CAIS graduate scholars convened an early career researcher conference entitled ‘A New Agenda? Debating the Middle East and Central Asia’ on 3 and 4 July 2015. The conference convenors sought to challenge the established narratives that are failing to explain the changing circumstances in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The opening address was given by Mr Ric Wells, Deputy Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The keynote speaker was Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, ARC Future Fellow, Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University. Speakers included: Dr Farhang Morady, University of Westminster presenting on Iran–US relations and the Nuclear Framework Agreement; Mr Haian Dukhan, University of St Andrews, presenting on Hafez al-Assad and the Arab tribes in Syria; Ms Natalya Hillme, Humboldt University, presenting on regime stability in Central Asia; Mr Azamjon Isabaev, University of Hamburg discussed security in Central Asia and Ms Zainab Jasim, University of Sydney analysed Al-Jazeera’s coverage of Bahrain’s uprising. CAIS scholars Mr Shuhrat Baratov, Ms Jessie Moritz, Mr Dirk van der Kley and Ms Elisabeth Yarbakhsh also presented papers on their research. The conference attracted a substantial audience which included policy-makers from the Department of Defence and DFAT as well as scholars from Australian universities and think-tanks.

Professor Amin Saikal was an invited speaker at a public colloquium, ‘The Congress of Vienna – 1815 / 2015 / 2115: Analyses, Perspectives, Projections’ held by The Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University, in cooperation with the Federal Chancellery of the Republic of Austria, the House of Liechtenstein, European Forum Alpbach, and Wiener Zeitung, Vienna, on 7-8 June, 2015. In addition to those listed above, panelists were: Albert Rohan, former Secretary-General of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Harold James, Princeton University; Thomas Seifert, journalist with ‘Wiener Zeitung’; Andrew Moravcsik, Princeton University. The objective of the public colloquium was to discuss and educate about the lessons and meaning for today of the Congress of Vienna of 1815 and project possible perspectives for the future of Europe and the global system. By reviewing the dynamics of the challenges to today’s international order it will be useful to focus on the lessons learned from prior successful inclusive concert diplomacy as applied to the changing nature of today’s diplomacy.

Professor Saikal’s paper was entitled: ‘Stabilising the Gulf: What about a Congress of Vienna Approach?’ He suggested while marking the bicentennial anniversary of the Congress of Vienna in 2015, it might be appropriate to revisit the Congress and its processes to see whether something similar could be attempted in relation to conflict resolution in the Middle East or more specifically its sub-region in the Gulf, which is currently in the grip of serious humanitarian, sectarian and geopolitical crises. He concluded that there was a need for an interlocking regional and international consensus in order to stabilise the Middle East.
**NEWS AND EVENTS**

**BOOKS PUBLISHED JANUARY TO JUNE 2015**

*Huda Al-Tantimi, Arabic Literature through History, Dar Al Saqi Publishers, Beirut, 2015.*

**LOCAL AND SEMINARS**


‘Impact of the Syrian Crisis in Lebanon’, Mr Ahmad El Hariri, Secretary General of the Future Movement, 26 February 2015.

‘Documenting Defiance: Women Writers and Filmmakers in Tehran Square’, Associate Professor May Tehrmissany, Arabic Studies and Film Theory, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures University of Ottawa, 16 April 2015.

‘Popular Culture as Resistance in the Arab Spring’, Associate Professor Walid El Khachab Arabic Studies, York University, 16 April 2015.

**POSTGRADUATE SEMINARS**


‘Pakistan, politics and terrorism’, Mr Aly Zamani, 22 May 2015.

‘Petronations? Oil, gas and national identity formation in Eurasia’, Dr Peter Rutland, Wesleyan University, 5 June 2015.

**FAREWELL CHRISTINE KERTESZ**

Prof. Saikal and all CAIS staff wish to express their sadness at the passing of Mrs Christine Kertesz on 20 May 2015. Mrs Kertesz was employed as a research assistant at the Centre from its establishment in 1994 to 2001. As a key staff member in the establishment years of the Centre, Chris’ commitment to excellence in her work producing publications, organising conferences and supporting academics’ research, was an important component in building the high reputation that the Centre quickly gained. Her intelligence, professionalism, perseverance and patience, as well as her gentle personality, earned her much respect from both her colleagues and the Centre’s external stakeholders.

**POLITICAL ISLAM SEMINARS**

The Centre has held three iterations of Political Islam Seminars to national security related departments across the Commonwealth Public Service. In 2015, Associate Professor Matthew Gray has convened these seminars for the last ten years at CAIS. Over this period, A/Professor Gray has designed each seminar program to fit the requirements of the groups attending. The seminars focus on creating a deeper understanding of Islam across a range of areas including history, law, power, forms of extremism plus Islam in regional areas such as Middle East, South Asia and Australia. A/Prof. Gray draws on a large pool of expertise from within CAIS, the ANU and from other Australian and international universities in order to provide the speakers for the seminars.

The June session was opened by CAIS Director Professor Amin Saikal and included a presentation by CAIS Visiting Fellow Dr Toby Mattheisen. Other contributors included Professor Michele Grossman, Victoria University; Professor Feith Mansouri, Deakin University; Melbourne; ANU specialists Professor Tom O’Haver and Dr Rachel Strickland; and external experts including former heads of states and occasionally represented him in the Council’s meetings from the late 1980s. He was tireless and passionate campaigner for humanitarian causes, he deeply cared about the future of Australia and the world, and never shied away from standing up for such causes. The last meeting of the InterAction Council he chaired was on interfaith dialogue in Vienna in late April 2014. He was keenly interested in the promotion of multiculturalism and positive interfaith relationships as key principles in generating the conditions for a better world. Malcolm was an enormous source of inspiration and counsel and a great friend of CAIS and the ANU. His spirit, courage, tenacity and foresight will continue to live as an example for us all.

Amin Saikal 20 March 2015

**VALE MALCOLM FRASER**

It was with great sadness and shock that I heard of the unexpected passing of Malcolm Fraser. He was a friend and a very supportive member of the Advisory Board of CAIS for the last decade. The last Board meeting that he attended was in June 2014. I worked closely with Malcolm in his capacity at first as the Chairman and subsequently as the Honorary Chairman of the InterAction Council of former heads of states and occasionally represented him in the Council’s meetings from the late 1980s. He was a tireless and passionate campaigner for humanitarian causes. He deeply cared about the future of Australia and the world, and never shied away from standing up for such causes. The last meeting of the InterAction Council he chaired was on interfaith dialogue in Vienna in late April 2014. He was keenly interested in the promotion of multiculturalism and positive interfaith relationships as key principles in generating the conditions for a better world. Malcolm was an enormous source of inspiration and counsel and a great friend of CAIS and the ANU. His spirit, courage, tenacity and foresight will continue to live as an example for us all.

Amin Saikal 20 March 2015

**PROMOTION**

ANU Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Young announced in February that Professor Amin Saikal had been promoted to the level of University Distinguished Professor. This promotion, to the highest academic level within the University, recognizes the international standing of Professor Saikal as a scholar. Professor Young said he was delighted to be congratulating Professor Saikal on his appointment.

**STAFF CHANGES/APPOINTMENTS**

Professor Saikal was on Outside Study Leave in April and May. During this time he was a visiting professor at Lichtenstein Institute on self-determination, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University.

A/Professor Matthew Gray will be on Outside Study Leave in second semester 2015.

Dr Christian Bleuer has been appointed as a Research Fellow at CAIS until December 2015. His appointment is to an ARC Discovery Project on Afghanistand Central Asia. The project leaders are Professor Amin Saikal and Dr Kirill Nourzhanov.

Ms Lissette Geronimo has been seconded to the ANU Planning and Performance Measurement Division. In her absence Ms Harriet Tomlin will act in the position of Senior Administrator and Postgraduate Co-ordinator. Harriet has come to CAIS from the ANU School of Music.

**VISITING FELLOW**

Dr Toby Mattheisen was a visiting fellow at CAIS for three weeks from late May to early June. Dr Mattheisen is a Senior Research Fellow in the International Relations of the Middle East, St Antony’s College, University of Oxford. He was previously a Research Fellow at Pembroke College, Cambridge, at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is the author of Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring that wasn’t, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2013 and The Other Saudis: Shism, dissent and Sectarianism, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Dr Mattheisen contributed to the intellectual life at CAIS with a public lecture, a seminar and many formal and informal discussions with academic staff and students.

**NEWS AND EVENTS**

**POLITICAL ISLAM SEMINARS**

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Amin Saikal 20 March 2015
In late May, I gave a talk at ANU about my new book on the Shia in Saudi Arabia and the rise of sectarian politics in the Middle East more broadly. The Other Saudis: Shiism, Sectarianism, and the Saudi State. I first became interested in the issue of sectarianism in Syria and Lebanon, where I studied Arabic and spent several summers. I wanted to understand the historical context of sect-formation and at what times this formation of identity became important in the political process. When I was looking for a dissertation topic to complete my Masters at SOAS I started to read about the Shia in the Gulf. There was hardly any literature at the time on the Shia in Saudi Arabia. Also, the case of the Shia of Saudi Arabia seemed to have a particular importance because of Saudi Arabia’s position in the Islamic world and because of the Saudi sponsorship of anti-Shiism.

In 2007 I started my PhD at SOAS on The Shia of Saudi Arabia: Identity Politics, Sectarianism, and the Saudi State. I carried out fieldwork in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and the transnational nature of the Shia’s political movements amongst the Shia in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and their relationship with the Saudi state.

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The Twelve Shia are mainly concentrated in and around the two old population centres of al-Asa’ and Qatif in the Eastern Province. The inhabitants of the cities of Qatif and al-Asa’ have been sedentary for centuries and largely engaged in agriculture, trade, fishing and pearl diving. Politics often amounted to ensuring the safety, economic wellbeing and survival of the community in a hostile environment. Some members of the urban notable elite were integrated into the Ottoman bureaucracy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But since the Saudi conquests of the Eastern Province in 1913 the Shia of al-Asa’ and Qatif have been subjects of a political entity that does not treat Shia Muslims as equal citizens. Shia from all backgrounds have prospered comparatively less than others.

Mohammed Montazeri and Mehdi Hashemi, who were side-lined after the Iran-Contra affair in 1986. So the book also contributes to an analysis of the fragmented nature of the early Islamic republic of Iran and to its foreign policy-making. Since 1979, changes in Saudi-Iranian relations impacted on the situation of the Shia and the book contextualises these changes in these relations. While I outline the history of the Shia in Qatif (and Syria), I do not, however, claim that all the Shia are somehow loyal to Iran because of their religious affiliation.

Quite to the contrary, the book also highlights the diversity within Shiism, by studying an Arab Shia community in depth. There are many polesmics surrounding Arab Shiism and the prominence of Iran as a player in the Shia worlds since 1979 has to a certain extent obscured the importance of Arab Shia intellectual and religious traditions. An issue of Saudi Shia is that they are marginal both within their country and within the wider Shia worlds. There are no Saudi Shia grand ayatollahs today, even though up to the early 20th century local clerics acted as ayatollahs for the local population and were seen as leading scholars across the Shi world. Some of them have contributed to Shia intellectual history. But by and large the Saudi Shia are also at the periphery of the clerical networks in Najaf and Qom, particularly since a large part of Saudi Shia are associated with the movement founded by Muhammad Mahdi al-Shirazi, which had Khomeini as their spiritual base.

The precarious situation of the Shia has received renewed attention in the wake of two devastating suicide bombings on Shia mosques in the Eastern Province by supporters of the Islamic State in May 2015. One would hope that this could be an eye-opener for the Saudi authorities, who should realise that the real threat to their stability does not come from the Shia, who are fighting religious and institutional discrimination, but rather from the sort of intolerant religious teachings that are being taught in Saudi schools and that are close to the ideology of the Islamic state.
Throughout the period between the Talas War of 751 and the Ghenghizhun in 1220, the Balkan reforms and social transformations were being spread through Central Asia, Russia, and Eastern Europe. By the 12th century, Nishapur, the capital of Khorasan, became the home of the highest Persian literature. Finally under Alparslan and his successors, the Seljukid Empire became the highest center of Persian-Islamic culture. Despite being increasingly under the influence of the Turkic dynasties, Persian language was still the language of high culture of Persian/Arabic speaking society throughout the period between the Talas and the acquisition of the complicated Ottoman territory. Status in Ottoman society was first and foremost signified by the knowledge of Arabic, Persian, and Arabic language under the Anatolian Seljukids. Thus well before the 13th century the Turkic dynasties dominated the Ottoman centuries: the realm of partly oral cultural traditions, epics, popular poetry and folklore and also the realm of high culture used by the Palace administration and intellectuals. In the final analysis the language reform and switch of the alphabet should be understood as the supercession of the language of prestige and power with a new one.

Footnotes
There were scenes of jubilation on the streets of Tehran—and, to a lesser extent, other major urban centers of a lower key sort fomented around a nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 nations emerging from the tortuous negotiations in Lausanne.1 It was the unlucky thirteenth day of the New Year and most Iranians had, as tradition demanded, spent it outdoors with family and friends, picnicking wherever space could be found—in crowded parks, on the dizzying slopes of mountains, in family orchards, or, the less fortunate, perched precariously on the narrow grassy verges of multi-lane highways. Usually, this day marks the end of the New Year holiday and a return to the drudgery of the work week, or, for far too many Iranians, the soul-sapping awareness of long-term unemployment. But this year the next day happened to be a Friday—a one day reprieve—and as such, could be found—in crowded parks, on the dizzying slopes of mountains, in family orchards, or, the less fortunate, perched precariously on the narrow grassy verges of multi-lane highways. Usually, this day marks the end of the New Year holiday and a return to the drudgery of the work week, or, for far too many Iranians, the soul-sapping awareness of long-term unemployment. But this year the next day happened to be a Friday—a one day reprieve—and as such, 

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution nationalism was rejected at the highest echelons in favour of a kind of borderless Islamism.2 Whereas Iran’s pre-Islamic history had been a source of celebration and inspiration during the Pahlavi era, under Khomeini’s leadership, the early 1980s saw the lack of precedent even to the point of denying earlier manifestations of the Iranian nation.3 Iran’s Islamic identity becomes a matter of competing claims of nationalism and Islamism.4 A more nuanced approach however recognises the rejection of nationalism (and implicitly, the nation) never truly took hold. Instead there was an emergence of two competing nationalism: one rooted in Shia Islam and the other in Iran’s pre-Islamic (and para-Islamic) history.5 

There has been a tendency to perceive these as two very distinct forms of nationalism and to see the adherents of one or the other as inherently opposed and neatly organised into pro- and anti-regime factions. However a number of pivotal events and issues in the life of the Islamic Republic have given lie to this. Iran’s nuclear program is one such issue that has united Iranians in a sense of shared pride.6 The January 16, 2015 revelation of the program in the early 2000s and the subsequent sanctions it attracted had an impact on the way in which Iranians imagined themselves and their nation. When the exiled and, within Iran, deeply unpopular Mujahedin-e Khalq, first revealed the existence of a hitherto undisclosed nuclear research facility at Natanz, mild-mannered reformist president Mohammad Khatami was in power. An opinion poll conducted by the InterMedia Survey Institute in 2006 found that 84 per cent of Iranians interviewed would be willing to face United Nations sanctions in order to develop not only nuclear power but nuclear weapons, and 75 per cent would risk hostilities with the United States in the same cause.7 

Most Iranians perceive their nation as a ‘great civilization that has been deprived of its rightful status as a region superpower’.8 Khatami’s government in common with previous and successive Iranian governments carried the burden of what Kishore Mahbubani has described as the ‘shaking off of the yoke of colonialism, and reclaiming for the people of Iran the true measure of respect, legitimacy, and status, commensurate with their long and glorious history’.9 Nuclear power has held out the promise of a restoration of imagined national glory and has, therefore, been a project attracting broad popular appeal. Drawing, often simultaneously, on mythologies of competing nationalism: one rooted in Shia Islam and the other in Iran’s pre-Islamic (and para-Islamic) history.10 

As negotiators inch towards a nuclear agreement and regardless of the outcome at the 30 June deadline, those who have insisted on seeing an Iran divided neatly into binaries of pro- and anti-government, Islamist and secularist, religiously-oriented and historically-oriented, may well be in need of new paradigms through which to understand Iranian society now and into the future.
BOOK LAUNCH: ‘MUSLIM CITIZENS IN THE WEST’


After a preliminary survey of the literature on British people who converted to Islam prior to the Nineteenth Century (typically in the Ottoman Empire), Ghim has captured in Warg, Ghim treats in some detail four later figures or groups. These were: Henry Stanley, who married Muslims, typically sailors, in various port areas of Britain (on whom, alas, there is only limited information). Not only is Ghim’s study fascinating and very readable, but he provides a great deal of documentation to primary and secondary sources, so that his book will be a starting point for any future work in this field.

In part, Ghim’s story is of a number of individuals, the key ones among whom – Stanley, Quilliam and Marmaduke Pickthall (a key member of the Woking-based group) – were influenced by contacts with Muslims in the Middle East, and who then subsequently converted. Stanley was very much a lone individual. Quilliam became an enthusiastic proselytiser, based in Liverpool. He was quite effective, but those whom he converted were, for the most part, ordinary people whose dedication did not last long beyond Quilliam’s leaving Britain. (Some of those who had had an association with him were to maintain contact with the Woking-based group, including Quilliam himself later, under an alias.)

The Woking group formed a round a Mosque which had been built, with Indian funds, by an orientalist called Leiter, at a college which he was running – which came into the hands of an Indian Muslim, Kamal-ud-din. He was an able lawyer who had come to England in connection with a case before the Privy Council, but also explicitly for the purpose of Muslim proselytisation. He, however, was not just any Indian Muslim lawyer, but a leading figure in the Lahore Ahmadiyyah. While, in the publication that he started, he did refer to Ahmad’s writings, he had been given the brief – to which he stuck – not to convert people to views that were distinctly modernist and anti-sectarian – and this approach strongly influenced the Woking converts. The Woking group was quite successful, and also developed a prayer room in London, and held celebrations of Muslim festivals both in Woking and in London hotels. A much smaller and less successful group in London was explicitly Ahmadiyya – but ‘Qadiani’. They took the view that Ahmad was the Manda, and that if his teachings were not recognised, then people were not properly Muslim.

The Woking group attracted a number of people of some social prominence – notably the Irish Peer, the Fifth Baron Headley – and also Pickthall, who was responsible for an English translation of the Qur’an, The Meaning of The Glorious Quran. Pickthall, while he had no scholarly training, was a man of considerable accomplishments, who learned Arabic and Turkish, and acted as the group’s intellectual leader when Kamal-ud-din was absent. Pickthall had spent time in the Middle East and Turkey, was also a prolific novelist, and drew on this background in some of his novels. He also gave serious thought to the interpretation of Islam – although much of this work took place in India, and this is – very reasonably – not covered in the present volume.

Lord Headley seems to have come to his own ideas about religion, and after talking with Kamal-ud-din, to have come to the conclusion that they were, in fact, Muslim. He was a serious convert, and took the Haj. He wrote a fair bit about Islam and was involved in polemical arguments. He offered interpretations of Islam that tried to address the (difficult) circumstances of English converts. He valued Islam for its lack of sectarianism, and to try to downplay the significance of divisions within Islam when he became aware of them. He also stressed commonalities between Islam and Christianity as Abrahamic faiths – but came in for some criticism for importing Christian ideas into his interpretation of Islam, and for what some (e.g. writers from India) saw as laxity in his interpretation of obligations for prayer and observance. (He also seems to have had some personal difficulties in giving up alcohol, and was once convicted of drunkenness.)

The title of the book – reflecting the title of Anne Freire’s biography of Pickthall, Loyal Enemy (1938) – points to the interesting question of the political impact of the people’s conversion. Stanley, Quilliam and Pickthall each became concerned with matters to do with British foreign policy, in particular, objecting to Britain’s move away from sympathy for the Ottoman Empire, and its alliance, instead, with Russia. There was, in part, continuity between older British views, e.g. of Disraeli. But in part, they were concerned with problems about Muslim sensibilities in the British Empire. They wrote on issues such as the problems in the Balkans, and Pickthall, who had been much impressed by the constitutional reforms of the Young Turks with some of whom he had personal contacts, also argued that, for example, Ottoman actions against the Armenians had been misunderstood. Pickthall wrote, and spoke – widely during the First World War, and he, and the Woking group, were subject to surveillance (Ghim’s other accounts being reconstructed from British security records!). Pickthall clearly made a nuisance of himself to the British authorities. His and other converts’ case against the dismemberment of a reforming Ottoman Empire (and also against Jewish settlement in Palestine), seems in retrospect to have been very strong. The book also deals – briefly – with St John Philby (the motivation of whose conversion to Islam is questioned).

All told, not only is this a fascinating read, but it is important in drawing attention to the changes of political sensibilities that came about with conversion to Islam (and which point, obviously, for the need for Western politicians to bear in mind the distinctive political viewpoint – e.g. on international relations – of non-convert Muslim populations, too). It also raises interesting points about what Islam means in practical terms for the lives of converts, who are not associated with an immigrant culture, in a Western country.
Mr Ahmad El Hariri
Secretary General of the Future Movement

Impact of the Syrian Crisis in Lebanon

Mr Hariri began by noting it is four years since the start of the Syrian revolution, and consequently it is no longer possible to speak only about the humanitarian consequences of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. The discussion needs to include other consequences such as demographic, economic, development, security and political impacts. The Future Movement (political party in Lebanon) believes that measures should be taken to prevent the economic and social challenges of the Syrian refugees crisis turning into political and security ones.

Hariri concluded with an overview of the current Lebanese government, headed by PM Tammam Salam and formed in February 2014. He said this government is more inclusive and includes more political groups such as the Future Movement. It has taken some major decisions to manage the Syrian displacement into Lebanon. These measures include strengthening border security and the provision of services for Syrian refugees and working with UNHCR to share the economic burden of the refugees crisis by expanding the humanitarian response to include a more structured development.

16 April 2015

A/Professor Walid El Khachab
Associate Professor Arabic Studies
York University

Popular Culture as Resistance in the Arab Spring

Prof. Khachab opened his lecture by saying the Arab Spring has led, in many cases, to the strengthening of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, or to the replacement of older autocratic governments by younger ones. He outlined how, like Hamid Dabashi, he believed, the open-ended disposition of these revolutionary uprisings amounted to laying claim to the emerging public space. This assessment was set against Habermas’ idealised vision of a public sphere to which all opinions have access, and where communication and rational reasoning ensure the best consensual decision making process.

Prof. Khachab stated that often the governments who came to power after the revolutions in the Arab World (2010-2012) evacuated and controlled the public space, especially where a symbolic value was added to the pragmatic occupation of strategic squares and streets. This physical ‘retreat’ of forces of change from the public space echoes a reorganisation of the public sphere, where communication does not seem to proceed according to Habermas’ theory. Prof. Khachab’s view, state control over media and discourses portraying the figure of the ‘Revolutionary’ (cast as disruptive, nihilist and apathetic) as well as conspiracy theories have led to a return to the pre-2010 situation, where the authoritarian regimes exerted control directly or indirectly over the public sphere. It was mainly in the realm of popular culture that an effort to reclaim both the public space, especially where a symbolic value was added to the pragmatic occupation of strategic squares and streets. This physical ‘retreat’ of forces of change from the public space echoes a reorganisation of the public sphere, where communication does not seem to proceed according to Habermas’ theory. Prof. Khachab’s view, state control over media and discourses portraying the figure of the ‘Revolutionary’ (cast as disruptive, nihilist and apathetic) as well as conspiracy theories have led to a return to the pre-2010 situation, where the authoritarian regimes exerted control directly or indirectly over the public sphere.

A/Professor Telmissany
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, University of Ottawa

Documenting Defiance: Women Writers and Filmmakers in Tahrir Square

A/Professor Telmissany opened by saying that documenting defiance in literature and films was an important tool of the Egyptian uprising (2011). The Egyptian uprising or civic defiance cannot be understood without examining the more radical ‘epistemic defiance’ of the established regime of knowledge informed by power relationships, and the way in which knowledge circulates and functions in relation to power centres and authoritarian elites.

Prof. Telmissany identified social and political epistemic defiance on a number of fronts in Egyptian society including: patriarchy and paternalism (family and state); neoliberal economic models (the role of workers and labour unions); state information apparatus including the role of social media, private networks, global media; and religious authority represented by interpretations of the scripture, institutions, public figures and political parties.

Prof Telmissany cited several examples of epistemic defiance observable during the Egyptian uprising, including women wearing and not wearing the veil, side by side equally fighting and standing against the regime.

The second form of epistemic defiance was against the idea of secularism as defined by the Mubarak regime. Telmissany believed Mubarak ‘played’ with the ideas of secularism by promoting secular institutions in Egypt. But the Egyptian Constitution states Islam is the religion of the state and the Sharia is the major source of law. While she was herself involved in the promotion of secularism with the online site Madaniya, Telmissany noted it is important to clarify that there was a huge difference between calling for a civil state – which is the opposite of a religious or military state – and the rejection of Islam or religion in general. The civil state protects all religions and guarantees individuals the freedom to practice their faith.

The third epistemic defiance she described was against the politics of despair. The 17th century philosopher Spinoza in his work on separation of church and state understood that religion was controlling people by promoting ‘sad passions’. People were encouraged to live with sadness in this life with the hope of happiness in the next life. As an alternative, Prof. Telmissany referred to the work of Edward Said and his premise of the politics of hope.

Prof. Telmissany presented ideas of secularism in her own work Gates of Paradise (2009) and examined the revolutionary context in the works of other artists and writers including: Ahmad Soueif - Cairo: My City, Our Revolution (2012); Mona Prince - Revolution is my name (2014); May Iskander - Words of Witness (2012); and Jehane Noujaim - The Square (2012).
Culture in Iran and the Middle East

Everyone seemed to know they share a common language with Iran, I did not meet anyone who could read the Persian script used in Iran, not Russian. I had many interesting conversations about the history of the Persian language in the region and its importance today. Although I was positively surprised by the warm welcome extended to me by all the locals. This combined with the social freedoms and the breathtaking mountain scenery made Tajikistan really an unforgettable experience.

**SAKAR'S APPROACH TO TEACHING AND SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING**

Teaching has always been my ultimate delight. The enthusiasm stems from the joy I experience in interacting with students and sharing my knowledge with them. My basic objective in teaching is to introduce students to the literary, historical, social, and cultural aspects of Persian Language and literature. I believe in building a strong relationship with each student, and creating a balance between challenge, enjoyment, and motivating students to learn, which in turn leads to higher engagement. In my lectures for the course on Iranian History and Culture, I share my memories of the 1979 Iranian Revolution when discussing the modern history of Iran. Feedback I have received from students indicates that it is fascinating to listen to an eye-witness of such a historical event, coming from a university student, then involved in the street protests, experiencing the roller-coaster process of hope and disappointment. In addition to discussing the accounts written by modern historians and analysing the causes and results of the Iranian Revolution, I share my memories with students about the days and nights of the revolution in our home, neighborhood, university, and town.

I am a strong believer in outside-the-classroom-activities as an important component in language learning. During my years of teaching Persian and Iranian Studies in three different cultural and academic environments in Iran, University of California, Berkeley, and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, I have always arranged Persian cooking classes for my students. This allows them to maximise their opportunities for language use, while also becoming more familiar with Persian culture. I have also celebrated the Persian New Year, Nowruz, with my students every year by arranging the traditional Nowruz setting haft-seen (left) in the classroom. I teach the history of this ancient tradition in my class before the celebration starts, and have found it influential in enhancing my students’ understanding and appreciation of Persian culture, history, and language and have also played an important role in motivating and inspiring them to further their Persian studies.

**PERSIAN ONLINE IN ITS SECOND YEAR**

Persian Online is in its second year with students enrolling for the first time in the Intermediate level class. Many of the students who completed Introductory Persian in 2014 returned to take the next units in this well-developed program. In addition, enrolments in Introductory Persian Online doubled from 2014. The student feedback for this program which is unique to ANU has been very positive and suggests student numbers will continue to grow.

**SPEAKING PERSIAN IN TAJIKISTAN**

“I had a wonderful opportunity to practice my Persian language skills this semester when I visited Tajikistan for a training program. This small mountainous Central Asian country was once part of the Persian Empire. Today, most of the population is ethnically Tajik and Persian speaking.

The Soviet legacy in Tajik Persian is most noticeable in the Cyrillic alphabet used for the Tajik language. I found it interesting to compare the spelling of written Tajik and Farsi. In some ways the Cyrillic alphabet is easier to read as all the vowels are written. The decades long shared Soviet history has also left many Russian ‘loan’ words in the Tajik language. While some commonly used Arabic ‘loan’ words, which are used in Iran, are not used in Tajikistan. My efforts to use Persian when shopping at the bazaar was usually met with a polite flow of Russian, which then turned into amusement of the happy Tajik shopkeepers when they realised I was actually speaking Persian, not Russian. I had many interesting conversations about the history of Persian language in the region and its importance today. Although everyone seemed to know they share a common language with Iran, I did not meet anyone who could read the Persian script used in Iran. At one shop I found a Persian children’s book written with both the Tajik and Farsi scripts, which the shopkeeper insisted was Tajik-Arabic until I read to her some of the Farsi script, which of course matched the Tajik writing she understood. Understanding spoken Tajik Persian was relatively easy despite some differences with the pronunciation of vowels as compared to the Persian spoken in Iran.

I was positively surprised by the warm welcome extended to me by all the locals. This combined with the social freedoms and the breathtaking mountain scenery made Tajikistan really an unforgettable experience.”

Mari Ruuskanen - CAIS student of Advanced Persian

**APPLIED ARABIC**

Twelve students from CAIS travelled to Qatar for six weeks study from December to January 2015. The Arabic students were accompanied and taught by the convenor of the CAIS Arabic Program, Huda Al-Tamimi. The students were generously accommodated at the University of Qatar in Doha. As a result of this intensive program and being immersed in an Arabic language speaking country, the level of Arabic for these students developed to an advanced level. The students are pictured here (right) with Huda Al-Tamimi; Dr Abdulah Abdul Rahman Ahmad, Director of the Centre for Arabic for Non-Native Speakers, University of Qatar; and Dr Muntair Al-Hamads Lecutre in Arabic at University of Qatar.

**SUMMER ARABIC 2015**

CAS lecturer Franco Meyer ran a five week program in Introductory Arabic over the summer break. The program attracted people from different backgrounds, ages and interests. Twelve students completed the program which covers the basic elements of learning Arabic at beginner level. Upon completion the students were familiar with the Arabic alphabet and the sounds needed for basic speech. Some of the students were interested in continuing with the next stage of Arabic either in an online or in a classroom setting.

**ARABIC ONLINE**

Introductory Arabic Online has been included in the CAIS Arabic Program this semester. While staff from CAS and the CASS Educational Design Studio have been preparing the online program there have been many student enquiries about the new program. At the commencement of first semester there were 16 students enrolled for the online Arabic bringing the total number of students enrolled in introductory Arabic to over 30. This boost in student numbers shows the continuing popularity of this language for young people advancing their careers in Australia.

CAS also offers an upper level Arabic Online course which will be offered in second semester this year. The course is Arabic Current Affairs and Media Arabic and it can be taken by both undergraduate and postgraduate students who have completed Intermediate Arabic.

MATTHEW GRAY
FEATURE ARTICLES

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
‘The Dynamics of Change in the Middle East’, Senior Executive Development Program, National Security College, ANU, Canberra, 5 November 2014. Briefing to officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on Middle East/ Gulf issues, Canberra, 18 November 2014.

‘National Security Policy Implications: The Dynamics of Change in the Middle East’, Executive Level 1 Development Program, National Security College, ANU, Canberra, 5 November 2014.


OUTREACH
RMIC Duntroon lecture ‘Russia and the Crisis in Ukraine’, 29 April 2015.

SERVICE
In February 2015, Dr Nourzhany was elected as president of the Australian Association for Communist and Post-Communist Studies (AACAS) for a term of 2 years.

MEDIA
8 television and radio interviews.

ZAHRA TAHERI
LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
‘One Destination, Two Paths: The image of women in Attar’s Nameh’, Congress of Spiritual Horizon and Worlds of Attar-e-Neyshabouri, Faculty of Literature of Humanities, University of Isfahan, Iran, 12 and 13 April 2015.

MINERVA NASSER-EDDINE
LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
Political Islam Seminars, CAIS, February & April 2015.

HUDA AL-TAMIMI
BOOK
Arabic literature through history, Dar Al Saqi Publishers, Beirut, 2015.

OMID MALEK BEHBAHANI
LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

FAYE MEYER
BOOKS

RAHMAN ISMAIL
FEATURE ARTICLES

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CAIS Bulletin
ISSN 1322 0462
The Bulletin is published bi-annually by the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (The Middle East & Central Asia).

Its aim is to provide information about the Centre’s activities and to disseminate knowledge about the regions of its coverage. Articles and commentaries appearing in the Bulletin do not necessarily reflect the views of CAIS.

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t: 61 2 6125 4928
e: anita.mack@anu.edu.au

For further information, write to
The Editorial Board
Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies
(The Middle East & Central Asia) College of Arts and Social Sciences
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
or email cais@anu.edu.au