

Transcript: Preserving Heritage in Iraq - Zainab Mahdi interviews Fatimah Al-Muqdadi, Architect, Researcher, and Heritage Professional

Zainab 0:06 Welcome to the Nahrein Network podcast where we delve into the captivating world of Iraqi history and heritage. I'm Zainab Mahdi Nahrein Network's communication officer. Today I'll be talking to Fatimah AlMuqdadi an award winning architect and researcher specializing in cultural heritage. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Baghdad in 2018. And in the same year, she was the first woman to win the Tamayuz award for her project Dialogue: urban renewal of alMustansiryah school and its historical fabric. She received a master's scholarship in Building Information Modelling at Coventry University, which she completed specializing in heritage digitalization with distinction in 2020. Her body of work encompasses a wide range of activities such as historic urban design, heritage, documentation, photography, architectural design, critical articles, and research all centered around celebrating Iraqi heritage as a pinnacle of human endeavor. Hi, Fatima, thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. It's a pleasure to have you here. I was thinking before we get started, maybe you could introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your background. What inspired you to become an architect specifically interested in cultural heritage and focusing on Iraqi heritage?

Fatimah 1:21 Thank you so much for this opportunity. My name is Fatima AlMuqdadi, and I'm an architect and researcher based in Baghdad. I am specialized in cultural heritage, particularly the field of digitalising heritage, documenting it and sharing it with everyone in open source experiences and interactive virtual manner. I started my interest in cultural heritage early. When I was in the university ISIS occupied Mosul and the western part of Iraq. During the occupation, they destroyed valuable cultural heritage monuments that represent a crucial part of Iraqi collective heritage and by default, humanity's heritage as a whole. And when they destroyed the Nimrud wingfalls. A large movement for cultural heritage started across Iraq, people started painting it sharing it on social media. And it got me wondering, maybe this is the one thing that could unify a diverse population such as the Iraqi people. And that's when I started I. I finished it with a project where I developed the urban fabric of al Madrasa Mustansiriya, which got me my MSc scholarship and heritage building information modeling, and it has been going on ever since documenting and sharing heritage with with everybody else.

Zainab 2:58 That's amazing. Actually, I was wanting to know more about this project that you worked on, maybe could tell us a little bit more about that being the first woman to get the scholarship.

Fatimah 3:08 Yes. So in the price went on for seven years before I participated. It was started by Ahmed alMallak, who is a lecturer at Coventry University and it was first sponsored by the late Zaha Hadid, the seven years before me, the project spanned from cultural centers to research centers, things that really did not speak to the Iraqi reality we we work with a lot of heritage in Iraqi environment. And this is a challenge that we tackle every day. But unfortunately, this topic was not often spoken about in architecture because it offered some limitations in terms of form in terms of function. It did not really suit the vision. But when I chose this project, I chose this project project because this is a space that I really, really adored. And that when I spoke about it, rarely people responded because they say I would never I have never visited this place. It's right across from Mutanabbi Street so it's often overlooked. But the Madrasa for me reflected a part of Iraqi heritage that really needed to be celebrated and spoken about. So I started with the process. It wasn't easy because there wasn't many references. Actually, I wanted a plan reference for al Madrasa. So I went

to the mayoralty of Baghdad, and they they told me they had no copies because the archive was burned in 2003. So I had like to scan it and document it myself. And that was the first time I ever scanned or measured a historical building. Later on the project won out of 265 entries from worldwide architectural students that are of Iraqi origins. And the award was essentially my masters Scholarship, which I used as a way to feed this interest in heritage and further explore other opportunities.

Zainab 5:08 Congratulations on that amazing award. So yeah, Iraq does have a rich cultural heritage. But it's like you mentioned it's faced significant challenges in the recent years with ISIS. So what do you think are the key issues facing Iraqi heritage today?

Fatimah 5:24 I think the instability is a big one. But I think bigger than that is the public response to heritage in itself. It's, it is a public knowledge that Iraq is very, very old. Whenever you speak to our people, they tell us where Mesopotamians we have invented writing, we're very proud of inventing the wheels and other inventions that really shaped the world we live in today. They know Assyria, they know Babylon, they know Ur this is public knowledge, everybody knows it. But unfortunately, when you look at the reality, because of the way that heritage is being run in Iraq, it is often it controlled by the Ministry of Tourism and Heritage, and the SBAH. It is often looked at as government property. So when you're looking at something as someone else's property, you wouldn't, you wouldn't bother to really look at how you can conserve it and how you can protect it, and how to safe keep it because it's their problem. It's not my problem. While I think heritage essentially is a collective property, and that it was never the government because the government is continuously changing. I mean, the Ishtar Gate did not belong to Nebuchadnezzar, it belong to the people. And it stayed well after he left this life. So I think that shifting the perspective, from Heritage being something of a governmental tool, rather, it is something that belongs to all of us and can be an opportunity for all of us is the main main critical issue that we need to look at in Iraq.

Zainab 7:07 So it's this shift in mindset within the Iraqi community as a whole. So where does one start? I mean, do we tackle social media? Or do we tackle education and schools? How do you think, you know, one would approach this

Fatimah 7:21 I think education is a big part of it starting early, which has started in recent years, I've been seeing a lot of school field trips to historical places to the Iraqi museum. And I think if there is a collaborative process, because the scope is too big for someone to hold it on its own. So we need a collaborative framework where the government represented by SBAH. And the federal government as a whole recognizes that this is something important and needs that needs funding that needs to be looked at and protected. And then putting their hands in the hands of NGOs, local NGOs, international organizations that work in Iraq, Iraq is rich in that a lot of international organizations work there, such as UNESCO, UNDP, UN Habitat and also Nahrein Network. So establishing this sort of collaborative approach where the government, the NGOs, the institutions, the universities, the educational system, and most importantly, the local community are involved in this are involved not only in the process of safeguarding, but also in reaping the rewards, enabling people to make use of their heritage renting it, rehabilitating it, adaptive reuse strategies, things that really shift the perspective of heritage in Iraq from a mummy that needs to be, like conserved every 50 years and kept in a dark dungeon, to something that is alive and changing every day. And responding to the people around it.

Zainab 9:09 What's happening now specifically, in Baghdad, we can see this change already happening, we can see the shift in the mindset, especially among maybe the younger generation, for example, and this is something that me and you kind of discussed earlier, which was the wedding

that happened in the almadrasa. So I mean, you can see that some change is happening. I think a lot of social media played a role in kind of raising awareness among the community in preserving and protecting and like you said, using it's not a mummy. So we do see that change.

Fatimah 9:40 Yes, we have seen it and I think I want to cite here the wonderful, wonderful organizations that are working on domestic tourism in Iraq, because this shift would not have been possible without these small organizations that created this movement across Iraq that you don't need to spend a lot of money that you want. You don't need to go to the airport visit something nice. And I've seen a lot of positive feedback over the past, let's say 10 years in this sense is that people always say we went there. And I didn't think we had a similar place in Iraq, I didn't think we had mountains, I didn't think we had, like, all the structures are things that really move you and make you feel like you've seen something unique and different. And I think hand in hand with this is social media and the youth. Seeing that how other nations are living and how other nations are utilizing their resources and how we are utilizing our resources, we are very dependent on our oil, and COVID-19 illustrated that without oil, we have a very limited, economical system. So that also falls within the government's vision for 2030, which is economical diversification. And I think this term, essentially, is made for heritage because it is it is a very unique, historical and economical value for its country. So I think that given all of this, also, the opening of cultures really is contributing to the changing perspective. There is however, a lot of resistance. And this is very, very normal. I think that people often resist things that they are afraid of, or they that they don't know enough about. For the wedding, we have seen a lot of resistance. And when I say that well, other structures are being rented under UNESCO's direct publications, that they're very shocked. They don't think that this is the correct way. So change is hard. It's gonna take time. But I'm very hopeful for a future where our heritage is living and breathing.

Zainab 11:57 Could you maybe share some examples of important cultural sites or heritage landmarks in Iraq, that are currently under threat? Or maybe the ones that really need the most conservation efforts and attention right now?

Fatimah 12:08 Yes, I think that we have a very wide umbrella of heritage types. We have archaeological, we have historical we have traditional we have heritage that is tied to special people. Most of it is under one unified threat, which is negligence. And how what negligence does is that nobody is paying attention to this monument, whether it would be listing, documenting or protecting. So in case of any emergency happening, we don't have enough documentation work to remember what what what could be lost or retrieve it or rebuild it. And this is actually what happened with al Hadba in Mosul, which was destroyed by ISIS in 2017. And when it was destroyed, nobody knew how high it was because there wasn't proper documentation about it. So I think this is a big part, we need to be actively proactive with our documentation. For examples, I want to cite our sacred cities, which are currently under severe threat of urbanization. So we have Najaf, Karbala, we have also Samarra and Kathemiyah, these cities are for those who haven't visited Iraq. These cities have been built under a sacred shrines. And they have a very beautiful architectural style and a very unique context. It is one of the most amazing places in the world that you can visit and they're only in Iraq, you cannot see something similar anywhere else. Unfortunately, those shrines are being expanded at the expense of the context around it. So the city is losing its character. And it's losing its uniqueness. And if we don't speak about it, we will end up with these cities who have more are identical to cities elsewhere. So we need to have more of a delicate approach in the cities as well. I want to also cite heritage, particularly in the center of cities, particularly in the center of Baghdad, which is facing also the same threat of rapid urbanization. So for examples Zumurrud Khatun in the historical cemetery of my Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, they are building a highway right next to it a bridge and a

bridge requires piles that are dug deep into the floor and some of the Zumurrud Khatun is very, very special. It's a conical dome. That is that similar to the hot one which is said to be the wife of Haroun al-Rashid is buried in social it's very unique in terms of architectural style and honestly irreplaceable, so any damage that has been put to it will cause us damage that cannot be replaced. So urbanization I think is a big threat to Iraqi heritage right now.

Zainab 15:16 What do you think about climate change and its effect on a lot of these sites as well. And that's also probably a risk that is hitting Iraq, more than any other country in the region?

Fatimah 15:27 Yes, definitely. Climate change. We see this in our natural heritage. People don't often look at natural heritage, they think about it. It's part that doesn't need to be conserved, but we can see it in our marshes. And our marshes are across the eastern part of the South. So you can see it in Amara and you can see it in Nassiriyah, but people only recognize the ones that are in Nassiriyah which are a world UNESCO site, ahwar al chibayish. But honestly, Iraq is very rich in marshes, and they're very, and there is like in Wasit in Amara and Nassiriyah because he marshes across it. And also in Basra, you have some unique natural sights, and in in Kurdistan as well. So there is a lot of natural heritage in Iraq that is now facing a threat, particularly our ecological life that we have certain species of birds, we have certain species of animals that have lived side by side with people, for example, al Furat al awsat in Iraq, which is consisted of Hilla Karbala, Najaf Diwaniyah and Samawah is famous for its ecological life and for domesticated animals. And now these animals are facing the damage of ecological systems to them, they don't have the crop that they used to eat, they don't have the weather. The rivers are a big, big problem, our main resources of water, the Tigris and the Euphrates, but unfortunately, they come from Turkey. And the sometimes the political tensions cause the rivers to have lower levels than they are what they are used to. So this is also a big problem that a lot of organizations are working on water scarcity as well.

Zainab 17:27 You mentioned also, documentation is very important right now, in documenting a lot of these heritage sites, archaeological sites, how do you even approach the preservation and conservation of sites, when you have rapid urbanization when you have conflict zones, considering these challenges that Iraq is faced with?

Fatimah 17:45 I can cite here what happened to the Iraqi Museum in 2003. When the invasion happened, the whole country went into chaos. And the museum unfortunately, was looted with pieces that are very valuable and are irreplaceable. Unfortunately, we didn't have or we had very, very limited inventory. So when you have a collection, or when you have something, but you don't know the attributes of it, you don't know how it looks, you don't know you have no documentation of it, it's very easy not to lose it and not being able to retrieve it. So heritage that has been a part of illicit trafficking can be can be retrieved. But unfortunately, we didn't have the proper documentation or the proper legal, legal work to retrieve the things that have been stolen from the Iraqi Museum in 2003. What I can say about the easy way and what I mean by documentation is not something very sophisticated for the average person I'm not talking about we need to laser scan all of Iraq, although that would be nice. But I think that even it comes down to a picture. My master thesis was on Hadbaa minaret and I wanted to see how digital technologies can be used to retrieve heritage that has been destroyed in conflict. And the way I retrieved it was I used crowdsource data and what crowdsource data means is that is data from everyone. People who has posted online websites such as Flickr and Getty, social media, and maybe you know some photographs that you can reach out to you reach out to the local community so I released a call online through my social media very basic stuff, telling them that friends in Mosul, please if you have pictures of our hotbar please send it to me and people sent me around 300 pictures of their they took and you can use this sample to reconstruct the monument to a fair level of of accuracy and and share it online with everyone

through 3d tours so that maybe they can experience it one last time. So I think this is, it comes down sometimes to just one picture of the monument that someone took online that they posted on Instagram that tells you there was something like this here. So I think that a big part of it, we all have a responsibility towards it, it's not something that we have to wait for the specialized people to come. It's something that going through the city every day photographing things that are important, sharing them online, keeping an archive for yourself, and then after that, maybe that could be shared together and building that archive together as a collective effort. So documentation doesn't have to be very, very sophisticated, doesn't have to take a lot of money. There are also, there is also vocally a very high numbers of people owning cameras, lots of people now like to photograph for social media for people. And the most times you have the youth have in a camera basic camera that they are around with. So this camera can be used for her to documentation. And it can be used into documenting the features. And maybe some somewhere specialist such as myself, or anyone else can take those pictures and work with them into develop them to something more. So really, it's just building our archive together visiting the site, maybe I don't have, I don't have the budget in my project to visit Duhok to documentaries there. But maybe reaching out to the Duhok community and telling them, Hey, I need to have this asset, maybe you can help me and then it also builds ownership. So it's not my model. It's our model. So it's something that we've built together. As an architect, what role do you believe architecture and Cultural Heritage Preservation play in rebuilding and restoring communities, especially those communities like in Mosul been affected by conflict? Yes, I think this is very tricky, because for societies such as ours, where the basic needs are unstable, and under threat, it is really difficult to talk to people and telling them, Hey, I care about this heritage, it's important, historic, they will tell us stop caring about the stone, we are here. So I think this is a feedback that most architects, architects who are specialized in heritage or heritage professionals get is that even the human is suffering. So why should we care about this stuff? I think Well, one way to look at it is understanding that the stone is the people and vice versa. And the second thing is that understanding that the stone can play a monumental part in the recovery process is so for example, after the occupation, that tourism rates in Mosul increased significantly, because people started talking about it, people started publishing it with a competition of al-Nuri Mosque , you cannot now go to al-Nuri Mosque mosque without seeing hundreds and hundreds of foreign people who come to visit this very, very special city. So I think that, looking at this in a way that it's a parallel process. So we develop the people by developing this aspect of life. And I think architects play a monumental part of it. Also, in terms of even when you are just an ordinary architect, not specialized in heritage, you will face heritage every day, you will work within a context there isn't I don't think there is a city or a place in Europe that doesn't have a context doesn't have a history doesn't have a story behind it that you need to work with in order to develop your design. So I think that working with context, learning from it, not being too egoistic towards it being humble, understanding that it's this context is a product of 1000s and 1000s of years of trial and errors, where entire civilizations have worked to develop it, you will gain more respect towards it, you will be humbled toward it and you will follow it not lead it. And this is a critical part we need to understand that our heritage, even even in Islam, which is the dominant religion in Iraq, there is something that is called "haq al asbaqiyah". Because you have been here first, you have the right to be respected. And I think this is something that architects really need to look at and stop trying to introduce new things rather, these new things need to be neutralized from our context as well. And also, recently, there has been a lot of rehabilitation work going around, especially in Baghdad that we have seen it in with an industry but that about these initiatives that are funded by private banks and sometimes private organizations As these, these efforts need to be led by architects who are specialized to avoid any mistakes that have been happening in the recent years

Zainab 25:11 Do you feel like that is a concern that these institutions are taking into consideration the Iraqi heritage is going back to the old when building new is something that's already incorporated? Or do you feel like a lot of maybe architects in Iraq investment companies are really focused on just building new and putting the heritage and the old to the side?

Fatimah 25:33 I think that the wonderful thing that's happened is that people steered the attention towards the historical area when, in the early 2000s, because of the after the invasion, you hardly saw a woman in the historical area, like I can ask my dad to take me out. But there are no woman there. How can I take you after that? Social Development's reopening, shedding the effects of the invasion, people started to feel like I have to go to this place. And maybe there's something interesting, and then when they started going, it became a family place. But there was a problem of operating it in the night that it was shut down. And that it was it did not operate in the night. So hence came the development process and the development process, I think, is working. But it needs a bit of direction. It needs more specialized people. And it needs more direction towards what documentation is really about. So I think the positive thing that came out of this attempt is that maybe the operation of within a district at night because this this was something that we did not dream of happening. Also you can look at positive impacts, maybe in the Petaluma Alomar Park, which used to be a park for illegal drugs, trafficking and illegal activities. Now, it's a completely family place, even at 12am, you can go there with your family and be completely said. So I think it's important to look at these projects critically, and not staring into one side over the other, there are positives that cannot be denied. There are also maybe things that we can work on having more specialized people, people will look at who people who are specialized in conservation, maybe I would, I would suggest having more time for the research part not executing straight away, because I think this is what the this project need to work on is that the research is very limited time it's like one month or two month for a very dense, densely historic city while the execution is started straight away. And I think we need to look back at this and maybe have a more holistic approach into intervening on heritage because there are intangible things that you need to look at there. There is an oral heritage there is the people, how can this affect the people? What does the people want. And also, this is a big part involved in the local community, because this is not being done. And this can be done with surveys on site interviews, people are only received being the result and they have to live with it and then criticize it maybe if we work them from the start as the main stakeholder and then telling them maybe what do you want to see? And then maybe if it's something that is not scientifically correct, maybe we can discuss it with them. And if it's something that is really positive for the area I can include as well. And the end, the results will be something that we can learn from and replicate elsewhere.

Zainab 28:44 Have you seen any innovative approaches or projects right now in Iraq that have involved or that you've been involved in that address the preservation of Iraqi heritage? Are there any examples that you could maybe share with us?

Fatimah 28:55 I can cite here, Qaf Media Lab. Qaf Media Lab is a wonderful small organization in Mosul, which started after the occupation. And they have this part of their scope that is called the Virtual Reality Lab. And the virtual reality lab. What they do is that they document Mosul heritage and then and then they they construct it into like virtual models. Unfortunately, I don't see them sharing these models. That would be like a wonderful plus. Other aspects include maybe maybe also looking at the way that the ministry is changing operation time. So for example, recently, the museum started opening during the weekend, which is something well as positive, but it's still like heritage sector in Iraq is still a baby, and we need to like look after it and then maybe steer it in the

right direction and hopefully within 20 to 30 years, we will have a more active heritage sector. a more mature,

Zainab 30:01 How do you navigate the intersection between cultural heritage preservation, and the political and social dynamics in Iraq?

Fatimah 30:09 I think the social political aspects of life are, you cannot escape them if you're in Iraq, because when you were out the taxi, when you go on public transportation, at work at school, people will always be discussing the political agenda, and what is happening in Iraq, and what the government is doing and how we should react to it, and what's missing and what's going on. So I think that looking at the social political aspect is, is something essential in every Iraqis life, and we are often born with it and raised with it. Understanding this from an insider perspective is a big, big plus. Understand looking through the local eyes, you are living this crisis. So what would you like, I am not an architect, or a researcher at core, I am just Iraqi. And I could never, for the life of me exist outside of this context, I will always be looking from Iraq perspective. And looking from Iraqi perspective, what would I like my city to be? How can I like? How can I visit the historical part of it in a better way? What would I love the museum to be? And I think that the lovely thing about it is that now Iraq is being reopened to other nations, and people are visiting Europe, and they're visiting other countries, Turkey, our neighbor, and these countries are all attempting to tackle the question of heritage in their own way in their own contexts and their own social and political aspects. So now people understand that there are other ways to look at these things. And then maybe these things are not a luxury, but a but a necessity that we can use a use. I also think that being secured into your own originals, not being steered away, it is very easy to steer behind a political side, and say that this is good, this is bad. It's black and white, but often in life, it's very grey. So I think being critical in that you need to weigh out the pros and cons of every political decision. And then understanding that it is very difficult to compare a country such as Iraq to other countries, because it has been into an unrest mode since I don't know like early 1900s. And there has been a lot of I mean, in the past century, Iraq went through more political changes than the other globe combined, I think, yeah, I mean, we went from a colonized, to a kingdom and then to a republic. And then that Republic changed into political direction, like multiple times, and then we went to the Democratic Republic. And it has changed rapidly to this to the point where it has lost its direction, which is completely normal. We need to understand this, we need to understand that change is lengthy, and that we will not wake up tomorrow with everything solved. We need to work slowly and build our way towards it. And understand that we have our own contexts we can learn from others, but we cannot replicate.

Zainab 33:33 What do you think are the gaps right now the most pressing needs within the communities that we need to address in order to conserve cultural heritage

Fatimah 33:41 I think about involving them, honestly involving them, having them being having them benefits, and there's not just as visitors, but as active participants, participants. The economical situation is very difficult for lots of Iraqis at the moment, because our currency is fluctuating up and down in terms of its price and its value. So there are economical challenges and life is not easy. It's not easy to live in Iraq. So I think that understanding this and understanding that people want to enlarge the way that they they need to look at things and then see things from a more cohesive perspective. Understanding that heritage could be an opportunity for that. People are willing now in 2024, they weren't willing in 2012 for example, to go to for example, Khanaqeen is a small town in Diyala. Nobody wanted to visit it now I can see like there are trips going there and experience the heritage of Khanaqeen and you go there and you find lots of heritage that you didn't expect would be there and a very versatile community and you come home feeling very happy. I cannot believe there are places like this in Iraq. So I think that understanding that people are willing to participate,

and they want to participate, and they want to safeguard, and I think the wedding, the wedding illustrated for us that people have opinions about their heritage, and they feel the response, a certain responsibility towards it. Now, how can we use this to our advantage? I think that one thing we can learn from the UK is that the heritage heritage is run in a very local manner. So every heritage site is responsible for its own, it doesn't need to be. It doesn't need to be involved into every small and big detail with the federal government. I think having the sort of authority to every city to just and regular regulated at first so that people can learn about it. And then maybe after that, giving them the freedom to utilize this heritage within within, of course, regulations and laws. Having them being free to use this heritage to their own advantage, and create opportunities from them is quite helpful, I think, because it will not be just something old that you can visit. It's something that your livelihood is interconnected with.

Zainab 36:23 Do you think the Iraqi diaspora maybe organizations outside of Iraq also play a role in preserving Iraqi heritage?

Fatimah 36:31 Absolutely, 100%. I think that I think that the the PowerPoint here is that people who have left Iraq and hopefully have settled in into countries which offer better opportunities and more status, stability, have their basic needs met. And now they can think more in terms of development, rather than just struggling to meet the basic needs. And I think this is something that's often overlooked, is that most people in Iraq are struggling to meet their basic needs. So maybe they don't have the mental capacity to think and develop. But but the diaspora outside of Iraq have had this opportunity. And we can see wonderful examples for it. For example, the Ark for Iraq institution, which works into conserving the naval heritage of Iraq, in Basra and in other in the other parts that have marshes is is started by Rashad Saleem, which was based who was based in the UK. So I think that this example and other examples as well, I mean, looking at the Nahrein Network, which we are speaking through Nahrein Network was started as the notion that this is something that is really important. And then then maybe the people who are living right by it are struggling into their own lives, that maybe they don't have the opportunity to look at this site. And maybe you can help them look at the side by providing exterior views an exterior perspective. And this is not something that is strange to Iraq, because it has always been situated at trade routes. So there has always been exterior perspective, being inside and then maybe exchanging ideas and being more open towards other nations. So I think, of course, the diaspora suffers with questions of identity or not, you're not born and raised in Iraq, but your Iraqi origin, and maybe you can you're based in somewhere in the UK and the USA, you don't fit here, you don't fit there, how can you like exist. And I think this collaboration between us all, really, really has benefits for all of us, you will find a place where you belong people who are who have similar values to you. But maybe you have had better opportunities. Maybe you had better education, but they also have the inside look that maybe it can produce a collaboration which happened in the Ark for Iraq? So I think yes, definitely, I think everyone should have the opportunity to reconnect with their roots, and then to be part of the process, no matter where they are based.

Zainab 39:17 So if we look ahead, what are your hopes and aspirations for the future of Iraqi cultural heritage? And I also wanted to give you a chance to talk about your own work and your own organization Mierath as well.

Fatimah 39:30 Whenever you ask an Iraqi What do you wish for they will always say al Aman, I wish for a safe Iraq, where heritage is valued. It is respected and it is looked at as a living and breathing symbol of our history. I envision an Iraq where our diverse and colorful population is unified under the notion of loyalty to this land and for everything on top of it and underneath it. And I think that this is the notion of heritage, it's not religious, it's not political, it's just heritage is it's very It doesn't

have an agenda to it is just a part of our memory. And I think we can use it for social reconciliation, and continuing the hard efforts that we've been working on it. My organization, or it's not more of an organization, it's a research lab, Mierath, which means legacy in Arabic. And it is something that is passed on from generation to generation looks at digitizing heritage, using modern day technologies such as photogrammetry, and laser scanning and GIS to produce models that can be shared online with everyone. So that may be if you are based in the USA, or if you are based in Australia, but you want to access this heritage, you have a relationship to it. If you are Iraqi, wherever you are based, you have the equal right to access your heritage and experience it as much as everyone else. So the main idea is having an open source platform where Iraqis can access their heritage, even if it's not accessible on site. So for example, sometimes we cannot access heritage, even if you're based in Iraq, because it may be it's a way it's in a desert, such as that how that maybe it's, it's somewhere where the situation is not stable, you have the right to access to it. And it's about restoring the ownership of heritage from from any other identity to the people. It also looks at sharing these models online in an open source manner, with researchers, architects, the government NGOs, so that they can build on these models, and then use them to further the body of knowledge in the Iraqi community. So it's more of it's not documentation, it's more as using documentation as the meaning to reclaim heritage and then having the information put online so that people can benefit from it. I did mention the situation where I wanted a drawing for almadrasa almustansirya, and I didn't find it. And it's one of the most famous historical sites, in fact that so you can imagine how much undocumentation we have and the large way ahead. So it's, it's a matter of having this information open and accessible in a transparent manner, sharing it with people. Maybe in the future. Also, research is a big part of it using these, these methods and producing a body of Iraqi research that is led, celebrated and owned by Iraqi people.

Zainab 42:57 That sounds wonderful. Fatima, I'm so excited for this research lab. And I'm really excited to see, you know, all the amazing things that you'll be doing as well in the future. I want to thank you so much for taking this time to talk to me. I've learned a lot and I hope to talk to you soon.

Fatimah 43:14 Thank you so much for this and I look forward to more collaborations with you. Thank you.