

INTRODUCTION

This is the second special issue of *Illumine* to emerge from the relationship between the Middle East and Islamic Consortium of British Columbia (MEICON BC) and the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society (CSRS) at the University of Victoria. This edition of *Illumine* presents the scholarship of four authors who delivered papers during the fifth annual MEICON Student Conference, held at the University of Victoria on March 23, 2013. Their work comprises inquiry into issues of law, identity, the agricultural landscape and its image, the problematic categorization of militants outside the requirements for humanity, the efforts to reconcile Islamist political sensibilities with the Republican Turkish State, and the convergent political and religious expressions of Near and Middle Eastern societies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These articles offer a cross-section of the pressing questions that are actively shaping communities within the Islamic world and their interactions with non-Islamic societies. They also provide a distinctly Canadian perspective in graduate student scholarship on Islamic and Middle Eastern issues.

Amber Ayers opens this issue with “Idealism ‘must not blind us:’ British legislators and the Palestine Mandate, 1929-1934.” This article examines the complexities faced by the British Mandate in Palestine as they attempted to formulate and enforce the legislation of agricultural rights. The dual goals of balancing a free market land economy with the needs of the *fellahin* peasant population, and the equally dichotomous promises made to newly arriving Zionists and the Arabs following the First World War were brought to their apex by the violence of the 1929 August Revolt, that saw many dead and

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the British stunned by their own incapacity to control the situation. Parsing the impact of the implementation of a new legal system on both the Palestinians and their British governors begs the question of whether systems of law and government, introduced by a state's representatives sent to work on the ground, can be held responsible for failures and unrest rather than the ruling figures themselves.

"Romanticizing the land: Agriculturally imagined communities in Palestine-Israel," by Jennifer Shutek continues the politically, historically and socially charged theme of agricultural laws, rights and practices in Palestine. This essay examines the evolution of agricultural images in the imaginings of the Palestinians and the Israelis as they seek to create identities that connect to the land, both justifying their respective cultural and economic claims and creating a symbolic, visual language through which to exclude the other. A system of propagandizing visual media has been part of the creation of a land-based identity at least as far back as Pharaonic Egypt, and it proves to be no less convincing and problematic in our own time, when film, advertising and logos traverse the globe. Middle Eastern movements conflate these images of land, food, safety and freedom for people who have none of any.

Jessica Singh approaches the process of othering in her paper "The Notion of subhuman identity in the War on Terror." By addressing the case studies of the United States and their treatment of al Qaeda and Taliban militants, both during operations and as detainees, she focuses on specific statements and terminology to point towards the dehumanization of the enemy, who can thereafter be treated outside the bounds of moral and legal considerations for human life. This weaving together of twelve years of speeches, press releases and operation lingo creates a disturbing picture of how a "subhuman identity" becomes a key tool in justifying seemingly unjustifiable acts in the name of warfare, rightness, and authority.

"Turkey Post 1980 coup d'état: The rise, the fall, and the emergence of political Islam," by Khash Hemmati rounds out this issue of *Illumine*. Tracing the events in Turkish politics since the formation of the Republic, he discusses the events that led to the exclusion of Islamic governance and an eventual backlash that saw the formation of political parties founded on "Islamic" platforms. This pro-Islamic identity clashed in the 1980s, as it does today, with the ideologies of Republican supporters, although growing enthusiasm for an "Islamic"

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option in Turkey's multi-party system has placed them at a crossroads that began with the 1980 coup d'état. Although Turkey is often seen to have a more "moderate" identity than its Near and Middle Eastern neighbours, it has its own history of military intervention and religious fervour. As we look towards the uprisings, "Springs" and elections both dubious and transparent in the Middle East, Turkey and its Twentieth-century coups are a reminder to consider the present and the future with an eye to the events of the past.

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Editor