Who are the St. Lawrence Iroquoians?

The identity of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians (SLI) is a long-lasting mystery in archaeology. It lies in the fact the groups encountered by Jacques Cartier in his voyage (1534-1542) had left the St. Lawrence Valley by the time Samuel de Champlain arrived in Québec in 1603, and were never to be encountered again as a separate cultural entity.

Currently, two different viewpoints exist on the matter:

1. Hurons-Wendat and the Mohawks believe themselves to be the direct descendants of the SLI;
2. Archaeologists, however, assign the SLI a distinct identity from that of the historic Iroquoian groups.

How can the views of the archaeologists and those of the First Nations be reconciled when archaeological data and Indigenous knowledge conflict over issues relating to identity, history and heritage?

Methods

1. Qualitative: investigating the layers of meanings given to recurrent concepts used when investigating the past (e.g.: artifact, archaeological site, identity, heritage, ancestor) through literature review and semi-structured interviews.

2. Quantitative: quantifying the convergence and divergence in order to build a model for reconciliation.

Relevance and Benefits

An inclusive archaeology is necessary to distance our field from colonial practices and have a positive impact on First Nations. Developing a dialogue between Québec archaeologists and Hurons-Wendat will most likely result in:

- a reevaluation of archaeological practices;
- a better integration of Indigenous peoples and worldviews in archaeology;
- a better understanding of Indigenous peoples’ rights over their cultural heritage.

Preliminary Objectives of my PhD Dissertation Research

I wish to develop a community-based research project with the Hurons-Wendat:

1. To document how Québec archaeologists and Hurons-Wendat view a) the role of Western science in documenting the past; b) the role of Indigenous epistemologies in documenting the past; c) “identity” and “heritage”.

2. To compare and contrast these views, looking for areas of convergence and divergence in order to build a more respectful, representative framework for future collaborative research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor George Nicholas, anthropologist Jean-François Richard and the Huron-Wendat community, my committee members John Welch and Marie-Pierre Bousquet, as well as the SSHRC and Simon Fraser University.