

## **Lang vegetarian controversy ultimately shows growing sophistication in West**

Cultural values more nuanced than outsiders tend to think, argues professor

**Montreal, Quebec – June 4** – In 1990, singer k.d. lang ignited a controversy in her native Alberta when she ‘came out’ as a vegetarian. But a University of Saskatchewan professor says the way the controversy ultimately played out illustrates the growing diversity and sophistication of Western Canadian society.

In a paper presented at the 2010 Congress for the Humanities and Social Sciences taking place at Montreal’s Concordia University, Valerie Korinek argues that lang’s open attack on the cattle industry – a symbol of the West – was in the end more problematic than her lesbianism, which she publicly declared two years later.

Lang’s decision to film an anti-meat commercial for PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) created a feeling of outrage and betrayal in her home town of Consort and elsewhere in the West.

“Most people had been aware that she was a vegetarian, and there’s no sense that she was hassled for these views,” says Korinek, the head of the University of Saskatchewan’s Department of History. “But as soon as she crossed the line and filmed that commercial, it unleashed a torrent of opposition – some of it quite nasty.”

From the outside, adds Korinek, the controversy created the appearance that Alberta was intolerant of difference. But she says there’s plenty to demonstrate just the opposite.

First, she says, until k.d. lang attacked the cattle industry, she was a source of pride in Consort even though unconventional by small-town standards. Consort, says Korinek, had ‘stretched’ to accept her.

And as the debate progressed, Albertans – especially in the urban areas – began to defend her right to speak her mind. Many urbanites were ready to state that they did not share some farm values. Korinek says outsiders often tend to view Alberta a cultural monolith, when it is not.

“Even within small communities you find people who aren’t stereotypical rednecks. The lang study makes it clear that you have to be very nuanced in how you analyze Western Canadian values.”

### **Get more from the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences**

Organised by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences brings together about 9,000 researchers, scholars, graduate students, practitioners, and policy makers to share groundbreaking research and examine the most important social and cultural issues of the day. Montréal’s Concordia University is the host of Congress 2010, May 28 to June 4.

The Congress program includes original research from across disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, providing a great collection of expert sources and innovative story leads. Contact the Congress Media room for assistance connecting with researchers at Congress.

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