

DÉRANGEMENT: HISTORY, MEMORY, IDENTITY AND ACADIAN POSITIONALITY IN THE 2020 SOUTH SHORE LOBSTER DISPUTE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK MY ADVISOR WILL LANGFORD FOR HIS SUPPORT. THANK YOU TO MELANIE ZURBA, STEVE MANNELL, JOSEPH LAHEY, KATHERINE PINDER, AND MY ESS HONOURS 2022 PEERS FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT.

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BACKGROUND

THE 2020 SOUTH SHORE LOBSTER DISPUTE

Between **September and November of 2020**, Nova Scotians witnessed the most violent resource-based conflict in recent history. Following the launch of the **Sipekne'katik livelihood fishery** on the Saint Mary's Bay, many white settler fishers reacted with anger and opposition.

Settler fishers cited **conservation anxieties and legal concerns**, claiming the livelihood fishery was not permitted to operate outside of the regulated commercial season according to an amendment of the **1999 Marshall Decision** which affirmed the legality of Indigenous commercial fisheries.

THE MOBILIZATION OF ACADIAN NATIONALISM

Waving flags of red, white, blue, and yellow against those of the Mi'kmaq fishers, **the Acadians** (a minority francophone group native to the region) identified themselves as a **distinct stakeholders** in the dispute, **contradicting public history depictions of Acadian-Mi'kmaq relations**.



"Our ancestors interacted and shared so many things... We created those bonds of friendship. To see these two flags next to each other today makes sense." Donna Augustine, Elsipogtog First Nation re: World Acadian Congress Acadian-Mi'kmaq gathering in 2019. Ironically, this photo is from the 2020 dispute.

OBJECTIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study **correlated the increased affluence of the Acadians in the Maritime fisheries** to important **political gains of the Acadian nationalists and neo-nationalists**, demonstrating that **the persistent relevance of the fisheries to Acadian self-perception** is the truest and **most influential historical narrative** that guided Acadian positionality during the 2020 dispute.

In turn, this work argues that other historical narratives surrounding the dispute such as the Acadian-Mi'kmaq relationship and the "victim story" of the Acadian population have been **mischaracterized by the influence of collective memory and settler colonialism on Acadian public history**.

Through this process, it is argued that the increased agency of Indigenous fishers was the primary point of contention or perceived threat for Acadians involved in the 2020 South Shore Lobster Dispute, leading them to mobilize their nationalism.

Image source: Taryn Grant / CBC News

RESEARCH QUESTION

Why was Acadian identity and nationalism mobilized during the 2020 South Shore Lobster Dispute, and how can turning to the group's history help answer this question?



LITERATURE REVIEW

HISTORY, MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND A NEW ACADIAN HISTORY

History, Memory, Identity is a framework that acknowledges how history is an extension of memory which informs identity.¹²

As different meanings of landscape are imposed by different groups, **historical truths become overshadowed by the dominant memory**.¹²

New Acadian historians have noted that Acadian collective memory and its use by nationalists, has created a **monolithic narrative** of the Acadian past, leading public history to continue characterizing the Acadians as the "gentle settler" **despite their increased political agency over time**.¹⁰

NATIONALISM & SETTLER COLONIALISM

Evocations of nationalism are largely connected to history, memory, and identity.¹

Nationalism in settler colonial societies has been proven to "instigate racist beliefs, as well as racism stimulating prejudice conceptions and **notions of nature**".¹¹

Environmental conflicts have been recognized as ultimately **rooted in the perceptions of their participants**, making identity a more influential factor than scientific truth.²

RESEARCH METHODS

MEDIA ANALYSIS

60 articles.
17 news outlets.
45 articles in English.
15 in French.

Published between **15 September 2020** and **30 November 2020**.

Theme Map of **key messages, problems, and solutions**.



HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Chronological approach to correlate historical developments of Acadian nationalism and the group's role in the fisheries.

Four distinct sections documenting particular moments in time when Acadian history, identity, the fisheries, and Acadian-Mi'kmaq relations overlapped.

Traced historical shifts in the power balance between fisheries rights of the Acadians and the Mi'kmaq to **contextualize the mobilization of Acadian nationalism**.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

MEDIA ANALYSIS

While the media was clearly cognisant of the role of history in the conflict, they **avoided engaging with Acadian identity** or the 1999 Burnt Church Crisis when characterizing settler positionality in the dispute.

93% addressed legality.

63% addressed conservation.

28% addressed legality.

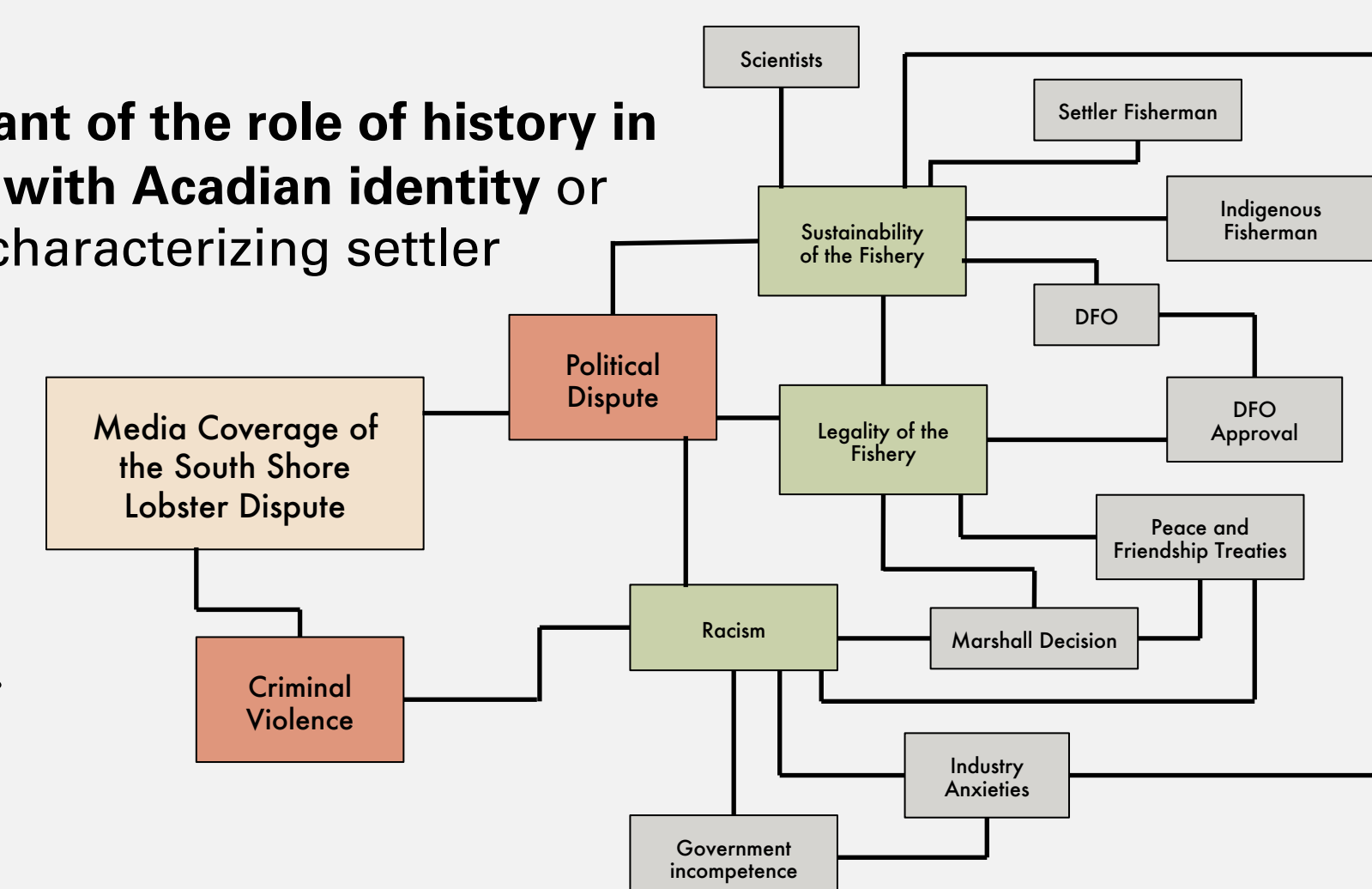
KEY FINDINGS

Reporting **favoured documenting the positionality of settler fishers** in the dispute, even though the positionality of Indigenous fisher was closer tied to fact and legal precedent.

In characterizing the settler fishers, only **0.03% of articles identified the Acadians** as a distinct stakeholder group, despite their overt display of nationalism during the dispute.

90% mentioned the Marshall Decision and 45% mentioned the Peace and Friendship Treaties of 1760 and 1761, yet **only 21% mentioned the Burnt Church Crisis** despite the similarities of settler positionality in the two conflicts.

Articles that did address the role of the Acadians took a misguided analytical approach, largely **pointing to the historic Acadian-Mi'kmaq relationship**.



A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ACADIAN NATIONALISM AND LIVELIHOOD

The Acadian-Mi'kmaq relationship was steeped in colonialism, with French policy at the time aiming to pacify and assimilate the Indigenous population.⁸ The deportation of the Acadians in 1755 is the key event that led the population to **view themselves as guileless victims of a great injustice**.¹⁵ Their return to the territory in the 1760s was marked by isolationism and a move away from collaborating with the also oppressed Mi'kmaq.⁵

ACADIANS AND THE FISHERIES

In the 19th century, Acadians began to **experience increased political and economic agency through their involvement in the Maritime fisheries and the first nationalist movement**. Acadian nationalism reacted to the population's lack of social, cultural, or geographic cohesion, **a unity that had been foundational to preserving Acadian livelihood**.⁴

By the 20th century, the Acadians had a **complete monopoly over the fisheries and exclusive co-operatives**,⁶ which in turn **influenced their self-perception** as a group that had **conquering oppression** and achieved the miracle of cultural survival. The **fisheries were the vehicle through which the Acadians preserved their livelihood and gained agency as minorities**.³

THE MARSHALL DECISION

The **1999 Marshall Decision** was a huge win for Mi'kmaq commercial fishers, increasing their agency and **altering the power balance between their fisheries and that of the Acadians**.⁷ The Acadians interpreted the Marshall Decision as a **threat to their own livelihood in the fisheries**, a livelihood that was central to their own battle against oppression and reacted with violence.

After the Marshall Decision, Acadian nationalists and fishers **began self-proclaiming themselves as Acadian-Métis**.⁹ Fishers even tried to assert their **"treaty rights"** to access the commercial fisheries, with Acadian nationalists such as Jackie Vautour adopting the identity, calling on others to do the same to **"join the real struggle for social justice"**.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Acadian nationalism has been repeatedly mobilized throughout history when the group perceived a threat to their livelihood. As livelihood began to mean fisheries, the two became further intertwined.

When the Mi'kmaq began to further their own agency through the commercial fisheries, it was interpreted by the Acadians as a threat to their own livelihood and ability to leverage their economic affluence against oppression.

The complacency of the Acadians in settler colonialism and their ultimate status as a settler population, although oppressed, plays a key role in their aversion to the growing Mi'kmaq involvement in the fisheries and sense of entitlement of the land and its resources.

As a result, the mobilization of Acadian nationalism during the 2020 South Shore Lobster Dispute can be directly correlated to their historical reliance on the fishery to further their own plight against assimilation.



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