

places. The church has played a role in this erasure. But if done right, decolonization can embrace all of us—indigenous and nonindigenous people—as we each ecologically, culturally, and spiritually strengthen the places we have come to call home. All we have to do is listen for ways that restoration of space and cultural memory is taking place around us, and jump in. The diverse voices that make up *Seeds of Diversity*, *Seeds of Hope* provide a helpful push.

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Leslie A. Robertson and the Kwaqu'ł Gixsam Clan, *Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las: Jane Constance Cook and the Politics of Memory, Church, and Custom*, UBC, Vancouver, 2012. 596 pp. \$39.95. ISBN 9780774823852.

In the summer of 1914 in 'Yalis (Alert Bay) off of northern Vancouver Island, Ga'axsta'las, or Jane Constance Cook, served as a Kwakwaka'English interpreter at the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission on the distribution of reserve lands in British Columbia. Half of the Kawkwaka'wakw applications for lands that had been used for centuries for fishing, berry picking and shellfish harvest were dismissed on the grounds that the land was already being used “productively,” predominantly by white farmers. Within weeks of Ga'axsta'las's swearing-in, my great-grandfather, newly arrived from England, received a certificate of preemption to homestead a lot less than 100 km south of 'Yalis.

One hundred years later, as I read and write about Ga'axsta'las, her descendants, my Anglican clergy colleagues, and members of the church to which we both belong, are among the survivors, family members, chiefs, elders, and witnesses attending ceremonies in Alert Bay for the demolition of St. Michael's Indian Residential School.

“Mrs. Cook” (1870–1951), in archival documents, or “Granny Cook,” to her family, was a controversial and influential woman who had a public voice and active role in Kawkwaka'wakw social and political life for decades. The dominant historical, anthropological, and community records depict her one-dimensionally as colonized and inauthentic, a half-white, missionary-raised Christian who supported the potlatch ban.

Potlatch, where the word potluck comes from, means “gift” in the Chinook trade jargon and refers to different west coast ceremonies that include a feast, dances, and gifts of food and goods to guests. Some people I know call these “give-aways,” “feasts,” or “winter dances.” More than an important ceremonial practice, potlatch is a legal, governance and economic system pertaining to land distribution for fishing and food-harvest, transfer of leadership, marriage alliances, wealth, welfare,

rank, and family. The practice was outlawed by the government of Canada from 1885 to 1951.

In *Standing Up With Ga'axsta'las*, Granny Cook's descendants, members of the Kwagu'l Gixsam Clan, seek to "set the record straight." They have collaborated with anthropologist Leslie Robertson to place Ga'axsta'las's memory in its social, economic, political, family, and cultural context, paying attention to what she stood for as well as what she stood against. The book shows Ga'axsta'las's family "standing up" in another way as well. It documents the Kwagu'l Gixsam Clan's recent revival in the Big House of those treasures—names, positions, dances, masks, rights, and responsibilities—that were cut off in 1888 when Ga'axsta'las, a noblewoman of high rank, renounced the potlatch, a requirement for Christian marriage.

Preparing to review this book, I alternated between feeling uniquely equipped to comment on it and barely qualified to read it. On the one hand I am a member of the same church as Ga'axsta'las, I have visited Alert Bay, I know individuals and families mentioned in the book, and my familiarity with the trajectory of Anglican-Indigenous relations on Vancouver Island is well above average. On the other hand I have studied neither history nor anthropology, under the disciplines' former claims to document and preserve objective fact, or under their more recent assertions about the cultural production of meaning. I have some experience of West Coast First Nations' cultural and ceremonial practice, but what is reinforced for me with every exposure and invitation is that the more I learn about indigenous ways of knowing, the more I realize how little I know and how much of what I think I know is actually intercultural translation or approximation. I see through white eyes.

While clear that there is much that will remain unknown, *Standing Up With Ga'axsta'las* succeeds in presenting a multidimensional portrait of its protagonist: mother of sixteen who raised both children and grandchildren; member of a high status family; midwife; translator; activist and spokesperson for land claims and health-care; correspondent of colonial agents; advocate for economic support of women and children; Anglican Women's Auxiliary president; organizer in early native fishing unions; and the only woman on the executive committee of the Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia. The book engages important questions about race, gender, history, anthropology, marriage practice, collective identity, the relationship of scholars to communities, and how the past and present interact. Yet I found it disappointing in a couple of ways.

My first criticism comes from a faith perspective and might not be noticed by the majority of readers. In this personal history, the authors do a very good job of addressing both "memory" and "custom" with depth and complexity, but their approach to "church," the third element of the book's subtitle, seems less engaged and was less engaging for me as a reader. Ga'axsta'las taught and preached in the

church, corresponded with bishops, attended synods and church meetings, and led the Anglican Women's Auxiliary for thirty years. Her granddaughter Christine Zurkowski describes her activism as rooted in her Christian faith, "motivated into mercy and justice," yet she was stalwart in her practice and defense of traditional indigenous values around food, family, land, and fishing. Unfortunately the depiction of Ga'axsta'las's Christianity—built from her own writing, historical documents, and commentary by Robertson and relatives who do not identify primarily as Christian—feels flat and leaves the false impression that a Kwakwa'ala Christian is an artifact of the past.

My second criticism will be relevant for more readers. This book is not easy to read. Nearly a decade in the making, it is scholarly in tone and nearly six hundred pages long, with more than one hundred pages devoted to notes, maps, genealogies, and photographs. Despite the wealth of information provided, prior knowledge is assumed, and contemporary individuals, historical figures, key events, and cultural practices are brought into the narrative with minimal introduction. Although it moves roughly from the time from Ga'axsta'las's immediate ancestors in the early 1800s to her death in 1951, the narrative is not linear or chronological; the book is framed by transcripts from a potlatch in 2007, and within chapters, contemporary voices and events are juxtaposed with the past. Some parts of the text are anonymized, many individuals have more than one name, every chapter includes Kwakwala vocabulary, and some people and places are named in both English and Kwakwala, a language that has been textualized in different ways at different times. There is a lot to keep track of.

Pearl Alfred, granddaughter of Ga'axsta'las, initiated this project with the intention that "nothing is to be written . . . at the expense of anyone else" (10). The authors' commitment to this responsibility through a complex web of careful deference protocols is evident. But this highly relational writing, coupled with an understanding of history that refuses "definitive" statements, makes the project feel at times like amorphous information with little in the way of tools or direction for evaluation and interpretation.

Still, I learned from and was challenged by this book. It named a kind of mental shorthand that I fall into, imagining indigenous people, especially in the past, as existing on a continuum from traditional to assimilated, and it exposed my unexamined emphasis on cultural and ceremonial practice as an indicator of identity. It reminded me that intersectionality—the coming together of culture, economics, politics, race, gender, family, and other factors applies as much to the past as the present. I learned more about the long history of white interest in and attempts to control native women's sexuality, mobility, marriage, and economic activity. I learned that I didn't know as much about potlatch and feasting as I thought I did.

The book brought into sharp focus the role of my church in the early industrializa-

tion and resource capitalism of British Columbia: Anglican missions and churches owned lumber mills and fish salteries, and industrial training was core to the ideology of Residential Schools. As an Anglican priest who works on justice issues with indigenous partners, I was particularly sobered by the role of church agents and structures. At face value, the provision of medical resources and education was a response to the clear requests of indigenous people with whom they had relationships; indeed they made space for indigenous voices. In the broader context they were party to the transfer of land and water from Native to white control, devastating epidemics of European diseases, and an education system that fits the UN definition of genocide.

Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las made me ask as a reviewer, What makes a good book? Challenging content, good research, readable prose, responsibility to community, integrity in writing? I am curious as to whether Ga'axsta'las's descendants feel that their book has or will achieve what they intended.

Questions aside, *Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las* is an important book. For scholars in Northwest Coast culture and history, including church history, it is essential. For anyone connected to 'Yalis or the Anglican Church on northern Vancouver Island, and for those involved in indigenous and gender studies, it is a valuable resource. For others, the fact that the book has been written may be sufficient.

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Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 2014. 166 pp. \$20.00. ISBN: 978162980655.

“Why can’t they just get along?” “How can we solve the conflict between Israel and Palestine?” “If only they could understand the other side.” These are questions and comments I often encountered when interacting with North American members of our constituency who visited Palestine while I was working with an international Anabaptist aid organization. It was difficult to explain the situation, since a lot of them came with assumptions about what was happening in the Middle East—assumptions that had been shaped by television, churches, and books from North America. These assumptions blinded them to the systemic power imbalance and the structures of imperialism that continue to haunt the region. I wish I could have handed them a copy of Mitri Raheb’s *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes*, a book full of insights about the web of connections linking the empire Jesus experienced to the experience of many people in current-day Palestine.

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