



Centre for Lebanese Studies
مركز الدراسات اللبنانية
— 40 years —

A History of the Centre for Lebanese Studies: 40 Years of Achievements



The civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990) spurred a wave of migration from Lebanon to countries perceived as safer, including the UK. Many Lebanese had settled in London, establishing businesses, forming cultural associations, and enriching the city's multicultural landscape. Despite the distance, the Lebanese community in London stayed connected to events in Lebanon, organising fundraisers and supporting their compatriots, advocating for peace and stability in their homeland.

Concurrently, between 1982 and 1984, Lebanon experienced significant political and military turmoil, marked by key events such as the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982 followed by the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps massacre, the deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force, the assassination of President-elect Bashir Gemayel, the bombing of the peacekeeping force's barracks and its subsequent withdrawal, the Mountain War, and the bombing of the American embassy in Beirut.

This period was characterised by intense violence, foreign intervention, and political instability, exacerbating Lebanon's sectarian tensions and prolonging its civil war.

The unfolding crisis in Lebanon resonated deeply within the Lebanese community in London, galvanising a sense of urgency and solidarity among expatriates. Many felt compelled to take action in response to the deteriorating situation.

These events propelled increased political activism among the Lebanese diaspora in London. Community members acknowledged the urgency of denouncing the violence and turmoil affecting their homeland, striving to rally support from the global community. Through various means, they worked to promote initiatives aimed at cultivating peace and reconciliation in Lebanon.

Furthermore, the Lebanese community in London maintained strong connections to their cultural heritage. Thus, the ongoing turmoil in Lebanon became a rallying point for expatriates, inspiring collective solidarity and action during a period of profound upheaval and uncertainty.



Formation and Evolution of the Centre for Lebanese Studies

Nadim Shehadi, the former director of the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS), describes the Centre's establishment as “a history of diaspora mobilisation in times of crisis.” The founding members, coming from diverse religious backgrounds and regions of Lebanon, aimed to demonstrate their unity and enhance Lebanon's image—an objective common among diaspora communities.

Despite being physically distant, their strong connection to their homeland is why Shehadi considers them a diaspora group. These members had left Lebanon either shortly after the war began or in the early 1970s, yet they maintained significant stakes in the country and were worried about its future and identity, especially in the aftermath of the events between 1982 and 1984. Through their efforts, they sought to support and positively influence Lebanon, remaining deeply connected despite their geographical separation. By the end of 1983, they had decided to establish the Centre.

Ghias El-Yafi, a founder and former board member, reflects on this period, stating, “Every change and event was massive. It was like Lebanon; the idea of Lebanon was finishing. We were being atomized as a country, as a society, as institutions.”

These founders initially met during gatherings organised by Ahmad al Hajj, the Lebanese ambassador in London, who El-Yafi credits as a catalyst for bringing the Lebanese community together.

The first initiative was the creation of the British Lebanese Association (BLA), which began with 500 members, both Lebanese and British. The BLA organised annual lectures, had a scholarship program, and hosted exhibitions and concerts. Soon after, another founding member, George Asseily, established the Lebanese branch at the Arab British Chamber of Commerce.

Throughout this period, the founding members convened on a regular basis, deliberating on methods to bring an end to the conflict in Lebanon. Their primary objective was to shift focus away from the narratives of strife and division, instead fostering a deeper understanding of their nation's history and promoting mutual understanding. Their focus centred on advocating for dialogue, education, and reconciliation as essential steps towards creating a more peaceful and unified future for the country.

It was on this basis that the Centre for Lebanese Studies was formally established on 19 May 1984, during a meeting held in Park Place, Surrey. The original trust deed, dated 4 October 1984, listed the founding trustees, including George Asseily, Sami Beydoun, Myrna Bustani, Nadim Dimechkie, Salah Hawila, Mazen Salha, George Zakhem, George Zouein, Albert Hourani, Michael Gilsenan, and Robert Mabro. Subsequently, Ghias el-Yafi, Ramez Dimechkie, Samir Lahoud, and George Zakhem were appointed to the board of trustees.

The Centre aimed to advance public education by facilitating the study and research of Lebanon's historical, economic, geographic, sociological, and cultural issues. It sought to create a library of archives, organise seminars, and publish related works. As Myrna Bustani notes, "It was essential that the centre was nonpartisan. The goal was to become an authority on Lebanon and the first pure research centre of the Arab world." The research from the Centre was intended to support the future rebuilding of Lebanon on a factual and sound basis.

Independence from outside influence was another core objective. Thus, CLS elected a chairman for a two-year term, with George Zakhem, Ghias al-Yafi, and subsequently George Asseily assuming the role. Asseily, frequently re-elected, was praised for his fundraising abilities, which were crucial as the CLS often faced financial deficits. El-Yafi recalls, "George was an amazing fundraiser. No one wanted to be chairman to avoid the burden of having to raise money. George brought people together. He had an amazing network and he and the board were highly credible people."

In August 1984, renowned historian Marwan Buheiry was appointed director. Buheiry, then teaching at the American University of Beirut, was selected for "his intellectual integrity and political impartiality." "Marwan was the keystone of this project," Bustani remarks. Buheiry served until his sudden death in February 1986. Albert Hourani, during Buheiry's homage, reflected, "I had the excitement of seeing what had been an idea in the minds of some Lebanese men and women of good will given a clear shape by Marwan."

Nadim Shehadi, who had joined the CLS in May 1985 as an assistant to Buheiry while still a PhD candidate, was appointed director. Meetings were initially held in London, often at Buheiry's, and later at Shehadi's homes. In July 1986, the board decided to purchase an office at 59 Observatory Street in Oxford to be closer to Saint Anthony's College ■

Affiliation with the Middle East Centre at Saint Anthony's College

With renowned figures like Albert Hourani, Michael Gilson, and Robert Mabro among its founding trustees, the decision for CLS to shift its headquarters to Oxford and establish ties with the Middle East Centre (MEC) at Saint Anthony's College was a natural progression.

Members of the CLS community attribute Hourani to a pivotal role in its development. El-Yafi acknowledges Hourani's vital influence at the Centre's inception, while Fida Nasrallah, former deputy director (1991-1997), describes him as "central to the Centre" and "the guru," ensuring its emergence as a coveted research hub.

Historian Eugene Rogan, former fellow and member of the research committee, elaborates on Hourani's multifaceted contributions, affirming that "Hourani's role was fundamental and foundational to the creation of the Centre." Rogan emphasises Hourani's diverse involvement, from organising conferences to conducting original research and delivering key lectures, which significantly enhanced the Centre's reputation. Shehadi underscores Hourani's network as instrumental in attracting esteemed scholars to CLS events, asserting that "all the work we did was not possible without Hourani's network."

Rogan notes that the contributions of CLS to Middle Eastern studies at Oxford proved enriching and mutually beneficial. CLS aimed to leverage Oxford's academic prestige to establish itself as a premier hub for Lebanese studies. Shehadi emphasises the importance of the Oxford connection, stating that "A connection with Oxford was very important to be able to build a network and make CLS the main centre for Lebanese studies."

A research committee, initially chaired by Hourani and comprising MEC fellows, CLS directors, and governors, facilitated collaboration between the two centres. Hourani was then succeeded by Roger Owen, Michael Gilson and Derek Hopwood. According to Rogan, "The meetings of the research committee were always a mixture of the social and the intellectual and confirmed the ties between the two centres." The committee would meet once each term, during Oxford's University three terms.

The meetings primarily revolved around appointing visiting fellows, advising the director on these appointments, and discussing the research program's direction. Additionally, they deliberated on the types of conferences the centre should organise and oversaw all its publications, particularly the books published initially with Ithaca Press and later with IB Tauris. Working papers were also a topic of discussion.

"There was a sense of building a research resource for people to have access to academic work on Lebanon despite the war, to keep Lebanon alive. That was really the work of the research committee," Rogan emphasises ■

Activities

Nadim Shehadi, in his role as research director, tapped into his network of scholars and policymakers in Lebanon and his deep understanding of archival materials to put together numerous conferences, seminars, and discussion panels. He also played a crucial role in getting numerous publications out. He was responsible for creating a vast collection of archival resources, neatly organised and stored in the CLS basement. These archives contained papers related to Lebanon sourced from prominent national archives like the United States National Archives. Eugene Rogan beautifully sums it up by saying that the CLS became “a home away from home” for scholars interested in Lebanon.

The Centre held its first workshop in Oxford in September 1986 on “New Research on Lebanon.” Between 1986 and 2001, the Centre organised dozens of conferences and workshops around the world, many co-organized with leading institutions.



Notable events organised by the Centre for Lebanese Studies throughout the years:

- “Rebuilding State and Society in Lebanon” at Tufts University in October 1988, co-organized with the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and the Middle East Centre at Harvard University.
- A seminar by Ambassador Clovis Maksoud on “Lebanon in search of its Destiny” at SOAS in February 1989, in cooperation with the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at SOAS.
- “L’avenir du Liban dans le contexte regional et international” in Paris in May 1989, co-organised with the Centre d’Etudes de l’Orient contemporain and the Centre de formation et de perfectionnement des journalistes.

- A conference on “the Lebanese communities in sub-Saharan Africa” at the Middle East Centre in September 1990, featuring presentations by specialists in African and Lebanese affairs.
- A seminar on “Lebanon in Comparative Perspective” by Professor Theodor Hanf at the Middle East Centre in December 1990.
- A conference at the Lebanese Forum at the School of Oriental and African Studies in December 1990.
- “State and Society in Syria and Lebanon 1919-1991” in Exeter in September 1991, co-organized with the Centre for Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter.
- “Peace-keeping, Water and Security in South Lebanon,” an international conference followed by two workshops on “Water and Security issues” in London and Oxford in October 1991, co-organized with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.
- “The Reconstruction of Beirut” in London in March 1992, co-organized with the Town and Country Planning Association and the Council for Development and Reconstruction.
- “Parliamentary Elections in Lebanon” in Oxford in May 1992, co-organized with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the International Peace Academy.



The Centre also hosted several occasional seminars, such as talks by ex-Prime Minister Dr. Salim El Hoss at the Middle East Centre and Dr. Brian McGuire on Lebanese Refugees in cooperation with the Refugee Studies Program (RSP) at Queen Elizabeth House.

In 1993, the Centre organised a panel at the EURAMES inaugural conference in July entitled “Lebanon in International Politics,” with speakers including Professor Leila Fawaz, Professor Michael Humphrey, Professor Ghassan Salame, Mr. Abbas Samii, Mr. Gregory Quinn, and Dr. Nasser Kalawoun. On November 8, 1993, the Centre organised a talk by ex-minister Mr. Walid Jumblatt on “Lebanon: The Challenges of the Future.”

In 1994, the Centre organised several conferences:

- “The French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon” in Oxford on July 9-10, jointly

with the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College. Participants included Professor Philip Khoury, Mr. Peter Shambrooke, Ms. Samia Hannachi, Mr. Michel van Leuwe, and Dr. Gerard Khoury.

- A three-day workshop on the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon in July, in cooperation with the Middle East Centre.
- A lecture by Mr. Giandomenico Picco, Former Assistant Secretary General to the United Nations, on "The Diplomacy of the UN Secretary General: The Case of Lebanon" in November, co-organized with the Royal Institute of International Affairs.



In March 1995, the Centre organised a symposium on "Downtown Beirut and its Archaeological Excavations" in cooperation with the Lebanese British Friends of the Beirut National Museum and UNESCO, hosted by the British Museum. Speakers included HE Mr. Michel Edde, Lebanon's Minister of Culture and Higher Education. The Centre also launched a joint project with the Refugee Studies Program at Queen Elizabeth House on "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon."

In January 1996, the CLS co-organized the "Lebanon: Electoral Systems Conference" with the Electoral Reform International Services. The three-day conference, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, studied the prospects for a new Lebanese law in a comparative perspective, with participation from MPs, academics, constitutional experts, and political analysts. International experts from the UK, US, and Europe also participated, along with specialists from the Electoral Reform Society in London. A report summarising the issues was published by the CLS.

Dr. Laila Parsons worked on a six-month research and documentation phase of the CLS's project on "Palestinians in Lebanon," organised jointly with the RSP at Queen Elizabeth House and funded by the European Commission. Documents collected were indexed and deposited at the RSP's Documentation Centre. A documentation list was published by the Centre and the RSP in March 1997. Research commissioned under this phase was presented at a conference in September.

In September/October 1996, the Centre and the RSP organised the “Palestinians in Lebanon Conference,” sponsored by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the governments of Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, the European Commission, and the Ford Foundation. A report summarising the conference debates was published in May 1997, and a special issue of the Journal of Refugee Studies appeared in the Summer of 1997.

In December 1996, a conference on Iranian-Lebanese Relations was held at Harvard University, organised by Dr. Houchang Chehabi in cooperation with the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard and the CLS.

In 1997, the Centre organised:

- Roundtable discussions on “Lebanon: Domestic and Political Developments” on October 6, with guest speaker Mr. Boutros Harb MP, in association with the Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- A discussion on the South Lebanon Monitoring Group on November 3, with Dr. Farid Abboud, Lebanon’s delegate to the Monitoring Group in South Lebanon.
- A conference on “Emerging Lebanon: A New Role for the Future” in March 1998. Sponsored by the Ford Foundation, this two-day stocktaking meeting examined regional, international, and sectoral trends affecting Lebanon’s future. Participants included business people, economists, and academics, with a report summarising the issues published by the CLS.

On June 7-9, 1998, the CLS co-organized a “brainstorming” conversation in Oxford with the Middle East Centre and the Royal Institute of Inter-faith Studies (RIIFS) Jordan, entitled “The Arab Image in the West.” The meeting, held under the patronage of HRH Prince Hassan of Jordan, examined preconceptions and prejudices associated with the Arab world. A report written by Susannah Tarbush, translated into Arabic by Talal Fandi, was published in both languages.





In 1999, the Centre co-organized:

- A one-day seminar titled “Lebanon Today” on January 27, with the Council for Advancement of Arab British Understanding in London.
- A conference on Privatization in Lebanon on March 20-21 at Blenheim Palace, sponsored by the World Bank, the Ford Foundation, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Participants included advisors to Ministers, members of the Privatization Committee in the Ministry of the Economy, private and public sector representatives, and UK-based experts with privatisation experience. A report summarising the issues was published by the CLS.

The CLS was elected as Observer Member for the UK in EUROMESCO, a network of research centres from the Mediterranean region.

In 2000, the Centre organised:

- An exploratory workshop on “The Palestinian Refugee Issue in the Middle East Peace Process” on March 4-5, in collaboration with the Middle East Program at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House). The workshop, funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was attended by 27 participants from the Middle East, Europe, and North America.
- The “Scenario Building Exercise on the Refugee Issue in the Middle East Peace Process,” held at Minster Lovell on July 22-24, 2000. Supported by the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, this meeting was attended by officials and experts from several countries, including from the Middle East. The event, co-organized with Chatham House, examined various scenarios and their implications on the Middle East Peace Process.
- The “Legal Workshop: Individual Rights and the Palestine Question” on October 7-8, organised jointly with Chatham House. The meeting aimed to examine legal frameworks and mechanisms for pursuing individual rights in the event of a Middle East peace settlement. Sponsored by the IDRC, this



was part of a program on the refugee issue in the Middle East Peace Process.

- The “Regional Dialogue on the Palestinian Refugee Issue” program, which aimed to hold in-country study groups leading to a regional meeting on refugee-host country relations. The Lebanon part was funded by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the regional follow-up work received a grant from the Canadian International Development Agency through the IDRC. A workshop was held in Lebanon in January 2001.
- The “South Lebanon Panel” at SOAS on December 6, 2000, in collaboration with the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at SOAS.

In 2001, the Centre organised:

- A “Stocktaking Workshop on the Palestinian Refugee Issue” at Minster Lovell on March 30-April 1. This meeting was attended by 25 participants from the region, Europe, and North America, aiming to evaluate research on the Palestinian refugee issue and set priorities for future research. The event was funded by the IDRC and supported by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

In 2002, the Centre organised:

- A “Research Project on Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon,” which culminated in a conference in April 2002, organised jointly with the UNDP. The meeting examined the socio-economic status and human rights of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and a report summarising the discussions was published by the CLS.
- A “Scenario Building Exercise on the Palestinian Refugee Issue in the Middle

East Peace Process,” held on June 1-2, 2002. This was part of the Centre’s program on the refugee issue, funded by the IDRC and supported by the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

- The Centre’s participation in the 6th Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) Annual General Meeting held in Alexandria, Egypt, in December 2002, as the representative for the UK.



In 2003, the Centre organised:

- A conference on “Druze Realities in the Middle East” on February 22-23, co-organized with the Druze Heritage Foundation and held at St Antony’s College, Oxford. The conference examined the role and position of the Druze in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel.
- A “Workshop on Palestinian Refugees” on June 20-22, co-organized with the UNDP and held in Beirut. The workshop focused on the socio-economic status and human rights of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

In 2004, the Centre organised:

- Several conferences on Palestinian refugees and Middle East policy, including workshops and policy forums on the ongoing conflict and its implications for Lebanon and the region.

On June 17, 2004, the Centre held a special event to celebrate its 20th Anniversary. The event, attended by friends, scholars, and colleagues, was a testament to the Centre’s enduring legacy and contributions to the study of Lebanon and the broader Middle East.

Throughout these years, CLS hosted numerous significant events and published reports, solidifying its role as a hub for Lebanese studies and regional dialogue ■

Archives

Over the years, the CLS acquired a large number of documents and files from four major archives: the National Archives and Records Administration, the Eisenhower Archives, the Israel State Archives, and the Belgian Diplomatic Archives. These documents were mostly photocopies from the original archives, in addition to microfilm printouts, microfilm reels, and microfiche pages.

Most documents were American diplomatic, military, and intelligence reports and correspondence. The earliest period covered was Lebanon under Ottoman rule.

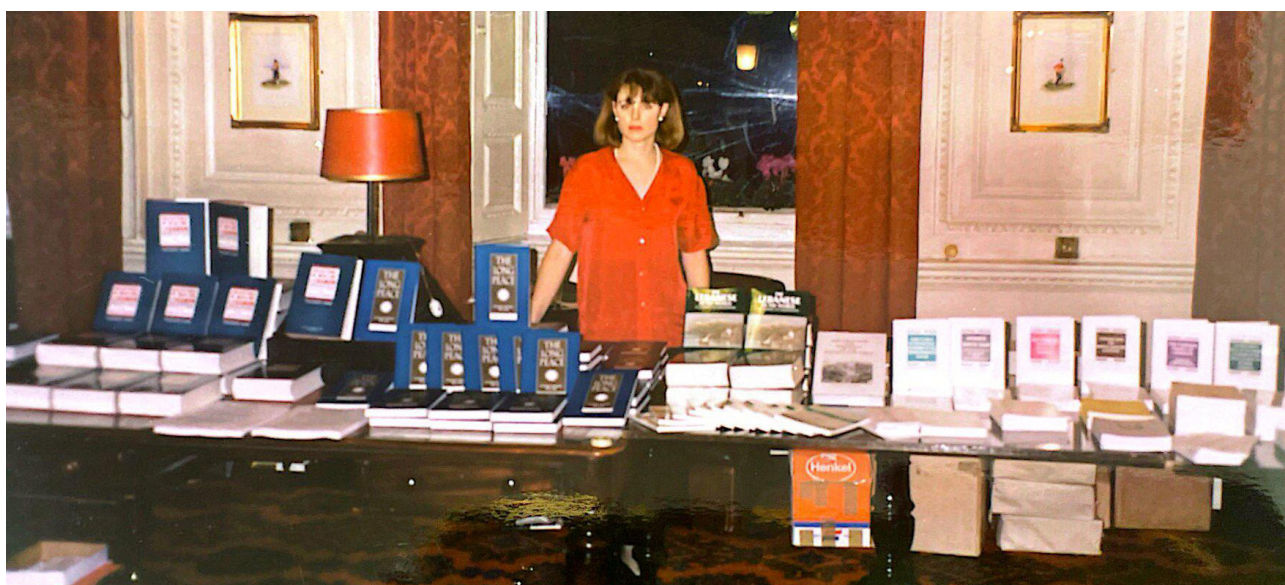
Chronologically next in order were the general Lebanon files from the National Archives and Records Administration. They covered the extensive period of the mid-1930s to the late 1950s. In short, they dealt with Lebanon under the French Mandate, the early years of independence, and the 1958 conflict.

The Special Files on Lebanon in the Eisenhower Archives dealt mainly with the 1958 conflict. US policies such as the Eisenhower Doctrine and US perceptions of Gamal Abdel Nasser and communism were also addressed, in addition to the Lebanese domestic crisis surrounding the 1957 parliamentary elections and the fears of different political groups regarding Western or Arab intervention.

The Israeli files mainly dealt with the relations between Lebanon and the Yishuv and later Israel. In short, these documents covered events from the 1920s to the late 1950s. They consisted of photocopies, the majority of which were in Hebrew with some reports in English, French, and Arabic. The main areas covered were Lebanese-Israeli relations, the Jewish community in Beirut and Damascus, Lebanese domestic and regional politics, the Maronite Church, and Lebanese political personalities.

Finally, the Belgian files covered the first years of Lebanon's independence 1943 - 1944. The main areas dealt with Lebanon's relations with France, Britain, and the United States, as well as addressing Lebanon's establishment of a political system, elections, General Catroux, and the revision of the constitution.

The Centre's archives were open to any scholar wishing to conduct research on the premises ■





Visiting Fellows

The Centre built strong connections with researchers studying Lebanon. Instead of formal applications, it relied on its network to find potential fellows. Members of the research committee or Shehadi himself would identify candidates through prior knowledge or meetings at conferences. They'd then invite these individuals to join their fellowship program, offering funding for the final stages of their projects in exchange for their work being published under the Centre's publications.

The first fellow at the Centre was the renowned historian and History Professor at the American University of Beirut, Kamal Salibi. In 1993, Dr. Abdul Rahim Abu-Husayn, also from AUB, undertook a year-long fellowship, during which he focused on Ottoman documents from 16th and 17th century Lebanon. Additionally, Professor Leila Fawaz from Tufts University joined in the same year, investigating the events leading to the formation of the Mutassarifiya. Professor Caesar Farah spent a month as a Visiting Fellow at the Centre in 1994, during which time he worked on his book "The Politics of Interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon." Concurrently, Mr. Ignacio Klich authored an extensive survey, complemented by a bibliography, on the study of Lebanese and Arab immigration to Latin America.

Some of the notable fellows of the Centre for Lebanese Studies

Professor Houchang Chehabi from Harvard University was a Visiting Fellow at the Centre in 1995. He organised a conference on Iranian-Lebanese Relations, which took place in the US before the MESA conference in December 1995. Dr. Youssef Choueiri from Exeter University also served as a Visiting Fellow at the Centre in 1995.

Dr. Jinichi Niitsuma, from the Faculty of International Relations at Asia University, Tokyo, was a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for the academic year 1996-97. His focus was on the modern and contemporary history of Syria and Lebanon. Dr. Kasturi Sen, another Visiting Fellow for the academic year 1996-97, worked on a project concerning the Rehabilitation of Persons with Traumatic Injury Related Disability in Lebanon and Palestine.

Miss Amal Alamuddine, from St Hugh's College, interned at the Centre during June/July 1997, primarily contributing to the organisation of the Centre's US Archive collection.

Dr. Peter Shambrook served as a Research Fellow at the Centre, working on a project collecting material from the Public Records Office and the French Archives Nationales concerning Mr. Riad el Solh, former Prime Minister of Lebanon. He also worked on a Guide to sources on Lebanon at the Public Records Office.

Mr. Hanna Ziadeh, from the University of Copenhagen, was a Visiting Fellow at the Centre during the Michaelmas Term, focusing on the developments in the Taef Agreement. Dr. Ahmed Al-Shahi, a Senior Associate Member, delivered a paper on “Some Anthropological Observations on Al-Tayyib Salih’s Writings” at the Centre.

Dr. Michelle Hartman served as a Research Fellow at the Centre for the academic year 1998-9, collaborating with the Michel Chiha Foundation in Lebanon. She was involved in editing and translating Michel Chiha’s collected works, as well as producing a thematic anthology of his essays. Dr. Kasturi Sen, also a Research Fellow for the year 1998-9, worked on projects relating to Population Health and Development in collaboration with AUB and funded by the EU.

Talal Fandi, a Research Associate at the Centre, contributed to several publications, conducting research and indexing. He also participated in organising recent CLS conferences and collaborated on a Druze bibliography project with the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies in Jordan.

Dr. Karen Abi-Ezzi joined the Centre as a Research Fellow in January 2001, focusing on Post-War National Reconciliation in Lebanon. Dr. Valerie Gorman and Ms. Lucie Ryzova were also associated with the Centre, working on projects related to refugees and in collaboration with the National Endowment for Democracy, respectively.

Finally, the Centre introduced a new category of Research Associates engaged in doctoral or post-doctoral research relevant to the Centre’s program. Three such research associates included David Russell from Democratic Dialogue in Belfast and York University, focusing on a comparison between the Taif and Good Friday agreements; Youssef Chaitani, affiliated with UN-ESCWA and Birbek College, studying Lebanese-Syrian Relations; and Xerxes Malki from Worcester College, investigating Lebanese emigration to Ghana ■





Dinner Lectures

In 2002, the CLS initiated a monthly lecture series in London, complemented by dinners, to delve into Lebanese and Middle Eastern issues. The diverse range of speakers and topics provided an in-depth exploration of the region's complexities. These events examined subjects from political violence and post-war reconstruction to the impact of global events like September 11th, offering attendees valuable insights into crucial issues shaping the Middle East.

“There was another thing we had to manage, which was the relationship with the Lebanese community in London. Some of what the centre was doing was not accessible to the community. This is where the dinners came. It also gave the board of governors a chance to play a more active role, especially to those who wanted the Centre to play the role of a pressure group,” Shehadi reveals.

Additionally, the outreach program and the successful dinner/lecture series significantly enhanced dialogue, featuring prominent figures from various sectors such as diplomacy, academia, journalism, and policymaking. The lineup of speakers over the years underscored CLS's commitment to fostering informed discussions and deepening the understanding of Lebanese and Middle Eastern affairs within London's business communities.

Over the years, the following individuals led discussions on a variety of topics:

Prof. Samir Khalaf from AUB discussed “Civil and uncivil violence in Lebanon: a discussion on political violence and post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation.”

Prof. Fred Halliday from LSE presented on “September 11 and the War on Terrorism: consequences for US policy in the region, including Iraq.”

Dr. Mai Yamani from Chatham House spoke about “The United States and the Arabs – friendly regimes and angry populations.”

Prof. Chibli Mallat from USJ addressed “War crimes and the future of the Middle East: building on International Law.”

Prof. Avi Shlaim from St Anthony’s examined “The Palestinian-Israeli conflict: what next?”

Mr. Afif Safieh, head of the Palestinian diplomatic delegation to the UK, talked about “The Middle East Peace Process: from breakthrough to breakdown.”

Dr. Rosemary Hollis, head of the Middle East Program at Chatham House, discussed “Means versus ends: how to combat terrorism in the Middle East.”

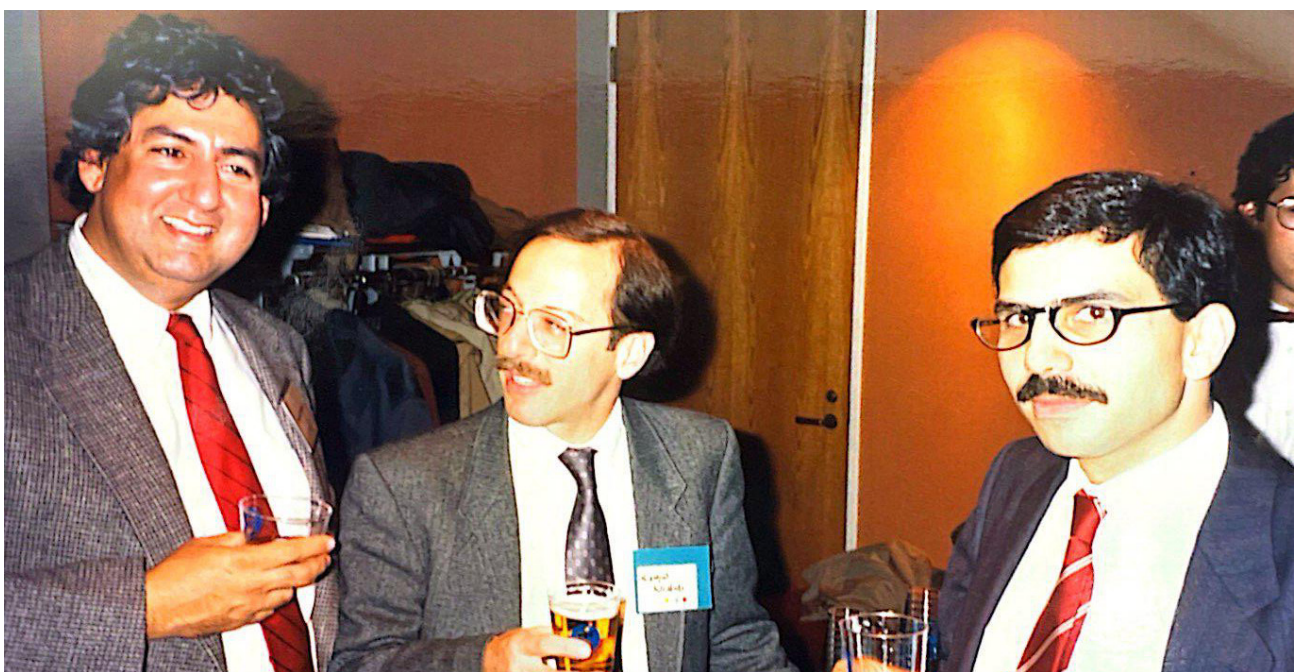
Michael Binyon from The Times explored “The Middle East peace process: where do we go from here?”

Dr. Patrick Seale delved into “The war on terrorism: implications for states in the Middle East and the existing world order.”

Sir Marrack Goulding from St Antony’s discussed “The events of September 11th and the consequences.”

Additionally, the following speakers also delivered talks: Amb. Richard Murphy, Sir Marrack Goulding, Amb. Ghassan Tuani, Serena Fass, Charles Glass, Prof. William Polk, Nassib Lahoud MP, Anton La Guardia, Marwan Hamade MP, Tim Llewelly, Sir David Gore-Booth, Yezid Sayigh, Alan George, Khalil Shikaki, Ghada Karmi, Clovis Maksoud, Yasmin Alibahi-Brown, Jeremy Bowen, David Ignatius, Claude Serhal, Henry Siegman, Christiane Amanpour, and James Rubin, Robert Mabro, Charles Tripp, William Pfaff, and Nabeel Khoury, Issam Fares, Fiona Gilmore, and Dr. Philip Salem.

“We continued doing that for years. I remember I must have hosted in the end with Youssef Khat at least fifty dinner lectures,” recounted Leila Buheiry, former board member and wife of the late Marwan Buheiry ■





Publications

The CLS's conferences and seminars played a pivotal role in establishing a highly successful publication program. Among its publications was the "Papers on Lebanon" working paper series, housing analytical essays concerning historical, political, and economic subjects. These papers were authored by both the Centre's staff and esteemed scholars, featuring the works of Albert Hourani, Ghassan Salamé, Marwan Buheiry, Nadim Shehadi, Miriam Cooke, Chibli Mallat, Kamal Salibi, Carolyn Gates, Michael Humphrey, Farid El-Khazen, and Caesar Farah, among others, with more than fifteen contributions in total. Additionally, the CLS introduced the "Prospects for Lebanon" series, focusing on policy aspects of contemporary issues. This series featured nine papers by notable academics, including Nawaf Salam, Antoine Messara, Samir Khalaf, Joseph Maila, Fida Nasrallah, Oussama Kabbani, John Kolars, Thomas Naff, Farid El-Khazen, and Elizabeth Picard.

The publications produced by the Centre during its tenure at Oxford stand as its most enduring legacy. Collaborating with esteemed scholars in the field, these publications, in partnership with I.B. Tauris in London, showcased the Centre's remarkable achievements. Through a series of edited books and scholarly monographs, the CLS contributed significantly to advancing the understanding of Lebanon and the modern Middle East, setting the standard for research in the field.

Some of the notable CLS publications

[Messarra, A. \(1988\). *The Challenge of Coexistence*.](#)

[Shehadi, N., & Haffar-Mills, D. \(Eds.\). \(1988\). *Lebanon: A History of Conflict and Consensus*.](#)

[Salibi, K. \(1988\). *A House of Many Mansions: the History of Lebanon Reconsidered.*](#)

[Hiiti, N. \(1989\). *The Foreign Policy of Lebanon: Lessons and Prospects for the Forgotten Dimension.*](#)

[Shehadi, N., & Harney, B. \(Eds.\). \(1989\). *Politics and the Economy in Lebanon.*](#)

[Fawaz, L. \(1990\). *State and Society in Lebanon.*](#)

[Hourani, A., & Shehadi, N. \(Eds.\). \(1992\). *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration.*](#)

[Hanf, T. \(1993\). *Co-existence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation.*](#)

[Fawaz, L. \(1993\). *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in the 1860s.*](#)

[Akarli, E. \(1993\). *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861–1920.*](#)

[Hollis, R., & Shehadi, N. \(Eds.\). \(1996\). *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East Peace.*](#)

[Gates, C. \(1998\). *The Merchant Republic of Lebanon: Rise of an Open Economy.*](#)

[Humphrey, M. \(1998\). *Islam, Multiculturalism and Transnationalism – From the Lebanese Diaspora.*](#)

[El-Khazen, F. \(1999\). *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976.*](#)

[Farah, C. E. \(1999\). *The Politics of Interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830–1861.*](#)

[Al-Sudairi, A. \(1999\). *A Vision of the Middle East: An intellectual history of Albert Hourani.*](#)

[Picard, E. \(1999\). *The Demobilisation of the Lebanese Militias.*](#)

[Malik, H. C. \(2000\). *The Challenge of Human Rights: Charles Malik and the Universal Declaration.*](#)

[Johnson, M. \(2001\). *All Honourable Men: the social origins of war in Lebanon.*](#)

[Salam, N. \(Ed.\). \(2004\). *Options for Lebanon.*](#)

[Abu-Husayn, A.-R. \(2004\). *The View from Istanbul: Ottoman Lebanon and the Druze Emirate.*](#)

[Attíe, C. \(2004\). *Struggle in the Levant: Lebanon in the 1950s.*](#)

[El-Solh, R. \(2004\). *Lebanon and Arabism: National Identity and State Formation.*](#)

[Chehabi, H., & Mneimneh, H. \(Eds.\). \(2006\). *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* ■](#)





The CLS Vision: Academic or Policy-Focused?

Diverse viewpoints emerged among board members regarding the Centre's mission, with some questioning its exclusive academic focus. Despite its crucial role in preserving Lebanon's diasporic connections, the Centre's impact on significant political developments was perceived as limited.

During the Lebanese civil war, CLS emerged as a cornerstone of the country's soft power. It facilitated scholarly exchanges between Lebanese and international academics, sustaining research efforts that upheld Lebanon's cultural identity. While universities in Lebanon persisted during the conflict, CLS ensured the continuity of research and provided a platform for open dialogue on Lebanese issues, leaving behind a valuable archival record. Its unique contributions during this period were unparalleled, filling a critical void in Lebanon's academic landscape.

Nevertheless, following the cessation of hostilities and the signing of the Taef agreement, some board members advocated for a shift in focus. They proposed that the Centre should engage in post-war reconstruction efforts, aiming to influence policy-making and decision-making processes. Discussions revolved around whether the centre should prioritise practical policy work or scholarly research. While some advocated for establishing a think tank to brainstorm solutions and engage in crisis management, others favoured maintaining the Centre's academic integrity, emphasising historical discourse and credibility. This dichotomy persisted, reflecting differing visions for the Centre's future trajectory.

However, despite these internal discussions and initiatives undertaken by the CLS, its



impact on policy-making and the political landscape of Lebanon remained limited. The Lebanese government did not actively seek solutions from the CLS, nor did the Centre proactively engage with policymakers. Although efforts were made to broaden the Centre's engagement, including collaborations with the research department at the Foreign Office and hosting talks by prominent figures, the academic community's detachment from political affairs limited deeper involvement in policy discourse. As Leila Buheiry points out, "The impact was on academia, there wasn't any impact on policy-making."

To some former members of the board and the management, the significance of academic pursuits extended beyond their immediate outcomes, contributing to global discourse and the long-term dissemination of knowledge. In contrast, policy engagement, while attracting more immediate attention, was often perceived as having a temporary impact, particularly within the realm of diaspora politics. Consequently, although the CLS made strides in shaping diaspora opinion and engaging with the London community, its lasting influence on Lebanon's political landscape remained a topic of ongoing debate ■



From Oxford to Beirut

The debate over the mission and vision of the Centre persisted throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The Centre endeavoured to keep pace with the tumultuous events in Lebanon, which had entered its post-reconstruction phase and endured two Israeli wars in 1993 and 1996, the Israeli withdrawal from the South of Lebanon in 2000, the peace process, the response to the Syrian refugee presence, among other challenges.

Furthermore, CLS had consistently struggled with funding issues, a challenge it had faced since its inception. When the Centre was established in 1984, board members and trustees, along with other members of the Lebanese community, committed to contributing £5000 annually to support its operations. Initially, the governors secured financial backing from a notable list of patrons, including Albert Abela, Edwin Abela, Antoine Asseily, Said Ayas, Elie Calil, Robert Debbas, M.S.A.R. Diab, Rafic Hariri, Salah Hawila, Michel Chalhoub, Taha Miqati, Khaled Ousseimi, Salma es-Said, Wafic Said, Hany Salam, and Elie Sehnaoui.



Despite these contributions, the funds barely covered the Centre's extensive projects and activities. Even with partnerships with other institutions and the acquisition of significant projects and funds, the Centre consistently faced financial deficits.

Consequently, in 2005, the board decided to cease operations in Oxford. The Centre was closed, its premises were sold, and its activities were reduced to fellowships, an annual conference, and the publication of a book, all while maintaining its affiliation with the Middle East Centre by supporting visiting scholars. In 2005-6, the Centre funded Professor Youssef Choueiri to spend the academic year in Oxford as a Senior Associate Member of St Antony's. In 2007, the Governors approved the creation of a Visiting Lebanese Fellowship, to bring outstanding Lebanese scholars to the Middle East Centre for a year of research. The fellows were: Sofia Toufic Shwayri (2007–2008), Maha Shuayb (2008–2010), Sami Hermez (2010–2011), Daniel Meier (2011–2012) and Mark Farha in 2013.

In 2010, Shuayb, whose focus was on fostering social cohesion within schools, initiated



a partnership with educational institutions in Beirut and the Ministry of Education to develop a new history curriculum. Working alongside fellow educators, they collectively established an association dedicated to advancing history education, aiming to empower individuals in this field. Through collaboration with the Lebanese Association for History, the Centre gradually gained influence in both policy-making and practical application, evolving into a more cohesive and dynamic organisation.

Despite initial progress, the implementation of the social cohesion policy faced setbacks due to corruption within the Ministry of Education. Recognizing the pivotal role of education in shaping the future, the board of directors decided to relocate the headquarters to Beirut in 2012, reaffirming their commitment to advancing educational initiatives ■



A New Era Begins

At that juncture, relocating to Beirut seemed logical. Lebanese society brimmed with vitality, presenting ample opportunities for innovation and impact. Recognizing its pivotal role, the Centre embarked on a visionary mission, rallying its board and team members with renewed inspiration and commitment. The supportive board granted the team autonomy to pursue their strategies, emphasising the translation of academic knowledge into practical outcomes. Maha Shuayb was officially appointed as director in 2012, marking the inception of a concerted effort to assemble a dedicated team for on-the-ground work.

The timing proved opportune, as educational inequalities persisted since the war, particularly with teachers being marginalised and perceived as ineffective. Consequently, the Centre adopted a bottom-up approach, forging close collaborations with educators, policymakers, and affected communities. This period also witnessed a strategic decision to end the Centre's affiliation with Oxford, redirecting its focus towards more impactful collaboration within Lebanon.



The Centre swiftly established networks, organised events, and engaged with local communities, forging connections with NGOs and educators. The focus was not merely academic but also practical, leading to studies on Palestinian students, citizenship education, and toolkits for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Beyond academia, the Centre's influence extended into policy realms. Collaborations with the Ministry of Education led to the adoption of a citizenship education strategy, thereby imprinting its mark on policymaking processes. Efforts intensified towards history and curriculum reform, with workshops addressing the teaching of the civil war and participation in transitional justice initiatives.

Moreover, CLS took on a pivotal role in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis starting in 2012, following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011. Notably, by 2014, it was among the first organisations to delve into comprehensive research on Syrian students. Moreover, CLS actively engaged in organising various academic events, such as

conferences and workshops, in both Lebanon and England. These efforts underscored CLS's commitment to understanding and addressing educational challenges in the region while also paving the way for innovative educational strategies.

In 2015, the Centre became affiliated with the Lebanese American University in Beirut. Former President Joseph Jabra ardently supported the mission and vision of the Centre, emphasising the importance of research and knowledge production.

In 2018, the Centre achieved formal registration as a Lebanese organisation, signalling a significant milestone in its journey towards autonomy and sustainability. The prestigious Lyle Spencer grant further affirmed its growing stature, enabling comparative studies of refugee education across different contexts and laying the groundwork for humanitarian education in Lebanon.

In 2020 CLS became affiliated with the History Department and the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge, a step that helped connect the Center to global debates. In 2021, the Director was appointed as the British Academy bilateral chair of education in crisis at University of Cambridge and CLS.

Many writings and academics today reference the work of the Centre. Furthermore, CLS has disseminated its projects through various channels including public platforms, scholarly books, and academic journals. Collaborative endeavours with other institutions and organisations in Lebanon yielded significant results. The research outputs garnered substantial attention from the media and were extensively referenced. Notably, the Centre effectively advocated for accountability within the Ministry of Education, challenging its policies on multiple occasions. Furthermore, it demonstrated a commitment to nurturing emerging scholars through scholarship opportunities. Additionally, the Centre expanded its research focus beyond education, introducing three new programs to explore novel areas of inquiry.

Today, by diversifying its research agenda, the Centre continues to address critical societal issues such as disability rights, migration dynamics, and social movements. Initiatives like the Disability Hub facilitate critical discussions, pushing forward agendas for social inclusion and rights advocacy. Similarly, the Centre's focus on social movements and migration dynamics capture structural changes and societal dynamics, transcending traditional academic boundaries to enact meaningful change within Lebanese society ■





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