

Uneasy Neighbours: Quebec-Newfoundland and Labrador's Relationship

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Newfoundland and Labrador only has one direct territorial contact with another province: Quebec. The harsh and often unwelcoming territory of Labrador has been the centre of the animosity between the two provinces. In the recent Supreme Court ruling regarding Churchill Falls, the Court, in a 7-1 decision, ruled that Quebec had no obligation to renegotiate the contract. Despite the reassuring words of the Newfoundland and Labrador Premier, Dwight Ball, that the two provinces have much more to gain collaborating and that he would do so with Quebec Premier, François Legault, the general comments in both provinces by citizens does not tend towards collaboration and friendship. Why is that so? What are the factors that have contributed in the past to so many tensions between the two neighbours? What contributes today to such feelings among the public despite the willingness of political actors to move on, to develop partnerships? This paper will explore these questions. It will be revealed that 'historical' collective memories as well as cultural products (songs, humour, slogans) have helped perpetuating an uneasy relationship among Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Resentment can be an individual emotion, an anger felt towards a perceived injustice. However, as Stockdale (2013) argues, resentment is certainly individual but can also be collective. She demonstrates that "the reasons for resentment in cases of broader social and political resentments will often be tied to social vulnerability and experiences of injustice." (Stockdale, 2013: 5) Furthermore, "collective resentment is resentment that is felt and expressed by individuals in response to a perceived threat to a collective to which they belong. In collective resentment, the reasons for resentment are reasons for a *collective*, not an individual victim of mistreatment." (Ibid.: 7) In that regard, collective resentment does not mean that all individuals in the group have been wronged, but individuals of the collective have reasons to feel they have been wronged. Collective resentment can thus be perpetuated and live in various ways. One of which can be the government's policies. Another way is through culture. The collective resentment for both provinces is rooted in various sources, both historical and cultural and are worth mentioning. I will start by looking at historical events.

In Québec, the resentment towards Newfoundland and Labrador is rooted in the decision of the Privy Council regarding Labrador. The territory of what is now Labrador went back and forth between the Dominion of Canada and Newfoundland (through various Acts and Treaties) up until the early 20th century and a request to the Judiciary Committee of the Privy Council (JDPC) was made to settle the question of the boundary. The catalyst for this tension was that both Newfoundland and Quebec claimed the right to issue licences to cut timber in certain contested regions of Labrador. The climax occurred in 1902, when Newfoundland granted the Grand River Pulp and Lumber Company (GRPLC) a licence to cut timber in a disputed region. The licence allowed GRPLC to cut timber around the Churchill River. The River, under the 1898 Act was on Quebec's territory up to Lake Melville. The owner of the company received a letter from the

Province of Quebec Deputy Minister of Lands telling him that the territory on which his company was cutting timber was Quebec's and that the wood he was cutting belonged to Quebec. To that letter the owner replied that he had a licence issued by Newfoundland to cut timber in that area and that the Government of Quebec could take the matter up with Newfoundland.

The problem that the Government of Quebec faced when it received the response from the company was that it could not directly address Newfoundland because of constitutional restrictions. As the status of Canada and Newfoundland were equivalent, only Canada could address the Newfoundland government. Despite efforts between the Canadian Governor General and the British Colonial Secretary in Newfoundland, the two sides were unable to settle their dispute. Disputes between Dominions and Colonies of the British Empire, which could not otherwise be resolved, were sent to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which acted as a court of final appeal (the equivalent of the Supreme Court today). Many steps were taken before the case was finally presented to the JCPC. The three main important steps are the following:

1. The province of Quebec requested that Canada submit the question to the JCPC. In 1904, Canada requested that the Labrador boundary be the subject of such a request.
2. In 1907, Newfoundland gave its consent to the reference. It is important to note that a matter could only be submitted to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council with consent of both parties.
3. In 1922, the question was put to the Committee, after 15 years of working out the terms for the submission of evidence.

The exact question finally submitted to the Judicial Committee in 1922 was "What is the location and definition of the boundary as between Canada and Newfoundland in the Labrador Peninsula under the Statutes, Orders-in-Council and Proclamations?" ("The Labrador Boundary Question", 1927: 150-151) It is worth also noting that the Committee was not asked to decide where the boundary should be drawn but where the boundary was actually found. The compilation of evidence by both sides took an extensive amount of time and expertise. The documents, including maps, are some of the most important sources relating to the history of Labrador.

It is also worth mentioning that Quebec could not directly address the JCPC. However, correspondence did occur for about a year between Newfoundland Prime Minister Walter Monroe and Quebec's Premier, L.A. Tashereau. In fact, in 1924, three years before the JCPC decision, Prime Minister Monroe agreed, if the price was right, to sell Newfoundland's interests in Labrador to Canada/Quebec. In February 1925, Monroe was ready to sell its rights in Labrador for \$30 million. In March of the same year, he was ready to sell it for \$15 million, half the original price. Why Quebec did not jump at the chance to buy Labrador? It is important to keep in mind that for Tashereau and Quebec, Monroe was offering something that the province thought it already owned. Tashereau's final decision, as sent to Monroe, was to let the JCPC decide the case. Unfortunately for Quebec's Premier, the JCPC supported the case presented by Newfoundland. To no one's surprise, the decision was well taken in Newfoundland. In contrast, the decision was viewed as unacceptable, particularly in Quebec. Quebec contested the Decision and claimed Labrador as 'hers'. Ever since, there has also been a constant claim by Quebec that Labrador, or at least part of it, is hers. The following official government map (see Map 1) shows that Québec does still not accept this decision. The legend mentions that the decision is not definitive.

Map 1 - Map of the province of Québec



Divisions territoriales
 - - - - - Frontière internationale
 - - - - - Frontière interprovinciale
 - - - - - Frontière Québec - Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador
 (cette frontière n'est pas définitive)

Projection cartographique Conique de Lambert avec deux parallèles d'échelle conservée (46° et 60°)
 0 200 km

Réalisation
 Production Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune
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Québec

Source: Ministère de l'Énergie et des Ressources Naturelles. *Cartes du Québec*. Retrieved from: <https://mern.gouv.qc.ca/territoire/portrait/portrait-quebec.jsp>

From this event, one can understand the strategic and importance of hydro developments in Labrador for Québec. The hydroelectric developments are what are at the root of the collective resentment of Newfoundland and Labrador towards Québec.

Signed in 1969, the Churchill Falls contract provided for the sale to Hydro-Québec of approximately 31 billion kilowatt hours per year for a term of 40 years. During those 40 years the price would be approximately 3 mills (3 tenths of a cent) per kilowatt-hour for the first 5 years and then decline in stages until it becomes approximately 2.5 mills for the last 15 years. Thereafter, with the expiry of the contract's term, the contract provided for automatic renewal of the contract for a further 25 years (until 2041) at a lower price of 2 mills. However, as Feehan (2009) points out, despite the end of the renewed contract in 2041, the question of ownership is still unsettled as Hydro-Québec will still own 34.2% of the Churchill Falls (Labrador) Corporation (CFLCo). Furthermore, "CFLCo holds the 99-year lease to the Churchill Falls watershed, a lease that does not expire until 2060 and is renewable for another 99 years." (Feehan, 2009: 38). In other words, it is more than likely that Hydro-Québec will benefit in some ways until 2159! Knowing the terms of the contract, it is no surprise that there is a lot of resentment in Newfoundland and Labrador towards Québec.

Furthermore, as the oil crisis in the 1970s unfolded and the prices for electricity (and the profits made by Hydro-Quebec) rise, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador attempted to rectify the situation. It has made appeals to Canadian public opinion; it has made requests to the Quebec authorities to renegotiate the contract; and it has called on the federal government to assist in finding a resolution. As Feehan and Baker also explain: "In the 1980s, the Supreme Court of Canada heard two appeals arising from actions launched by the Newfoundland government: one to gain access to a larger portion of the energy and the other to test the validity of nullifying the contract by legislative action. Both challenges, which were opposed by CFLCo as well as Hydro-Québec, failed." (2007: 208-209) None of the other tactics has been successful either.

The injustice of the contract resonates in Newfoundland political culture, being characterized as another case where outsiders have exploited its resources. So much so that it eventually led the former Premier of the Province, Danny Williams, in its will to develop the Lower Churchill, today know as Muskrat Falls. As Bannister rightfully summarizes: "Danny Williams's premiership did not alter the province's political culture so much as it culminated. For two generations that culture was predicated on the politics of anticipation, as Newfoundlanders waited for deliverance from the injustices of the past - especially the infamous 1969 Churchill Falls deal." (2012: 212). To develop a project without Quebec (as a payback from the lopsided Churchill Falls) and where Newfoundland and Labrador will be "masters of our own destiny", a Crown corporation was created in 2007, later named Nalcor, to manage the province's energy interests. Williams repeated the "masters of our own destiny" phrase when he tapped Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro to plan the development of a multi-billion dollar Lower Churchill hydroelectric project (Marland, 2010). The climax of Williams' premiership happens in 2010. In August 2010, the Government of Canada signed a memorandum of understanding with the governments of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia to provide the promised loan guarantee. Shortly after, a report by a federal-provincial environment panel recommended that Nalcor commission further analysis. The partisan response foreshadowed the upcoming election campaign and beyond: Dunderdale vowed that the Lower Churchill project was sensible, the

Liberals and NDP argued that work should be stopped until further study was conducted, and the federal Conservatives were silent. That Danny Williams chose to reassure Newfoundlanders by pointing out that this was an opportunity to “finally shake Quebec” (VOCM, 2011) indicated some concern about public confidence in his legacy project. Even recently, at the Commission of Inquiry Respecting the Muskrat Falls Project, Williams reaffirmed: “Williams acknowledged there was some comfort in not being “subservient to Quebec” and “I did like the idea of getting it independent of Quebec.” (CBC, 2019). But he denied his goal of making the province “masters of our own destiny” clouded anyone's judgment related to the project.

So, on November 2, 2018, when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Quebec had no obligation to renegotiate the Churchill Falls Contract, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador was once again rebuffed by the Courts, but it is becoming clearer that the Muskrat Falls project will also be a massive debt.

Culture takes various forms, but one of the most international aspects is humour. As Davis (2005) points out: “ [...] a kind of joke that is almost universal - the ethnic, regional, local jokes told about the stupidity of a neighbouring group.” (p. 70). Canadian jokes are no different and are made about Newfoundland. Due to its geographical location (the eastern edge of the country), the long economic gap¹, the way of life and the social attitudes, Newfoundland has all of the characteristics to be at the centre of “stupidity jokes” (Davies, 2002, p. 114). Among the striking features of the Newfoundland jokes is its longevity. The cycle of jokes started in the 1960s and lasted long in the 1990s. Furthermore, another feature is that Newfoundland jokes exist in both official languages. While jokes told in English will emphasize the speech pattern, the accent or the Newfoundland English, the jokes told in French will be play on words, making the ‘Newfie’ look stupid. Jokes about Newfoundland in French were so predominant during the cycle that ‘Newfie’ or ‘Newf’ became part of the linguistic expressions in French Québec most notably. *Être Newfie* (To be a ‘Newfie’) equated as being imbecile, or fool (Baker, 2017, p. 10; Davies, 2002, p. 117; DesRuisseaux, 2003). The *Newfie jokes* may now be less common, but the term ‘Newfie’ is certainly still not settled. As Baker (2017) demonstrates, youth in Newfoundland do not necessarily see the term as an ethnic slur, but do feel that it depends on the context. The context is not only important, but the portrayal is also crucial. In a recent *Simpsons* episode (aired in April 2019), the mentioned of the ‘stupid Newfie’ clubbing baby seals let many people in the province to debate about the offensiveness of the scene. Although a satiric show, the *Simpsons* did open a Pandora box because, as the CBC reports: “‘Newfie’ is considered by many to be a derogatory label in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the seal hunt has long been staunchly defended in the province against outsiders who oppose the practice.” (CBC, 2019). It is worth mentioning that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have long been made fun of because of their accent, and that, for lots of them, the term ‘Newfie’ is really offensive and leads to a notion of being ‘inferior’.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the cultural aspect of resentment can also be found in songs. If you ever venture to George street, the famous two blocks of pubs, bars and restaurants, you are likely to hear a song entitled *The Islander*. Played under an energetic Celtic beat, the lyrics are worth reproducing:

¹ Note: the unemployment rate in Newfoundland and Labrador is the highest among Canadian provinces (nearly the double of most provinces) at 11.5% (see: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/14-20-0001/142000012018001-eng.htm>)

The Islander

Chorus

I'm a Newfoundlander born and bred and I'll be one till I die.
I'm proud to be an Islander and here's the reason why.
I'm free as the wind and the waves that wash the sand.
There's no place I would rather be than here in Newfoundland.

I spent some time in New York state I nearly lost my mind.
The city life's too fast for me nobody had the time.
Cement and steel and flashing lights was all that I could see.
It may be good for New York state but it's no damn good for me.

Chorus

In Montreal the Frenchmen say that they own Labrador.
Including Indian Harbor where my father fished before.
And if they want to fight for her then I'll surely make a stand.
And they'll regret the day they tried to take our Newfoundland.

Chorus

Now that the oil is on our shore we better take the time,
to develop it more carefully or else you're going to find,
what could have been the answer to our poor economy,
has changed our way of living and destroyed our fishery.

Chorus

(bold is my own addition)

I have underlined in bold the lyrics that are worth attention for the purpose of this paper. Note that here the Québécois are referred to as the 'Frenchmen'. The song clearly makes a reference to the historical resentment felt by Québec towards Labrador. There is a clear 'them' and 'us' dichotomy in that verse. Furthermore, not only do past animosities between Québec and Newfoundland and Labrador resurface, but here, it almost takes the form of a war. The language could not be clearer: the Islander of the song is ready to fight over Labrador. Interestingly though, Labrador here, although mention in the first line, is soon eclipsed to be amalgamated to Newfoundland.

Methodology

The feud between the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador and Québec is certainly rooted in both types of resentment. Now that I have discussed both the historical/political and cultural aspects, I was curious to take a deeper look if any of them will be referenced in day-to-day interventions. As my starting point, I did a discourse analysis of the comments about the Supreme Court Decision in November 2018. The analysis consisted of systematically reviewing the texts and language used until patterns emerged. I chose to focus on the comments section found on the webpage of CBC/Radio-Canada. In total, 100 comments in French were analyzed and 693 comments in the English version. The news article chosen was the one that was similar in both French and English. I purposely omit any opinion letters or deeper analysis as to have a similar point of comparison (note: the news did not gather much opinion letters in the francophone Québec media, but did gather more in the English or in Newfoundland media). I also limit myself

to CBC/Radio-Canada, but could certainly expand the analysis to print/newspaper media (the main problem here will be to choose which one in Quebec would be the equivalent of the Telegram or local newspapers in Newfoundland) By proceeding to such analysis, I was curious about what kind of collective perspectives were held on both sides of the equation. There are certainly lots of limits, some of which I have already identified, to such an analysis. On one hand, I have no way of knowing, in either the French or English news article, where the person comes from or lives unless the person will acknowledge that (which was rarely the case). On the other hand, and despite those limitations, interesting patterns did emerge, as I will discuss below.

Analysis

Table 1 shows the results from my discourse analysis of the Radio-Canada comments. All of the 100 comments were written in French. Seven times the mention of either that Labrador was stolen, given away or lost appeared. Interestingly, in six of the seven instances, this was mentioned in combination that it was because of London and the Privy Council. The historical resentment towards that decision is still very present in the discourse. The term 'Newfie' is only mentioned once, which can be in line with the cycle of Newfie jokes that ended in the 1990s. Almost 20 years later, this term has but little meaning to most young people in Québec.

Table 1 - Discourse analysis of the comments section on Radio-Canada*

Term(s)	Number of times a term is mentioned
Labrador volé/perdu/donné à Terre-Neuve	7
redonner nous...	2
Newfies	1
Londres (conseil privé)	6

* The article and comments analyzed can be found at: <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1133479/churchill-falls-hydro-quebec-contrat-cour-supreme>

Table 2 shows the results for the CBC article. Among the patterns that emerged is the questioning as to whether or not the decision will have 'remained' if the roles were reversed. Most of the 15 comments saying that added that it was, to their beliefs, unlikely that Québec would have stayed quiet if it was in Newfoundland's shoes. Other comments were quite more aggressive and mention to turn the switch off, to shut the power off (a comment event continued and said: let them [the Québécois] freeze and die). This sort of comment would certainly resonate to the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta with Premier Jason Kenney 'turning off the tap' of the pipeline bill (Keller and Cox, 2019). The terms *Newfs* or *Newfies* were used seven times, in each instance; it was used to mean stupid.

Table 2 - Discourse analysis of the comments section on CBC**

Term(s)	Number of times a term is mentioned
shut it/turn the switch off/power on and off	11
reversed roles	15
Newfs	2

Newfie 5
Labrador taken from Quebec 3
** The article and comments analyzed can be found at:
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/churchill-falls-hydro-quebec-supreme-court-1.4888321>

Conclusion

In this paper, I analyzed the role of collective resentment in both Newfoundland and Labrador and Québec. I start off by providing some historical background to the causes of resentment towards Newfoundland and Labrador from Québec. For the Québécois, the idea that Labrador has been stolen from them is predominant. Furthermore, the long survival of Newfie jokes and the integration of the term 'Newfie' in French expressions reveal the portrayal that people may have towards Newfoundlanders. From Newfoundland and Labrador's perspective, the collective resentment comes from the infamous Churchill Falls contract. The perceived unfairness and injustice of the contract has led the province to the Supreme court several times (all decisions have favoured Québec) and to develop Muskrat Falls without Québec (an endeavour that has plunged the province in a precarious financial position). The animosity towards Québec is also seen in songs such as *the Islander*. My analysis has shown that the fate of the relationship between the neighbouring provinces, despite the willingness of their leaders to collaborate, will need to also be integrated in the general consciousness. Humour, songs, and historical memories can be long lasting. However, despite their differences and the resentment, the two provinces have much in common and could be called nationalist brethren, but this is a topic for another paper.

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