Correcting the Record: Haida Oral Tradition in Anthropological Narratives

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Abstract: For over 100 years, anthropological and popular sources have perpetuated Rev. Charles Harrison's published account of Haida chief Albert Edward Edenshaw and the corroborating accounts of Edenshaw's descendants. These sources have misrepresented Edenshaw, and here I present Haida oral traditions which dispute Edenshaw's claim to be the "greatest of all Haida chiefs." This case study points to problems of historical reconstruction which rely on too few sources and an external frame of reference.

Résumé: Pendant plus de cent ans, des sources anthropologiques et populaires ont perpetué les récits du chef Haida Albert Edward Edenshaw ainsi que ceux de ses descendants reprenant les mêmes affirmations. Ces sources ont montré sous un faux jour Edenshaw et dans cet article je présente les traditions orales Haida qui réfutent les déclarations d'Edenshaw à l'effet qu'il était le plus grand de tous les chefs Haida. Cette étude de cas met en évidence les problèmes de la reconstruction historique basée sur trop peu de sources et un cadre de référence externe.

> Charles Harrison fits into [the] antiquarian category, however briefly, with his *Ancient Warriors of the North Pacific*. A missionary to the [Queen Charlotte] Islands for the CMS originally, Harrison reached Masset in 1883, where, like so many others... he fell in love with the Coast, the Queen Charlotte Islands in particular. After setbacks that stronger men would not have faced, Harrison outlived the family disgraces and became the Islands' greatest promoter in the first two decades of this century.
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> — C. Lillard, *The Ghostland People*, 1989, p. 27

For over 100 years, both anthropological and popular sources have perpetuated Rev. Charles Harrison's published account of Haida chief Albert Edward Edenshaw's narrative and the corroborating accounts of Edenshaw's descendants (among these are Blackman, 1982; Chittenden, 1884; Collison, 1981 [1915]; Dalzell, 1968; Duff, 1967, 1981; Duff and Kew, 1957; Harris, 1966; Holm, 1981; Lillard, 1989; Swanton, 1905; Walsh, 1971). Historically the oral traditions of Aboriginal peoples everywhere have been deemed inferior by literate Western societies and have not been considered worthwhile or appropriate to record. In recent years much work has been done by scholars to recognize traditional oral material and the need to re-evaluate White-recorded Native history (see, for example, Eid, 1979; McClellan, 1970; Rosaldo, 1980; Schmalz, 1977, 1984; Sioui, 1992). An important contribution to the study of the problems of historical reconstruction that refers to the oral and written accounts of the Yukon Native people is Cruikshank's "Images of Society in Klondike Gold Rush Narratives: Skookum Jim and the Discovery of Gold" (1992; also see Cruikshank, 1989, 1991). Cruikshank points out that "[a] critical handling of... written, as well as in oral, accounts may direct us back to the social process in which both are embedded, raising questions about the privileged status of documentary evidence as a reference point for establishing truth, falsehood, or factuality" (ibid.: 21). Such studies provide the building blocks from

which a detailed picture of Native history can be constructed while offering valuable insights into Aboriginal people's views of their own history.

In sum, understanding of a cultural system by outsiders may easily go astray and in fact be perpetuated within a scholarly tradition. It is important to Haida people that chiefly rank and behaviour has been misread and misrepresented, but it is critical for anthropologists that they should understand how mistakes are made and how and why they persist. This is important to me because I am a member of the Daadans Yaaku 7laanas Raven matrilineage and the granddaughter of the fourth and last hereditary chief Weah of (7Ad7aiwaas) Masset Haida. To make this case, I present here a case study involving contrasting accounts of Haida chief Albert Edward Edenshaw's narrative, one enshrined in written records, and the oral traditions of Haida elders. I show that while Edenshaw's narrative was widely publicized and given considerable credence, the other, conflicting oral narratives reveal the importance of public opinion in granting or refuting claims of legitimacy in Haida society. To do so I first give a brief ethnohistoric account of the Haida, leading to a description of Haida social organization with respect to lineage rights and legitimacy. I then present a written account and an oral narrative that involve conflicting claims of legitimacy between two branches of K'yuust'aa (Haida lineage): K'aawas and Sdast'aas. The written account was transmitted by Albert Edward Edenshaw (7iidangsaa) of the Sdast'aas lineage to Rev. Charles Harrison over a century ago and was widely publicized. The oral narrative comes from my late grandmother. It was recorded by Marianne Boelscher in the early 1980s. Next, by drawing on evidence from Gough (1982) and by contrasting the public support given to chief Segai for the appointment of his son, Weah, with that of the public support for Edenshaw's claim, I reveal how Edenshaw's claim to be the "greatest of all Haida chiefs" has been disputed by other strong lineages in the past as well as the present. Finally, I cite some ethnographic sources which were derived from Harrison's original account, and the corroborating narratives of Edenshaw's descendants, and which continue to perpetuate Edenshaw's claims.

Haida Gwaaii (Islands of the People), known as the Queen Charlotte Islands, home to the Haida (the People), was first visited by the Spaniard Juan Perez in July 1774. This visit marked the beginning of a lucrative trade in sea-otter skins with the Europeans, and thereby introduced the Haida to new goods and no doubt played an important role both in producing and increasing the number of potlatches and in enriching the material and social life of the Haida. The Haida social organization is characterized by a division into two matrilineal moieties: Raven and Eagle, which in turn are subdivided into politically autonomous corporate matrilineages comprised of a number of households. Each household had a chief who acquired this status by either giving "a house-building potlatch to get a new dwelling erected and thereby establish oneself as its chief, or a funeral potlatch to validate the inheritance of a house and its chieftainship" (Murdock, 1936: 15). The house chief ruled the household and his power was almost absolute. He co-ordinated the economic activities for the household and also controlled military power. "The fact is, each Haida household was so complete in itself that all it required was a name and a certain amount of isolation to develop into an entirely independent family [lineage], and there was a constant tendency in that direction" (Swanton, 1966, in Boelscher, 1988: 33). The highest chief was the lineage chief or "Town chief," who was also a house chief with his house being in the centre of the village. The corporate lineage owned land and resources, its members sharing rights to hunting, fishing and gathering locations such as major spawning rivers, berry patches and house sites; in addition, lineages owned symbolic property such as myths, crests, songs and dances. The highest chief, or lineage chief, then, was the trustee of the lineage lands, and his permission was necessary before other lineages could have access. "[L]ineage's property rights were established by prior occupancy or claim, purchase from previous owners, inheritance [passed to younger brother or sister's son or any suitable heir], or as compensation for injury in a legal settlement. Infringement of these rights was a serious matter . . ." (Stearns, 1984: 193).

In the oral tradition, in some rare cases land has been alienated from original lineage holders. One example involves the practice of filial inheritance which "broke the custom" of matrilineal descent. This remarkable event occurred in post-contact times (around 1840) and involved the transfer of chieftainship of the great Raven chief Sigai who passed the title and the town of 7Ad7aiwas (Masset) to his son who took the chief's name Wiiaa (Weah) from his father's father's lineage (see Boelscher, 1988). My late grandfather, who died in 1974 and was the fourth and last Weah to inherit the chiefship of Masset, said that the chief loved his son so much and that was why he gave the village to him. Swanton notes that in former times this division was considered rather inferior; "but very recently its chief has become town chief of Masset by sufferance of the people, and owing to his personal popularity" (ibid.: 1). Still another means of alienating lineage property and boundaries about 1840

involved the attempted "taking over" of village sites by members of a different branch of the same lineage.

This notorious and widely publicized case included the attempted "takeover" of the village site K'yuust'aa of the K'aawas Eagle lineage by 7iidangsaa of the Sdast'aas; another branch of the same Eagle lineage. Chief 7iidangsaa, Christianized to Albert Edward Edenshaw, was born around 1812 and was reported to be from Gaahlans Kun on the East coast of Graham Island. While it was customary for his family to marry locally, Edenshaw migrated to K'yuust'aa and married into Daadans which had a traditional affinal relationship with the K'aawas of K'yuust'aa, and then claimed to be the rightful successor to his "uncle," the previous chief of the Sdast'aas proper; a claim Edenshaw perpetuated to Whites, in particular the missionary Charles Harrison. Harrison published this view of the matter:

> This worthy Haida chief [Albert Edward Edenshaw] . . . did his utmost to promote a feeling of good fellow-ship between the Europeans and his people, and he was successful in his efforts. No description of the Haidas can be complete without a short account of this noteworthy man. It was through his untiring energy that the Haidas finally cast off heathenism, adopted a more civilized mode of life, and acquired a respect for the laws of the Empire.... The uncle he succeeded was a powerful chief at Dadans and bore the same name. Each succeeding chief bore this name, but no son of the chief could take his place or name, for according to Haida custom the chieftainship descended to the chief's eldest sister's son and he was trained by his uncle for the position he was to assume. Edenshaw's two eldest brothers died and he was then placed in command of his uncle's war canoes and led many an expedition as his uncle's representative. According to Haida tribal law he had to marry the chief's daughter, i.e., cousin, but his uncle had no daughter, so it was arranged that he should marry the daughter of a powerful chief in Alaska. His uncle finally died, and Edenshaw succeeded to his property and chieftainship, and at his succession the grandest and largest distribution of goods and articles of great value, including slaves, took place that has ever been recorded in the traditions of these islands. The young chief's property included twelve slaves, male and female, and upon the occasion of his marriage, his wife's father gave his daughter ten more slaves to accompany her to her new home. (Harrison, 1925: 165-166)

While Edenshaw's boasts to Harrison have been widely publicized, the oral accounts provided by elders of the K'aawas lineage, and other strong lineage factions from my village of Masset, give a very different interpretation from that of Edenshaw's. The oral history accounts provided by elders reject Edenshaw's claim involving the replacement at K'yuustaa of the K'aawas by Edenshaw of the Sdast'aas, which is another branch of the same Eagle lineage.

My earliest memory of any conversation about Edenshaw dates back to my early childhood. It was my grandmother's words and the tone and expression in her voice that had an impact on my young mind as I recall her saying: "Edenshaw is not even chief." While these words spoken by my grandmother left an impression on me, it was not until my adult life that I came to understand the full significance of the controversial role that Edenshaw played in my Haida community.

My late grandmother, Sandlenee (1894-1989), a high-ranking woman of the Yaakn 7laanas lineage from Daadans on north island and widow of the fourth and last chief to carry the chiefship and name of Weah in Masset, and whose mother's father was from the K'aawas lineage of K'yuust'aa, provided the following narrative of the attempted "takeover" of Kyuust'aa by Edenshaw of the Sdast'aas. The narrative was recorded by Boelscher in the early 1980s:

> Henry Edenshaw's father [Albert Edward Edenshaw] is not the chief of Kiusta. Kiusta was full when they [the Sta'stas] tried to get in there.... Finally they [the K'awas] had a big meeting called together by llsqandas. She was taking care of the village. She must be the niece of the chief. They allowed others to stay there for a while. When they had the meeting they told Edenshaw to anchor way out while they had it. They just allowed him to stay there—didn't give him any land. (Personal communication, and Stearns, 1984: 206)

When Edenshaw arrived at K'yuust'aa, then, around the 1840s, he was told he could only live at the end of the village. Relegating him to the end of the village was a symbolic denial of his claim to chiefship, as chiefs had their house in the centre of the village. The single Eagle lineage of K'yuust'aa, on northwestern Graham Island, belonged to the K'aawas lineage and was headed by Ihldiinii, the town chief (personal communication, Lawrence Bell). According to a story collected by Swanton (1908), Ihldiinii disappeared while fishing; later it was reported that he had washed up near the Stikine River where he was rescued by the Tlingit and became chief among them (Boelscher, 1988). It was during the period of Ihldiinii's absence that his niece was caretaker of the village. According to my grandmother, and other strong lineage factions, Ihldiinii did return to K'yuust'aa; but before his return, Edenshaw, of the Sdast'aas, challenged the au-

thority of Ihldiinii's descendants and "took over" the village and established himself as town chief. It appears Edenshaw was unwilling to take a subordinate position to Ihldiinii by respecting the norm governing "guest lineage" where the original title holder has priority and other lineages of the same moiety only enjoy residential privileges with consent (see Stearns, 1984). Furthermore, as noted by Murdock, "a clan (lineage) chief cannot be deposed for any reason" (1936: 17). Edenshaw's actions then were seen by the K'aawas as an attempt to assert dominance and therefore were not recognized as legitimate at the time, nor subsequently, as will be revealed.

Other field data recently unearthed by Barry Gough (1982) helps to correct the picture with regard to Edenshaw's status and that of his lineage. This noteworthy passage quoted from Hill's journal, written in 1853, is consistent with the picture of the K'aawas, and other strong lineage factions, regarding Edenshaw's strategic marriage and relationship with Whites:

> [w]hat self interest dictates: he is ambitious and leaves no stone unturned to increase his power and property. He is now about thirty-five years old; his father dying while he was young—left him poor, at the head of a weak tribe, only safe from the attacks of their neighbour on account of their poverty, which made them not worth attacking: to better this he contrived to marry a woman nearly 50 years of age, who is a high chief of the Kilgarny tribe, inhabiting the coast opposite the north coast of Queen Charlotte, one of the strongest of the Northwest tribes of Indians. . . . (Gough, 1982: 136)

We later catch glimpses of Edenshaw in logbooks and journals of American ships that visited the Queen Charlotte Islands in search of gold in the early 1850s after the sea otter supply waned. Edenshaw, with K'yuust'aa behind him, was chief at Kung near Naden Harbour during this time and was sought as a pilot by ships' captains. It is fitting that Edenshaw, whose environment was very much a maritime one, and whose people were referred to by Murdock as "the Vikings of the Northwest Coast" (Brink, 1974: 256), would have been sought out as a pilot by ship captains unfamiliar with coastal waters. However, it is important to note that "[t]he economic stimulus these vessels gave to the Haida should not be underestimated, and this stimulus may have intensified Edenshaw's ambition to be a powerful chief, a status related to the rank, prestige and wealth of rival chiefs" (Gough, 1982: 133). These new goods and the means of acquiring them fitted in with the competitive striving for rank among the Haida, and Edenshaw in a position of lower rank availed himself of the new opportunities. A case in point was the plunder of the American schooner, the *Susan Sturgis*, for profit. In 1852, Captain Rooney, of the *Susan Sturgis*, sought out Edenshaw as a pilot who "had an excellent idea where a large ship could go, and where she could not" (Inskip, in ibid.: 135). Rooney found Edenshaw in Skidegate and picked him up to return him to his village of Kung near Naden Harbour on the north coast of Graham Island. En route to Kung, near Rose Point, on Graham Island, Rooney, his crew and Edenshaw met a canoe from Masset. There was an exchange of words between Edenshaw and the Masset chief, chief Weah, on board the canoe that day; Rooney, of course, did not know the language and took no precautions (ibid.). The next day, 150 of the Masset Haida, led by chief Weah in their canoes, captured, pillaged and burned the *Susan Sturgis*, enslaving her crew (ibid.). While it was chief Weah who actually seized the vessel in Masset Harbour in 1852, Edenshaw, who had been on board the *Susan Sturgis*, was nevertheless also suspected of planning the attack and sharing in the plunder. But it was chief Edenshaw who was the one who was detained for questioning on board the warship H.M.S. *Virago* sent to investigate (ibid.). Edenshaw was able to convince the investigators that if he had not been present on the *Susan Sturgis*, the crew all would have been murdered; subsequently, Edenshaw was credited with having saved the lives of the crew. In support of Edenshaw's claim, the ship's captain, Matthew Rooney, presented Edenshaw with a document which is still in the possession of Edenshaw's descendants:

> Fort Simpson, October 10, 1852.
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> The bearer of this, Edenshaw, is chief of the tribe of Indians residing on North Island. I have reason to know that he is a good man, for he had been the means of saving the lives of me and my crew, who were attacked by Massett Indians off the Harbor of that name. He and his wife and child were on board that vessel coming from Skidegate Harbor round to North Island, when on September 26, 1852, we were surprised by some canoes alongside. We were so overpowered by numbers and so sudden the attack, that all resistance on our part was quite impossible, but after gaining the cabin, this man and his wife and two or three of his men who happened to come off in a small canoe, protected us for seven hours until he made some terms with which he brought to Fort Simpson and gave to me without ever asking for any remuneration. I hope that if this should be shown to any master of a ship, that he will treat him well, for he deserves well at the hands of every White man.

'Matthew Rooney'
Former master of the schooner *Susan Sturgis*.
(Dalzell, 1968: 67)

In recognition of Edenshaw's service, a marble monument, which stands in my Masset community to this day, was presented by Whites to Edenshaw's family with an inscription (now partly effaced) that reads:

In Memory of Albert Edenshaw, head chief of
Born 1822, Died 189
A member of St. John's Church
A staunch friend to the white man
He heroically save the life of Capt. Rooney
and his crew of the Sch. Susan Sturgis
attacked by Indians, Sept 26, 1852,
for which he is held in grateful remembrance. (Ibid.: 68)

Some revealing and fascinating passages, recently unearthed by Gough (1982), shed new light on Edenshaw's role in the plunder of the *Susan Sturgis*. The prisoners were released eventually to the Hudson Bay Company at Fort Simpson after Chief Trader John Work obtained their release by paying in blankets, as anticipated by Edenshaw (ibid.). Yet, "Work and other whites who knew these Indians were of the opinion that Edenshaw was party to the whole affair" (Kuper to Moresby, February 4, 1853, in Gough, 1982: 135). When on board the H.M.S. *Virago*, Edenshaw was detained for questioning, as noted above, by the commander of the ship, James C. Prevost (Gough, 1982). While Prevost and his men on board could not prove directly Edenshaw's complicity in the *Susan Sturgis* affair, they had no doubts about his share in the plunder and his slyness; thus, they took every precaution against the likelihood of Edenshaw attacking their own ship, the *Virago* (ibid.). Prevost stated that Edenshaw was "decidedly the most advanced Indian [he had] met with on the Coast: quick, cunning, ambitious, crafty and, above all, anxious to obtain the good opinion of the white men" (Prevost, 1853, in Gough, 1982: 135), and the ship's surgeon noted that Edenshaw was "a sharp fellow and known to be a great rogue [and] a great vagabond" (Treven, 1852-54, in Gough, 1982: 135). After all endeavours failed to implicate Edenshaw, Prevost remained convinced of Edenshaw's role in the whole affair and thought his character to be "paradoxical" (ibid.: 136).

While Gough suggested that what transpired between Edenshaw and Weah on that fateful day in September 1852 will never be completely known, Haida oral history has nonetheless firmly asserted that Edenshaw played a part in the plunder of the *Susan Sturgis*; a charge that was documented by the first missionary who lived among the Masset Haida in 1876, who said that some members of the tribe informed him that it was by this chief's [Edenshaw] orders that the schooner was attacked and taken (Collison, 1981 [1915]: 71).

Thus, it is of no surprise then that when the monument in recognition of Edenshaw was erected "many old people in Masset were furious and disputed the monument" (personal communication, Lawrence Bell). Edenshaw's actions offended many of his contemporaries and his actions still provoke controversy among Masset Haida to this day. He is described as a very crafty, shrewd and cunning person, who outraged many Haida members by using whites to bolster his claim to be " the greatest of all Haida chiefs" (personal communication, Lawrence Bell).

By the time of George Dawson's visit to the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1878, Edenshaw had already abandoned the village of Kung and was living in the new site of Yatza village (Dawson, 1993: 152). Later he built a house in Masset where the Anglican mission had begun its work, and was "welcomed in Masset by the influential chief Henry Weah . . ." (Brink, 1974: 67).

While Edenshaw was credited with four house raisings and seven to ten potlatches, real or imagined, his bid for chieftainship at K'yuust'aa was never publicly legitimized. Opposition to his attempt to legitimize his claim to chieftainship and to ownership of K'yuust'aa goes much further because general recognition and public opinion acknowledges or refutes legitimacy of a person's social position, which is dependent on conduct suitable to a high-ranking Haida. High status is held by a person who is *yahguudaag*, "fit for respect," and an individual who wants to remain respected is tied to a network of social rules and ritual obligation. To be respected, a person must show respect to others by being generous and by showing moderation (see Boelscher, 1988). Flaunting achievement and bragging about oneself is never endorsed. Consequently, when Edenshaw boasted to Whites to have had the unique distinction of having given 10 potlatches (the numerical reference to social completeness in Haida society) (Duff and Kew, 1957: 24), to have possessed 12 slaves and to have received 10 more upon his marriage from his bride's father (Boelscher, 1988; Dalzell, 1968; Harrison, 1925) and that his marriages and succession to chieftainship were of the right order (ibid.), his actions of self-promotion and self-maximization were not acknowledged favourably or condoned by the public.

Moreover, because the Haida use classificatory terms for uncle, nephew or niece, for example, Eden-

shaw could be nephew to any chief of the Stast'aas or K'aawas lineage (personal communication, Lawrence Bell). More importantly, while the name Ihldiinii has disappeared from written records, the name has been carried by recent descendants who claim to be the rightful owners of K'yuust'aa, a claim which was formally validated recently by a potlatch, implying that Edenshaw's claim was not seen as legitimate.

Although Edenshaw claimed to supersede chief Weah and even the legendary "chief Ninstints" (see Duff and Kew, 1957), and was acclaimed, by Harrison and other 19th-century visitors to the island, as the most powerful chief, it was "Weah [who] was the most prominent chief in Masset, not Edenshaw" (Brink, 1974: 67). Haida elder, Peter Hill, asserted, "there was no voice that can be raised against chief Weah; they all seemed to back up the rightful chief of the village" (Blackman, 1972: 216). Further evidence of support for Weah is described in a letter written by Harrison in 1888 as he noted that "the autochthonous Haida of Masset took steps against Harrison's assistant teacher, who was a son of Edenshaw [Henry Edenshaw]" (Brink, 1974: 67). The Haida refused to accept Edenshaw's son as a teacher to their children because Edenshaw did not belong to the Masset group (ibid.). Thus, in contrast to Sigai's public support for the appointment of his son Weah, Edenshaw was denied the support and recognition he sought in his own society, as he repeatedly outraged public opinion by seeking the support of Whites to bolster his claims of being " the greatest chief of all the Haidas." It is important to note that the Haida do not permit status legitimacy to be granted by the outside world. "While he worked within the values of his culture, he exaggerated them" (Stearns, 1984: 218).

For over a century, both anthropological and popular sources—most notably a popular history account of the Queen Charlotte Islands written by Dalzell (1968) and a juvenile novel (a winner of four major book awards) written by Christie Harris (1966)—have perpetuated Harrison's published account of Edenshaw's narrative and the corroborating accounts of Edenshaw's descendants. John R. Swanton, for example, the first person to carry out serious ethnographic investigation on the Haida, engaged Henry Edenshaw, son of Albert Edward Edenshaw, as an interpreter (Swanton, 1905). It is of no surprise, then, that Edenshaw is on Swanton's list as one of the three eagle families [lineage] that "stood first" (ibid.: 70). Additionally, the renowned Haida artist Charles Edenshaw, nephew of Albert Edward Edenshaw, worked as an interpreter for C.F. Newcombe of the Provincial Museum in Victoria (Blackman, 1982). The late Wilson Duff (1925-76), Curator of Anthropology at the British Columbia Museum and later professor at the University of British Columbia, a renowned Haida scholar and a friend of Edenshaw's descendants, conducted his most lengthy and intense research project studying Albert Edward Edenshaw and his nephew, artist, Charles Edenshaw. This research would sustain Duff until his death (Reid, 1981). Christie Harris, whose book, *Raven's Cry* (1966), was a fictional account of Albert Edward Edenshaw's life, acknowledged the invaluable assistance she received from Duff who was requested by her publisher to read her manuscript. According to Harris, this publisher, Atheneum, wanted "to check its authenticity" (Harris, 1992: xix-xx); "What I needed most of all," wrote Harris, "was input from Charles Edenshaw's family" (ibid.: xviii).

To cite yet another example, Blackman (1982) was highly criticized for her biases by uncritically incorporating excerpts from Harrison (1925) into Florence's autobiographical account in her book, *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson*. Indeed, the criticism of Blackman's work lies beyond the scope of this study. When *Raven's Cry* was republished in 1992, a new foreword was included that was transcribed from a taped conversation between Robert Davidson, descendant of Albert Edward Edenshaw, and Margaret Blackman, which specifically concerned that book. Blackman, apparently differing from the opinion she expressed in her 1982 publication, stated in her conversation with Davidson: "Chief 7idansuu's [Edenshaw] rivals, chief 7wiiaa [Weah] and his family, are not portrayed particularly favourably in this book because events are seen through the eyes of the Edenshaw family. So it should not be viewed as a Haida history. . . ." Davidson replied, "It's really interesting to work with you, because you have a different approach and you're educated in a different way. Just to be off the subject a little . . ." (Harris, 1992: xi). Davidson continued the statement with a compliment on the exceptional job Blackman did on writing his grandmother's life story. By being silent, or refraining from commenting on Blackman's statement, Davidson failed to acknowledge others' contributions in Haida society, and perpetuated the myth " that all of Haida society is built around the Edenshaw family" (personal communication, Lawrence Bell). It is interesting, given the fact that Haida society is a matrilineal society, how the esteem of chiefly status has been reserved for the Edenshaw family which traces its genealogy back to skilled and famous carvers along patrilineal lines, a misguided link which has been perpetuated by scholars, cultural institutions and the Edenshaw family alike.

Edenshaw has become the single, most-documented and popularized Haida chief to date. In contrast, in Haida society there are no paramount chiefs and in Haida oral tradition there exists no single authoritative interpretation of events. Yet when Edenshaw's narrative was widely publicized, it was his version that became official history and was given considerable status. "Such is the power of literacy" (Tonkin, 1992: 71).

In contrast, in her exemplary book, *The Curtain Within* (1988), Boelscher acknowledges the importance of oral tradition among my people by recording and cross-checking the oral tradition of several Masset Haida elders. Included in these oral narratives, as noted above, are accounts which concern the legitimacy of the "takeover" of K'yuust'aa by Albert Edward Edenshaw. In the process of having her book published then Boelscher was accused of doing too much "Edenshaw bashing" (personal communication, Marianne Boelscher). "It's not about bashing anyone" Boelscher affirmed to me, "these stories were told to me over and over again by numerous elders" (ibid.).

From the Haida point of view there are many voices and many stories. For too long now our own histories have had to contend with outsider, White views propagated by missionaries and others alike. While Harrison's written account was undoubtedly produced with a 19th-century Christian readership in mind, and although it included a clearly partial narration of the exploits of a Haida chief with "self-in-the-best light" (Tonkin, 1992: 115), his representation has survived through the ages as "official knowledge" by anthropologists and scholars who continue to insist on defining to the world what they think our stories are all about.

While Edenshaw's publicized account is treated as an attempt at legitimizing one's own lineage's version of chiefly succession, the conflicting claim of legitimacy or any dissent, by the K'aawas and other strong factions is never voiced in any public forum, because Haida public speaking is characterized by positive reinforcement, inasmuch as high rank is received and validated not only by potlatching, but also by showing respect to others in words and in action. Silence, moreover, has an important function of protesting against these kinds of acts (see Boelscher, 1988; 1991). "By refraining from saying anything that says a lot, it's not what people say, it's what they don't say" (personal communication, Lawrence Bell). In the case of conflicting claims of legitimacy then, such as the relationship between the K'aawas and the Sdast'aas, my grandmother described the relationship between conflicting factions to Marianne Boelscher with the Haida proverb "there is something like a curtain between them." In her book, *The Curtain Within* (1988) (the title is an ellipsis of Haida proverb as noted above), Boelscher notes that the curtain metaphor indicates the flexibility of the boundaries between lineage factions, because the curtain can be symbolically drawn during times of conflict and removed when relationships are harmonious. This is important in Haida society because the very groups who are denied legitimacy are also vital in providing assistance to and validating the status of one's own lineage.

Conclusion

The narrative of Edenshaw of the S'dast'aas has been perpetuated for over 100 years by scholarly writings and corroborating narratives of the Edenshaw descendants. Clearly, for ethnohistory to improve our understanding and progress as a scholarly discipline, ethnohistorians must display more sensitivity and openness to learning new methods of combining the study of written documents with the oral traditions of Native peoples. Conflicting oral narratives not only reveal the importance of public opinion in granting or refuting claims of legitimacy, but throw light on lineage relations within Haida society.

Although we visited with Edenshaw at K'yuust'aa; Kung; Yatza; and Masset, it is apparent that his house raisings, potlatches and lavish distribution of goods are not all that matters: the reader has seen that public scrutiny is an essential element of determining legitimacy. Edenshaw's bid for chieftainship at K'yuust'aa was never politically legitimized by other important factions. This fact, together with Haida oral history and Gough's work, reveals Edenshaw's commerce with Whites and his attempt to use their approval to his advantage. While Edenshaw triumphed over the successful plunder of the *Susan Sturgis* and won the acclaim of Whites by becoming the single most documented and popularized Haida chief, his actions contradicted Haida norms of chiefly behaviour, namely *yahguudaag*, or "fitness for respect," which depends implicitly on what is considered proper behaviour for a high-ranking person. His chiefly status remains contested by many other strong lineage factions of northern Haida Gwaii.

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