Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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BA. Honours (McGill University, 2007)

“Living Well Through Story: Land and Narrative Imagination in Indigenous-State Relations in British Columbia”

Department of History

Tuesday, August 8, 2017
9:00 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room B215

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. John Lutz, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Elizabeth Vibert, Department of History, UVic (Member)
Prof. Rebecca Johnson, Faculty of Law, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. J. Edward Chamberlin, Department of English, University of Toronto

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Jodie Gawryluk, Department of Psychology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Students of colonialism know well that the stories we tell have the capacity to make, maintain, or transform our relationships as well as our material futures. As earlier work has shown, Indigenous and settler peoples encountered and apprehended one another through story at first contact and in all subsequent contact moments, reaching right up to present-day mechanisms for negotiating conflicts over rights, resources, sovereignty, and historical injustice. In this dissertation, I explore in depth the role of story as a social practice in Indigenous-state relations, examining a series of key encounters over the last 150 years in which Indigenous peoples challenged and contested the state’s possession of their lands in what would become British Columbia. Informed by archival and community-based research with two Indigenous nations – the Stō:lō and the Haida – this study offers a history of Indigenous tactics in pursuit of the larger objective of decolonization, especially since the 1960s.

Each of the four main chapters explores how Indigenous peoples have engaged distinct state-sanctioned mechanisms for addressing the state’s dispossession of their lands. The first chapter examines the dynamics of orality and literacy in a series of Stō:lō petitions from the late nineteenth century, a time when reserves were being reduced in order to accommodate a rapid influx of settlers seeking agricultural lands. Chapter 2 looks at Stō:lō experiences of treaty negotiation in the early twenty-first century, and how they are attempting to re-write the master narrative of Stō:lō-state relations. Chapter 3 focuses on the Haida blockade of logging in the mid-1980s, examining how the Haida acted into being what would become an iconic story of Haida nationhood. Finally, chapter 5 explores story and belief through a close study of the narrative dynamics of Haida participation in the Joint Review of the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project between 2012-2014. In each of these encounters, Stō:lō and Haida people exceed the limited narrative spaces they are assigned for communicating who they are and how they relate to their territories and to the state, while attempting to shift the established narrative.

Recent scholarship on Indigenous-state relations has focused on how liberal settler states continue to exclude Indigenous peoples even through their gestures at including them into the body politic. While such work on the state is critical, I suggest that it is equally important to understand Indigenous peoples’ demonstrated capacity for collective cultural endurance, and how it exists in tension with the forces acting to assimilate and subsume Indigenous difference within the normative structures of settler society. This study attempts to grasp the nature of this endurance, and finds that narrative is as central to Indigenous peoples’ repossessions of their land as it was to the state’s original dispossession of it.