

Ethnohistory Field School Report 2011

Traditional Stó:lō Ways of Conflict Resolution

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Introduction

Conflict is a natural and inevitable part of human relations. Confrontations occur not only when opposed parties do not share the same cultural norms, but also when they belong to the same cultural background. The way we perceive and respond to a conflict is determined by the culture.

The Sto:lo culture provides a distinct lens for understanding the nature of human relations, the manners of dealing with conflicts and restoring justice and harmony between all living things. With time, specific mechanisms of dealing with conflicts have been elaborated by the Sto:lo. A profound analysis of the Sto:lo way of dispute settlement, on the one hand, and its comparison with that of different cultures, on the other, may provide certain important historical and anthropological insights into the problem of conflict resolution. Moreover, it might also reveal some historically anchored models that may have contemporary value. My research is an attempt to raise and address a few relevant issues of such a comprehensive study.

The idea of this research project was initiated by the Sto:lo and identified as being important for their community. So far, little scholarship has been done on the topic. Most of the works in this area contain only a general discussion and do not represent any comparative analysis. However, certain studies have provided a useful background for my work. In his monograph *The Problem of Justice: Tradition and Law in the Coast Salish World* (2001), Bruce Miller depicts three Coast Salish communities, including the Sto:lo, and their attempts to administer internal justice according to their own cultural norms. He devotes much attention to the impact of colonialism on that process, so his interests are more in the present than in the past. Some bright examples of the Sto:lo mechanisms of conflict resolution are offered by Keith Carlson in his monograph *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (2010). Traditional Sto:lo justice principles and practices in their connections with the contemporary system of a community-based justice system are considered by Wenona Victor in her Master's thesis (2001). Those studies introduced me to some findings in regard to the Sto:lo way of conflict resolution and served as a starting point for my own research.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the principles and mechanisms employed by the Sto:lo to resolve conflicts that occurred between their people in the past. Specifically, I focus on the traditional way of conflict resolution that accorded with the Sto:lo culture and differed from the Euro-Canadian legalistic practices. Even more specifically, my research concerns the resolution of internal

conflicts within Sto:lo families and communities, rather than those with “outsiders” (other Native or non-Native people).

This paper argues that among the main principles of the traditional Sto:lo way of internal conflict resolution were open discussion, consensus, and correction, as opposed to punishment. The Elders and *Si:ya:m* were the main respected authorities in dispute settlement process by the virtue of their knowledge and life experience. Although violence was not a rare way of dealing with conflicts, non-violent ways of dispute settlement were privileged in dealing with internal conflicts.

The findings of my research are revealed in several steps. First chapter is devoted to the basic principles of the Sto:lo culture that determined the way of conflict resolution. Some common types of conflict resolution are described in the second chapter. The next chapter is an attempt to reveal some current issues in regard to the Sto:lo way of conflict resolution. Finally, concluding remarks are made about certain challenges I faced while working on this research.

Such research methods as interviewing (oral history), ethnohistory field work, and critical analysis of primary and secondary sources were employed for this project.

My primary source of data comes from 4 interviews conducted with four Sto:lo men during the Ethnohistory Field School with the Sto:lo Nation in May of 2011. My interviewees were chosen by suggestions of the supervisors of our Field School and the officials of the Sto:lo Research & Resource Management Centre. The informants for this project were: 1) Sonny McHalsie, Cultural Advisor at the Stó:lo Nation office; 2) Francis Charlie, Qwi:qwelstom Justice Worker; 3) Herb Joe, Cultural Advisor at the Sto:lo Nation Child and Family Services; 4) Jeff Point, member of the Sto:lo Treaty Advisor Board and an Elder from Skowkale First Nations. The first two men on this list are respected cultural leaders of the Sto:lo Nation, and the last two are the Sto:lo Elders.

By no means is it an exhaustive list of all informants for my research. This paper could have possibly benefited from a greater number of interviews. I admit that geographical representation of my informants could have also been broader since my sample of informants covers only the Central and Upper Fraser Valley. In addition, because I did not have an opportunity to conduct interviews with Sto:lo women, this paper does not reflect the possible difference between the ways men and women perceive conflicts resolution process. Thus, for the further research of this subject, informants' social differentiation and diversity of personal experiences must be thoroughly accounted for.¹

¹ The problems of selection the informants are examined in: Kirin Narayan, “How Native Is a “Native” Anthropologist?” *American Anthropologist*, 95 (3) (1993): 671-686. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/679656>. 29 April 2011. Alexander Soucy, “The Problem with Key Informants,” *Anthropological Forum*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2000): 179-199. EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete, 2 May 2011.

All interviews for this research were conducted as open-ended semi-structured interviews. I had one introductory question and a list of general questions I wanted to explore. However, my priority was to follow the natural flow of the interviewees' narratives and not to interrupt or direct them. Thus, in the first place, my questions arose from what had been said by an interviewee, and only then – from the prepared list of questions.

Before moving further, two important terminological comments should be made. Firstly, I use terms “conflict” and “dispute” in my paper interchangeably. However, many conflict scholars draw a distinction between those terms. For example, John Burton suggests that *disputes* are short-term issues over physical possessions that are relatively easy to resolve, while *conflicts* are long-term problems over seemingly non-negotiable issues that relate to ontological human needs that cannot be compromised.² However, I do not distinguish between the two terms in my paper. According to the ethical and scholarly protocols of oral history research, it was inappropriate to impose a terminological distinction that originates in the Western scholarly tradition on the Sto:lo people. Besides, the interviewees were using both terms interchangeably during the flow of their narratives. In addition, a strict distinction between “conflict” and “dispute” seems unsuitable because of a possible linguistic problem of finding an appropriate translation for these words in the Sto:lo language, Halq'emeylem.

Thus, in this paper, *dispute* and *conflict* are used as synonyms and both describe serious short-term or protracted periods of disharmony between two or more people that are caused by disagreements over material resources or ideas.

Secondly, we should specify what we mean under the term *traditional* with regard to the Sto:lo way of conflict resolution. Does it mean practices and principles that used to be applied for the conflict resolution process before the contacts with Europeans? Does it include the nineteenth century practices, or the twentieth century? What about today?

When I started my interviews, I asked my informants to tell me about "the Sto:lo way of resolving conflicts."³ I did not specify the time frame of my inquiry. My informants addressed to oral tradition and decided to speak about stories that were told to them by their parents and grandparents – about their own experience and the experience of their ancestors. Some stories, relatively fewer in number, concerned my informants' own experiences, and they clearly indicated whether or not the

² John Burton, “Conflict Resolution As a Political Philosophy,” in *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and Application*, edited by Dennis Sandole and M. H. Van (Manchester, 1993), 55.

³ An introductory question for all my interviews sounded in the following manner: "I will be grateful if you agree to share your knowledge with me about resolving conflicts within your Sto:lo community. If there is a disagreement, how do you settle it? Who usually reconciles people? How?"

conflicts were resolved traditionally. Sometimes my informants indicated that there was no particular practice of conflict resolution nowadays, or it was obvious from their narratives that certain “old” practices simply cannot be applied today. Thus, I conclude that my informants' stories have revealed the principles and practices of the Sto:lo ways of conflict resolution that were inherent to the Sto:lo culture before the contact with Europeans and, in most cases, were widely practised at least until the beginning of the twentieth century. In this paper, I identify them as “the traditional way.” By no means am I going to say that those practices are frozen in time and have completely disappeared. Some of them are still used today, some have been modified, and some have vanished. In addition, the concept of the “traditional” is one of the highly controversial terms in history and anthropology and might imply negative meaning. For the purpose of this paper, I would like to dissociate myself from those debates. I would like to stress that the purpose of my paper is to reconstruct some of the past practices, to which I am impartially applying the term *traditional*, i.e. such methods of conflict resolution that were common during the time when the Sto:lo were virtually unaffected by the European influences.

Last but not least, I would like to say that I am indebted to my informants for their cooperation and willingness to share their knowledge with me. I was impressed by their treating their knowledge as something that had been shared with them and was now to be passed on to others. It would have been impossible for me to write my paper without their help.

Research challenges

During my work on this research, I faced certain challenges that I am going to describe in this chapter. I would like the reader to perceive all findings and conclusions of my research in this light.

First of all, I felt that it was a challenge for me as a person of another culture to research the Sto:lo history and culture. Because I am not a Sto:lo person, it is not very easy to comprehend the Sto:lo traditional knowledge and spirituality and put it into academic framework. There is always a fear to misinterpret or to use that knowledge in an inappropriate context. Ethnohistory researchers are distanced from the culture they are trying to comprehend. In addition, their ways of thinking are unavoidably influenced by their own worldviews.⁴ My identity as Ukrainian and Christian, to name only a few components of this complex notion, inevitably influenced my work. However, being aware of certain limits of my research, I still tried to comprehend the Sto:lo culture. The goal of my work is understanding. I spent one month within the Sto:lo community and tried to use all benefits of the

⁴ John Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver, 2008), 26.

Ethnohistory Field School and my scholarly training in order to understand the Sto:lo worldview, particularly their conflict resolution system. My research is an attempt of an outsider to get an access to and interpret others' points of views, and to lead a dialogue with another culture by its own terms.

The second challenge has to do with certain obstacles to an accurate reconstruction of the former Sto:lo way of conflict resolution. First of all, a question about reliability of the oral history interviews may arise. As Bruce Miller indicates, many Coast Salish Elders grew up in circumstances with limited access to justice practices. Because of the residential schools policy, they had limited, if any, experience in observing the way their Elders resolved conflicts. Coast Salish communities were restricted in their ability to perform traditional ways of justice practices. In addition, policy of the residential schools was aimed to break the transmission of the Native language. But language is not only a method of communication. It embraces culture. Thus, breaking the knowledge transmission also meant breaking the transmission of key ideas, including also those related to conflict resolution.⁵ My informants recognized that they had limited access to their traditional culture when they were young. As some of them confided, they “came back” to their culture in their mature ages.

However, that forced interruption in the transmission of cultural knowledge is only one part of the problem. Another research challenge is the nature of oral history narratives. As Julie Cruikshank indicates, oral tradition is an open-ended system of constructing and transmitting knowledge. It cannot be treated simply as evidence of “facts” and analyzed retrospectively. Oral tradition is a part of the present-day social process: it answers contemporary questions and tries to resolve current issues.⁶

Thus, it is not quite appropriate to perceive my informants' stories only as evidence of the past. Their oral accounts inevitably depend on the context in which they are performed. What is that “context”? As Bruce Miller argues, such a contemporary context that shapes Sto:lo Elders' narratives might be “a current pressure to present idealized versions of honoured predecessors' live.”⁷ In addition, attempts to present contemporary problems as a result of ignoring traditional Sto:lo culture might be observed. In such a way, the “past” is described as ideal and is used as a means to influence the future.⁸

In favour of his argument, Bruce Miller shows certain divergence that developed in perspectives and reflections about Sto:lo justice with time. Sto:lo Elders, who were interviewed for Wilson Duff's

⁵ Bruce Miller, *The Problem of Justice: Tradition and Law in the Coast Salish World* (Lincoln, 2001), 55-56.

⁶ Julie Cruikshank, “Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues,” in *The Canadian Historical Review*, 75 (3) (1994): 403-422. ProQuest. <http://proquest.umi.com.cyber.usask.ca>. 2 May 2011.

⁷ Miller, *The Problem of Justice*, 55.

⁸ Ibid. Bruce Miller refers to the conception in: Ann Fienup-Riordan, “The Yupiit Nation: Eskimo Law and Order,” in *Essays: Yup'ik Lives and How We See Them*, edited by Ann Fienup-Riordan (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 192-220.

fieldwork in 1952, focused on practice of exiling, deserting, and killing those who caused troubles to the community. However, as Bruce Miller points, in more recent interviews, Sto:lo Elders focused on less striking causes of community disharmony.⁹

So, the value of oral history testimonies is not only, or even necessarily, the documentation of the past, but also revealing the people's present perceptions of the past. But it is one of the merits of the oral history research rather than its shortcoming. However, due to my research possibilities and methodology, the aim of my research is to reveal the Sto:lo way of conflict resolution in the past. I recognize that life experiences of my informants and contemporary social context influenced their stories that I was told. In order to refine the collected data from the contemporary influences and a cobweb of memory, I tried to focus on general principles and cultural values of the traditional Sto:lo conflict resolution process. My strategy was to search for underlying principles and methods that guided the traditional process of conflict resolution. I divided each interview into its descriptive and judgemental parts. In order to reveal the Sto:lo traditional rules and types of conflict resolution, I analyzed descriptive parts of the my interviews. Judgemental parts were used to extricate information about informants' today's perception of the past tradition of conflict resolution.

Despite all my efforts, I admit that my analysis might be not thoroughly refined from all research obstacles that I described. Moreover, some unidentified challenges might be also present. My work asks, but fails to answer, many questions. But controversy is a natural part of the historian's work. More or less, but we are limited in our capacity to fully comprehend the past. To my mind, one mitigation we can do is to be always conscious of our limitations in understanding others and to be ready to acknowledge them. In my paper, I provided an initial analysis of the traditional Sto:lo way of conflict resolution. I hope it will be helpful for the future researches as a starting reference.

I. Main principles of the Sto:lo way of conflict resolution

1.1. Balance and Harmony

There were some significant principles in the traditional Sto:lo culture that regulated the nature of human relations. It is important to describe them because they defined the basis of the Sto:lo way of dealing with conflicts.

⁹ Miller, *The Problem of Justice*, 128-130.

Interconnection of all living life was a very important part of the traditional Sto:lo worldview. According to that belief, inappropriate behaviour hurts not only a troublemaker but the entire family and community. As Jeff Point explained, health is one the main principles that leads Sto:lo people. It is not limited to physical health of one person. It connects the whole family. If you do something wrong, it disturbs the health of your family.¹⁰ It was also clarified by the Sto:lo Elder Leonard George in his interview to Wenona Victor: “any kind of dysfunction that is happening on the reserve, it doesn’t hurt just the family, it hurts the whole village, everybody feels it.”¹¹

Thus, it was significant to maintain balance and harmony between people for the well-being of the whole community. That constituted an essential part of the Elder’s teachings. By the virtue of their experiences, the Elders possessed significant knowledge and skills for resolving disputes. They controlled and corrected children's behaviour and taught younger generations such important components to Sto:lo justice as respect, sharing, and humility.¹² As Wenona Victor indicates, the Elders were the means by which teaching about balance and harmony were transferred, protected, and achieved.¹³

So, teaching about balance and harmony was supposed to prevent a harmful behaviour and conflicting relations. It defined an attitude to conflict as to something that hurt not only the antagonists but the whole community. Thus, it forced to restore balance and harmony as soon as possible.

1.2. The reference point in conflict resolution

Traditional teaching was the prime guideline in conflict resolution. In the Native culture, knowledge was passed down from one generation to another by the means of oral tradition. Teaching was some kind of unwritten law that was transferred by the Elders and determined the way of conflict resolution. Jeff Point started his interview by explaining the significance of the teaching:

There has been many disputes, really, amongst our people. And our Elders have a way we settle that. The teaching of our people has a great deal of... if you follow the teaching – it’s been put, bestowed on you, from a child up, then it is easy to settle a dispute then – does not matter what kind of dispute you are in... So, if you’ve been brought up culturally-wise and within our teaching, then you’ll agree with this, but if not – then you argue. But... that’s when... like today, if there is this dispute, and if we don’t have the teaching – you’re gonna be in trouble.¹⁴

¹⁰ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

¹¹ Quoted in Wenona Victor, “Searching For the Bone Needle”: The Sto:lo Nation's Continuing Quest For Justice,” Master of Arts thesis (Simon Fraser University, 2001), 84.

¹² Victor, “*Searching For the Bone Needle*,” 75.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

In reference to another conflicted situation, Jeff explained that the leader of the longhouse referred to “the rule of longhouse” in his choice of a resolution to a conflict:

So, the leader of the house said then... he had to do something, and he told his grandparents [grandparent of the troublemaker], “It is a rule of the house...This is the way it is written [figuratively] that we have to deal with this. It was passed down and we have to do these things. It is not my law, it is a law of our house.” And the grandparents did not say anything, because he was right. They knew the law. And if the leader did not do what he was supposed to do, then they would take him off. And the dispute would go over the same person.¹⁵

As Jeff summarized, that conflict was resolved by reference to the teaching. So, teaching, not personal preferences, appears to have determined the way of dealing with trouble-makers. Dan Milo, in his interview with Oliver Wells (1964), described one type of conflict in which such a method of resolving conflict was chosen: a trouble-maker was left in the mountains and the whole village abandoned its previous location and moved away. It is important to note that a trouble-maker was a son of “the head man of the village”. And it was an initiative of that head man to abandon his child:

And the head man of those people that lived there, he had a little son, a small little kid, and that kid gets so rough and killed other kids. And he couldn't do nothing with his little child. He told his friends: "The only way we can do is to leave my kid. We'll leave him. We'll move away from here." That's what he told all his friends. That little boy, he killed quite a few of them other kids, you know. So, well, they all agree.¹⁶

A similar story was recorded by the cultural anthropologist Wilson Duff in 1952. According to that story, a grandfather of the trouble-maker called all people of the village and said that everybody was to move away and to leave his grandson behind.¹⁷

Thus, from the stories told by the Sto:lo Elders, it appears that a traditional protocol of conflict resolution was passed down in the form of teaching and was supposed to be implied to everybody involved in a specific type of conflict.

1.3. Consensus and correction

Consensus was an important principle of the traditional Sto:lo way of conflict resolution. It meant working together, through open discussion, toward reaching a mutual agreement on how to best repair the harm and restore balance and harmony to the disrupted relations. It allowed all members of

¹⁵ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

¹⁶ Interview with Dan Milo, July 29, 1964. In *Oliver N. Wells Interview Collection, 1961-1968* (Archive at the Sto:lo Research & Resource Management Centre), 26.

¹⁷ Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia* (Victoria, 1953), 89.

the Sto:lo community to be directly involved in the justice process.¹⁸ Herb Joe stressed this principle in his interview:

The intent is to find resolution for the conflict through family discussion, open family discussion. And using (of course, contemporary language) “**work towards consensus**”; and at the end of the day, hopefully, we can all walk away with a solution that everyone can live with.¹⁹ [Emphasis added]

The primary aim of the Sto:lo conflict resolution process was to correct a wrong behavior rather than to punish for it. In her research, Wenona Victor indicates that the Elders tried to correct guilty or troubled people without offending them and with an intention to teach them something positive. After correcting the behavior, an observation period followed in which the Elders would watch person's behavior and praise his/her changes for better.²⁰ For example, Leonard George, Wenona Victor's informant in 2000, was first brought to the public gatherings and forced to rebuilt the fence and chopped enough wood for the Elders because of his wrong behavior. After complying that, “he was once again placed in front of the community in a public gathering. But this time he was honored for having completed what was asked of him.”²¹

1.4. Nonviolence

Another significant aspect of the Sto:lo way of conflict resolution was the prerogative of the non-violent way of resolving disputes. As it was pointed by Herb Joe:

Historically our families originated up in the Chilliwack River Valley... the way we conducted ourselves, evolved sort of “in-house”, in a community that was relatively isolated where everyone was related to one another, so the way to resolve conflict became a way that one would do it within a family, a biological family. It evolved into conflict resolution that didn't have, necessarily, violence. Like, for instance, in Europe, in medieval times, conflict between two families often was resolved by two knights fighting it, then the victor was declared the victor of the conflict as well as the fight, that kind of conflict resolution. Well, our people, the Ts'elxweyéqw who are now part of the Stó:lō, didn't have that sort of conflict resolution within our families, so we found other ways of doing that... In most parts, our people preached non-violent conflict resolution.²²

It must be stressed that violence was not eliminated as a way of dealing with conflicts. However, it was the last resort. Initially, several meetings – by family members, the Elders, villages

¹⁸ Frank Charlie. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 11 May, 2011. Transcript.

¹⁹ Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

²⁰ Victor, “*Searching For the Bone Needle*,” 71.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

²² Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

leaders – were gathered where the way of correcting a harm behavior was discussed. Only if that did not help, a severe punishment was used as a method to end a conflict.²³

In the interviews that I conducted and read from other sources, it was rarely mentioned about violence in conflicting situations. As Herb Joe admitted, “there wasn’t as much talk about historic warriors and a warrior society. There was very little talk about that all from my teachers.”²⁴ However, “little talk” does not necessarily mean absence of violent ways of resolving conflicts. I presume that some weighty reasons could be justified that “silence”.

First of all, non-violent way had a priority before violence. It was the first stage of settling conflicts where many disagreements were resolved. It was important to teach children first and foremost non-violent methods of resolving disputes. Maybe, the goal was to present non-violence as prime, if not a sole way of resolving conflicts. As Herb Joe told us,

My teachers, they always tried to lead me the other way, to teach me how to be patient, and humble. They said “That’s the kind of *siyá:m* we want you to be, we don’t want you to be a warrior and kill other people.”²⁵

An interview with Chief Frank Malloway, conducted by Heather Myles and Tracey Joe in June 1996, prompted me to consider the second reason for avoiding stories about violence in the Elders' narratives. Frank Malloway explained that history of violence could hurt people and must be avoided for this reason:

Even though today all the Sto:lo villages are closely knit, in earlier times there were disputes among different Sto:lo tribes. There was always some people trying to claim more territory. They used to use these big war canoes for those raids... I don't know how often they happened, but in every community there was always one leader who would lead his people and try to get more territory or wealth. It stopped when he was killed or whatever. We never hear how often these things happen... you don't hear it too much, people do not talk about it. You might create friction and family disputes right among our own people, and its past history, its past history. It shouldn't be talked about, and that's the reason I think a lot of these stories about battles was put in the black. You don't bring it up no more or you'll start a fight again. So they weren't recorded as history.²⁶

²³ Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript; Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript; Interview with Dan Milo, July 29, 1964. In *Oliver N. Wells Interview Collection, 1961-1968* (Archive at the Sto:lo Research & Resource Management Centre), 26.

²⁴ Herb Joe. Interviewed by Tylor Richards, 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Interview with Chief Frank Malloway of Yakweakwioose, June 1996, conducted by Heather Myles and Tracey Joe,” In *You Are Asked to Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History*, edited by Keith Carlson (Chilliwack, 1997), 9-10.

Thus, my sources allow me make the following conclusion. Violence was one of the mechanisms of conflict resolution. But because violence could lead to further conflicts, non-violent way of resolving internal disputes had a priority. For the purpose of this paper, prime principles and methods in resolving an intercommunity rivalry were avoided. Oral histories, archival and archeological evidence, facts of existing warriors – all that indicate a broad range of inter-community violence.²⁷ In this case, the priority of principles and rules in conflicts between the Sto:lo and “others” requires further thorough investigation. Were there other mechanisms, except warfare, to resolve intercommunity disputes? If so, how often were they applied? By whom? To my mind, the Sto:lo concept of “violence” must be also thoroughly analyze. It might imply different meanings in the Sto:lo and European traditions.

All the principles described in this chapter should be bore in mind when considering different types of conflict resolution. They formed that important basis on which most types of conflict resolution in the Sto:lo community were grounded. However, that list does not pretend to be an exhaustive and requires further revision and specification. Especially, possible regional differences must be taken into account.

II. Traditional Sto:lo mechanisms of conflict resolution

After examining certain basic principles that determined the traditional Sto:lo way of dealing with conflicts, we can proceed with the review of some particular mechanisms of conflict resolution. For the most part, the following analysis was done on the basis of my interviews and some extra interviews with the Sto:lo Elders conducted by other researchers.

Putting into practice, the Sto:lo way of conflict resolution was traditionally implemented through several stages. Different authorities and mechanisms were applied at each stage. Let us define those processes in turn.

2.1. “Talking”

Usually, “talking” to trouble-makers and conflicting persons was the first stage of conflict resolution and had a priority before others methods. “Talking” through the open discussion was guided by the authoritative and respectful people.

²⁷ Bill Angelbeck, “Conception of Coast Salish Warfare, or Coast Salish Pacifism Reconsidered: Archaeology, Ethnohistory, and Ethnography,” In *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, edited by Bruce Miller (Vancouver, 2007), 260-284.

My informants recognized the Elders' primary role in settling family disputes. For example, Herb Joe explained:

In my own family, for instance, it's either my wife or I or both of us, as the grandparents in our family, that normally address any of the issues of conflict between family members. What we'd normally do would be to intervene, and address the issue with the individuals involved... the initial intervention would be by us – my wife and I, as the senior members of our family.²⁸

Sometimes grandparents felt that they were very subjective and could not resolve conflicts between their children in a fair way. Then they “could bring their children before a renowned *siyá:m*... In this case of conflict resolution, the people would go to the *siyá:m* and choose to have the *siyá:m* to solve the issue, resolve the conflict.”²⁹ So, when it was impossible to settle disputes within families, the Elders applied to the *siyá:m* as a third party in the resolution process. In Halq'emeylem, *Siya:m* means “leader”. Good, “traditional” *siya:m* did not domineer over people. They were wise, generous, and modest people who talked to others. That is why their advice was accepted. Pacifism was one of their hallmark.³⁰

Confrontations between two villages were resolved by discussing the issues at the gatherings by the *siya:m* and the family leaders. If they could not reach an agreement at that level, then a broader public was involved: “the *siyá:m* or leaders of all the families in the tribal territory [sat at] a leaders conference and [discussed] the issues.”³¹

An interview with Jeff Point proposes an interesting insight into the question of the main authorities in the conflict resolution process between two communities. As Jeff indicated, a dispute around fence between two reserves, Skowkale and Yakwekwioose, was resolved by a man who had a respect amongst people:

He said, “It [a fence between reserves] goes right here.” And they listened. Because he had a **respect**, he was a **leader** amongst that people. **They did not think twice about it**. And he was a **leader**, he was a leader of the people.³² [Emphasis added]

In another story that was recalled by Jeff, a conflict between two villages was resolved by a man who did not belong to either of the conflicted villages. That man:

²⁸ Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Keith Carlson, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto, 2010), 234-235.

³¹ Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

³² Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

...Walked from one village to another and talked good things to people... he was something like a priest or a monk. He did not preach, but he talked to everybody about being kind, help each other, and that kind of things. And he knew all languages. Everybody liked him... And **because he was highly respected, they listened to him.**³³ [Emphasis added]

Those two stories do not specify the social status of the dispute settlers. It is not so important as the affirmation that those persons were highly respected. Because of that, conflicting parties followed the resolutions that were imposed by that respected men.

Sometimes conflicts were finished when it was revealed that conflicting parties belonged to one family. For example, Jeff Point recalled a story about a dispute by two villages. Initially acting in a violent way against each other, these villages were brought to the negotiation table by one extraneous but a very respectful man. "Sitting and talking near the fire", that man reminded them that they were a family:

And they actually were a family. He said, "You all come from one family." Because they were apart within 20-30 miles, they forgot that they were one family. Reunion started.³⁴

It can be implied that one conflict between different families might be accompanied by violence, but the same conflict within one family might be quickly settled. So, non-violent way of dealing with conflicts had greater priority when happened within one family than between different families.

One of the most common ways of resolving conflicts over ownership was the resorting to family history. Again, the Elders were entrusted with resolutions of such disputes because they were holders of important knowledge about genealogies. They knew where other families used to hunt, to fish, and to pick berries. So, they could determine who's descendants had rightful or wrongful claims to particular hunting or fishing grounds.³⁵ A significant example was given by Jeff Point. He had a conflict with one family over the fishing spot that was given to him by his great-great-great-granduncle. When a man who claimed that spot asked for a proof, Jeff referred to that man's mother

³³ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript; Albert (Soony) McHalsie. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 5 May, 2011. Transcript. Problems and conflicts around ownership of the fishing grounds are discussed in: Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us," In *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, edited by Bruce Miller (Vancouver, 2007), 82-130. Keith Carlson, "Innovation, Tradition, Colonialism, and Aboriginal Fishing Conflicts in the Lower Fraser Canyon," In *New Histories for Old: Changing Perspectives on Canada's native Pasts*, edited by Susan Neylan and Ted Binnema (Vancouver, 2007), 145-74.

who witnessed the transferring of that fishing ground to Jeff. In such a manner, a legal owner was identified and the dispute was resolved.³⁶

As Keith Carlson explains, Sto:lo people traditionally had a genealogically based rights of ownership. Those rights were associated with names and transferred through potlatch naming ceremony. An access to ownership and privileges was very important, and if property rights of one family were rejected by other family, violent conflict could emerge. In order to resolve such a conflict, representatives of highest-status families were “called to witness” the potlatch ceremony about the transfer the property rights.³⁷

So, “talking” to conflicting parties was led by the most respectful people at different kinds of gatherings which were initiated in order to discuss the issues and decide how to resolve them. As it was stressed in the first chapter of this paper, my informants avoided stories about violence as a way of dealing with conflicts in the past. However, some other sources indicate that when parties could not come to an agreement, violence erupted.

Bruce Miller, a professor of anthropology at the University of British Columbia, makes such a conclusion relying on the Coast Salish ethnographic materials. He shows that seniors members of the families, as those who were responsible for the behaviour of the members of their families, met together in order to discuss terms of compensation if damage for personnel or property had been done. Very often restitution in forms of gift exchange or services to the family and community was a way to resolve such disputes. But if parties could not reach a consensus, rivalries or blood feuds could happen. Bruce Miller assumes that such a way of dealing with difficulties between families might reflect the dangerous and more violent environment that existed in the middle and late nineteenth century, after the smallpox epidemic and during the period of intense colonial displacement.³⁸

One more interesting insight into the question of the violent way of dealing with conflict is given by Keith Carlson. He shows that if balance was disrupted in a violent way, it could be restored also in a violent way. For example, if somebody was killed during the raiders attack, typically the counterattack against that group would be done. The revenge could be directed at initial offenders as well as at their family members or property. Sometimes even innocent persons could be harmed.³⁹

³⁶ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Ryan Buhay, 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

³⁷ Keith Carlson, “Innovation, Tradition, Colonialism, and Aboriginal Fishing Conflicts in the Lower Fraser Canyon,” In *New Histories for Old: Changing Perspectives on Canada's native Pasts*, edited by Susan Neylan and Ted Binnema (Vancouver, 2007), 148.

³⁸ Miller, *The Problem of Justice*, 64.

³⁹ Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 257-258.

Nevertheless, as it was stressed by the Elders, an attempt to reach an agreement through the “talking” was an initial and prerogative method of dealing with internal conflicts. An open discussion was that means by which a mutual agreement about the way of resolving conflicts could be reached. Grandparents, the Elders, the heads of the house, the *siya:m*, and the most respectful people were the main authorities in conflict resolution. Their knowledge, experience, and respect were the main factors that determined their key positions in the conflict resolution process. That gave them rights to suggest and impose different methods of dispute settlement, such as, for example, resorting to family history, gift exchange, or different services.

2.2. Competition

If conferencing and “talking” did not help to resolve disputes, such method as competition could be used. As I understand, the aim of this type of conflict resolution was to release anger that was caused by a conflict in a safe way through a game. It was important because anger could hinder the contesting parties from finding a solution to their problem. But I also suspect that it is not an exhaustive explanation. There might be a deeper cultural foundation for such a method of conflict resolution.

Herb Joe recalled that he was told by one Elder about gambling as a method of dispute settlement:

What we call *Slahal* is a gambling game – a fun game – a celebration game. They told me that occasionally conflict was resolved that way. You’d compete against each other in a gambling game, where there’s lots of drumming and singing, and vent, if you will, where you’d you sing hard and loud.⁴⁰

Another example of such a kind of conflict resolution was a canoe race: “They’d get men into their canoes and they’d go ten miles that way, ten miles that way, and ten miles back, and the first one back would in the conflict, that kind of thing.”⁴¹

2.3. Banishment and abandonment

Sometimes a person, who was a source of a trouble and danger, did not respond to the initial conflict resolution protocols that were described above. In such cases, in order to secure well-being of all people, a solution was to get rid of the source of a disorder – to get rid of a trouble-maker. Banishment and abandonment were methods that resolved conflicts in such a way.

⁴⁰ Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁴¹ Ibid.

As Herb Joe descried, banishment was “probably the second most serious way of resolving conflict.” It meant the loss of name, family, community, and identity. Neighbouring communities would also know about it and would not accept a disturber as their member. In such circumstances, a wrongdoer had to move to another tribal community that was unaware of the banishment. Only there a possibility of re-establishing as a person with a new identity and self-worth could be found.⁴² As Herb Joe summarized, banishment was not a desirable way of ending conflicts:

Banishment was one of the more distasteful ways of resolution; our siyá:ms would have felt pretty bad about having to banish someone. It would have been like telling your own son that you’re no longer part of my family: “You have to leave now. If you don’t leave, there’s a good chance you’re going to be killed.” It wasn’t a very pleasant way of resolving conflict.⁴³

So, a trouble-maker was forced to leave his/her village. Some other stories demonstrated that all people abandoned their previous villages and relocated to another places. In the story that was recalled by Jeff Point, a trouble-maker was led into the mountains. While he was there, his village moved in unknown direction. And when he came back to his village, nobody was there.⁴⁴

I found a similar story in Oliver Wells's interview with Dan Milo (1964). A little kid from one village started killing other children. Nothing could stop him. Finally, that little boy was led in the woods and left there. All people from the village took off and move away from the village. ⁴⁵ A story with very similar scenario was also recorded by Wilson Duff in 1953. His informant indicated that the story with such a way of conflict resolution happened around 1840.⁴⁶

Some interesting examples of abandonment are mentioned by Keith Carlson in his monograph. For instance, he refers to a story that was told by Chief Harry Edwards during the interview with Oliver Wells in 1964. Harry Edwards recalled a dispute within a tribe around the appropriate placement of a house post, a significant status symbol, within a longhouse. Keith Carlson cites the Chief Edwards' words:

One party was always moving the posts. Well the other party, the other party would move it back again. So, they split up, they split up without getting into a fight, you know; they just split up. Part of them went to Ohamil, and the other party moved over to what you call Cheam now. They split up without any quarrel [violence].⁴⁷

⁴² Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁴⁵ Interview with Dan Milo, July 29, 1964. In *Oliver N. Wells Interview Collection, 1961-1968* (Archive at the Sto:lo Research & Resource Management Centre), 26-27

⁴⁶ Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley*, 42.

⁴⁷ Cited by: Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 129.

Professor Carlson provides one more illustration of the abandonment as a way of conflict resolution. He mentions one story that was told by Bob Joe to Wilson Duff in 1949. According to Bob Joe, there was a dispute on a island near present-day Hope. The slaves population of that community became so large that it was difficult for the slaveowners to retain their serfs obedient. The owners held a council and decided to abandon their island and leave slaves alone.⁴⁸

As those two examples show, abandonment was a method of ending conflict between large groups without resorting to violence. Two conflicting parties separated one from another and physically moved away from the source of conflict. When one person was causing trouble to the rest of the community, a solution was to take a trouble-maker away from the community. Also, an alternative remedy was for everybody to move away. A troublesome person could not find a new place of the village and in such a way a community got rid of a trouble-maker. In such cases, conflicts were also resolved without physical violence.

2.4. Capital punishment

Capital punishment was the most serious way of conflict resolution. It was used when other non-violent methods had been applied and proved to be ineffective. One story, recalled by Herb Joe, demonstrates why a conflict was resolved by killing. There was a conflict between two Sto:lo communities. One community was led by a warrior who claimed a part of the territory that historically did not belong to his tribe. In order to resolve that conflict, a council of the *siyá:m* was gathered. That warrior was invited and suggested to stop laying his unfounded claim. When that did not work, another council of the *siyá:m* was gathered and a relative of that warrior was charged with the duty of looking after that warrior. But when it became obvious that “that warrior wouldn’t back down”, he was invited to the gathering and “a couple of warriors ambushed him and killed him”. As Herb Joe explained,

This gives us insight into the process where, when there were no other alternatives, capital punishment became part of conflict resolution. As I was told, that was the end way of resolving conflict. It wasn’t normal or natural, but obviously our people would get to that point, where if there is no other way to resolve the issue, then capital punishment was part of the resolution of conflict.⁴⁹

It would be interesting to investigate further the question of applying capital punishment. Especially, it is important to determine whether or not capital punishment had the same “priority” while

⁴⁸ Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 141-142.

⁴⁹ Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

settling inter-community conflicts and conflicts within a single family. Was it equally applied? Or was it more preferred in one case than in the other?

It is important to notice that applying violent and non-violent methods of settling conflict was entrusted to different people. Warriors are described in Coast Salish oral histories as “naturally aggressive” men who liked to kill. They participated in large-scale inter-community conflicts and occasional raids, that, naturally, anticipated a violent and aggressive behavior. At the same time, warriors were not paid the same respect as *si:ya:m*, community leaders, who had a reputation of non-violent dispute settlers.⁵⁰

A clear distinction between *si:ya:m* and warriors as people who employed different ways of dispute settlement is evident in the mentioned story recalled by Herb Joe. The council of *si:ya:m* tried to resolve a problem by talking and correcting a behavior of an aggressive violator. When it did not work, a couple of warriors, not *siya:m*, killed him.

III. “I would be better if we moved to a way that our people used to do that things”: traditional Sto:lo way of conflict resolution today

And we do not have that structure [*in regard to the story about conflict resolution - MM*] anymore amongst our people. If we have a dispute on a reserve, anywhere, they call RCMP, and they settle that dispute, or court system does. They do not go back to our own cultural ways. It is unfortunately. But, I think, it would be better if we moved to a way that our people used to do that things.⁵¹

This regret was expressed by Jeff Point in his interview. Other informants articulated similar opinions. In general, they can be summarized as follows: traditional Sto:lo ways of conflict resolution have been seriously altered and almost forgotten.

As my interviewees unanimously recognized, the reasons for breaches the Sto:lo traditional protocol of conflict resolution emanated from the state policy of prohibition to perform cultural practices and forced assimilation policy at residential schools. As Herb Joe explained it:

And the way of course the way residential school taught them [young people] to resolve any type of conflict was through a very autocratic way of resolving issues. Those young people who graduated from residential schools and returned to their

⁵⁰ Keith Carlson, “Intercommunity Conflicts,” In *A Sto:lo Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Carlson (Vancouver, 2001), 48.

⁵¹ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

communities obviously brought that with them. While there was a lot of family dysfunction over that same period, mainly because of those reasons.⁵²

Outcomes of that assimilation policy have destructively effected several generations. They are still tangible today. As Jeff Point told me:

They [young people] do not have discipline; they do not have any teaching. I understood why [they] did not have any teaching – because [they] came from people that did not have any teaching... It is unfortunately. Our people do not really want to have this... They do what they want to do with us. Not civilize us, but assimilate. They have done it. Not even being aware about it. But it happened. It is too bad, but. We are losing that things we have been talked to now [*about the tradition of conflict resolution- MM*].⁵³

Because of “ the huge gap in traditional Native knowledge transmission”, as Frank Charlie defined it, many traditional methods of conflict resolution have been forgotten.⁵⁴ Jeff Point recalled one story about dispute between two villages that he heard from his grandfather. Later he recognized that it was the first time he recalled that story:

They [young generations] do not hear about it anymore. Not like we, like my grandfather used to tell stories. I do not even tell stories. It is first time I told this story.⁵⁵

Sonny McHalsie explained that many conflicts around fishing grounds arise today. Often people do not follow traditional way of their settlement and many conflicts are still unresolved.⁵⁶

Sonny explained that information about your fishing ground is among that knowledge that is attached to your name. Thus, it is very important to know the history of your name and to follow all traditional protocols that are bound with it. However, many people have forgotten about that:

A lot of that cultural information has been lost over years, because of the impact of the smallpox epidemic, missionaries, and of course the assimilation policy of the government. All those different things acted upon us. And, of course, banning of the potlatch. That effectively interrupted the way we did our business. Over the years ownership of the names slightly changed. Most of the names today do not have those things attached anymore.⁵⁷

⁵² Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁵³ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript. See also: Frank Charlie. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 11 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁵⁴ Frank Charlie. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 11 May, 2011. Field notes.

⁵⁵ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁵⁶ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, “We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us,” In *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, edited by Bruce Miller (Vancouver, 2007), 96-97.

⁵⁷ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 5 May, 2011.

Dissociation from traditional practices causes tensions between people. For example, Jeff Point told about one recent dispute around fishing ground: one man claimed a fishing ground of another man while it was not his ancestor's spot and he simply did not have any rightful base for such a claim.⁵⁸ Sometimes people resort to violence while non-violent methods were used in that cases formerly. Sonny McHalsie gave one such an example: twenty years ago, his uncle, who asserted a rightful ownership of the fishing ground, was forced to abandon his ground after being threatened by a Sto:lo man with physical violence.⁵⁹

My informants were convinced that addressing to traditional Elders' teachings and some ways of conflict resolution can alleviate contemporary disagreements between Sto:lo people. For instance, Sonny McHalsie expressed a hope that Sto:lo people would settle disputes around fishing grounds if they knew their family history, history of their names, and were aware of all rights and responsibilities that are attached to their names:

I am hoping that the work you are doing and talking about that, and people will start understanding that, and maybe will start finding out about the things that were attached to the names. Family will find out the places their ancestors use because they are important place to them, they fill obligation to use them, to maintain them. Not only to use, but to take care about it. Hopefully, people start realizing, talking about that things and acting upon them.⁶⁰

So, forgetting the traditional Sto:lo culture and altering its such components as conflict resolution practices were considered by my informants as signs of the present time and harmful influence on the Sto:lo culture and relations between people.

This problem is complicated by the rough co-existence of the Canadian and Sto:lo justice systems. Because those two systems are rooted in different cultures, there are many hardly compatible differences between such Euro-Canadian agencies as RCMP, the Courts, and the Crown Counsel, on the one hand, and Sto:lo justice systems, on the other hand. As Herb Joe explained, adversarial character of Canadian justice system does not fit traditional Sto:lo way of conflict resolution:

Very often – most often, our people weren't educated about the Canadian justice system. They didn't adjust well to the adversarial way that the justice system is set up, where you go into court and there's always a winner and a loser. The way our historic people would resolve those same conflict issues were by consent, consensus, and it ended up everyone being a winner. They went into the Canadian justice system and there was always a winner and a loser. You know the term sore loser? I'm sure that played a part in that those losers would end up feeling very bad about it, and the

⁵⁸ Jeff Point. Interviewed by Ryan Buhay, 18 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁵⁹ McHalsie, "*We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us*," 99-100.

⁶⁰ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 5 May, 2011.

conflict wouldn't really go away. It remained there boiling until more conflict would arise.⁶¹

Frank Charlie stressed that the purpose of the traditional Sto:lo justice is reaching a consensus, healing, encouraging balance, securing equal opportunities for participants to voice their concerns. Those and some other principles distinguish Sto:lo justice from the Western-based model and impede their co-existence.⁶²

An attempt to provide the Sto:lo people with culturally relevant system of justice have been done through the Sto:lo Nation Justice Program. It was implemented in 2000 and received an official Halq'emeylem name *Qwi:qwelstom*.

Qwi:qwelstom has two main objectives. First, because Euro-Canadian agencies cannot adequately resolve problems of the Sto:lo people, the Sto:lo Nation tries to take traditional forms of justice and apply them to contemporary issues.⁶³ Secondly, *Qwi:qwelstom* aims to provide the Sto:lo people with an opportunity to resolve conflicts and experience “justice” according to their culture, to help one another and protect each other to stay strong as culture. It is based upon traditional Sto:lo forms of dispute resolution and allow people to become directly involved in the conflict resolution process.⁶⁴

Qwi:qwelstom is not an independent program. Its activity is restricted by the Crown Counsel and the RCMP who view *Qwi:qwelstom* only as an alternative measures program for resolving minor crimes and conflicts.⁶⁵ Besides that, as Wenona Victor indicates in her Master Thesis (2001), *Qwi:qwelstom* faces two major challenges. First, it is an educational problem: non-Native people and Sto:lo people are not familiar with cultural teachings that guide *Qwi:qwelstom* work. The second challenge is the oppression of colonial ideology of Western superiority that is being passively objected by the Sto:lo people.⁶⁶

Unfortunately, I did not have more recent sources in order to gain information about current challenges that are facing by *Qwi:qwelstom*. It would be especially interesting to describe the way the Sto:lo people perceive its work. How do they feel about a culturally relevant system of conflict resolution? What is the best way for them to deal with conflicts? How is the Sto:lo traditional way of

⁶¹ Herb Joe. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 16 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁶² Frank Charlie. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 11 May, 2011. Transcript.

⁶³ Victor, “*Searching For the Bone Needle*,” 124.

⁶⁴ Frank Charlie. Interviewed by Maria Melenchuk. 11 May, 2011. Transcript. See also: Victor, “*Searching For the Bone Needle*,” 101-124.

⁶⁵ Victor, “*Searching For the Bone Needle*,” 123.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

dispute settlement perceived today by the Sto:lo people in regard to its appropriateness and effectiveness? What Western principles of conflict resolution are adopted and practised by the Sto:lo people? Can Sto:lo people be divided into strict adherents of traditional way of conflict resolution and its strict opponents?

Answering those questions will help to determine and implement some effective ways of conflict resolution that would be driven from the Sto:lo culture and supported by the Sto:lo people. It is also important to ensure protecting and respecting different Canadian and Sto:lo worldviews and cultural bases for the conflict resolution.

Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to reconstruct some basic principles and mechanisms of the traditional Sto:lo way of internal conflict resolution during that time when Sto:lo people were untouched by the European influences.

There were several important features in the Sto:lo culture on which the traditional way of conflict resolution was grounded. A belief in the interconnection of all living things and in the need to maintain harmony and balance lay in the foundation of relations between people. It constituted an important part of the Elders' teaching that was passed down to younger generations. So, the striving to achieve balance and harmony with the others was supposed to prevent a harmful behaviour and conflicting relations. Naturally, such a teaching did not guarantee a non-conflicting existence because conflict is an inevitable part of human relations. In the traditional Sto:lo culture, careful and efficient way of dealing with conflict was elaborated. It was founded on the principles of open discussion, consensus, and correction of a wrong behaviour rather than punishment for it. First and foremost, it concerned conflicts within families. Although violence was not a rare way of dealing with conflicts, non-violent ways of dispute settlement had a privilege in situations of internal conflicts.

I was able to identify several stages and mechanisms of the tradition Sto:lo way of conflict resolution. First of all, a dispute was addressed at the family gathering under the supervision of senior family members. The Elders talked to the persons who were involved in conflicts and tried to find such a solution that would accord with the teachings and approved by other members of the family. Sometimes the Elders brought the *si:yam* as the third party in order to resolve conflicts in a fair and objective way. The Elders and the *si:yam* were trusted to resolve conflicts because they were the most

respected people by the virtue of their knowledge and experience. For example, because of their knowledge of family genealogies, they could approve or disprove the legality of a claim in the conflicts around fishing or hunting grounds.

When it was impossible to resolve a conflict within a family, then a behaviour of a troublesome person could be discussed at a public gathering of all community members. Again, the Elders and the *si:yam* played the leading roles there. Public gathering of all family and community leaders was also a way to resolve disputes between Sto:lo families and communities. At this level, such methods of resolving conflicts as gift exchange, community service, or competition, such as gambling or canoe races, could be used.

In general, “talking” and open discussion played the most important part in the first stage of conflict settlement. Resolution of the problems occurred mostly within a family and was guided by the senior members of the family. If “talking” within the family did not help to correct a harmful behaviour, a wider circle of public was engaged in finding the solution. Elders from other families and the *si:yam*, as family and tribal authorities, would make a suggestion. A priority was given to a mutual consensus – “a solution that everyone can live with.”

If a person refused to amend his/her behaviour in a suggested way and nothing could help to resolve conflict, then banishment or capital punishment were the ultimate methods of an internal conflict resolution. The trouble-maker was led out of the village and abandoned there; in the meantime, all of his/her fellow-villagers would move away from the current village to a new location. Capital punishment was usually implemented by the warriors, not *si:yam*, in order to protect the well-being of other people by eliminating an incorrigible trouble-maker. However, punishment was not a purpose of the traditional Sto:lo justice. The purpose was to correct a wrong behaviour, re-establish the wrongdoer in the community and restore balance between people. Only if nothing could help, then a banishment and capital punishment were resorted to.

Traditional Sto:lo way of conflict resolution has been seriously altered since the contact with Europeans. The state assimilation policy manifested by the prohibition to perform cultural practices and eradication of the Native culture at residential schools suspended execution of the traditional Sto:lo justice for a long time. Moreover, it had a destructive impact on subsequent generations who have to a great extent abandoned, voluntarily or involuntarily, the traditional way of conflict resolution. An attempt to return certain traditional principles and methods of conflict resolution to Sto:lo people has been made through the formal means of dispute resolution – *Qwi:qwelstom*, the Sto:lo Nation Justice

Program. However, the *Qwi:qwelstom* activity is restrained and complicated by the tense co-existence with Canadian justice systems. Still many issues, both external and internal, are causing the Sto:lo Elders to feel disappointment with the contemporary way of dealing with conflicts and express their regret in the words like “it would be better if we moved to the way our people used to do those things.”

* * *

Searching this project, working with the Sto:lo people and Sto:lo culture – all that was a challenging experience for me as for a historian and an individual. I respect the Sto:lo people's manner to reveal their knowledge and perceptions about conflict resolution. Their knowledge were generously presented for me, for an outsider, for a person from different culture. I was entrusted to listen and interpret it. I know that mistakes are possible. But I tried to be open-minded and to reach the ultimate goal of ethnohistory research – understanding. I wish to stress that this research is my own interpretation done through the dialogue with the Sto:lo. I tried to do it in a respectful way. I hope the Sto:lo people will find my research valuable for them.

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