



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUB Press Hosts Charles Al Hayek at the 66th Beirut Arab International Book Fair: “How Do We Return History to the Public?”

As part of its participation in the 66th Beirut Arab International Book Fair, AUB Press hosted a compelling discussion titled “How Do We Return History to the Public?”, featuring renowned public historian Charles Al Hayek in conversation with Dr. Bilal Orfali. The event was supported by the Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Chair and organized in collaboration with the Center for Arts and Humanities at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

Charles Al Hayek is a Lebanese historian, founder of the Heritage and Roots platform, a researcher at AUB, and the creator and host of Lebanon with a Story, a popular history program broadcast on LBCI. The event attracted a diverse audience of established historians, university students, and history enthusiasts.

Dr. Bilal Orfali opened the discussion by addressing the widespread perception of history as a “dry” subject in schools—often disconnected from the lived experiences of the people it seeks to represent. Al Hayek expanded on this by noting that while Lebanon’s history textbooks were last updated in the 1990s, these changes affected content, not pedagogical approach. The result, he argued, is a non-critical engagement with history. He also emphasized the overlooked value of oral histories—stories, poems, zajjal, and other cultural expressions—as vital sources for understanding the past.

“Public history,” Al Hayek explained, “aims to create accessible knowledge that helps people remember where they come from and better understand the present.” This approach not only informs the public about historical events but encourages critical thinking and the asking of difficult questions.

The conversation then turned to the importance of individual and collective memory in enriching historical narratives. Al Hayek highlighted the need to bring an emotional dimension back into history, arguing that when emotions are present, they are often exploited to serve political ideologies. Conversely, emotionless history risks being alienating and unrelatable. A more humanized approach would highlight not only political milestones and conflicts but also the everyday lives of people living through these events.

American University of Beirut

PO Box 11-0236, Riad El Solh, Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon
T +961 1 35 00 00 – Ext 2650 | communications@aub.edu.lb

aub.edu.lb

When asked about the relationship between general and specific historical narratives, Al Hayek emphasized the power of storytelling as a tool for bridging the gap. Narration, he noted, can transform traditional archives into stories that resonate with broader audiences. However, he cautioned that storytelling can also be manipulated when used to support ideological agendas.

Dr. Orfali raised the issue of how digital platforms are reshaping the way younger generations engage with history. While short-form content on social media increases accessibility and democratizes knowledge, Al Hayek warned that it also opens the door for misinformation, especially when content creators lack a background in historical research. He proposed the use of serialized content to maintain depth while retaining audience interest.

The discussion concluded with a lively Q&A session, where attendees raised questions about contested historical narratives and how best to navigate them.

Visit [“AUB Press” on Youtube](#) to watch the full discussion.

ENDS

For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar, PhD

Executive Director of Communications
Lecturer – Political Studies and Public Administration Department
Founding Director – Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory
Fellow – Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs
Member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Research, Innovation, and Creativity Hub

T +961 1 37 43 74 Ext: 2676 | M +961 3 42 70 24
sk158@aub.edu.lb

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 790 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 9000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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