buildings and, and their history and their heritage and so on. The main step should be done is to solve the people problems of life. Everywhere, for example, in Najaf, let me come back to my case study in Najaf, if it's difficult, for example, to talk with the one has an old house inside

the city, and say to him, "do not demolish your house and build a multi store building, to be a hotel", because the hotel is very good investment for such person. And this valuable place, even it is maybe 15 square meter, it is very important for him to improve his life. So I think we shall let them improve his life. And let him don't to think and doing this and then building in new building. And for example, multistory building, and so on. And I think this is the objective of sustainable development. For example, if we can plan for him a project, how to use, for example, his house, and also an investment, maybe hotel or elsewhere, or any cultural events, and so on, and gain money and improve his life in a better way. I think we will succeed now to make the people themselves keep their heritage, not to, for example, bring an army or make rules and laws and so on, and to enforce people to keep the heritage.

Mehiyar 17:19 So you're speaking about education, advocacy?

Ali Naji 17:23 Everything? Let me start from education, of course, yes, everything.

Mehiyar 17:28 But if the state institutions are weak in terms of advocacy and education, who else could do this? Is it the role of civil society, cultural groups in Najaf? Ali Naji 17:40 Yes, yes, of course, I think they should have an important role in this direction. Because I think now people in Iraq are starting to use, let me say, the campaigns, and so on, use the short social media and NGOs and so on. Those are new things. But I think it now started to work very well. Maybe in the past 10 years, it was weak, and maybe just get the grant from here on there. And the projects are not background. But I think since the October last October, and the movement of the young people's movement of in every direction, let me say like that, not only in the political direction, make people think in a new way, how to change, they are now I think, have the courage to change their situation, and how to ask for their rights and so on. I think they will have an important role in the coming days.

Mehiyar 18:47 You're speaking here about the protests,

Ali Naji 18:49 it's a new era for Iraq started in October. Yes, it is maybe focused in the beginning. And very, we say very limited area, like jobs and so on and electricity, but later on very fast, to change to another thing, change to have. As I said, it is the desire of change. And this is important, how you are not not giving up on thinking always in change. And this what will go to this spread and everywhere. And all for example, people, not only young people, also NGOs, maybe authorities and so on. They have now the courage to change.

Mehiyar 19:32 Just going back to some of the things you've been speaking about. Have you discussed some of your ideas regarding documentation, protection, rules and regulations? Perhaps they exist but are not implemented with state authorities? With the governorates in Najaf?

Ali Naji 19:50 Yes, of course. We had a lot of meetings or presentations. Every time for example, when we are thinking to organize a conference and so on. The first people thinking about provide them is the governorates and the governor and the authorities and the State Board of archaeology and heritage and all people related from the formal point of view about those for example, buildings or properties zones, etc. But I can I can say honestly, their reactions are very weak, but not depends on on on themselves, but they are not believe in heritage or something like that. What depends on the weakness of all the system? Let me say, Iraq has no policy for culture. Has no policy, for example, for tourism, for many Iraq only think in the how to make an army or how to sell the oil and the economy. And, unfortunately, the other things like culture, and tourism are many important things in such a civilized country with a great cast. I can say it is postponing for later, maybe later governments, later Parliament's and so on. So this is why our system is enough, for example, as evidence for my speech, that the Ministry of archaeology and tourism started as a corporation, and then was a ministry and later cancelled, and the mayor to the other ministry, Ministry of Culture and so on. And we don't know

later, what will happen to this ministry, always sharing the positions between political parties, for example, make this ministry ignored. No one wants to take it, for example. They they divided the ministries into let me say, high rank ministries and low rank ministries. Unfortunately, education and higher education and culture laws are lower on key ministries. So when you see this is the policy of the whole country, you will expect that you will have weak system dealing with such properties and such such politics and so on.

Mehiyar 22:26 And if we can speak about your scholarship, could you tell us a bit about the the the topics, the themes that you've you've looked at?

Ali Naji 22:33 My host was Bartlett School of Architecture, it was well known in the field of architectural engineering and my supervisor is a professor Eduardo Dennison. He helped me a lot. For example, I attended some of the presentation of his PhD students, one from Egypt and the other from India. And those two were co-working on maybe that we say the same idea about the value of the place, but the first in Egypt and the second, in India, yeah. And make use of many information. And also I have a lot of meetings with others, by the help of Professor Denison, in my scholarship proposal was how to increase the awareness of the local communities, to the importance of heritage. And the methodology used in my proposal is to link the tangible and intangible heritage inside the city, to the practices inside the city for all communities, I met a lot of persons and gave many presentations, in many places, and universities, and also got feedback from those audience, then, those presentations. And I think it will bring new ideas for me when I come back to Iraq, to think and how to implant this proposal because it is just a proposal or let me say hypotheses that needs surveying and data from the field to ask people about this thing about the tangible and intangible values in their daily life. So I think now, I'm ready and my university is ready to do that, provided that we have a good grant to implement this project in the city of Najaf. If we succeed to do that, and measure, I think it will be good example for all the cultural heritage and call Iraqi cities because the Iraqi, the same in any city, but maybe you let them difference and then the practices and the identity and so on, but I think we can bring the interest of all Iraqis to their heritage.

Mehiyar 24:54 Could you tell us a bit about the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage? What are the type of conclusions you've come to in based on your experience in Iraq and your research here in UK, and how that can contribute towards the sustainable development of heritage in Najaf?

Ali Naji 25:09 If you imagine that the tangible heritage is as a circle. And the intangible heritage is another circle, I think those circles have a common area, there is an interaction between them. And there is a common area between those types of heritage. This common area, I can't mention it by this step, it is the spirit of place, or the value of place for people. If we can explore this idea, and the places where the Iraqi people are living now, especially, but all the places, I think we can get this common area between tangible and intangible. And if we promote for this idea, and for example, make the people have more interest in this idea of the spirit of place, they will improve their life. And I will say to you how to do that, because you mentioned the sustainable development. A lot of people now, for example, in Najaf, especially they're living is dependent on the value of their place. For example, let me say now, take an example the cemetery, the cemetery is very important to the city, from the economical point of view. Let me mention that, because also from the cultural point of view, it is very important, because why the Salem is now a very famous place in the world, as a huge cemetery. But maybe a little note about the economic value of this place for the city, a lot of hundreds of people, maybe 1000s of people are working in this place, and many practices, all those practices, or let me say a small words, it depends on the heritage. For example, the rituals of our funeral, for example, rituals, where the families bring the body and then what to do, and when they are visiting this body, for example, after seven days, and then 40 days and so on, what are they doing, they are using some

materials. So for example, like candles and so on, and for example, using water, and stacks of water, and so on, all those things, practices are our opportunity of work. And a lot of people doing that as a part of the approach. But it was it was done. Now, let me say randomly, without the planning, sometimes my affecting things, for example, affecting the traffic, for example, the easy of the movement of those people inside the cemetery, and so on. So if we have a plan for, for example, how to make all those business and works, how to improve them in a good way, for example, in modern tools, and I think that will help life of those people to be more better than now. Mehiyar 28:36 You're currently in London, but you plan to go back to Iraq quite soon. And what are your ideas regarding the type of work you would you intend to do? Ali Naji 28:45 Yes, many things in my mind, maybe some of them are easy to do. And some of them may be difficult to do. Let me say that, for example, maybe that easy to do, for example, to write an article about this subject that I wrote some articles and published in conferences. And in presentations, I'm also presented in many countries and universities. But I think it should be now in more detail to go in more detail. And this subject, this one thing, the other thing, which is maybe the main the main objective for me is to implement this proposal because implementations let me say it in very fast way. We should collect data from the from the field. I'm thinking in using our students in different colleges like College of Engineering, College of planning and cultural heritage and archaeology, and other maybe college of administration and we have good department of NGOs, those students, we should plan them how to make interviews for local people inside the city, and also the pilgrims and the workers and so on, to identify the spirit of place and the value of place for them. And the value of place and not not not only the place, it also contains the buildings and maybe the narrow roads between buildings and the old fabric of the city and the shrine itself, and so on. So, those data are very important. And I just mentioned very simple example, from symmetry from the Old City, which has very clear practices done every day. But from my point of view, there are a lot of hidden values, maybe unknown for those people living in the city. I cannot mention the cleric people or the let me say, the students of Religious Studies, those are also very important community inside the city, they have come high values for, as I say, this housing and Mia, this is a very well known scientific university, but it's not a classical University, maybe it is 1000 years ago started in this place. And also they have traditions, traditions, in the way of study and dressing, and then living and so on. And all of those things, this, those practices are related to them. Also to to this small place, which is the historic part of the city. So how to make interview and train students to do the Teleview with them, and what are the data collected from them, then classify this data, and then analyze it and tangible and intangible and so on. As I mentioned in my proposal, I think this is the main objective for me, and I'm searching maybe I will search for a grant for one of the organizations which give grants for such projects, and then start to implement it soon. The third the objective, which may be more difficult, or it needs time to be implemented, as to establish, let me say, some organizations or some some establishment who are important for heritage, for example, ecommerce of Iraq I met during this trip, the president of E-commerce, UK. And she gave me a lot of information about this thing and the importance to have an E-commerce chapter or E-commerce branch to our country. So one of the ideas also to establish ecommerce in Iraq. Also at the same time, because we mentioned in this interview, me and view that we agreed, we should solve many problems for the people to keep the heritage and this needs multidisciplinary team team, which may be for example, bring one from history, other from archaeology, the third engineer, the fourth may be planter and so on economy, and their dogs, people sit together and implement some strategies and research and plans to improve the life of people. I think this needs to establish a research center or research tool in our university. And in my mind, I'd maybe name it, center of cultural heritage studies. And without adding anywhere else, to be general, to bring all those people together to work in this research center and maybe participate in solving the problems of of people. And let me say, it's very maybe strange. For the audience. Maybe one of the most important problems for the people is transportation. I saw here for example, in London, the

transportation problem was solved first for people and later, for example, they can keep heritage in some examples and site especially the old part of mendacity. The transportation always is a problem for the people, for example, now the old part of the city or the historic part of the city, because it's difficult to go to this place, for example, or to have maybe a visit or work and so on that because the public transportation is very weak. And also the streets are very small and we're not we didn't have like here in London tube antenna and underground and so on and solve the problem in very brilliant way to make millions of people move inside the city. And you cannot feel that there is crowds here and there, maybe only the rush hour, at the morning and afternoon, you'll feel that. Other times, there was no problem. In Najaf, for example, at the time of ziarat or pentagrams, all the roads are blocked, and the people have a lot of problems to do to complete their daily life in such days and so on. So I think establishing the research center, who should be more disciplined not to search for on the archaeology or history as nor should be general.

Mehiyar 35:34 In addition to your scholarship, you're also a grantee, you've been awarded a small grants in Nahrein network. Could you tell us a bit about the grant? What kind of project are you planning to pursue in Iraq?

Ali Naji 35:47 Yes. The same time when they, in fact, before my posting scholarship, I might my university let me say, represented by me, and also University by a very wonderful professor named Manuel. And we propose to get a grant from Nahrein Network 30,000 pounds to document and to make conservation plan for several buildings inside Kufa, Kufa city. Because Kufa City, unfortunately, they didn't attract the same interest, like Najaf. A lot of now thinking about Najaf, and writing about Najaf and doing a lot about Najaf. About regarding the Kufa, unfortunately, the situation is different. And maybe, let me say, the Kufa city, which is river beach, and the Euphrates River beach. It has many changes, and many things from the heritage of the city will be lost because of ignore of this ignorance. So we think in going ahead, and such projects, which are underway mentioned some buildings like bathroom, public bathroom, and house, and mosque and etc. And then the project will make us also offer students to train them how to document make a drawing for the drones, for those all the places and then make an interview for the owners of those places because they are private ownership. And try to also explore the value of those old buildings of buildings for them, and if they can, if they want to keep them or not, or maybe they want they are thinking and new projects as I mentioned. And also the proposal, a part of it is to review the curriculum of the colleges of archaeology and also of architecture, the articles of department Engineering College, and College of urban planning, to see if the conservation topics, conservation of heritage buildings, topics are taught to people we say, enough hours to make our graduates aware of the importance of conservation of heritage. This is a brief about this project,

Mehiyar 38:16 In terms of your scholarship, what are the institutions did you visit in the UK?

Ali Naji 38:21 During my visit, so it was a one one month and a half, but unfortunately, I make use, I made use of only one month, the two weeks just locked down like other people in the UK, because of COVID-19. In fact, I visited museums and many types of museums. For example, let me say the British Museum in one side and also maybe smaller museum or community museum inside the garden city of network. So it is a variety of museum like science museum, like the natural history, Victoria and Albert and so on. So a lot of museum. I like the diversity of those Museum and I want to make experience, in fact, to make use of how to make the museum touching the life of people, of nowadays people and also of the past people and the common people as well. And this is the first thing that I do. And also, let me say I attended many events, like for example, a workshop held at UCL School of archaeology, which was how to deal with the decision makers with regard to the heritage, how to make them change, for example, their ideas about the heritage, those decision makers like politicians and

so on. I think it was also a good example even only discussed the situation of UK. As you know, Iraq is may be a little bit different from UK in this context. But it is important for me that, for example, how to use social media to have a campaign to make maybe a member in Parliament, changed his mind, for example, and help to keep heritage someone. The other event also, it was that the British Institute of studies of Iraq, that was the lecture of Professor Postgate about his work in the south of Iraq. And also it was good opportunity to meet him and meet those people, experts in working in British Institute of studies of Iraq. And in fact, I planned during this event to visit Birmingham Museum and present a lecture there. But unfortunately, this event was canceled because of the COVID 19. And also attended also many call example. lectures or conferences like the conference held for the PhD students of the Bartlett School of Architecture, were the students we say submitted their thesis and their work, and very lovely, fair, and also presentations. And there are a lot of feedback for the professor's attending this event about their work. As I mentioned, some of them, those PhD's work and a similar thing, what I proposed relating to the tangible to intangible heritage. Also during the trip, I had the opportunity to participate in a workshop on heritage organized in Barcelona and Spain. It was a it was a two days workshop. But it was really very valuable for me for many reasons. First is introduce myself and also have good networking for other expats of heritage from other countries, from Libya, Syria, Yemen, and also from, let me say, like, Netherlands, in addition to UK, of course, and Spain, and it is good networking for me, to hear from them, and also to hear what happened in those countries, which which are similar to Iraq, from the same situation. Also, they had problems wars, and conflict always, and some of those countries are still in that situation. And the second reason we make this trip is very important for me to Spain, is that visiting the old city of Barcelona. I can say honestly, that the historic part of Barcelona is very similar to Najaf, from the urban planning point of view, and also, from the conservation, maybe I can make a comparison between the two cities, even that is a good example and Barcelona but bad example, in my city Najaf. So I think that it was very good experience for me to have a tour inside the city events, maybe two days, but I can say maybe half of the photos I took in this trip it was in Barcelona because of the similarity between Barcelona and Najaf. And maybe one of my coming articles to make a comparison between the two cities, Barcelona and Najaf. And the third reason is to visit the history of Catalan. As you know, Barcelona is the main city in Catalonia, from my point of view, from my mind, because look look like similar to Kurdistan and Iraq. So for me, it is important to visit this place, the history of Catalan and see how those people are the Spanish people and Catalan on the Catalan people that we say like that, how they be, say, promote their cultural identity, as let me say, as a part of the community of the Spanish community? How they can keep their let me say special identity or something related to their culture and to their past? And also it was good to experience. The design of the museum and the way of keeping old things and the new things also, is very important, added to me a lot.

Mehiyar 44:42 And one final question with the knowledge that you have your experience work in Iraq, being Iraqi and seeing what's happening in the country and seeing what's happened in the country since 2003. And also before that, if you were to look at the next 20 years in Najaf, particularly related to its cultural heritage, say 20 years from now, what would Najaf look like?

Ali Naji 45:08 I think the answer of this question depends on the first step, if you if you have a feel first step is right, you will go to the right direction and your reach or what what you want to reach and with a good objective. But if the first step is bad, which is, for example, not part of a strategic plan of public policy from the government and so on, I think maybe the coming 20 years, we'll be West maybe we have situation with and then an hour a day maybe lose all the Old City and many persons from 2003 till now are always talking about demolishing all the city and make it an open space like what happened in Mecca and Medina. So, it depends on on on the good start, on the good the plan should be put forward to start to start it from now, I can I cannot expect exactly what will happen. I am always

optimistic. And for me as the maybe as a professor in university or as a citizen in iraq, I think we should not stop talking or asking or requiring and so on. Always we should move, move by speech move by writing move by events, move by campaigns also always you should move forward. We should not give up. This is my law. This is my also a recommendation for all Iraqi people, especially those who are working with heritage should not should not give up. We should keep because all nations are suffer for the same thing. And because of their insistence because of their patients, they reach the good thing they want. But also we should do the same thing. We should continue. We should not give up.

Mehiyar 47:01 On that note, Dr. Ali Naji, Kufa University. Thank you very much for this opportunity to interview you for this podcast. I wish you luck and good wishes for your future work.

Ali Naji 47:15 Also, I should thank you and thank all friends and Nahrein network, the British Institute of studies of Iraq, who helped me especially Professor Eleanor Director of Nahrein Network and all others who helped me to succeed in this trip, and I am sure that we are they will help me also and my future plans.

Mehiyar 47:40 Thank you very much.

Ali Naji 47:42 Thank you.