What is in a Name?  
Identity, Politics and Stó:lō Ancestral Names

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Abstract
Scholars gain a deeper understand of identity and meaning in Stó:lō history by recognizing the role of ancestral names in Stó:lō society — at “contact” in the nineteenth century, throughout the twentieth century, and in the twenty-first century. Currently, Stó:lō are reviving traditions of naming ceremonies and carrying ancestral names. Ancestral names are critical to the existence of Stó:lō culture; they are the tangible manifestation of a Stó:lō person’s connection to ancestors, past and future. This paper explores the significance of ancestral names in Stó:lō tradition through conversations and interviews conducted in the spring of 2005 with members of the Stó:lō Nation, transcripts of earlier interviews conducted with Stó:lō elders held in the Stó:lō Nation Archives, the ethnography of the Stó:lō, and more recent scholarly works. This analysis seeks to contextualize the role of ancestral names in Stó:lō society to reveal a deep, multilayered, understanding of history.

Introduction
The systems of remembering and demonstrating genealogical lines of descent in Stó:lō pre-colonial and tradition, and in the Hal’qemeylem language, are complex and often confusing to non-Stó:lō researchers. Xwelitem (non-native newcomers of European descent) researchers and scholars, often unconsciously, seek to place Stó:lō pre-colonial history, post-“contact” narratives and individuals’ personal histories into the type of historical package that “white” academic, and popular, culture is accustomed to. As researchers from outside the Stó:lō/Coast Salish community, we instinctively look for linear, clear-cut chronological histories that are familiar to our own worldview. Often this Xwelitem paradigm fails to incorporate the gravity of personal relationships to ancestors or the urgency of demonstrating hereditary lineage to a certain deceased Chief. By exploring the fundamental ways in which Stó:lō people identify themselves and carry their history, one can begin to address the stalemate of understanding which can result from contradictory worldviews and confusing cross-cultural exchanges.

Trying to make sense of some Stó:lō “family trees” with the multiple layers of relations, brings to mind Geertz’s statement that “coherence cannot be the major test of validity for a cultural description.” Geertz argues that scholars need to see not just the broad but also the deep layers of meaning and must avoid judging the validity of cultural and historical

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1 See Christopher Miller and George Hammell, “A New Perspective on Indian-White Contact.”
2 “Thick Description,” 17.
understanding based on preconceived definitions. Stó:lō family histories and the role of ancestral names in Stó:lō society reveal a deep, multilayered, interwoven history—a history that is not necessarily coherent and comprehensible from an “outsider” perspective. Ancestral names, and their importance in Stó:lō and Coast Salish identity, provide an intersection of past, present and future wherein an exploration of identity, meaning, and history can be pursued.

Currently, Stó:lō are reviving traditions of naming ceremonies and carrying ancestral names, following a period beginning in the early to mid-twentieth century where Stó:lō were in many cases disconnected from their families and history. Ancestral names are elemental to the construction and preservation of Stó:lō social organization, social hierarchies and history as they give form and meaning to Stó:lō identity. In other words, ancestral names are critical to the existence and organization of Stó:lō culture and are the tangible manifestation of a Stó:lō person’s history and connection to ancestors, past and future.

Methodology

Contemporary ethno-historical research requires an awareness of the researcher’s ideological context, done by shifting the lens of analysis away from the primary focus on the “other” towards the researcher. Scholars must acknowledge the relevance of multiple historical frameworks and ensure that their ethno-historical analysis does not favour one framework over another, for example a Stó:lō framework or “Western” perspective. Not only are these frameworks false absolutes, they stifle the potential for creative ideas and understanding to emerge in the research process. As Stó:lō oral histories indicate, history is a dialogic process, serving multiple needs, audiences and purposes; all stories and histories are constructed by social interactions, and demonstrate layers of experience, diverse worldviews and various ideological/spiritual contexts. Only by recognizing the intertextuality of historical experience and historical expression can one begin to engage with other cultures and make meaningful “contact.”

The use of ancestral names in Stó:lō culture and the role they play in political, social and economic interactions is indicative of a cultural paradigm different from “Western” ontology. Working from a framework that recognizes and seeks to understand these

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3 Further discussion of insider/outsider researchers found in Kirin Narayan, “How Native Is A ‘Native’ Anthropologist?”

4 I would argue that factors involved in contact with Europeans such as migration, disease, residential schools, the concentration of Indigenous populations into urban centres all contributed to a tendency away from carrying ancestral names and following Stó:lō tradition. See Carlson, “Reflections on Indigenous History and Memory” and A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas.

5 By “contact” I refer to John Lutz’s discussion of contact as a series of “encounter moments,” or the site, the zone at which the “stories begin.” See Myth and Memory, 13–14.
differences is essential. This research brings to light an aspect of Stó:lō conceptualizations of history that needs to be acknowledged in order to facilitate multi-leveled and cross-cultural understanding.

Ancestral names in Stó:lō tradition and their importance is explored in this paper through interviews, transcripts of earlier interviews conducted with Stó:lō elders held in the Stó:lō Nation Archives, and the ethnography of the Stó:lō and other Northwest Coast peoples, such as the work of Franz Boas, Charles Hill-Tout, Wayne Suttles, Helene Codere, and more recently scholarly work by Jay Miller, Christopher Roth, Crisca Bierwert, Keith Carlson, and John Lutz. Offering historical background, these sources situate the tradition of carrying and giving ancestral names as well as the origins of current “name disputes.” Interviews and conversations with members of the Stó:lō Nation, from elders to young adults, conducted in the spring of 2005, demonstrated the persistent importance of ancestral names. Further the individuals interviewed reflected on the pivotal role ancestral names played in past generations, and how these names form a critical aspect of Stó:lō identity by linking present, past and future.

This research is, however, limited by the small number of interviews conducted and the ever-present fact that interview-based research reflects certain individuals’ beliefs and experiences used to represent a whole. The people interviewed, although intimately connected with the Stó:lō Nation, are not all Stó:lō themselves, but represent other Coast Salish groups such as Thompson and Ts’ymsen. In subsequent studies, a wider range and greater number of interviews would provide a more adequate illustration of the role and importance of ancestral names in Stó:lō culture and history. Also, the conspicuous role of an ethnographer, or “outsider” interviewer questioning Stó:lō or other Northwest Coast peoples about their intimate understanding of self and history may inevitably result in some answers that are tempered and/or framed to satisfy the listener. Real communication and trust between an interviewer and interviewee in most cases requires substantial time to be established.

Family Histories and Ancestral Names

Generally speaking, Stó:lō and other Coast Salish groups have historically, pre-contact and continuing into the twentieth century, identified themselves by “Indian” ancestral

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6 Carlson, “Reflections,” 49. Carlson notes that claiming descent and showing genealogical ties to “genealogy founders” — often heroes, protectors, or transmitters of epic stories — is important to Stó:lō today.

7 The brief time I spent as a field school student researching in British Columbia did not allow for these relationships to be fully established. However inadequate, this introductory paper is intended to provide worthy background for further research on Stó:lō family histories and a context for current attempts made by Stó:lō individuals to document their genealogy.
names. Ancestral names were pivotal in identifying individuals as Stó:lō, and were used to define individuals according to their family lineage. Through carrying an ancestral name, individuals gained a place in their family histories. These histories were often linked to epic stories where great men and their great actions formed a larger supratribal history. If their name connected them to the supratribal history, then their social status was augmented and, further, their historical knowledge and/or their interpretations of history gained greater legitimacy within the community. According to Wayne Suttles, at the time of initial recorded observations and contact with Coast Salish, including Stó:lō peoples, amateur ethnographers (and later observations by professional ethnographers), noted Coast Salish societies were organized and socially stratified. Ancestral names were key to this social organization as names demonstrated status, ensured resource allocation according to family connections, and monitored personal behaviour. Knowledge of one’s history, which was gained through ancestral names, was pivotal to establishing social status in Stó:lō society. This is reflected in the terms for the upper class, the “worthy” people who were referred to as smela:lḥ, “those who know their history” and s’texem, meaning the lower-class, “worthless” people.

Name Disputes

Many of the individuals who were interviewed note that caution is paramount when giving ancestral names, because by carrying an ancestral name, one carries the family’s history. There is a fear that if given to the ‘wrong’ person, history may be told (and ultimately unfold) badly, not only jeopardizing the people exposed to this ‘bad history’ but also dishonouring the ancestral name and all implicated ancestors. Stripping an individual of their name was, and continues to be, a serious disgrace; therefore great care continues to be dedicated to choosing and giving names. Naming necessitates discernment in order to prevent the granting of a name to someone who might potentially pollute that name. Harley Chappell, a Stó:lō man and young father, maintained that the name must be “kept clean for future generations.”

1 Franz Boas, “The Indian Tribes of the Lower Fraser River” and Charles Hill-Tout’s studies of the Kwa’ntlen: “1902 Ethnographical Survey of Canada.”
2 Suttles was part of the dialogue as to whether social stratification and a significant “lower class” existed in what was referred to as Coast Salish society at “contact.” He concludes that this “Coast Salish” society was stratified. See “Private Knowledge, Morality, and Social Classes among the Coast Salish.”
3 Ethnographers and anthropologists who observed Stó:lō and Coast Salish groups in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries noting social organization are discussed by Wayne Suttles in Coast Salish Essays. Carlson also discusses the use of the terms smela:lḥ to delineate high- and low-class status Stó:lō in A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas, 27 and “Reflections,” 49. Also Suttles, “Private Knowledge,” 6–9; diagram of social stratification, 12.
4 Harley Chappell e-mail. A name carried with it the actions and behaviours of all those who have held it previously. With a name one also inherits the actions of their predecessors.
In his article, “Reflections on Indigenous History and Memory: Reconstructing and Reconsidering Contact,” Keith Carlson discusses in greater detail the convergence of truth, fiction, reality and embellishment in Stó:lō criteria for legitimate histories. He provides an example where history was manipulated in an individual’s narrative in order for him to claim genealogical connections and therefore rights to history and resources. Currently, controversies abound when individuals claim certain family names. For example, a priority for Stó:lō Elder Joe Aleck and his family is to document genealogical links to a prominent historical figure, Chief Alexis, as they fear other families are attempting to illegitimately claim the ancestral name and its inherent rights. This case, and presumably others like it, implicate a multitude of factors that cannot be understood without first examining the fundamental role of ancestral names in Stó:lō tradition.

**Stó:lō Worldview — Language and Spiritual Forces**

Stó:lō/Coast Salish concepts of time — past, present, and future — do not follow a European, linear chronology. Many authors, notably Bierwert, Miller, and Carlson, have explored how in Stó:lō and other Coast Salish belief systems, human beings are sites of “multiple spiritual forces.” Affected by the metaphysical spirit world, humans are understood as fluidly linked in various ways to their ancestors as well as to future generations. Vocabulary in the Halq’emeylem language demonstrates this belief. In the Stó:lō Historical Atlas, Carlson uses interviews with Stó:lō elders and documentation of Halq’emeylem words to describe and illustrate how there is one and the same word for great-grandparents (great-aunt/uncle) and great-grandchild (great-niece/nephew): sts’ó:mqw. The use of a common word for ancestor and future relative continues on until great-great-great-grandparents and great-great-great-grandchildren, who are referred to as tomiyeqw. This terminology illustrates the belief among the Stó:lō that “people from a parallel past and future generations, up to seven times removed from current living relatives, are considered to hold the same relationship with the current living generation.” Many of the people interviewed for this paper, particularly Harley Chappell, discussed how the individual living in the present with an ancestral name plays a central role in linking an entire tradition, both past and future. The power of these metaphysical connections is remarkable compared to a Xwelitem (“European” or non-Stó:lō) worldview that is rooted in linear beliefs and generally sees little intrinsic connection between generations.

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14 Ibid., 27–28.
The Naming Process: Ceremony, Status and Gender

Charles Hill-Tout, in 1902, noted that ancestral names were given through a naming ceremony when a youth passed into adulthood. Hill-Tout’s observations were confirmed by current oral histories which explained how in “the past” naming ceremonies, like potlatches, represented a family’s wealth and status; by hosting a big ceremony a family indicated their wealth and subsequent worthiness to carry a particular name. Isadore Charters and Irene Aleck both confirmed, in separate interviews, that in the past naming ceremonies included up to two or three days of feasting, speeches, and giveaways, and people gathered from far away villages to act as witnesses and to carry the news of the naming to their homes. The naming depended on receiving the consent of the gathered community, and if consent was not given the name would either be given up or the family would be expected to hand out more gifts in order to convince the community of their worth and the worthiness of giving that name. This is interesting as it demonstrates that wealth could potentially “buy” a name, regardless of historical entitlement. Ancestral names conceivably organized Stó:lō society by fixing class divisions, as lower class Stó:lō were prohibited from accessing high class names due to their status and lack of wealth.

According to Bob Joe in an interview with Oliver Wells in 1962, a father’s name was always given to his oldest son. Wayne Suttles, in his discussion of the Katzie, describes the sons as being the ones to succeed their father’s “inherited names.” However, names were also given to daughters as “part of their dowries to be used by their sons to show their mother’s origin.” In the Thompson tradition it was the duty of the matriarch, the grandmother, to name the children born into the family. According to Isadore Charters (who is Thompson), naming young children was based on the child’s physical or personality resemblance in some way to a deceased ancestor, regardless of gender. Among various Coast Salish groups women carried multiple names that would then be distributed to their sons, to represent matrilineal lineage.

Through the multiple layers of families, marriages, and intermixing, individuals could and currently continue to, trace their lineage to several groups and ancestors. For example, Wayne Suttles worked with Simon Pierre who traced his lineage to “Saanich communities at Patricia Bay and Brentwood Bay and with people at Tsawwassen.” He was also connected through uncles and aunts to Scowlitz at Harrison River, Lillooet and with “descendants of white settlers.” In 1894 Boas similarly observed that among the Stó:lō that names [were] given by both paternal and maternal relatives" and an

15 “1902 Ethnographical Survey of Canada,” 63. Also in Keith Thor Carlson, You Are Asked To Witness, 167 — acknowledgement of rights and privileges during naming ceremonies.
16 From Charters and Aleck interviews.
17 Brian Thom, Stó:lō Traditional Culture, 35.
18 Bob Joe interview.
20 Charters interview.
21 “Katzie Ethnographic Notes,” 28.
individual could carry more than one name.\textsuperscript{22} The interwoven webs of ancestry are therefore complicated by the various naming practices and identities acquired through receiving ancestral names. Further, an individual became connected through each name to a specific place.

**Name and Place**

Names were and are integrally linked to their place of origin. Franz Boas’ work, as well as current oral histories, affirms that names could be associated with a certain location or village.\textsuperscript{23} Some Stó:lō and Coast Salish people have discussed how an ancestral name could belong to the village and the tribe, as the ancestor was part of that particular tribe, rather than to the individual. Thus, when in a particular village, an individual personified a certain ancestor to those people in that place she/he was given that name regardless of other names the individual might carry. The name and place stayed together, while the person embodying that name in that place changed with the generations.\textsuperscript{24}

Association with ancestral names was key to establishing communities within villages and identifying the members of a tribal group.\textsuperscript{25} Isadore Charters maintained that, “Without [an ancestral] name it’s almost like going without an ID.” Names served, and serve, to identify individuals and their role or position in the community. In the past, the purpose was primarily to define communities within villages. Currently persons are still recognized for their ancestral links and given status based on their role within a community and family. A twenty-first century example of this is given by Tíxweláts (or Herb Joe). He explained the reasons he received his name, Tíxwelátsa, a name that “goes back to the beginning of the Ts’elxwéyeqw people”:

> I was given the name by an Elder in our family who decided that because of my position in the community — I was a newly elected, very young, chief, I was working for the federal penitentiary service, with supposedly a totally First Nations case load — so he said that it was important that I carry a traditional name, a family name, so that when I was at big chief’s meetings, he said that the other families from the other tribes would recognize who I am and recognize me. The only way that they would recognize me is through the names. Because what he asked was, “Who knows Herb Joe? We know Herb Joe because you’re our family but who else would know you? No one! So we put a name on you then everybody will know you.”\textsuperscript{26}

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\textsuperscript{22} \textit{“The Indian Tribes of the Lower Fraser River,”} 5.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. Wilson interview; Charters interview; also Frank Malloway interview with Heather Myles in Carlson, ed., \textit{You Are Asked to Witness}, 2–26.
\textsuperscript{24} Interviews with Chappell, Charters, and Wilson.
\textsuperscript{25} Boas, 1894.
\textsuperscript{26} Herb Joe interview.
Similarly, the late Amelia Douglas, stated that she was “accepted by Abel Joe” because of her name, Siyamia. Abel Joe told Amelia that they must be related because “they have a Siyamia in their family.”

Thus even now, Stó:lō connect, reconnect, and fall into prescribed relationships, according to the ancestral names they carry.

**Ancestral Names and the Web of Reciprocal Relationships**

Harley Chappell believes that the basic premise of holding an ancestral name is the relationship that forms between the people who carry, and have carried, that name. He explains, “the person whose name you receive is the closest to you in the family” even if they may be separated by up to seven generations; they are your mentor, your role model and your guide through life.

This was evident in conversations with several individuals. Isadore Charters (Yen MoCeetza) when speaking of the man he was named after intimately provided details about his ancestor’s personality and characteristics:

> Yen MoCeetza was old, was a traveller, a sort of shaman. . . he was an awesome storyteller and a fiddler. He knew lots of legends and stories about the Creator, and he believed in the higher power and so every time he went into different homes, he would be like, he would be helping, he would help chop wood, gather wood, do a lot of different things that needed to be done and people liked him so they let him stay. So he travelled, he was from the States, Coleville area. . .

Generations removed, Isadore nevertheless spoke of Yen MoCeetza with personal fondness and profound respect.

Naming, the giving and receiving of ancestral names among the Stó:lō, forms a web of reciprocal relationships and responsibilities that bind communities and families together, transcending physical time and space. Similarly, Jay Miller observed that for the Ts’myesen, ancestral names provide the “mortal-immortal connection.”

Among the Ts’myesen sharing names is believed to “sustain and enhance the status” of both the contemporary individual and the ancestor. Carrying a Name obligates one to act honourably and respectfully towards that ancestor. However, one can also in return depend on having guidance not only from that ancestor but also from the Elder who gave the Name and, essentially, the entire community that was present when that name was given.

For Chappell, ancestral names mark the cycle of history; they represent “how we [Stó:lō] keep our history going.”

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27 Douglas interview.
28 Chappell interview.
30 This point came up in a few interviews — Wilson and Chappell — and an informal conversation with a Stó:lō Elder from a reserve near Chilliwack.
31 Chappell interview.
belongs, affirming identity and membership in a collective community, names also ensure that family roots remain and will not be lost. Ancestral names keep history alive.

“Names Feed People”

Among the Stó:lō there is a parallel to Miller’s observation that “names feed people.”32 This is because names connected individuals to their rights to land and resources. Miller furthers this saying, “in this manner, the immortal sustains the mortal”33 demonstrating the living relationship between the ancestor and the person carrying their name. Miller offers insight into naming ceremonies and importance of ancestral names for individuals and their families/tribes. He explains that in the Ts’mysen tradition, each House (the family/genealogical lineage) owned “a corpus of immortal names”34 which were passed down through the matrilineal line. The chief of the “house” held a leading name, which carried with it the responsibility of reciting the “adawx” or the epic: the history and events that came with that name, the history of the descendents of that name — similar to the “genealogy founders” in the Stó:lō tradition.

The smela:lh, those high status Stó:lō who knew their ancestors and where they came from, also enjoyed social, economic, and political advantages.35 An ancestral name gave individuals rights to inheritance, resource locations, fishing sites, songs and dances which were part of that line of descent for centuries. Also, people who carried different names from the different villages where they had relatives had access to even greater wealth and resources as each of the names provided for them.36

Ancestral names in Stó:lō living tradition may play different roles. However, whether they serve to connect family, mark genealogies, or give rights to ancestral places and resource sites names are central to Stó:lō identity. Ancestral names indicate family and thus connect individuals to people they have never encountered.37 Ancestral names can bridge gaps within and between families, creating vast, complicated webs of relations.

Halq’émeylem and the Organization of Relations

Halq’émeylem has extensive vocabulary to explain relatives and different familial connections. The language distinguishes between matrilineal and patrilineal relatives and

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 662.
35 Carlson, “Reflections,” 49.
36 Thom, Stó:lō Traditional Culture, 35; Boas, 3.
37 Chappell interview. He also added that this makes dating so much harder, because you never who you are actually related to — another impetus to put together family genealogies!
has, as well, words for half siblings, relatives of separated spouses, illegitimate children, adopted children, orphans, widowed, and so on. In an interview with the late Amelia Douglas, Sonny McHalsie mentioned how in English, the words cousin, aunt, uncle and grandparent do not indicate which side of the family they are from, whereas in Halq’emeyel these relationships are made clear. Amelia Douglas responded to McHalsie’s statement saying that without knowing the Halq’emeyel words, the only way she came to understand how she had so many relatives was when her mother “got some matches, she set out matches and there was two up on top, from the two they branched out, spread out so that’s the only time I know of that I realized that Bob, Alex and Oscar were my third cousins…. When Amelia was little, her parents “couldn’t seem to explain who their relatives were” so everyone was referred to as siyo:ye, which she later learnt meant your relative or your relation. Through this, Amelia discovered that she has family all over Fraser Valley and that, “most of the Fraser Valley is related somehow.” This is interesting not only in terms of examining a particular Stó:lō understanding of history and family, but also noteworthy that Amelia Douglas came to understand her family lineage in “European” terms rather than Stó:lō, perhaps a result of growing up in the period where there was a profound intrusion of non-Stó:lō (Xwelitem) ideas and education into Stó:lō life.

To further illustrate these complex familial linkages through ancestral names one can look at Amelia Douglas’ explanation of her grandmother’s name: Siya:mia, which is the ancestral name Amelia inherited and carried. Amelia Douglas’ grandmother whose English name was Lucy was married three times. Amelia’s mother was Josephine. Josephine’s father’s name was Siyemtel and Amelia’s first cousin inherited that name. Lucy’s other two husbands were William and Waleseluq from Iwowes — who “maybe” is Alan Guiterrez’s great grandfather. Lucy’s name began as Siya:mia from her first husband, and then with her second husband (who she noted was also respected and wealthy) her name changed to Luxsiya:mia once “the sxwyo:yxwoy mask was in the family.” In the case of Agnes Kelly, she had three husbands and with each of these marriages came rights to pass on ancestral names to children, as well as rights to berry picking sites, fishing sites and so on.

Names and Land-rights

Perhaps most important politically is how ancestral names connect individuals to rights to land. According to Roth, names link Ts’msyen members to their past as well as to “the land upon which that past unfolded.” Connection to land, made through names, is

39 Douglas interview.
40 Ibid.
41 Kelly interview.
42 “The Names Spread in All Directions,” 69.
particularly important for the Ts’msyen in their treaty negotiations and land claims. Roth explains, “Hereditary names connect individuals to corporate descent groups.” He uses the example of the court case Delgamuukw vs. the Queen to show how the entire house of Delgamuukw was called on for the case — generations and generations of people that call on the rights inherent in that hereditary name. Earlier, Boas noted that each of the Stó:lō ancestors remembered through names is connected to a village, a certain place. The connection to a particular location is further accentuated in cases where the ancestors were turned into a physical element such as a rock (a transformer site) often found close to the village. Of vital importance to the Stó:lō is that ancestral names remain in the place of their origin. Contemporarily, Frank Malloway discussed in You are Asked to Witness, the names of four original chiefs of the Ts’elxwéqw people. One of the names, Wili:leq, problematically, according to Malloway, “went to [a person in] Victoria”; it was given to an aunt’s grandson. According to Ken Malloway, who carries the Wili:leq name, this is regrettable because a Chilliwack name that is part of the history of the people in Chilliwack should never leave that territory.

Claiming Descent

Claiming descent from ancestors is a complex process. European genealogical mapping systems, which assert legitimacy and primacy to an ancestor on a purely linear, chronological level do not work. Instead, among the Stó:lō family lineage is remembered through the oral telling and retelling of stories. In his work on the origins of the Katzie people, Suttles provides an example of how difficult it would be to find the “authentic” original groups of the Katzie. According to Suttles, the Katzie came from three original groups: Pitt Lake, Sturgeon Slough and Port Hammond people. However, Simon named ten “tribes” or “families” settled at Katzie. Potentially, one could claim descent from any of these Katzie settlements, thus connecting oneself with the original ten tribes, and claiming rights to the land in that area. Similarly, Boas’ recorded seven generations of the original Stó:lō tribes. However, these tribes no longer exist and various Stó:lō now claim to be “returning” to their homeland.

On the one hand, some Stó:lō are claiming names and rights they believe are inherently theirs, while on the other hand, other Stó:lō see them as illegitimate invaders of their own rightful land. Fishing disputes also are connected to ancestral names as conflicts arise from people believing that their claims to fishing locations are “more traditional, and therefore more legitimate, than someone else’s.” Proof of legitimacy and authenticity are difficult to determine within the web of oral history, interwoven family genealogies, and changing, inconsistently documented names.

43 Ibid., 70.
44 Boas, 1.
45 Myles interview.
The Aleck Family

The case of Joe Aleck and his family’s desire to document their hereditary links to Chief Alexis (Chief of Cheam 1867–1888) accentuates the precariousness of attempting to justify one’s claim to history. Their claim to ancestral rights to Chief Alexis’ name is arguably similar to what Carlson refers to in his article as history disputes — where one group challenges another’s assertion of hereditary rights and prerogatives, calling into question fact, fiction, truth and reality.48 Elder Joe Aleck (Siyamalalexw) and his family claim to be descendents of Chief Alexis, who was the first listed Chief of Cheam in DIA records and who played a vital role in early Stó:lō interactions with the Canadian/British government, missionaries and land claims petitions.49 The Aleck’s link to Alexis is made through Joe’s great-grandmother, Lucy Olale, who is believed to be a descendant of Alexis. However, to date genealogical links have not been firmly established by Stó:lō Nation genealogists and researchers.

The inability to consolidate this family’s genealogy results primarily from inconsistencies of surnames and dates in marriage, birth, death, baptismal and census records, as well as the aforementioned layers of relations in Stó:lō families. For example, as listed in the Stó:lō Nation genealogical files, Chief Alexis Sroucheleou (b. 1843) and his wife, Pauline Marie Steyroula (b. 1843) had nine children — four of whom were listed carrying the surname, Alexis, while four others are listed with the surname Sruetslanough, and the seventh child is listed with the surname Edwards.50 Also, while some records claim that Chief Alexis’ father was Louie Skw:etes, the Stó:lō Nation’s genealogical database shows Alexis’ father to be Mathieu Hielamacha. There is no mention or record of Skw:etes — who apparently is the ancestor linking “many of the people of the Stó:lō Nation.” The book In the Shadow of Mount Cheam states the families of Cheam — Alex, Casimer, Douglas, Edwards, Harris, Louie, Murphy, Shaw, Thomas and Victor — are all connected through Louie Skw:etes, Chief Alexis’ father; however genealogical data compiled by Stó:lō Nation fails to reflect this.

While this topic requires more detailed research and analysis, it is important to note the urgency with which Joe Aleck and his family wish to consolidate their link to the Alexis name. This is presumably due to tension with another family on the Cheam reserve who some Stó:lō believe have been given the name Alexis illegitimately. Relatives of Joe Aleck have even recently changed the spelling of their surname from “Aleck” to “Alexis” to assert their hereditary right to the name. In the limited information gained for this paper, why the Alexis name was so desired was not made clear exactly. Yet, one can

48 Carlson, “Reflections,” 68.
50 Spouses are only listed for the first child, but she is not listed as carrying her husband’s surname, leading me to believe that the difference in surnames is not reflective of the children’s spouses.
imagine that due to his vital political role, Chief Alexis is among the great “genealogical founders” of the Stó:lō nation, and thus holds a highly respected and honourable name.\(^{51}\)

### Reflecting the Ancestors

In addition to their role in sustaining familial heritage and family linkages, many believe ancestral names are given according to personality traits and/or to a person’s (usually a young child’s) resemblance to an ancestor. In this case, the responsibility of the Elders is to remember the ancestors and their personalities, and to match young individuals with appropriate names. Isadore Charters notes how in his Thompson tradition, grandmothers always name the young children. They would look at the young baby, reflect on the past, and choose a name according to the child’s visible personality. His own name, *Yen MoCeetza*, guides Isadore to follow the path set by his ancestor who was the original owner of the name. In an interview in 1988, Matilda (Tillie) Gutierrez discussed how grandparents can give Stó:lō names at birth because of the baby’s resemblance to a deceased relative or because the name is not occupied: there is “nobody standing for that name.”\(^{52}\)

Some Stó:lō believe, however, that giving names to babies is unwise, as the full knowledge of the responsibilities inherent in carrying a name are not known to that baby. To assign ancestral names to babies before seeing what kind of people they will become is believed to be too great of a risk. Thus, some contend names should only be given once individuals have demonstrated they are responsible enough or have accomplished something special — ancestral names must be earned.\(^{53}\) Others, however, believe names and carrying an ancestral name is a “matter of fate.” With the proper guidance and support, children will grow into the name and its requisite responsibilities and obligations.\(^{54}\)

### Names to Non-Stó:lō

Ancestral names are sometimes given to non-Stó:lō people. Richard Wilson’s name was given to him by a Stó:lō elder, although he himself is Ts’msyen, married to a Stó:lō

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\(^{51}\) I hesitate to touch on this topic as briefly as I am doing; however, I was not able to conduct the interviews with Joe Aleck and his family members as I had anticipated. I do not want to present the case falsely, but only wish to demonstrate the current desire among Stó:lō individuals to have their genealogies documented, as well as the difficulties encountered when conducting genealogical research.

\(^{52}\) Gutierrez interview: “And I feel the power of my name. And I got it right when I was born. My grandfather and grandmother named me Qw’olamot right away... You see they gave it [the name, Qw’olamot] to me as soon as I was born because my grandfather’s mother was dead long time ago...”

\(^{53}\) Informal conversation with a Stó:lō woman living in Chilliwack, BC.

\(^{54}\) Chappell e-mail.
woman. The name was given not to connect Richard with his direct ancestors, but to reflect his special abilities and his role in the Stó:lō community. Richard’s name, Si:yo Laylex, means Spirit Singer and is integral to Richard’s identity and daily life. As a drummer and singer, Richard, through his name, carries a responsibility to his community to drum and sing whenever and wherever he is needed. He admits that,

Sometimes I think my name is a jinx but I’m really honoured and I’m really happy to be able to carry the name that I do, because I love to drum and sing. Like I said I originally come from Kitimat and up there we rarely do cultural stuff, like we do down here. And down here it’s every day for me.55

In this way, Richard’s name vitally connects him to a community not of his ancestry. For Richard and others, carrying an ancestral name involves enormous responsibility. A recurrent theme when discussing ancestral names is the challenge, and the responsibility, an ancestral name entails to “not drag it [the name] through the mud.”56 This theme demonstrates the continuous commitment among Stó:lō to honour and respect the responsibilities that come with accepting an ancestral name. Although ancestral names are negotiated in different ways to give meaning to Stó:lō identity, the recognition of the power inherent in ancestral names is constant.57 This responsibility is arguably the primary motive to receive or not receive ancestral names, as one must live carefully to do the name justice and neither dishonour the Elders who gave the name, nor the ancestors implicated and reflected in that name. Many Stó:lō youth and adults refuse or decide not to carry a name, often because they feel they are not living in the way they would like to as carriers of an ancestral name.58

Interestingly, at the time of the interview with Richard Wilson, his mother in Kitmat was preparing to pass on to Richard, her eldest son, a hereditary chief’s name. Among the Ts’msyen, with a chiefly name comes a “mandate to authority and a deed of sovereign land title.”59 Richard discussed the honour, but also the immense pressure that comes with holding a chief’s name. According to Roth, the successors to a name are accountable for their predecessors’ actions, “the agency and accountability associated with an action transcended the lifetime of a mortal individual and pertained not to a biological self, but, rather, to an onomastic one.”60 That name must not only be carried with honour, but also must be carefully passed down to someone who will equally respect and honour the name. It is similar among the Stó:lō. The ancestral name Harley Chappell carries is from

55 Wilson interview.
56 Ibid.
57 I had originally hoped to interview a wider variety of people. However, due to time constraints, this was not possible. In further studies, it would be valuable to explore alternative perspectives on Stó:lō identity and ancestral names, among Stó:lō youth, adults and Elders.
58 Wilson interview. This also came up in the interview with Harley Chappell and other informal conversations with young Stó:lō people.
59 Roth, 70.
60 Ibid., 78.
an ancestor who was a leader, a guide. With this name, Harley feels he must “live up to my name,” and therefore strives to be a guide and leader in his community and family.

Belonging to a Name

An ancestral name does not belong to the person; rather the person belongs to the name. Roth quotes a Ts’msyen Elder who stated, “People are nothing... it’s the names that are really real.” He goes on to explain that names are “social actors who constitute a social order that transcends their holders.” Similarly, Chappell asserts that ancestral names are precisely “how we carry our history. That’s how we carry our culture.” It is interesting to currently witness how naming ceremonies, and carrying ancestral names, are gaining prominence in Stó:lō society after a period where ancestral names were generally not used and were forgotten. Interviews from the late 1980s indicate that although “Indian” names were a topic of discussion, many Elders were unsure as to the specific meaning of their names and often only close family members referred to them by their ancestral name. For example, when asked what her “Indian name” Themset meant, Elsie Charlie replied, “something about the little pools in the river something like that [Sonny McHalsie: How long have you had the Indian name?]” I guess since I was a little girl... nobody seemed to call me by that name... just my sister.

Generations of Stó:lō

The generational difference that Elsie Charlie reflects is noteworthy. A young Stó:lō woman expressed that carrying an ancestral name means carrying an understanding of history — “so that when an Elder or someone asks what your name means, or where it comes from, you should be able to give an informed answer.” When I was gathering information for this paper, the “younger” generation of Stó:lō were quick to explain exactly where and from whom their names came while the older generation did not all know such specifics.

In Elder Irene Aleck’s case, only as an adult has she reclaimed her name, Tiaktenaw Sluholt. She points to her experience at boarding school as being the reason why people’s “Indian” names were forgotten and taken away. In an informal conversation with a

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61 Ibid.
62 Tsimshian [Ts’mysen] Elder quoted in Roth, 69.
63 Roth, 75.
64 Chappell interview.
65 Interviews looked at include those with Elders Elsie Charlie, Matilda (Tillie) Gutierrez, Agnes Kelly and Amelia Douglas.
66 Charlie interview.
67 Informal conversation with young Stó:lō woman, living in Chilliwack.
68 Aleck interview.
Stó:lō elder from a reserve near present-day Chilliwack, the elder mentioned how she sees the value placed in names and family ties in Stó:lō culture clash with western ideas of the individual. She contends that the experience of residential schools has had such a lasting imprint on Stó:lō people; teaching people to forget who they are, forget their identity as Stó:lō, and forget their ancestors and history: all aspects contained within an “Indian” name. Similarily, Irene Aleck stated, “We didn’t know who we were, just little brown white people.”

Similarly, Irene Aleck stated, “We didn’t know who we were, just little brown white people.”

Current Reclamation of Ancestral Naming

Many Stó:lō are now reclaiming their language, their history and role in Stó:lō society by reclaiming their ancestral names. However, living in a contemporary and predominantly “white” culture, Stó:lō are “immersed in subjectivities imponderably alien to non-First Nations understandings.” Contemporary Stó:lō identity needs to be negotiated to bridge traditional and contemporary realities. Irene Aleck stated that names are vitally important as they show people who they are and they allow “Salish” people to be who they are. She explained:

I think that [now] more of the younger generations know of who they are and what they are, what we believe in, what our traditions are. That gives them the strength; it gives them strength to be a better person. Give them an Indian name and say that’s an old old name and there’s about twenty people lined up behind you that had that name, and they’re going to guide you and help you, so you don’t rub that name in the mud. You carry it with pride. Be proud of who you are, that name is strong and you have to behave in a way that all these ancestors will expect you to behave.

As maintained by Harley Chappell, Stó:lō youth need to acknowledge their identity; they need role models as they struggle to transcend their present chaos to “start to live instead of just surviving.” He believes that carrying ancestral names and nurturing cross-generational connections provides what is necessary: identity, role models and cultural grounding. Through ancestral names, Stó:lō youth “learn to be better people than their parents.” And the nation, through remembering its history, is kept alive.

In current Stó:lō tradition, naming ceremonies continue to be significant events for families. Reflecting the enduring importance of community gatherings and cultural celebrations, Richard Wilson explained his experience at his naming ceremony:

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69 Informal discussion with Stó:lō Elder.
70 Aleck interview.
71 Roth, 71. While Roth was referring to the Ts’msyen, I feel this statement fits a Stó:lō context as well.
72 Aleck interview.
73 Chappell interview.
That’s where you find out where your family is, or who your family is. People that you helped before will come back and they’ll thank you and then they’ll help you during that time, during a naming ceremony. We were told [for his naming ceremony], that we gotta call witnesses and people who help us, we gotta pay them. So we had to save a lot of money and we thought we were going to be short. Because I had a hundred and fifty dollars in quarters and that wasn’t enough and then and then there was, like I said there was people that come up and say you’re part of their family, they claim you, or they want to repay you for what you did for them. They’ll come up and they’ll help you out with money or blankets, so by the end of the night, by the end of the naming, and after we paid everybody off, I still had a hundred and fifty dollars in quarters [laughs] . . . cause so many people came up to help. And that’s, that’s the way it is around here.74

Naming ceremonies and the enduring tradition of giving and receiving ancestral names offers a sense of belonging, security and affirmation. Although not ubiquitously, ancestral names can generate dignity and empower Stó:lō people and others in the Stó:lō community, to serve and nurture their community and family in a way that is honourable and consistent with Stó:lō traditions and history.

Conclusion

For many Stó:lō, there is a sense of obligation “to [their] past and future generations to ensure that our identity and our connection to the land lives on.”75 Ultimately, from the limited interviews that were conducted, it is evident that it is through the conscious reclamation of ancestral names and the continuous ritual cycles of naming that Stó:lō are remembering who they are and where they come from. This process is nurturing a revivification of meaning in Stó:lō culture.

It is vital that studies of Stó:lō ethnohistory include a recognition, and seek to understand the power of, ancestral names in Stó:lō identity. Although not unanimously used and by no means uniformly interpreted, Stó:lō ancestral names and the relationships between past, present and future exemplified in the Halq’eméylem language embody a worldview, a narrative, and a relationship with history that differs significantly from the one guiding the “Xwellem” (mainstream popular cultural) paradigm. By recognizing and seeking to understand these multilayered differences, mutually positive and mutually beneficial contact can and does occur.

74 Wilson interview.
75 Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, “Place Names.” In Carlson, 2001, 134.
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