

A closer look at Native rights

"The only good Indian is a dead Indian." Until the early 1970s, textbooks in North American schools, the Hollywood film industry and 'civilized' conversations were rarely ashamed about promulgating this kind of language and rhetoric in reference to North American Native peoples. The political and social currents of the previous thirty years, whether in response to the greater notion of a just society, an affect of a new postmaterialist philosophy or simply an evolution of societal tolerance, has decreased and nearly eliminated this kind of language from the public discourse. Or so we thought.

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Dalhousie has introduced a new panel discussion series aimed at addressing timely and relevant issues within a forum for academic debate. The first of these panels, named Cross-Currants, was held on Thursday, November 4, in the MacMechan room of the Killam library. A panel of multi-disciplinary Dalhousie academics presented topics in relation to the Lobster Wars. The presentations offered material from several distinct angles. The panel consisted of academics Nathan Brett from Philosophy, Philip Girard of the Dalhousie Law School, Tanya Lee of Sociology, Peter Aucoin from Political Science, and the English department's Andrew Wainwright.

A caveat provided by Prof. Girard informed the audience that the panelists had not co-scripted their presentations. This was an unfortunate truth. While each of the presentations was interesting in its own merit, the forum attempted to cover too broad a range of topics in the hour and a half allotted. There was a sense that the central issue of the Lobster Wars, whether it be resource management, racism, the political role of natives in Canada,

or the modern implications of the Supreme Court in Canada, was not addressed fully. Rather, each topic was dealt with in a specific and varying manner.

The presentations made discussed the question of collective versus individual rights, examined language that was used in the media and its significance, and talked about the role of history both as legal evidence in the case and in framing the conflict generally, and the role of expert witnesses in court cases.

The Lobster Wars were conceived a few months ago when Donald Marshall was caught by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans sitting in his boat with a bucket of eels (a 450 pound bucket!). Mr. Marshall was fishing out of season and without a license, but claimed a legal right to fishing based on his Indian status and treaty rights dating back to the 1760s. The case went to the Supreme Court. The Marshall decision upheld the treaty right to fishing. This touched-off a fierce battle between natives and non-Natives, which resulted in demonstrations, the cutting of fishing lines and public displays of racism that dated back to centuries of ignorance.

Tanya Lee's presentation of the surrounding media discourse highlighted not only the prominence that the Supreme Court decision and subsequent reactions received in the national media, but more specifically the language that was used. Most interestingly the term 'non-Native' which signals a reversal in the way native issues are now perceived. Native status is gaining such political influence in this country that the term 'non-Native' rings of the same tone as 'the rest of Canada,' a term that is used when discussing political issues relating to Quebec.

English professor Andrew Wainwright spoke passionately of the need for professors to ensure that the discussion of current issues, such as the Marshall decision, are carefully tempered by historical and contextual information. Knowledge must be the antecedent to debate. This became most apparent when an audience member, who had worked extensively with refugees of military conflicts, asked if the

term "Lobster War" was really appropriate. Mr. Wainwright responded convincingly that this is indeed a war. This is a conflict between nations that has been unfolding for centuries, and the casualties continue to suffer from alcoholism, unemployment, poverty and suicide rates far beyond the national average.

The Cross-Currants series will continue to conduct panel discussions when issues of

significance appear in the media and in the classroom. These academic forums service the discourse of contentious issues by placing the debate into the public sphere. While these panels could be better served by more closely correlating each presentation, this forum provided both clarification of the issues and a chance to become better informed on what is a deeply historical and currently complex subject.

David Brock

Canada's role in the genocide in Iraq

Very little has been heard from Iraq in recent years, and indeed it has shrunk into oblivion in the media's eye. The perfectly choreographed Gulf War has ended, and the illusion has been secured that all is well in the Gulf. In fact, little could be further from the truth. America and its allies have continued to bomb Iraq almost annually, in addition to strict sanctions designed to "eliminate Iraq's potential to manufacture weapons of mass destruction, and depose Saddam Hussein."

As two Canadian citizens who visited Iraq, Irene McGinnis and Linda Morgan recently told a gathering at Dalhousie University that these sanctions have come to mean almost certain death for millions of Iraqi children and civilians. 600,000 children have already died from preventable diseases rendered fatal by the absence of medicine in Iraq since 1990.

That is a fact that both American and Canadian politicians seem to shy away from, falling back on the familiar refrain, "We must limit Saddam's capabilities in the Gulf." Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State, went so far as to say, "No one said this would be easy; there are prices to pay."

What Irene McGinnis and Linda Morgan stress is the blindness with which these sanctions are followed internationally (Canada has a ship positioned in the Gulf helping to enforce the sanctions), as well as the lack of criticism of the items

being kept out of Iraq. A list of forbidden items presented by Morgan and McGinnis seems reminiscent of fascist cultural blackouts designed to destroy a culture and its people's morale. Items such as aluminum foil, ambulances, eye glasses, door-knobs, sand paper, sandals, soap, ventilators, pins, painter's brushes, paints, pans and paper clips are ludicrously labelled as items necessary for a program of mass destruction. Even axes, the scourges of modern technological warfare, are forbidden, lest Iraqis try to modernize their armed forces.

The pretence of deposing Saddam is farcical at best, and yet seems to be accepted without qualification. Morgan and McGinnis draw attention to the fact that "these sanctions were only meant to be temporary," and that they are now strongly opposed by Russia and France, and indeed by UN workers in Iraq. Dennis Halliday, a long time UN employee and UN coordinator in Iraq at the time the sanctions were imposed, resigned in disgust saying that "the situation in Iraq is abhorrent, and the oil for food solution is inadequate and was inherently not designed to eliminate the situation, but only prevent it from further deterioration." Furthermore, the UN's current coordinator in Iraq felt that the sanctions only served to "deprive another generation of Iraqis from becoming responsible global citizens."

And what is Canada's role in all of this? According to

Morgan and McGinnis, Canada's approach is blind obedience of resolutions which stand against Canada's humanitarian principles. Not only has Canada shown no opposition to the sanctions, but Canadian armed forces are also playing an active role in the blockade of Iraq. It is a role which deprives Iraqi children of the food and medicine they need to survive; a role which Canadians have remained ignorant of and indifferent to for almost 10 years.

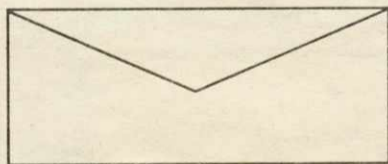
Morgan and McGinnis, who have been on a cross-country tour speaking out against the sanctions in Iraq, offer encounter after encounter with Iraqi civilians harmed by the sanctions. Stories of mothers sitting at their children's bedsides as they die from a myriad of curable conditions. Morgan's description of how one child died while they were touring an Iraqi hospital perfectly accentuates the horrific nature of the sanctions.

"All that child needed was a 50-cent piece of tubing, and as we left the parents turned to us and said in Arabic, 'this was your fault!'"

Given the systematic killings and the general destruction of the Iraqi people, no word seems better to describe what is happening than genocide. And as the Iraqi infrastructure further deteriorates, the death toll is sure to mount, while Canadian politicians, unwilling to upset American counterparts, and Canadian citizens, unaware of what is happening, say nothing.

Mohammed Loubani

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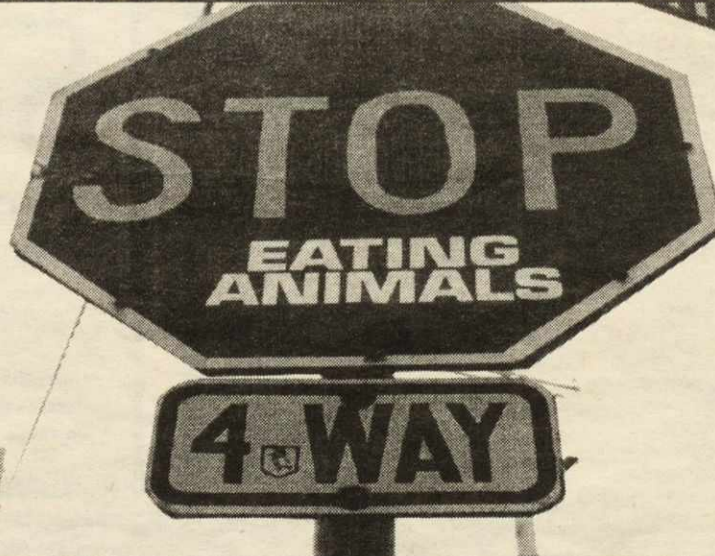
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THE GAZETTE

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



"But keep driving."

photo by Jon (the animal) Elmer