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Abstract

A collaborative research project using video interviews documents the rich, mostly Euro-Canadian history of Silver Islet (a mining community later transformed into a cottage community) while also addressing the absence of Anishnabee and Métis peoples' narratives from this region of Northern Ontario. In the discussion and conclusion, we discuss some of the opportunities and challenges associated with conducting video interviews in rural Canada, while also providing solutions addressing Aboriginal erasure.

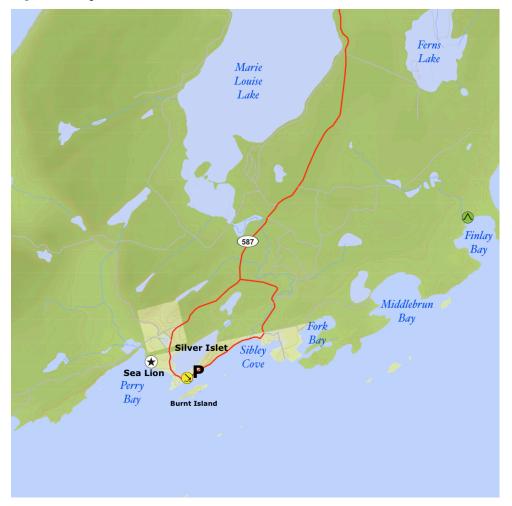Keywords: Aboriginal erasure, First Nations, Métis, Lake Superior, video interviews

1.0 Introduction

Located near the end of the Sibley peninsula, approximately 100 km away from Thunder Bay and 5 km from the Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, the village of Silver Islet, a former mining community later converted into a cottage community, located in Northern Ontario, includes the shoreline of Perry Bay to Fork Bay, Middlebrun Island, and Burnt Island (see Figure 1). The village features two gift shops, a general store, and a federally licensed government wharf now condemned by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (Ontario Parks, 2007). Additional private wharfs are located at Sawyer Bay and Camp Bay. Approximately ten of the 175 privately owned homes (many of which are the original mining homes) are equipped for year-round living. Since the village

is not connected to the electric grid, power is provided through photovoltaics, wind turbines, and generators; others have opted to use propane. Some cottages are equipped with running water and septic fields and others with holding tanks and outhouses. Wood and propane stoves are used for heating and cooking. Situated north-east of the community and now located within Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, is a cemetery with 79 graves, reportedly built near an Aboriginal burial area (Forma, 1981; Ontario Parks, 2007).

Figure 1: Map of Silver Islet.

Source:Ryan Garnett, 2012.

A collaborative study using video interviews conducted with participants from Silver Islet documented the early establishment of the community by miners and the later transformation of the village into a tourism and cottage community. Findings regarding Silver Islet being one of the oldest cottage communities on Lake Superior and the subsequent development of a tourism industry are reported elsewhere (see Lemelin et al., in-press). 5 of the 11 participants mentioned an Aboriginal (Anishnabee, Métis) presence along the Sibley Peninsula and in the village of Silver Islet. Most of this discussion however, referred to a time prior to the establishment of the mine. That said, some respondents did discuss the presence of spirit houses (a wooden box, where offerings could be left) placed over an Anishnabee grave in the Silver Islet cemetery. None mentioned the

Brohm archeological site, the legends associated to the area (see Lemelin & Beaulieu 2010) for an expanded discussion on this topic), or the reported burial grounds on Porphyry Island (Boegh, 2005; Piper, 1924). Apart from one individual who is a member of the Métis Nation, no respondents discussed the roles and contributions of the Métis. Peters (2000) suggests that such oversights are not uncommon, and many similar absences have been documented in the fields of archeology, history and geography. These absences contribute to an ongoing "erasure of Aboriginal peoples from the Canadian landscape" (Peters, 2000, p. 53). In some situations, this erasure has been facilitated by the removal of skeletal remains and archeological artifacts, by the relocation of Aboriginal people to remote, rural reserves, and by urbanization and assimilation policies (Byrne, 1997; Peters, 2000).

In cases where settlements, burial grounds, and artifacts such as petroglyphs have been found, these objects are often associated with a bygone era now subsumed by colonial narratives (Allen 1988, Byrne, 1997). By ignoring this colonial legacy, Byrne (2003) argues, researchers have been complicit in the absence of any dialogue regarding the "historical coexistence and entanglement of settler and Aboriginal cultures" (p. 77). This erasure has had profound detrimental effects (e.g., psychological, social, legal) on First Nations and Métis people in Canada (St. Denis, 2011). This absence is however, increasingly being challenged through land claims, participatory action research, culturally sensitive interpretive strategies in museums and the co-management of parks and historic sites at the territorial, provincial and national level (Lemelin & Baikie, 2011; Pullar, 2008).

As stated earlier, participatory video interviews were crucial in establishing rapport, gaining legitimacy with community members from Silver Islet and creating narratives which convey "what respondents want to communicate in the manner they wish to communicate" (Prosser, 2012, p. 485). Through these narratives we were able to acquire information from a grassroots level to complement existing information and fill in gaps in the official history of the Anishnabee Nation and Métis in Silver Islet. Addressing the exclusion of Anishnabee and Métis narratives from this region of rural Ontario, through Aboriginal erasure, is the primary aim of this article. A discussion regarding the potential contributions and challenges associated with conducting video interviews in rural settings is also presented in the discussion and conclusion sections of the paper. Next we review the method and analysis and discuss the findings.

2.0 Methods – Video Interviews

Founded in the pioneering work of visual anthropology and visual sociology (Pink, 2007; Rose, 2001), the recent rise of visual interviews, digital storytelling and digital ethnography (Kindon, 2003) allows community members to tell their stories through their own words (Radley & Taylor, 2003). Whether they are the traditional sit-down interview, or complemented by photographs, images and historical artifacts owned by the participants or by go-alongs (i.e., conducted while walking with the participant) (Carpiano, 2009), video interviews are particularly well suited for exploring the informants' knowledge and experiences, and interactions with other community members and the environment (Carpiano, 2009).

Some researchers have noted that video interviews can actually be problematic to conduct, especially for technological novices, while others have questioned the veracity of video interviews, suggesting that participants "play-up" to the camera (Gibbs et al., 2002; Luff & Heath, 2012; Rose, 2001). Gibbs et al. (2002) and Murthy (2008) discussed how various technological improvements like smaller digital cameras and increased computing capacity to store and render digital video files have facilitated the inclusion of visual technology in research (Gibbs et al., 2002; Murthy, 2008). In addition, the proliferation of webcams in households combined with the growth of synchronous online video such as Skype (http://www.skype.com) or Ustream (http://www.ustream.tv/new), and asynchronous online video such as YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/) or Vimeo (http://vimeo.com/), suggest that users are increasingly comfortable with the medium of online video (Prosser, 2012; Wachowich & Scobie, 2010).

A purposive sample aimed at capturing the stories from long-term residents of Silver Islet was prepared by the research team, which was composed of the principal investigator, two community advisors, a regional advisor, and a research assistant. In total 11 participants (one group interview with two participants and nine personal interviews with single individuals) were interviewed (Esterberg, 2002). Four participants opted to participate in traditional sit-down video interviews and two video interviews were facilitated through photo-elicitation. Two residents participated in the go-along interview. In two instances, a combination of go-along interview and traditional sit-down interview was used (see Table 1). All interviews except for three were conducted in Silver Islet.

Interviews were digitally video recorded with participant's consent. In order to acquire rich, contextual data, all interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, conversational format (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008) loosely based on the participant's experiences and recollections. This format allowed for new and unexpected themes and ideas to emerge, and for the interviews to expand on ideas or themes that the participant deemed fit. After the interviews were conducted, the video files underwent a fairly standard video rendering procedure in order to allow the video interviews to be viewable on other computers. This involved two stages: first, files were transferred to hard drive (backed-up) from the video camera, and then converted to MPEG files.

Rather than utilizing transcription, a widely accepted method of data preparation (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; McLellan et al., 2003), we employed an indexing method (short phrases and sentences) which enabled a quick retrieval of pertinent qualitative data when conducting coding (Saldana, 2009) and which allowed us to keep the video and audio intact since nonverbal communication is lost in transcription. The interviews were then analyzed descriptively using inductive open coding to allow for emergent themes (Saldana, 2009). Crichton & Childs (2005) argue that this methodological approach allows the research team "to hear and see the gestures, intonation, passion, pauses, and inflections throughout the analysis process" (p. 42).

Table 1. *Overview of Video Interview Participants*

Participant	Years in Silver Islet	Interview type (s)	Interview Highlights
Interview #1 Fisher	36 years	A	Original commercial fishermen at Silver Islet were Finnish and Swedish. Mentions the possibility that early European fishers may have learned their skills from Aboriginal fishers.
Interview #2 Harvester	60+ years	A	Resource extraction such as picking berries and hunting in the area which became Sleeping Giant Provincial Park was common before the park was established.
Interview #3 Businessman	24 years	A	Over the years there has been some community resistance to progress such as road improvements, phone service and electrical installation.
Interview #4 Year round resident	60+ years	a, c	The Camp Bay area of Silver Islet was originally an Aboriginal settlement.
Interview #5 James Cross	39 years	a, b	Provided evidence of Aboriginal artifacts (pictures, letters, artefacts) Discussed the spirit boxes
Interview #6 Member of the Métis Nation	N/A	a, b	Childhood memories of commercial fishing and boating into Camp Bay to visit the fishermen. Recognized that the First Nation and Métis fishing heritage on the north shore of Lake Superior isn't well documented.
Interview #7 Gardener	50 years	a, c	During the mining days, miner homes were built on every second lot to help prevent house fires. Noted that rose plants and apple trees have roots dating back about 100 years to the Cross family.
Interview #8 & 9 couple	80+ years both participants	a	The construction of the road changed the dynamic of the community, The buildings are no longer shacks as campers have improved the buildings over the years.
Interview #10 Long-term member	88 years	a	After the mine closed some people started using the old miner cabins. The Cross Estate didn't seem to mind much. Mentioned the spirit boxes in the cemetery.
Interview #11 Former executive on the Silver Islet Campers Association (SICA)	35 years	A	Camp purchase prices have risen sharply and many cottages remain in families and are passed down to next generation.

Note: a – video interview; b – video interviews with photo-elicitation; c – go along interview

3.0 Findings

Knowledge collected from the video interviews relating to Aboriginal erasure and displacement are corroborated by findings presented by Bogue (2007), MacDonald (2008, 2010) and Roinila (2003). These studies suggest that the construction of mining and fishing villages and logging camps in combination with the designation of game sanctuaries and provincial parks were the principal cause of Aboriginal displacement from the north-shore of Lake Superior. Other documentation suggests that the absence of Aboriginal people along the peninsula is inaccurate since some Anishnabee were gainfully employed in Silver Islet. For example Sibley himself noted in 1871 that the mine has, "given a great deal of encouragement to the Indians, employing them in large numbers and give them the same pay as we give to others" (Arthur, 1973, p.144–145). In other situations, groups like the one lead by Chief Blackstone opposed any mining operations in the region at least until a treaty had been established (Arthur, 1973; Grant, 1873; Roland, 1887).

5 of the 11 interviewees also provided some evidence of the presence (first by Anishnabee and later by the Métis) along the peninsula. Interview #1 acknowledged that there should be some recognition of the First Nations people who originally fished the waters and who would have likely taught the original European fishers how to fish Lake Superior. Interviewee #4 suggested that this would have been most probable considering that a fishing village was located at Camp Bay. Interviewee #5 provided evidence of contact between his family and Native families in the early 20th century (most likely associated with First Nation citizens working or outfitting the lumber camps). Interviewee #4 also mentioned that the Silver Islet cemetery was located on the site of an ancient Native burial ground and noted that some of the graves sites dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries contained spirit boxes. The fact that spirit boxes were located here suggests that the links between Euro-Canadians and First Nations in Silver Islet extended into the early 20th century. The evidence arising from these interviews may in fact oppose suppositions by various authors and historians regarding early European settlement as the cause of First Nation displacement. The cause of First Nation and Métis migration away from the peninsula may have actually been due to conflicting messages by their leaders, a lack of employment opportunities, and the establishments of the Fort William First Nation and the Métis community at Fort William (Peterson, 1978; Reimer & Chartrand, 2004).

The significant regional contributions of the Métis nation from the days of the fur industry, to outfitting camps, operating lighthouses, participating in the war of 1812, and fishing, were, apart from one respondent, largely overlooked. This is somewhat surprising considering the continuous presence of the Métis around Lake Superior (i.e., Sault Sainte Marie, Fort William) has been documented since the 19th century (Reimer & Chartrand, 2004). When asked to clarify why such exclusion occurred, the participant mentioned that the mobility of the Métis and the defeat of the Métis and their First Nations allies at Batoche in the late 19th century in Western Canada forced the Métis to downplay their status or completely deny it. Interviewee #6, a member of the Métis Nation knew at least two First Nations commercial fishermen along the north shore of Lake Superior, and acknowledged that efforts were made by one of the fishermen to keep his Aboriginal heritage undisclosed. Stories like these indicate that despite a continuous presence in the region and the recognition of Métis rights being entrenched in the Canadian constitution and recent political victories like the Powley case (e.g., 0. J. No. 5310 [Ont. Prov Ct., 1998) (Lischke &

McNab, 2007; Reimer & Chartrand, 2004), the Métis may indeed be Canada's and Ontario's forgotten people (Lischke & McNab, 2007).

3.4 Discussion and Conclusion

Settlement narratives of the area promoted by historians (MacDonald, 2009, 2010), shared by miners, fishers and later cottagers reveal most respondents in Silver Islet have in essence erased any Aboriginal presence or attachment to the area (Byrne, 2003). In fairness to respondents, the absence of Aboriginal peoples in these narratives does not appear to be driven by conscious objection to an Aboriginal presence. It does, however, illustrate a non-reflexive narrative dedicated solely to European explorers and Euro-Canadians.

Apart from showcasing a very scenic and unique local in Northern Ontario, the video interviews also helped to document the ongoing role of Aboriginal people in this region of rural Ontario. Some of these, like Chief Blackstone challenging the extracting of silver at the mine, or the use of spirit boxes, have been poorly documented, while others like the contributions of Métis people in fishing have been virtually ignored. Byrne (2003), suggests that addressing this exclusion, whether intentional or not, requires further discussion and research. To avoid doing so "leaves us clinging to the fiction of pure, unalloyed, and separate cultures" (Byrne, 2003, p. 83).

Although the video interviews worked quite well, conducting video interviews in-situ whether this be in a participant's home or while walking around the community did present some challenges. There were challenges, for example, in dealing with light and sound quality and the disorienting process of walking and filming (Carpiano, 2009; Pink, 2007). These challenges were offset in our study by conducting a number of mock video interviews (to familiarize the research team) and having two researchers conducting the video interviews. That way one researcher could engage the respondents while the other set up the camera and tested for visibility and sound. Since the go-along took us around the community, a discussion surrounding the visual path (i.e., the road to be taken during the interviews) and the sites we were likely to see took place prior to conducting the go-along interviews.

In rural areas where information is often hard to acquire or quite dispersed, video interviews can capture local histories and lore through local voices, while giving these voices back to the local communities, in this case by providing each interviewee with a copy of his/her interview, giving the local historian a copy of all the interviews, and creating a website highlighting each video interview. The video interviews also helped to challenge local narratives regarding Aboriginal erasure by documenting the presence of Anishnabee and Métis people along the peninsula throughout the 20th century. That said, much more research on the role of First Nations and Métis in this region of rural Canada is required.

Acknowledgments

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