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Call for Papers

Memorial Reckoning and the Fall of Imperial Icons

Guest Editors / Éditrices invitees

Angela Failler (University of Winnipeg)

Jason Hannan (University of Winnipeg)

Sabrina Mark (University of Winnipeg)

SPECIAL ISSUE OVERVIEW

The late philosopher Michel Serres described statues as one of the bedrocks of Western societies (2014). Statues, he held, are repositories of cultural memory, serving as historical anchors to guide human communities through the ravages and upheavals of time. In this view, statues provide a vital social function by consolidating societies and preserving collective identities. Yet, statues and other public memorials are never apolitical, nor are they always affirming. They can also negate, exclude, distort, and deny. Statues speak for some, while silencing others. In this way, they are avatars of partiality. What does it mean, then, when a statue is defaced, toppled, removed, or destroyed? What does it mean, in particular, when colonial monuments and icons of empire are challenged from “below” by those who have been historically subjugated, exploited, and excluded from institutional power and privilege, and from the official narrations of national history and public memory?

This special issue of *Global Media Journal* will explore the politics of public monuments, including: memorials, statues, place names, and other public markers. We are arguably living through a critical historical moment marked by a global revolt against the enduring structural and symbolic legacy of European colonial empires and settler colonialism. Following the emergence of powerful political movements like Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, Land Back, and Rhodes Must Fall, we have witnessed the defacing, toppling, removal, and destruction of colonial monuments across the globe, possibly a new chapter in the history of iconoclasm. We have also witnessed a reactionary defense of these monuments in the name of “history” and “tradition.” How do we make sense of this pivotal political moment? How do we chronicle the battle over public monuments as media of social and cultural memory? What are the possibilities for

reckoning with memorial landscapes that have served to enshrine histories of colonial, racist, and gender-based violence? How might they be reimagined? We seek contributions that address these core questions. Additional questions to consider include the following:

- What does the fall of imperial icons and colonial monuments, such as the statues of Queen Victoria, Cecil Rhodes, and Christopher Columbus, mean for the politics of culture and public memory?
- What “epistemologies of resistance” (Medina 2012) are behind these revolts (eg. Black, Indigenous, Latinx, feminist, queer)? Is the defacing and toppling of statues an example of “revolutionary spontaneity” (Luxemburg, 1970)?
- How does the renaming of public buildings, schools, libraries, roads, and highways fit into the statue wars and possibilities for memorial reckoning?
- How do the politics surrounding public monuments play out differently when they are colonial figures (e.g. Queen Victoria) versus figures of resistance (e.g. Louis Riel, Frederick Douglass) versus memorials dedicated to the survivors of state-led violence (e.g. Indian Residential Schools, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, slavery, the LGBTQ2+ Purge)?
- What are the possibilities and limitations of grassroots/community-based memorial projects versus government sponsored ones? What is the significance of the relationship between the sponsor and the subject of the memorial?
- How can alternative forms of public art respond to and/or take the place of toppled statues? What are the possibilities and limits of counter-monuments and anti-monuments?
- What role has digital memorialization come to play as part of public culture and/or political movements?
- Beyond the canon of Eurocentric critical theory, what decolonial theorists might we turn to for a better understanding of the current politics surrounding colonial monuments and icons of empire (e.g. Fanon 2004; Coulthard 2014; Memmi 2016; Simpson 2017; Mignolo & Walsh 2018)?

We welcome contributions that address these and related questions about the politics of colonial monuments from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, including: media studies, rhetorical studies, art history, Indigenous studies, history, women’s and gender studies, religious studies, postcolonial studies, and political theory. In addition to scholarly essays, we also welcome alternative submissions, such as poetry and artistic works, that speak to the core theme of this special issue.

ABSTRACTS

If you are interested in participating in this special issue, please submit an abstract of 150-250 words, along with a brief, 50-100 word bio, to memorialreckoning@gmail.com by **April 25**,

2022. If the abstract is accepted, we will invite you to submit your full paper for peer review shortly afterward. Full papers will be due **August 15, 2022.**

GUIDELINES

Author guidelines are available at: <http://gmj-canadianedition.ca/for-author/>

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