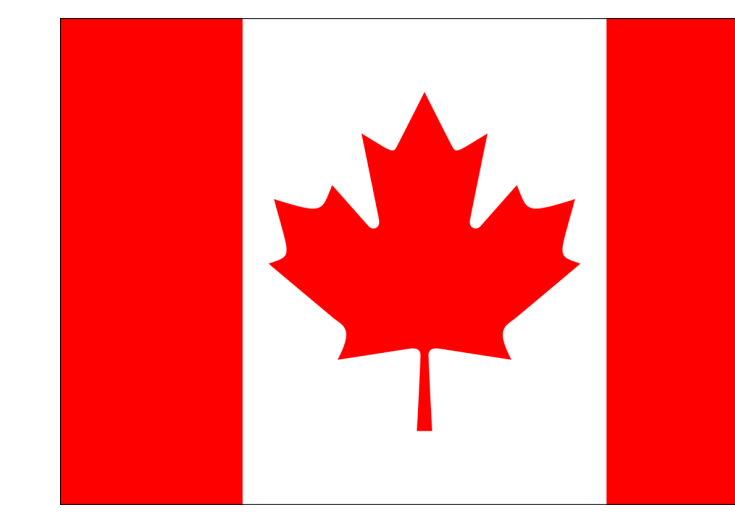


Пам'ять (Pam'yat) - Memory

Theatre as a Vehicle for Healing Intergenerational Trauma within the Ukrainian Canadian Experience



The Context

For over one thousand years, Ukrainians and their ancestors have developed rich folkloric traditions, many of which are inspired by centuries of defending the cultural community from external oppression and invasion. Synonymously, modern Ukrainian identity is largely constructed of collective memories of external oppression and Ukrainian resistance. Ukrainian folkloric traditions and collective cultural identity have been transported all around the world by the Ukrainian diaspora. Canada is home to the second largest Ukrainian diasporic community outside of Russia, having seen four mass waves of immigration over the past 125 years. The Ukrainian Canadian community has experienced its own unique history of oppression. Hundreds of years of embodied traumatic experiences have led to significant intergenerational trauma within the Ukrainian Canadian community. Research shows that countless Ukrainian Canadians feel shame, anger, and embarrassment and experience symptoms including nightmares, illness, depression, pain and dissociation (Beaulieu). Whilst Ukrainians have used folkloric traditions for centuries to express and commemorate their harrowing history, this embodied intergenerational trauma that is painfully prevalent in the Ukrainian Canadian community is rarely discussed and addressed directly. Most survivors of the aforementioned trauma choose not to or are unable to talk about their experiences. Meanwhile the emotional and physical effects of this trauma are passed on to the next generation, leaving a distinct gap in knowledge and understanding between the older and younger generations. As a descendant of survivors of these traumas, I have directly experienced this fissure in the community and the accompanying intergenerational trauma. Having spent innumerable hours listening to the stories of Ukrainian Canadians across the age spectrum and as an artist and academic, I elected to create a devised theatrical play about a Ukrainian Canadian immigrant family and how these associated traumas were diffused across three generations. The play, entitled Пам'ять/Pam'yat, which means "memory" in Ukrainian, was presented to Ukrainian Canadian communities across British Columbia, Canada in 2018 with the intention of promoting healing and intergenerational conversation in the wake of these traumas. An expanded production was scheduled to be performed in 2020 but was postponed indefinitely when the pandemic hit.

Immigration

In the late 1800s, the Dominion of Canada began to promote the underpopulated Canadian prairies to Ukrainian peasant farmers with the promise of free or cheap farmland. This led to four waves of mass immigration from Ukraine to Canada, from 1891–1914, 1923–1939, 1945–1952, 1991–present.



Image 1. (1)

Internment Camps (1914-1920)

During WW1, the political climate and the 1914 War Measures Act allowed the Canadian Government to label the very same Ukrainian immigrants they had invited to Canada mere years before as "enemy aliens". Around 5,000 men, women, and children were interned in 24 internment camps across the country. Another 80,000 Ukrainian Canadians were forced to carry "enemy alien identification cards" and regularly report to the police. Most of the men were forced to conduct physical labour, saving the government labour costs on various "improvement projects," including railway and highway construction, mining, logging, and more. The conditions were said to be "exceptionally harsh and abusive". The internment camps continued for a full year after the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919; many internees were not aware that the war had ended until after their release in 1920.



Image 2. (2)

Holodomor (1932-1933)

Holodomor means "death by forced starvation" and refers to the genocidal man-made famine that occurred in Ukraine from 1932-1933, perpetrated by the Soviet regime of Joseph Stalin. Experts say between 7 and 10 million Ukrainians died.



Image 3. (7)

"The Soviet government used food as a weapon against the Ukrainian rural population. It also wiped out the cultural, religious, intellectual and political leadership of Ukraine. In committing this genocide, Soviet authorities sought to repress Ukrainian aspirations for autonomy and eradicate all opposition to collectivization and communist rule."

- Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (5)

Research Question

To what extent can Applied Theatre be used as a vehicle for healing intergenerational trauma within the Ukrainian Canadian experience?

Research Objectives

- To encourage intergenerational dialogue around the three primary historical traumas that affect the Ukrainian Canadian community: historical prejudice directed at Ukrainian immigrants to Canada, the internment of Ukrainian immigrants as "enemy aliens" in Canada during the First World War, and the Holodomor, the genocidal famine in Ukraine that occurred in 1932-1933 during which millions of men, women, and children were starved to death by the Soviet regime of Joseph Stalin.
- To promote healing from intergenerational trauma caused by the three primary historical traumas
- To help Ukrainian Canadians come to a new understanding of their place in the Ukrainian Canadian and wider Canadian narrative
- To help non-Ukrainian Canadians come to a new understanding of the Ukrainian Canadian immigrant narrative and the wider Canadian narrative
- To strengthen relationships in the Ukrainian Canadian community
- To encourage all Canadians to have a wider understanding of the topics of intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, and colonialism
- To encourage the use of Applied Theatre and therapeutic witnessing as a tool for addressing and healing from trauma and intergenerational trauma

Research Participant Groups

- Group 1: Ukrainian Canadian Youth and Young Adults (ages 15-30)
- Group 2: Ukrainian Canadian Adults (ages 30-60)
- Group 3: Ukrainian Canadian Seniors (ages 60 or older)
- Group 4: Actors/Co-devisors – Preferably of Ukrainian or Slavic Descent
- Group 5: Ukrainian Canadian Audience Members
- Group 6: General Canadian Audience Members

Research Stages

- Stage 1: Community-based research**
Interviews were conducted with individuals in Groups 1-3 who voluntarily consented to participate. Interviews were about the individual's experience and their family's experience in the Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian community. These interviews were used as inspiration for the devised theatre performance. To ensure confidentiality of participants, any stories provided during the interviews were fictionalized in performance.
- Stage 2: Devising and Rehearsal Process**
Individuals were selected to participate in Group 4 (Actors/Co-devisors). They took part in a devising process to create the performance. They also received course credit for their participation in the project.
- Stage 3: Performance and Feedback (POSTPONED DUE TO COVID)**
Individuals in Groups 5 & 6 (Audience Members) would have attended a performance of the theatrical production *Pam'yat* in Victoria, Comox, or Vancouver, BC and, if they so chose, participated in a facilitated post-performance reflection and/or the post-performance survey. The post-performance reflection and survey were to focus on themes including immigration, intergenerational trauma, racism, ethnicity, and the Canadian narrative and their audience members' response to the performance.

Devising and Rehearsal Process

Eight (8) actors/co-devisors were cast for this project via an audition process. All actors were current UVic students. Of the actors, four (4) were of Ukrainian Canadian descent, one (1) of Romanian Canadian descent, and three (3) of non-Slavic Canadian descent. In addition, seven (7) crew members were brought on board – a stage manager, assistant stage manager, a marketing manger, and four (4) designers: set, costume, lighting, and sound. Four (4) of the crew members identified as having Ukrainian or Slavic ancestry.

Inspiration was drawn from interviews, historical research, artwork, music, dance, and poetry. The production was created over a six-week devising process, after which point we were shut down due to the pandemic.

Photos



Image 4. (4)



Image 5. (4)



Image 6. (4)



Image 7. (3)



Image 8. (6)



Image 9. (4)



Image 10. (6)

Community Response

"Amazing cultural, insightful play ... Ukrainian Holodomor (death by forced starvation) and Internment camps were something that I was aware my Grandparents experienced, although it was something they would never talk about. I found out tonight that is very common."

"I now understand why [my parents and grandparents] were all so passionate about keeping our heritage alive. They were oppressed, even forced to make the tough decision to change their last name so as to not let anyone know their Ukrainian heritage. This play touched me so much. ... I saw my Grandparents and Mom and their struggle on that stage. With my Parents and Grandparents gone, this was a priceless experience to go through with my kids. Feeling so blessed and proud to be a strong Ukrainian Canadian!"

*From the 2018 production

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The amazingly talented cast and crew of *Pam'yat*

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