

# Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek. Eternal Memory: Monuments and Memorials of the Holodomor

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**Wiktoría Kudela-Świątek. *Eternal Memory: Monuments and Memorials of the Holodomor*.** Translated from the Polish by Guy Russell Torr; preface by Frank E. Sysyn, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies P in co-operation with Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, 2021. 410 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. List of Illustrations. Index. \$43.95, paper.

**T**his monograph represents the first attempt at systematically and comprehensively analyzing the memorialization of the Holodomor by exploring the trend of the construction of monuments and memorials to the victims of this man-made famine of 1932–33. The book's author, Wiktoría Kudela-Świątek, is an assistant professor at the Institute of History and Archival Studies at the Pedagogical University of Kraków. She has dedicated herself to the research of memory practices in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet countries—her methodology including the examination of both monument building and oral history.

This volume contains six chapters that organize the content in a thematic, and only occasionally chronological, way. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework of the study. It immediately proves to be very complex, as it combines different approaches and methodologies—from Pierre Nora's elaborate conceptualization of "lieux de mémoire" ("sites of memory") to critical discourse analysis (CDA). The methodological framework is enriched with additional references and reflections in subsequent chapters, demonstrating the author's mastery of the memory-studies literature. For example, Chapter 2 investigates the concept of "community of memory" and applies it to the memorialization of the Holodomor. Here, the identified communities are the diaspora, the survivors, and the citizens of post-Soviet Ukraine. A survey of the memory practices of these three communities makes up the core of the work.

Chapter 3 shows—through an inspection of texts and by looking at the construction of a memorial (St. Andrew Memorial Church in South Bound Brook, NJ) and some museums—that in the Ukrainian diasporic community of North America, preserving the memory of the Holodomor served dual purposes. On one hand, it helped foster in successive generations a sense of belonging to the diasporic community, and on the other hand, it was an aspect of political opposition to the Soviet Union. Chapter 4 presents the history of the politics of memory in Ukraine from the period of perestroika to the time of the presidency of Viktor Ianukovych—post-Soviet Ukraine was struggling to rapidly find a shared memory of the past. The central role that was assumed over time by the Holodomor is to be attributed to the political actions of President Viktor Yushchenko and also to Ukrainian diasporic

communities, who brought some modalities and practices of memorialization to their country of origin.

Chapter 5 should, in effect, represent the culmination of this research study, as it deals with the “iconology analysis” of memorials—the monuments in Edmonton (built in 1983), Winnipeg (1984), Lubny (1993), Kyiv beside St. Michael’s Golden-Domed Monastery (1993), Kyiv on the grounds of the Inter-Regional Academy of Personnel Management (MAUP; 2002), and Washington, DC (2015) and the so-called Candle of Memory (Svicha Pam”iati) structure in Kyiv (2008). However, the author does not make a clear case for her choice of memorials beyond her indication that these are the ones that seem to be most important to her. Second, the accounts of the construction processes and the iconological descriptions appear to lack truly analytic and effective focus. There is a near-total absence of attention toward determining how these memorials were received and utilized following their inauguration (one would expect some information in light of Kudela-Świątek’s references to Stuart Hall and communication decoding [see, e.g., 57]). Overall, one is left feeling that had the topic of memorials been examined within the narrative concerning memorialization processes instead of in a separate chapter, the author’s presentation would have benefited in strength and clarity.

Chapter 6 continues the line of iconological analysis, but in a more original way. Some tropes (or “iconological motifs”—the terminology used in the book) of the visual language of memorials are identified, such as mothers with children; hands; crosses; angels; bells; and circles, and the author follows them by spotting changes in meaning and influence between the monuments themselves and between communities of memory. It is particularly interesting that in two cases—those of the monument (made by Vasyli Pereval’s’kyi) beside St. Michael’s Golden-Domed Monastery and the statue (made by Petro Drozdovs’kyi and known by the name *Hirka pam”iat’ dytynstva* [*Bitter Memory of Childhood*]) at the Candle of Memory memorial in Kyiv—the monuments have been reproduced many times at the sites of other memorials and have, as a result, become representative images of the Holodomor. The artists who created these two statues do not oppose the reproduction of their original pieces, nor do they demand monetary compensation, as they are respectful of the symbolism associated with those images.

This volume is an important study of the memorialization of the Holodomor through the construction of monuments. Furthermore, it demonstrates the key role played by such memorialization in helping build a

strong sense of national belonging among Ukrainians.<sup>1</sup> Other, more contested periods, such as World War II, are not as unifying for Ukrainians, and thus, their memorials have been less influential, or even counterproductive, in the creation of a shared national memory. Overall, given the transnational nature of famine commemorations, this monograph is a must-read for anyone wishing to study the politics of memory in contemporary society.

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<sup>1</sup> The commemoration of the Holodomor has lent itself to the formulation of a common heritage somewhat like Holocaust memorialization (whose forms are sometimes repeated by others in their own memorials to tragedies around the globe).