

Native Witchcraft Beliefs in Acadian, Maritime and Newfoundland Folklore

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Résumé de l'article

Les légendes et les croyances traditionnelles acadiennes ont été recueillies et étudiées par différents chercheurs, la première étant Catherine Jolicoeur, qui amassa approximativement 400 récits traitant de la population autochtone des Maritimes, alors qu'elle menait ses enquêtes de terrain dans les zones acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick. Cet article s'intéresse à la question de la croyance en la sorcellerie amérindienne, non seulement dans le folklore acadien mais également chez les anglophones des Maritimes et de Terre-Neuve, afin de mettre en valeur les ressemblances ou les différences entre leurs systèmes traditionnels de croyance ainsi que leurs attitudes envers les groupes amérindiens. On établit une comparaison entre les positions des groupes catholiques et protestants, et on porte une attention particulière aux questions liées au sexe et à l'identité des « sorcières », en s'appuyant sur des sources allant du dix-septième au vingtième siècle. L'article démontre que durant toutes les périodes de l'histoire, depuis les premiers contacts entre les Européens et les populations autochtones des provinces maritimes, ces dernières ont été perçues par les Européens comme étant potentiellement dangereuses et elles ont été soupçonnées de posséder des pouvoirs surnaturels et malveillants.

NATIVE WITCHCRAFT BELIEFS IN ACADIAN, MARITIME AND NEWFOUNDLAND FOLKLORE

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In an article about Catherine Jolicoeur's vast collection of Acadian traditional legends, I chose the theme of supernatural narratives referring to the Aboriginal population of the Maritimes as an example of the many topics that can be explored thanks to her fieldwork (Greenhill and Tye 1997: 28-38). A survey of the approximately 400 recorded narratives dealing with Native people revealed that about 350 of them told of how the Mi'kmaq had the power to curse or to "witch" people and animals, causing them serious harm. In most of the narratives, contacts with the Natives take place when they stop at people's houses, either to sell baskets or other wares, or to beg for food. A small number of stories tell of how Natives supplied Acadians with various cures for their physical ailments, but in general, the Natives are seen as potential witches. One of Jolicoeur's informants even said that the first prayer a Mi'kmaq woman taught her children was the secret of witchcraft [*le secret du sorcelage*] (Greenhill and Tye 1997: 36). I would now like to examine in more detail the issue of belief in Native witchcraft, not only in Acadian folklore, but also among anglophones of the Maritimes and Newfoundland, in order to point out similarities or differences in their traditional belief systems, and also in their attitudes towards Native groups.

It is difficult to establish an exact equivalency between English and French terms relating to witchcraft. In the collection edited by Peter Narváez entitled *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, Richard P. Jenkins refers to the distinction made by anthropologists between witchcraft and sorcery, the former depending on an innate power within the individual's body, and the latter relying for its efficacy on the manipulation of medicines and spells (Jenkins 1991: 302). It would be equally difficult to determine clearly whether magical practices in Atlantic Canada correspond more closely to the definition of witchcraft or to that of sorcery, as this article demonstrates.

In the anglophone tradition, witches are considered to have the power to harm people by casting spells, but it is not clear whether their power is innate or whether it has been acquired through learning, for example by obtaining a book of magic. There are occasional references to "wizards" in Maritime folklore, but this term may be used simply to distinguish male from female practitioners of witchcraft.

In the Acadian tradition, there are many narratives explaining that a *sorcier* or *sorcière* obtains power through a transaction with the devil where he or she sells his or her soul in exchange for the knowledge necessary to bewitch people or animals. Acadians often use the expression *jeteux de sorts* to refer to an individual known to cast spells, while the term *sorcier* or *sorcière* is more commonly used to refer to a person who has acquired a wide reputation over time as a practitioner of witchcraft and who is closely identified with the practice. A *jeteux de sorts* may possess the knowledge necessary to cast spells, while otherwise leading a normal life. These individuals may sometimes redeem themselves through a rejection of the devil and acceptance of Roman Catholic doctrine, while the *sorcier* or *sorcière* is seen as the agent of the devil on earth, and is considered to be damned. Narrators who tell of spells cast by Natives rarely point to specific individuals as *sorciers*. Rather, they express a general belief that the Mi'kmaq people who came into contact with Acadians possessed a shared supernatural knowledge giving them potentially dangerous magical powers.

As historian Robin Briggs has pointed out, in Christian societies of the past, the world was thought to be full of hidden and potent forces that ultimately referred back to the two great antagonists, God and the Devil (Briggs 2002: 2). In North America, Native populations were easily suspected of being devil worshipers because of their shamanistic religious practices. According to historian Mary Beth Norton, English

settlers everywhere on the continent viewed the shamans as witches (Norton 2003: 59). Attitudes were hardly less antagonistic in New France, where in 1632, Father Le Jeune, the Superior of the Canadian Jesuit mission, described his territory as "Satan's Empire" (Maxwell-Stuart 2001: 96).

The generally peaceful relations that existed between the Acadian and Mi'kmaq peoples may have prevented the supernatural beliefs of the former provoking hysterical witch hunts, the likes of which happened in New England. Recent studies of the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts in 1692 have shown that the residents of Massachusetts were living in constant fear of the Wabanaki tribes to the north, whom they considered to be the allies of the Devil. They also believed some witches would go into the woods, the domain of the Natives, in order to meet with Satan. One of the most dominant figures in the witch hunt, Cotton Mather, explicitly referred to the Wabanaki as "Devils" (Norton 2003: 81-136).

The fact that the Mi'kmaq shared a common religion with Acadians may also explain in part why the latter did not go so far in their condemnation of Native witches as did anglophones. In her study of witchcraft and religion in Acadian society, ethnohistorian Denise Lamontagne shows how Acadians and Natives even shared a common spirituality characterized by a strong devotion to Saint Anne. As the grandmother of Christ, Saint Anne was perfectly adapted to the Native system of belief based on ancestor worship, where she embodied the figure of the grandmother/midwife/healer. She was also a powerful traditional figure in Acadian spirituality, despite efforts by the Church to replace her with the cult of the Virgin Mary (Lamontagne 2005).

The topic of witchcraft was one of eighteen included in Catherine Jolicoeur's collection of Acadian legends published in 1981, *Les plus belles légendes acadiennes*. In the eleven narratives presented in the chapter entitled "La sorcellerie," the identity of the witch is not revealed, and few details are given regarding the cultural background of the people held responsible for casting spells, apart from a few references to the fact that they were strangers in the community. In eight of the narratives, the witches are male, while only in three are they female. Gender is perhaps the principal factor differentiating witchcraft legends in English and French speaking cultures. Although the English term "witch" has not always referred specifically to female practitioners of witchcraft, the common usage has long been to associate the term to a female

figure. In French language terminology, witchcraft is not primarily associated with women, and both masculine and feminine forms of the French term *sorcier/sorcière* are used in the Acadian tradition, depending on the person's gender.

According to Helen Creighton, the term "witch" is applied to male or female without distinction in Nova Scotia (1968: 18). Her published collections of witchcraft beliefs indicate, however, that female witches were far more numerous. For example, the chapter on witchcraft and enchantment in *Folklore of Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia* contains twenty-six texts mentioning the gender of a witch. In twenty-one of them, the person responsible for casting spells is female. In *Bluenose Magic*, Creighton's major work on the supernatural, there are approximately eighty narratives dealing with female witches, and only twenty where men are considered to be responsible for acts of witchcraft. Jenkins reports that in Irish folklore, witches were believed to be more often women than men. He explains the fact by stating: "Witches were commonly at their busiest stealing milk or blinking churns, both feminine spheres of responsibility" (Jenkins 1991: 326). The word "blinking" is used here as a transitive verb meaning to trick, signifying that the witch causes the churn to malfunction through trickery.

In her article dealing with violence expressed against women who are considered to be witches in Newfoundland, Barbara Rieti suggests that magical attacks on a witch's person are almost always used by men against women, even though "men may sometimes be witches" (1997: 79). She also states that male witches do not seem to be subject to bodily harm (83). In one case where the aggression against a female witch is perpetrated by another woman, Rieti explains that the attacker was White, while the victim was a Mi'kmaq woman, and was therefore lower in status, just as women are the targets of men (80).

Helen Creighton's research seems to support Barbara Rieti's contention that magical attacks on witches are generally perpetrated by men against women. *Bluenose Magic* contains two references to a man considered to be a witchmaster. One informant adds that he was called the "Father of Witches," and that he "could control them all if they went too far" (21, 34-35). It seems that, in the field of witchcraft, as is the case in many other spheres of activity, there existed a traditional hierarchy where a small number of men had the power to exert authority over female subordinates. In almost all cases where an individual is called upon to free a victim of witchcraft from a curse or spell, it is a

man who performs an act of magic destined to reverse the effects of the spell by attacking the witch, sometimes with fatal consequences. Just as Barbara Rieti's Newfoundland informants referred to the Bible in order to justify deaths supposedly resulting from counterspells (1997: 78), so Helen Creighton's Lunenburg informants quoted the passage from *Exodus* 22: 18, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" in order to defend the actions of witchmasters (1968: 25).

It is possible that in predominantly Protestant areas of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, awareness of the biblical references to witches may explain the common image of the witch as an evil woman, while in Acadian communities, suspicions of witchcraft did not necessarily lead to accusations pointed at women: the guilty party could be a *sorcier* just as easily as a *sorcière*. Acadians, who are traditionally Roman Catholic, tend not to use literal interpretations of the scriptures as a basis for their actions. In the *Bible de Jérusalem*, the most widely used French language translation of the Bible, the passage quoted above from *Exodus* expressly refers to female witches: "*Tu ne laisseras pas en vie la magicienne.*" However, the passage never appears in the Acadian witchcraft narratives consulted.

It is worth noting that in the numerous Acadian legends involving people who are possessed by the devil or under evil supernatural influence, the local priest is generally the person to whom the victim or their family turns for help, while in the case of Native witchcraft, the priest is rarely consulted. One narrative from New Brunswick involves an Acadian man who was taught a magical Mi'kmaq word that could cause injury or death when muttered in the presence of an animal. After he went home, the man tried the magic word three times, pointing each time at a chicken. In each case, the chicken dropped dead. The man immediately went to find the parish priest, who exorcised him, asking him to repeat prayers as he held a Bible over his head. When the man then returned home, he realized he had already forgotten the magic word thanks to the intervention of the priest.¹

In a case from western Prince Edward Island, an Acadian family set their dogs on a group of itinerant Mi'kmaq in order to chase them away from their home. As the party leave, they mutter that the Acadians will soon be barking themselves. A pregnant woman in the household soon gives birth to a girl who has fits causing her to bark like a dog.

1. CEA, Catherine Jolicoeur Collection, Recording n° 8521.

When she grows older, her parents take her to see a priest who is considered to be a holy man. The priest lays a Bible on her head and prays, after which he says she will never suffer from barking fits in a church.² The fact that the priest, despite being considered a holy man [*un vieux saint*], was unable to rid the girl completely of the Mi'kmaq curse is perhaps indicative of the strength attributed to Native magic in the traditional belief system of the Acadians.

One apparent difference between anglophone and francophone witchcraft beliefs is that people targeted as witches in Acadie did not necessarily have a low social status. There are several cases where members of the commercial elite were believed to practice witchcraft. In Chéticamp, Nova Scotia, for example, during the time when the fishery was controlled by the Robin family firm from the Channel Islands, the local population believed that the men brought from the Islands to work for the firm practiced witchcraft (Chiasson 1961: 258-260). Another example from Nova Scotia is the ship captain from Arichat named Pierre Forest, who was said to have made a pact with the devil enabling him to sail with favourable winds in all weather conditions, therefore obtaining an advantage over his rivals on the commercial run between the Maritimes and New England.³

Studies of witchcraft or *sorcellerie* in Acadian society indicate that those considered to be witches had in common the fact that they were outsiders. This phenomenon was studied in detail in Myriam Marsaud's *L'étranger qui dérange*. It focuses on Jean Campagna, who was accused of practising witchcraft in 1684 and found to be not guilty at the conclusion of a trial the following year. Campagna was originally from France, and had recently moved from Port-Royal to the tight-knit community of Beaubassin, where he had no kinship ties and whose residents had heard unfavourable rumours on his behalf.

The fact that Campagna and his accusers were all brought to Québec City for the trial indicates that suspicions of sorcery were still taken seriously by French authorities in the late seventeenth century. Robin Briggs suggests that the French Crown established complex legal procedures pertaining to accusations of witchcraft at that time in order to put an end to the rash of witch hunts that took place in France in the first half of the century (Briggs 2002: 290-291). Acadian settlers had

2. CEA, Eileen Pendergast Collection, Recording n° 7.

3. CEA, Archives de folklore, Ronald Labelle Collection, Recording n° 1594 (1983).

left France during the years immediately following the massive witch hunts of the seventeenth century, and would have brought with them beliefs and prejudices that had caused the disorders in their homeland.

References to male *sorciers* in Acadian communities often point to the fact that they were originally from France or Québec. A well-documented example is that of Lazare Lizotte of Chéticamp, nicknamed “le Canadien” (in the Maritimes, Québécois were traditionally called “Canadiens”, as opposed to “Acadiens”). Anselme Chiasson quotes several narratives where Lizotte casts spells and even appears in the shape of a large dog (Chiasson 1961: 260-261). Because of their origin, men like Lizotte were outsiders to the communities where they lived.

In an article examining Mi’kmaq “witching” in Newfoundland, Rieti states that both Mi’kmaq men and women are likely to be considered as witches. Reflecting on what Native people and women have in common, she points to their secondary social status to White males (Rieti 1995: 21). She refers to several cases of supposed “witching” in White Newfoundland communities blamed on the Mi’kmaq, concluding with a reflection on racial stereotypes that lead us to see others as “dangerous strangers” (29). She also draws a parallel between Mi’kmaq witching in Newfoundland and the fear of being cursed by itinerant Gypsies in West Country England (25-26). Rieti’s research thus leads to a vision of the witch as a stranger, despite the fact that she presents a hypothesis linking witchcraft primarily to social status.

While Rieti attributes the prevalence of female witches in Newfoundland to misogyny, the image of the witch as an outsider who threatens the stability of local society may, in certain contexts, be applicable to women in general. Jenkins has pointed out that in Irish rural society, the woman usually married into a community, where she may possibly “have remained an outsider to some extent” (Jenkins 1991: 326).

According to Denise Lamontagne, Mi’kmaq women, through their identification with both healing practices and witchcraft, perfectly embody the ambivalent nature of female spirituality in Western culture. The Mi’kmaq are thus seen as both powerful and dangerous. Lamontagne mirrors Rieti’s description of Mi’kmaq women as “dangerous strangers”, referring to their “*inquiétante étrangeté*” (Lamontagne 2005: 38). In *Witches and Neighbours*, Robin Briggs argues that what sets apart the people suspected of witchcraft is that they are reduced to a state where they depend on the charity of their neighbours. Those who refuse charity

feel guilty, and project their own feelings onto the other person, leading them to suspect witchcraft if a misfortune follows their rejection (240). The suspected witch may therefore be a person who has always lived in the immediate area, and who is known to all.

Mi'kmaq peddlers were certainly considered outsiders in any White society, whether they were selling their wares in Acadian communities, or among anglophones in the Maritimes and Newfoundland. Acadian narratives generally reflect a taboo regarding relations between Acadians and Natives. Despite the fact that they shared a common religion, Roman Catholic priests did their best to keep the two groups apart, especially in communities such as Chezzetcook, Nova Scotia, where they lived in close proximity to each other and even shared a parish church.⁴ The Acadians and the Mi'kmaq were thus never permitted to become "neighbours."

The image of the Mi'kmaq in Acadian folklore contrasts sharply with their mythical portrayal as the Acadians' historical allies. Essayist Robert Pichette devotes an entire chapter to "Le mythe du bon sauvage" in his work entitled *Le pays appelé l'Acadie*. He explains that although Acadians and Mi'kmaq fought side by side against the British during the eighteenth century, the former treated the Natives with contempt throughout most of their history, while Acadian writers invented a romantic image of a mythical friendship between the two groups. In his survey of the place occupied by Natives in Acadian literature up to the 1950s, Dennis Bourque finds an admiration for the Mi'kmaq in the writings of authors from all periods since the seventeenth century. In their view, the Natives deserved recognition not only as friends and allies, but also as the saviours of the Acadian people in the post-deportation era (Bourque 2004-2005: 216-217). However, Bourque points out that Acadian authors preferred to express their admiration for the Mi'kmaq from a distance, mentioning that two of the most important writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Pascal Poirier and André-Thaddée Bourque, both went out of their way to stress that the Acadian people had no "Indian blood" in their veins (209).

The legendary figure of La Mariecomo, who lived in Southeast New Brunswick between 1838 and 1910, exemplifies the fact that intermarriage was extremely controversial at the time. In the preface

4. CEA, Ronald Labelle Collection, Recordings n° 1123 and 1401.

to his novel based on the character of La Mariecomo, Régis Brun states that she inspired fear and admiration among Acadians, who were uncomfortable at the fact that a fair haired White woman would choose to marry into the Mi'kmaq community (2006: 3-4). La Mariecomo left a lasting impression in southeast New Brunswick, where some people said she had been seduced by a Mi'kmaq witch, and that she became a witch herself, while others believed she had simply married for love.⁵

Many stories about Acadian girls who fall in love with Mi'kmaq men express the belief that the women were bewitched by their lover. In one case, the sister of a girl who is desperately in love with a Mi'kmaq consults another Native man who explains a way to nullify the spell. He tells her to examine the girl's shoes during the night to see if a leaf from a tree is hidden inside the sole. Once the sister finds and removes the leaf, the girl ceases to pine for her Mi'kmaq lover.⁶

In Acadian folklore, as is the case elsewhere, there were people who had the knowledge of ways to rid people of spells in general, and it was not necessary to ask help from the Mi'kmaq themselves in order to remove them. In one example, an Acadian girl suffers from fits after being cursed by a Mi'kmaq suitor her mother had turned away from their home. After a few days of suffering, an old man comes to the house and enquires about the physical appearance of the Mi'kmaq. He then draws a picture of the man's face and stabs it with a fork, after which the witch arrives with wounds on his face, saying he is ready to deliver the girl from the spell.⁷

One of the earliest references to Native witchcraft in Acadian folklore deals precisely with the taboo subject of interracial relations. The story concerns Joseph Gueguen (1741-1825), an important figure in the early history of Southeast New Brunswick where his numerous descendants go by the surname "Goguen." In 1771, Gueguen, a widower with four young children, married a widow named Marie Quessy. The couple separated permanently in 1778, after years of constant strife. According to oral tradition, Marie Quessy had been cursed by a Mi'kmaq woman whom she had abruptly turned away because she was tired of being approached by beggars both at home and at her family's

5. CEA, Lauraine Léger Collection, Recordings n° 463 and 1240; Catherine Jolicoeur Collection, Recording n° 10,034.

6. CEA, Catherine Jolicoeur Collection, Recording n° 6260.

7. CEA, Catherine Jolicoeur Collection, Recording n° 7863.

general store (Brun 1984: 52-53). Quessy was seen as the victim of a spell that caused her to experience an obsessive jealousy toward her husband, whom she accused of infidelity with Mi'kmaq women.

Stories of native witchcraft concerning Gueguen and his wife Marie Quessy remained in oral tradition for over one hundred years until written down by Placide Gaudet in the late nineteenth century. Their resilience in the collective memory of Acadians may be explained by the scandal provoked by the couple's separation (and unsuccessful petitions by Gueguen to obtain a divorce). It is possible, however, that a conflict over attitudes towards the Mi'kmaq in the Gueguen/Quessy household may have been the catalyst for the development of a memorable supernatural narrative. As a teenager, Joseph Gueguen had studied at the Québec Seminary, and had then acted as personal secretary to the missionary working among the Mi'kmaq of the Miramichi region. Gueguen spoke Mi'kmaq fluently and even produced writings in the language (Brun 1984: 66-67). His home in Cocagne could easily have attracted itinerant Mi'kmaq, who knew they would find a friend there. Marie Quessy, however, who was certainly not on such close terms with the Mi'kmaq, may have had a suspicious attitude toward them. Underlying the narrative about the spell suffered by Marie Quessy are the rumours that must have swirled around her accusations of infidelity. For the Acadians in the Cocagne area, the possibility that a member of the local elite may have had extramarital relations with Mi'kmaq women could easily have led to rumours that invited a supernatural explanation.

It would be tempting to explain stories of Native witchcraft as manifestations of a deeply held belief in the malevolent power inherent in females. In Acadia as in Newfoundland, however, stories of spells attributed to Natives are not at all gender specific. In Acadian communities, fear and suspicion towards outsiders, coupled with the widespread belief in the supernatural, can explain the prevalence not only of tales of Mi'kmaq witching, but also of witchcraft narratives in general.

In Newfoundland folklore, witchcraft narratives involving Native women often tell the common story of the itinerant Mi'kmaq who curses those who either refuse to purchase her wares, or who turn down her request for food. There is, however, one common narrative that is peculiar to the province, and that reflects the yearly migration of the Mi'kmaq between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. The most widespread version of the story tells of how baskets belonging to a

Mi'kmaq woman are damaged during the crossing from Nova Scotia, after which the Canadian National Railway Company refuses to compensate her for the loss. The woman tells the company managers that they will suffer losses before the end of the year, and several ferries run aground during the following months.⁸

Narratives concerning Mi'kmaq men are quite varied, but the most common ones tell of encounters between hunters and White merchants in Newfoundland communities. The merchants either refuse to buy pelts from the Mi'kmaq hunters, or offer inferior prices, leading to a spell being cast on them. One example comes from the community of Gaultois. It tells of how a merchant offered a low price to two Mi'kmaq hunters, stating that their furs were worth little because of their inferior colour. The men cursed the merchant, who later became colour blind.⁹ The situation where the Mi'kmaq find themselves at the mercy of a merchant's judgement as they try to sell their pelts is similar to that of the White inhabitants of outport Newfoundland, although the former likely suffered from racist attitudes on the part of the merchants, apart from their unjust trading practises. There are also cases involving Mi'kmaq men who work alongside White people, as in the story of the crew member on a dragger who curses the skipper and crew after he is fired.¹⁰

Beliefs in countercharms existed in Newfoundland folklore as in the Maritimes, but the number of cases reported is not high enough to determine whether these forms of opposition to Native witchcraft are used more often against women than men. The concept of the witchmaster does not seem to have existed in Newfoundland folk beliefs, but there are a certain number of narratives that reflect the corpus of magical practices inherited from Western European tradition, such as drawing blood from a witch to prevent him or her from being able to cast a spell, or shooting a drawing representing the witch in order to gain revenge for having suffered the effects of a curse.¹¹ In one reported case, revenge is replaced by an act of kindness, as a merchant who suffers an injury after having refused to deal with a Mi'kmaq man is told to prepare a meal and invite the local Natives to a "scoff", after which he is healed.¹²

8. MUNFLA, Folklore Survey Cards, 68-17K/84.

9. MUNFLA, Folklore Survey Cards, 68-3K, 156; 69-6I, 117.

10. MUNFLA, Folklore Survey Cards, 68-7J, 158.

11. MUNFLA, Folklore Survey Cards, 6-6I, 122; MS68-10F/2-3.

12. MUNFLA, Folklore Survey Cards, 68-7J, 156.

A survey of narratives dealing with Native witching in the Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) suggests that the social and economic status of the itinerant Mi'kmaq in Newfoundland coastal communities was not necessarily lower than that of the White population. For example, while at least one narrative concerns a man who was cursed for having refused to shelter a Mi'kmaq couple,¹³ another presents the opposite situation, where a White hunter is fed and sheltered overnight by a Mi'kmaq woman, and is then cursed by her after leaving her home without sharing his bounty of partridges.¹⁴ While Barbara Rieti explains the generality of Mi'kmaq witching beliefs in Newfoundland by the low social status of the native community, it can be argued that there, as in Acadie, fear of outsiders seems to be a more likely explanation.

In Acadian folklore, supernatural narratives of encounters between whites and the Mi'kmaq are more numerous than in Newfoundland, reflecting the fact that intercultural contacts were certainly more frequent in the Maritimes, given the presence of a large number of Aboriginal communities. The separation between Acadian and Native communities is however reflected by the fact that the Mi'kmaq were used as frightening figures by parents who warned their children that the *sauvages* would come and take them if they didn't behave.¹⁵ Also, when a woman was about to give birth, young children would be sent to a neighbour's house and told that the *sauvages* were on their way with a baby. When the children returned and found their mother confined to her bed, they were told the *sauvages* had broken their mother's leg before leaving.¹⁶ The term "*sauvage*," which was always used to refer to the Mi'kmaq, did not necessarily have a negative connotation.

One woman from Southeast New Brunswick told of how she had been raised with a great fear of the Mi'kmaq, believing that they could even steal children. One day, when she was alone with her children, a Mi'kmaq woman came to her door asking for tea. She was so anxious to be rid of the visitor that she handed the woman a bag containing her entire supply of tea. Later on, she says she overcame her fear of the Native population and even befriended a Mi'kmaq woman.¹⁷

13. MUNFLA, MS68-13D/8-11.

14. MUNFLA, MS68-10F.

15. CEA, Catherine Jolicoeur Collection, Recording n° 12596.

16. CEA, Gratien Bossé Collection, Recording n° 97.

17. CEA, Lauraine Léger Collection, Recording n° 893.

The following example shows how a mixture of fear, respect and guilt toward the Mi'kmaq could haunt the Acadians, and permeate their psyche. In my doctoral dissertation, *J'avais le pouvoir d'en haut: La représentation de l'identité dans le témoignage autobiographique d'Allain Kelly*, I explain how Allain (or Allan) Kelly, a New Brunswick Acadian partly of Irish descent, suffered for over twenty years from the effects of a serious foot infection, leading to the amputation of part of his left foot. The infection appeared when he was a child, not long after he had used the foot to kick the straw hat of a Mi'kmaq girl after a gust of wind had taken it as she walked along the shore with her mother. Kelly always feared that the injury was the result of a spell cast by the mother of the young girl, and many years later, as he awoke in hospital after the amputation, the woman appeared to him. Standing in the doorway of his room, she declared: "They cut the foot! They cut the foot!" and then disappeared.

Acadians may have had closer contacts with the Mi'kmaq than did most anglophone Maritimers and Newfoundlanders, but there remained a vast distance between the two communities, one that could only be bridged with acts of kindness and fraternity, on rare occasions when people managed to overcome their traditional suspicion. One such example from Northeastern New Brunswick dates from the 1940s. A man recalled how two Mi'kmaq couples stopped by his house to ask if they could camp on his family's land near the shore and use water from his spring. When his wife accepted, one of the men told her they had asked several people for the same favour, and all had said no. Before leaving, the Natives offered gifts to the family: a fancily woven sewing basket, an axe handle, and also a wooden toy for the couple's son.¹⁸

During a ceremony held in Nova Scotia as part of the World Acadian Congress of 2004, the Société Nationale de l'Acadie symbolically awarded the Médaille Léger-Comeau to the Mi'kmaq people as recognition of the help they had given the Acadians over the past 400 years. For such a gesture to have real meaning, however, it would be necessary for the Acadian people to recognize that they maintained a racist attitude toward the Mi'kmaq for centuries. While this is not likely to happen in the near future, it is even less likely that anglophone Maritimers and Newfoundlanders will improve their perception of the Mi'kmaq, given that historically, there has been little cooperation between those cultures. Finally, this study has shown that

18. CEA, Catherine Jolicoeur Collection, Recording n° 12416.

everywhere in the Atlantic region, members of First Nations were considered in the past as potentially dangerous outsiders, and were thus easily identified in White communities as practitioners of witchcraft.

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 Catherine Jolicoeur Collection, Recording n°12596.
 Lauraine Léger Collection, Recording n°893.
 Eileen Pendergast Collection, Recording n°7.

Memorial University of Newfoundland, Folklore and Language Archives (MUNFLA)

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