

Middle East Studies Forum Annual Report



2019 in review

2019 saw a number of accomplishments for the Middle East Studies Forum. We held our highly anticipated *Islamic Republic of Iran at 40* symposium and seminar series, saw the publication of seven new books and saw our network grow with the addition of new local and international members.

MESF Events

This year continued the MESF tradition of hosting research seminars, with seven events in the calendar, including our *Islamic Republic of Iran at 40* symposia to our research-intensive seminars. The *Islamic Republic of Iran at 40* welcomed scholars from a diverse array of research disciplines to debate the legacies of the 1979 Revolution. Our MESF Convenor, Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh opened the symposium with a welcome address to our local and interstate guests. The symposium examined three broad research streams considering the political legacies of the revolution both within and external to the state, the ideological trajectory and how these ideas have transformed the social and political context of the Islamic Republic and the shifting dynamics of cultural and artistic expression within Iran over the last 40 years.

MESF works hard to promote the work of Early Career Researchers (ECR) and was proud to host three separate seminars led by ECRs in 2019. Mr. Mohsen Solhdoost (The University of Queensland) looked at the role of nonstate armed groups influence in foreign policy, Dr. Tezcan Gümüş (University of Melbourne) examined strongman politics in the Turkish state, and Ms. Marika Sosnowski (University of Melbourne) discussed the need for a stronger conceptualization of the role of ceasefires in conflict. In addition to showcasing ECR work, the 2019 seminar program brought together academics and journalists to build on our understanding of issues affecting the Middle East region. Mr. Maher Mughrabi (Feature Editor at *The Age*) brought his considerable insight to a discussion with Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh which explored the shifting social contract across the Middle East.

2019 saw the launch of two highly anticipated books: *'The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria'* by Dr. Dara Conduit, and *'Armenian Christians in Iran'* by Dr. James Barry. These books are the product of extensive research and both have received favorable reviews.

Academic Achievements

2019 proved to be another fruitful year for scholarly achievements for MESF. Our scholars published a monumental six books, including:

- Akbarzadeh, S., (2019) *Routledge Handbook of International Relations in the Middle East* (Oxon: Routledge),
- Barry, J., (2019) *Armenian Christians in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Conduit, D., (2019) *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Ibrahim, N., & Maley, W., (2019): *Afghanistan: Politics and Economics in a Globalising State* (Oxon: Routledge)
- Jamal al-Deen, T., (2019) *Motherhood, Education and Migration Delving into Migrant Mothers' Involvement in Children's Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan)
- Mozaffari, A., (2019) *Heritage Movements in Asia: Cultural Heritage Activism, Politics and Identity* (Oxford: Berghahn Books)
- Pace, M., (2019) *The Palestinian Authority in The West Bank: The Theatrics of Woeful Statecraft* (Oxon: Routledge).

The work of MESF scholars is widely recognized with a further 5 book chapters and 25 journal articles across a range of high-ranking journals. Our top-cited papers published in 2019 include: Benjamin Isakhan & Lynn Meskell: 'UNESCO's project to 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul': Iraqi and Syrian opinion on heritage reconstruction after the Islamic State,' *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Published online February 12, 2019, and Peter E. Mulherin & Benjamin Isakhan (2019): 'The Abbott government and the Islamic State: a securitised and elitist foreign policy discourse,' *Australian Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 54, No. 1. pp. 82-98.

Research Awards

The MESF network has been the proud recipient of several research awards in 2019. In early June, Dr. Zahid Shahab Ahmed was honored for publishing one of the top-20 most read Global Policy articles for the 2017-2018 period. On September 26th MESF Convenor, Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh was named Australia's top researcher in Middle East and Islamic Studies by *The Australian*. Professor Akbarzadeh was also awarded the Deakin Faculty Award for International Research Collaboration on the 25th of November 2019.

The Faculty Awards recognized Professor Akbarzadeh was among four other recipients from the Alfred Deakin Institute. Dr. James Barry's '*Armenian Christians in Iran*' received an honorable mention in the Der Mugrdechian SAS Outstanding Book Award 2018-2019.

The MESF PhD cohort also achieved key milestones in 2019. Former MESF-PhD candidate, Tezcan Gümüş was awarded his Ph.D and graduated in 2019 and Abbas Farasoo passed his colloquium.

Funding Success

MESF enjoyed great success in funding this year, recognizing the cutting-edge research capacity of MESF. This success includes funding from the prestigious Australian Research Council and the DFAT Council for Australia-Arab Relation.

A/Prof Benjamin Isakhan & Prof. Lyn Meskell. After Islamic State: Local-State -Global Heritage Dynamics in Syria and Iraq (ARC Discovery Project)

Dr. Dara Conduit Women Know MENA Australia-Lebanon Exchange (DFAT Council for Australia-Arab Relation)

Research Engagement

Media platforms provide an important link between the scholarly community and the broader community and the MESF network were actively engaged with a range of media in 2019. More than 35 interviews and media comments were given by our network of scholars including ABC News 24, ABC Arabic Radio, ABC World News, ABC Saturday Extra, SBS, SBS Armenia, SkyNews, IranInternational and comments for Al Jazeera among others. Our network also held in-depth discussions on a series of podcasts including the Asia Institute, SEPAD and the ABC 'Religion and Ethics Report'.

Online media including analytical briefs prepared by our network for The Conversation and Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA). The quality of these briefs was on display when Professors Ihsan Yilmaz and Fethi Mansouri's [piece](#) made The Conversation's top-5 most read article across Deakin for the month of November 2019.

MESF members gave keynote addresses at the 2019 AAIMS Conference, the Tunis Process for Intercultural Dialogue and the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia Conference, alongside presentations at MESA, The 2019 American Academy of Religion Meeting, and the Second International Peace Symposium at the National Defense University of Pakistan amongst many others. Our PhD candidates also represented MESF well at a series of conferences including TASA 2019, University of Queensland's International Relations Theory and the 2019 CAIS Conference.

The MESF also engages with the wider community via its social media channels including its Twitter account ([@MESF_Deakin](#)) and its website ([mesf.org.au](#)). Our website continues to provide a [repository](#) of our research and commentaries. Engagement with our website was also positive with a rise of 89 percent in new users to the site.

A Growing MESF Network

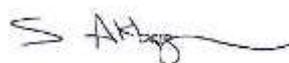
And finally, we welcomed two more highly accomplished researchers to our network in 2019. Non-resident member Professor Anoush Ehteshami joined in November and Dr. Marian Abouzeid in December 2019.

Professor Ehteshami joins our network from Durham University where he is a member of the School of Government and International Affairs and the Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Chair in International Relations and Director of the HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Programme in International Relations, Regional Politics and Security. Professor Ehteshami is also the Director of the prestigious Institute for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies (IMEIS) at Durham. He acts as Co-director of the Open Worlds Initiative entitled Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community. His full bio can be accessed [here](#).

Dr. Marian Abouzeid brings a diverse skillset to MESF. Dr. Abouzeid is the Associate Project Lead of the Lancet-American University of Beirut Commission on Syria, and a Senior Research Fellow, Humanitarian Issues in Armed Conflict, with the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership and an Adjunct Research Assistant Professor with the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut. Her research has focused on humanitarian research and advocacy, with a particular focus on the Eastern Mediterranean region. Dr. Abouzeid's bio can be accessed [here](#).

Both new members bring with them extensive knowledge and research expertise on issues affecting the Middle East region, as well as valuable opportunities for further collaboration and we look forward to seeing what 2020 will bring!

For a full list of MESF members and current research visit [website](#).



PROFESSOR SHAHRAM AKBARZADEH, MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FORUM CONVENOR

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