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Article abstract

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Thinking Relationally and Pedagogically about Commemoration: A Critical Inquiry into Charlottetown's Macdonald Statue

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Abstract

In this article, I provide a critical reading of the now-removed statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada. I bring together my own experience visiting the statue with understandings from Indigenous scholarship and public pedagogy theorizing to think about commemorations as public pedagogies that are foremost relational. I consider how the Macdonald statue works narratively, discursively, and as a site of embodied encounter to create a harmful relationality. Thinking relationally, and pedagogically, about colonial statues suggests possibilities not only for understanding how these commemorative practices produce bad relations but also for envisioning and enacting good relations.

Keywords: Commemoration; settler colonialism; relationality; public pedagogy.

When it comes to commemoration and the experience of public history, it all depends on where you sit.
(Groat & Anderson, 2021, p. 466)

As monuments that represent colonialist, white supremacist, and patriarchal worldviews are being challenged, Indigenous historians Groat and Anderson's (2021) words remind us that commemoration practices are foremost relational. Commemoration depends on where we "sit" in terms of cultural and historical experience, and our positions within power dynamics, relations as human beings to all around us, and engagement as active, embodied agents within spaces and places and on lands and territories. Commemoration is also very much about teaching and learning. Statues can be understood as "public pedagogies," a term which refers to "the educational force of the wider culture" (Giroux, 2011, p. 7) and to "spaces, sites, and languages of education and learning that exist outside of the walls of the institution of schools" (Sandlin et al., 2010, p. 1). As Sypnowich (2021) observes, visiting monuments is "educative and in a special way": monuments are places of encounter that present us with an object that "makes our connection to the past more tangible" yet "represents phenomena beyond our experience" thus requiring interpretation (p. 472). Statues, as objects of public art and public memory, are intentionally educative devices that work to teach us not only about the past but also about who and what matters in our cities, societies, communities, and nations. Their pedagogies are multimodal and complex, working through their materials, scale, placement, and representations, the stories they tell or do not tell, and the ways of being together in the world they call forth or deny.

These relational and pedagogical understandings of commemoration inform the approach I take here to analyzing a statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada. The statue provides a site for examining colonial statues as creating a harmful relationality and for considering what is needed for building good relations. Indigenous understandings of relationality extend to land, peoples, and "more-than-human kin," and centre relationship and responsibility: "to *feel* the world as kin is to enact a relational ethos and the responsibilities and accountabilities that accompany it" (Tynan, 2021, p. 600).

As a white settler Canadian, I acknowledge that my capacity to truly understand relationality has limitations. I respectfully seek to learn from the understandings of relationality provided within the

Indigenous scholarship that I draw upon. I also bring my own experience visiting the Macdonald statue, along with understandings of relational pedagogies from public pedagogy theorizing, to thinking relationally about commemorative practice within settler colonial nation-states. I contend that this way of thinking is crucial for centring Indigenous voices, values, and epistemologies, and for honouring our relationships. After providing a critical reading of the statue, I conclude by offering some reflections on what all this might mean for where we sit within the public pedagogies of commemoration.

Every statue tells a story and every statue has a story. I begin with the story of the controversy that brewed around Charlottetown's Macdonald statue from June 2020 until May 2021, when city council finally agreed to remove the statue after the unmarked graves of 215 Indigenous children were found in Kamloops, British Columbia.

From commemoration to vigil: The story of the statue's removal

Commemorations that connect to oppressive ideologies, make invisible those who are marginalized, and celebrate historical figures whose legacies are now associated with state violence have become focal points for critical conversations and resistive and transformative actions. Around the world, statues are being challenged, defaced, reimagined, removed, and toppled as part of public protest and in response to crises in national narratives. The efforts of those who rush to salvage the reputations of problematic historical figures, and to preserve the commemorations that celebrate them, can be seen to "conflate history with nationalism and nationalism with education in ways that deserve careful and rigorous critique" (Wāhpāsiw et al., 2021, para. 7).

Figure 1: Sir John A. Macdonald bench statue, Charlottetown, PEI, 2018. Author photograph.

In the summer of 2020, Charlottetown, an east coast city and the capital of PEI, was struggling over what to do about a bronze bench statue of John A. Macdonald that sat within the heart of its downtown (Figure 1). On the west coast, in Victoria, British Columbia, a Macdonald statue had already been removed by city council as part of a formal reconciliation process with the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on whose territories the city was built (Helps, 2018). With the reputation of

Canada's first prime minister growing increasingly tarnished across the country by critiques of his role in establishing policies and structures aimed at the control, dispossession, assimilation, and even starvation of Indigenous peoples (Daschuk, 2013; Stanley, 2014, 2020), Charlottetown's Macdonald was becoming a site of contention. The City received demands for the statue's removal and the statue was splattered with red paint as concerns grew about allowing Macdonald, chief architect not only of Canadian Confederation but also of the Indian Residential School System, to continue to sit on a bench in a prominent downtown spot encouraging photo opportunities (Fraser, 2020). Adding to the pressures, were the Black Lives Matter solidarity marches against racism and police violence that were happening across the US and Canada in the aftermath of the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. However, controversy over Macdonald posed a serious dilemma for a city that built its tourism around its branding as "the Birthplace of Confederation" and its memorialization of the "Fathers of Confederation" (Johnson, 2019a, 2019b). It is therefore not surprising that the City faltered, wavered, and delayed making a decision about the statue.

A slow process began in June 2020 which saw city council pass a unanimous motion to keep the statue in place but start a dialogue with PEI's Indigenous communities (Higgins, 2020). On January 28, 2021, the Epekwitk Assembly of Councils issued a statement signed by the Chiefs of Lennox Island First Nation and Abegweit First Nation expressing their concerns that the City seemed interested only in consulting about revising the text on the existing plaque and had not placed signage on the bench statue to prevent photo opportunities. The statement outlined five recommendations they had made to the City "to amend the art installation and tell the true story of this individual and begin to address the trauma that its presence is continuing to perpetuate" (Epekwitk Assembly of Councils, 2021, para. 3). A motion was passed May 10, 2021 with 8 to 1 in favour of adopting the recommendations (Ross & MacLeod, 2021). Almost a year had passed since the motion to keep the statue, during which time the statue had been knocked over and splattered with yellow paint and red paint on separate occasions, with the City responding each time with clean-up crews.

Then, on May 27, 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation (2021) announced that the remains of 215 Indigenous children had been found at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia. Ground-penetrating radar detected these children who never made it back to their homes from which they had been taken. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), established in 2007 to officially record statements from survivors and witnesses as part of the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, has played a major educative role in bringing to the attention of the Canadian public the harms and abuses Indigenous children experienced in the Residential School System. The TRC (2015) documented how for over 150 years over 150,000 children were separated from their parents, families, and communities. Their identities and lives were engulfed by "a government-sponsored attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures and languages and to assimilate Aboriginal peoples so that they no longer existed as distinct peoples" (TRC, 2015, p. 153). The system created a legacy of intergenerational trauma and ongoing inequities in education, child welfare, language, culture, health, and justice. Administered by the churches and underfunded by the government, residential schools were sites of neglect, hunger, exploitation, spread of infectious diseases, physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse, and death. Yet many Canadians, myself included, were not prepared for the horror and sadness of 215 children in unmarked graves although there had been survivors' stories of witnessing deaths, the Commission had made specific recommendations to government, and Volume 4 of the TRC's (2016) final report is titled "Missing Children and Unmarked Burials." The unmarked graves in Kamloops would turn out to be the first in a number of gravesites to be found at former residential schools.

Charlottetown's Macdonald statue became a place of vigil and ceremony for the 215 children, one of many that were happening across the country (Morris, 2021). There were prayers and jingle dancing, and a memorial of 215 pairs of children's shoes was set by Macdonald's feet. Macdonald's hands were splashed with red paint, to signify blood on his hands, and a sign was placed on the bench: "John A. Macdonald. Father of (the word "Confederation" crossed out) Residential Schools." City workers quickly took away the statue after city council voted unanimously on May 31, 2021 to remove it and place it in storage until its future could be decided. In the wake of the press release about the 215

children, other colonial monuments across Canada were challenged, including Kingston, Ontario's removal of a Macdonald statue from City Park, and dramatic topplings of Egerton Ryerson (a key architect of the Residential School System), in Toronto, Ontario, and Queens Victoria and Elizabeth II in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

A city removing a statue does only so much and can seem like merely another maneuver in what for many has become an unsatisfying reconciliation discourse. It does not resolve the inequities, violences, injustices, and systemic racism that Indigenous people face in Canada. Nor does it meet the demand for decolonization, which Tuck and Yang (2012) define as bringing about "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (p. 1). Yet, understanding statues as educative and as powerful pedagogical devices points to how much commemoration practices matter. The TRC (2015) identified the importance of Canadian heritage and commemoration practices to the work of reconciliation in its calls to action 79 to 83. Statues, and the public spaces in which they are installed, shape and influence our perceptions, understandings, interactions, and relations (Wāhpāsiw, 2020).

In what follows, I examine commemoration as an educative site that has significant implications for thinking about our relations. I begin by employing a wide lens, one that considers Charlottetown's Macdonald statue as part of heteropatriarchal settler colonial structures, narratives, and discursive visuality; then, I move in closer to examine the statue as a pedagogical space of embodied and relational encounter.

Commemorating "Founding Fathers"

That Macdonald has emerged as a particularly contentious figure is not surprising given his large role in forming and shaping the country Canadians know today in ways that involved overlaying Indigenous lands and territories with his vision for the nation. As Stanley (2020), a historian of racism, writes: "Macdonald's entire project was to create not only a territory in which people of European origins belonged but also a territory that belonged to them" (p. 107). Prime Minister from 1867-73 and 1878-91, and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs from 1878-1887, Macdonald can be considered key architect of the Canadian colonial nation-state, a state which developed policies toward Indigenous peoples that have been referred to as "cultural genocide" by the TRC (2015) and as "genocide" by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) (2019). Within Macdonald's national dream were: the imposition of a capitalist property regime on Indigenous homelands; the creation of the North-West Mounted Police to establish Canadian law and sovereignty over the West; the shaping of "Indian" policy as an instrument of control that exists to this day; the violent response to the North-West Resistance which included the hanging of Métis leader Louis Riel and the incarceration of Cree Chiefs Big Bear and Poundmaker; the development of a pass system that confined Indigenous people to their reserves; starvation of Plains peoples through the withholding of food rations to force compliance; and the establishment of the Residential School System (Daschuk, 2013; Stanley, 2014, 2020). Eager for Western settlement and a transcontinental railway (built with exploited Chinese immigrant labour), Macdonald deemed Indigenous people to be in the way. His record in seeking to exclude both "Indian-ness" and "Asian-ness" from his vision for Canada and his white supremacist rhetoric are well-documented (Stanley 2014).

Macdonald's national dream was also built on the disempowerment of Indigenous women. Macdonald was not prime minister when the *Indian Act* was enacted in 1876; however, the Act reflects policies developed by Macdonald, and he was responsible for its enforcement as Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs (Stanley, 2020). The *Indian Act* and other colonial policies of assimilation and control established a system of what the National Inquiry into MMIWG (2019) referred to as "gendered oppression" that continues to affect Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people and makes them unsafe. According to a study, Indigenous women and girls are sixteen times more likely to be murdered or missing than white women in Canada today (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019). The Canadian state imposed a Euro-Western gendered framework of control and policing that tied Indian status and descent to the male; devalued women's labour, roles, authorities, and contributions to their communities; and enforced European values regarding sexuality and gender expression. This was a patriarchy imported from centuries of the subjugation of European women

under capitalism (Federici, 2014), and it was also a colonial calculation: "destroying existing Nations was a precursor to forming new ones. In this project, women were an important focus through a variety of measures designed to reduce and eventually eliminate First Nations" (National Inquiry into MMWIG, 2019, p. 244).

Indigenous feminisms contribute to understanding settler colonialism as heteropatriarchal, as reflecting "social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent," and as working in concert with heteropaternalism which presumes "that heteropatriarchal nuclear-domestic arrangements, in which the father is both center and leader/boss, should serve as the model for social arrangements of the state and its institutions" (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 13). These oppressive ideologies were internalized and have left a legacy of gendered inequities and violence. Anderson (2016), who is Cree/Métis, discusses the colonial project as "the dismantling of Indigenous womanhood" and "the dismantling of gender equity" (pp. 33-55). For Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2016), "the state is a man" maintaining its sovereignty through the "disappearance" of Indigenous women whose bodies in settler colonial nations are "loaded with meaning – signifying other political orders, land itself, of the dangerous possibility of reproducing Indian life and most dangerously, other political orders. *Other* life forms, other sovereignties, other forms of political will" (para. 18). The notion of "Fathers of Confederation" or "Founding Fathers" loses any veneer of historical charm and reveals its colonial violence when viewed through such understandings.

The now-removed Macdonald statue in Charlottetown was just one piece within a narrative that the city used to brand and market itself by proudly asserting its importance as a heritage destination as "the Birthplace of Confederation." Charlottetown's downtown became an accumulation of colonial statues, buildings, plaques, interpretive panels, historical re-enactments, and actors in historical costume thus creating a barrage of settler colonial commemorative practice. As Groat and Anderson (2021) point out, settler Canadian commemoration typically fails to understand Indigenous ways of knowing that are being enacted within contemporary Indigenous heritage practice: "relational practices that distinguish themselves by their engagement with the land and the integration of human, natural, and spirit worlds" (p. 465). Wāhpāsiw (2021), a Nehiyaw woman and critical educator, emphasizes the importance of relationship and local peoples when thinking about memorials and monuments. In doing so, she points to the MMIWG Call for Justice 15.7:

> Create time and space for relationships based on respect as human beings, supporting and embracing differences with kindness, love, and respect. Learn about Indigenous principles of relationship specific to those Nations or communities in your local area and work, and put them into practice in all of your relationships with Indigenous Peoples. (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019, p. 199)

Contrary to enacting a relational ethos rooted in interconnectedness and respect for local peoples, Charlottetown's commemorative practice was developed to valorize individualism and hierarchical relationships through its invitation to learn about the past through the deeds of "great" white men. From where he sat on a bench at the Corner of Richmond and Queen Streets, the bronze Macdonald was prominent within the settler colonial narrative overlay covering almost the entire downtown with a celebratory story of Charlottetown's history as the place of Canada's "Birth" by "Fathers of Confederation." Much like Macdonald superimposed his vision of a Canadian nation over Indigenous homelands, Charlottetown spread its image of itself over unceded Mi'kmaw territory. This colonial overlay obscures and overwrites Mi'kmaw presence, histories, identities, stories, voices, meanings, and relationships to land and place. It naturalizes perceptions of Charlottetown and Canada as belonging to settlers. Of course, devices of power, domination, control, and erasure that exercise their colonial authority over urban landscapes are not unique to Charlottetown, or even to commemorative practices specifically. They are present in the layout of cities, the language on signs, the names of streets, the architecture, and the institutions—pervasive, everyday, naturalized markers of white settler dominance (Stanley, 2020). In this way, the "structuring of settler colonialism . . . is

woven into the material, symbolic, and embodied spaces" (p. 90) of cities and towns throughout Canada, and "most settler colonizers see their own meanings reflected back at them" (Stanley, 2020, p. 106).

I experienced Charlottetown's "Founding Father" tourism for myself when I was in the city researching Cree artist Kent Monkman's *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, produced by the Art Museum at the University of Toronto in partnership with the Confederation Centre Art Gallery (Johnson, 2019a, 2019b). Monkman's touring exhibition, a critical counter-narrative to Canada's celebration of 150 years of Confederation, was installed within the Confederation Centre Art Gallery in Charlottetown from June 23 to September 15, 2018. My interest in Charlottetown's settler colonial narrative was in understanding how Monkman's exhibition, located only steps away from the Macdonald statue, was operating as a counter-narrative. Of course, between the time of this writing and when I visited Charlottetown in 2018 the statue has been removed and there will have been some other changes within the city's heritage tourism related to expanding diversity and partnering with Indigenous communities (e.g., Confederation Centre of the Arts, 2019). Charlottetown has extensively celebrated Macdonald's visit of 1864 when he came from the Province of Canada to encourage a union with the Maritime colonies, although PEI did not join Confederation until 1873 (six years after Confederation). Charlottetown presented a dizzying array of representations of Macdonald and other "Founding Fathers." Confederation Centre of the Arts, a multi-purpose cultural centre that also houses the Art Gallery and which opened in 1964 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference, includes Memorial Hall where Macdonald's name is carved into the marble-lined walls along with the names of the other thirty-five Fathers. Within the Centre's replica of "Confederation Chamber," where the Fathers met to discuss Confederation, visitors can play at being a Father by trying on a top hat; view colourless, stiff-looking statues of Macdonald and other delegates; and watch a film in which Macdonald makes eloquent arguments to woo the other delegates into union. When I visited, there were actors costumed as Fathers strolling about the streets of downtown Charlottetown, interacting with the public, singing with the Confederation Brass band, and performing in historical vignettes. One restaurant menu even offered a "Founding Father" burger. The Birthplace of Confederation narrative spread down to the waterfront and to "Confederation Landing." In this space with its complex history of Mi'kmaw habitation, Acadian and British settlement, and 19th-century shipbuilding, the interpretive panels, public art, and other commemorations gave primacy to the arrival of Macdonald and the other delegates from the Province of Canada by steamship.

Although I saw costumed "Ladies of Confederation" (not "Mothers" as it appears to be only Fathers who birth nations) to accompanying the Fathers in their strolls, vignettes, and singing, the visuality of Charlottetown's downtown enforced an emphasis on celebrating elite, white men. As Morgan (2021) observes, "Canada's commemorative landscape is . . . littered and cluttered . . . with masculinity" (p. 446). The clutter of settler colonial masculinity within Charlottetown's downtown that I observed worked to create a visuality that, and here I draw on Rose's (2001) concept of "discursive visuality," not only privileges and celebrates white, heteronormative, male identities but renders unseeable how heteropatriarchal, heteropaternal settler colonialism works to overwrite Mi'kmaw identities, relations, and connections to land. Both representational practices and the practices that representation serves to hide are pedagogical, thus shaping our historical understandings and our sense of self and the world (Clover et al., 2018). Monkman's exhibition of paintings and installations provided a disruption to Charlottetown's dominant visuality as the artist's glamourous, gender-bending alter ego/narrator Miss Chief Eagle Testickle time travelled through history exposing the cruelties and heteronormative hypocrisies of Macdonald and the other Fathers (subversively re-named "The Daddies" in one painting). Miss Chief makes visible Indigenous resilience and the plurality of genders and sexualities that have been oppressed and obscured by the settler colonial project.

In sharp contrast to the temporary discursive ruptures created by Monkman, along with reconciliation projects developed as part of Confederation Centre's re-envisioning of itself (Johnson, 2019a; 2019b), the Macdonald statue, sitting there cast in bronze, discouraged historical learning that engages with any sort of complexity. The statue can be understood as an object of "tourist-friendly history" and, as such, "a representation of the past that denies active engagement with historical

argument and alternative readings of evidence" (Gordon, 2021, pp. 436-437). The statue's placement directly outside the Anne of Green Gables store, which sells merchandise associated with Canadian literary icon Lucy Maud Montgomery's popular red-haired heroine, further situated it as something to be consumed uncritically by tourists. Even the bronze plaque beside the statue offered, in English and French, the barest of biographical facts and focused on Macdonald's legacy in achieving Confederation. The plaque's reference to Canada as "the young country" worked discursively and in tandem with the statue to further erase Indigenous histories and geographies.

Contextualizing the Macdonald statue within understandings of what Canada's first prime minister has meant for Indigenous peoples, and situating it within oppressive settler colonial heritage and public memory practices, underscores the extent to which the statue operated in ways that not only maintain but reinscribe the colonial relationship. The Macdonald statue worked pedagogically as part of a heteropatriarchal and heteropaternal narrative overlay and discursive visuality that came to dominate Charlottetown's downtown. Statues are expressions of power, the power to decide what gets remembered and what gets to occupy public space. They are also complex teaching and learning devices that communicate stories, identities, ideals, and relations. Encounters with statues, as I will discuss below, can connect to deep registers of experience that are embodied, experiential, relational, and holistic.

Encountering Charlottetown's Macdonald

In contrast to Euro-Western traditions of keeping knowledge domains separate and prioritizing cognition, Indigenous understandings of teaching and learning emphasize holism— the interconnections of the spiritual, emotional, physical, and cognitive (Blackstock, 2007; Williams, 2018). Learning happens not only, or even primarily, with the mind but also with body, heart, and spirit. Public pedagogy theorizing around the relational possibilities of pedagogy also encourages robust conceptualizations that emphasize "the intersection of the subject and object of pedagogy—the relational meanings that are generated via active, sensate, embodied interactions" (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013, p. 147). As Ellsworth (2005), whose understanding of "anomalous places of learning" is foundational to this theorizing, writes, "to be alive and to inhabit a body is to be continuously and radically in relation with the world, with others, and with what we make of them" (p. 4). Colonial statues tend to be fairly dull representations of history and predictable tellers of national narratives. Yet, our encounters with these objects of public art and public memory are intrinsically relational and embodied.

The somatic and relational nature of commemorative encounters within space, place, and time is captured by Kim Anderson's (2019) involvement in "Native feminist spatial practices" (p. 124). Her immediate reaction in spotting a newly installed Macdonald statue on her university campus in Waterloo, Ontario was to engage bodily in the space. Her "first instinct is to jump up on one of the chairs" being held out by Macdonald and "hang a noose" around her neck to tell the story of how Macdonald hanged Louis Riel (as cited in Groat & Anderson, 2021, p. 466). Instead, she returned with historian colleague Lianne Leddy (Anishinaabe), to use her body as a Cree/Métis woman to intervene in the statue. The pair, both costumed in Halloween jailbird suits and with images of Chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear taped on their chests, sat in the chairs held out by Macdonald, intended presumably for Canada's two "founding nations," the British and the French. Anderson writes:

> In dressing as these leaders, we used our bodies to re-narrate the dominant nation-building discourse and make fluid those spaces of gender, past and present, through irony, by enacting ceremony and kinship, and by revealing multiple histories through the institutional seats of prison and academy. (Anderson, 2019, p. 125)

Anderson's work points to commemoration as a site in which we are addressed as bodies in spaces and in relation, and to how this address works differently depending on where we "sit." Our encounters with statues happen within our own racialized and gendered bodies. These somatic experiences teach us about our belonging or not belonging within the represented national identity (Stanley, 2020) and, for many, statues can be a site not only of exclusion but of trauma. The Epekwitk

Assembly of Councils' (2021) statement on the status of the Macdonald statue in Charlottetown referred to "the trauma that its presence is continuing to perpetuate" (para. 3). This idea of trauma needs to be considered not through a Euro-Western individualist, medical framework but rather through Indigenous understandings of trauma as collective, cumulative, intergenerational, and the result of colonial violence (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019). As controversy around Charlottetown's Macdonald grew during the summer of 2020, Abegweit First Nation member Marie Knockwood, a survivor of residential school sexual abuse and beatings, sat on the bench to educate about what the statue means to Indigenous people (MacLeod, 2020). Like many other Mi'kmaw children in PEI, Knockwood was sent off-island to the Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia which operated from 1929 to 1967. Knockwood's event with its truth telling, drumming, and singing emphasized the Macdonald statue (a flag of the Mi'kmaw people draped over one shoulder) as situated within Mi'kmaw space, land, and understandings and in relation to Indigenous bodies. Knockwood underscored how what might look to settlers like merely a mundane or celebratory object is an object of pain. Writing about settler Canadian commemoration, Groat and Anderson (2021) refer to "the chafing of a wound, the reminder of a long-standing ache, or even a stinging slap" for Indigenous people (p. 466). In news articles about the removal of the Macdonald statue in Victoria, BC, where I live, the mayor and Indigenous members of the "City Family" emphasized the pain the statue caused for Indigenous people who had to walk past it to enter City Hall (Stanley, 2020). My privileged whiteness allowed me to pass by that statue giving it not much thought at all.

Charlottetown's Macdonald statue is not the remote and officious statesman of Victoria, nor is it the imperialistic leader in ceremonial robes looking down from his grand pedestal in Montreal, Quebec (toppled during a demonstration in summer 2020). Yet, the statue is just as troubling. Commissioned by the City of Charlottetown in 2008 and the work of a US sculptor, Charlottetown's Macdonald is the charming politician who arrived determined to turn a conference about Maritime union into one about uniting the British North American colonies. Clad in the garb of his time, each detail well-observed, he appears casual with one leg crossed jauntily over the other and his shoelaces loosely tied. His gaze is directed not distantly at some passerby but at where an imagined person would sit beside him on the bench. The statue, through its gaze and an accommodating, welcoming empty space on the bench, invited people to sit down for a photo opportunity. This troubling relationality was recognized within the five recommendations to the City from the Epekwitk Assembly of Councils (2021) which included "Fill in or seal off the empty space on the bench to remove any opportunity for the bench to be used for photo opportunities" (para. 3). The statue was inviting people to sit with it, to have fun, to smile, to be silly. In addition to this problematic encouragement for colonial history as play, the act of sitting with someone suggests much to think about in terms of our relations. When I sat on that bench with Macdonald in 2018, I was aware of how it was not possible for my racialized white body in that space to signal opposition, unless I intervened in the statue in some resistive way—in fact, to signal anything other than some presumed solidarity. I felt that I was being invited into an imagined relationship. There is the way Macdonald's gaze is directed at the sitter and then also how his body turns to the sitter, as though to lean in for a close conversation. His arm extends along the top of the bench getting so close as to almost touch whoever sits beside him. This positioning, with only the iconic Father's top hat between Macdonald and me, felt close, too close for complete strangers sitting on a bench. It felt as though I was someone known to him, someone who belonged there, and that he wished to tell me a secret about his vision for Canada, or charm me into sharing his views.

The statue thus serves as a storytelling device, an invitation to imagine going back in time and being a participant in the parties, debates, and encounters that occurred around the Charlottetown Conference. It was not hard for me to imagine this, given the costumed actors and historical re-enactments in the downtown area. As the Discover Charlottetown (2021) website (which had not at the time of this writing been updated to reflect the statue's removal) suggested: "Enjoy a seat and imagine a conversation about the Canadian dream." The statue invites the sitter to be party to the intrigues, maneuvers, and side conversations of those heady nation-building days, to imagine being there. As Charlottetown's commemorative images and texts reveal, there was much socializing, dining, drinking, and dancing, and the daughters and wives of politicians were included within the festivities

and political machinations (Johnson, 2019b). However, the women's power was limited to being able to put in a good word with a father or husband. My sitting beside Macdonald was racialized in that as a white woman of European descent I would have been permitted a seat, provided I was of the proper class and connections, but it was also gendered in that my seat would have been on a bench but not at the Confederation negotiation table. Complicit but not equal.

Although anyone could sit with Macdonald on the bench statue, their experience would be shaped by where they "sit" within commemorative practice. My own experience was that the Macdonald statue addresses the racialized white body in a particular way, as transported back in time to the Conference, as belonging there, and as being in the privileged position of hearing the story of "the Canadian dream" straight from "Father's" mouth. An Indigenous sitter is unimagined and unimaginable within this particular relation that the bench statue invites. The Mi'kmaw and other Indigenous nations were not invited to the Charlottetown (or any other) Confederation talks and had no say in a process that re-mapped their lands and territories with settler colonial geographies. Cree scholar Dwayne Donald (2012) advocates for "ethical relationality" which he characterizes as "a transactional form of imagination that asks us to see ourselves implicated in the lives of others not normally considered relatives" (p. 93). This involves moving away from settler colonial notions of irreconcilable difference and instead respecting "how we are simultaneously different and related" (p. 104). The statue denied such a possibility by working to move the Indigenous "Other" beyond the settler imagination, as neither in the story nor relevant to the story. Trawlwulwuy scholar Lauren Tynan (2021) explains that "When all things exist in relatedness, it is inconceivable that an entity, idea or person could exist outside of this network, or be considered as 'Other' to this system of relationality" (p. 601). The Epekwitk Assembly of Councils (2021) sought a correction to the statue through "the addition of another figure, such as an Indigenous child or elder, to offset the existing one and therefore visibly represent his impact on Canada's Indigenous peoples" (para. 3). When Marie Knockwood sat on the bench to tell what Macdonald means to her and to Indigenous people, she was inserting her racialized and gendered body as a Mi'kmaw woman into that space, as a counter-argument, a resistance, and a resilience. Moreover, she was seizing the role of storyteller away from Macdonald. The pedagogical value of stories and storytelling is well-recognized within Indigenous teaching and learning practices (Archibald, 2008), and narrative processes are valued within the field of adult education as important for holistic, transformative learning (e.g., Clark & Rossiter, 2008).

Our encounters with colonial statues are as storied individuals within racialized and gendered bodies, which affects where we "sit" within commemoration practices. Their pedagogies work on us in ways that engage not only cognitive but multiple dimensions of learning, and that situate us within particular relations to one another, land, place, and all around us. What to do about colonial statues (remove? relocate? transform? replace?) is fraught with challenges and rooted within specific local contexts. I believe such decisions are best made in full consultation with local Indigenous leadership and communities. The story of Charlottetown's Macdonald statue points to the importance of working towards building good relations by transforming city space in ways that, far from "erasing the past" (as many statue defenders declare), bring history, land, and voice into focus in ways that honour relationships. The interventions in and removal of the Macdonald statue can be understood not as a story of destruction and erasure but rather one of empathy, healing, creativity, reimagining, and rebuilding.

Conclusions

An understanding of commemoration as foremost relational underscores the need to engage in critical questioning and dialogue about how statues and monuments work to teach in ways that reinscribe colonial, racist, sexist, and heterosexist relations. It also requires that we reflect on where and how we "sit" within a web of relations. By extension, thinking relationally is something we can bring to all of our places of teaching and learning: from classrooms and campuses to city streets and everywhere that our encounters with the broader culture influence and shape our identities, relationships, and ways of being in the world.

Charlottetown's Macdonald bench statue created a space of harmful relationality, as part of a settler-colonial narrative overlay that obscures Mi'kmaw history and presence; a heteropatriarchal and heteropaternal discursive visuality that glorifies white, elite "Fathers"; a site of trauma and pain for those whose identities were excluded from Macdonald's vision of the nation; a photo opportunity that encouraged colonial history as play; a space of racialized and gendered belonging/not belonging; and a storytelling device that invited imagined participation in a celebratory, one-sided colonial story, one in which Indigeneity was not only made invisible but unimaginable. The interventions in Macdonald statues that I have discussed by Kim Anderson and Marie Knockwood, and Monkman's intervention in the national narrative with his exhibition *Shame and Prejudic*e, create ruptures in the privileging of settler colonial identities, ways of knowing, and relations. Their pedagogies work holistically and through story, representation, the experiential, and the somatic as they bring forth truth telling, the complexities of history, and the importance of relationships and responsibilities. They are temporary, but they suggest important possibilities for reimagining public pedagogies of commemoration. Thinking relationally, and pedagogically, about statues and monuments suggests possibilities not only for exposing bad relations but also for envisioning and enacting good relations.

When I visited Charlottetown in 2018, I took a seat on a stone bench in the Aboriginal Garden Display at Confederation Landing. The small garden is in the form of a Medicine Wheel, a traditional healing and teaching tool representing a circle with four quadrants or directions and rooted in Indigenous understandings of the cycles of nature, the life stages, balance, and interconnectedness (Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI, 2018). On the bench at the centre of the Medicine Wheel are carved the words, in the Mi'kmaw, English, and French languages, "Welcome all my relations, sit here on this chair." It is a reflective and meditative space. What if Charlottetown took the Aboriginal Garden, that was being overwhelmed by the colonial commemorative structures around it, as a model for reimagining itself as a space for welcoming all our relations? What if commemoration drew on Donald's (2012) conceptualization of "ethical relationality"? Such an approach to a pedagogy of public memory would involve "an ethical imperative to acknowledge and honour the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people in the world are tied together" (p. 104). Pedagogically, commemorative space might be "transitional" in the sense Ellsworth (2005) describes it: "a time and space of play, creativity, and cultural production . . . a place of learning about what already is and what cannot be changed in a way that teaches about what can be changed" (p. 60), but with Donald's specific ethical imperative. I find hope in the City's selection of Mi'kmaw artist Melissa Peter-Paul to design a pedestrian crosswalk at the intersection of Queen and Richmond Streets where the Macdonald statue once sat (MacLeod, 2021).

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