

INTRODUCTION

The articles included in this special issue of *Illumine* were presented at the Second Annual Student Conference of the Middle East and Islamic Consortium of British Columbia (MEICON-BC) held at the University of Victoria in March 2010. The topics found here are extraordinarily well-timed given the news reports arriving daily of challenges being raised by people in the Middle East to abuses by state and other dominant powers in the region. This is the subject matter of these articles.

Two articles deal with the topic of political Islam, a concern that resonates at present with the fall of the governments of Tunisia and Egypt and the political arena becoming more accessible to many previously suppressed political and Islamic groups. In “Islam/ism and Democracy: Past the Compatibility Problem and Toward the Post-Islamist Turn,” Matthew Gordner challenges the assumption that Islam/ism and democracy are incompatible by describing the variety of religious and political expressions contained within the terms “Islam” and “Islamists,” and shows that Islamic thought contains democratic principles, albeit of a sort that do not necessarily lie within the framework of Western-style democracies. Along the same lines, Catherine Musekamp’s “Negotiating Egyptian Nationalism: Militant Islamist Confrontations with the State and the Fragmentation of Political Authority,” based largely on Ernest Gellner’s theories of nationalism, addresses the challenge posed by Egypt’s militant Islamic movement to the state’s domination of nationalist ideologies.

The lasting ethnic and religious conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis and internal ethnic strife in China are the topics of two other articles. In the essay “Subaltern Voices and Perspectives: The Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish,” Balraj Dhillon looks at the poetry of

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Darwish, written between the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and his death in 2008, and applies Edward Said's theories of postcolonial and subaltern studies. Dhillon finds that the poems of this "poet of Palestinian resistance" express resistance to the Israeli occupation without denying the humanity of either the Israelis or the Palestinians. Calvin Ching's "Ethnic Tensions between the Han and the Hui: The Neo-Sufi Jahriyya Movement of Ma Hua Long of the late Qing Period (1862–1871)" describes the Muslim minority, the Hui, and their historic opposition to the Chinese majority, the Han, providing the background for ethnic tensions that have recently erupted onto China's political landscape.

Finally, this issue of *Illumine* ends with two articles that focus on the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ardalan Rezamand's "Use of Religious Doctrine and Symbolism in the Iran-Iraq War" shows how the Khomeini government "reformulated" religious doctrine to rally public support for the war effort against Iraq (1980–1988). In "The Sovereign's Confessions: International Relations and the Post-Elections Show-Trials," Setareh Shohadaei applies postmodernist theories to her analysis of the "dissident" trials that followed the 2009 Iranian elections which were used to project state authority to the international community.

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