Forgotten Places in Political Spaces

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The way in which many people, perhaps particularly those in secure and affluent circumstances, view their ancestry and heritage and display it to others is often a matter of pride. In some contexts, however, the identification of "ancestors" and "heritage" can have critically important—and sometimes dire—political, social, and spiritual ramifications. Here we examine examples in which archaeological and/or historical evidence points to a distancing or "active forgetting" of ancestors and places associated with them. The motives for creating these "forgotten places" are diverse and might include people's fear of "ghosts" or death, the desire to project a newly constructed or evolved political identity to outsiders or distant relations, as well as a sociopolitical and economic need to distance themselves from their ancestors. In this article we will explore four examples from indigenous settings in northern and eastern Canada where peripheral or forgotten spaces were actively constructed.

La façon dont de nombreuses personnes, peut-être en particulier celles qui vivent dans des circonstances sûres et aisées, considèrent leur ascendance et leur héritage et les montrent aux autres est souvent une question de fierté. Dans certains contextes, cependant, l'identification des « ancêtres » et de « L'héritage » peut avoir des ramifications politiques, sociales et spirituelles d'une importance cruciale, et parfois désastreuses. Nous examinons ici des exemples dans lesquels des preuves archéologiques et/ou historiques indiquent un éloignement ou un « oubli actif » des ancêtres et des lieux qui leur sont associés. Les motifs de création de ces « lieux oubliés » sont divers et peuvent inclure la peur des « fantômes » ou de la mort, le désir de projeter une identité politique nouvellement construite ou évoluée comme des étrangers ou à des relations éloignées, ainsi qu'un besoin sociopolitique et économique de se distancer, eux-mêmes de leurs ancêtres. Dans cet article, nous explorerons quatre exemples de milieux autochtones du nord et de l'est du Canada où des espaces périphériques ou oubliés ont été activement construits.

Introduction

This article was first conceived to provide something of a foil to the conference session discussed in this volume for which presenters were asked to deal with the erroneous historical perception of people and places as "marginal." Instead, we chose to focus on what might be regarded as the phenomenon of intentional self-marginalization. We present examples from Labrador and elsewhere in which people have intentionally recreated their former selves or their ancestors as marginal and peripheral. In this scenario, people actively forgot or distanced themselves from the people they once were or the places they once inhabited, relegating them to an unknown and sometimes toxic past.

Below, we present examples of two different kinds of "past avoidance." The first operates at an immediate and visceral level as a fear of "ghosts" or other poorly understood extra-natural dangers that emanate from the past but are perceived as a continuing threat to well-being in the present. In this case, places associated with bad things (such as death or the failure to follow cultural protocols) may be perceived as haunted in some way by previous misfortunes and transgressions. As a result, these places were avoided to prevent contamination of the present by threats from a dangerous past. In the second situation, the motives for avoiding the places of the past are more complex and can involve high-level political and economic ambitions, as well as the continual reshaping of group identity (Jones 1997). In this latter case, formerly inhabited or formerly used places are associated with an obsolete identity or activity that is seen as incompatible with newly constructed cultural or economic realities. As such, they need to be erased from the collective memory, and their association with the present group identity needs to be hidden or denied. In effect, we argue that these two types of past-avoidance are two facets of the same phenomenon, namely the selective use of past events

and the spaces associated with them in the construction and shaping of the cultural present. We maintain that the avoidance or denial of past places is the other side of the coin of commemoration. Places associated with the past may be selected for commemoration as part of the construction of a present cultural identity, as, for example, in the maintenance of burial monuments and similar memorials because they embody values, events, or people that are supportive of an emerging identity or reality, or because they provide a focus for the reassertion of traditional values. Conversely, some places may have associations that are perceived as a threat to group security or stability, or that contradict a newly evolving identity or reality, and thus need to be "de-commemorated" through avoidance or denial.

Ghosts

Inuit and ASTt Examples

The fear of death, ghosts, and of offending both the spirits and ancestors is a very real concept in many cultures, and such fears are factors in creating marginal spaces that are poorly understood archaeologically. Our first example is drawn from the early 20th-century Moravian records from Okak, Labrador (now Nunatsiavit) (FIG. 1B).

In 1769 King George III of Great Britain granted the Unitas Fratrum and the Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel, a missionary organization of the Protestant Moravian church in Britain, both land and rights to establish missions in northern Labrador for the purpose of evangelizing Inuit. The Okak mission station, which opened in 1776, was the second of eight mission stations operated by the Moravians. By the early 20th century more than 200 Inuit resided around the mission. Moravians taught Inuit the Gospel, as well as reading and writing, in the Inuktitut language. Life skills that the Moravians deemed acceptable were also encouraged, such as the Inuit love of music and sewing. European trade items, including foodstuffs to supplement the traditional Inuit diet of seal and other wild foods, were available to the congregation at the mission trading store. Missionaries boarded in large communal dwelling houses

alongside the church and mission store, while Inuit, who resided at the mission during the winter months, lived close by in traditional sod dwellings. These dwellings were disliked by the Moravians on both moral and hygienic grounds, and often became the subject of sermons (Whitridge 2008: 295).

In 1912, Moravian doctor Samuel King Hutton (1912: 309) noted in his record that the members of the Inuit congregation were slowly beginning to abandon traditional semi-subterranean sod dwellings for their primary residences in favor of ground-level, European-style, wood-framed cabins. Hutton was encouraged by this and believed the shift to cabin dwelling could be equated with the adoption of a more Christian lifestyle. However, Hutton was quick to note the Inuit habit of disassembling their houses only to reconstruct them elsewhere if someone died in the house (Hutton 1912: 295–296) and had to concede that Inuit still observed older spiritual traditions concerning death.

The abandonment of "death houses" is a tradition that appears to be widespread among Inuit in the eastern Arctic. Boas (1888: 613, 1901: 121–22) noted this practice among Inuit of the central Arctic and Baffin Land in the late 19th century. In these regions, Inuit would move those who were ill and dying to their own houses in preparation for death, but, if someone died in an occupied house before these preparations were completed, everything but the tent posts would be destroyed. The posts, like the house frames at Okak, were then re-used elsewhere, and the original location of the house was avoided thereafter. Inuit customs concerning illness and death were often elaborate and undertaken with extreme care so as not to hurt and/or anger Sedna, the principal sea deity whose perilous undertakings had created the sea mammals so significant to Inuit survival. Inuit believed that sea mammals would be harmed through exposure to the contaminating influences of death, and that these beings would avoid the hunters who had encountered death without observing the proper protocols. Moreover, the sea mammals could transfer this pain to Sedna, who could punish human transgressors with sickness, bad weather, and starvation (Boas 1901: 120–122). In order to avoid this wrath, both houses and associated belongings
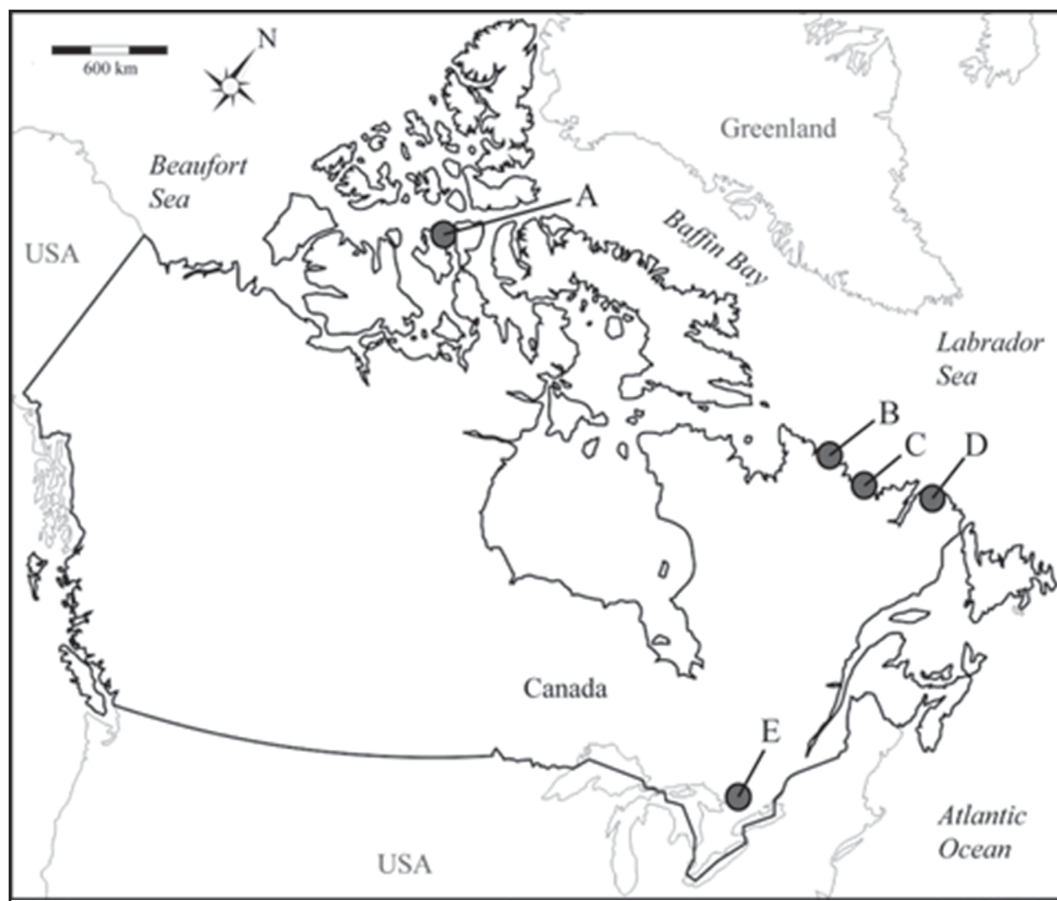
Figure 1. Locations of places referred to in the text. A: Bettison Point, Nunavut; B: Okak, Labrador; C: Hopedale, Labrador; D: Sandwich Bay, Labrador; E: Balsam Lake, Ontario. (Base map: d-maps [https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=1541&lang=en]; map by Peter Ramsden, 2022.)

were destroyed, and the location of the house avoided in future in an attempt to mitigate any association with death and transference of the contamination to other creatures and spirits. Such traditions may well have been observed at Okak, where Inuit continued to rely on seal for their primary subsistence needs. We currently lack an understanding of the ways in which Christianity may have influenced or altered these beliefs, but Hawkes (1916: 118–119), who observed similar customs among Labrador Inuit in 1914, noted that Inuit feared "the malignant influence of a corpse ... and are very much afraid of ghosts" who may find their way back into the house, and thus they would rely on the power of a shaman for guidance.

Belief in ghosts exists in new forms in Labrador Inuit communities today and has had an impact on our ability to undertake community-based archaeological research successfully. In 2017 we were asked by the Hopedale Inuit Community Government to conduct archaeological research into the Inuit settlement of Agvituk, the remains of which lie beneath the present community (FIG. 1C). The invitation was extended in large part due to the successful community outreach undertaken in conjunction with archaeological excavations at Double Mer Point, located adjacent to the Nunatsiavut community of Rigolet. In Rigolet our team was given access to the local Net Loft Museum to use as a laboratory. Located by the wharf and adjacent to the craft

shop and grocery store, the lab became a hub of activity where community members would gather daily to see the new finds and exchange stories and information about the objects (Rankin and Gaulton 2021). In anticipation of a similar outcome, the Hopedale Inuit Community Government gave us access to the beautiful, historical Moravian mission residence building for use as a lab. Though located in a busy part of town, adjacent to the only restaurant and hotel, we quickly noticed that very few community members visited the lab. Far from their being disinterested in the project, we eventually learned that many community members consider the mission residence building as haunted and avoided entering the structure. Many Hopedale residents continue to identify as Moravian, even though the last missionary was recalled in 2005. Since that time Labrador congregations have been responsible for tending to their own pastoral needs as an Indigenous church, and many Hopedale residents continue to attend services and events in the church. Therefore, it is not the church itself that is considered haunted, but specifically the residence building. We received no explanation of this haunting, and it may simply be that the building has fallen into disuse and no longer serves a purpose in the community, or it may reflect the ongoing negotiation with the colonial process of the missionization by outsiders. The only other contemporary haunting of which we are aware also concerns a Moravian residence building, located in the Nunatsiavut community of Makkovik, which was occupied over the years by outside ministers, traders, teachers, and medical personnel (Jarvis 2016). Unlike the Moravian residence in Hopedale, which has become a marginal space to be avoided so as not to confront the ghosts that dwell within, the Makkovik building, once avoided, has found new life as the community museum and has slowly returned to use. This is not the case in Hopedale, where we were compelled to modify our outreach practice and the archaeological work has received tremendous support from the Hopedale community (Rankin et al. 2022).
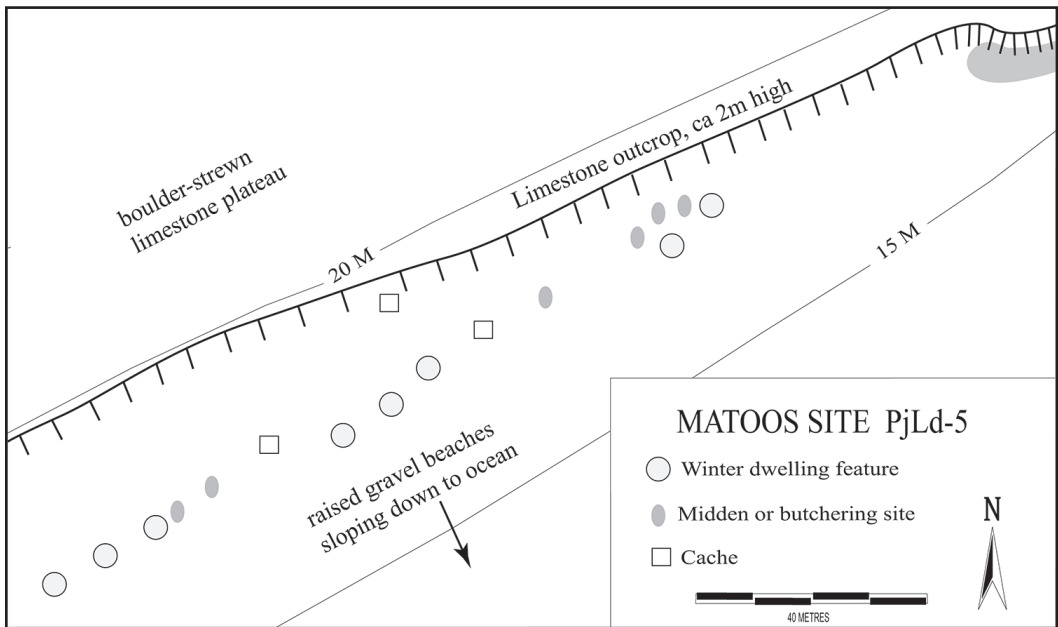

Figure 2. Map of the Matoos site (PjLd-5). (Map by Peter Ramsden, 2020.)

The fear of ghosts and other powerful spiritual forces with the ability to inflict sickness, starvation, and trepidation on the living can therefore prevent people from returning to previously vibrant community spaces, creating marginal and sometimes forgotten places. Without the benefit of written records, archaeologists might have difficulty recognizing the types of practice witnessed in Inuit Labrador communities. Nevertheless, while admittedly stretching the notion of ethnographic analogy, it may still provide a viable interpretation of far more ancient settlement patterns in the Canadian Arctic and is illustrated by the following example from Ramsden's 1980–1982 fieldwork.

At Bettison Point, on Prince of Wales Island in the central Canadian Arctic (FIG. 1*A*), is a series of early Pre-Dorset sites (ca. 4,000 years ago), including both summer and winter settlements (Ramsden and Murray 1995). The winter structures have the appearance of having been occupied for only one season, and the sites typically consist of only one or two small rock-and-moss features—probably remnants of snow-walled structures—suggesting that one or two dwellings comprised a normal winter settlement. But one location stands out— the Matoos site, where eight winter-house features as well as middens and caches are strung out along a single beach crest for a distance of some 140 m (FIG. 2). The location of the Matoos site is one that people might well have wanted to return to year after year, being backed by a steep, short slope that provides both protection from northerly winds and a deep bank of blown-in snow from which to cut blocks for the dwellings. But the extended linear arrangement of the features as well as the wide separation of groups of two or three structures suggests that they may in fact represent the annual relocation of two or three contiguous winter dwellings; two or three families preferring to move several meters down the beach each year rather than occupying precisely the same spot as the previous year. The overall similarity of artifacts in all of these features leads to the inference that it was the same group of people repeatedly returning to this site but avoiding the locations they had inhabited before. A similar distribution pattern of very similar-looking features was encountered by McGhee at the Cold site and other

early ASTt[1] sites near Port Refuge, on Devon Island (McGhee 1979: 12-33). In the case of the Cold site, McGhee was able to carry out a detailed stylistic analysis of lithic artifacts from a number of small features distributed along a beach crest and was able to identify several individual toolmakers based on distinctive styles of burins and concave knives. The distribution of the various styles in different features reveals a few cases in which two or more structures were occupied, on different occasions, by the same toolmaker. This again strongly suggests that families revisited the site, but established new dwellings some distance removed from the old, rather than reoccupying or living adjacent to their previous locations.

While the tendency to return to a favored location is understandable, why not reoccupy the same spot each time? Presumably the first spot occupied at the Matoos site was considered the prime location for winter dwellings— and, indeed, the easterly end of the site would have provided the best shelter and the best building snow—so why not go back there? Why relocate several meters down the beach to a less optimal location each time? Obviously, we can never be certain of the explanation, but it is plausible (and would not be unusual) that Pre-Dorset people had an aversion to previously occupied structures due to the fear of either the ghost of someone who had died there or of the bad luck that might have been encountered there and might still linger. It is demonstrable that the structures at the Matoos site were occupied in winter, and given that hunting failures and death from starvation or malnutrition, as well as other causes, are much more likely in winter in the bleak High Arctic environment, it is perhaps more likely that winter structures would be inhabited by the ghosts of the dead, or the specter of calamitous bad luck, and thus need to be avoided.

This behavior on the part of the Labrador Inuit, and perhaps the Pre-Dorset people, is not a rejection of "heritage" or of the past or of tradition. But it is an acknowledgement that some things about the past may be "poisonous," i.e., they can have negative conse-

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1 ASTt refers to the Arctic small-tool tradition, a series of generally similar early Arctic assemblages characterized by a microlithic stone technology, dating roughly from 2500 to 800 B.C. Regional and temporal variants include the Denbigh Flint Complex, Independence I, Saqqaq, and Pre-Dorset.

quences in the present, and the need to distance oneself from them outweighs any benefits of embracing the remnants of the past. This is a fairly immediate and visceral kind of rejection of things of the past rooted in basic human fears and a healthy respect for the dead and things only poorly understood.

We now wish to explore some more-complex instances in which people may actively "forget" their past and places associated with it for the more complicated and intellectual purpose of reinventing themselves to suit new social, economic, or political agendas in which some aspects of their heritage would be like unwelcome ghosts at a banquet.

Identity

Southern Labrador Inuit Examples

Between 2008 and 2013 Rankin worked in partnership with the southern Inuit of NunatuKavut, Labrador. This community draws its ancestry from the union between British male settlers and Inuit women, and many community members are able to recite their family trees deep into the 19th century, when the first settlers arrived. The southern Inuit hoped that Rankin and her colleagues would be able to help them learn more about their pre-settler Inuit heritage. That period of their history had been forgotten, even though it immediately predated their established and relatively well-known family trees. Throughout the 20th century, in a bid to assimilate into the dominant white society economically and politically, their Inuit heritage was stigmatized, denied, and selectively forgotten, as information about the past was not transmitted from one generation to another (Kennedy 2014: 242–244). For this community, selectively remembering the past was a matter of survival. The homes and places of their Inuit ancestors were similarly marginalized in this act of denial, so much so that when Rankin and her students undertook archaeological surveys and excavations in Sandwich Bay (FIG. 1*D*), not only did they locate many unknown Inuit settlements, but nearly 90% of the Inuit sites located were situated within 50 m of contemporary or near-contemporary (within 35 years) southern Inuit settlement. Furthermore, the current or recent residents

had no comprehension, memory, or oral history concerning the presence of what were, in most cases, very obvious archaeological features in the immediate landscape. In some cases, these features even found new lives as contemporary middens, as the old semi-subterranean house features functioned as receptacles for the modern garbage of recent settlement. As the investigation into the Inuit history in Sandwich Bay deepened, Rankin found that this purposeful denial of cultural history, or selective recollection of cultural history, was something that had happened among Labrador Inuit before (Rankin and Crompton 2016).

When the Inuit settled the coast of Labrador during the 15th century, it marked the culmination of a rapid migration from Alaska, across the Arctic to Greenland, and southward into the Labrador Peninsula. Throughout this migration Inuit settlements took several forms as they traversed different ecological zones and ultimately contended with the cooling climate of the Little Ice Age. Many of the earliest Inuit to leave Alaska were whale hunters. The large settlements they left behind suggest that people came together seasonally and worked communally for a whaling captain for the purpose of capturing the whales that would sustain them and the prestige that accompanied the families who arranged and participated in a successful hunt (Whitridge 1999). By the time Inuit arrived in the eastern Arctic and Greenland, however, their settlements included only small houses occupied by nuclear families in a more egalitarian fashion. Inuit brought this tradition of small, single-family dwellings with them to Labrador. The locations of these first Labrador Inuit settlements on outer islands and headlands resembled their Arctic tundra homes, and from these sites they hunted familiar sea mammals from the ice edge (Kaplan 1983). Within 150 years this pattern of settlement was abandoned throughout the Labrador coast in favor of large, communal houses secluded at the heads of inner bays, and their small, outer-coastal homes show little archaeological evidence of continued use.

The shift in settlement location has been equated with an increasing familiarity with the landscape and resources available on the Labrador Peninsula and ultimately occurred all along the Labrador coast (Kaplan 2012).

However, the archaeological evidence from southern Labrador indicates that the shift to communal-style houses occurred in the south first and was accompanied by increased contact with nearby European fishers and whalers with whom the Inuit traded for exotic goods (Rankin 2014). Sandwich Bay communal houses indicate a return to a more hierarchical, or corporate, structure in Inuit society, with a central male trading captain and his family benefiting from the labor of an extended community and accessing prestige trade items that were not fed into an Inuit trading network, but worn and displayed by the most prestigious trading families. Elsewhere, Rankin and Crompton (2016) have argued that the emergent Inuit elite drew on the memory of ancestral whaling captains to legitimize their newfound wealth and power—perhaps even controlling access to similar necessary prestige items, such as boats. These selective memories of the past helped to forge a new Inuit society in Labrador, but one that required the abandonment of egalitarian ideals and the nuclear-family houses that accompanied them.

A similar example of the erasure, or very selective memory, of the past and its places, and the reinvention of a society in the face of rapidly changing political and economic circumstances is found in Ramsden's study of a group of 16th- and 17th-century Huron-Wendat in the lower Great Lakes (Ramsden 2016).

Huron-Wendat Example

The Huron-Wendat are Iroquoian-speaking people of the lower Great Lakes, and in the early 17th century they formed a confederacy of several "tribal" or local groups in a small area of southern Ontario known as "Wendake" or "Huronia" (FIG. 1*E*). One of these, the Rock Nation, or Arendarhonon, was the most easterly and was reported by the Jesuits to have moved into Wendake to join the confederacy in about 1590 (Trigger 1987: 58). While visiting the St. Lawrence Valley in 1609, the Rock were the first Huron-Wendat to encounter Europeans directly, although the impacts of the European presence in the St. Lawrence Valley had been felt as much as a century earlier. Champlain eventually traveled to the main town of the Rock Nation and spent

the winter of 1615–1616 there. An extensive archaeological project in the area of Balsam Lake, some 50 km to the east of Rock Nation territory, has revealed the probable 16th-century roots of this nation of the Huron-Wendat Confederacy (Ramsden 2016).

The archaeological evidence shows that from about 1530 to around 1590, this area saw the coalescence of at least four distinct "ethnic" groups into a few large communities: (1) a group of Huron-Wendat from lower down the Trent Valley who had moved into the area ca. 1450; (2) Algonkian-speaking people arriving in the area at about the same time, probably from the Ottawa Valley to the northeast; (3) a second group of Huron-Wendat from areas to the southwest nearer to Lake Ontario, arriving ca. 1530; and (4) a significant number of St. Lawrence Valley Iroquoians who arrived in company with the third group (FIG. 3). There is compelling evidence of political and economic competition within these communities involving "progressive" factions who favored increasing contact with Europeans in the St. Lawrence Valley and a reliance on trade as an economic base vs. "conservative" factions who favored more reliance on traditional economic pursuits and technologies, and a retention of traditional values and symbols. It is probably no accident that these political factions loosely coincided with ethnic and linguistic affiliations; the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and the more southerly Huron-Wendat tended to constitute the progressive faction, while the Trent Valley Huron-Wendat and the Algonkians tended to comprise the more conservative faction. In at least one community the conservative faction prevailed for a time, and several progressive households were forced to leave and join a more compatible community (Ramsden 2009).

With their move westward to join the Wendat Confederacy at the end of the 16th century, however, this cosmopolitan and multiethnic group of evolving communities clearly reinvented itself as a new, single ethnic group: the People of the Rock (Ramsden 2016). They presented themselves to the confederacy, and later to the French, as a strong, unified nation, and for a generation they assumed a dynamic and aggressive leadership role in the relations between the Wendat and the French. There is no hint in any of the records left by Champlain

Figure 3. Map showing the location of Wendake, the Rock Nation, Balsam Lake, and Champlain's route. (Base map: Goggle Earth; map by Peter Ramsden, 2022.)

or any of his successors that anybody among the Rock Nation identified as anything other than "Wendat" or spoke any language other than Huron, despite the strong and clear evidence that many of them had, until a few decades earlier, lived in proudly and defiantly St. Lawrence Iroquoian or Algonkian households and families. The multicultural past of the Rock Nation was effectively hidden from outsiders, probably including other members of the Wendat Confederacy, in order to promote its newly created identity.

Perhaps most telling, in the winter of 1615 Champlain accompanied a Rock Nation war party on a journey to carry out a raid on an Iroquois town south of Lake Ontario (Biggar 1929: 56). The route led them east across the Lake Simcoe narrows and then to Balsam Lake and down the Trent River system to Lake Ontario. The Wendat soldiers led Champlain

through the very country that they and their families must have inhabited until about 20 years before and probably within sight of places where some of them were born and raised. Champlain himself recorded seeing places that had been cleared, presumably for villages and agricultural fields. It seems he may have asked his companions in arms about these places, for he wrote in his diary that they told him that "all these regions in time past were inhabited by savages, who have since been compelled to abandon them out of fear of their enemies" (Biggar 1929: 59). This enigmatic reference by Champlain is more noteworthy for what it does not say, because it seems a strange way for those people to refer to the villages where they may have been born and where some of their ancestors were buried. It seems almost inescapable that Champlain's companions were trying very hard to distance

themselves from this part of their history— from this place, where archaeology shows that they had been a very disunited group, of many languages and identities, unsure of their political and economic future, and of their place, as it were, in history. And this is entirely consistent with their rejection, at least in the presence of outsiders, of traditional languages and ethnicities that were anything other than Huron-Wendat. In other words, their reinvention of themselves as the Rock Nation, a strong and leading component of the Wendat Confederacy, required them to forget everything that had gone before, including the very places where, in every sense, they had been born.

Conclusion

In the examples above we have looked at some ways in which people have purposely created marginal spaces, and we suggest that both kinds of situations described are ultimately related to the greater process of identity construction (Jones 1997; Lowenthal 2015: 324; Van Dyke 2011). In the first type of example, what we are dealing with is the preservation or maintenance of identity, and in these cases marginal spaces are created to ensure the continuity of the group in the face of possible dangers that might linger from the past. It is likely that, archaeologically, it would be hard to see this without the added dimension of documentary sources, but the Pre-Dorset example presents a situation in which, knowing that such behaviors occur, it is a plausible interpretation. Such behavior may have become even more important when there were encounters with outsiders and identity may have been perceived as under threat (Van Dyke 2011: 237). So, for example, when the Labrador Inuit were becoming Christian and creating some new traditions, the more ancient custom of creating marginal spaces may have continued as a way to prevent group identity from fragmenting. The end results of this may, in fact, be still playing out in Nunatsiavut in the form of resistance to entering buildings once inhabited by outsiders. And this provides the overarching link between the two kinds of situations.

In the second set of examples, we have demonstrated a situation where the creation of

a new identity is the motivation. Contrary to the first examples in which former spaces are remembered and avoided, in these cases the older knowledge is forgotten or denied in order to prevent it from intruding into the present reality (Harrison 2013: 166; Jones and Russell 2012: 274; Lowenthal 2015: 539). The result is the creation of marginal spaces that reflect, and threaten to betray, that former phase of group identity.

Those of us born into secure circumstances in a relatively affluent Western society tend to imbue our heritage, both recent and ancient, with a kind of reality and permanence, and we have collectively made an industry out of identifying and celebrating it (Van Dyke 2011: 233, 250). We sometimes forget that this is not necessarily the "natural" state of things—that it is instead part of our particular circumstance in which a perception of long-term stability and maintenance of the status quo is a desirable goal. But even that may be illusory, and most societies are constantly reframing and reinventing their identities. Part of that process necessarily involves agreeing to erase former identities from collective memory (Harrison 2013: 166, 198; Lowenthal 2015: 320, 539) and to constantly place the associated objects and spaces at a safe and unrecognizable distance.

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