



Canadian Slavonic Papers

Revue Canadienne des Slavistes

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcsp20>

Eternal memory: monuments and memorials of the Holodomor

by Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek, translated by Guy Russell Torr, Edmonton, Alberta, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2021, 409 pp., \$43.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-894865-61-6

Nicolas Dreyer

To cite this article: Nicolas Dreyer (2023): Eternal memory: monuments and memorials of the Holodomor, Canadian Slavonic Papers, DOI: [10.1080/00085006.2023.2167691](https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2023.2167691)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2023.2167691>



Published online: 06 Feb 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 13



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

BOOK REVIEW

Eternal memory: monuments and memorials of the Holodomor, by

Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek, translated by Guy Russell Torr, Edmonton, Alberta, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2021, 409 pp., \$43.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-894865-61-6

Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek's monograph broadens our understanding of the nexus among history, memory, and identity relative to Ukraine and the Holodomor. *Eternal Memory* – the main title echoes an Eastern Orthodox memorial hymn – reflects on memory theory and its applicability to the Holodomor – the Great Famine in Soviet Ukraine of 1932–1933 – and the Ukrainian national and diasporic contexts. The study deepens our knowledge of the parallel evolution of differing Ukrainian “communities of memory” and their relationship to “places of memory.” It demonstrates how individually and locally chosen symbolism and endowed meaning result from the preferences of specific communities of memory that create monuments and memorial sites. Implicitly, *Eternal Memory* also pursues the author's larger question of the suitability of monuments and memorials for the commemorative and educational representation of genocide and comparable crimes. The work is meticulously researched and referenced; the argument's evolution is well-structured, extensively signposted and reflected upon throughout the discussion. Kudela-Świątek's book contains a comprehensive bibliography as well as an index of names and subjects; the discussion is accompanied by many illustrations and photographs of the exhibits or monuments in question.

Kudela-Świątek sets herself the complex task of tracing the genesis of Holodomor memory culture and the monuments and memorials to which it gave rise. She follows up on these objectives in the course of six chapters. In the introduction, the author lays out the aims and scope of her research project: explaining the culture of memory and its importance to Ukrainian national identity in Ukraine and in Ukrainian communities abroad by studying the places of memory related to the Holodomor. Kudela-Świątek's research identifies the background and symbolism of monuments, memorials, and real and symbolic burial places, which all constitute the empirical embodiment of memorial culture and the specific physical or symbolic places of memory.

In Chapter 1, Kudela-Świątek develops her theoretical framework. She discusses in depth Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (“places of memory”) and its applicability to the context of Ukrainian memory of the Holodomor, and she compares it to related concepts such as *milieux de mémoire* (“realms of memory”), *sites de mémoire* (“sites of memory”), and associated approaches developed by other theoreticians of memory, such as Aleida Assmann, Krzysztof Pomian, Lech Nijakowski, and Roma Sendyka. The author explains her approaches to reception theory, critical discourse analysis, and iconological reading, which she applies in discussing the design as well as the physical and symbolic expression of Holodomor monuments and memorial sites.

Chapter 2 traces various communities of memory as the basis for the subsequent discussion of places of memory and offers historical, social, and cultural context. According to the author, it is the link between communities of memory and their places of memory that offers insight into the meaning and symbolism of individual “places.” Even though the communities of memory and their “practices of commitment” concerning the Holodomor and its

memorialization may be defined and delineated in various or fluid ways, the author suggests that the first two main communities may have consisted of Ukrainian emigrants – especially post-war emigrants – and the oldest generation living in Ukraine. Both communities shared “the conviction about the Holodomor’s genocidal character and acceptance of the rituals of memory connected with its cultivation in national discourse” (113). The generation that descended from the event’s victims aligned with western Ukrainians who, in spite of western Ukraine not belonging to the Soviet Union and not being affected by the famine at the time, nevertheless “accept and share the Holodomor as a common national tragedy” (113). This group and their descendants, in particular in the diaspora, make up a third community of memory. The fourth community of memory came to the fore in post-Soviet Ukraine and “consciously accepted the Great Famine as historical fact and postulated it as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian nation” (113). This community in Ukraine – in fact consisting of various communities of memory made up of individuals, social initiatives, and public activism as well as state activities – used eyewitness accounts of the Holodomor as a primary source to document Stalinist terror.

Chapter 3 develops the discussion of the various religious and secular commemoration practices among the largest Ukrainian diaspora communities, especially in North America, Great Britain, Australia, and Brazil. It details the first initiatives in North America – including the building of a major symbolic and architectural commemorative achievement and place of memory – the Ukrainian Orthodox St. Andrew Memorial Church in South Bound Brook, New Jersey, in 1965 – as well as further memorial places elsewhere; this is always done in relation to the distinct purposes of the respective local community of memory.

Chapter 4 likewise chronicles memory initiatives, but it does so in the context of Ukraine since perestroika and independence. It applies the lenses of “acting out” and “working through” trauma by way of engaging in memorial activities; the choice has been between a continuous state of mourning and a more “productive” investing of past suffering with meaning, something that also results in differing symbolic representations.

In Chapters 5 and 6, discussion of the meaning and symbolism of monuments is elaborated upon by iconological and visual analysis of a whole range of monuments, memorials, and burial sites in Ukraine and in the diaspora, including at the major memorial site in Kyiv, built in 2008, and at the Washington, DC memorial that opened in 2015. The author views the symbolism of many such sites as being characterized by a mixture of Orthodox sacral or iconographical, folk and pagan, as well as secular references. Whereas at monuments and memorials in the diaspora “symbols of nation, religion, and human suffering prevail” (350), sites in Ukraine tend to “memorialize both the victims of the Holodomor and Stalinist repressions generally” (350). *Eternal Memory* is a very useful resource for students, general readers, and researchers in the fields of Ukrainian and post-Communist memory and monument studies.

Nicolas Dreyer

Otto Friedrich University, Bamberg

 nicolas.dreyer@uni-bamberg.de

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3620-4155>

© 2023 Nicolas Dreyer

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2023.2167691>

