

Narratives of Leadership: Oral History and the (Re)production of Tradition

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Introduction: Telling Stories

Chief Richard Malloway (Th'eláchiyatel), a direct descent of the four original ancestors of the Chilliwacks; Th'eláchiyatel, Yexwpilem, Siyemchess, and Xwexwayleq, was an important and influential Stó:lō individual who lived in the Lower Fraser Valley from 1907 to 1987. Stories of his life are remembered and told frequently in the Stó:lō community today. Some of the stories come from people who told me about Richard Malloway, and some of them he told himself and had recorded for the Coqualeetza oral archives. As a student of anthropology thinking and writing about Richard Malloway's life, it is my task to attempt to gain some cultural understanding from these stories. To grapple with meanings in these stories it is of course important to establish the social context in which the stories were told (Darnel 1989:315). I believe that I can gain further cultural understanding by discussing these historical narratives in the context of the contemporary communities they are told in.

I propose that there is an interesting relationship between the issues which permeate contemporary communities and the things considered important to discuss about their historical pasts. I hope to identify what some of the relationships are between the stories people tell from their past and their contemporary concerns. This will hopefully provide a richer understanding of some fundamental cultural issues in Coast Salish society. This understanding may be intuitive for the participants in a particular culture, but is not necessarily obvious for an outsider (such as the anthropologist). By providing circumstantial accounts of how people talk about their own lives, and narratives about the life of this particularly important individual, we the listeners may gain a broader understanding about important cultural issues in contemporary and historic Stó:lō society.

However, my interpretations of these issues are also culturally constructed. My ethnographic stories are only partial truths which provide one of many ways that these stories

and life experiences can be interpreted. As Cruikshank has stated in her recent book *Reading Voices*: "The concern here is less with determining 'truth value' or with 'getting the facts straight' than with asking how our ideas about 'truth' and 'facts' are constructed in the first place" (Cruikshank 1991:8).

So the telling of stories from the life history of Richard Malloway involves not one narrative, but many. If I am successful in composing them, three different narratives will emerge: the life stories about Chief Malloway; the lives and experiences of contemporary Stó:lō community members; and the experiences of myself as a student of anthropology working in a First Nations community. In the original extended version of this paper which I prepared for the Stó:lō Tribal Council, I presented the stories people told in their own words, as transcribed from taped interviews. However, as I am reading this paper, I believe I would lose their voice in my own, so I have summarized them. I believe the points I would like to make here can still effectively be made, although much of the context of the individual stories has been lost.

Ethnographic Experience

I will begin my series of narratives (which have in a sense already begun) by telling about how I got to be involved in writing life stories of a prominent Stó:lō chief. In the spring of 1993, the Department of Anthropology and Sociology was approached by the Stó:lō Tribal Council (STC) about the possibility of there being an ethnographic field school held in that community. A good relationship with the Department had been built up over the past few years by the archaeologists working with the Stó:lō. During this time, Gordon Mohs, a non-native STC employee with a Master's degree in anthropology, and Sonny McHalsie, a self-trained native historian and anthropologist, came to realize that there were a number of issues that university anthropology students could address, which would be useful for the mandate of the STC. The mandate identified by the STC is "1) to re-affirm Stó:lō cultural values; 2) to re-establish self-government; and 3) to restore healthy communities" (Carlson 1993:2).

The idea of recording the life history of one of the most important community leaders

was immediately suggested by Mohs and McHalsie as an appropriate topic for one of the fieldschool students - particularly me. I had been involved in archaeological work with the Stó:lō during the past year researching prehistoric social and political organization through burial practice. I was immediately singled out for the project, partly because of my interest in Coast Salish politics, and partly because of my experience with the community. My initial research questions focused on the reconstruction of the major life events and contributions of Richard Malloway to Stó:lō society. I was particularly interested in those elements of leadership that I could define as "traditional", through comparison with accounts of earlier Coast Salish leaders in the ethnographic and ethnohistoric records. I felt that this kind of analysis would be anthropologically interesting, as well as fitting into the mandate outlined by the STC.

When the field school began, I spent a lot of the four weeks in Richard Malloway's son Frank Malloway's smokehouse. I was somewhat surprised to find that the smokehouse did not cease being used as a place to gather after the winter ceremonial season was finished. A number of people lived in the smokehouse, including Frank (currently Chief of the Yakwekwioose Band) who uses it as the Yakwekwioose Band office all year round. The people I met and got to know told me the things that they felt were important. They all knew that I was there working on Richard Malloway's life history. However, few of the people I met at the smokehouse, other than Frank, said any more than a few praising words about him. Most people felt it was not for them to talk about Richard Malloway. However, they were most receptive to discussing issues which seemed current and timely in the community. They unanimously suggested that I discuss the subject with Mrs. Malloway. Mrs. Malloway was not feeling well during this time. My only opportunity to interview her was two months before, when we talked for a number of hours and at the conclusion of our discussion, she had given me a scrapbook of newspaper clippings to study. This material, and material collected from the Coqualeetza archives provided the majority of my source material for my research.

Richard's Spirit Power Stories

Spirit dancing and spirit power (which is referred to as *syewen*) provides one of the central themes or topics of discussion both in contemporary and historical settings. Although this is only one theme of many I could present here, I feel it well illustrates the interesting connection between the content of narrative and the context which it is told. Spending the summer in a winter spirit dancing house, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with some of the winter spirit dancers who stayed with or came to visit Frank Malloway. These *syewen* dancers often talked about their experiences of participating in the winter ceremonial. This was at times, a difficult topic to discuss. My own experiences differ greatly from those of a winter spirit dancer. However, there was some common ground upon which to stand. Literally. Discussing this topic was often centred around particular places in the smokehouse in which we lived. A interesting example is this particular post in the smokehouse was known to be a focus for bad spirit power. Knowing about this was important advice for new-comers to the smokehouse. I would not have recognized the particular dangers of sleeping near this post, even though it was thoroughly marked by the devil's club which is hung around it's perimeter.

As demonstrated with the bad spirit pole in the smokehouse stories, about places often show the listener how to conduct oneself in Stó:lō society. The relationship of spirit power to place is also profoundly important as a way of talking about history. Place carries the history of the Stó:lō people. Archaeological sites like the Hatzic Rock, the Scowlitz Burial Mound site and Lady Franklin Rock all have important contemporarily told stories regarding their history and spiritual significance. For example, the pool of water from which emerged the *sxwayxwey* talked about in Richard Malloway's published narrative entitled *The origin of the Chilliwack Sxwayxwey*, is located along the shores of the Scowlitz site. A completely different sense of the importance of the site is noted when discussing it from an archaeological narrative and from the *sxwayxwey* origin narrative. Establishing the historical and cultural significance of these kinds of places has important contemporary significance in the context of land claims with the Canadian Government. Oral traditions solidify the connections between the land and the Stó:lō

people. These issues of understanding oral traditions in the context of place have been discussed at length by Basso (1984) and Cruikshank (1990) who have dealt with similar issues in their work with the Western Apache and Southwestern Yukon First Nations respectively. It was after reading these materials that I began to understand these important relationships of place, history and social behaviour.

Issues of changing traditions, especially where the winter ceremonial was concerned, is a hot and sometimes contentious issue in the community. Just as political leadership styles have needed to be flexible to operate effectively in different historical circumstances, so do spiritual practices. Winter spirit dancing was outlawed by the Canadian Government until the Potlatch laws were dropped in the middle of this century. The few people who did practice *syewen* through this period had to keep their gatherings underground. This created a gap in knowledge of many of the "traditional" practices for the generation of current *syewen* leaders. Negotiating "traditional" forms of spirit dancing in "modern" society is one of the more difficult challenges for these leaders.

One of the interesting debates is different practices of the various smokehouses in the region. The practice of *syewen* by the people at any given smokehouse is usually conceived as either more traditional, or more moderate. Frank Malloway's smokehouse, which recently burnt down, was considered one of the most moderate, being more warm and comfortable in the winter-time, letting non-Native anthropology students stay there in the summer time, and being more physically gentle on the initiates. This would be in contrast to another smokehouse, like the one at Skowkale which follows more strict, rigid "traditional" rules of order in the smokehouse. Frank and others often pointed out that things change and that they didn't need to live like the old people used to.

Strictness of control of alcohol and drugs during the non-winter spirit dancing season was also an issue often talked about in the smokehouse. Frank and the "moderate" smokehouses advocate openness in their smokehouse, helping people kick their habits when they are ready,

but not forcing them out if they relapse into drink. While sitting in front of the TV in the front room of the smokehouse, Frank told a story of the late Chief Albert Douglas, who was a good friend and relative of Richard Malloway. Frank discussed how Chief Douglas was a *sie'm*.

Sie'm is a term which refers to an important person, often a community leader. When someone is a *sie'm* you would expect them to have only big high class friends. In fact, Chief Douglas often spent time helping out poor and alcoholic people he saw around town. He provided food and shelter to them. Frank described how in return, these people often worked for him when they were feeling better.

This narrative touches upon a traditional solutions for critical problems in contemporary Stó:lō communities - specifically poverty and alcoholism. Paying kindness and helping non-high-class community members has long been a strategy of Coast Salish leaders in building their communities. It is also an effective Salish strategy for leaders to gain support from people beyond the extended family. It seems appropriate that Frank would tell this story about Chief Douglas, when Frank's style of leadership is clearly very similar.

This kind of leader, or *sie'm* is typically found associated with the more moderate smokehouses. Frank himself is an excellent example of this - letting people come and go in his smokehouse during the summer months, and housing elders like Francis Phillips and young spirit dancers like Dean Douglas all year long. Frank has his dancers "dry out" if they need to before they do any spiritual "work" on the initiates, and does not exclude them from future "work" if they drink in the summertime, as is the practice in some of the other smokehouses. One sceptical community member wonders the "value" of having "unsuitable" people in the smokehouse. Some of them, he says, are clearly in it for the fun or the experience, others are in it as an escape from drudgery of drugs and alcohol, still fewer are there because they have some spiritual calling that forces them to go there. This sceptic wonders if everybody gets out of the smokehouse what they have the potential of with such a mix of folks. These kinds of difficult issues of cultural change face community leaders.

Regardless of how "traditional" or "moderate" the smokehouse leader is, the smokehouse provides an important centre for healing people who are physically and spiritually sick. On many occasions through his life, especially as he got older, Richard Malloway was called upon by the local medical doctor, Dr. Norman Todd, to help Native people who were spirit sick. A discussion between Gordon Mohs and Richard Malloway recorded in 1986 shows one occasion where the smokehouse provided culturally sensitive healing services that western medicine could not give. In this story, Richard Malloway tells of how a young Native fellow became very sick. Dr. Todd could not provide help, so the man was sent to Richard Malloway. Malloway realized that the fellow was spirit-sick and put him into the smokehouse where his spirit song was eventually recovered. The man soon after became better.

At the outset, it is fairly obvious that this story in one sense was told to legitimate spiritual healing in contemporary society. However, when one considers that it was told to a non-native who by that time had worked in that community for at least 6 years, the emphasis of the story shifts from one of validation to a general concern for the people of the community by this particular leader. Like Albert Douglas discussed before, Richard Malloway has extended his traditional knowledge and leadership to the benefit of multiple members of the community, from the medical doctor to the young spirit dancer to the anthropologist. These people in turn support Malloway as a leader in the community, reiterating his position as a traditional *sie'm*.

Another interview between Richard Malloway and Gordon Mohs that had been taped in 1986 brings together some of these connections of place, spirit power, proper behaviour, and changing traditions. This important discussion regards Richard Malloway's spirit quest. When he was a boy, a *shxwla:m* named Catholic Tommy trained Richard to take his place as one of the few 'medicine men' in the community at time in the 1920's. Richard's initial training was not in the smokehouse, as is common practice today, but by one on one training with this *shxwla:m*. Today, Stó:lō who wish to become spirit dancers have to deal with constraints such as school and employment. Integrating these traditional practices with contemporary urban life is difficult,

if not sometimes financially impossible. Community leaders pressing for fishing rights and other traditional means of employment often point out how important this kind of seasonal work is in the schedule of their spiritual lives. Finding solutions to these problems provides an enormous challenge for Stó:lō leaders today.

Retelling Stories - Enter Anthropology

As I come to the end of this paper, I return to the initial questions that were asked of me in doing this project. My writing about and presenting narratives connected with Richard Malloway's life history, in the context of the settings which they are told helps support the Stó:lō Tribal Council's mandate of reaffirming cultural values, re-establishing self-government and restoring healthy communities. Anthropological writing has an active role to play in the communities which are being written about. The use of the documents I have produced by the Stó:lō Tribal Council has been to reinforce their claims against the Indian Act election system. Recalling this mandate, it is also notable that the issues which are addressed in it are also often addressed in these various narratives.

By constructing this anthropological discussion I hope that I have avoided presenting the narratives as stories that must be "salvaged" as last remnants of a dying culture, which many of the older anthropological narratives tend to do. This approach has been critiqued by authors like Rosaldo (1980a, 1980b) and Cruikshank (1987, 1991). These authors object the use of oral traditions to construct "timeless primitives" whose oral traditions are mere survivals from the past (Rosaldo 1980b:27). My point here has mainly been to recognize the situation of life history narratives in contemporary social contexts.

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