



STUDENTS

Memories of York: A decade after graduation

BY JAIME YARD

Jaime Yard is chair of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Douglas College, British Columbia. She earned her doctoral degree from the Department of Anthropology at York University, specializing in narrative political ecology with a focus on the British Columbia Coast. Yard's research examines evolving relationships with nature and place amid economic shifts, particularly in the context of resource extraction and real estate investment. Her current research is focused on zines as tools for knowledge dissemination from classrooms to communities and as feminist DIY praxis.

It's hard to believe it's been over 10 years since my doctoral graduation from the Department of Anthropology at York. I haven't been back to campus since I crossed the stage in the summer of 2012—a fact that fixes my memories at a point in time when there still wasn't a subway to campus; when one could rely on the Falafel Hut in York Lanes for a good cheap meal; and when York Village was still under construction. I lived on campus in the first year of my MA and of my PhD at York. The campus was like a strange island city, either 15 minutes or up to two hours from the Downsview subway station, depending on traffic. I was born in Vancouver, but I grew up at York. The cosmopolitan student populations were my teachers, and the interdisciplinary faculty in Anthropology, Environmental Studies, and Canadian Studies were my role models and mentors. I do hope to return to campus someday, even though somehow I know that it will inevitably evoke a painful nostalgia for a time I didn't appreciate fully when it was happening because it was too full and moving so fast.

Thanks to the timely nomination of my dissertation to the Robarts Centre, mere days after my defence, by the then Anthropology Graduate Program director Dr. Teresa Holmes, I became the inaugural recipient of the Barbara Godard Prize from the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, and I subsequently also received the Canadian Studies Network dissertation prize. It is difficult to overstate what a boost these prizes gave me as a newly minted PhD attempting to secure a stable academic position. The support shown for my work by my home department and the Robarts Centre certainly helped me to present myself and my work with confidence.

The perspective I needed to write my dissertation, "Working Natures: An Ethnography of Love, Labour and Accumulation on the British Columbia Coast," was gifted by my decision to pursue graduate studies at York. I would never have studied my familiar home if it was not made so irreconcilably strange by my taking up dwelling in North York, Toronto, and Hamilton. I think of my work as narrative political ecology—the use of ethnographic methods to draw attention to changing relationships to nature and place amid an economic shift from a base in resource extraction to one in recreational and retirement real estate investment on the Sechelt Peninsula. From my graduate school vantage points in Ontario, I could see things about extractive labour and placemaking in British Columbia that were unavailable to me as a BC local. "We don't know who discovered water, but we know it wasn't the fish," as the oft-cited Marshall McLuhan quote says.

In my current role as faculty and chair of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Douglas College, I am grateful for my academic apprenticeship at York. While I identify, first and foremost, as a social and cultural anthropologist, there is no denying that my work likely finds a more comfortable home in the precarious and contradictory field of Canadian Studies. Precarious, because it has perhaps always been uncommon in Canada to invest as much in scholarship conducted in Canada, by and for Canadians; and contradictory, because most of the work in the interdisciplinary field is rightly critical of the settler-colonial foundations of Canada itself, and thus is gathered under a name we disavow and from which we cultivate a critical distance. The Robarts Centre encapsulates the challenge—to support and promote rigorous analysis of Canadian identities and experiences, environmental challenges and changes, national and international governance, and economies, “staples” extraction and otherwise, at home and abroad. ■