

Doctoral Statement of Purpose
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My research explores how Québécois Catholics navigate the formation of a national identity—whether as a Canadian, as a Québécois, or a combination of the two—through physical practices of religious faith. The function of religion in social and public memory forms the basis of my theoretical stance as I consider the social role of religion in the lives of those who reside in a province with strong religious roots, within a larger secular society. In order to promote further understanding into the complex ways in which Québécois, and Canadians more broadly, engage with their surroundings, in terms of both the physical landscape and the political sphere, I will research the narratives of individuals who travel to pilgrimage sites in Québec. My Master's Major Research Paper explores extant scholarship pertaining to the connection between national identity and Catholic pilgrimage—a topic which has been researched extensively in European communities but on which a North American perspective is lacking—and proposes theoretical and methodological approaches for studying the topic in Québécois pilgrimage. By visiting pilgrimage sites, pilgrims may be equipped with the tools to interact with the history, community, and potential futures of their respective churches and nations. Pilgrimage has been found to be influential on national identity formation by such scholars as Stevenson (2004), whose study into secular war memorial pilgrimage in Québec yielded important insights on Québécois pilgrimage and national identity. My project departs from Stevenson's secular focus to consider the impact of Catholic pilgrimage among Québec constituents, 74% of whom were found to identify as Catholic in the 2011 National Household Survey (Statistics Canada 2013). In the doctoral program I will take the theoretical exploration of my Master's research into the ethnographic field, travelling to three of the most popular and celebrated Catholic pilgrimage sites in Québec: the Sanctuaire Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré near Québec City, Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal in Montréal, and Sanctuaire Notre-Dame-du-Cap near Trois-Rivières. At each site, I will engage in participant observation of pilgrims, interview the administration, and engage in dialogue with research participants open to discussing their views on religion and political affiliation.

My work is especially influenced by sociological ideas of religion and social memory as proposed by Hervieu-Léger (2000), who argues that the increasing popularity of secularism and individualism in French society raises questions as to how historical and religious memory relate to community and national belonging. Combining these sociological concepts with an ethnographic approach will allow me to explore the interconnection of pilgrimage, place, and politics in Canada. This study benefits from an ethnographic approach as pilgrimage is often considered to be a very personal experience, and its lasting influence on the lives of participants may not be immediately clear. Building a rapport with participants will allow me to interview them both during and following their journeys, enabling me to collect more detailed data on the impact of their pilgrimage experience. My exploration of national identity formation will not only consider the human aspect of pilgrimage, but also the role of the landscape as an actor—the spatial embodiment of history, culture, and community and its effect on travellers.

My interest in pilgrimage studies builds on my background in the study of religion at the Master's level, and my focus on both the study of religion and anthropology at the

undergraduate level. Recent publications in the study of pilgrimage have noted its interdisciplinary nature (Eade & Katić 2014), and my history of crossing intellectual boundaries has opened me to the diverse opportunities a study in pilgrimage can present. I can consider pilgrimage, and more broadly modern religious practice, as an anthropologist of religion, while incorporating tools of sociology, geography, political science, and digital tools of mapping. I am currently in the second year of my Master's with the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto, and due its interdisciplinary approach to religious studies, and its focus on public culture, I can think of no better institution in which to continue my studies.

In my short time at the Department for the Study of Religion, I have been actively engaged in activities which have been helping me develop my skills as an anthropologist. I have worked in the digital humanities thanks to my position as a research assistant on Dr. Pamela Klassen's project *Spiritual Invention of a Nation: Media and Missionaries on Indian Land*; I have established professional and interpersonal relationships with young Canadians thinking about religion due to work-study placements with both the Religion in the Public Sphere initiative and the Multi-Faith Centre, as well as in my role as a Marketing Coordinator for The Elements Experiment; and I have widened my understanding and engagement with the field of pilgrimage studies by aiding Dr. Simon Coleman with introducing The Pilgrimage Forum to the wider academic community. Undertaking these tasks has exposed me to many aspects of what an anthropological study entails, and I find it fascinating. To this end, I have been preparing for the eventuality of ethnographic fieldwork by improving my fluency in French and completing courses with both the Department for the Study of Religion and the Anthropology Department in methodology, research design, and theoretical approaches.

Admittance to the doctoral program at the University of Toronto will grant me the resources and intellectual support to perform an ethnographic study of contemporary Québécois religious practice. The interdisciplinary nature of the Department for the Study of Religion's faculty will enable me to explore aspects of my project that may not have been accessible in simply an anthropology or sociology department, and the advantage of having a committee not only of anthropologists, but also of political scientists such as Dr. Ruth Marshall, will be indispensable for a thorough study of the Canadian religious landscape. Dr. Simon Coleman, the advisor for my Master's project, has encouraged me to continue my studies under his tutelage at the Department for the Study of Religion. His focus not only on the anthropology of pilgrimage, but also on new methods of studying anthropological pilgrimage theories, has been indispensable in formulating my research projects, both past and present. There are a number of potential committee members of the Department faculty that I believe would be a good fit with my topic, such as Dr. Pamela Klassen, whose work on the intersection of religion and the secular in Canadian settings has encouraged me to consider how pilgrims define their secular lives through their religious practices, and Dr. Kevin O'Neill, whose exploration of Guatemalan citizenship and Christianity in *City of God* (2010) largely influenced my approach to questions of Canadian national identity. The guidance of the Department for the Study of Religion will enable me to contribute to ongoing discussions about the changing field of pilgrimage studies and the cultural context of modern Canadian religious practices.

Works Cited

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