

## Stó:lō Traditional Food ‘Talk’ as Metaphor for Cross-cultural Relations

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### Abstract

This paper explores Stó:lō peoples’ perceptions of twentieth century change in their dietary practices. Stó:lō peoples’ discussion of the historic shift from a ‘traditional’ to ‘store-bought’ diet reveals relationship of attitudes towards cross-cultural exchange and a colonial dynamic. Stó:lō elders and community members emphasized the nutritional and even spiritual superiority of traditional vs. ‘store-bought’ foods. They described traditional dietary practices as deteriorated. In some cases, however, certain ‘western’ foods were acceptably used in traditional contexts. The fluidity and multiplex nature of such ‘talk’ about food defies academics’ previous attempts to characterize this twentieth century transition as either wholly a scenario of decline or testament to the ‘power’ of Stó:lō traditional knowledge. The discourse surrounding traditional as opposed to ‘store-bought’ foods among the Stó:lō comprises a set of historical understandings in continual dialogue with the present — or ‘contact.’

### Introduction

*Stan Green told me once [that] one of his elders had told him that despite the fact that, you know, the different government policies that were trying to take away our culture — and the missionaries and the diseases — despite that that elder told him that our culture is still out there. It’s all around us. And. . . if we try to take it all back all at once we won’t be able to handle it, ‘cause we’re just — we’re weak, we’re not strong enough because we’ve lost a lot of it. And so he said we have to take a little bit at a time. So each time we take a little bit of our culture back it makes us stronger so that we can take other parts, and I think that’s what our people are going through right now.<sup>1</sup>*

This paper explores Stó:lō peoples’ perceptions of twentieth century change in their dietary practices. Academics have explored two possible means of assessing twentieth century changes in Stó:lō dietary practice. In a methodological piece, Kirin Narayan argued anthropologists would do better to understand their roles as researchers “in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations.”<sup>2</sup> This same argument can be applied to Stó:lō peoples’ descriptions of twentieth century changes in their dietary practices.

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<sup>1</sup> McHalsie interview.

<sup>2</sup> “How Native Is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” 671.

While articulating her larger thesis that British Columbian Natives' bodies were sites of struggle in Canadian colonial praxis, historian Mary-Ellen Kelm described a time (based on Nancy Phillip's recollection) early in the century when Stó:lō fished and hunted for sustenance as they adopted various non-Native foods or methods of food production.<sup>3</sup> She later contextualized this by referencing M. M. Lee, R. Reyburn, and A. Carrow's finding that by 1969 refined and processed foods, including bread, cereals, and soft drinks, accounted for 48 percent of Anaham adults' caloric intake — a transition newly detrimental to their health as nutritional analyses indicated indigenous foods had formerly provided the bulk of their required protein, calcium, and vitamins. Her conclusion, given these two pieces of information, was that "Euro-Canadian culinary imperialism" both symbolically and physically weakened its Stó:lō and other Aboriginal targets.<sup>4</sup>

Alternatively, Kevin Washbrook appraised the metaphorical means by which Stó:lō people talked about plants as medicine.<sup>5</sup> His initial research plan had been to evaluate Stó:lō discourse surrounding the roles of plants as food and technology; instead, people responded to his request, "[T]ell me what is important about plants," with lists of plant uses in solving health issues. Such reactions eventually led him to believe that when informants related cure stories they were in actuality affirming the power of their traditional knowledge over the inefficacy and ignorance of 'White' medical practice, emphasizing the continuity between their culture's self-sufficient past and powerful present as embodied in their elders' wisdom. So whereas Kelm descriptively traced an incidence of historical decline via dietary change, Washbrook conversely highlighted the enduring utility of indigenous (or, in this case, Stó:lō) plant customs.

Discussion with Stó:lō informants, however, indicates that the discourse surrounding both 'traditional' and 'western' foods does not neatly conform to either one or the other line of reasoning. Stó:lō collective consciousness relative to dietary change from the mid to late twentieth century involves both spiritual and material/economic aspects that jointly reflect the community's current understanding of historic cross-cultural relations and the colonial dynamic. I aim to illustrate this mindset by examining what foods, exactly, the Stó:lō identify as 'traditional.'

## Methods

James Axtell stated, "ethnohistory is essentially the use of historical and ethnological methods and materials to gain knowledge of the nature and causes of change in a culture defined by ethnological concepts and categories."<sup>6</sup> Following Axtell's cue, this paper blends traditional historical analysis of primary and secondary literature as well as ethnographic interviews. Primary and secondary material were selected from unpublished articles and interviews held at the Stó:lō Nation Archives, academic journals located

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<sup>3</sup> Phillip's had briefly described her father's diary farm. See *Colonizing Bodies*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–36.

<sup>5</sup> "Plants and Medicine."

<sup>6</sup> "Ethnohistory," 2.

through online databases, and pertinent books found at the University of Saskatchewan's library. Interviews were carried out using open-ended questions to obtain 'un-biased' responses from participants. Staff in the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre provided the original list of potential people to interview, based on elders' or community members' perceived knowledge of the issue, and interviews were conducted with those people I was able to contact.

## Defining Traditional Stó:lō Foods

When asked to comment on dietary changes he had seen over his lifetime, Steven Point answered, "[W]hen we were growing up. . . we ate fish all the time, eh. We just ate fish."<sup>7</sup> Leona Kelly similarly answered immediately when questioned about traditional foods she ate as a child, "Well, I remember as a young girl. . . supper, it would be taters and rice, and fish, a lot of salt fish," and later recounted that canned fish, dried fish, and deer meat were consumed in her household either more or less frequently.<sup>8</sup> Gwen Point listed baked, dried, and smoked salmon as staples, and related that in childhood she also regularly ate 'wild' meats like deer, duck, grouse, and eulachon.<sup>9</sup> Albert 'Sonny' McHalsie, although likewise mentioning deer and eulachon in brief, expanded on salmon's importance as a dietary mainstay:

We try to eat as much traditional food now then we did before [sic]. Actually, we eat a lot of fish, for sure. . . Um, my mom used to can. The most jars I've seen of canned fish was like three hundred and sixty quarts. . . in our pantry. The most I do nowadays is, um, about a hundred and, um, oh it'd be about a hundred and eighty, so not even half of it. But yeah, she did, like, over three hundred quarts. And so we were eating a lot of canned fish, and then she would have, uh, you know like those freezers [SM gestures] like from the file cabinet to here, about here, a big long freezer like that, half of it was frozen, and she would, um, dry, I don't know — gee, about two hundred dried fish. And she would trade her dried — some of her dried fish for smoked fish. So there's a lot of fish, uh, we ate a heck of a lot of fish when we were growing up. And I still like it. [laughter]<sup>10</sup>

These Stó:lō community members' invariable references to either salmon or fish are not surprising given what archaeologists, anthropologists, and other scholars have surmised concerning the historical use of resources by Coast Salish peoples. Karen Fediuk and Brian Thom,<sup>11</sup> for example, citing Deur, suggested that salmon had been Coast Salish groups' primary food resource possibly for as far back as 6000 years; they moreover

<sup>7</sup> Steven Point interview.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly interview.

<sup>9</sup> Gwen Point interview, June 20, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> McHalsie interview.

<sup>11</sup> "Contemporary and Desired Use of Traditional Resources in a Coast Salish Community," 2–3, 5.

reference Suttles' estimate that no more than 10% of the Central Coast Salish diet had been derived through gathering (i.e. fruits and vegetables) in pre-contact times. Furthermore, after reviewing Marilyn Bennett's 1971 estimates of the pounds of salmon consumed per capita/per year in Stó:lō territory, and relevant Department of Fisheries and Oceans data on Stó:lō catches from 1956 to 1999, Fediuk and Thom concluded that during the latter half of the twentieth century Stó:lō annually took 55 salmon per capita with an edible weight of 253 pounds (it should be noted that their approximation deviates significantly from Bennett's original calculations).

Plant foods, although consumed in small quantities by pre-contact Coast Salish peoples, were nonetheless mentioned by current Stó:lō elders and community members when discussing 'country' or traditional fare.<sup>12</sup> Helen Joe noted that her grandmother had instructed her and her husband carefully about incorporating vegetables into their children's diets, and conjectured that her two eldest daughters' memories of visiting their great-grandmother would include "spaghetti, green salad, and green beans."<sup>13</sup> Ray Silver recollected that he and his wife used to avoid purchasing tea and coffee as, in his words, "we got wild stuff here"; his grandfather would collect 'swamp' tea<sup>14</sup> in sacks he then hung to dry, and Silver himself gathered rose hips in his youth for his mother to subsequently brew. He further recalled that at one time "tons and tons of fruit" grew on uncultivated plots locally, and listed sugar plums, blue dempseys, prunes, and egg plums to emphasize those varieties formerly available.<sup>15</sup> Kelly likewise described picking stinging nettles as a child, along with crab apples and wild berries (she specifically mentioned blackberries), which were later made into jams.<sup>16</sup> And Steven Point, somewhat dissimilarly from both Silver and Kelly, referred to his mother's backyard garden that apparently contained strawberries, beans, corn, cucumbers, carrots, cherries, crabapples, and egg plums, which would be harvested for canning or use in home-made preserves.<sup>17</sup>

Both Joe's and Point's comments concerning 'traditional' plant foods admittedly deviate from what might be expected: for example, foods that Kelm labeled "newcomer,"<sup>18</sup> and which are commonly known to have indigenous origins elsewhere, are discussed fluidly and in tandem with other 'safely' designated traditional dietary staples. Thus, in Kelly's case "taters" and "rice" are listed alongside fish to comprise a typical traditional meal, despite the fact that potatoes were brought to Stó:lō territory vis-à-vis Hudson's Bay forts

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed list of Stó:lō plant foods, see Kevin Washbrook, "An Introduction to the Ethnobotany of the Stó:lō People in the Area Between New Westminster and Chilliwack on the Fraser River."

<sup>13</sup> Joe interview.

<sup>14</sup> The plant here referred to is also commonly known as Hudson's Bay or Labrador tea.

<sup>15</sup> Silver interview. It is worth noting that Stó:lō territory has elsewhere been described as a "berry-picker's Eden" (Robert J. Theodoratus, "Loss, Transfer, and Reintroduction in the Use of Wild Plant Foods in the Upper Skagit Valley," 37). For a complete list of fruits available to and used by the Stó:lō, see Washbrook, "An Introduction," 15–24.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly interview.

<sup>17</sup> Steven Point interview.

<sup>18</sup> *Colonizing Bodies*, 35.

in the nineteenth century,<sup>19</sup> and that rice was introduced to the Northwest Coast during the 1858 gold rush. Methods of processing both gathered and grown plant foods that might also be identified as blatantly foreign similarly crop up in conversations about professed ‘country’ fare; so while Steven Point discussed canned goods in a ‘traditional’ context, Theodoratus suggested that canning, although quickly picked up by Northwest Coast Aboriginal groups, was pioneered by homesteaders in the late 1890s.<sup>20</sup> However, the *ways* these plant foods were accessed and processed is consistent with longstanding Stó:lō subsistence practices. Theodoratus, referencing Turner’s work, observed that Salishan peoples partly cleared plots of weeds, stones, and brush by controlled burning, and that sod was ‘lifted’ with digging sticks to harvest larger bulbs —neither of which seems a stretch from gardening.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, whereas berries had been preserved in the past by sun drying, or a sped up process whereby fruit was covered with leaves and then hot ashes,<sup>22</sup> canning simply comprised a new means by which to achieve the same end, i.e., retard spoiling. The importance Stó:lō people ascribe either harvesting or gathering foods in culturally appropriate manners, though, is perhaps best revealed in discussions surrounding the spiritual aspects of meat eating.<sup>23</sup>

## Spiritual Nutrition

When asked about traditional hunting and gathering practices, Gwen Point responded:

I don’t know what it is, I just cannot eat store bought meat. I can eat meat that comes from a man that has our teaching, that knowledge, cause it’s not just going out and shooting a deer. There’s a teaching that goes with it. That man has to be right in his heart, and his mind, and how he takes care of the deer, right to when the meat is brought to the people. I don’t know what stores put into their meats. That’s why I’m quasi vegetarian.<sup>24</sup>

Several noteworthy ideas spring from this passage. First, in this case — and as opposed to the above scenarios with plant foods — an obvious discursive dichotomy is established between a type of ‘western’ versus ‘traditional’ food; Point is explicitly averse to ‘store bought’ meats, but she will eat game in specific instances. Second, the ‘right’ contexts allowing her to eat meats involve culturally defined hunting practices, as her description

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<sup>19</sup> Theodoratus, 35–52.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 44–45.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>22</sup> Washbrook, *An Introduction*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Rozin has argued, in part based on Andras Angyal’s views on the matter, that culturally variable objects of disgust are almost always animal products due to both moral and health reservations. See “Why We Eat What We Eat, and Why We Worry about It,” 38–39.

<sup>24</sup> Gwen Point interview, n.d. (from David Schaepe, Marianne Berkey, Jonathon Stamp, and Tia Halstad, *Sumas Energy Two, Inc. Traditional Use Study-Phase Two: Stó:lō Cultural Relations to Air and Water*, 2004).

is somewhat suggestive of a Stó:lō worldview that cast humans and non-humans in “reciprocal social relationships based on mutual respect and autonomy.”<sup>25</sup> Third, her distaste for ‘store bought’ meat is conversely the result of the suspect nature of its origins.

Paul Rozin has suggested that on some level the majority of people believe the adage, “you are what you eat,” in the sense that individuals subconsciously judge cultures who eat boar as boar-like, turtles as turtle-like, and so on.<sup>26</sup> Coast Salish worldview somewhat reflects this precept, as humans and animals are considered extended family<sup>27</sup> — which explains Gwen Point’s declaration that “Salmon is our brother, family, was a person.”<sup>28</sup> According to Old Pierre, as beings with vitality or thought (or in salmon’s case a soul), animals are at once both conscious and watchful of humans’ actions, as well as ready to aid them in times of need; as a result, hunters must to be careful to avoid “improper treatment of game, such as the rude hurling of a hide to the ground.”<sup>29</sup>

This two-pronged deference to animals was ritualized in certain circumstances, as exemplified in the First Salmon ceremonies historically prevalent among Coast Salish communities. In the first instance, by reenacting those oral narratives surrounding how people acquired the knowledge to catch and process salmon, Aboriginal participants reinforced what they believed was an age-old relationship between kin.<sup>30</sup> Alternately, as McHalsie suggests, the ritual was undertaken so that attendants could “thank the salmon for returning every year” and respectfully petition “*him* to return again the next year [emphasis added].”<sup>31</sup>

These culturally prescribed codes of conduct further reveal individual and community desires to avoid spiritual contamination. Rozin also argued that the “you are what you eat” maxim heavily informs both individual and cultural perceptions of what is disgusting; as he explains it, not many people drank (during his own experimental inquiries into the matter) from a glass containing a dead, sterilized fly as “flyness” had somehow entered its contents. “Flyness,” for all intents and purposes, refers to the energy or properties passed from one to another object through touch — in anthropological jargon that concept is dubbed the “law of contagion,” and is integral to sympathetic magic.<sup>32</sup>

For Stó:lō people, object-to-object or person-to-object energy transfers occur in a variety of situations, and not just instances of physical contact. As a consequence, staring longingly at a cookie on a neighbor’s plate, according to Steven Point, is enough to drain

<sup>25</sup> Washbrook, *An Introduction*, 6–7.

<sup>26</sup> Rozin, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Franz Boas, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Fraser River*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Gwen Point interview, June 20, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Washbrook, “An Introduction,” 6.

<sup>30</sup> Pamela T. Amoss, “The Fish God Gave Us,” 58.

<sup>31</sup> Sonny McHalsie, “Are the Spirits Addicted.”

<sup>32</sup> See Rozin, 39–41 for a full explanation.

it of its spiritual value.<sup>33</sup> Or, as Gwen Point maintained, harbouring a negative attitude while prepping or cooking a meal can effectively contaminate the food.<sup>34</sup> The idea then, which she acknowledged in the above passage about hunting, is that a person “be right in [their] heart, and [their] mind” while dealing with foods.<sup>35</sup> When this sort of food handling is achieved, as Joe suggests, the resultant meal provides “not only nutritional food for your body, but. . .also food for the spirit.”<sup>36</sup>

The protocols associated with ritual ‘burnings’<sup>37</sup> exemplify just how much this rationale configures day-to-day Stó:lō activities. Pregnant and menstruating women, given their ritually susceptible state, are barred from preparing and cooking meals lest they inadvertently alter the spiritual substance of the food. Moreover, that prohibition applies not only to the meal prep done immediately prior to the ceremony, but also when foods are preserved throughout the year as canned, dried, and smoked goods may eventually serve ceremonial purposes.<sup>38</sup> Kelly noted that this proscription permeated her traditional education in childhood (her exact words were, “It’s always on our mind”), as her mother had forbade her from picking stinging nettles, drying fish, and even climbing fruit-bearing trees during menstruation.<sup>39</sup> Those involved in food preparation are warned to tieback their hair, as there is a sense that if a strand is burnt along with the food it will carry part of that person’s spirit across to the ancestor realm.<sup>40</sup> More importantly, cooks must “be of good mind” — manifesting what Kelly called ‘poise’ — as they complete their work because negative thoughts jeopardize both the meal and ritual overall.<sup>41</sup>

In light of such cultural taboos, Gwen Point’s switch to partial vegetarianism seems perfectly understandable; as she states, she does not “know what stores put into their meats,”<sup>42</sup> meaning she is unsure about not only their physical, but also their spiritual integrity. Likewise, Steven Point’s brother’s advisory against eating too much hamburger seems reasonable, as any energy possibly obtained from beef is suspect.<sup>43</sup> To clarify, these meats are questionable from a Stó:lō perspective because they are almost certainly metaphysically contaminated in one or each of two ways: either they were inappropriately harvested, or handled, or both. Assembly-line style butchery essentially

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<sup>33</sup> Steven Point interview.

<sup>34</sup> Gwen Point interview, June 20, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Gwen Point interview, June 20, 2007 and Kelly interview.

<sup>36</sup> Joe interview.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Burnings’ involve transferring food, clothing, and blankets to deceased Stó:lō ancestors by placing items in a ceremonial fire. They are usually conducted in the spring and fall of each year, and are considered among “the most important Sto:lo rituals” (Bruce King, “White Conceptualization and Industrial Canning,” 6; Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, “Sto:lo Deceased,” 4–5.

<sup>38</sup> McHalsie, “Sto:lo Deceased,” 6.

<sup>39</sup> Kelly interview.

<sup>40</sup> McHalsie interview.

<sup>41</sup> McHalsie, “Stó:lō Deceased,” 6; Kelly interview.

<sup>42</sup> Gwen Point interview, n.d.

<sup>43</sup> Steven Point interview. Point’s brother had implied, via gesture, that eating hamburger caused dull, witless ‘cow-like’ behaviour.

constitutes the antithesis of proper Stó:lō hunting technique, and buying meat at a grocery store disingenuously distances the meat-eater from that animal's death. For Steven Point, the 'problem' with 'store bought' meat can be summed up as follows:

These kids don't know where chicken comes from. We used to see them walking around and then one day they'd be on the table. . . We used to have to kill them all, cut the heads off, bleed them, boil them, pluck them, clean them, stuff them in bags. Then they're chicken stew the next day. You know, we *knew* where chicken came from. . . That's one thing about the kids. . . they have this idea that there's an endless supply somewhere, that we just need to stop off and buy it from somewhere. . . you know, which is a mistake. . . they don't have an appreciation, right.<sup>44</sup>

## Twentieth Century Changes in Stó:lō Peoples' Health and Diet

There is, of course, also a material aspect to this aversion to 'store bought' foods; Stó:lō people readily associate the above-mentioned historical shift from a traditional to a 'western' diet with a drastic reduction in their physical health. McHalsie, for example, blamed 'store bought' foods for his and his sister's medical conditions, saying:

I think that's why I have diabetes. . . because of those other foods that I used to eat. And my sister Chevy, she has some kind of a thing, she's not—she has to watch her diet too. I don't know what she has, I think she has high blood pressure, or something. . . That's why I straightened out last, yeah, over a year now I quit — I quit all those fatty foods. I quit fast foods. Like I quit. . . sausages, quit pepperoni, quit french fries. . .<sup>45</sup>

His comments are echoed by Joe's opinions concerning her husband's diagnosed diabetes and high cholesterol, as she attributed his ill health to fast foods and eating out at restaurants.<sup>46</sup> Steven Point, in a similar way, pointed to a community-wide concern about 'store bought' high-starch, high-sugar diets — he noted that at a particular gathering an announcement was made to henceforth ban soft drinks from ceremonies in favour of water and fruit juice.<sup>47</sup> Gwen Point also faulted sugar, specifically, for rotting Stó:lō peoples' teeth and, like McHalsie, linked her gallbladder problems to historical changes in Stó:lō dietary practices.<sup>48</sup>

According to scholars like Borré and Thom and Fediuk, (and obviously Kelm, as cited above) their suspicions are not entirely unfounded. Borré claimed that a traditional Inuit diet was healthier than its 'store bought' equivalent, as it was high in quality protein,

<sup>44</sup> Steven Point interview.

<sup>45</sup> McHalsie interview.

<sup>46</sup> Joe interview.

<sup>47</sup> Steven Point interview.

<sup>48</sup> Gwen Point interview, n.d.

polyunsaturated fats, iron, and vitamins, and constituted a healthier source of all nutrients except calcium, vitamin C, and carbohydrate. To better her argument, she cited Schaefer and Steckle's 1980 report, which correlated an increased reliance on 'store bought' foods with high rates of dental caries, acne, obesity, and iron deficiency anemia on reserves.<sup>49</sup> Fediuk and Thom reported that as only 57% of British Columbian Natives consumed meat daily in 1991, there had been drastic reduction in Aboriginal *food security* following the change to a 'store bought' diet.<sup>50</sup> They suggested that statistics indicating that Hul'qumi'num infants experienced high rates of anemia due to inadequate iron intake simply reaffirmed this conclusion — as they stated, “the situation of infants reflects the poor diet of their parents.”<sup>51</sup>

Each of these authors backed their contentions from an 'accessibility' standpoint: Borré outlined the potentially harmful effects of recent sealskin embargos on Inuit subsistence hunting, as pelt sales previously afforded hunters with necessary cash to buy hunting supplies;<sup>52</sup> and Fediuk and Thom discussed Coast Salish peoples' shift towards 'market' as opposed to traditional foods in light of government-imposed restrictions on harvesting and post-contact era poverty.<sup>53</sup> Their perspectives reflect Drèze and Sen's theory of entitlement connecting social determinants and hunger (a type of prolonged food insecurity), although neither party referenced this concept directly. Drèze and Sen had determined that access to food, or *entitlement*, was based on individual command over alternative commodity bundles given prevailing legal, economic, and political arrangements. Or, put another way, they had suggested personal food security depended on both intrinsic ownership of a means to produce or gain food (*endowment*) and/or what can be acquired through (market) exchange.<sup>54</sup>

According to King, Stó:lō faced increasing restrictions on fishing throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whether for commercial or subsistence purposes. While the development of the canning industry in the Fraser Valley was originally a “temporary boon” to Native peoples (as they were able to stock and work in the canneries due to British Columbia's small population), it later inspired limiting legislation like A. C. Anderson's 1882 prohibition on Indian commercial fishing.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, canneries' overfishing, resulting from rapid rises in production, lead to observations by non-Native parties that *Aboriginal* fishers took too many fish, and that Native subsistence fishing “should be dispensed with in the way of other foods, such as canned pilchards or other food products rich in iodine and oil.”<sup>56</sup> Ensuing bans on reef nets, fish weirs, and other Native fishing technologies, along with prohibitions on Aboriginal people either selling

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<sup>49</sup> “Seal Blood, Inuit Blood, and Diet,” 57.

<sup>50</sup> For their purposes, food security was defined as “adequate access [to] affordable, high quality foods that are culturally acceptable.” (“Contemporary and Desired Use,” 6.)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> “Seal Blood,” 57.

<sup>53</sup> pp. 4–5, 10–14.

<sup>54</sup> *Hunger and Public Action*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> pp. 15–16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–18.

or obtaining too much deer meat,<sup>57</sup> accordingly severely decreased Stó:lō peoples' initial *endowments* as well as market opportunities to procure food by other means. That stated, Stó:lō peoples' use of welfare, or government food vouchers, and wage labour — or their development of “moditional” economies, to quote John Lutz<sup>58</sup> — in addition to subsistence activities temporarily provided for their dietary needs. So although, for example, the Department of Indian Affairs issued relief rations in 1928 to First Nations limited to twenty-four pounds of flour, two pounds of sugar, and whatever beef, pork, fish, bacon, or beans \$2.00 could buy, a standard Seabird Island menu even decades later still incorporated ‘country’ salmon along with lettuce and potatoes to comprise a healthy meal overall.<sup>59</sup>

After WWII, however, Stó:lō people lost opportunities to successfully navigate between various economic ventures. Lutz reported that British Columbian Natives' involvement in wage labour increased by 400 percent from 1940 to 1942, and that by 1945 Aboriginal dependence on welfare in BC had dropped to two from nine percent as recorded ten years previously. During this interim, when Stó:lō and other Aboriginal people spent less time pursuing subsistence activities, the provincial Game Department and the Department of Fisheries implemented new restrictions on food licenses issued to subsistence harvesters. Aboriginal labourers, later ousted from their jobs when veterans returned, soon discovered that hunting and fishing were largely no longer viable.<sup>60</sup> Annie Alex said that whereas her family had spent a significant amount of time engaged in subsistence activities prior to the War, afterwards “they got convicted for hunting.”<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Gwen Point suggested that the switch to a ‘store bought’ diet was precipitated by restrictions on hunting and fishing, stating:

To get store-bought bread — our families didn't get it because they wanted it, [but] because they restricted hunting, restricted our fishing more and more, restricted our areas more and more. . .our families had to rely on the local grocery guy's just small selection. And [he] charged high prices sometimes. . .<sup>62</sup>

The DIA's 1946 decision to newly emphasize protein-rich foods in their monthly relief schedule (including tinned vegetables, fresh meat, beans, and peanut butter) effectively signaled the change in times: “[n]ever in the seventy-year history of Aboriginal welfare in British Columbia had Aboriginal people not been able to obtain sufficient protein from their traditional subsistence activities.”<sup>63</sup> The fast-paced nature of modern living further

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<sup>57</sup> Following the First World War, Aboriginal hunters were restricted to harvesting three deer per annum during a four month open season. (Liam Haggarty, “A Cultural History of Social Welfare Among the Stó:lō,” 25.)

<sup>58</sup> Lutz coined the term to describe economic systems combining modern and traditional pursuits to maximize adaptability and reduce dependence on a single economic pursuit (Haggarty, 19).

<sup>59</sup> Kelm, 34–35.

<sup>60</sup> Haggarty, 27.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Gwen Point interview, June 20, 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Haggarty, 28.

confounded efforts to eat traditionally: Joe recalled a time when she would pick up fast food over cooking a meal, as it was easier in light of her family's busy schedule<sup>64</sup>; and Washbrook recounted that many informants' sole remarks about plants as food were that people were too 'rushed' or "live too fast now" to bother with their collection.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

Neither Kelm's historical account nor Washbrook's symbolic assessment of Stó:lō "talk" about (plant) food entirely encapsulates Stó:lō perceptions regarding traditional dietary practices. In discussing the historic shift from a 'country' to a 'store bought' diet, Stó:lō community members both highlighted the spiritual superiority of their traditional foods — or more accurately, methods of food production — and their people's ill health in the later twentieth century. Day-to-day rhetoric among Stó:lō conversationalists holds up healthier and metaphysically pure traditional foods over physically and spiritually contaminated 'store bought' foods. Certain plant foods tentatively bridge an interesting theoretical middle ground in the sense that newcomer fruits and vegetables can fit a 'traditional' mold.

With this rather flexible dichotomy in mind, it becomes apparent that the entire debate between traditional vs. 'store bought' foods forms a part of a larger Stó:lō discussion about the effects of 'contact' — if 'contact' is defined as "a series of moments that occurs repeatedly, and yet somewhat distinctively each time people speak across cultures."<sup>66</sup>

When Stó:lō people talk about the 'power' of traditional foods they are articulating instances of beneficial liminal exchange between their and newcomer cultures. For example, when Gwen Point described her white classmates' enthusiasm over her salmon and bannock lunches<sup>67</sup> she was also relating a case of cultural indemnification and affirmation. Conversely, when Stó:lō people thrash out the negative consequences of the move away from traditional food use, they are in actuality discussing 'contact' gone badly, or the adverseness of the colonial encounter.

Part of a conversation with Helen Joe about traditional food use provides an exemplary case in point. The Stó:lō label for Europeans, *xwelitem* (which loosely translates to 'the hungry ones'), was brought up, but with only a passing reference to the meaning inherent in its original usage.<sup>68</sup> Instead the term was contextualized to (playfully) tease my fellow researcher and I about our seemingly insatiable desire for knowledge: for the moment, food 'talk' was used to jokingly characterize a particular and reoccurring aspect of

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<sup>64</sup> Joe interview.

<sup>65</sup> Washbrook, "Plants and Medicine," 3.

<sup>66</sup> Keith Thor Carlson, "Reflections on Indigenous History and Memory," 54.

<sup>67</sup> Gwen Point interview, June 20, 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Joe recounted that when Indians on the Fraser first encountered Europeans they were famished and required charity in the form of food; hence, they were *literally* hungry. Joe interview.

Native-newcomer cases of ‘contact’ — white people are incorrigibly curious and constantly questioning. When asked about a possible third implied meaning of the word involving European ‘hunger’ for and exploitation of resources, Joe reflected that

that [attitude]’s taken over some of our culture as well. Overfishing and logging by some people — it’s how they learned to survive. Traditionally, people only took what they needed. They would only smoke so much salmon because they would only eat so much.<sup>69</sup>

She then added disapprovingly that she had partly adopted consumerist mannerisms towards food use, as she occasionally purchases more groceries than needed and currently had year-old, unused fish in her freezer.<sup>70</sup> A discussion that originally concerned traditional dietary practices, therefore, quickly and fluidly turned within the course of several minutes to dialogue on cross-cultural relations in which the power dynamic flip-flopped between Aboriginal peoples on top (in the joke) to unfavourably affected (following the acquisition of negative cultural traits).

Significantly, this ‘contact’ scenario comprises just one among many ‘contacts’ between Stó:lō and newcomers where food is of central importance; the true ramifications of this fluctuating and heterogeneous discourse on diet are apparent only when one considers that Albert ‘Sonny’ McHalsie makes *daily*, historically-informed decisions to eat healthier or that Gwen Point swore off ‘store-bought’ meats *altogether* to gain a spiritual nutrition. The mixed sense of regret and cultural-assurance discussed above regarding traditional dietary practices therefore takes on more import in light of that opening quote by Stan Green about the process of ‘taking back culture.’

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<sup>69</sup> Joe interview.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

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