



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUB Hosts "Questions of Body, Memory, and Archive in Iman Mersal's Writings" Panel Discussion

The American University of Beirut (AUB) hosted a literary panel titled "Questions of Body, Memory, and Archive in Iman Mersal's Writings." AUB's Sheikh Zayed Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies organized the event, which featured renowned Egyptian poet and writer Iman Mersal in conversation with Lebanese writer Riwa Bou Hamdan. Mersal reflected on how her writing navigates the interplay of the body, memory, and the archiving of personal experience.

Mersal's critically acclaimed works *How to Mend: Motherhood and Its Ghosts* and *Traces of Enayat al-Zayyat* were touchstones in the discussion, as both books grapple with themes of motherhood, absence, and memory. These works have earned her major literary honors, including the Sheikh Zayed Book Award and the James Tait Black Prize. Mersal described writing as a means of reclaiming selfhood and preserving memory—especially for women—while interrogating cultural narratives surrounding motherhood and womanhood.

During the discussion, Mersal humorously likened the guilt of motherhood to a "dinosaur" looming over mothers, prompting debate on whether such guilt is psychological or culturally imposed. She also discussed absence as a literary tool. In *How to Mend*, Mersal confronts the unspoken "ghosts" of motherhood, while in *Traces of Enayat al-Zayyat*, she resurrects the memory of an overlooked Egyptian novelist. The conversation noted how the language around motherhood and womanhood is steeped in inherited moral metaphors that are difficult to escape, and how literature can challenge these entrenched ideas.

Mersal further highlighted literature as an alternative archive for marginalized voices, suggesting that writing can preserve women's stories and create bonds of care across time. She reflected that researching Enayat al-Zayyat felt like forming a friendship across generations—a form of female solidarity through storytelling.

The audience engaged with these insights through a lively question-and-answer session. This panel was part of an ongoing series hosted by the Sheikh Zayed Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies at AUB, underscoring the university's commitment to fostering literary discourse in the region. Through such events, AUB provides a platform for critical conversations and celebrates contemporary voices like Iman Mersal.

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

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
Former 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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