

Statement of Intent

In pursuing a thesis-based Masters of Arts in History at the University of Victoria, I am interested in exploring questions on indigenous-mainstream relations in British Columbia, the production of popular knowledge about indigenous peoples in the province, and the roles indigenous peoples themselves are playing in this regard. More specifically, I would like to better understand how, in a setting marked by conflicts over rights to lands, resources, and the authority to represent, the Sto:lo Nation in British Columbia has been actively re-presenting the past to non-indigenous publics. In this, I build on research conducted for an undergraduate honours thesis in Anthropology at McGill University, in which I explored representations by Sto:lo peoples of the Fraser River salmon fishery at the beginning and end of the twentieth century, using archival and recently published texts. The latter included three books commissioned by the Sto:lo Nation, collaboratively produced with scholars, researchers, and community members, and designed for regional elementary and secondary public school curriculums (see Carlson 1997; 1998; 2001). In looking at the production of these texts, I follow from Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), who points to the importance of historical representations in events and activities outside of the academy (including memorials, films, and state holidays) in contributing to popular understandings of the past. In terms of methodology, I would like to combine qualitative research (interviews with individuals involved in the production of the texts) with text-based content analysis.

Although my B.A. is in Anthropology and English Literature, I feel that both of these have provided me with a broad perspective as well as an intellectual background and critical orientation that will prove valuable in pursuing an M.A. in History. Further, in my final year I had the opportunity to take a graduate level course on the intersections of history and anthropology, through which I was exposed to authors such as Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Bernard S. Cohn, Ann Laura Stoler, and others. This course, in combination with two upper-level history courses I completed in my last term at McGill, has impressed upon me the importance of thinking about culture, history, and politics together, an approach I have come to understand as crucial when considering issues related to indigenous peoples and colonized settings. To this end, I believe that the University of Victoria's History department provides an ideal setting to develop my theoretical and research-based knowledge in these areas. The two-year thesis M.A. will allow me to become competent in community-based and archival research and in combining these skills in ways that resonate with the interests, goals, and needs of indigenous communities, while providing me with the theoretical underpinnings to effectively carry this out. I am especially keen to work with, and learn from professors Wendy Wickwire, Elizabeth Vibert, and John Lutz.

In terms of funding, I have applied for a SSHRC Canadian Graduate Scholarship for Masters students, and would be interested in any Teaching Assistantships and Research Assistant positions that might be available. In regards to the latter, I have been fortunate to work as an RA (2006-present) on a SSHRC-funded qualitative research project (referee Dr. Amanda Grenier, P.I., Standard Research Grant, 2005-2008) at McGill University, in which I have helped coordinate, conduct, and analyze sixty semi-structured interviews with older persons, and contributed to emergent discourse analysis of government policy documents on aging.

I hope you will consider my application to the University of Victoria's M.A. program in History and I look forward to hearing from you soon.