



MEISA Newsletter - December 2021

Salam/Merhaba/Kia ora from MEISA!

THE YEAR THAT'S BEEN

To mark the first full year of MEISA's existence we are delighted to present this first edition of the MEISA Annual Report. This report is intended to look back at the year's activities and highlight the research, teaching, community engagement and other activities by our members in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world. In the process of compiling this short summary it became clear that our new yet growing network has achieved a great deal in a short amount of time under challenging conditions. We want to acknowledge the efforts of all the MEISA members and friends who have taken the time to present their research and expertise, helped arrange events, and attended seminars and workshops online and in-person.

Since August 2020 MEISA has held five online research seminars by postgraduate researchers on a wide range of topics, starting with Hend Zaki's fascinating insights into the development of a 'Western Muslim Identity' in Aotearoa New Zealand. Tasmia Tahia enlightened us about the extent of military involvement in Pakistani politics. Eric Jeunot invited us to rethink the role of tribes, the state and sovereignty in the complex politics of Yemen. Nashie Shamooun delved skillfully into the identity formation processes of Assyrian youth in Australia and New Zealand and Okan Tan summarised his fascinating research into constitutional change in modern Turkey.

These early research seminars also provided an opportunity for open discussion around the future shape of the network. We had vigorous discussion and a vote to finalise the name and scope of the network. Much debate and consultation went into the final MEISA logo design. Sheikha al-Mamari of Sultan Qaboos University provided many wonderful design options before we settled on the current design. Many thanks to Sheikha and to everyone for their great input into this process.

On the 3rd and 4th of May 2021 MEISA was officially launched at the Wellington campus of Otago University with the generous support of the National Commission for UNESCO, the University of Otago and the Otago Politics Programme. The opening event was a great success with an in-person and live online audience sharing insights from distinguished guest speakers, including Labour MP Ibrahim Omer, Emeritus Professor William Harris and Tony Lynch from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, preceded by an introduction of MEISA by Leon Goldsmith and Nadine Kreitmeyr. The objectives of the launch were to showcase the new network to community groups, the academy and to government. MEISA members, Ayca Arkilic and Leon Goldsmith were invited to brief representatives from several government agencies in Wellington on 3 May 2021. A number of MEISA-related colleagues (Ayca Arkilic, Nadine Kreitmeyr, Hanlie Booysen, Leon Goldsmith, Tasmia Tahia, Negar Partow, Jim Ockey and Naimah Talib) were invited to participate in *He Whenua Taurikura*: Aotearoa New Zealand's first Hui on Countering Terrorism and Violent



Extremism on June 15. MEISA also participated in the government-organised Threat Assessment workshop in October 2020.

Since the official launch, MEISA has held four panel webinars on topical issues, starting with a panel of prominent Iranian scholars, Negar Partow, Mehran Kamrava and Houchang Hassan-Yari, discussing the significance (or lack of) of the June 2021 Iran elections with Hanlie Booysen chairing. Next, we had a truly fascinating panel event chaired by Ayca Arkilic looking at the question of what it is like to be a Muslim re/convert in Aotearoa New Zealand. Guest speakers included Noeleen Van de Lisdonk, Bronwyn (Aisha) Wood and Abdullah Drury. In September the key obstacles to peace in Syria were explained from two quite different perspectives by two prominent Syrian scholars and opposition figures, Dr. Mhd Hosam Hafez and Mr Louay Hussein, with Hanlie Booysen and Leon Goldsmith acting as discussant and chair. Finally, in October three seasoned analysts and professionals with many years of experience in the Gulf provided rare insight into Aotearoa New Zealand's past, present and possible future relations with a rapidly changing and pivotal Gulf region. Guest speakers were Lucia Dore, Michael Webb and Geoffrey Miller.

We would also like to use this opportunity to congratulate Ayca Arkilic for a University of Victoria in Wellington Early Career Research Excellence Award and Leon Goldsmith who was awarded an Internationalisation of the Curriculum Initiative Award for his Middle East Politics and Politics of the Arabian Peninsula courses.

ON TO 2022!

MEISA is looking forward to further strengthen our membership as well as relationships and cooperation with new and established partners in 2022. Negar Partow (Massey University Wellington) has created a fabulous opportunity for MEISA and the [Middle East Studies Association](#) (MESA) to collaborate on a conference in May/June 2022 entitled: [Shia Studies in the 21st Century](#). We will also continue our engagement with government and Nadine Kreitmeyer is leading our current outreach to the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, which we hope will support a workshop planned with students from refugee backgrounds. Nadine has also kindly agreed to take on the role of MEISA Head Coordinator in 2022. We are also planning to have our first national conference, including an AGM, next year. Please start thinking what you would want from the conference as we will be contacting you for ideas early in the new year.

He hono tangata e kore e motu; ka pa he taura waka e motu
Unlike a canoe rope, a human bond cannot be severed.

Happy Holidays & Meri Kirihimete!

MEISA Admin team