

The Makhnos of Memory:  
Mennonite and Makhnovist Narratives of the  
Civil War in Ukraine, 1917-1921

by

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*All that we have a right to demand of history is that it shall point us with faithful and sure hand to the general causes of human suffering - among these causes it will not forget the immolation and subordination (still too frequent, alas!) of living individuals to abstract generalities – at the same time showing us the general conditions necessary to the real emancipation of individuals living in society. That is its mission, those are its limits, beyond which the action of social science can only be impotent and fatal.*

*- Mikhail Bakunin, God and the State*

This thesis is dedicated to all victims of Ukraine's revolution and civil war.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the conflict between the military forces of Nestor Makhno and Mennonite colonists in southern Ukraine during the Russian Civil War (1918-1921) through the historical narratives found in each group's literature. Employing a methodology derived from deconstructionist approaches to history and James Wertsch's theory of distributed collective memory, this thesis considers the nature of each group's historical narratives, their biases, the context of their respective productions and how these same narratives contain intimations of the other side's perspective. The thesis explores Makhnovist and Mennonite narratives in relation to each other. Regarding the Makhnovists, the thesis argues that the personal writings of Nestor Makhno, Victor Belash, the Makhnovist Chief of Staff, and Makhno's wife, Galina Kuzmenko, as well as histories by two of the movement's intellectuals, Voline and Peter Arshinov, understood the Mennonite colonists through categories of class. The thesis divides Mennonite narratives of Makhno into *Selbstschützer* and pacifist accounts, both found in newspaper accounts, memoirs and secondary historical accounts. The thesis shows how both of these Mennonite accounts identified Makhno as the enemy but ultimately narrativized Makhno in different ways. The thesis analyzes eyewitness accounts of the 1919 Eichenfeld massacre and its representation in current historiography, arguing that this tragic event was the consequence of organized class-based terror. By reframing Eichenfeld within the context of "revolutionary terror" a multi-perspectival narrative emerges, embracing yet critical of both Makhnovist and Mennonite narratives.

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The remaining list consists of those individuals that in some way contributed to the completion of this thesis. If I have missed anyone I take full responsibility. Lisa Gislon, Mary Marshall, Dr. Felix Schnell, Dr. Colin Darch, D.D. Johnston, Joel Penner, Peter and Lorna Doerksen, Dave Berg, Eldon Heinrichs, Marilyn Heidebrecht, Paul Patterson and Kelly Ruth.

## Chapter 1

### Theory and Methodology

In the summer of 2011 I traveled to the Zaporozhye region in southeastern Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> Amongst the locals of Gulyai-Pole circulates a legend that upon abandoning his struggle and fleeing Ukraine, Nestor Makhno ordered a cache of loot to be buried in a secret location. The intention was to safeguard funds for a renewed future struggle. Makhno never did return to his homeland and according to local rumour the treasure remains buried to this day. In my travels to Gulyai-Pole, I panned the sources and even spoke with a relative of Makhno, but never were any clues to the treasure's location revealed. In the end, the gold at the end of the Makhnovist rainbow proved as ephemeral as any pirate's tale, but even if Makhno's gold did exist what could be expected by finding it? For myself I hoped to transform the imaginings of my mind into something "real" by capturing a tangible piece of the past.<sup>2</sup> Somehow I believed it might bring me closer to the historical Makhno and a clearer understanding of his movement and its legacy.

In a sense all history is alchemy. Whether turning lead to gold or the past into "objective history" the goal is frustratingly elusive. Descending into the rabbit hole of Makhnovist research has inevitably led me to confront a multitude of competing histories, memories, myths and legends, all jostling to assert their own unique perspective. Poet and blogger Marie Marshall writes of Makhno:

My peering into the life and character of Nestor Ivanovich Makhno has grown arms and legs, and the more it goes on the less I am able to grasp hold of truth, the more he becomes a wisp of smoke, a man whose legend seems more important than his reality. That reality retreats into iconography – can it be recaptured?<sup>3</sup>

Marshall articulates a fundamental reality confronting any attempt to accurately represent the life of Makhno and his movement. In a topic whose literature is fraught with folklore, ideological battles and radically divergent cultural memories, how is one to discern fact from fiction? Who is the real Makhno? Or to phrase it differently: who are the Makhnos of memory?

## I. Background

Nestor Ivanovitch Makhno was the youngest child of a poor peasant family from the town of Gulyai-Pole. As a youth Makhno embraced philosophical anarchism and became active in a local anarchist group. After the group assassinated a local police chief, Makhno was arrested and sentenced to a life of hard labour. Following the 1917 February Revolution Makhno's release from prison was secured. Returning to his hometown, he and other local anarchists organized the peasantry for the expropriation and redistribution of land in the region. During the German and Austro-Hungarian occupation of Ukraine in 1918 Makhno directed a peasant insurgency against the occupiers. Out of this insurgency emerged what would be called the *Makhnovshchina* ["Makhno movement"]. The movement was locally popular and successful in its harassment of German and Austrian units stationed in the area.

Ideologically, the movement associated itself with the principles of anarchist-communism and actively recruited anarchist intellectuals to assist with propaganda and social reform.<sup>4</sup> The Makhnovist program was primarily concerned with the organization of freely elected local soviets and the egalitarian redistribution of land. The Makhnovist



army came to see itself as guardians of the civil population's right to freely organize themselves without any compulsion from outside forces. The movement was highly suspicious of centralized authority and virulently opposed to party politics.<sup>5</sup>

With the end of World War I and the withdrawal of the occupying powers, a power vacuum emerged in Ukraine. Given the weak Bolshevik presence in Ukraine, various local powers asserted their control over the regions of Ukraine. The *Makhnovshchina* quickly consolidated its power over Gulyai-Pole and the surrounding area. In the ensuing civil war, the Makhnovists would battle both the Whites and Reds in a bid to establish an independent anarchist region. The Makhnovist struggle would last until August 1921 when the Red Army finally overwhelmed the movement and Makhno was forced into exile.

The high tide of the movement came shortly after the White army's thrust through southern Ukraine towards Moscow in the fall of 1919. Makhno directed his forces to attack the White army's vulnerable rearguard, severely affecting the Whites' ability to continue their campaign and forcing the White commander, General Denikin, to transfer frontline troops to deal with Makhno. Shortly thereafter, Red forces routed the White army. Amidst the defeat of Denikin, the Makhnovists greatly expanded their sphere of influence, occupying a substantial area of eastern Ukraine until the arrival of the Red Army in January 1920.

During this period the Makhnovists occupied the numerous Mennonite colonies of southern Ukraine. Due to the widespread wealth of the colonies the Makhnovists identified most Mennonites as class enemies. Furthermore, in an effort to protect their families and property many colonies had established self-defense [*Selbstschutz*] units,

which had collaborated first with the German occupation and later with the White army. In the Makhnovists, the colonies perceived a direct threat to their continued existence. Already during the German occupation, the colonies suffered under a wave of Makhnovist raids that inevitably brought with it robbery, murder and rape. The decision to arm themselves greatly divided the colonies between *Selbstschützer* and those who maintained traditional Mennonite pacifism. Under Makhnovist occupation Mennonite families were subjected to constant harassment and abuse. The horror of their experience culminated in November-December, 1919 when a series of massacres were carried out by Makhnovist troops in the colonies.

The histories that emerged from Makhnovists and Mennonites in the aftermath of these events consist of radically opposing narratives. To the former, Makhno and his movement is a vindication of anarchism in practice and a shining example of the masses' ability to self-organize. In Makhnovist literature, the Mennonites are never mentioned by name. Rather they are referred to simply as "German colonists" or more commonly as capitalist exploiters. Furthermore, not a single mention of the massacres of 1919 is found in the corpus of Makhnovist literature. These events are left unmentioned and the positive aspects of the movement are overwhelmingly brought into relief.

By contrast, the Mennonite narrative presents the *Makhnovshchina* as a force of irrational violence void of any ideological vision. Makhno is a wholly negative character held personally responsible for the massacres and the suffering of Mennonites during the civil war. He is described as a terrorist or bandit consumed by an illogical hatred of Mennonites. The Mennonite narrative highlights the martyrdom of the Mennonite community, particularly its pacifist members who died a martyr's death. Generally the

motivations behind the Makhnovist attacks, the nature of the movement and Makhno's specific role are treated in a cursory fashion. The history of Makhnovist-Mennonite relations and their apparently irreconcilable narratives constitute the subject of this thesis.

Makhno cannot be explained from one totalizing perspective. Even to those who knew him closely there was a slipperiness to his personality that evaded definition.

Makhnovist intellectual Voline wrestled to write a biography of Makhno.<sup>6</sup> The unfinished manuscript is revealingly subtitled "Contributions to the Study on the Enigma of Personality". Voline described his attempt to unravel the mystery of Makhno:

One may be in contact with a man for many years. But if his personal intimate life remains outside this contact you will not learn much about his true personality. During the six months in total I spent with the movement, I was in close contact with Makhno. I experienced with him episodes of "all kind" ... I spoke and discussed much with him ... Often, I shared evening meals with him. The given conditions to determine the personality of Makhno, were therefore quite favorable. Yet I must emphasize that such knowledge always stopped short. His intimate, personal life remained absolutely unknown. Of it, I knew absolutely nothing. But it was above all just that which would have allowed me to penetrate the depths of his personality.<sup>7</sup>

It would appear Makhno was no more penetrable to his close comrade than to today's researcher. For those who did not know Makhno personally his character is frequently presented as either an unsolvable riddle or an abstract signifier of anarchy, liberty or terror. In the historical literature, Makhno is fragmented into an array of competing personalities and representations. Makhno has been variously described as a revolutionary anarchist, a peasant rebel, a Ukrainian Robin Hood, a bandit-terrorist, a mass-murderer and pogromist. No better an example is to be found of the divergent interpretations of Makhno than between the historical narratives of the Makhnovists

themselves and the Mennonite colonists of southern Ukraine. Nowhere else are the Makhnos of memory so starkly contrasted.

While the psychology of Makhno may never be quarried in the manner Voline had hoped for, we can come to understand Makhno and his movement through the narratives that have been preserved. Through a narrative approach we meet many Makhnos, some of which are verifiable through multiple sources, and others, which bear the marks of myth, or even outright falsehoods, but nonetheless had a very real historical impact. To the extent possible, fact must be differentiated from fiction, but, as Alun Munslow writes, “Language, like memory, can recollect, but it can never be reality.”<sup>8</sup>

This thesis is self-consciously deconstructionist in its theoretical orientation. I use the term deconstruction to signal a postmodernist perspective, generally skeptical of history’s ability to represent the past in an unbiased referential manner. Herein lies the methodological crux of this thesis: that the narrative form of history is as important as its content; and furthermore, that form often regulates and modifies content to maintain narrative integrity.

It is imperative to emphasize that the deconstructionist position does not argue that history is merely a genre of fiction. To borrow a distinction made by deconstructionist historian Alun Munslow, historical narratives are fictive but not fictional.<sup>9</sup> A historical narrative’s shape is constrained by actual events; however, these very real events must be filtered through linguistic constraints of the human mind before they become narrative. The Soviet semiotician and cultural historian, Yury Lotman, explains:

The historian cannot observe events, but acquires narratives of them from the written sources. And even when the historian is an observer of the events

described . . . the observations still have to be mentally transformed into a verbal text, since the historian writes not of what was seen but a digest of what was seen in narrative form . . . [W]hen an event is retold by means of a language then it inevitably acquires a structural unity. This unity, which in fact belongs only to the expression level, inevitably becomes transferred to the level of content too.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically this thesis will discuss how Makhnovists and Mennonites have emplotted each other in their respective histories. It will be examined how specific characterizations of Makhno and his movement by Mennonite authors, and vice versa, service broader narrative interests. In other words, we will be exploring how the “structural unity” of a narrative imposes itself upon the level of historical content.

An integral component of my argument is that the group identity projects of Makhnovists and Mennonites alike have shaped their historical representations to such an extent, and in such an exclusionary manner, that two radically divergent versions of history have evolved. Indeed, one could be forgiven for thinking that completely different events were being narrated.

## II. The Scope of this Project

The evolution of Makhnovist-Mennonite relations and the historical narratives that emerged from this encounter is the topic of this thesis. In addition to attempting to verify the factual circumstances of past events, I will also explore how these events have been subjectively experienced, interpreted, and articulated as part of Makhnovist and Mennonite collective memory. A close examination of key primary sources will serve as the means to accomplish this objective.

Chapters two and three will present the Makhnovist and Mennonite narratives respectively through eyewitness memoirs, histories, newspapers and documents. Chapter two will contain a close reading of Makhno's memoirs alongside the works of Makhnovist intellectuals Voline and Peter Arshinov, and Makhnovist Chief-of-Staff Victor Belash. To a lesser extent information has been drawn from the diaries of Makhno's wife, Galina Kuzmenko, and the head of the Makhnovist counter-intelligence Lev Golik, as well as the memoirs of Makhnovist participants Osip Tsebry and Alexei Chubenko.

Chapter three will present the Mennonite perspective predominantly from the diaspora memoirs of Russian Mennonites Gerhard Schroeder, Dietrich Neufeld, Gerhard Lohrenz and David G. Rempel. Letters found in the archives of Russian Mennonite historian Victor Peters have also been used to supplement the above-mentioned memoirs. I have also made extensive use of the Molochnaia settlement newspaper *Friedensstimme* to present a first-hand pacifist perspective. Finally to present the historical context of the Mennonite colonies in Ukraine I have relied upon the work of James Urry, who has specialized on understanding Russian Mennonite culture from an anthropological perspective. Other important secondary sources include the works of John B. Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein's research on the Mennonite *Selbstschutz*.

Each collective narrative will be submitted to a deconstructionist reading. The shape of each narrative's representation of the other will be sketched while simultaneously bringing into relief contradictory elements therein, which threaten the structural unity of their collective historical narrative. It will be shown that the structural unity of the Makhnovist and Mennonite historical narratives are inherently unstable, each

containing the seeds of a radically new narrative that has the potential to transcend the narrow identity projects of Makhnovists and Mennonites alike. By examining how Makhnovists and Mennonites have represented each other, the goal is to present a history that moves beyond a culturally insular interpretation of events.

Chapter four sets out to present such a re-narrativization of the Makhnovist-Mennonite story through a close examination of the Eichenfeld massacre. The chapter will show that the massacre was undeniably a Makhnovist action but at the same time challenge how Mennonite historians and their supporters have narrativized the event. To reconstruct the events around Eichenfeld a close reading of the previously mentioned Makhnovist and Mennonite sources has been employed. Particularly invaluable for this chapter were the eyewitness accounts of Eichenfelders provided by Marianne Janzen from her personal files. To explore how historians have presented Eichenfeld a close analysis has been made of the Mennonite publication *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre*, in addition to the works of Ukrainian historian Nataly Venger. While Venger is Ukrainian, she is closely associated with Mennonite scholarship and favours a traditionally Mennonite perspective on Eichenfeld. In conclusion the Makhnovist persecution of Mennonites will be re-narrativized through the concept of “revolutionary terror” as a means of presenting a new historical narrative capable of communicating the victim’s and perpetrator’s perspectives alike.

The remainder of this chapter will explore the theoretical relationship between narrative, identity and collective memory as it relates to our topic. For an understanding and definition of deconstructionist history I have relied heavily upon the work of Alun Munslow. The theoretical thrust of this thesis centred on narrative and collective

memory is primarily informed by James Wertsch's theory of distributed collective memory. Wertsch's influence is supplemented by readings of Maurice Halbwachs, Hayden White and Jacques Derrida to construct my particular methodological approach to the narratives of Makhnovist-Mennonite relations.

### III. Deconstruction and Narrative

Alun Munslow writes that, "deconstructionist history treats the past as a text to be examined for possibilities of meaning ..."<sup>11</sup> As mentioned, historical narrative is constrained by the existence of verifiable past events. It is not a genre of fiction. It would be difficult indeed to argue against the description of Makhno as a short, slender man of peasant stock who self-identified as an anarchist. However, as soon as we begin to interpret these basic facts by ordering them into a clear storyline of causal connections we enter the realm of narrative creation and meaning making. For instance was Makhno's physical appearance a result of genetics, poor nutrition or the fact he contracted tuberculosis early in life? What type of anarchist was he and did he authentically perform that label? Neither question can be answered exclusively by reference to objective facts. They must be submitted to an interpretation, which is in turn influenced by personal preferences, cultural biases and available primary sources amongst other factors. Ultimately an interpretive statement is produced, or, in other words, a possibility of meaning.

A historical narrative is a structurally unified representation composed of possibilities of meaning that reference simple verifiable facts. However, the whole is



greater than the sum of its parts. There is a transcendent logic to the historical narrative that exceeds the mere accumulation of factoids. Even in something as basic as a chronology there is a “social logic”.<sup>12</sup> For example, in Michael Malet’s study of the Makhno movement his chronology includes the date for the Gorkaya pogrom, in which renegade Makhnovists allegedly murdered Jewish colonists, but excludes any dates of Mennonite massacres.<sup>13</sup> Such an authorial decision can radically alter the narrative logic of the text. The historical narrative mediates a specific perspective that usually tries to convince its readers that it is representing the story.

A deconstructionist account differs from more traditional approaches in that it attempts to recognize its own, as well as its subject’s, inherent biases. It offers *a* story as opposed to *the* story. Still, as James Wertsch observes, “in reality ... one can ask how often any of us recognizes such mediation in our accounts of the past.”<sup>14</sup> Wertsch argues that the resources we use to construct history are not “neutral cognitive instruments” but rather “we are often committed to believing them, or not believing them sometimes in deeply emotional ways having to do with fundamental issues of identity.”<sup>15</sup> No matter how conscious a historian may be, narrative subscripts are almost always at play just below the surface of the text.

A prime example of what Wertsch describes can be found in the introduction to Voline’s *Unknown Revolution*. Voline writes:

Each [person] deliberately seeks and finds, in a revolution the elements which will support a personal thesis ... The reality itself is adapted to the design of the narrator ... For authors ... have all too often passed over in silence facts of the highest importance, if they did not conform to their own ideas, did not interest them, or were inconvenient.<sup>16</sup>

Initially Voline seems deeply aware of the constructed nature of historical accounts, yet one page later writes:

The concern for a frank exposition and an impartial analysis ... is favoured by the author's ideological position. Since 1908 he has not belonged to any political party ... So he can permit himself the luxury of being objective, for, as an Anarchist, he has no interest in betraying the truth, no reason to deceive. He is not interested in power, nor in the triumph, 'at any cost', of a doctrine. He seeks only to establish the truth, for only the truth is fertile.<sup>17</sup>

Voline's approach is profoundly contradictory but emblematic of the blindsightedness that afflicts all histories and historians.

Deconstruction points to the inescapably perspectival and storied nature of the human experience. This is not to deny an objective reality but rather to acknowledge and honor narrative, or story-telling, as our primary means for ordering the events of life and deriving meaning. In a way we are story incarnate. We experience reality as narrative and narratively construct our individual and collective identities.

#### IV. Narrative and Memory

Through narrative our minds weave meaning from seemingly haphazard events. Even at the pre-linguistic level experiments show that sensory input is immediately subjected to a process of filtering, or "gating". Scientific studies have shown that "incoming sensory information is not received passively," but rather the "interpretation of sensory stimuli [is] based on expectations about how the world works."<sup>18</sup> While "sensory gating" is only the first step in the production of narrative the same fundamental logic weaves its way from the pre-linguistic level to the complexities of collective memory. All historical narrative is ultimately rooted in memories. Memories serve as the building blocks of narrative. Therefore the production of historical narratives is intimately linked to an understanding of how collective memory functions.

While the individual brain performs the act of remembering, memory is never exclusively individual. Memory is a social phenomenon capable of reaching outside its shell. The works explored in this thesis are the personal reminiscences of individuals but are simultaneously part of broader collective narratives. A reciprocal relationship exists between personal memory and collective memory in which they act upon each other, in a process of narrative creation. Such is the “social framework” of historical memory.

Any discussion of collective memory will inevitably begin with the work of Maurice Halbwachs. Central to Halbwachs’ thought is that all memory presupposes a “social framework”, that “a person remembers only by situating himself within the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or several currents of collective thought.”<sup>19</sup> The key point is that collective memory is the product of individual membership within a social framework and that the memories that exert the strongest influence on us are those associated with these frameworks.

### *Distribution of Collective Memory Between Individuals*

Halbwachs’ insight into the social framework of memory has been vital to collective memory theory but does not fully articulate the processes by which it is formed and transferred. A systems approach, like James Wertsch’s theory of distributed collective memory, does so by interpreting collective memory as a form of mediated action between people and between people and objects. This approach goes “beyond the categories of individual and collective narrowly defined.” Wertsch explains: “Mental processes such as remembering and thinking are not viewed as being situated solely

within the individual. Instead, they often are distributed across individuals and between agents and the cultural tools they employ to think, remember, and carry out other forms of action.”<sup>20</sup>

Wertsch outlines three varieties of distributed memory between individuals. The first and simplest form is homogenous distribution. This suggests the perfect correspondence of memory about an event. Pure homogenous memory, is very rare if not impossible, as even individuals who have witnessed the same event experience and remember it differently. An approximated version of homogenous memory can exist in small close-knit, isolated communities, where the individual is more thoroughly integrated with the collective. Mennonite colonies of Ukraine appear to fit this description, but even here a wide variety of subjective experiences are reported. Nonetheless, certain generalized statements that may be considered homogenous are present. For example, Mennonite authors almost universally describe Makhno as a “terrorist-bandit”. Wertsch points out that it is particularly in sweeping statements about the “other” that homogenous memory is found.<sup>21</sup>

The second form of distributed memory is complementary. Wertsch defines this form of collective memory as one in which “it is assumed that different members of a group have different perspectives and remember different things, but these exist in a coordinated system of complementary pieces.”<sup>22</sup> Nearly all the Mennonite colonies in Ukraine encountered the *Makhnovshchina* in unique localized contexts, but consistent overlapping patterns of experience are present, giving rise to a common collective memory of Mennonite-Makhnovist relations that transcends the spatial and temporal boundaries of each colony’s experience. Such a common narrative is discernible in the

various reports and editorials in *Friedensstimme*, coming out of the different colonies and local contexts but nonetheless sketching a complementary picture of events. Wertsch describes this phenomenon as a “fish scale knowledge system in that there is partial, but not total, overlap of memories that forms a more general pattern.”<sup>23</sup> The same can be said of the various Mennonite memoirs, which present a clear pattern of encounter with Makhnovists despite the accounts coming from geographically separated colonies.

A major memorial dividing line for Mennonites is between those that maintained their traditional pacifism and those that took up arms against Makhno through the formation of self-defence units (*Selbstschutz*). Pacifist and *Selbstschützer* narratives can appear to be oppositional but find common ground in the broader narrative of Mennonite persecution and martyrdom suggesting more of a complementary relationship. The *Selbstschutz* has been frequently condemned, privately and officially, as a tactical and theological blunder. Nevertheless, the broader community has never formally disowned individual *Selbstschützer*. In this way, the *Selbstschutz* experience has been integrated into a broader collective narrative that reaffirms traditional pacifism and group integrity. The *Selbstschutz* experience plays a cautionary role within Mennonite collective memory, which by way of example, paradoxically, strengthens traditional notions of Mennonite identity.

True oppositional memory, or contested distribution, occurs predominantly between Mennonites and Makhnovists. Unlike complementary distribution, contested memory “does not function together in a cooperative or reciprocal fashion.”<sup>24</sup>

Negotiation is unwanted and considered impossible. Wertsch explains:

Competition and conflict characterize this sort of representation of the past. Instead of involving multiple perspectives that overlap or complement one another, the

focus is on how these perspectives compete with or contradict one another. Indeed, in some cases, one perspective is designed specifically to rebut another.<sup>25</sup>

Mennonite and Makhnovist memories of historical events are characterized less by such explicit competition and conflict than by silence and denial. Nonetheless, the implicit structure of each groups' narrative points to a deep conflict of collective memories. For example, Peter Arshinov's history of the *Makhnovshchina* is a highly romanticized account presenting the movement as a force of freedom and justice. This stands in stark contrast to first-hand Mennonite accounts of Makhnovist violence in the colonies. Likewise, Makhno, in his memoirs, argues that he issued orders to prevent the killing of innocent colonists, by contrast many present-day Mennonite historians and N. Venger argue Makhno is personally culpable for the 1919 massacres.

Within Makhnovist literature Mennonites are never referred to specifically but always as German colonists. This generalizing term does not differentiate between the varied cultural and religious communities of Germans in Russia. The lack of any distinction by Makhnovists suggests that in the popular peasant imagination there was no essential difference between the two. Thus, already at a most basic linguistic level, there is a denial of the other group's experience. This denial is further compounded by the fact that none of the Makhnovist authors address any of the massacres of Mennonites. In a strict sense, the Mennonites are non-existent in Makhnovist collective memory, existing only on the periphery as hostile *kolonisty*.

On the other side of the memorial divide, Makhno and his followers are ubiquitously present. Makhno is central to collective Mennonite memory of the civil war but this does not translate at any level into an acknowledgement of the Makhnovist

perspective. The evocation of Makhno in Mennonite literature is inevitably a device to explore Mennonite suffering and martyrdom. Furthermore, Makhno himself is frequently a metonymic device. It is imagined that “Makhno committed the massacres” or “Makhno terrorized the colonies”. There has been little effort by Mennonites to determine the actual level of Makhno’s personal involvement. Equally there has been virtually no systematic use of Makhnovist sources by Mennonites to explore the movement’s origins, ideology, or motivations. The complexities of the Makhnovist movement are written out of history and replaced by a simplistic view of the *Makhnovshchina* as an archetypal “terrorist-bandit gang”.

The problem with collective memory masquerading as objective history is that stereotyped characterizations prevail over complex realities. In each case, the other’s memory and identity is rejected and ultimately denied by weaving an exclusionary narrative around events. These results are not necessarily the product of a conscious conspiracy but more often a function of each group’s narrative form. There is simply no role for the other to play without causing a crisis in the storyline. Thus to maintain narrative integrity the bourgeois *kolonisty* must be purged from history and conversely Ukrainian history must be colonized by the Mennonite perspective.

#### *Distributed Memory Between Individuals and Memorial Artifacts*

Just as collective memory is distributed between individuals, it is also distributed between individuals and memorial artifacts. A memorial artifact can adopt any mode of expression such as text, video, ritual, music, theater, monuments or cyberspace. In all

cases they are shared by a culture and accessible to its members. Wertsch explains, “the idea is that [individuals] share a representation of the past because they share [cultural] resources. The use of this [cultural tool] may result in homogenous, complementary, or contested collective memory, but in all cases, it is the key to understanding how distribution is possible.”<sup>26</sup> Maurice Halbwachs himself pointed in this direction when he wrote that memories “are recalled by me externally, and the groups of which I am part at any given time give me the means to reconstruct them.”<sup>27</sup> This view goes far to explain how collective memory can be transferred across generations well beyond the living memory of events.

This is the explicit purpose of a film like *And When they Shall Ask* (1983). A combination of reenactment and interview the film preserves memories of the Mennonite civil war experience for future generations. In many ways it has come to epitomize Russian Mennonite collective memory. Makhno is roundly presented as a lunatic bandit who forced the Mennonite community to decide between passive martyrdom and armed resistance. The film interviews both pacifists and *Selbstschützer* giving time to both perspectives.

A similar venture from the pro-Makhnovist side takes the form of Nikolai Kapta’s 2005 television series *The Nine Lives of Nestor Makhno*. This twelve-part mini-series aired on both domestic and international Russian television and is described as a “historical biographical drama about the life of Nestor Makhno.”<sup>28</sup> Despite its pretensions to objectivity the film presents a highly romanticized, popular account of events. The clear intention is to rehabilitate Makhno in the popular mind as a type of revolutionary Robin Hood.



Enthusiasm for Makhno is universal throughout Gulyai-Pole. Various plaques, busts, an oversized *tachanka*, a seven-foot orthodox cross, a brand of mustard and two life-sized bronzed statues all bear the inscription of Makhno. One statue sits in the garden of Makhno's brother's former home. The house was renovated by the local government as a heritage site and is owned by a relative of Makhno who has set up a shrine in her bedroom for visitors. A shrink-wrapped coat that belonged to Makhno's wife is set alongside various other artifacts and photographs. After signing the guest book one is encouraged to buy Makhno fridge magnets. In Guylai-Pole Makhno is all but canonized.<sup>29</sup>

The allure of Makhno is strongly rooted in today's suspicion of authority. Whether it is western anarchists' distrust of global capitalism or Ukrainian malaise over national politics, Makhno serves as a historical rallying point that can reinvigorate the present with a fighting spirit of freedom. Uncomfortable historical details can be quarantined in the past as long as the central narrative is preserved in the archive of popular memory. Like temporal renegades the *Makhnovshchina* have reentered the fray of present social-political battles as a real force to draw upon.

In an environment so saturated with the memorialization of Makhnovist virtue it is easy to forget the Mennonite experience. Nonetheless, Mennonites have managed to make their mark on the Makhnovian landscape. Until 2010 Mennonite "heritage cruises" were organized. A frequent feature of these cruises were visits to former colonies and the sites of massacres. In Eichenfeld a stone memorial is dedicated to the 82 victims murdered there on November 7-8, 1919. The patch of land where the memorial sits is maintained voluntarily by Ukrainians from the neighbouring village. Today Mennonite

memorials of various sorts can be found across southern Ukraine. My tour guide felt it was quite meaningful that not one of these memorials has been vandalized – and this in a country where public vandalism is not uncommon. At the inauguration of the Eichenfeld memorial both Mennonites and Ukrainians gathered in a spirit of reconciliation to commemorate the massacre.

The memorial activities of Mennonites in Ukraine have had an impact on the local narrative. Many locals are now aware of the Mennonite experience and Ukrainian historians such as Svetlana Bobyleva and Natalya Venger have started to write about Makhnovist-Mennonite relations. Even the Guylai-Pole museum has begun to integrate the Mennonite narrative into an exhibition otherwise dominated by Makhno. How far this integration will proceed and how successful Ukrainian historians will be in communicating Mennonite perspectives to a Ukrainian audience remains to be seen.

Memorial artifacts can be used to strengthen pre-existent contested memories and sharpen memorial conflict, or, alternately, be used as agents of reconciliation. By exposing opposing groups, in a sensitive and reflective manner, to the remembrance of events outside their cultural experience, rigidified and exclusionary collective memories can be freed from their narrative restraints. Hayden White once observed, “if human beings learn to see themselves as disconnected from the past ... they may come to realize what an enormous amount of freedom they enjoy.”<sup>30</sup> Contested memories can be transformed into complementary memory and new embracive collective narratives can be allowed to take shape. This process does, however, involve an active choice on the part of the individual to question the inherited collective memory of their culture. Derrida explains:

When you inherit a language, it does not mean you are totally in it or you are passively programmed by it. To inherit means to be able to, of course, appropriate this language, to transform it, to select something. Heritage is not something you are given as a whole. It is something that calls for interpretations, selections, reactions, response and responsibility. When you take your responsibility as an heir, you are not simply subjected to the heritage, you are not called to simply conserve or keep this heritage as it is, intact. You have to make it live and survive, and that is a process - a selective and interpretive process.<sup>31</sup>

The individual may have to confront deeply ingrained notions of identity in order to acknowledge the other. Left to our own devices this is unlikely to occur but through the facilitation of memorial artifacts greater possibilities arise.

Although it is not a source I further examine, a potentially fruitful space to encourage this process is on the internet. Makhno is already widely known in cyberspace but largely as a contested figure. Across a variety of websites, discussion forms and youtube videos, communities from all sides of the debate present their own version of Makhno. The pro-Makhnovist narrative is heavily represented on the net, best illustrated by anarchist hubs like *libcom.org*, the Russian language *makhno.ru* and the *Online Nestor Makhno Archive*.<sup>32</sup> At these sites visitors may access a wide selection of, often very valuable, information on the *Makhnovshchina*. A host of independent researchers and translators have made available an enormous amount of material that would otherwise be very difficult for the non-academic to access.<sup>33</sup> In the past decade the best of English Makhnovist scholarship has not come from traditional academia but from the dedicated work of “amateur” historians and small publishing companies.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of *libcom.org* and *makhno.ru*, discussion boards exist to encourage the exchange of thoughts and information. Both sites function as memorial artifacts that help strengthen collective memory of all things Makhnovist. By virtue of the internet the

potential for identification with Makhnovism has extended far beyond eastern Ukraine and the purview of a small elite of anarchists. For many Makhno has become a key figure embodying one of the few instances when philosophical anarchism was put into practice at a mass level.

Unfortunately, contact between Makhnovist and Mennonite perspectives is rare. When it does occur, it can result in very crude exchanges. A youtube user self-identifying as a Mennonite sympathetic to anarchism posted excerpts of *And When they Shall Ask* in response to the “heroicizing of Nestor Makhno”.<sup>35</sup> The video has since received more dislikes than likes and the commentary disabled due to hostile pro-Makhnovist responses.

On the other hand, signs of progress are evident. Nick Heath in his biographical sketch of the Makhnovist Simeon Pravda on *libcom.org* makes use of Mennonite memoirs. Heath concludes his article writing that, “the unhappy relations between the Mennonites and the Makhnovists deserve to be examined in greater detail and an investigation into the atrocities allegedly committed by the Makhnovists should take place.”<sup>36</sup> Shortly thereafter, an article was posted by an unknown author entitled “The Makhnovists and the Mennonites: war and peace in the Ukrainian Revolution”. This article is the only attempt to address the issue of Makhnovist-Mennonite relations from an anarchist perspective. It is equally unique in its acknowledgement of Mennonite suffering concluding, “Makhnovist historians will need to abandon the fairy tale of unfailingly firm-but-fair revolutionary chivalry and acknowledge the undeserved violence endured by some Mennonites.”<sup>37</sup> The author is equally critical of Mennonite histories arguing that, “If there’s to be any rapprochement between Makhnovist and Mennonite

histories, the latter will need to abandon the myth of the Mennonite community's special martyrdom."<sup>38</sup> The author encourages a common ground to be sought in the shared humanity of both groups and their mutual suffering in the face of revolution and civil war. The article is an excellent example of how the internet can mediate new potential narratives of collective memory through active participation.<sup>39</sup>

### *Schematic Narrative Templates*

Postmodernist philosopher Paul Ricoeur proposes that historical narratives perform a necessary "configurational act" that "grasps together sets of temporally distributed events into interpretable wholes or plots."<sup>40</sup> Hayden White describes this process as "emplotment" explaining, "by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures."<sup>41</sup>

However, narratives are not isolated but are engaged in constant dialogue with other narratives. Pre-existing narratives, rooted deep within a culture's collective memory, will influence and constrain how new memories are expressed. Traditionally new events in a people's history are integrated into a pre-existing broader historical narrative.

Collective cultural memory offers base scripts, or schematic narrative templates, which emplot on new input. Wertsch contrasts specific narratives, that describe events limited to a specific time and place, with the more abstract form of a schematic narrative template: "the notion of template is involved because these abstract structures can underlie several different specific narratives, each of which has a particular setting, cast

of characters, dates, etc.” Templates mediate pre-existing meaning structures that allow individuals to make sense of new events from a particular cultural perspective.

For our purposes we will be discussing two schematic narrative templates. Underlying Makhnovist histories is the template of Ukraine’s perennial “quest for freedom and justice”. Hardly a controversial statement, this abstract narrative is demonstrably present throughout most of Ukrainian history due to its geographical position as a colonized territory. It has taken on many specific forms but in the context of the civil war we see a particular manifestation in the *Makhnovshchina*.

The Makhnovshchina rejected the concept of a nation-state, but nonetheless sought a radical autonomy for Ukrainians. The movement drew heavily upon the collective memory of Zaporozhian Cossackdom.<sup>42</sup> Makhno himself remarks in his memoirs that he considered his movement heir to the Zaporozhian traditions.<sup>43</sup> Even today in Ukraine clear connections are made between Makhno and Zaporozhian Cossackdom. An exhibit at the Zaporozhye Regional Art Museum in 2011 included Makhno in a series of paintings of Cossack leaders. While the Makhnovshchina was specific to its time, it was also very much a product of its memorial environment, which influenced how it constructed its identity and later represented itself in written histories. Makhnovist accounts focus on the movement as a “bringer of freedom and justice” to the labouring peoples of Ukraine, frequently excluding evidence that might contradict this basic template.

A second template we will be discussing is the Mennonite narrative of martyrdom. Core concepts of Mennonite identity were forged in the context of Anabaptist persecution during the Reformation. *The Martyr’s Mirror* is a testament to

this persecution and the centrality of martyrdom to Mennonite identity. Ethelbert Stauffer went as far as to write that the “theology of martyrdom” is the “hidden sanctuary or crypt of Anabaptist Christianity”. Given its centrality of martyrdom to Mennonite identity, it is not surprising that Mennonite accounts of the civil war are often organized around the theme of persecution and martyrdom. The practical result is a Manichaean interpretation of events in which Mennonites are frequently depicted as an enclave of spirituality, innocence and “defencelessness” [*Wehrlosigkeit*] facing the onslaught of Makhno’s demonic forces. Particularly in pacifist accounts Makhnovists are commonly characterized in spiritual terms as possessing satanic qualities. At worst the result of such an interpretive framework is the dehumanization of the enemy and at best, a hesitancy to engage the topic from opposing perspectives.

These templates inform the production of memorial artifacts, which if found socially useful, in turn feed the collective reservoir of memory. They are integrated into the broader whole where they then contribute to the employment of future events. A wide variety of memorial artifacts contribute to the construction of a group’s collective memory. The sum effect is the continuity of group identity in the face of potentially destabilizing events. A common interpretive thread is maintained within the collective memory.

## VI. Conclusion

An advantage of a deconstructionist approach to history is its active encouragement, even advocacy, of dissent. This dissent is accompanied by the promise

of new narratives and forms of relationship. Hayden White wrote that the role of today's historian is "to transform historical studies in such a way as to allow the historian [and reader] to participate positively in the liberation of the present from the burden of history."<sup>44</sup>

This liberatory impulse is also at the heart of both "anarchism" and "anabaptism." Anarchism and anabaptism both seek justice through the rejection of traditional models of social organization. Both profess care for the marginalized and oppressed. Both are driven by an incalculable notion of justice outside of human or religious law. This type of justice is aptly described by Derrida as one "that is so strong and so powerful that it shatters every calculus, every possible economy ... it is what gives us the impulse, the drive, the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law."<sup>45</sup> At its most basic level, justice can be seen as relation to the other.<sup>46</sup> Both anarchism and anabaptism aim to create a society on the basis of this relation. In Christian terms this is the process of forgiveness and redemption, where the self is redeemed through the radical acceptance of the other.

Unfortunately, human beliefs tend to rigidify over time. Narratives are hardened, laws writ in stone and relation to the other lost. Deconstructionist history can serve to loosen these binds by revealing the tension, inconsistency and alternative possibilities inherent within our historical narratives and collective remembrances. Derrida writes: "It is because I am not one with myself that I can speak with the other and address the other."<sup>47</sup> In the realization that our narratives are matrixes of contradictions, that they contain seeds of the other, we are freed from their strictures and become open to new possibilities of relationship. To quote Derrida one final time:



Once you take into account this inner and other difference, then you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your own identity is not exclusive of another identity, is open to another identity. And this prevents totalitarianism, nationalism, egocentrism, and so on.<sup>48</sup>

The purpose is to reconstitute that initial vision of justice as positive relation with the other, by recognition of our mutual otherness. It is on this ground that reconciliation is possible. A means towards this reconciliation can be found in this thesis' goal of re-narrativization, in which the culturally insular Makhnovist and Mennonite narratives of the past are shed in favour of a new multi-perspectival narrative capable of embracing both groups.

## Chapter 2

### Through Makhnovist Eyes

#### I. Identifying the Enemy

The Makhnovist and Mennonite narratives of the civil war are like two parallel train tracks navigating a common territory but rarely intersecting. These two narratives were birthed from radically different social paradigms and became rigidly entrenched within the histories of each group. Over the ensuing near century, they have rarely entered into dialogue and remain unchanged in their basic evaluations of Makhno and his movement.

Amongst emigré Makhnovist authors, and their anarchist heirs in the West, the *Makhnovshchina* embody the liberation of the peasantry from all hierarchies of oppression. For them it remains a fundamentally positive example of one of the few times anarchism has been put into practice successfully on a mass level. It is thus a glaring historical irony that for Mennonite authors Makhno epitomizes the very oppression he is said to negate. The character of Makhno functions as an arch-villain in Russian Mennonite histories, evoking memories of suffering, martyrdom and massacre. The two narratives could not be more incongruent.

A second great irony is that despite Makhno's prevalence in Mennonite histories, reference to "Mennonites" is absent from the entire corpus of Makhnovist literature. Mennonites are certainly present in Makhnovist literature but are never explicitly

identified. The most specific label used for Mennonites is *nemetskie kolonisty* [“German colonists”], a term also used to describe German Lutheran and Catholic colonists.<sup>1</sup>

One source however does suggest a modicum of awareness of the Mennonites as a distinct group, which can help us understand their absence from Makhnovist histories.

An article published in 1919 by Stéphane Roger, a journalist and deserter from the French army stationed in southern Ukraine, begins:

Always true to their own lying system of propaganda, the bourgeois and estate-owning Mennonites from the German colonies of Ukraine have for several months now carried on a deceitful campaign of slander with the goal of vilifying the reputation of Comrade Makhno. Only those without the slightest acquaintance with our Brigade Commissar Makhno could take seriously their perfidious insinuations.

I, as a French journalist who has seen Makhno and his detachments with my own eyes, am entitled to tell those who don't know the real story what these soldiers stand for and what sort of person their commissar is.<sup>2</sup>

It is possible Roger was responding to anti-Makhnovist articles from *Friedensstimme* – a Mennonite newspaper published in Halbstadt. Not addressing any specific accusations, Roger goes on to give a glowing report of the Makhnovists and how a large crowd in Halbstadt enthusiastically received Makhno.

Most importantly, as the only pro-Makhnovist primary source that explicitly identifies the Mennonites, Roger's text illustrates a key interpretive factor of Makhnovist literature: the enemy is not Mennonites in general but rather the “bourgeois and estate-owning Mennonites”. In other words, those Mennonites considered as class enemies. As shall be shown, at no point did the Makhnovist leadership consider itself as targeting Mennonites, or even “German colonists.”

This interpretive factor has become a common source of confusion and is rooted in the way each group tended to categorize identity. As anarchist-communists the

Makhnovist leadership interpreted their environment through class analysis. Ethnic categories were eschewed in favor of class. In the immediate rural environment, anarchist-communists drew the battle lines of class struggle between the impoverished labouring masses, or toilers, and the wealthy *kulaks* and *pomeshchiks*. A strict definition of the word *kulak* is debatable but at its most basic level it referred to a wealthier bourgeois farmer that employed labour for the purpose of their increasing profits. *Pomeshchiks* referred to the owners of large estates.<sup>3</sup> In the eyes of a Makhnovist, any individual Mennonite was first and foremost either a toiler or a class enemy. Ethnicity or religious affiliation was inconsequential.

In Makhnovist propaganda ethnicity only appears in official condemnations of national chauvinism or anti-semitism, often coupled with an appeal to transcend ethnic divides on the basis of class solidarity. For example, Makhnovist intellectual Voline reproduces the following proclamation from May 1919:

Peasants, workers and partisans, you know that the workers of all nationalities – Russians, Jews, Poles, Germans, Armenians, etc. – are equally imprisoned in the abyss of poverty ... We must proclaim everywhere that our enemies are the exploiters of all nationalities – the Russian manufacturer, the German iron magnate, the Jewish banker, the Polish aristocrat ... The bourgeoisie of all countries and all nationalities is united in a bitter struggle against the revolution, against the laboring masses of the whole world and all nationalities.<sup>4</sup>

Peter Arshinov, likewise, comments in his *History of the Makhnovist Movement*:

The *Makhnovshchina*, strictly and resolutely got rid of the national, religious, political and other prejudices of the regime of oppression and slavery; it based itself on the real aspirations of the proletarian class of the city and country, and it carried out a bitter warfare in the name of these aspirations...<sup>5</sup>

Makhno himself also personally resisted national prejudices early in his career. While in prison during the world war, he openly confronted his fellow inmates' anti-Germanism.<sup>6</sup>

The Makhnovist paradigm of class identity contrasts with traditional Mennonite identities, centered on culture and religion. Thus we have two groups apprehending events through the very different lenses of class and culture. This discrepancy in fundamental paradigms greatly impacted how both groups constructed historical narratives of each other.

The issue is further problematized by the fact that a large segment of the Mennonite population qualified as *kulaks* and *pomeshchiks*. The majority of Mennonites owned land plots much larger than the surrounding peasantry and frequently employed Ukrainians as servants and farmhands. Furthermore, from the mid-1800s onwards in the wake of the emancipation of the serfs, Mennonites acquired large estates from the struggling Russian and Ukrainian gentry. Neighbouring Makhno's village of Gulyai-Pole was the Schönfeld colony, which by 1914 contained over 200 individual Mennonite properties, many reliant upon cheap Ukrainian labour.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards Mennonites increasingly replaced the serf-owning Russian landlord as the face of rural exploitation. Having moved into positions of privilege, the large upper and middle Mennonite classes found themselves in the Makhnovists' direct line of fire. Due to the Mennonites' strong cultural self-identification, it has been popularly assumed that Makhno targeted them as an ethnic or religious group. This however was not the case from the standpoint of Makhnovist logic, which interpreted a significant segment of the Mennonites as class enemies, while at the same time denouncing all manifestations of ethnic prejudice.

## II. Sources

The history of the *Makhnovshchina* is a large and multi-faceted phenomenon reaching far beyond the scope of this thesis. Our purpose is not to provide a general history of the Makhnovist narrative but rather to conduct a focused investigation of how Mennonites have been narrativized by Makhnovist writers. To accomplish this objective I have relied primarily on the works of Peter Arshinov, Voline and Makhno. The works written in exile by three of the movement's most important participants, together constitute the canon of Makhnovist literature. They are the most commonly referenced works and most accessible sources to the general public, thus constituting the basic building blocks of the movement's collective memory. As memorial artifacts they provide indispensable insights into how the Makhnovists conceptually situated the Mennonites in their world. They also provide a diversity of perspectives and styles of writing.

Peter Arshinov was a metal worker and revolutionary activist who had been sentenced to death for the murder of a railway boss in 1907. After a series of escapes and rearrests, he was eventually sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. In prison he met Makhno for whom he became something of an intellectual mentor. After Arshinov's release from prison in 1917, he helped to organize the Moscow anarchists before joining the Makhnovists in April 1919. Arshinov would remain with the movement for the remainder of its history serving within its cultural-educational department and editing the insurgent newspaper *Put' k svobode* [Road to Freedom]. In exile Arshinov would retain

close ties with Makhno until his public break with anarchism. In 1935 Arshinov returned to the Soviet Union only to be arrested and executed for his anarchist past two years later.

Arshinov's book *The History of the Makhnovist Movement* is considered the official history of the *Makhnovshchina*. Written early in exile the work is based upon eyewitness accounts and official documents, providing a full history of the movement.<sup>8</sup> As a memorial artifact, Arshinov's account acts as the standard interpretation of the movement amongst Makhnovist sympathizers – as much today as then. Indeed, Voline's book relies heavily upon Arshinov's, at times copying it word for word. Arshinov's history interprets events through a paradigm of uncompromising class conflict, is propagandistic in its style and intention, and largely glosses over any negative aspects of the movement. The account is also characterized by the author's self-conscious detachment. Despite being an eyewitness himself, Arshinov never interjects himself into the narrative refusing us insight into his personal experience of the movement. Within Arshinov's narrative the Mennonites are wholly subsumed within the category of class enemy. They are considered a parasitical and reactionary element for which no mercy should be shown.

Voline's work, *The Unknown Revolution*, by contrast, was written much later in exile and not first published until 1947. While drawing heavily upon Arshinov for the general form of its narrative, this work is unique for its self-reflective moments and harsh criticisms of the movement. Voline sees the *Makhnovshchina* as a fundamentally positive phenomenon but is particularly disturbed by the army's violence and Makhno's "darker side." In exile, Voline would break sharply with Arshinov and Makhno, while drawing closer to Galina.<sup>9</sup> Voline does not directly deal with the Mennonites beyond

Arshinov's slogans of class warfare, but his book does offer critical clues as to how the violence of 1919 evolved.

Finally, we have Makhno's memoirs divided into four separate works. The first piece, originally entitled "My Autobiography" provides a narrative of Makhno's youth and, critically for us, an account of his employment on a Mennonite farm. The remaining memoirs were published in three volumes, of which only the first Makhno lived to see in print. Posthumously, Voline edited Makhno's draft manuscripts to produce the final two volumes.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, Makhno's narrative only takes us to the end of 1918 but does provides us with rich material for understanding his relationship with the Mennonites.

A note must also be made concerning the broader intent of these works. Our three primary sources were written largely in response to the competing narratives of Bolshevism and Ukrainian Nationalism. The early histories also contain large sections refuting charges of anti-semitism.<sup>11</sup> These accusations were particularly disturbing to Makhno, as he had harshly punished even the slightest display of anti-semitism. In 1927 Makhno even challenged his Jewish accusers to an open debate over the alleged atrocities.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these overriding concerns, at least in Makhno's case, there is evidence he was aware of the Mennonite perspective. In 1924 Makhno was arrested in Danzig "on charges of robbery and murder committed against German colonists."<sup>13</sup> Makhno never mentions these charges in his writings but Galina did briefly recall this incident in an interview in 1968.<sup>14</sup> One cannot help but wonder if the charges impacted Makhno's representation of the Mennonites in his memoirs.<sup>15</sup>



I have further supplemented my study with lesser-known sources that have only come to light since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Foremost is the history-memoir *Dorogi Nestora Makhno [Roads of Nestor Makhno]* by Makhno's Chief of Staff, Viktor Belash. A very detailed account, it should be noted that Belash was forced to write his account under the supervision of the Soviet secret police. Belash frequently attributes negative aspects of the movement to Makhno, perhaps in an attempt to whitewash his own role in events. It is an idiosyncrasy of our subject that we must always be on watch for the memory-constructions of the Soviet state. Soviet authorship endlessly accused the *Makhnovshchina* of being a *kulak* conspiracy guilty of banditry and anti-semitism. Events were imaginatively reinterpreted and even purposely fabricated in an effort to tarnish the movement's popular image. Regardless, Belash is a critical source for the year 1919 alongside offering us important insights into the movement's relationship with the Mennonites.

We have also consulted the diary of Makhno's wife, Galina Kuzmenko. Again we encounter difficulties. The authenticity of the diary has long been in question and it has been suggested that the Soviet police fabricated it.<sup>16</sup> Part of the confusion arose from the fact that Galina composed the diary in a notebook bearing the name of her friend Feodora Gayenko.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore the original diary was captured by the Soviets. While the possibility of tampering cannot be excluded, it must be noted that a diversity of scholars now consider the diary authentic at least in its basic content.<sup>18</sup> Fortunately, the chronology of the diary corresponds with the diary of Lev Golik, head of the Makhnovist counterintelligence, enabling us to cross-reference relevant events. Both diaries depict Makhno negatively and describe an attack on a German colony in 1920.

The remainder of this chapter shall explore how the above-mentioned sources narrativize the Mennonites and other German colonists.<sup>19</sup> Part of this objective involves how the different authors represented the Makhnovist movement in relation to the colonists. Thus not only how the Mennonites are narrativized but also how Makhno and the movement is narrativized with the context of encounters with colonists. Finally it is asked to what extent the authors' narratives are intertextually homogenous, complementary or conflicting.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. Makhno's memoirs of his youth shall be examined, followed by his later experiences with colonists as recollected in his three volume memoirs. Makhno's memoirs abruptly end in November 1918, after which we turn to the other Makhnovist sources to continue the narrative. Narratives describing the period between December 1918 and mid-1919, when the Makhnovists and Mennonite *Selbstschutz* were in direct conflict, are examined, followed by a final section dealing with late 1919 until the end of the civil war.

### III. A Rebellious Youth

There is a legend that during Makhno's christening the priest's cassock set aflame. According to the local peasantry the incident prophesied that the child would become a famous bandit.<sup>20</sup> While perhaps no more than a fable, the story directs the listener's attention to Makhno's infancy; that his career is somehow explainable through reference to childhood.

Although not as riveting as combustible priests, Makhno's remembrances of his youth do provide omens of their own for both his future career and relationship with the Mennonites. We know that Nestor Ivanovich Makhno was born the youngest child of an impoverished single-mother.<sup>21</sup> Makhno's identification with his family's social status is evident in the opening lines of his memoir: "I am a peasant by origin. I was born in the small city of Gulyai-Pole of Yekaterinoslav *gubernia* in Ukraine."<sup>22</sup> My parents were serfs originally, and then became emancipated peasants. According to my mother, their lives under serfdom were horrible."<sup>23</sup> Most of Makhno's memories of his parents deal with unfair servitude. His father was compelled to remain working for his former master after emancipation before taking a job as a coachman for a factory owner. Shortly thereafter his father died – Makhno still an infant - leaving the family in financial straits.<sup>24</sup>

Of his mother Makhno fondly remembers a headstrong woman who always resisted servitude, writing, "while still a child she was twice beat with canes." The first time for refusing work she considered degrading and the second for demanding higher pay. Makhno evokes the image of a caring and dedicated mother who instilled in him a fierce sense of independence and justice. Complementing his mother's personal tales of rebellion were bedtime stories of freebooting Zaporozhian Cossacks.<sup>25</sup> Makhno is quick to make the reader aware that from a young age he had been conditioned for a rebellious youth.

Fatherless and for a time occupying a half-finished home, Makhno describes how his family struggled to make ends meet on a four hectare plot with three ailing horses.<sup>26</sup> Amidst these desperate circumstances at the age of nine Nestor was compelled to find

summer employment on a local Mennonite estate.<sup>27</sup> Makhno writes of his first experiences:

When summer arrived, I was hired as an ox drover by a landowner named Janzen. I was paid 25 kopecks per day ... Every Sunday after receiving this sum, I joyfully went home, running most of the seven kilometers clutching the money in my fist. Running into the house, I handed over the money right away to my mother, just as my older brothers had done with their pay on earlier occasions. Now I was also earning money and just like them, passing it on to Mother... My young heart was filled with happiness. I remember once I forgot to water the oxen, and so when they were pulling a wagon filled with sheaves, they suddenly veered off the road towards a pond. Just then the overseer's assistant came riding up in a *britzka*. He was a nasty character whom we called "flyeater" because his mouth was always hanging open. He struck me twice with his whip. I was so angry I almost ran home and was restrained by doing so only by the memory of Sundays and the joy I found in bringing money home for Mother. And so I kept working the whole summer and earned a total of 20 rubles. This was my first job.<sup>28</sup>

Mirroring his mother's childhood work experience, Makhno describes his time on the Janzen estate as laced with injustices. Time and again the family's finances would force Nestor from the schoolroom to the fields. In this environment of crushing poverty and hard labour Makhno recalls how he came to question the system he had been born into:

It was around this time I began to feel anger, bitterness, and even hatred towards the landowner and, especially, towards to his children: those young slackers often passed by me: sleek, well-dressed, and immaculately groomed and scented; while I was filthy, clad in rags, barefoot, and stinking of manure from cleaning the calves' barn. The injustice of this state of affairs was staring me in the face. My only consolation then was my childish reasoning that this was the natural order of things: they were the "masters" and I was a worker whom they paid so they wouldn't have to handle manure themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Makhno writes of how he attempted to ignore the cruelty of his environment recalling: "I observed how the young 'well-bred masters' beat people like myself, and I not only kept quiet, but tried, like everyone else around me, to pretend that I didn't know anything and

never noticed anything.”<sup>30</sup> However, Nestor’s frustrated acquiescence soon reached a breaking point.

In the summer of 1902 Makhno describes how two of Janzen’s sons leveled an exceptionally cruel beating on one of the farmhands. Makhno recalls that he ran to inform the senior stablehand, Bat’ko Ivan, who in turn gave the smug masters a thrashing. In response to the incident the farm workers collectively marched on Janzen’s home threatening to quit the estate. Janzen pleaded with them to forgive his sons’ stupidity. Convinced of the effectiveness of their protest, the workers agreed to continue their work. As for Makhno, he was particularly affected by Bat’ko Ivan’s final words: “Nobody here should ever allow themselves to be beaten... And if some day, my little Nestor, one of the bosses tries to hit you, grab the nearest pitchfork and skewer him!” Initially shocked by Ivan’s advice, Makhno “instinctively felt it innately sane and just.”<sup>31</sup>

Most striking about Makhno’s account is that there is no trace of ethnic animosity. Makhno’s experience on the Janzen estate was far from uncommon amongst Ukrainian labourers at the turn of the century. Mennonite pacifism was frequently discarded when it came to punishing workers suspected of theft. One extreme incident involved a farmhand being locked in a grain bin for two days before being sent to the mayor for disciplining.<sup>32</sup> What is uncommon is for these accounts to be recorded by the peasantry itself. Makhno’s account offers us a rare window into the psychological landscape of a peasant from the lowest strata of society. Makhno identifies his employer as neither Mennonite nor German, and if it were not for the Janzen name we would have no indication of the ethnic dimension. For Makhno the beatings and humiliation of hard labour are represented exclusively as the symptoms of an unjust class system.

The lack of ethnic prejudice in Makhno's account is all the more noteworthy given that the class divide in provincial Ekaterinoslav was often stratified along ethnic lines. The wealthy Mennonite population was particularly large in the Gulyai-Polyan region. The Krasnopol *volost*, neighbouring Gulyai-Pole, contained the Schönfeld colony, home to some of the richest Mennonites in Imperial Russia. While the traditional pattern of a Mennonite colony consisted of a tightly knit series of villages along a riverbank or series of streams, Schönfeld by contrast, was unique consisting of many estate-settlements spread over a large area.<sup>33</sup> The Janzen estate was located at Silberfeld [Serebropol] some seven kilometers southwest of Gulyai-Pole.<sup>34</sup> Founded in 1839, the property grew to 20,000 *dessiatines* before its subdivision into five separate properties in 1897.<sup>35</sup> To understand the socio-economic landscape inhabited by the young Makhno, a brief overview of the region is called for.

In southern Ukraine land ownership served as the foundation of Mennonite wealth. From historical records we know that the average full Mennonite farm in 1905 was 65 *dessiatines* while the average Ukrainian holding was just 6.3 *dessiatines*, the bare minimum to meet subsistence requirements.<sup>36</sup> Makhno's family owned just over 4 *dessiatines*. By contrast, Schönfeld estate-owners commonly owned properties of hundreds, even thousands, of *dessiatines*. Despite its small population, by 1909 Schönfeld owned roughly 10% of all Mennonite property in the empire.<sup>37</sup> To gain an idea of the comparative wealth between Mennonites and the peasantry compare the average yearly income of a full farm colonist at 3-8000R to 60-90R for a seasonal farmhand. Female maids earned a mere 50R per year and even skilled factory workers

earned only 2R a day. Successful estate owners by contrast could turn a profit of over 200,000R per year.<sup>38</sup>

The emancipation of serfs in 1861 coupled with the rapid development of capitalism in the region and overpopulation in the villages left a legacy of socio-economic inequality in left-bank Ukraine where the *bedniaki* [poor peasants] constituted two-thirds of the peasant population, and one in six peasants were landless. While the poor peasantry owned 57 percent of Ukrainian farms they occupied a mere 12 percent of the land.<sup>39</sup> Historian Colin Darch writes: “The provinces of Kherson, Tauride and Ekaterinoslav were a part of the Russian empire where the poor peasants’ lot was extremely hard. The increasing poverty of the peasants contrasted sharply with the potential fertility of the black-soil regions and with the enrichment of the few kulaks and *pomeshchiki*.”<sup>40</sup> With social and economic pressures mounting on a desperate rural population class antagonisms correspondingly rose.<sup>41</sup>

For another year Makhno laboured at the estate replaying Bat’ko Ivan’s advice over in his mind. Makhno reflects: “Subsequently, more than once when I was pitching hay in the stable and saw one of the bosses, I imagined him trying to hit me, and myself stabbing him with my fork on the spot.”<sup>42</sup> Some fifteen years later Makhno would himself adopt the title of Bat’ko, and help bring Ivan’s raw logic of class conflict to fruition on a mass scale.

In the ensuing years Makhno writes that he took on numerous odd jobs, including employment at a Mennonite-owned factory.<sup>43</sup> After the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution Makhno for the first time become involved in revolutionary politics. Early on Makhno writes that he joined a “tiny group of peasant anarcho-communists from Gulyai-Pole”,

that came to be known as the Union of Poor Peasants.<sup>44</sup> Operationally Prokop Semeniuta, whose brother Makhno knew from the Janzen farm, led the group.<sup>45</sup> However it was the group's ideological leader Voldemar Antoni that Makhno credits for "cleansing my mind once and for all of the slightest trace of the slave mentality and desire to submit to any authority whatsoever."<sup>46</sup>

Makhno recalls that the group carried out its most violent actions in response to the Stolypin reforms, "which eliminated communal property in land." According to Makhno, the group waged "black terror" in the countryside "setting fire to the pomeshchiks' property and fields wherever possible." While these actions would have certainly affected the landowning Mennonites of the region, Makhno does not specify any targeted attacks against colonists per se.

The group's demise finally came about after a rivalry with the local police chief ended in his assassination. The action led to Makhno's arrest and in March 1910 he was sentenced to death. This sentence was subsequently commuted to life with hard labour after the intervention of his mother.<sup>47</sup> Makhno would survive seven years of imprisonment, often shackled hand and foot in an isolation cell. After the political amnesty of the February Revolution, Makhno would return to Gulyai-Pole with a focused vision to upend the social system that had carved his path from the Janzen farm to Butyrki prison.

#### IV. Land and Freedom



Makhno describes a hero's welcome upon his return to Gulyai-Pole in March 1917. As the only returning political prisoner he was treated with reverence by the peasantry, referred to as "the one who rose from the dead."<sup>48</sup> Makhno immediately devoted himself to pushing forward the revolution. Reconnecting with remnants of the local anarchist-communist group, Makhno set forth his social vision in a speech:

Here in Gulyai-Pole and the surrounding region we should act decisively to dissolve government institutions and absolutely put an end to private property in land, factories, plants, and other types of enterprises. To accomplish this we must keep in close contact with the peasant masses ... We must convince the peasants we are fighting for them and are unswervingly devoted to those concepts, which we will present to them at village assemblies and other meetings.<sup>49</sup>

Makhno's philosophy was heavily influenced by the writings of anarchist-communist Peter Kropotkin, whom he felt "most closely approach[ed] the peasant mentality."<sup>50</sup> The anarcho-communist program of Makhno would have a major impact on the neighbouring Mennonite population.

Makhno writes that a Peasant Union was established with himself as chairman, and in the ensuing weeks other unions rapidly spread throughout the region. Organizationally, Makhno and his supporters had formed a popularly elected body capable of challenging the government's authority in the region and most importantly seizing the land. The government body in Gulyai-Pole representing the authority of the Provisional Government in St. Petersburg was the Public Committee. This local body was a temporary authority for maintaining order before official elections. Rural public committees were often controlled by liberals and moderate socialists, mirroring the composition of the Provisional Government. By contrast, the peasant unions mirrored the workers' soviets, offering an alternative source of authority and a direct challenge to the Provisional Government.

In Gulyai-Pole, Russian and Serbian army officers stationed in the village led the public committee.<sup>51</sup> Makhno writes that he successfully demanded the re-election of this body and was able to quickly bring representatives from the Peasant Union into the Committee. The goal from the outset was to dissolve the Committee and neutralize its police force. Most importantly, Makhno became chairman of the body's land committee.

In the spring of 1917 Makhno's main concern was preparing for the seizure and redistribution of land. Makhno's program was by no means uniquely radical. At a regional congress in Alexandrovsk a resolution was passed, despite the protests of Social-Democrats and Kadets, proclaiming "the transfer of land into the hands of labouring society without compensation." Makhno recalls a general fear amongst the peasantry that unless immediate action was taken "the Revolution will perish and we shall again be left without land." This sentiment referred to the widespread feeling amongst the peasantry that they had been robbed of their right to the land in the aftermath of emancipation.<sup>52</sup>

Following the Alexandrovsk congress Makhno emphasizes that the Gulyai-Pole Peasant Union issued a Declaration stating: "the toiling peasants of the Gulyai-Pole raion believe in their inalienable right to proclaim as communal property the lands of the pomeshchiks, the monasteries, and the State, and intend to carry this into effect in the near future."<sup>53</sup> In late June Makhno writes that he assembled the region's *kulaks* and estate-owners to inventory "a precise account of all the wealth in land at the disposal of the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks* for their idle lifestyle."<sup>54</sup> On the basis of this inventory the land was to be reorganized into free communes and equally divided amongst the peasantry. At a later congress it was resolved that the estate-owners and *kulaks* would be offered a choice between joining a commune or an individual plot.<sup>55</sup> The goal was to

level society and eliminate the rural bourgeoisie as a class but not physically. While this policy would have had a great impact upon Mennonite estate-owners, it does not appear to have targeted colonist villages where the majority of middle and lower class Mennonites lived.

Although, the Provisional authorities regarded the Peasant Union's actions as illegal and even threatened to send in troops, outside events were to prove fortuitous for Makhno. A crisis struck the Provisional Government when General Kornilov, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, threatened to march on St. Petersburg. Makhno writes that he was ordered by the central authorities to organize a local defence force against potential counterrevolution. This pretext, recalls Makhno, was used to disarm the local bourgeoisie. Of particular interest to our topic are Makhno's orders:

...divide yourselves up into groups of 10 or 15, with 5 to a wagon, and don't lose any time – cover the whole Gulyai-Pole raion and visit the pomeshchiks' estates, the kulak khutors, and the rich German colonies and confiscate from the bourgeoisie all the fire-arms you can find ... but do not harm in any way, either by word or gesture, the bourgeoisie themselves ... [you] must not get carried away and be involved in pillaging. Pillaging is not a revolutionary act, and so long as I am at the head of our movement any delinquent parties will find themselves before the Tribunal ...<sup>56</sup>

Makhno's characterization of this action directly contradicts the traditional Mennonite narrative of Makhno as a terrorist-bandit intent on their destruction. Makhno certainly had no compunctions using force when faced with resistance, however, lending credence to his version of events is the fact that no murders of Mennonites are recorded for this period. Indeed, for the whole of 1917 there are no Mennonite deaths in the region, at a time when Makhno was perhaps most solidly in control of the area.<sup>57</sup> The incident does however reveal that Makhno perceived the Mennonites as inherently a

counterrevolutionary threat. The scope of Makhno's actions in this instance is extended to the colony villages suggesting he expected, or was already facing, stiff resistance from colonists as a whole to his redistributive program.

Soon after this action, Makhno writes that the peasantry began seizing the land. By February-March 1918, a number of estates had been designated as free communes. The communes ranged in size from 50 to 200 people. Makhno emphasizes that he himself was a member of Commune No. 1, established on the former Klassen estate.<sup>58</sup> In April 1918, the Red reserve commander Belenkevich visited the reorganized Klassen estate who, according to Makhno, was "profoundly moved" by the peasantry's self-management.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, livestock and farming implements were redistributed. Makhno states that "former owners were left with two pairs of horses, one or two cows, one plough, one seeding machine, one mower, one winnowing machine, etc."<sup>60</sup> Peasant families joining the communes left their villages to take up residence in the homes of the former estate-owners. Management of the communes was, "conducted by a general meeting of all its members"<sup>61</sup> The communes were officially endorsed by the A-K Group but were purely voluntary.

From the perspective of the pro-Makhnovist peasantry, the presence of the anarchists helped to stabilize the situation and reestablish life on a more egalitarian basis.<sup>62</sup> Makhno even claims success amongst some of the German colonists who "realized that one way or another they could not continue as owners of thousands of *dessiatines* of land ... Without hesitating any longer they sided with the Revolution and organized their lives on a new basis."<sup>63</sup>

Thus far Makhno's narrative characterizes himself as a bringer of freedom and justice to his people. Makhno's memoirs of his youth present a genealogy of injustice suffered first by his parents in their life of servitude and then by himself on the Janzen estate and finally in prison. Juxtaposing these indignities is a narrative of resistance, first represented by Makhno's mother and Bat'ko Ivan, and then in his own career as a member of the Gulyai-Pole anarchist group. Upon his release from prison and return home, Makhno presents himself as a type of messianic figure in the eyes of the peasantry. He is "the one who rose from the dead." Within this context Makhno sets forth to liberate his people, first from outside authority, symbolized by the Public Committee, and then from the enemy within, symbolized by the local bourgeoisie and estate-owners.

The Mennonites, within Makhno's narrative, are consistently referred to as "German colonists" or, more vaguely, as part of the broader category of *kulaks* and *pomeshchiks*. From his account of the Janzen estate to his disarming of the bourgeoisie to the land redistribution, Makhno is unconcerned with the Mennonites as a distinct cultural group. For Makhno, landowners like Janzen and the "rich German colonies" were merely pieces of a broader unjust class system that had been imposed upon the labouring peasantry. Seen from this perspective, the confiscation of Mennonite land is not an assault on Mennonites per se, but rather upon a specific privileged caste in the rural landscape. Makhno is eager to emphasize that he opposed pillaging of the colonies and even sought to smooth their readjustment to life in the new revolutionary landscape. Thus, while Makhno sought to destroy the foundations of socio-economic privilege in the countryside, he presents himself as wanting to avoid violence, preferring to win the colonists to the side of the revolution.

## V. The Battle of Dibrivka

From March to November 1918 the Central Powers occupied the whole of Ukraine. By all accounts the German and Austro-Hungarian armies acted as oppressors in the Ukrainian countryside. By mid-1918 the occupation forces were dealing with multiple peasant uprisings throughout the whole of Ukraine.<sup>64</sup> Makhno describes in detail how the occupation forces executed many close of his comrades and, in a targeted personal attack, burnt down his mother's home and executed his brother Emilian.<sup>65</sup> After a brief tour of Russia, Makhno returned home in August 1918 to organize resistance against the occupation in the Gulyai-Pole region. This period saw the *Makhnovshchina* develop into a fighting army and the legend of "Bat'ko Makhno" take shape. It was also a critical historical moment for Makhnovist-Mennonite relations.

During the occupation the Ukrainian peasantry watched how Mennonite and German colonists embraced their occupiers. They watched as traditionally pacifist Mennonites now offered up their sons for military training under German supervision. On March 21, the German command issued an order demanding the return of all colonist land and property previously taken by the peasantry. Mennonites sometimes accompanied punitive detachments during the retrieval of stolen property. Such expeditions were frequently violent and could end in summary executions.<sup>66</sup>

A key event in the evolution of the *Makhnovshchina* and a pivotal turning point in Makhnovist-Mennonite relations described by Makhno was the Battle of Dibrivka. In late October 1918 the German and Austrian authorities dispatched a large force, which

cornered Makhno and thirty of his partisans near the village of Bolshe-Mikhailovka. Makhno describes how his force retreated into the Dibrivka forest, adjacent to the village, where contact was made with the detachment of the insurgent Fedor Shchuss. Meanwhile a large enemy force of Austrians and German colonists had surrounded Makhno and Schuss. The two insurgents agreed to combine their forces in an attempt to break out of their encirclement. Despite being grossly outnumbered, Makhno and Schuss were successful in their attack. The Austrians were caught off-guard, not expecting a frontal assault and overestimating the size of Makhno's group. They fled in panic leaving their arms and horses to the insurgents. Supported by peasants from Bolshe-Mikhailovka, a section of the colonists were hunted down and drowned in nearby river. Victory complete, Makhno describes how he was declared the leader of their insurrection and given the title of *bat'ko*.<sup>67</sup>

Makhno continues how three days later on October 24, a large punitive detachment of Austrians and colonists, supported by German artillery, bombarded Bolshe-Mikhailovka forcing the Makhnovists to abandon the village. The Austrians and colonists then entered the village setting aflame over six hundred homes and executing large number of peasants. For two days the village burned during which the attackers, according to Makhno, raped and tortured many of its citizens. From a distance Makhno watched the village burn. He records in his memoirs:

I sat up and reluctantly gazed in the direction of Dibrivka (25 *versts* distant). One could no longer see any sign of flames. There was only a column of smoke which stained the blue sky with its terrible blackness and reminded us of the events of yesterday, events which I would never forget for the rest of my life.<sup>68</sup>

In the aftermath of Bolshe-Mikhailovka's destruction Makhno's focus was on achieving retribution while maintaining the revolutionary integrity of his movement. Initially an eye-for-an-eye policy was adopted. In the surrounding villages various executions were carried out and the homes of *kulaks* believed to have participated in the attack on Bolshe-Mikhailovka were burned. Makhno writes that the insurgents adopted the slogan: "Death! Death! Death for the death of each revolutionary, death for each violated peasant women must befall every German and Austrian soldier and officer, every Hetmanite Guard or son of a *kulak*, who takes up arms against the Revolution or hires someone to do so."<sup>69</sup> All sentimentality was cast aside in a bid to mercilessly deal with the enemy.

Makhno writes that a number of armed German colonists from Mariental were apprehended. Posing as a member of the provincial militia Makhno recalls this revealing exchange with them: "You're traveling with weapons – you must be bandits. Where were you going? 'We're not bandits, we're bandit-killers,' was the answer I received."<sup>70</sup> This exchange reveals how the line between soldier and bandit had become thoroughly blurred. In the context of ideological warfare, terms such as bandit or terrorist become meaningless adjectives revealing more about the author's political position than the character of the "bandit".

The colonists proceeded to describe to Makhno how they had burned Bolshe-Mikhailovka. The description appears to have provoked a psychological breakdown in Makhno. He describes running off alone only to catch a glimpse of the rising smoke from Bolshe-Mikhailovka, whereupon he writes, "I pulled a revolver out of my pocket, and quite unconsciously, cocked the gun and pointed the barrel at my forehead. But as



soon as I felt its cold touch, I was filled with an overwhelming horror.”<sup>71</sup> Makhno sought out the company of his comrades and ordered the colonists’ executions.

Capturing another set of armed colonists Makhno writes that he learned the “most ferocious component of the enemy forces” were from the small German Catholic colony of Krasny Kut [Neu-Grüntal]. At Neu-Grüntal the colonists were still returning from Bolshe-Mikhailovka when they encountered Makhno. Following a brief battle, the inhabitants of the village were assembled in a field and the colony of some 60-70 households was burnt to the ground. In total, according to an official report, eighteen colonists were killed in the attack.<sup>72</sup> Makhno addressed the survivors: “You are free to go ... You are now in the same situation as those peasant men, women, and children whom your fathers, husbands, and sons jeered at, and whom they subjected to beatings, rapes and the burning of homes.” Makhno then warned the colonists that, “No one will be spared unless they come to their senses and voluntarily renounce their position of lording it over the country.”<sup>73</sup> The destruction of Neu-Grüntal was followed by a series of retributive attacks on landowners in the region over the next few days.

After Makhno’s initial retributive actions he established a number of ground rules for the occupation of estates and colonies. Faced with the prospect of an uncontrolled bloodletting Makhno writes that he chose moderation over vengeance, noting: “I well understood that our goal was not exacting merciless vengeance of our enemies.”<sup>74</sup> On the contrary Makhno sought to transform the peasantry’s anger into a focused revolutionary insurrection. Makhno produces the following key resolution in his memoirs:

Starting in October 1918, to introduce into the operating procedure of our detachments the rule according to which each which captures a proprietor-owned

*khutor*, a German colony, or a *pomeshchik* estate must first of all call a meeting of all the owners of these properties and, after ascertaining the extent of their wealth, impose a financial levy and announce the confiscation of weaponry and ammunition. All this must be carried out under the direct supervision of the detachment commanders, who will exercise the strictest revolutionary discipline. If the owners are not willing to surrender weapons, the detachments must carry out careful searches ... If a search does not find any weapons, the owner is to be left alone, untouched. In the reverse case, if weapons are found, their owner is to be shot ...

All enemies of our movement and its Revolution who *actively take up arms against us* will be shot where they fought as soon as evidence concerning their actions has been gathered from the local population.

The best method of applying revolutionary justice, which should always be practiced by all Batko Makhno detachments, is to hold a preliminary inquiry conducted by village assemblies in those localities (villages and hamlets) where the accused were active and where they were apprehended by our detachment.

Non-compliance with this procedure will result in revolutionary sanctions up to and including the public disowning of the offending detachments as having no connection with the general staff of the revolutionary-insurgent Ukrainian movement led by Batko Makhno.<sup>75</sup>

Makhno's official resolution was to dictate his relations with the Mennonites for the remainder of the civil war. The resolution not only clearly articulated a policy toward the Mennonite colonies, but also offers us a critical insight into Makhno's intentions.

Foremost, it is apparent Makhno considered the Mennonites and other German colonists as a dangerous threat to the revolution and guilty of collaborating with the occupation.

To neutralize this threat Makhno felt that a sustained campaign of vengeance would not be beneficial in the long term. Rather he writes that the focus should be on "disarming the bourgeoisie and arming the revolutionary toilers." The resolution also stipulates ratios for fair exchanges of horses and other supplies. The thrust of the resolution implies that the colonies were to be used as supply bases. Most importantly, the resolution makes clear that the official Makhnovist position was to leave peaceful civilians unharmed.

Furthermore, those units that did not follow the procedural protocols for determining the guilt or innocence of colonists would be publicly disowned.

Makhno states that the resolution was spread across the region. It is at this point that we see a large increase in the number of robberies and murders throughout the Schönfeld region. Makhno confirms that, “Now we mainly paid visits to *kulak khutors* or colonies and the estates of *pomeshchiks*.”<sup>76</sup> The destruction of a second German colony [No. 4] is described by Makhno as home to a self-defence unit commanded by the estate-owner Lentz. While “most of the colony was burned down” Makhno insists that only “those [farmers] who had shot at our partisans were annihilated on the spot.”<sup>77</sup> This action was followed by a coordinated march through the *khutors* and colonies of the region “applying fire and sword,” with the purpose of “confiscating horses, *tachankas*, various kinds of weapons, and cash.”<sup>78</sup> An advance cavalry was to engage the enemy if necessary followed by groups from the main force whose task was to confiscate weapons and supplies. Makhno describes this action as a “tough, but necessary, march.”<sup>79</sup> In this manner the Makhnovists acquired a large sum of money and arms to wage war against the occupation.

It is difficult to determine to what extent Makhno’s resolution was adhered to. Officially only those who had participated in the “*kulak* detachments” were to be executed but Makhno’s order left ample room for personal and community grudges to influence events. It would be surprising if no innocents were murdered. Regardless, the imprint of these raids on the Schönfelders was terrifying, causing the majority of them to flee for the Molotschna colony by winter.

While killings increased in frequency there were no large-scale massacres during this period. Makhno emphasizes that the “executions could have taken on a mass character” but that the insurgency consciously avoided this. Makhno writes:

These landowners could have been annihilated along with their mansions. In essence, this would have been an appropriate response for the losses sustained by the insurgents due to raids by *pomeshchiks*. But it wasn't necessary for the insurgency to take their lives ... Death, even for those who had shown no respect for the lives of others was regarded as an extreme measure, applicable only for individual cases, not for masses of people.<sup>80</sup>

For Makhno it was important that the attacks were justifiable from a revolutionary perspective. Wanton terror or wholesale vengeance was at odds with his logic of revolution. All actions were to serve the broader anarchist vision, and as such his representation of events was inevitably filtered through this perspective. For example, Makhno's address to the colonists of Neu-Grüntal represents his actions as a form of raw but necessary justice. He is cast as almost a liberator of the colonists themselves by destroying their ties to property and privilege and offering them a second chance to side with the revolution. Makhno also serves as a voice of reason and higher morality within the movement. He is an avenger of the masses but equally capable of restraint when necessary.

However, with the responsibilities of leadership came an apparent violent inner struggle, most poignantly illustrated by Makhno's near suicide. He even questions his title of *Bat'ko*: “I often asked myself: is it honourable to allow oneself to be exalted in this way by my fellow workers? What does it mean to be the object of the grateful admiration of people who trust you implicitly because they perceive you as someone sincerely devoted to their welfare?”<sup>81</sup> There is a tension in his memoirs expressed by his

fluctuations between self-doubt, anger and revolutionary righteousness. The reader accompanies Makhno as he struggles to achieve a balance between justice and vengeance. The different sides of Makhno's self-representation compete with other, offering the reader a portrait of him as frequently internally conflicted. The narrative tension between Makhno's simultaneous impulse towards vengeance and justice is never fully reconciled and the reader is left with a deep impression that the specter of unrestrained violence lay just beneath the events described. In the coming year it would explode to the surface.

In Makhno's memoirs as a whole, the Mennonites are consistently cast in the role of class enemy through the labels of "German colonist", *kulak* and *pomeshchik*. Prior to the battle of Dibrivka, Makhno's goal was to eliminate the socio-economic privileges of the colonists namely through disarming the colonies and redistributing the lands of the Mennonite estate-owners. This was not a targeted policy against Mennonites or German colonists, but part of a broader social program aimed against the rural upper and middle classes.

After the battle of Dibrivka there is a discernible change in Makhno's willingness to violently engage the colonists. His approach is initially characterized by acts of vengeance, including the execution of colonists and the destruction of their colonies. Fearing a descent into wanton terror, Makhno reconsiders his approach issuing a resolution outlining ground rules for engaging the colonists. Makhno presents as an often reluctant and even conflicted leader. Makhno, who may be accused of selective memory and whitewashing his own bloody deeds, appears to struggle with his limitations, straining to explain the complexities of civil strife. His memoirs provide a fascinating

insight into how he struggled to navigate what he considered a just policy toward the German colonists. Unfortunately, Makhno's memoirs abruptly end and we are left to mine other sources for his intentions and the movement's direction from December 1918 onwards.<sup>82</sup>

## VII. December 1918- Mid-1919

Our other Makhnovist sources the class-based revolutionary narrative for the remainder of the movement's history. Particular attention shall be given to the year 1919. Arshinov's history helps furnish a general background narrative of events and offers insight into the "official" attitude of movement during this period. Belash's work recounts a number of encounters directly with colonists giving a glimpse of Makhnovist-Mennonite relations for this period. Voline's history mirrors Arshinov's closely, however his personal reflections on Makhno and the army furnish a dissenting voice. Finally the diaries of Galina Kuzmenko and Lev Golik offer a brief glimpse of Makhno in 1920 and firsthand accounts of a massacre at a German colony in 1920. Perhaps unexpectedly, our five sources for this period are silent concerning the massacres on Mennonite colonies in 1919.

The year 1919 was by far the most tragic for the Mennonite communities of Ukraine. According to Mennonite researcher Peter Letkemann, sixty-seven percent, or 827 victims, of the total number of Mennonites civil war victims were killed in 1919, the vast majority during a brief six-week period from November 8 to December 18.<sup>83</sup> No fewer than four major massacres affecting the Molotschna, Yazykovo, Borozenko and

Sagradovka colonies would scar the Ukrainian Mennonite community. The Chortitza<sup>84</sup> colony would also experience atrocities in the form of pillaging, executions and mass rape. All of these crimes occurred under Makhnovist occupation. If Makhno had managed to hold back the floodgates of vengeance in the aftermath of Dibrivka, the year 1919 unleashed a veritable deluge.

The year 1919 also saw the *Makhnovshchina* reach its greatest strength but concurrently saw the rapid disintegration of its army by the new-year. With the end of World War I, many of the remaining occupation forces in southern Ukraine withdrew to the German and Mennonite colonies where they did not go on the offensive unless provoked. Makhno quickly filled the power vacuum in this situation. With the free movement of insurgents throughout the countryside, nearly all the Mennonites of Schönfeld fled to the relative safety of the Molotschna colony in early 1919.<sup>85</sup> Arshinov refers in passing to this period as “the expulsion of the *pomeshchiks*”.<sup>86</sup> Land and property was once again redistributed amongst the peasantry and the free communes reconstituted.

According to Arshinov, this period saw the establishment of a southern front against the new face of counterrevolution, General Denikin’s Volunteer White Army. The White army was organized by former tsarist officers – or the “living debris of the overthrown monarchy” as Arshinov put it – who sought to overthrow Bolshevik rule and reinstitute traditional landed relations. Their ideology was distinctly Russian, imperial and nationalist but vague in its long-term political goals.<sup>87</sup> The Whites were given Allied support – particularly by the French in Odessa – and relied heavily on Allied armaments received along the southern ports of the Black and Azov seas. Over the course of the

civil war, the Whites gained a notorious reputation for mistreating the revolutionary peasantry and instigating Jewish pogroms.<sup>88</sup> Despite Makhno's distrust of the Bolsheviks, he would twice subordinate his troops to the Red army in order to defeat the Whites.

More importantly for our concerns, the Whites became deeply entrenched in the Mennonite colonies. Close relations with the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* were quickly established further confirming the colonists as a hostile population in the mind of the local peasantry. White weapons, training and operational advice were provided to the *Selbstschutz*. Soon the "self-defence" was participating in joint offensive actions against Makhno.<sup>89</sup> As early as December 1918, Makhno established a front at Polohy against White and colonist units.<sup>90</sup> A seesaw battle ensued until a combined Red-Makhnovist force overran the Molotschna colony in March.

Speaking of this period, but not identifying the Mennonites specifically, Arshinov writes with his typical ideological bent:

The liberation of the people in reality leads to the degeneration and return to savagery, not of the people, but of those who thanks to power and privilege, live from the labour of the people's arms and from the blood of the people's veins. The Russian revolution gives an example of how thousands of families from the privileged class – clean, well nourished and well groomed – fell to decadence and savagery. The revolution deprived them of their servants, and in a month or two they were covered with dirt, they were mangy. The liberation of the people leads to the savagery of those who live from its enslavement.<sup>91</sup>

It is an emotion-laden speech communicating the extent to which the enemy had truly become the "other." The "privileged class" is outside of "the people." There is a distinct sense that the wealthy are inhuman. They are monsters living from the labour of the people, vampirically feeding from the blood of the masses. Now without a host to



exploit, their true ugliness is revealed as a “dirty, mangy” savage. Dirtiness is a typical trope employed by propagandists to dehumanize and distance oneself from the enemy. It is also a psychological necessity in order to rationalize and actualize an implicit logic of extermination.

Of course, the hatred expressed by Arshinov had very real roots. It was not an irrational hatred. The German occupation had taken its toll. It had returned the land to the *pomeshchiks*, confiscated the peasantry’s crops, and sent out punitive detachments, often accompanied by colonists. Now the peasants watched as the colonists turned to the White army to reestablish their property and help organize the *Selbstschutz*. With each push of the White army into Makhnovist territory the peasants would re-experience the loss of land and summary executions. A downward spiral of vengeance could only escalate hatreds between the two communities on opposite lines of the battlefield.

Belash recalls how the excesses of the occupation had come to be visually linked with the colonies. He recalls of his train travels from the end of 1918: “I looked out the window at the road leading from the station to the nearest German colony. From the trees along the road dangled human bodies, around which a number of soldiers crowded. Those hung were captured Makhnovists.”<sup>92</sup> If proof were ever needed that the colonists constituted a fifth column here it was in a brazen display. Arriving in Makhnovist-controlled territory Belash further records a revealing interaction between three colonist travelers and the Makhnovist patrol:

Come here boys! I know all of these creatures! – The Makhnovist pushed three tall, thin Germans out of a train car. A group of Makhnovists came forward with a shout: Ah, here they are, my little birdies! ... Kreutzer, where are your sons? In the punitive detachments? Do you remember how I served you? Remember how I joined the Red Guard? Do you remember how you and your sons led a punitive

detachment to Temry and burned my home down? – asked a stalkerly middle-aged man. The German only shrugged his shoulders and cried.<sup>93</sup>

The train pressed onwards and Belash watched from his seat as the colonists were impaled by bayonets. Deeper into Makhnovist territory Belash was confronted by a mound of corpses jealously guarded by a pack of dogs. He thought to himself, “Dogs brutalized, acquire the tendencies of wolves. And people? Are we any different than wolves?”<sup>94</sup> This question was to haunt the movement throughout its history as it struggled to maintain the principles of freedom, equality and solidarity amidst the dehumanizing effects of warfare. An internal battle ensued in which the wolfish nature of humanity competed, and often intermingled, with the rhetoric of revolutionary justice.

Another example of the escalating violence during this period comes again from Belash. In mid-March 1919 Fedor Shchuss was ordered to levy contributions on the Lutheran German colony of Yablokovo [Silbertal].<sup>95</sup> Shchuss would return daily from the colony with pairs of boots but no money, sparking Makhno’s suspicion. Finally, a grieving colonist confronted Makhno requesting she be allowed to bury her dead. Makhno’s suspicions were confirmed and a serious confrontation erupted in which Makhno threatened Shchuss with execution if he did not stop killing colonists.<sup>96</sup> The timeline is unclear but at some point during this incident the colonists assigned two of their own men to assassinate Makhno in revenge for Shchuss’ actions. In Guylai-Polye the Makhnovist guard attempted to arrest the would-be assassins and a shoot-out ensued in which a Ukrainian boy was killed in the crossfire. Enraged, Shchuss took a team to Silbertal where he massacred thirty colonists. A team of Makhnovists apparently investigated the incident, although Shchuss remained a prominent figure in the movement

until his death in 1921.<sup>97</sup> However, relations between Shchuss and Makhno were strained for a long time after this incident.<sup>98</sup>

This incident is notable for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests that Makhno did not have full control over his troops. Secondly, it shows that while Makhno did not follow through with his threat of execution, he was clearly disturbed by the indiscriminate murder of civilians. The incident shows a consistency with his earlier order regarding the colonies. A final incident from Belash supports such a conclusion. At the end of October 1919, a week before the outbreak of the Mennonite massacres, Makhno confronted a commander at Berdyansk ordering him to cease the unauthorized shooting of German colonists.<sup>99</sup>

Thus far within the narratives of Arshinov and Belash we encounter a period in which the Makhnovists were locked into open conflict with the German colonies of southern Ukraine. From the accounts given it appears that the situation easily devolved into unrestrained violence and the pursuit of retributive vengeance. This is most vividly communicated by Belash's account of the colonist travelers and the massacre at Silbertal. Nonetheless, despite this trend towards vengeance, we encounter in Makhno attempts to maintain a semblance of justice even for those identified as class enemies. Belash's accounts of Makhno's response to Schuss and his intervention at Berdyansk indicate Makhno's commitment to his earlier resolution that sought to avoid a slide into wanton terror. Nonetheless, the tension between vengeance and justice is present in both Arshinov and Belash's narratives. The murder of the colonists and the mounds of corpses disturb Belash, but he is powerless to alter the situation.

Likewise, Makhno is enraged by Schuss' actions but nevertheless does not follow through with his threat of execution. Nor does he follow the protocol of his 1918 resolution and publically distance the movement from Schuss. It was perhaps Schuss' high standing within the movement that made Makhno powerless to follow through with his threats. In this instance vengeance was allowed to take precedence over justice. The inability to effectively institute strict disciplinary measures in the face of excessive violence would contribute greatly to the development of the massacres in late 1919.

#### VIII. September 1919 –1921

From Voline, Makhno's most inveterate "friendly" critic, we are given an insight into the army's moral decline and slide into wanton violence in 1919:

Any army, of whatever kind, is an evil, and even in a free and popular army, composed of volunteers and dedicated to the defence of a noble cause, is by its very nature a danger. Once it becomes permanent, it inevitably detaches itself from the people and the world of labour. Its members lose the inclination and the ability to lead a healthy working life. With an imperceptible and therefore all the more dangerous gradualness, it becomes a collection of idlers, who acquire anti-social, authoritarian and even dictatorial leanings, who acquire also a taste for violence as a thing in itself, for the brute force even in cases where recourse to such means is contrary to the very cause it purports to defend.<sup>100</sup>

While Voline's history very closely follows Arshinov's, he breaks form with regards to the army's behavior and Makhno's role in 1919. A different vision emerges from Voline of an army elite drunk with power and obsessed with violence.

From Arshinov's and Voline's accounts we read that in May 1919 following a disastrous breakthrough in Makhno's sector by the Whites and a bitter falling out between Makhno and the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovist army was forced into a sustained retreat throughout the summer into central Ukraine. A special White unit – which

included colonists – was charged with pursuing Makhno and eliminating his forces once and for all. By September Makhno's force had been squeezed into a small patch of territory in central Ukraine controlled by the Ukrainian nationalist army. In the city of Uman Makhno was compelled to negotiate a non-aggression pact with the nationalists. Meanwhile, to the east Denikin issued his famous "Moscow Directive" whose ultimate goal was to occupy the heart of Russia. Major centers such as Ekaterinoslav and Kharkov quickly fell to Denikin and by October the Whites were just 240 miles south of Moscow. Denikin's offensive marked the high point of the White movement and the last time it would critically threaten the Bolshevik regime.

At Uman Makhno was encircled by the Whites, and faced a desperate situation. In an action reminiscent of his miraculous breakout at Dibrivka, Arshinov writes that Makhno ordered his troops to make a frontal assault on the Whites near the village of Peregonovka in an effort to smash through the encirclement. In a repeat miracle Makhno's plan worked. The consequences for Denikin were disastrous. In an all or nothing bid, Denikin had left his rear guard extremely vulnerable. Believing Makhno a spent force, White reserves were thinly spread across central and eastern Ukraine.

Capitalizing upon his victory at Peregonovka, Makhno made a mad dash for Gulyai-Pole. Arshinov narrativizes this event in highly mythologized language:

The following legend is told among the peasant of Great Russia. After his uprising he fell into the hands of the authorities. He told the noblemen sitting around him: 'In this uprising I only gave you a foretaste. But wait: soon after me will come the real broom – it will sweep all of you away.' Makhno showed himself to be this historic broom...<sup>101</sup>

The army fanned out into three forces aimed at Ekaterinoslav, Gulyai-Pole and Nikopol. Rapidly, the Makhnovists occupied major cities such as Alexandrovsk, Gulyai-Pole,

Berdyansk, Melitopil' and Mariupol'. On October 20 the Makhnovists briefly captured Ekaterinoslav and at the height of their advance bombarded Taganrog where Denikin himself was stationed. At Volnovakha major White supply lines were severed and along the Azov seaports Denikin was cut off from Allied support. Within this context the Makhnovists came to occupy the major Mennonite colonies of the Molotschna, Chortitza, Jasykovo and Sagradovka.

Pertinent to our discussion is the policing of civilian life within the Makhnovist zone. The capture of a host of cities and villages saw the large-scale expansion of the Makhnovist *kontrrazvedka* [counter-intelligence]. The *kontrrazvedka* was divided into military and civilian sections as well as personal bodyguard for Makhno. The service quickly gained a notorious reputation for being uncontrollable. Russian anarchist researcher Vyacheslav Azarov considers its civilian section “the crowning disgrace of the Makhnovist movement.”<sup>102</sup> Makhno himself acknowledged that the *kontrrazvedka* had effectively been given “unlimited powers” during this period and that some of its actions caused him “mental anguish and embarrassment when he had to apologize for their excesses.”<sup>103</sup>

According to Belash, by the autumn of 1919 the *kontrrazveka* had developed a network structure that reached down to every squadron. Furthermore, the service employed locals to provide information on White collaborators. The major tasks of the civilian section were to help provision the army “through expropriations and the collection of contributions, as well as the pursuit of agents and former collaborators of the Whites.”<sup>104</sup> Given this description it is inevitable that the *kontrrazvedka* would have been keenly interested in hunting down Mennonite *Selbstschützer*. Belash writes that the

*kontrrazvedka* shot all individuals with any connection to the White army including officers, police, prison guards, spies and provocateurs.<sup>105</sup> The door-to-door terrorization described by Mennonites fits Belash's description of the counter-intelligence during this period. As we shall see Mennonite accounts of the massacres strongly suggest the presence of the *kontrrazvedka*.

Voline looked upon the influence of the counter-intelligence with horror. Theoretically it was subordinate to the Revolutionary Military Soviet – a civilian body that served as the executive of the movement of which Voline was chairman – but practically it functioned outside of civilian control.<sup>106</sup> In his history Voline does not label the organization by name but under Soviet interrogation he stated that he was overwhelmed by civilian complaints against the *kontrrazveda*.<sup>107</sup> In November 1919, a special commission, which included worker and peasant delegates, was established to investigate the reckless activities of the service.<sup>108</sup> Regarding Makhno, Voline writes that his behaviour was increasingly authoritarian, which he attributes to the development of a “warrior sentiment” and “military clique” around Makhno. He furthermore accuses Makhno of reckless drunkenness, excessive violence and rape.<sup>109</sup>

In exile Voline's relations with Makhno became severely strained, although he did not print his accusations until quite some time after Makhno's death. In his unfinished works, Voline explains that he had withheld certain information for fear of retribution from Makhnovists in exile. He also accuses high-ranking commanders of driving a wedge between Makhno and Galina for fear of her influence, and preventing Galina from speaking out about Makhno's “darker side.”<sup>110</sup>

Voline's account offers us a contested memory of Makhno from within the movement itself. Many anarchists have since questioned the truthfulness of Voline's accusations, as he does not provide any verifiable evidence or specific details. Makhno's close friend in exile, Ida Mett, regarded Voline as an "unscrupulous character." With regards to the rape accusations, she points out that Makhno's wife, Galina, was a known defender of women's rights and had personally executed rapists.<sup>111</sup> Leah Feldman, a Makhnovist nurse, likewise rejected Voline's charges. In an interview she commented: "Who in Russia is he supposed to have raped? His wife was always riding on a horse beside him and would have soon put a stop to that."<sup>112</sup> Galina herself continued to give largely positive assessments of her husband and the movement throughout her life.<sup>113</sup>

On the other side of the equation, certain Makhnovist intellectuals came to disdain the violence of the movement. In exile Mark Mratchnyi, previously involved with the cultural-education section of the movement, refused to be printed in the same journal as Makhno. He also accused Arshinov of covering up Makhno's dirty past and downplaying the extent to which antisemitism had infected the army.<sup>114</sup> Aron Baron, another important intellectual figure of the movement, likewise opposed the army's violence in 1919.<sup>115</sup> The problem with all of these sources, however, is that they provide no details or specific events that can be further investigated. Even such critics as Voline and Mratchnyi remain self-restrained, maintaining a code of silence over the murkier aspects of the movement.

Two sources that do not submit to such self-censorship are the diaries of Galina Kuzmenko and Lev Golik. The diaries both cover the period of February-March 1920 and show a large degree of agreement over the detail of events. Both complain of



Makhno's drinking bouts and erratic behavior. In one instance, Golik records having to tie down Makhno after he threatened to shoot a commander for flirting with Galina. Also described, in both diaries, is a massacre at the German Lutheran colony of Mariental. According to the entries for March 15, 1920, the village's self-defence unit killed two Makhnovist scouts. In response the village was burnt down and thirty men executed. Some Germans fled to the nearby Greek village of Komar, whom the inhabitants turned over to Makhno who personally executed the Germans on the spot.<sup>116</sup>

The Makhno encountered in these diaries is a ruthless character suffering from bouts of heavy drink and fits of rage. It is perhaps a Makhno driven to frustration with an unending civil war and thoroughly desensitized to the violence by this point. The matter-of-factness with which dozens of executions are listed in the diaries and the callousness with which life is so easily eliminated gives a chilling illustration of Voline's observation that, "the continued existence of an army within the movement, of whatever kind it may be, always and inevitably ends by being affected by certain serious faults, by a special kind of evil mentality."<sup>117</sup>

It is also from this period that we encounter Belash's last mention of "German colonists". In a final statement, which turns collective Mennonite memory on its head, is Belash's observation from 1920:

The German colonists - our former irreconcilable enemies - now resigned themselves. In all the colonies, where we stayed, they were doing reconnaissance, stood in the outposts, warning us of any movement of the Red Army. They carefully, apparently out of sympathy, or perhaps because of fear, hid the place of our stay from the Reds: we were out of danger.<sup>118</sup>

The impression given is that the Makhnovists had worn down the colonists will to resist, and “perhaps out of fear” had terrorized at least a portion of the civilian population into submission.

Whatever the truth of Voline’s specific allegations, it is undeniable that excessive violence and mistreatment of the civilian population was a chronic problem within the army. The longevity of the war and revolution had taken its toll, with violence giving way to terror. We need look no further than the Mennonite experience to confirm the horrors that are but vaguely suggested in Makhnovist literature.

## Chapter 3

### Through Mennonite Eyes

#### I. Identifying the Enemy

At the Winnipeg Mennonite Heritage Center hangs a clock known less for its ability to tell time than to tell of a time past. The clock's hands reach out at awkward angles and its faceplate bears the distinct impression of a boot. The artifact's description reads:

Marauding anarchists, led by the infamous Nestor Makhno, destroyed many Kroeger clocks. When they plundered Mennonite villages the clock became a favorite target because they mistook its burnished metal for gold. They'd seize a clock, gallop out of the village and later cast it aside after ripping out the weights and chains.

One clock is known as the Nestor Makhno clock. The brutal bandit was known to take over a village and make himself at home in the most prosperous house. From there he would lecture village leaders on how life would now proceed under the revolution. On one occasion a Kroeger clock bonged while Makhno was in mid-speech. The interruption startled him and in fury he tore the clock from the wall and trampled on it.

When he left, the family collected the pieces. Years later Arthur Kroeger was called upon to create a duplicate faceplate. The damaged original was donated to the Mennonite Heritage Center in Winnipeg, where it still bears the dents of Nestor Makhno's boots.<sup>1</sup>

As a memorial artifact Makhno's clock communicates the essence of the collective Mennonite experience of Nestor Makhno and his movement. On the heels of revolution came the boot of Makhno, destroying the finely tuned world of the colonies. The meeting of Makhno and the Mennonites marked in time a deeply destructive moment,

one that would ultimately end in the decimation of the colonies and the exodus of the Russian Mennonites.

The Mennonite narrative of Makhno is steeped in the collective memories of a people that suffered enormously in the face of war and revolution. The vast majority of Mennonite accounts about the Makhnovists are dominated by recollections of murder and robbery. This deep narrative script often colours the construction of official Mennonite histories. For example, a guide for the Mennonite Heritage Cruise in Ukraine summarized Makhno's career as follows:

Makhno attacked Mennonites because they had food, horses, equipment and did not resist – simple as that. Makhno was an anarchist and their philosophy was to scorch the earth and rebuild. There are myths surrounding Makhno, like the one that suggests he worked for a Mennonite family that mistreated him. They are not true. Makhno was a brutal terrorist and bandit who died a fitting death from syphilis in Paris at age 46.<sup>2</sup>

This depiction of Makhno communicates a number of falsehoods: Mennonites did resist in the form of the *Selbstschutz*; the preferred strategy of the anarchists was to preserve the large estates and establish agricultural communes; Makhno did work for Mennonites where he experienced mistreatment; finally, Makhno did not die of “syphilis” but of tuberculosis related causes.<sup>3</sup>

We must assume the guide was not intending to mislead his audience. How then could such a representation of Makhno become part of a historical tour? The answer revolves around the construction of cultural narratives and their transmission through the generations in an unchallenged form.

The above characterization, however, does communicate a narrative truth reflected in the Mennonite's collective experience of the civil war. The Mennonites were

rich in food and supplies compared to the neighbouring peasantry. The average colonist did not resist while hundreds were murdered by Makhnovist troops. The average Mennonite, having little knowledge of philosophical anarchism or the Makhnovist political program, watched as gangs of peasants seized their land and even burned down entire estates. Today's Mennonite brought up with traditions of non-resistance and Christian charity would likewise be suspicious of any claims that their descendents mistreated Ukrainian servants and farmhands. Finally, the Makhnovist occupation was nearly synonymous with rape; it is thus narratively appropriate for Makhno to die of syphilis.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, what is being communicated is not historical fact but a historical narrative from a distinctly Mennonite perspective.

Modern Mennonite histories likewise contain historical biases rooted in the collective memories of the *Makhnovshchina* from the civil war era. Until very recently Mennonite histories relied heavily on the accounts and memoirs of their own people to the near exclusion of Ukrainian sources. For example, despite the ready availability of Makhno's memoirs, and Voline and Arshinov's histories, few Mennonite historians have conducted an in-depth examination of these sources.<sup>5</sup> The consequence is that many accounts of Makhno cite personal memory and rumour as fact, without thoroughly considering the "other" side.

Some examples of factual errors derived in this manner include Makhno being a "Siberian exile", "fluent in Low German"<sup>6</sup>, "neither Ukrainian nor knowing anything of Ukraine's history"<sup>7</sup>, and an adherent of "anarcho-individualism".<sup>8</sup> Such errors can partially be attributed to the general dearth of reliable archival sources throughout the Soviet period, but in equal measure they are a result of the self-referential nature of

Russian Mennonite historical scholarship. In this way narrative biases and factual inaccuracies have gone unchallenged and are reinforced within the broader collective Mennonite memory.

One difficulty in handling Mennonite memoirs from this period is that their authors normally experienced only the destructive side of the Makhnovist movement. House searches, expropriations, murder and rape characterize the collective Mennonite experience of the Makhnovist occupations. They were keenly aware of the ubiquitous presence of the *kontrrazvedka* but were likely to have never heard of the movement's cultural-educational section or Makhno's patronage of orphans, for example.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the personal tyranny of individual "bat'kos" – such as Simeon Pravda – dominate Mennonite accounts whereas reference to the anarchists' advocacy of direct democracy is rare.<sup>10</sup> Still, as we shall see, a close reading of the primary literature – in particular pacifist sources – reveals a greater range of experience and interpretation of Makhno and his movement than might be expected. Perhaps unexpectedly, a number of Mennonite sources reveal a degree of positive experience with Makhno.

Although this topic will not be directly revisited, there is evidence of a hidden narrative of Mennonites who experienced the *Makhnovshchina* from within its ranks. These individuals have largely been left without a narrative voice in their people's history. Their mere existence stands as an uncomfortable reminder that Makhno was not always considered an implacable enemy. Fortunately, through the work of David and Johann Rempel a fleeting glimpse of their story has been preserved.<sup>11</sup>

The Mennonites were privy to the darkest side of the *Makhnovshchina* and have faithfully recorded it in all its horror. For this reason the Mennonite sources, commonly

overlooked by today's supporters of Makhno, are critical to understanding the *Makhnovshchina*.<sup>12</sup> However, Mennonite sources, like any other, are perspectival. As memorial artifacts they are narratively subjective in terms of both the individual author and the deeper narrative templates that inform their production. Any fair assessment of the *Makhnovshchina* must therefore acknowledge its destructive *and* constructive aspects. Only then can a more embracive multi-perspectival history of the movement be achieved. Thus this chapter seeks to present the Mennonite perspective on Makhno and his movement but remain mindful of its constructed, and potentially biased, nature.

After a brief overview of Mennonite sources, this chapter begins with a background history of Mennonite presence in southern Ukraine. Drawing upon James Urry's historical-anthropological work on Russian Mennonites, this section places Russian Mennonite colonization of the region into the broader context of Tsarist empire-building. From this initial imperialist context is seen the evolution of a master-servant relationship between Mennonites and the Ukrainian peasantry. Also examined are the affects of the anti-German campaigns during World War I and the response from the Mennonite community.

After laying the narrative foundations of the Mennonite experience in southern Ukraine, the dominant narratives of the civil war are examined. Due to the voluminous nature of Mennonite sources from this period this chapter takes a different form from chapter two. It is organized thematically rather than by author to facilitate a framework in which the array of sources can be narratively assessed. The Mennonite *Selbstschützer* and pacifist narratives will be compared and contrasted to see how they stand in relation to each other as complementary and contested narratives. The final section of this

chapter shall explore direct encounters with Makhno as found in Mennonite literature. In this section I will emphasize how these accounts contest the dominant negative image of Makhno in Mennonite narratives.

## II. Sources

While a variety of Mennonite sources are used in this chapter, a number are worthy of more detailed mention. Helpful in composing this chapter was Mennonite historian Victor Peter's letters with colonists who had experienced Makhno and his movement firsthand. The letters were solicited in the 1960s as part of Peter's own biography of Nestor Makhno. Particularly helpful are the accounts from Schönfeld residents Anna Goetz and H.B. Wiens.

For the pre-civil war Mennonite perspective on events the memoirs of Gerhard Lohrenz and the diary of Peter J. Dyck were indispensable. Peter J. Dyck's diary was self-published by the author's son in 1981. Dyck was a resident of the Molotschna and recounted in detail events from the beginning of World War I to the end of the civil war. Gerhard Lohrenz was raised in the settlement and fought in the *Selbstschutz* and White Army. Lohrenz later immigrated to Canada where he wrote a number of works on the history of Russian Mennonites. His observations on pre-revolutionary life in the colonies are especially illuminating. His study of the Sagradovka massacre, *Fire Over Sagradovka*, is also important to this thesis for the deeply personal eyewitness accounts of Mennonite women he collected.



The diary and memoirs of Dietrich Neufeld stands out amongst the primary sources. The diary, spanning the period of September 1919-March 1920, offers the reader a perspective on the Makhnovist occupation as it occurred. Originally composed in German and French, the diary was first published in German in 1921 but did not find an English translation until 1977.<sup>13</sup> In 1922 Neufeld published two memoirs of the civil war, which in translation were combined with the diary to produce the book *A Russian Dance of Death*. Originally from Sagradovka, Neufeld resided in Chortitza during the autumn of 1919. As a teacher and intellectual his writings are reflective and even philosophical. They delve into the heart of the conflict often challenging traditional Mennonite self-perceptions. Neufeld was a pacifist and his writings reflect this stance in his harsh criticism of the *Selbstschutz* and pre-revolutionary colony life in general.

Another pacifist memoir that deals explicitly with the *Makhnovshchina* is Gerhard Schroeder's *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*. Schroeder was also teacher who resided in Schönfeld. Schroeder's account gives us a detailed account of the Mennonite experience in Makhno's immediate region. Schroeder also had a number of personal encounters with Makhno making him a critical source for this study.

A unique source in this thesis is the oral history of the Janzen family – the family for whom Makhno worked as a youth. The family's history contains an account of Makhno's early life on the Silberfeld estate and a further encounter with the family during the civil war. I was fortunate enough to make contact with one of the great-granddaughter of Silberfeld's former proprietors, which has led to a fruitful dialogue on the question of Makhno and the Mennonites.

Finally, we have the surviving issues of the Molotschna newspaper *Friedensstimme*. The newspaper was founded in Halbstadt in 1903 under the editorship of Abraham Kroeker. Originally serving as an organ of the Mennonite Brethren, during the civil war it became the only colony newspaper greatly expanding the scope of its readership. Kroeker was a staunch pacifist reflecting this in his editorials and choice of guest writers. Kroeker was openly critical of the *Selbstschutz* and frequently admonished the broader Mennonite community for its materialism and lack of faith. On frequent occasions the newspaper was put under military censure and even suspended. Its pages offer a wealth of information from news reports of Makhno's activities, to the debates over nonresistance, to reflections on the Makhnovist occupations and massacres. The survival of a large number of *Friedensstimme* issues allows us to delve into the Mennonite experience during its time of crisis.

A final note on the primary sources involves a potential bias in favour of the pacifist narrative. The majority of accounts published by émigré Mennonites come from pacifists. As mentioned, *Friedensstimme* also heavily favored pacifist perspectives. Few extensive memoirs from *Selbstschützer* are available. Even Gerhard Lohrenz, who fought in the *Selbstschutz*, does not discuss his experience in his memoir.<sup>14</sup> For the most part, pieces of the *Selbstschützer* narrative must be extracted secondhand through pacifist sources.<sup>15</sup> The dominance of the pacifist narrative in Mennonite sources is understandable when set against the background of the post-civil war condemnation of the *Selbstschutz*.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary Mennonite historians tend to interpret the self-defence strategy as a tragic miscalculation. Mennonite commentary commonly argues that the

*Selbstschutz* put at risk the general Mennonite population and contributed to provoking the worst of the Makhnovist attacks.<sup>17</sup>

### III. Background

There is a fundamental paradox at the heart of Russian Mennonite history that must be addressed in order to contextualize the tragic civil war experience of the colonies. James Urry has argued that in various historical settings Mennonites have adopted “paradoxical rhetorical strategies” where we find simultaneously “*separatist* arguments derived from their faith's tragic orientation” and “*assimilative* arguments derived from the comic orientation of their yearning to be good citizens.”<sup>18</sup> In the Russian context, through the process of escaping an oppressive Prussian state and founding their community on the Ukrainian frontier, Mennonites functioned as collaborators with a Russian imperialist agenda. Through their settlement of the “Russian” frontier Mennonite colonists became an essential ingredient in Russia’s colonization of Ukraine. It should be stressed that Mennonite “colonialism” was not as cynically conscious as other some colonial projects, but nonetheless served the interests of Russian empire building and the pacification of the Ukrainian peoples. The role played by the colonies in the socio-economic make-up of southern Ukraine strongly supports Urry’s conclusion that “Mennonites have never been far from politics and not all have been unwilling participants in the power plays of the ‘world’.”<sup>19</sup>

Prior to Mennonite colonization, the indigenous Zaporozhian Cossacks of south Ukraine were scattered, co-opted and enserfed by the expanding Russian empire. Under

Catherine the Great the capital of the Cossacks, was destroyed in 1775. In 1783 Catherine issued a decree that abolished all Ukrainian political institutions and privileges. In the same year serfdom was introduced.<sup>20</sup> Poorer Cossacks of villages such as Gulyai-Pole, suddenly found themselves registered as serfs and forced to pay dues in the form of labour [*obrok*] to noble landowners.<sup>21</sup> Massive tracts of land were gifted to Russian nobles and a small Ukrainian elite, who in turn imported serfs from central Russia to work the land. Still, the existing population of the vast Ukrainian steppe was too small to sufficiently develop the region and Catherine found it beneficial to entice European settlers with wide-ranging privileges. Into what became the south “Russian” provinces of Ekaterinoslav and Tauride were brought foreign settlers including Germans, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbians and Mennonites. Each ethnic group tended to establish separate settlements to foster community bonds and preserve traditional cultural patterns.<sup>22</sup>

The Mennonite historians emphasize the social insularity of the colonies. The original Mennonite colonists, who settled in the Khortitsa region, were especially noted for their belief in establishing a non-conformist community of believers that stood apart from the state and the worldly ways of non-believers. Mennonite historians C. Krahn and L. Sawatsky describe the “old colony” pattern of living as follows:

In the total pattern of Mennonite history they could be compared in some respects with the *Kleine Gemeinde* of the Molotschna, the Hutterites, or the Amish, although more conservative ... Their utmost concern centered around the preservation of their way of life. From their point of view the total cultural pattern including language, clothing, education, furniture, self-government, mutual aid, village pattern, and all forms of customs were integral parts of their church concept. They preserved the most extreme form of separation from the world and the practice of church discipline by means of the ban and avoidance. Contact with the outside world was kept at a minimum.<sup>23</sup>

In the spirit of Psalm 35:20 they sought a life as the “quiet in the land,” separate from but at peace with their neighbours. In time the colonies achieved a great degree of prosperity and came to be described as a virtual “state within a state” or, as termed by Mennonite historian and Chortitza resident David G. Rempel, a “Mennonite Commonwealth.”<sup>24</sup> Gerhard Lohrenz described the Mennonite village at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as “from afar looking like an oasis in the steppes.”<sup>25</sup> In their relative seclusion Mennonites established themselves as an affluent *Völklein* [“little nation”] amidst the Tsarist “prison house of nations.”

A key element of Russian Mennonite history, emphasized in Mennonite historical narratives, are the colonial privileges acquired from the Russian Tsar. In 1800 Tsar Paul granted the Mennonites extensive privileges in a document called the *Privilegium*. Foremost, the *Privilegium* included the guarantee of religious freedom; exemption from military service; ten to fifteen year tax exemptions; the assurance of Mennonite inheritance and property practices; and sixty-five *dessiatines* of land per family.<sup>26</sup> The *Privilegium* comes close to a kind of founding constitution for the Russian Mennonites. Most powerfully, the *Privilegium* embodied the Mennonite’s special relationship with Russian imperialism. James Urry comments: “

If, in the hope of salvation, Mennonites believed they possessed a special covenant with God, the Lord's anointed tsar had provided an earthly covenant in the form of the *privilegium*. Under the protection of God and the tsar, Mennonites and their descendants were free to seek heavenly salvation in peace and security.”<sup>27</sup>

It is symbolic that the Mennonites carefully preserved the original copy almost as a holy relic before its destruction by the Makhnovists.<sup>28</sup>

A common refrain in Mennonite histories is that German and Mennonite colonists were particularly desired due to their reputation for efficiency and industriousness. Indeed, the Russian government intended for them to serve as model farmers in the region. The preamble to the *Privilegium* reads in part that their, “excellent industry and morality may, according to the testimony of the authorities, be held up as a model to the foreigners settled there and thereby deserves special consideration...”<sup>29</sup> The Russian exaltation of the industrious Mennonites as a special people, bolstered pre-existing Mennonite narratives of divine election. The *Privilegium* served to reinforce this sense of chosenness. In the hierarchy of colonists, the Mennonites were first amongst equals. Mennonite cultural insularity combined with such narratives of specialness would profoundly impact the development of their social relations within the broader Russian landscape.

Urry writes that the Mennonites lived up to their benefactor’s expectations setting a shining example of agricultural efficiency in the region. Despite their social conservatism Mennonites proved to be excellent innovators being amongst the first farmers in the region to replace sheep-rearing with wheat cultivation in the 1840s.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, under the leadership of Johann Cornies they were successful in peaceably settling the semi-nomadic Nogai peoples as well as spearheading agricultural apprenticeships for Ukrainian and Jewish farmers in the region.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century the economic wealth of the colonies rapidly grew. Lohrenz comments, “Most of our people in Russia were prosperous, quite a few were rich, and some very rich.”<sup>32</sup> By 1914 there were 104,000 Russian Mennonites inhabiting four major settlements and 15 daughter colonies amongst a multitude of

smaller hamlets and estates. Beyond agriculture Mennonites were successful as millers, merchants, craftsmen and industrialists. By 1911 Mennonites owned over fifty percent of the milling industry and were responsible for producing 10 percent of the region's agricultural implements.<sup>33</sup> The era preceding World War I marked the height of the Mennonite commonwealth and is traditionally narrativized as a lost golden age. It was also an era of intense devotion to the Tsar and empire. The words of influential Mennonite minister-historian P.M Friesen illustrate this sentiment:

As long as we are in Russia, we fear, in the final analysis, only God and the tsar, and likewise we only trust in God and the tsar. We also believe that as subjects, citizens and Christians we will not only be able to live in Russia with an untroubled conscience, but that we will also be able to stand as a patriotic, culturally useful, small member in the large family of Russia (into which we have been adopted by Divine Providence), and will learn to do this more and more as a total body. If individuals among us [Mennonites] at times should act contrary to the general interest and to the law, then we as a fellowship of believers confess "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities."<sup>34</sup>

At the economic level Mennonite separation from the outside world was increasing less of a reality. As the colonies grew in wealth and size contact with outside groups became inevitable and even beneficial. However, internal pressure to remain religiously and culturally distinct, through maintaining radically different social patterns from their Ukrainian neighbours, worked against broader integration. Extensive contact with the peasantry did however come in the form of hired help on the colonies and estates. The sight of hired help on the colonies from local Ukrainians and migrant Russians increased rapidly after the serfs' emancipation so that by 1904 "practically every farm employed 2-4 seasonal workers and some a worker for the entire year."<sup>35</sup> This was in addition to maids, wet-nurses, and other servants. The servant economy employed lower class Mennonites as well, many of whom worked on the large estates.<sup>36</sup>

This servant economy was not restricted to the wealthy estate-owners but penetrated the very heart of Mennonite socio-economics.

Furthermore, Mennonites collectively purchased vast tracts of land in the late 1800s to establish daughter colonies as a means to alleviate the pressures of a growing landless Mennonite population. These new colonies, located on land sometimes formerly worked by Ukrainian serfs, quickly prospered. In the case of Sagradovka, as Dietrich Neufeld observed, the neighbouring peasantry had to pass through these prospering Mennonite villages to access their own distant strips of land.<sup>37</sup> A great many other Ukrainians, like Makhno, worked as farmhands or servants on the estates and colonies. In many cases, the working arrangement was amicable. Gerhard Lohrenz writes of his relationship with the family farmhands: “My relationship with our workers was always the very best. I spoke their language perfectly, knew them, understood them and liked them. I think they always considered me their friend.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, there are numerous examples in the pages of *Friedensstimme* in which servants intervened to save the lives of their Mennonite employers during the civil war.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, when instances of abuse did occur they were not easily forgotten, as in the case of Makhno. Furthermore, the system was vulnerable to the critique of radical thinkers. For example, a *Friedensstimme* article from early in the revolution reproduces excerpts of a Moscow anarchist journal in which the servant economy is openly challenged and the peasants are encouraged by the author to “throw open your master’s gates to the tide of revolution.” The Mennonite author in turn ignores the article’s socio-economic arguments choosing instead to present a caricature of anarchist thought based on the most extreme examples of anarcho-individualist writings.<sup>40</sup>



Accompanying this servant economy were distinct ethnic prejudices. Mennonites consistently referred to Ukrainians as “Russians” or “Little Russians” and Ukraine as “South Russia” thus denying the native population its distinct identity in a similar manner to how Makhnovists designated Mennonites as “German colonists.” Implicit stereotypes about “Russians” are not uncommon in Mennonite writings. The most common stereotypes consider the peasant as “dirty”, “ignorant”, “violent”, “thieving” and “spiritually backward.” Gerhard Lohrenz described the living arrangements between Mennonites and their workers:

If the labourers were Mennonites they slept in our home and ate at our table, but if they were Russian the girls slept in our home and the boys slept in a room with a bed in one corner of the barn. The Russian labourers ate apart, but the same food was given to them as we had ... To a Canadian this eating apart and sleeping in the barn may seem discriminatory. It was not meant that way, and the Russian did not take it that way either. They would have felt uneasy eating with us, since their table manners were different. They liked to use their fingers as much as the fork ... As far as sleeping in the barn is concerned, the Russian peasant was used to it from home.<sup>41</sup>

As Lohrenz indicates these prejudices were not characterized by hatred or even dislike but rather annoyance, frustration and simply assumed cultural differences. For example, Schönfelder H.B. Wiens, remarks in his memoir that, “since stealing is the custom of most Russians, this could not be prevented in Machno ...”<sup>42</sup> Still, the overall impression communicated is the peasant as a child in need of paternal guidance. Indeed, these sentiments mirror the patronizing attitudes of the Russian elite and the worship of the Tsar as the *batyushka*, or “little father”, of the masses.<sup>43</sup> This paternalistic regard for the peasant comes across clearly in the admonishments of evangelical Mennonites to proselytize amongst the Orthodox Ukrainians – a practice that was illegal in Tsarist Russia.<sup>44</sup> The Orthodox faith was widely believed by some Mennonites to be

insufficiently Christian. Lohrenz expresses this sentiment when he recalls that, "... the Word definitely exerted a great influence on our people. This was especially noticeable in comparison with our Russian neighbours, who also called themselves Christian but who were, in general, totally ignorant of Biblical facts and truths."<sup>45</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that evangelical missions, like one present at the Eichenfeld massacre, frequently encountered hostility from both the devout Orthodox and atheist revolutionaries.

The current Mennonite historical narrative is shy to discuss prejudice against Ukrainians by Russian Mennonites. To do so would be to confront attitudes that in large part had their origins in the colonialist heritage of Ukraine. Ultimately it would mean acknowledging the role of Mennonites, however inadvertent, in an imperial system that engendered a great degree of bitterness and hostility amongst the Ukrainian population. It would complexify the dominant narrative of Mennonite victimization, and cast a spotlight on the entanglement of Mennonite interests with the colonizing agenda of the Russian state.

By contrast, the anti-German propoganda and legislation of World War I are frequently addressed by Mennonite histories. With the outbreak of war, the government viewed Russian Germans as potential fifth columnists in spite of their displays of patriotism and support for the war effort. The nationalist press fanned the flames of ethnic hatred, imploring Russian citizens to cast out the Kaiser's agents. The government, sensing a scapegoat, passed a series of land liquidation laws, which was to see all Russian Germans stripped of their property and relocated.<sup>46</sup> Dietrich Neufeld recalls how the war "gave cunning nationalists a golden opportunity to deflect the dissatisfaction of the lower

classes from themselves to the ethnic aliens in the country.”<sup>47</sup> Anti-German riots were reported throughout the empire, including a major one in Moscow in 1915 that saw eight deaths and seventy million rubles worth of damage.<sup>48</sup> Peter J. Dyck, a Molotschna colonist, recalls in his diary how the use of German in public was banned and that all colonies were renamed in Russian.<sup>49</sup> *Friedensstimme* even reported a case in which a colonist was arrested for speaking German with his neighbour.<sup>50</sup> However, since the ban applied only to High German, unlike other German colonists, Mennonites were able to adapt by employing Low German in public. As the war deepened all German public employees were dismissed. In the case of Peter Dyck and his colleagues at the Molotschna Credit Union a mere twelve days notice was given before their discharge.<sup>51</sup> Many Mennonites felt it was only a matter of time before the land liquidation laws took effect and forced to relocate.

According to Gerhard Lohrenz, anti-Germanism at the local level of the colonies did not affect relations with their neighbours as much as might be expected, but “still the situation poisoned relations somewhat.” Gerhard Lohrenz relates an encounter of his younger brother with a Ukrainian teenager: “Ah here comes one of those damned Germans. We should put all of you Germans with your head on the block. We should exterminate you ...”<sup>52</sup> While such extreme anti-Germanism occasionally reappears in later accounts with Makhnovists it is rarely expressed in such an explicit manner.

What the anti-German propaganda did accomplish was to encourage an atmosphere of mutual distrust on the eve of revolution. According to Neufeld, the anti-German propaganda convinced the peasant that the colonist was “nothing but a traitor and scoundrel.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the liquidation laws enflamed pre-existing tensions

encouraging the peasantry to see the expropriation of German lands as a legitimate and accomplished fact. Neufeld cuts to the heart of the matter in this reflection:

Long before the War the Russian peasant was already casting envious glances at the much more prosperous colonist, who only too often was his employer and master. As a hired hand he was not as badly treated by the Mennonites as he was by the [Russian] landed proprietors, but the relationship was still that of capitalist master and inferior servant and not that of equals and brothers ... The [downtrodden masses] of Russia were finally no longer willing to bear this affliction.<sup>54</sup>

From this perspective, anti-Germanism only masked the deeper socio-economic reasons for the coming conflict between the colonists and peasantry.

At this time a type of political accommodation called *Hollanderei* emerged within the Mennonite colonies. *Hollanderei* argued that Mennonites were not ethnically German but Dutch.<sup>55</sup> Likewise the Low German dialect was redefined as a Dutch dialect. The argument was historically true to a certain extent as many Mennonites could trace their lineage to the Netherlands. However, other Mennonites traced their roots to various areas of Germany and Switzerland.<sup>56</sup> It was a politically expedient decision on the part of the Mennonite leadership and arguably avoided the imminent liquidation of the colonies.<sup>57</sup> Others, however, felt the argument to be inauthentic. Peter J. Dyck wrote in his diary:

Today at the *Schulzenbott*, a sample petition was read. Each individual is to hand in his own petition to His Majesty, the Emperor, in regard to the land requisition and expropriation of the their homes. In this we are to state that we are actually not German, but Dutch, and that the Boers of Africa are our *Rodneje Bratja* (true brothers). There is a fair amount of self-praise in the petition. We really seem to lack faith in God, as Pastor Kuegelgen is to have said in Petrograd. The other Germans, who also wish to remain German, and are not suddenly turning into Dutchmen, are, I believe, not working nearly as hard as the Mennonites.<sup>58</sup>

Dyck's entry in some ways foreshadows the difference of opinion to later emerge between pacifists and *Selbstschützer*. Dyck believes the civil leadership is

compromising Mennonite identity to avoid persecution, which is indicative of the community's spiritual malaise and lack of faith in God. Dyck may also have seen the *Hollanderei* position as an abandonment of their Lutheran German brothers, some of whom faced the full effect of liquidation in 1916. The charge of insufficient faith and the abandonment of Mennonite identity would be renewed when some Mennonites chose a path of armed struggle over non-resistance.

The question of Mennonite ethnicity would resurface in the wake of the German occupation. Mennonite accounts describe the arrival of German troops with enthusiasm. An eyewitness describes the occupation's arrival in the Molotschna colony:

[They were] greeted by cheering crowds of Mennonites jubilant over their rescue by soldiers from the ancient 'homeland.' Pretty blonde Mennonite girls carried bunches of flowers and their mothers offered *zwieback* and thick slices of ham to the astonished but delighted young liberators. They then all joined in the singing of 'Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles.'<sup>59</sup>

Mennonite writer Al Reimer reflects on the Mennonite embrace of the Austro-German occupation:

One can only imagine what the neighbouring Russians, who were now quaking in their turn, must have thought of this open fraternization with the enemy. The Mennonites, no matter how understandable their behavior was, were to pay dearly for their political naiveté and for their ethnic identification with the occupation troops.<sup>60</sup>

The thoughts of the hostile peasantry would be articulated by the commander of a joint Red-Makhnovist unit in 1920: "You damned apostates from the faith of your fathers, for 400 years you could not take any weapons into your hands, but now, on behalf of your damned Kaiser Wilhelm."<sup>61</sup> In many ways the political decisions of the colonies during

the civil war had unintentionally confirmed the suspicions aroused by anti-German propaganda.

The Mennonite response to the occupation was a critical moment for the direction of their relations with the neighbouring peasantry and the Makhnovists. While the embrace of the Austro-German troops was universal, the degree of collaboration varied within the Mennonite community. Viewpoints fractured along the lines of those who wished to uphold traditional nonresistance and those who allowed themselves to be armed by the occupation. Both perceived Makhno as a direct threat to the continued existence of the colonies but interpreted events in very different ways.

#### IV. *Selbstschützer* and Pacifist Narratives

The fundamental question that divided pacifists and *Selbstschützer* concerned interpretations of what constituted the core of Mennonite identity. For both the *Hollanderei* and *Selbstschützer* the physical protection and preservation of the colony was fundamental to the future existence of the Mennonite *Völklein*. Traditionally Mennonite justifications for self-defence have been framed within the context of Makhno. For example, a Mennonite farmer described how his son had joined the *Selbstschutz* under the firm conviction that he must “protect his mother and other village women from Makhno and his bandits.”<sup>62</sup> The first reports of Makhno’s activities reached the Molotschna colony with the arrival of fleeing Schönfelders in the fall of 1918. The November-December issues of *Friedenstimme* devoted a large amount of space to accounts of Makhnovist murder and robbery.<sup>63</sup> Two reports directly refer to the

destruction of Bolshe-Mikhailovka as a catalyst for the raids.<sup>64</sup> The torture of a young Mennonite to extract a confession that he fought the Makhnovists at Bolshe-Mikhailovka is also described.<sup>65</sup> The image of Makhno and his band as a force of senseless terror and destruction from these reports onwards was solidly established in the colonies. The response from one segment of the Mennonite population was to call for the physical protection of the colonies in the form of armed self-defence.

In hand with reports of murder and torture were the reports of rape. The rape of Mennonite women in particular is stated as a motivating factor for joining the *Selbstschutz*. Indeed, Makhnovist raids became synonymous with rape. By 1920 some 100 women and girls were being treated for syphilis in Chortitza alone.<sup>66</sup> Apologists for the Makhnovists may suggest that a whole host of armies equally guilty of horrendous atrocities were present at various times in the colonies, but for the women who suffered the attacks there is no doubt as to their rapists' identity. Furthermore, the accounts given all correspond with the known periods of Makhnovist occupation.<sup>67</sup>

Gerhard Lohrenz was unique in having collected the harrowing experiences of rape victims. He reports that in numerous cases husbands were tied up and forced to watch their wives and daughters raped by Makhnovists.<sup>68</sup> One case in particular communicates the horror faced by Mennonite women:

Four bandits entered the home of the Boschman family. Husband and wife with their three small children were in one room. The bandits cut Boschman down with their swords. While he lay gasping and bleeding on the floor they gang raped his wife in front of the children. When they were through with her, her husband was dead. She took her children and left the house. She walked through the garden into the open steppe walking towards another village. When they had gone some distance, two riders came after them. They raped the woman there in the open field with her children standing around them. About a year later the house this woman was living in was broken into a night by half a dozen bandits. They ransacked the house, shot the proprietor and gang raped the widow. I have known this woman.

She was the daughter of a highly respected family, sensitive and intelligent. The inner conflict and turmoil such a person goes through is hard to describe.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the only appropriate commentary is best expressed by another Mennonite survivor: “I have one wish and one wish only, namely that all those murderers and bandits in there would have one common throat and that I be permitted to put my hands on that throat for a little while!”<sup>70</sup>

The importance of recording these events lay in helping us to fully understand the psychological pressures that led a people who had upheld pacifism for nearly 500 years to embrace the sword. These memories of atrocity show how the attack on the colonies extended beyond wealth and property to the intimate bonds of family and a woman’s honour. Rape as a weapon of war strikes at the foundation of societal bonds and in the case of a tightly knit socially conservative community it has the power to destroy a people’s sense of self-identity.

The rape of Mennonite women struck at the heart of Mennonite identity and for many *Selbstschützer* proved the prime motivator in their war on Makhno. The Germans and Whites were certainly aware of this and took full advantage of the Makhno threat to recruit young Mennonites. At a village assembly in Alexandertal, a White officer argued:

You farmers destroy the weeds among your grain, without pangs of conscience. Who is Makhno? A weed that is worse than weeds, and he must be destroyed. Furthermore if a rabbit destroys a young tree in your garden, you shoot without further consideration. Who is Makhno? An animal, worse than an animal who must be shot down.<sup>71</sup>

Recruitment to the *Selbstschutz* was so successful that by the spring of 1919 three thousand colonists in the Molotschna colony alone helped to form a joint front with the White Army against Makhno’s forces.



The common narrative found in Mennonite memoirs and histories is that Makhnovist atrocities were the inspiration for the organization of the *Selbstschutz*. Yet according to Mennonite sources, the *Selbstschutz* was founded before October 1918 preceding the first reports of widespread murder. The first mention of a Mennonite *Selbstschutz* in the pages of *Friedensstimme* comes from May 18, 1918.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the decision of the Lichtenau Conference to tolerate Mennonite self-defence occurred in July 1918.<sup>73</sup> The situation was similar in the colonies beyond the Molotschna, where there was no Makhnovist presence in 1918. In Chortitza, Sagradovka and Jasykovo, self-defence units make their first appearance in the summer of 1918 during the German occupation.<sup>74</sup> Finally, Molotschna resident Adolf A. Reimer dates the origins of the *Selbstschutz* even earlier recalling that, “young men belonging to a secret *Selbstschutz* already organized before the German occupation almost immediately obtained arms from the German command.”<sup>75</sup> The chronology and geographic dispersion of the *Selbstschutz* would suggest that armed self-defence was less a direct response to Makhno and more a consequence of the German occupation’s influence and the general fear of peasant banditry.

The recovery of lost property and goods also played an important role in the growth of the *Selbstschutz*. Predating the organization of the self-defence units were reports of Mennonite colonists accompanying German punitive detachments into Ukrainian villages. In a unique letter to the editor from *Friedensstimme* a Mennonite author describes in detail one such punitive expedition:

They wanted to take revenge for all the insults suffered from the Russian peasantry. Indeed, not only did they meditate upon but practiced revenge. Small groups were formed which broke into the homes of the Russian peasants and miserably thrashed them with the *nagaika*. House searches were also conducted

by our side, and the surrounding Russian villages were pretty much robbed. Initially, some Germans were also brought along, so it might appear that everything was done in the name of the Germans. But it should be noted that this author knows of no theft by German soldiers, and firmly believes that they committed no rude acts unless provoked by trickery. The blame rests on us!<sup>76</sup>

Directly relating to Makhno is another *Friedensstimme* report from July 2, 1918 in which a repossession of property was carried out with the aid of Austrian troops in Gulyai-Pole. The repossession was resisted and several Gulyai-Polyans executed.<sup>77</sup> This report may refer to the incident, described in Makhno's memoirs, in which his mother's home was burned down and his invalid brother executed.<sup>78</sup>

The eagerness to retrieve property was seen even within the colonies, forcing the German district commander to issue the following warning in June 1918:

During the period of the Bolsheviks, Anarchists, etc. some inhabitants of the Mennonite and other German villages, mostly poor people, were forced ... to work with the Bolsheviks. They were often forced, under threat of arms, to collect all sorts of contributions from the well-to-do ... Now the former owners, most of them well off, demand the return of their goods – in part through all kinds of threats, evictions, etc. ... Such behaviour ... is designed to arouse a sentiment among the poorer classes, which eliminates all peaceable and profitable work together. It is a great mistake for a few well-off people to think that the German troops came into the land only to protect the rich ... I hope this warning will suffice and that in the future more tolerance will prevail, especially among one's ancestral brothers. I would hate to see myself forced to take severe action against anyone who threatens calm and peace by his quarrelsome, aggressive behavior.<sup>79</sup>

These actions all occurred before the fall raids at a time of relative security. As we shall see, accusations of materialism and greed were frequently leveled at the wealthy by pacifist Mennonites and cited as the source of the community's abandonment of non-resistance.

Furthermore, as suggested by James Urry and Helmut-Harry Loewen, the abandonment of pacifism even predated the revolution. In the wake of the 1905

Revolution, in which some Mennonite estate-owners experienced robbery and even murder, it became common to employ armed Cossacks. These guards were given the authority to beat and even kill for such minor offences as pasturing on estate lands. In some cases, Mennonites themselves meted out justice. Urry and Loewen write that, “Landowners, usually with the acquiescence of the local authorities and police, hunted down horse thieves, tracking suspects to villages...”<sup>80</sup> In some case houses, and even whole villages, were burned in retribution. Set into this context the slide into armed “self-defence” was not a “peculiar aberration” of the civil war but rather an extension of pre-existing practices.

The influx of refugees from Schönfeld would certainly have encouraged the growth of the *Selbstschutz* but it appears that the attribution to Makhno for its initial formation is a retroactive argument. In this narrative Makhno functions as an archetypal bandit symbolic for all of Mennonite suffering. A telling example of this is an account in which Makhno is fully depersonalized referred to, like a plague, as *the* Makhno.<sup>81</sup> In this way Makhno achieves the status of *the* bogeyman or *the* Devil; an abstract embodiment of pure fear and evil. As Mennonite author Anne Konrad writes, “Makhno was a man every Russian Mennonite child in Canada knew was close to the devil.”<sup>82</sup> In this scheme Makhno functions as a screen memory, a distracting reference point towards which all blame can be focused and from which it is possible to avoid examining the deeper reasons for the abandonment of non-resistance, some of which betray an aggressive attachment to material goods and colonial privileges.

In contrast to the *Selbstschützer* narrative, the pacifist looked towards the preservation of their Mennonite identity through the spiritual doctrines of Anabaptism.

The pacifist narrative focuses on a theology of martyrdom. According to the Mennonite Encyclopedia martyrdom theology presents,

an integrated Anabaptist vision of victory for the church and the kingdom of Christ through suffering and martyrdom, in which the Anabaptist martyrs are seen as following in the footsteps of the suffering saints of the Old and New Testaments and most of all in those of Christ Himself.<sup>83</sup>

Ethelbert Stauffer, the author of a seminal text on Anabaptist martyrdom, fittingly described it as the “apocalypse of martyrdom.” In this theology of history, suffering for one’s faith is elevated to the prime vehicle for the progression of God’s plan and a “causal necessity in the great fight between the divine and the satanic order.” In a literal blood sacrifice, nonresistant martyrdom propels history towards a new “kingdom” reality. According to this belief, the Anabaptist is a “soldier” of Christ who considered death as a kind of “baptism by blood.” Stauffer viewed the “blood of the martyrs [as] the seed of the coming aeon...” The Mennonite theology of martyrdom takes a radical stance against the secular world, in that “a believer’s conflict with the ‘world’ is the surest indication that the disciple is true to the master.” Anabaptist disciples are “like sheep among wolves.” For Anabaptists, martyrdom expresses the core of their worldview, or as Stauffer wrote, it is the “hidden sanctuary or crypt of Anabaptist Christianity.”<sup>84</sup>

In the face of civil war this meant in practice maintaining *Wehrlosigkeit*, or “nonresistance”. If this spiritual core could be maintained, even in the face of persecution and death, it was believed God would reward the Mennonite people for their faithfulness. Conversely, to abandon this spiritual identity would incur God’s anger. In some cases, Mennonite writers referred to the civil war as a kind of purification of their people, implying God was attempting to set his people on a renewed path of faithfulness

by allowing the atrocities to take place. As early as January 1918 a *Friedensstimme* author writes, “We will not be harmed more than the Lords permits.” An editorial for September 14, 1919 reads, “Like in the Book of Job, God gave us up into the hands of Satan. It seemed as if hell itself was let loose.” Likewise, in the December 14, 1919 issue an author implores his co-religionists to “private and corporate confession” asking, “what is marked on God’s debit sheet against our people?”<sup>85</sup> Within this fatalistic narrative God is an interventionist meting out rewards and punishments based upon obedience. The failure to obey not only endangers the individual soul but the community as a whole.

The pacifist narrative was harshly critical of the *Gutsbesitzer*, or estate-owners, for their perceived greed and materialism. They saw within the colonies a state of spiritual degeneracy predating the revolution but finding its logical conclusion in the embrace of German militarism in 1918. While the Germans were initially embraced as saviours even by pacifists, the decisive juncture occurred when the youth were enticed by the Germans to form self-defence units. From the outset pacifist writers, such as *Friedensstimme* editor Abraham Kroeker, were deeply critical of Mennonite efforts to recover stolen property. Already in April 1918 Kroeker wrote:

Why did we suffer? Not because of “higher things” as our martyred ancestors, but because of our wealth. We have suffered for the sake of Mammon, which we have so eagerly emulated. We were too materialistic, too selfish. Therefore God sent the first liquidation and when it did not achieve its purpose, he had to cut the knife deeper. Thus, as a man sins so he is punished.<sup>86</sup>

This basic argument becomes a constant refrain in the pages of *Friedensstimme* for the remainder of the civil war.<sup>87</sup> In the wake of the German withdrawal and first Makhnovist raids one writer bemoans: “Never before has the avarice and greed in our society been

greater than now...” concluding that, “our people have suffered greatly in the recent year but seem to have learned so little.”<sup>88</sup> In another article from September 4, 1919 the author asks why the Mennonites are hated so violently by the peasantry, concluding that they “did not act correctly before God”, were attached to “earthly goods”, mistreated their servants, and lusted after land and riches.<sup>89</sup>

One of the most extreme criticisms came in the aftermath of the Makhnovist massacres from a pacifist in the December 21, 1919 issue. Establishing that the *Gutsbesitzer* suffered most during the Makhnovist occupation, the author points out that there appears to be little sympathy amongst Mennonites for the wealthy, believing they got what they deserved. The author then asks whether this attitude is justified and proceeds to argue in the affirmative. Derisively referring to the estate-owners as *Steppenkönige* [“kings of the steppe] the author chides them for their lack of education and failure to provide spiritual and cultural leadership. The author’s final assessment is scathing, accusing the landowners of arrogance, alcoholism, inter-marriage that “stunted their abilities”, “flirting” with servant girls and the abuse of hired help.<sup>90</sup> Vitriol aside, the article is illustrative of the deep and bitter divisions within the Mennonite community in the wake of the Makhnovist occupations.

Pacifist memoirs are likewise critical of Mennonite estate-owners and the *Selbstschutz*. Dietrich Neufeld reflects on the matter:

For the Mennonites the blunder of abandoning pacifism for militarism was particularly incriminating. Have we not always, with justified pride, pointed to our 400-year tradition, which signified a strict pacifism? And at the very moment when, as a result of a bloody war without parallel, militarism in all its worst aspects, and pacifism had begun to spread with unprecedented popular appeal – even in Germany – then we abandoned our noble position. A Mennonite who surrenders the fundamental idea of peace and affirms war has judged himself. He is henceforth no longer a Mennonite.<sup>91</sup>

Neufeld's cuts to the heart of the pacifist critique: through taking up the sword Mennonite identity had been forfeited, which by virtue made the physical survival of the colonies a moot point. The hypocrisy of their position would therefore destroy any claim to Mennonite identity even in the eyes of the enemy. For Neufeld it was an untenable stance that would lead to the physical and spiritual destruction of his people.

However, the diagnosis of the pacifist remained highly metaphysical frequently skimming over the broader socio-economic factors that had brought Mennonites into conflict with the peasantry. Materialism and greed were condemned on theological grounds but the basic sacredness of private property, servitude and capitalism generally remained unchallenged. Speaking in particular of the Mennonite Brethren, Lohrenz writes that prior to the civil war, "Smoking, for instance, was considered a grievous sin, but considerably less was said about underpaying the labourers or exploiting people one way or another."<sup>92</sup> Writers such as Kroeker virulently attacked the suggestion that socialism could be compatible with Christianity. In response to a letter from a "revolutionary Mennonite" who refers to Jesus as "the greatest socialist" Kroeker resorts to naming-calling and identifies the eight-hour workday as an ally of Satan.<sup>93</sup> Neither did Kroeker challenge the colonialist narratives of his people. In an 1914 issue of *Friedensstimme* Kroeker wrote: "We were called to Russia to cultivate the steppes and we have done that. This has accrued to our benefit, but also to our neighbours, the Russians and other groups."<sup>94</sup> In the end, the pacifist narrative remained largely attached to colonial privileges and a paternalistic attitude towards the peasantry.<sup>95</sup>

The pacifist remedy beyond non-resistance was mainly confined to Christian charity, prayer and increased evangelization amongst the peasantry. Had such an approach been uniformly adopted by the colonies it is conceivable that it could have lessened their suffering, but ultimately it was a strategy defined by the privileged insularity of the Russian Mennonite world, largely blind to the broader forces at play.

Makhno was as much of a devil to the pacifist as to the *Selbstschützer* but emplotted in a critically different way. Neufeld describes Makhno in his journal as a fearsome entity, an “inhuman monster . . . whose path is literally drenched in blood.”<sup>96</sup> Elsewhere his followers are referred to as “devils in human form” who exhibited “the bestiality of men who had become raging animals.” Particularly illustrative is the monologue of a Makhnovist given to us by Gerhard Schroeder:

Do not try to change me with advice to read the Bible and believe in God or with anything of that kind of advice. We Makhnovtsy as partisans and as anarchists have only one program, only one desire and aim – to enjoy living off someone else’s property, to rob and kill as we please. We will not change, and will be a menace to others as long as we live. Nothing will change us, not the Bible nor God, neither Hell nor Heaven. We will live this way as long as possible and when that is not possible we will commit suicide, and only when soft Mother Earth has covered us, will we be harmless.<sup>97</sup>

Whether Schroeder’s account recalls the words of this Makhnovist verbatim is less important than how it narratively positions the pacifist in relation to the Makhnovist. A spiritual battleground is painted for the reader in which the Mennonite is confronted by an entity that embodies a satanic philosophy of unrestrained self-indulgence. For the pacifist it was a test that had to be met with the patience of a martyr.



## V. Direct Encounters With Makhno

Given the centrality of Makhno to Mennonite civil war narratives, it is perhaps surprising that direct encounters with the *bat'ko* are few and far between. More surprising, however, is that the encounters recorded are overwhelming neutral or even positive in character. The earliest account of Makhno comes from the Janzens, the estate family whom Makhno described working for as a youth. Their account of the young Makhno was “brought down through oral tradition” and put into written form by the great-granddaughters of Abram Janzen.<sup>98</sup> How Abram Janzen came to Silberfeld and his exact relation to Wilhelm Janzen, the proprietor of the estate, is still unclear. However, through the consultation of property records, genealogical records and correspondence with the Janzen family, a possible scenario has been reconstructed.<sup>99</sup> It would seem that Abram and his brother Heinrich were sent to Silberfeld after the death of their mother. In 1909 Abram inherited 100 hectares at the estate where he and his wife Maria Friesen settled. The couple’s life together was cut short when Abram died of an asthma attack in August 1917.

According to the oral tradition of the Janzen family, Makhno and Abram grew up together at Silberfeld, “were friends and spent many evening playing together.” Later after the death of Abram during the Makhnovist raids, Makhno himself appeared at the home of the widow Maria and her children. As the story goes: “When Makhno realized that this was the widow and children of his old friend, Abram Janzen, he ordered his men to drop all the precious belongings they had already put in their bags and to leave this house without taking anything or harming anyone.”<sup>100</sup>

Given Abram's age and his inheritance of estate lands it is quite possible he and his brother were the old Janzen's heirs described so negatively by Makhno. So we have what appears to be a radically contested memory in contrast to Makhno's account. Yet the two accounts are perhaps not totally incompatible. It is quite possible that as children, not yet conscious of the cultural and class divides of the adult landscape, they did enjoy evenings of play together. It is also possible that the young Janzen brothers in their adolescence succumbed to the intoxication of power that came with their high status and were guilty of mistreating the farmhands. A cruel act can erase a lifetime of friendship and so history would have it that Makhno would remember the mistreatment and forget the friendship, while the Janzen family would remember Makhno, as Abram's childhood friend and for his merciful gesture toward Maria.

The next memory of Makhno comes from Anna Goerz, the daughter of the estate-owner Jakob Neufeld. Jakob Neufeld owned Ebenfeld, located next to Silberfeld. Makhno had also worked for Neufeld as a youth. Early in the revolution, prior to the German occupation, Makhno stayed overnight at Ebenfeld. Anna Goerz, recalled that "... since their relationship had been good, Makhno showed no hostility ... he made every effort to establish a friendly basis and when he was offered a key for his room for greater safety, Makhno refused to take it, saying that he felt safe among friends."<sup>101</sup> Goerz describes how the next morning Makhno proceeded to the Klassen estate where a redistribution was conducted. Here Klassen was invited to take an equal portion of the goods.<sup>102</sup> While it may seem a cruel joke to take an equal share of your own property, the depiction of Makhno thus far does not correspond with his reputation as a murderous devil.

Gerhard Schroeder describes in his memoirs the first appearance of Makhno near Schönfeld in November 1918. Rumours of Makhno's approach led the men of the village to arm themselves and prepare for a battle. However, "as luck would have it, Makhno did not advance to our village, but sent word the next day that he would leave us unharmed if we surrendered all our weapons at a specified place. This was done."<sup>103</sup> This account confirms Makhno's order to disarm the German colonies but leave its peaceful civilians unmolested. It would appear that in this instance at least the protocol was followed.

Another account given by Schroeder, which may refer to a separate incident at Ebenfeld, likewise presents Makhno in a more positive light. Schroeder records the following conversation with the Schönfeld school board president:

But you know, Makhno has promised Mr. X not to touch his property or him personally. The question is whether anyone can trust the words of a man like this one. When the period of anarchy broke out, Mr. X tried to resist the plundering raids with the help of several German soldiers, and succeeded for awhile in repelling the bandits. However, one day Makhno sent a messenger to this Mennonite landowner. The message read, 'Mr. X, I have not forgotten how in 1906 I found a place of refuge on your estate. There I succeeded in eluding the cruel dogs of the Tsarist police. It was only through your help and cooperation that in 1906 I succeeded in eluding the police and thus was saved from being shot by them. I have not forgotten the old practice of khleb-sol [reciprocating a favour]. Do not shoot anymore, and we promise not to touch either you or your property.'<sup>104</sup>

While the president in the account is distrustful of Makhno it does relate how Makhno conducted himself amongst the landlords early in the civil war. That Makhno received refuge in 1906 from a Mennonite estate-owner is also an intriguing piece of information, suggesting his relationship with the wealthy was not uniformly hostile, at least on a personal level.

The personal favoritism of certain Mennonites by Makhnovists is a theme that reoccurs in a number of accounts. Dietrich Neufeld records in his diary with astonishment how his Makhnovist guests wanted him to write a poem to be personally presented to the *bat'ko*. As Neufeld was a teacher, and considered part of the labouring classes by Makhnovist standards, they assumed Makhno was also a hero to Neufeld.<sup>105</sup> In time Neufeld established an amicable relationship with his uninvited guests and even enjoyed some of their company.

In another instance, Schroeder recounts his strange relationship with Simeon Pravda, an ill-tempered Makhnovist commander and former beggar known as “the wooden one” by virtue of his wooden stumps for legs. Between the winter of 1918 to the spring of 1919 “*bat'ko*” Pravda and his men terrorized the area around Schönfeld. According to various Mennonite accounts Pravda murdered his brother in a drunken dispute.<sup>106</sup> He was immediately arrested by Makhno for this incident but released shortly thereafter, apparently congratulated for maintaining discipline. Pravda’s importance within the movement is frequently exaggerated in Mennonite accounts. Neufeld describes him as the “chief of the intelligence department” and “Makhno’s right-hand man.”<sup>107</sup> The truth of the matter is that Pravda achieves only a brief mention as a “good organizer” in Makhno’s memoirs. In Belash’s account Pravda is depicted as irrational drunkard and potential liability for the movement.<sup>108</sup>

While certainly a violent man he was nonetheless capable of forming friendly relations with those who gained his respect. Schroeder, and fellow Schönfelder H. Wiens, managed to cultivate a relationship with Pravda in which he deferred to their advice on a number of important occasions.<sup>109</sup> Pravda even invited Schroeder and Wiens

to have tea with Makhno during a visit by the *Bat'ko* in the summer of 1919.<sup>110</sup> Makhno was boarded at Schroeder's residence, of which he remarked: "I cannot say that we relished the affair but I must say that on this occasion we found Makhno to be a very friendly man, and we had a rather nice visit with him."<sup>111</sup>

A second encounter with Makhno occurred in September 1919 after Schroeder had relocated to the Chortitza colony and was also witnessed by Chortitza resident David G. Rempel. A partisan had taken a liking to Schroeder's horse and forced him to exchange it for a camel. Shortly thereafter Schroeder noticed Makhno passing by and called out to him, "Comrade Makhno, you know me. You have been to our place in Schönfeld. I am a teacher. Just now I returned from plowing a field for my relatives. Your men have just taken my horses and wagon. You know that I am a teacher, a labouring man, not a capitalist. Could I have my horses back?" Makhno intervened on Schroeder's behalf, but Schroeder's horse was retaken after Makhno moved on.<sup>112</sup>

Mennonite accounts often agreed on the efficacy of personal appeals to Makhno and on the importance that Makhno placed on concepts of justice. Often a past relationship saves the Mennonite in a tight situation. Makhno comes across as an individual wanting to intervene on the side of justice and fairness. Yet he also appears a singular figure amidst an army of ill-disciplined characters. The release of Pravda and the failure to keep Schroeder safe from theft suggest a leader not fully in control of his troops. Finally, these accounts stand in direct contrast with more general descriptions of Makhno and his movement as the embodiment of evil.

In this contrast we see how Makhno is frequently denied his real-life personality in favour of an abstracted stereotype. He becomes a metonym for the Makhnovist

movement as a whole, and in turn, all of Mennonite suffering. Therefore, future historians would do well to make the distinction between Makhno the metonym and Makhno the man. This is not to suggest Makhno was not violent or that he was a patron of the colonies. Such is certainly not the case. However, a close reading of the primary literature suggests a character far more multi-dimensional and even contradictory than the dominant image of Makhno in collective Mennonite memory.



**Chapter 4**  
**The Eichenfeld Massacre:**  
**A Re-narrativization**

I. Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to explore how the Eichenfeld massacre of 1919 has been narrativized in primary sources and interpreted by current historians. The chapter begins with an overview of primary Makhnovist and Mennonite sources relevant to the Eichenfeld massacre, followed by a discussion of the two calendar systems in use during this period as they relate to these sources. In turn, factors significantly contributing to the massacre are examined through the subtopics of the Eichenfeld *Selbstschutz*, the Makhnovist army, the *kontrrazvedka*, and orders from Makhno. A reconstruction of the massacre based on Mennonite eyewitness accounts is followed by a discussion of local motivations and the role of the neighbouring peasantry in the massacre. Attention is then given to current interpretations of Eichenfeld. Specific attention is given to Harvey Dyck, David Staples and John B. Toews' book *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre* and the writings of Ukrainian historian Nataliya Venger.

The thrust of this chapter argues against the view of Eichenfeld as an ethnic pogrom. It is argued that the victims were targeted primarily on the basis of class. Furthermore, given the available evidence, it is argued that Nestor Makhno did not personally order the massacre. It is proposed that Makhnovist cavalry en route to



Ekaterninoslav combined with local Ukrainian peasants to perpetrate the massacre. This chapter aims to re-narrativize Makhnovist-Mennonite relations through the concept of “revolutionary terror”. This concept will be further explained in the final section of this chapter along with its application to our topic. The goal is to present a narrative that simultaneously communicates the perpetrator’s and the victim’s experience. In approaching controversial historical events there is always a risk of being misinterpreted. As such, it should be stated in no uncertain terms that the final responsibility for these massacres – and indeed all atrocities of war – solidly rests with the perpetrator and never the victim. Nonetheless, it is imperative that we confront the assumptions built into our historical narratives and collective memories, if we are to honestly seek a more comprehensive and multi-perspectival understanding of events.

## II. Primary Sources

### a. Makhnovist Sources

As noted, any direct mention of the Mennonite massacres is absent from Makhnovist sources, including the archival trail.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, a careful reading of Makhnovist literature is able to shed light on certain aspects of Eichenfeld. The works of Voline and Arshinov give us a sense of the overall mood in the Makhnovist army for the period of concern. Voline in particular paints a picture of an increasingly militarized and violent movement. An even richer source for the actual reconstruction of events is Belash. His work describes key troops movements around the time of the Eichenfeld

massacre. Furthermore, Belash describes the movements of Makhno himself. Finally, we have a sampling of the orders and internal communications of the Makhnovist army from the fall of 1919 detailing the breakdown of troop discipline.

A recent unique source is a collection of interviews conducted by the Ukrainian historian Svetlana Bobyleva in 2001 with the oldest residents of Novopetrovka. Novopetrovka encompasses the lands formerly occupied by Eichenfeld. Bobyleva recorded the surviving memories of the massacre. Excerpts from these interviews were subsequently published in *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre*. The interviews present a coherent picture of events that broadly confirm Mennonite eyewitness accounts. However, the majority of the Novopetrovsk accounts are told at one generation removed from the event, presenting its own set of troubles. For example, the few interviewees alive at the time of Eichenfeld were very young and could not have understood the full complexity of events. Working with subjects who were children at the time of events also presents a greater possibility for false or altered memories. Indeed, certain memories deviate substantially from, and even contradict, eyewitness Mennonite accounts. The interview process is not explained in detail and Bobyleva does not offer a discussion of the methodological problems of soliciting memories so far removed from the event.

A further problem involves assessing to what degree Soviet propaganda may have influenced the collective memory of Makhno in the region. From the post-civil war years to the era of *glasnost* Ukrainians were exclusively exposed to anti-Makhnovist propaganda. Makhno was presented as the mentally deranged leader of a “*kulak*” uprising responsible for anti-semitic pogroms and every other manner of atrocity.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to imagine that these negative stereotypes did not impact the interviewees’

narrative construction of Makhno in some manner. Nonetheless, the data collected by Bobyleva offers us an important case study in collective memory, which we can compare against Mennonite accounts.

## b. Mennonite Sources

In contrast to the dearth of Makhnovist sources, Mennonite literature abounds with eyewitness accounts, recollections and commentary on Eichenfeld. Most helpful to this thesis was Marianne Janzen's collection of eyewitness sources presented as an appendix to her paper "The Story of Eichenfeld."<sup>3</sup> Janzen, as the niece of Eichenfeld's *Selbstschutz* leader Heinrich Heinrich Heinrichs, was in a unique position to gather family sources critical to the reconstruction of events. Most significant is a letter from Heinrich's brother Cornelius – a *Selbstschutz* participant and eyewitness at Eichenfeld – who outlines in detail the events leading up to the massacre. Also notable are the recollections of Eichenfeld survivors David Quiring and H.W. Klassen.

As a whole the Mennonite accounts present a coherent and detailed picture of events, but they also deviate from each other in some critical respects. For example, the exact nature of the Eichenfeld *Selbstschutz* and its leadership is sometimes contested. The exact identity of the perpetrators of the massacre has also been an important issue of debate. All accounts indicate the presence of Makhnovist cavalry on the night of the massacre, but some accounts further assert that the neighbouring Ukrainian peasantry was equally to blame for the tragedy. Particularly enlightening regarding the question of responsibility is Cornelius Heinrichs' account and the research of David G. Rempel.

Finally we have the account of Nikita Salov-Astakhov, a Ukrainian Stundist convert present at Eichenfeld as part of an evangelical Mennonite tent mission. Astakhov was one of the few missionaries to survive the massacre. The Astakhov source is unique in that it is the only surviving Ukrainian eyewitness account, although from a distinctly evangelical perspective. Astakhov records a number of conversations with Makhnovists that provide critical insight into the mind of the perpetrators. He also reveals that Makhno personally granted the tent missionaries permission to evangelize throughout Makhnovist-held territory.

A step removed from eyewitness accounts is the commentary of Mennonites from outside the Jasykovo colony. Particularly helpful in this regard are the remembrances of Dietrich Neufeld, Gerhard Schroeder, and David G. Rempel. All three resided in Chortitza at the time of the massacre. Their accounts help to place it in a broader context and give insight into how the tragedy was received and interpreted by the larger Mennonite community at the time.

### **c. Calendar Systems**

A common source of confusion regarding the chronology of the massacres is the presence of two competing dating systems during the civil war. Pre-revolutionary Russia employed the Julian (“Old Style”) calendar, which fell roughly fourteen days behind the Gregorian (“New Style”) calendar used in Western Europe. Only on February 1, 1918 [OS] was the Gregorian calendar officially adopted by the Soviet regime. Thus February 1 became February 14 with a stroke of Lenin’s pen. However, the new system was not

immediately or uniformly adopted. In fact, its adoption tended to divide along political lines with radicals embracing the new calendar and opponents of the revolution adhering to the old. Relevant to our study is that the majority of Mennonite sources still used the Julian calendar in 1919 while the Makhnovists used the Gregorian. Furthermore, current Mennonite histories often use old style dates without clarification.<sup>4</sup> For example, the massacre at Eichenfeld is cited as October 26 when in fact it occurred on November 8 according to our current calendar. This chapter will use the new style followed by the old style in brackets.

Difficulties emerge when attempting to cross-reference Mennonite and Makhnovist sources, since it must first be determined who is using what calendar. The failure to do so can lead to a confused chronology of events. A case in point is Natalya Venger's reconstruction of events leading up to Eichenfeld. Venger mistakenly assumes Eichenfeld occurred on October 26, new style. She believes Belash was using old style dates, when in fact he was using the new style calendar. Belash wrote his account after the civil war under Soviet custody when the old style calendar was no longer in use.

As a result of this mistake, Venger falsely concludes from Belash's account that on the eve of the massacre Makhno was in Gulyai-Pole organizing an attack on the White Army's supply depot at Volnovakh. As part of this operation, the Makhnovist commander Taranovsky was assigned to blow up a stockpile of armaments near Volnovakh. According to Belash, Taranovsky set out for the station where, "arriving at some colonies, he started drinking heavily, stole some tachankas [in the colonies] and returned ..."<sup>5</sup> Venger, in turn, surmises that "since the period of absence of Taranovsky's

detachment corresponds with the date of the punitive expedition to the village of Dubivka [Eichenfeld], it is possible to conjecture that he was the initiator of those bloody events.”<sup>6</sup>

Venger’s interpretation is problematic for a number of reasons. Eichenfeld, which was located on the right-bank of Dnieper in the Jazykovo colony, was quite far from Gulyai-Pole and in the opposite direction of Volnovakh. There would have been no reason for Taranovsky to make a two- day trip across the Dnieper to Eichenfeld to carry out a massacre on a community with no strategic importance. Moreover, Belash writes that Taranovsky returned to Gulyai-Pole after his foray in the colonies. Taranovsky could not have traveled such a distance, organized a massacre and returned in a single day. Finally, Belash says nothing about Taranovsky killing colonists; he does, however, mention on the same page that Makhno intervened with a commander near Berdyansk to stop the murder of German colonists.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, it is important to confirm conclusively what calendar Belash was using. To establish this fact an objective event must be identified in two separate sources and the dates compared. For Belash’s book I chose the arrival of the Makhnovists in Chortitza and their crossing of the Einlage [Kitchkas] bridge, in which two Mennonite guards were forced to jump into the Dnieper. This event is described by both Belash and Dietrich Neufeld’s diary. The relevant passages are as follows:

**[October 5]:** Our cavalry brigade, led by Makhno, swooped into Khortytza and destroyed a white squadron. At 4am they took the Kichkas bridge and drowned the watchguard in the Dnieper. At 5am they entered Alexandrovsk. At 10am on the 5<sup>th</sup>, part of our infantry entered the city, occupied its outskirts and continued to the next village.<sup>8</sup>

**September 21:** "They're here! Who they are and under what political banner they are fighting nobody knows. We see nothing but brutal madness, looting and

killing ... How long will they stay? From our house we can see an endless train moving from here to Einlage-Kichkas, the nearby village at the Dnieper bridgehead. Presumably, they are crossing over to Alexandrovsk.<sup>9</sup>

In a subsequent footnote to Neufeld's entry it is written that on September 21 two Mennonite guards on watch at Einlage "were given the macabre choice between execution on the spot or jumping off the bridge."<sup>10</sup> Neufeld later confirms that the troops crossing Einlage were in fact Makhnovist. The discrepancy in days between the two sources perfectly corresponds to the difference between the Julian and Gregorian calendars. It can therefore be said with certainty that Belash was using new style dates and Neufeld old style dates.<sup>11</sup> As such to derive any relevant information from Belash we must turn to his description of events around November 8.

### III. Contributing Factors

#### *a. The Eichenfeld Selbstschutz*

Any account of Eichenfeld must begin by examining the activities of the local *Selbstschutz*. As in the Molotschna, in the summer of 1918 a *Selbstschutz* was organized and armed by the German officers stationed in the Jasykovo settlement. Eichenfeld, also known by its Russian name Dubovka, was a village within Jasykovo. In the whole of the settlement 250 young men served in the *Selbstschutz*.<sup>12</sup> In Eichenfeld the *Selbstschutz* was led by Heinrich H. Heinrichs. According to Heinrich's brother, Cornelius Heinrichs, the group did not consider itself within the structure of the official *Selbstschutz*. He relates: "Eichenfeld never had a *Selbstschutz*. They never drove out, never practiced, and

were never organized. Heinrich Heinrichs was always the leader whenever an emergency arose.”<sup>13</sup> A report in *Friedensstimme* likewise describes the Jasykovo *Selbstschutz* as “poorly organized and lacking in uniform leadership, military training and discipline.”<sup>14</sup> It is possible it was a more impromptu group organized to respond to threats against the village as they arose.

There also appear to have been different self-defence units formed at various times in Jasykovo. According to Eichenfelder Julius Loewen, the German army imposed a draft on all men eighteen to thirty-five. Cavalry units of ten to twelve men were then organized in each village, with the remaining men serving as infantry.<sup>15</sup> They were under the overall command of a German Commandant until the withdrawal of the occupation. Later, according Heinrich Heinrichs’ diary, the Red Army also encouraged the organization of self-defence:

In 1918 the *Selbstschutz* was organized by us, and I, too, had to join. The Reds had already been in our town. They gave us orders to form a *Selbstschutz* so that our village would experience less robbery from the little bands that had formed. We also received guns from the Reds, sent from their town to us.<sup>16</sup>

Regardless, of its origins, the Eichenfeld unit was to subsequently incur the wrath of the Reds and Makhnovists.

Throughout 1919 the Jasykovo *Selbstschutz* gained a measure of notoriety, successfully repelling bandit attacks throughout the spring of 1919. In one incident they feigned an arms turnover to local bandits. At the arranged spot of exchange the Mennonites turned their guns on the bandits forcing them to retreat. A number of prisoners were captured and possibly executed en route to Ekaterinoslav.<sup>17</sup>



Upon hearing of this incident Soviet troops arrived and demanded a turnover of all Mennonite arms in Jasykovo. The majority of the *Selbstschutz* acquiesced but the Eichenfeld group hid theirs. During this period Eichenfeld faced a growing threat from both the Reds and local peasantry. The Reds held rich landowners as hostages to extract “contributions” from the colony, even taking prisoners for months at a time.<sup>18</sup> In one instance, according to Eichenfelder Susanna Klippenstein,

Some riders came and threatened to set our village on fire. They had it surrounded so that no one could get out. A plane flew over us. A lot of people were standing on the street. I don't know what they demanded, or why they didn't set fire to the village, but everyone was thankful that we were saved once more.<sup>19</sup>

Here we see a clear precedent to events that would later occur in Eichenfeld.

Unfortunately there is no indication as to the exact identity of the riders or why they wanted to destroy the village.

In July 1919 the Reds ordered the young men of Eichenfeld to assemble but the call went unheeded. The following morning 300 troops surrounded Eichenfeld. Apparently mistaking the troops for bandits, Heinrichs' group reemerged to repel the Soviets without a single casualty. A number of Reds were killed and the invaders were forced to flee. Only in the aftermath of battle did Heinrichs realize the attackers were government forces. C. Heinrichs explains:

When it was over we found out the government had sent this group. We sent a delegation to [Ekaterinoslav] and told them we were sorry but that we had thought they were bandits. We wanted to make good but no arms were surrendered. The government came and examined but nothing was ever done.<sup>20</sup>

Another critical incident, which may have occurred before the above battle, also involved the Eichenfeld *Selbstschutz*. The Reds had established a district soviet in

Nikolaipol, the administrative center of Jasykovo, under the leadership of a Commissar Snissarenko. It was at this point that one of Heinrichs' comrades, Daniel Hiebert, may have turned traitor, passing the names of *Selbstschützer* to Snissarenko in return for a position in the local soviet. Hearing of Hiebert's betrayal, Heinrichs decided to eliminate the soviet. In the words of Cornelius Heinrichs, "the group decided to clean up these men. Heinrich Heinrichs was the leader – they decided they would kill everybody, take no prisoners and not one person would utter a word."<sup>21</sup> Three members of the soviet, including Hiebert and Snissarenko, were murdered, however, a fourth managed to escape by hiding in an oven. Upon reporting to his superiors, a delegation was sent to Eichenfeld to investigate the matter. It was at this time Heinrichs left Eichenfeld. Apparently nothing came of the investigation before Jasykovo came under the occupation of the Whites in the summer of 1919. Nonetheless, the spring actions of the *Selbstschutz* were to have tragic consequences for the community following the Whites' withdrawal.

*b. The Makhnovist Army*

Amidst the collapse of Denikin's rearguard in October 1919 the Makhnovists established themselves in the Mennonite colonies. To fully understand the evolution of events that culminated in the massacre, we must set Eichenfeld in the broader context of the Makhnovist occupation. Arshinov reports the mood of the army in October:

They literally swept through villages, towns and cities like an enormous broom, removing every vestige of exploitation and servitude. The returned pomeshchiks, the kulaks, the police, the priests ... all these were swept out of the victorious path of the Makhnovist movement ... All those known to be active enemies of the peasants and workers were condemned to death. Pomeshchiks and kulaks perished in great numbers.<sup>22</sup>

A large degree of vengeance underpinned the growth of the Makhnovist army in autumn 1919 as it swelled to over 100,000 men. House searches, robbery, rape and murder characterize Mennonite descriptions of the Makhnovist occupation. In total more than 800 murders occurred over a six-week period between late October and early December. Economically the colonies were devastated by the Makhnovists demand for food, lodging and clothing. Finally, at the end of the occupation a typhus epidemic spread from the Makhnovists to their Mennonite hosts. By the New Year, typhus had decimated the army and killed thousands of Mennonites.<sup>23</sup>

The rapid growth of the army – which was only a fifth of its size prior to the breakout at Peregonovka – created huge organizational problems. For one, the army came to be composed largely of local forces, some of which were of a dubious character. A large number of Reds caught behind enemy lines, nationalist units and independent groups now fought under Makhnovist leadership. Historian Michale Malet writes that at this time, “criminals entered the army for what they could get out of it, especially plunder in the towns.”<sup>24</sup> The problem was made worse by the fact that Makhno commonly dynamited the city prisons and released its prisoners. Rempel writes that in Alexandrovsk “one of the first acts of the Makhnovites was to release the inmates from the city prison and then blow it up.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the Makhnovists had recently integrated a large force of Grigorievites in July-August 1919, who had been notorious for their anti-semitic pogroms.<sup>26</sup>

This large force of disparate groups occupying an expansive territory frequently resulted in the breakdown of troop discipline. Looting and drunkenness became a

common complaint amongst regimental commanders. Commander Petrenko issued the following order: “Requisitioned and confiscated goods are for the use of the whole army, not just for the benefit of individuals who may have joined our army in order to sabotage it.”<sup>27</sup> Other commanders, such as Dorosh, felt completely helpless as they watched the spread of “banditism” through the army.<sup>28</sup> In November the Alexandrovsk city commandant A. Klein - himself of a German colonist background - was sent to the front as punishment for public drunkenness.<sup>29</sup> A number of commanders were also executed for organizing Jewish pogroms.<sup>30</sup> Makhno himself issued an appeal to immediately halt all drinking, looting and violence against civilians writing,

Either you and I will fight to the finish with the enemies of the people – a fight which requires the wholeheartedness and honour of each insurgent, or we’ll part ways for good. I want your response – not just in words but in deeds. The Revolution we’re defending demands it, and in the names of its conquests so do I.<sup>31</sup>

On October 9, 1919, Makhno ordered the destruction of all alcohol in the army’s possession due to its affect on troop discipline.<sup>32</sup> The Army Staff published further appeals and arrests were made but the situation remained unmanageable.<sup>33</sup> The commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Donetz Corps, A. Kalashnikov, summarized the situation when he wrote in an appeal to the army: “When we arrived in Katerinoslav gubernia, we saw the light, but we weren’t able to seize the opportunity. We’ve turned that light into something vulgar, disgusting...”<sup>34</sup>

*c. The Kontrrazvedka*

In late October the 4<sup>th</sup> Regional Congress of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents met in Alexandrovsk. During the congress a “Draft Declaration of the RPAU (m) on Free Soviets” was issued.<sup>35</sup> This important document gave a clear ideological vision for the movement including the following statement concerning the judicial process:

A system of real justice must be organized, but it must be a living, free, creative act of the community. The self-defence of the population must be a matter of free, living self-organization. And so any moribund form of justice: judicial institutions, revolutionary tribunals, codes of penalties, police institutes, Chekists, prisons – all this must collapse under its own weight.<sup>36</sup>

Commenting on this passage Ukrainian anarchist historian V. Azarov remarks:

On the one hand, this is an understandable protest of the anarchist-Makhnovists against the punitive organs of the State. But on the other hand, such a formulation of the question of justice leads to the dictatorship of emotional impulses, the tyranny of momentary rage, and opens the possibility of manipulation of “people’s justice” by special-interest groups. In other words, it leads to lynch law. Furthermore, it allows any kind of abuse to flourish on the grounds of the “just struggle with the exploiting classes.”<sup>37</sup>

Azarov goes on to identify the civilian section of the *kontrrazvedka* as embodying the worst manipulations of “people’s justice”. Azarov, however, makes the error of asserting, “cases of repressive actions of the Kontrrazvedka are unknown in the villages [i.e. rural areas].”<sup>38</sup> The Mennonite experience, betrays a radically different conclusion.

As mentioned the civilian *kontrrazvedka* was charged with ferreting out “anti-Makhnovist elements.” It was a ubiquitous organization that at its height claimed one in ten Makhnovists as members, and made extensive use of civilian informants. According to M. Hutman, an eyewitness to the Makhnovist occupation of Ekaterinoslav, “pillaging took place under the pretext of searches for hidden weaponry. A common type of pillaging [by the *kontrrazvedka*] was the looting of the quarters of Denikinist officers that

had been liquidated by the Makhnovists.”<sup>39</sup> It is important in this regard to remember that the Makhnovists considered *Selbstschützer* as White collaborators.

Mennonite literature widely attests to the presence of the *kontrrazvedka* in the colonies and role in hunting down *Selbstschützer*. All three of our sources from Khortitza – Neufeld, Rempel, and Schroeder – make mention of the *kontrrazvedka* by name and give examples of their search for weapons and *Selbstschützer*. Rempel, who briefly billeted three *kontrrazvedka* members in Nieder Khortitza, writes,

As self-proclaimed members of the counter-intelligence ... intent on ferreting out White Army members and other traitors to Batko Makhno and his revolutionary movement, they were the most obnoxious and ruthless of all the village's unbidden occupants. Aside from eating, they slept all day, then towards evening left for their escapades, to hunt down counter-revolutionaries, and to search houses, pilfering whatever touched their fancy or simply because they enjoyed tormenting innocent people.<sup>40</sup>

Rempel further relates that “Makhnovites justified their ferocious attacks as part of their relentless search for Abram Löewen [a notorious *Selbstschützer* at large].”<sup>41</sup> Neufeld’s journal entry for November 2 similarly relates, “... it’s getting more and more dangerous. Makhno has ordered his intelligence agents to finish off without mercy every person of hostile views.”<sup>42</sup>

At Eichenfeld a similar pattern emerged, in which the “search” for Heinrichs and his unit was used to rationalize the total destruction of the village. Schroeder confirms that, “the immediate excuse used by the Makhnovtsy was that the young men of the villages had during 1918-1919 formed self-defense units.”<sup>43</sup> Significantly, Schroeder relates that the Makhnovists were well acquainted with the details of Heinrichs’ activities and the identities of the group’s membership.<sup>44</sup>

*d. Makhno's Orders*

In the days leading up to the massacre a series of key troop movements occurred, which explain the military context in which Eichenfeld occurred. On November 4, in the face of Denikin's retreating army, Belash reports that the decision was made to evacuate Alexandrovsk in favor of Ekaterinoslav.<sup>45</sup> Such a large-scale transfer of troops involved marching the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps northwards through the Mennonite colonies of Chortitza and Jasykovo. En route various units were stationed in the colonies along the west bank of the Dnieper, occupying an eighty mile strip from Chortitza to Ekaterinoslav.<sup>46</sup> According to Belash the transfer was complete by November 9 with heavy fighting ensuing for control of Ekaterinoslav. Belash further states that part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army corps was deployed to the village of Fedorovka, a Ukrainian village near Eichenfeld, on the eve of the massacre.<sup>47</sup>

Makhno himself left Alexandrovsk for Ekaterinoslav on November 6 ahead of the troop movements. However, prior to leaving Makhno produced a list of eighty persons to be executed before the evacuation. On November 5 the following declaration appeared in the Makhnovist daily *Put' k Svobode*:

The bourgeoisie is all laughs as it sees our failures on certain fronts. I will give them my final word: the bourgeoisie in their futile arrogance hope for our defeat and the victory of the Don and Kuban Whites. I tell you our setback in this area will be the death of the bourgeoisie. To accomplish this I have taken action.

In the hands of the remaining chiefs of defense for the city of Alexandrovsk, Kalashnikov and his adjutant Karetnik, have been invested with the task of eliminating the bourgeoisie and their minions. Death to the bourgeoisie! Death to all their minions! Long live the liberation of the working class! Long live the Social Revolution!

Army Commander Bat'ko Makhno  
4 November 1919, Alexandrovsk<sup>48</sup>

Those on Makhno's list were arrested, which included Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, industrialists and even railway unionists.<sup>49</sup> Belash was needed to authorize the death sentences, but refused to do so in direct disobedience of Makhno. The prisoners were released on their word that they would not collaborate with the Whites.<sup>50</sup>

The order was clearly intended for the city of Alexandrovsk but appears to have been felt in the countryside as well. Corresponding to the time around the order's publication are the following entries from Neufeld's diary:

November 4 [October 22]: Shocking! Today the big Cossack [a commander] who was here a few days ago came back. He grandly announced that the pretended neutrality of our Mennonite villages would no longer be tolerated. The struggle had now entered a crucial stage and they were prepared to force the issue: it was either for or against. We must now decide whether we'd stand and fight on their side or be counted with their enemies the Whites. If the latter, then we were to be wiped out to the last man.

November 5 [October 23]: We feel as if we have been condemned to death and are now simply waiting for the executioner to come. Those who are not sunk in apathy are thinking of escape. But we have been notified that anyone caught three steps from his house will be shot without warning. Actually there are so many armed riders around that any attempt to escape would mean certain death.<sup>51</sup>

Neufeld's next entry describes the massacre at Eichenfeld.<sup>52</sup> Whatever Makhno's intentions regarding the publication of the November 4<sup>th</sup> order, the effect was to aggravate already existing tensions between the Makhnovists and Mennonites. On October 30 [October 17] Neufeld recorded that the squad leader stationed in his home claimed that a number of "Germans" had been hung near Einlage for shooting at Makhnovists. The Commander further related to Neufeld "in confidence" that the



“commanders had had a tough time preventing their troops from taking revenge against all the villages.”<sup>53</sup> For the rank and file of the army Makhno’s words were clear: destroy the enemy. The order functioned in effect as a *carte blanche* for the army and *kontrrazvedka* to vent their frustrations on those labeled as counterrevolutionaries.

Another “order” of Makhno to emerge in relation to Eichenfeld points in a radically different direction. According to the memoirs of N. Astakhov, Ukrainian tent missionary and survivor of Eichenfeld, Makhno personally gave the missionaries permission to evangelize throughout the Makhnovist region. In the aftermath of the massacre Astakhov even tried to arrange a second meeting with Makhno.<sup>54</sup>

*Friedensstimme* editor Abram Kröker further relates that in the Nikopol *volost* itself, “after some difficulties Brother Dick received permission (from the Makhno officials) to hold tent meetings, and the first was held that afternoon.”<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, despite this official “protection” the tent missionaries were not spared, apparently targeted for their evangelizing presence.

However, the fact that Makhno and his authorities granted permission to the tent mission raises many questions. Why did Makhno and other Makhnovist authorities grant safe passage in the first place? And why were these orders ineffectual in protecting the missionaries? These are questions in need of further investigation, but it does lend support to the thesis that Makhno himself was not directly involved in orchestrating the massacre.

#### IV. The Massacre

On the morning of November 8<sup>th</sup> a large number of Makhnovist troops passed through the villages of Jasykovo en route to Ekaterinoslav. At about ten in the morning the Makhnovists' first action was to kill a man they believed to be Heinrich H. Heinrichs.<sup>56</sup> They in fact murdered Heinrichs' father, who bore the same first and last name as his son. Mennonite historians Dyck, Staples and Toews theorize a rationale for the massacre based on this initial murder:

In the midst of Makhno's struggle to assert firm control over the region, this execution of a prominent leader in the self-defense movement was surely an intentionally symbolic act. The Eichenfeld massacre was a warning to Mennonites throughout the region that Makhno would not tolerate resistance.<sup>57</sup>

Many of the troops continued through the settlement, but at nightfall a cavalry squadron entered Eichenfeld. The village was blockaded to prevent an escape route. In the massacre that followed all landowners and their sons over the age of sixteen were systematically executed. When the killing was finished seventy men and five women lay dead.<sup>58</sup> Over the next ten days the death toll rose to 136 in the whole of the Jasykovo settlement.

In the aftermath of the killing, peasants from the surrounding area descended upon Eichenfeld taking anything of value. Raisa Gurazda, a resident of Novopetrovka interviewed by Bobyleva, relates the story of her mother:

Later some daring people from neighbouring villages came, after everything was deserted. They took all the doors and windows. The Germans had everything of the best quality ... Not a single German home remained standing in the village they were torn down ... It was like a 'black hole'. The bricks were scattered around. It was desolate and the cats slunk about, and the dogs."<sup>59</sup>

As for the survivors, after three days the dead were gathered from the streets and buried in a series of twelve mass graves. Eichenfeld had ceased to exist.

The perpetrators appear to have targeted the male landowning population. Eichenfelder, H.W. Klassen recalls: “Grandmother lived at the end of the village not in the farmer’s row. [She was an *Anwohner*, landless]. Because of this, my brother and father stayed alive.”<sup>60</sup> That the *Anwohner* were spared on ideological grounds is further confirmed by Eichenfelder David A. Quiring’s account. At the height of the massacre Quiring was assigned the chilling task of informing each household that they were to bake bread for the Makhnovists. While performing his grim duty, Quiring was brought before a Makhnovist commander:

I murmured and prayed for strength and grace to bear the fate that would be announced for me. The commandant placed his revolver to my forehead. He asked if I owned land ... I owned neither land nor house. Mrs. Franz Klassen had to verify all my answers and so I was released. He commanded one of his soldiers to see me safely to the street.<sup>61</sup>

Later that evening Quiring met the commander again at his brother’s home:

They grilled my brother Klass. I interceded on his behalf. They freed him too, since he had no material possessions. Then came Jacob’s turn. He was asked if he owned land. He said yes. The commandant shouted and ordered him to remove his clothes. How pale he became! He saw death before him ... We knew that they would execute him ...<sup>62</sup>

The above accounts strongly suggest that the attack was motivated by class antagonisms. From the surviving evidence it appears that the attackers were following orders to execute all landowning males but to leave the landless unmolested. A Ukrainian interviewee attributes to Makhno the order: “Don’t harm the workers, women, or children.”<sup>63</sup> The fact that the *anwohner* were expressly spared in the massacre suggests the attack was motivated less by anti-German sentiment than class antagonisms.

## V. Local Motivations

Reflecting on the massacre Gerhard Schroeder writes, “Eichenfeld was a very prosperous Mennonite colony, thus constituting a highly desirable prize for looting by Makhno’s men and then to be turned over for wholesale plunder to some of the neighbouring peasant villages.”<sup>64</sup> In contemporary Mennonite histories Makhno is commonly held personally accountable for the massacre. Yet when the primary sources are carefully examined, there is strong evidence that the neighbouring Ukrainian peasantry were as much to blame for the tragedy as Makhno and his men.

First, there is the widely attested fact that immediately following the massacre, residents of the surrounding Ukrainian villages, in particular Fedorovka, looted Eichenfeld. This information is contained in virtually all eyewitness accounts including the Ukrainian interviews conducted by Svetlana Bobyleva. Second, we have eyewitness testimony that the Jasykovo colony was being harassed by local bandits prior to the arrival of the Makhnovists, and that they even threatened to burn down Eichenfeld on one occasion. Perhaps speaking of the same bandits HW Klassen writes: “One day a robber band came to plunder from our village ... Later this same band joined with Makhno to bring this village to its knees.”<sup>65</sup>

Klassen’s observation is corroborated by David G. Rempel, who lived in Nieder Chortitza and was the nephew of Heinrich H. Heinrichs. Rempel writes that “the act of revenge may have involved more than regular members of Makhno’s army, it may have included representatives from neighbouring peasant villages now finally able to even the

score with a resident of Eichenfeld who had insulted or injured him in past years.”<sup>66</sup> At least two surviving Eichenfelders even recognized German colonists amidst the killers.<sup>67</sup> Rempel concludes that despite “the virtually unanimous verdict among Mennonites that the nightmarish experiences of Eichenfeld and the surrounding communities were part and parcel of the Makhnovshchina ... it is safe to assume that many of the worst excesses in Eichenfeld, [etc.] were carried out by peasants of neighbouring villages.”<sup>68</sup> C. Heinrichs confirms Rempel’s conclusion in a letter to him in which he asserted that responsibility for Eichenfeld “rested more with the neighbouring peasants than with Makhnovstsy per se.”<sup>69</sup>

Rempel further attributes the peasantry’s underlying motivation to “loot and land hunger.”<sup>70</sup> The bitterness engendered by the unequal division of land after the Emancipation cut deeper than many Mennonites ever imagined. The Yazykovo colony, like Sagradovka, was purchased in the wake of the Mennonite landless crisis from the local nobility. Situated in a highly fertile area Jasykovo became very prosperous in a short period of time arousing, according to Rempel, “envy and resentment among many of the neighbouring peasantry who no longer were able to rent smaller or larger pieces of land from their former gentry landlords.”<sup>71</sup> Unwittingly the daughter colony of Jasykovo placed itself in the direct line of fire in the years leading up to the revolution.

Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting colonists from Jasykovo actively participated in the punitive expeditions of the German occupation in 1918. A letter reproduced by Ukrainian historians B.V. Malinkovsky and T.V. Malinkovsaky reports the following:

There appeared a detachment of the German-Austrian army joined by German colonists from the Nikolaipol volost [the volost of Jasykovo] and the German

landowners of the Novopokrovskoi volost, who were armed with machine guns and rifles. They would enter each village and collect all citizens without exception who were shot and beaten mercilessly.<sup>72</sup>

The reasons ostensibly given for these raids were to retrieve stolen property and land, but they often took on an excessively violent dimension that only contributed to the deteriorating relations between the colonists and peasantry. An anonymous diarist who left Eichenfeld during the German occupation wrote these reflections:

The clear understanding should have told people that it was impossible for a small heap to resist the great majority ... In October 1919, 85 people were hacked to pieces with sabers there, partly shot to death. A true Bartholomew-night. I do not want to sit in judgment over my own people, but I believe that one had not made the surrounding Russians into friends in the good years, but rather to enemies and this murder was the answer.<sup>73</sup>

As has been emphasized, the goal of this chapter is not to stand in judgment of the victims but to better understand the dynamics that led to the Eichenfeld massacre. The majority of victims likely had nothing to do with the *Selbstschutz* or the punitive expeditions and for them it matters not whether their murderers were Makhnovists or neighbours. But for the historian, understanding how situations evolve and why massacres unfold is a grim but necessary task, if only to point to warning signs for future generations. The bitterness engendered through social inequalities, and the failure of broader society to adequately address these inequalities, is always in danger of rapidly evolving into a situation where acts of revenge once considered inhuman become routine and interpreted as necessary.

## VI. Historiography

The most in-depth investigation of a Makhnovist massacre by Mennonite historians is Dyck, Staples and Toews' book *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre* [2004]. It functions very much as an official companion to the memorial erected at Eichenfeld in 2001. The memorial's ceremony features prominently in its contents. Interpretation of the massacre is provided by the editors in a chapter entitled "Narrative and Analysis."

While the commentary is based on a diversity of sources, a biased cultural narrative seems imposed on the historical material. Aside from several chronological and factual errors the piece draws a number of somewhat misleading conclusions. Regarding the date of the massacre the authors do not clarify that they are using the old style calendar. Chronologically the German occupation is excised from the narrative, removing a key factor in the escalation of tensions between the colonists and their Ukrainian neighbours. The authors also state without evidence that Makhno fought for the Ukrainian nationalists and "briefly flirted with an alliance with the Volunteer Army."<sup>74</sup>

The *Selbstschutz* is only passingly broached, effectively neutralized by the sentence: "In spite of pacifist religious convictions, some desperate Mennonites had followed the example of their Ukrainian neighbours and formed armed self-defence units to protect their communities."<sup>75</sup> In reality, the *Selbstschutz* was first organized under the supervision of German officers during the unmentioned occupation. Despite a majority of Bobyleva's interviews identifying the *Selbstschutz* as a key element in the evolution of

the tragedy Dyck, Staples and Toews do not discuss its role in the evolution of events. As for the massacre itself the authors do identify many key contributing factors but without a proper assessment of the *Selbstschutz*'s links with the German and White armies the analysis remains incomplete.

The authors' conclusions are also somewhat misleading. Without offering evidence that Makhno was present at the massacre or that he directly ordered the attack, the authors nevertheless hold Makhno responsible:

... [the Makhnovist's] disciplined, purposeful actions and clear-cut criteria in singling out their victims bespoke careful planning, and in Makhno's territory, Makhno was the chief planner. Makhno exercised close military discipline over his forces, and it is almost unimaginable that the Makhnovites carried out the massacre without his approval.<sup>76</sup>

As we have seen, Makhno did try to exert strict discipline over his troops but in late 1919 the army staff was losing control over its regular troops as well as the *kontrrazvedka*. For example, just west of Eichenfeld, former nationalist units that had integrated into the Makhnovist army carried out a series of pogroms. The commanders of these units were executed for anti-semitism.<sup>77</sup> The situation and nature of the army in late 1919 did not allow for total control and massacres under the black flag clearly did occur without Makhno's approval.

It should also be remembered that Makhno himself, and the counter-intelligence, were answerable to the civilian controlled Revolutionary Military Council. In theory all political executions were supposed to pass through this body before any action was taken. Despite Makhno's high rank, and his sometime cavalier disregard for authority, he was not the executive of the movement. It is probable that Makhno and other high-ranking



Makhnovists became aware of Eichenfeld but without further evidence it is impossible to judge the degree of their direct involvement.

Dyck, Staples and Toews also resurrect the old specter of Makhnovist anti-semitism, implying that there was a policy of persecuting the Jewish population.<sup>78</sup> Makhnovists never denied the presence of anti-semitism within their rank-and-file membership. They did deny that the army encouraged these actions or let them pass unpunished. Perhaps the best evidence that the Makhnovists were successful in stamping out anti-Jewish actions is that within the Makhnovist region of control fewer pogroms occurred than in areas controlled by any other armies. According to the tabulations of the Central Committee of Zionist Organization in Russia for the whole of the civil war the worst offenders were the Nationalists with 15,000 Jewish victims followed by the Volunteer White Army with 9500. No pogroms are attributed to Makhno.<sup>79</sup> Undoubtedly atrocities against Jews did occur within the Makhnovist sphere of influence but to accuse Makhno or his Army Staff of anti-semitism is gravely mistaken.<sup>80</sup>

Another trend in current scholarship is to conceptualize the massacres as pogroms. Ukrainian historian Natalya Venger proposes such an interpretation of Eichenfeld. Venger is a professor at the Dnipropetrovsk University that has closely worked with Mennonite academics. Her writings tend to support a traditional Mennonite narrative that sees Eichenfeld as a type of ethnic pogrom. In an article for the Mennonite magazine *Preservings*, Venger writes that,

Machno, who had a personal history with the Mennonites and colonists,[17] explained to his soldiers that the Mennonites, who had cooperated with the German occupants and White army, must pay with their lives. Machno directed negative peasant energy toward the colonies.<sup>81</sup>

The source cited by Venger is from Belash but the footnoted page does not mention German colonists or relate to the discussion at hand.<sup>82</sup> Regardless, it is true that the colonies were targeted due to their collaboration with the Germans and Whites, however, the manner in which Venger presents this information exaggerates Makhno's personal involvement.

In a more recent article, Venger defines Eichenfeld as a pogrom through a comparative study with a Jewish pogrom committed by White troops.<sup>83</sup> Venger's reconstruction of events is problematic. The massacre is described as "indiscriminate" including infants as victims. However, the official list of victims from Eichenfeld and the surrounding area does not include infants.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore the vast majority of eyewitness accounts describe the massacre as highly organized specifically targeting male landowners.

To bolster her argument that the massacre was ethnically motivated Venger cites a thirteen-year-old eyewitness, who reports a Makhnovist asking, "Are you a German? We've been ordered to kill all Germans."<sup>85</sup> It is possible such an encounter did take place given widespread anti-German sentiment, however, Venger does not explore the large body of evidence that strongly suggests the perpetrators chose their victims on the basis of class and not ethnicity.<sup>86</sup>

Further difficulties emerge as Venger tries to explain the massacre in light of Makhnovist ideology. Venger is aware that Makhno officially denounced all forms of ethnic violence. She even reproduces this important order of Makhno from the end of 1918:

Every robbery, murder, and rape committed against Jews or peaceful inhabitants of other nationalities will subject the perpetrator to being shot. Even the killing of

people who belong to the ranks of our opponents – the Denikinists, unless authorized by the army staff, will result in the perpetrator being shot.<sup>87</sup>

Nonetheless, without supporting evidence Venger asserts that, “While pronouncing himself an internationalist, Makhno instilled the army with his personal negativism towards German colonists and Mennonites.”<sup>88</sup> Venger claims that the Makhnovists considered the colonists not as fellow liberated workers but as “the personification of evil.” It is true that landowning Mennonites were demonized as *kulaks* and *pomeshchiks*, but Makhno did embrace landless Mennonites and even teachers as part of the working class.<sup>89</sup> In an attempt to force Eichenfeld into the pattern of a pogrom, Venger overemphasizes the ethnic dimension of Makhnovist-Mennonite tensions. Nonetheless, in conclusion Venger writes:

An additional motivating factor was required ... that the Germans were kulaks and traitors. The instinctive brutality of the peasants was directed not so much at an ethnic group as at that “embodiment of evil” which the ethnic group represented in accordance with the ethnic stereotypes prevailing in society.<sup>90</sup>

The assessment that those murdered at Eichenfeld represented an “embodiment of evil” to their killers is not an unreasonable conclusion, however the events at Eichenfeld were not as unfocused as Venger represents them. Far from targeting all Germans, or Mennonites, the current evidence suggests the perpetrators attacked almost exclusively male landowners and their sons and spared landless colonists. Venger’s interpretation, however, does contain crucial insights into the progression of violence in the civil war. The demonization of the enemy through a constructed stereotype is a critical ingredient in the evolution of massacres.

Conceptualizing the massacres as pogroms presents a final problem. Given its historical origins, the term “pogrom” inevitably puts a premium on the ethnic dimension.

No matter how one qualifies its definition, within the Russian context, “pogrom” evokes the image of Jewish suffering. Therefore, the use of pogrom in this context unavoidably involves a coupling of Jewish and Mennonite suffering. Indeed, Venger very consciously does this through a comparison of Eichenfeld with a Jewish pogrom by White troops. The implicit argument is that the violence against the Mennonites is comparable with the Jewish experience; it is of the same “typology”. Furthermore, given the unique history of Jewish persecution, the equation of Jewish and Mennonite suffering discretely implies a genocidal narrative. The comingling of these two separate narratives of suffering under the typology of “pogrom” offers more opportunity for confusion than clarification. A potentially more profitable strategy would be to avoid cultural comparisons of suffering and seek an understanding of the Mennonite massacres as unique phenomena in and of themselves.

## VII. Re-narrativizing Eichenfeld as a Product of Revolutionary Terror

One strategy in approaching Eichenfeld is to seek a category that communicates both the victim’s experience and the perpetrator’s intentions. A potentially more accurate category is “revolutionary terror” or, as the Makhnovist themselves referred to it, “black terror.”<sup>91</sup> Revolutionary terror implicitly places more emphasis on the class element but does not exclude the presence of ethnic factors. It also suggests the perpetrator’s mentality while simultaneously communicating the impact on the victim, all the while avoiding anachronistic comparisons of suffering and cultural narratives. Finally it is appropriate to the period, the “Black terror” occurring parallel with the Red and White

terrors. Terror is a term broad enough to embrace a diversity of motivating factors while still being specific enough to help conceptualize the massacres. To explore the dynamics of revolutionary terror I have drawn heavily from the ideas developed by historian Arno J. Meyer in his book *The Furies*.

Terror can be defined as “a symbolic act designed to influence political behavior by extranormal means, entailing the use or threat of violence.”<sup>92</sup> Revolutionary terror emerges in the context of extreme reciprocal violence and is ostensibly based on a pursuit of “justice.” In a revolutionary situation this frequently occurs when the state can no longer maintain its monopoly over violence. Violence becomes decentralized and legitimated through competing local forces. Arno J. Meyer writes:

The quantum jump of violence is both cause and effect of the breakup of a state’s single sovereignty into multiple and rival power centers, which is accompanied by a radical dislocation of the security and judicial system. As a consequence, the positive legal standards for judging and circumscribing acts of political violence give way to moral and ethical criteria. In other words, in the calculus of means and ends, the principles of “law” are superseded by those of “justice.”<sup>93</sup>

Due to the disappearance of universal law as administered through the state, justice is applied subjectively according to each competing power. These competing notions of justice come into conflict triggering, as in the case of Makhno and the Mennonites, a state of escalating violence, in which each group attempts to use force and fear to compel the enemy to accept the other’s regime. In this scenario the moral line between justice and primitive vengeance or terror begins to blur.<sup>94</sup>

We see this process emerging in the fall of 1918 when Makhno struggled to formulate a “just” policy regarding the German colonists. After the burning of Bolshe-Mikholaivka, Makhno was driven to seek vengeance through a campaign of sword and

fire. Only when he realized that such a policy would inevitably descend into indiscriminate terror did he attempt to enshrine a just policy through a general order. From Makhno's perspective clear boundaries for the movement had to be set if justice was to be maintained. However, preventing the slip from justice to indiscriminate vengeance was to prove exceedingly difficult. Unlike Makhno's aggressive policy against anti-semitism within the movement, his policy to curb the murder of innocent German colonists was a failure.

The incident with Shchuss is illustrative. Shchuss was guilty of executing unarmed Germans, which according to Makhno's policy should have led to Shchuss' expulsion from the movement. Makhno went further and threatened Shchuss with execution. Here we see a confrontation between Shchuss' terrorism and Makhno's attempts to maintain a just policy. In the end terror was victorious, as Makhno did not follow through with his threat despite the two commanders' relations being severely strained. In a time of *realpolitik* could Makhno have afforded to execute a figure only second in popularity to himself? Regardless, justice for the colonists was absent and it would be increasingly so as the civil war progressed.

While there is no evidence Makhno participated in or directly sanctioned any of the massacres, his behavior by November 1919 was increasingly "terroristic." Particularly the activities of the *kontrrazvedka* coupled with Makhno's public declaration of war on the bourgeoisie only enflamed existing tensions within the occupied colonies functioning to encourage further violence. Eichenfeld was a casualty of this environment.

In our final example we encounter a Makhno apparently broken by the civil war's seemingly endless vortex. In Galina's diary the *Bat'ko* is reduced to a drunken accordion player, a jealous husband and ruthless killer. In the last recorded incident between Makhno and the colonists he personally participates in the burning of Mariental and the execution of twenty colonists in retribution for the shooting of two Makhnovist scouts. Viewed in this sequence, events take the narrative form of a tragic fall from the pursuit of justice into excessive terror.

Edgar Quinet in his 1865 history of the French Revolution described the dynamics of terror as "opposing electric currents making for perpetual thunder and lightning."<sup>95</sup> A cyclone is an appropriate metaphor in which "terrible reprisals" become progressively infused with a "spirit of extermination."<sup>96</sup> In the civil war the *Makhnovschina* found itself facing an "opposing current" first in the form of the German occupation and then in the White Army. Both conducted vicious campaigns of terror against the peasantry.

Many Mennonite and German colonists were strongly supportive of these regimes and some even complicit in their acts of terrorism. From their perspective justice was sought through the reclamation of stolen property and the protection of their families from marauding bands. But here, as in the case of the Makhnovists, the pursuit of justice gave way to terror. A White army captain attached to a *Selbstschutz* unit wrote in his diary about the Mennonite fighters' relationship with the Makhnovists:

Fine soldiers, reliable and true; but they are savages. They do not take prisoners, never bring them to the unit's staff. Formerly rich rural squires, they have now been completely ruined by the Makhnovists and take their revenge on them – deliberately, brutally and coldly. But the Makhnovists deal with them in the same manner.<sup>97</sup>

Mennonite collaboration with the counterrevolution can also be conceived as a gradual process that contributed to an evolving “spirit of extermination.”

The embrace of the German occupation was a decisive moment. In the eyes of the surrounding peasantry the vociferous support afforded to the occupiers clearly identified Mennonites as counterrevolutionaries. Public fraternization with the occupiers, the presence of Mennonites in punitive expeditionary units and the military drilling of Mennonite youth under German command did nothing to enamor the colonists to their Ukrainian neighbours.

Nevertheless, in hindsight the Mennonites’ response to the occupation is understandable given the threat they faced. Since November 1918 the Mennonites had faced a growing wave of theft, harassment and official expropriations. They had been forced to radically alter every aspect of their living arrangements including sharing their estates with Ukrainian families. Former estate-owners were reduced to small lease landholders and their properties converted to communes for the landless. Throughout the colonies Mennonites were subjected to seemingly random house searches, arrests and executions. The self-imposed isolation of the Mennonite commonwealth had been traumatically shattered. The arrival of the Germans offered reprieve from the chaos and the promise of a return to the past.

The ethnic dimension of the German occupation also played a critical role in its embrace by the colonies. In the developing Mennonite narrative of the civil war the German troops were emplotted as cultural saviors. Their Germanic cousins were particularly romanticized by the youth, who quickly succumbed to arguments in favour of “self-defense.” This ethnic component, placed in the context of the anti-German



propaganda of World War I, served only to reinforce peasant suspicions of the Mennonites as fifth columnists.

Thus far, while theft and harassment were widespread, murder had yet to take on a mass character. The first actions that could constitute mass terror against the Mennonites were the Makhnovist attacks in the aftermath of the burning of Bolshe-Mikhailovka. This event more than any other signaled Makhno's resolve to deal with what he considered a nest of counterrevolutionaries in his home territory. These attacks also caused a large number of Schönfelders to seek refuge in the Molotschna colony. With them the refugees brought harrowing tales of murderous and raping anarchists. An immediate sense of urgency was brought to bear on the question of self-defence. With fear in the air, and the Germans on the verge of withdrawing from Ukraine, the *Selbstschutz* was allowed to flourish in the majority of Mennonite villages with minimal opposition. Prior to the German army's withdrawal the *Selbstschutz* made overtures to the White Army for munitions and operational advice. While the *Selbstschutz* leadership ensured its operational autonomy from the Whites, from the Makhnovist perspective the Mennonites had once more militarily aligned themselves with the counterrevolution. Even these technical distinctions were eliminated when many former *Selbstschützer* joined the White Army in the face of a Red-Makhnovist spring offensive.

It is at this juncture that the conflict becomes truly Manichean and thus exponentially susceptible to the logic of terror. The narrative on both sides of the field is hardening. Individual actors are increasingly subsumed by caricatures of the enemy so as to psychologically prepare for and justify the inevitable deeds that must be done in the case of intractable warfare. The Makhnovist is inevitably a murderous rapist and the

Mennonite a scheming counterrevolutionary agent. Such stereotypes commonly acted as screens to resolve personal vendettas or community grievances.

On the other hand, the use of stereotypes may also be seen as an attempt to comprehend seemingly incomprehensible events. If the perpetrator, or victim, is reduced to less than human, if they are made wholly “other”, then events can be ordered and given meaning. Typically this is achieved by invoking deep cultural narratives – or narrative templates – of the enemy.

In the language of the Mennonites, the Makhnovists are spiritually demonic and the events accompanying them apocalyptic. Makhno functions as an antichrist figure and his hordes of plague-infested troops as fallen angels. Defilement and the spread of disorder and pestilence are themes against which the *Selbstschutz* act as guardians. The *Selbstschutz* are portrayed as reluctant warriors who maintain their morality in the face of battle.<sup>98</sup> Yet there is a sense that they too are fallen in their inability to embrace the fate of the suffering martyr. Hence we encounter contradictory narratives within individuals like *Selbstschützer* Henry Regehr who believed that God disapproved of the *Selbstschutz* but also protected them in battle.<sup>99</sup>

From the safety of the New World the *Selbstschutz* would be severely criticized by the Mennonite leaders and academics. The standard interpretation today is that the *Selbstschutz* was a tragic misjudgment that carries the burden of having provoked the massacres. One cannot help but contrast this interpretation with other cultures in which armed resistance to a perceived evil is considered honorable. The historical memory of the *Selbstschutz* is not one of defiant glory but tragedy linked to the near loss of Mennonite identity. As Dietrich Neufeld reflected: “A Mennonite who surrenders the

fundamental idea of peace and affirms war has judged himself. He is henceforth no longer a Mennonite.”<sup>100</sup> In an attempt to prevent the outward destruction of the colonies, an equally serious internal process of destruction was provoked by adopting the sword. Still *Selbstschutz* members considered their actions a desperate response to the brutal realities of civil war; namely to protect their communities from theft, murder and rape.<sup>101</sup>

In the final analysis, while the *Selbstschutz* were able to hold off the Makhnovists at various moments, its sum effect was to confirm in the eyes of the peasantry Mennonites as intractable enemies of the revolution. The *Selbstschutz* provided “evidence” for the stereotyped image of the Mennonite and a convenient rationalization for the increased terrorization of the colonies. House searches were justified on the basis of searching for weapons and hiding counterrevolutionaries. Furthermore, in all cases a *Selbstschutz* action preceded a massacre. This is not to argue that the colonies would have escaped persecution but the presence of the *Selbstschutz* and their ties to the German and White armies did act to fuel the cycle of vengeance and terror.

The legacy of the *Selbstschutz* would continue to haunt the Mennonites, as in 1922 when the chairman for the Ukrainian Committee for National Minorities toured the colonies at the request of the Mennonites who were seeking reprieve from the harassment of local authorities. The chairman concluded that, “the Mennonites represented a segment of the counterrevolutionary elements previously active in the south, particularly in view of the activities of the *Selbstschutz*...” He further criticized the Mennonites for their “religious hypocrisy”.<sup>102</sup> In the longer term, as John B. Toews concludes, “the fatal suspicion” arosed by the *Selbstschutz*, “affected the status of the Mennonites and German during the 1930s and again in World War II.”<sup>103</sup>

A second Mennonite narrative representing a majority of emigré literature is the pacifist one in which Makhno plays the role of God's punishing hand. The terror according to this narrative is a consequence of the Mennonites' lack of faith and attachment to materialism. For many the massacres were interpreted as "a judgment upon the constituency for its disregard of a sacred principle."<sup>104</sup> The image of God is of one meting out punishments and rewards based on the observance of certain strictures. Pacifist Mennonite Anton Sawatsky interpreted Eichenfeld through this narrative:

The day of reckoning came for Eichenfeld because God could not leave their offence unpunished. But in his great mercy, God, who does not want the death of sinners but that they turn to Him and live, sent tent missionaries to Eichenfeld two days before this terrible night, giving them a chance in the last minute to repent and make right what they had wronged ... But those who died were not martyrs, but victims of God's judgment.<sup>105</sup>

The terror is presented as a "purification" of the community, through which God intends to shepherd his flock back to the enclosure of the true faith. For Sawatsky and other pacifists, the *Selbstschutz* and Mennonite materialism were seen as roadblocks to the successful revival of the suffering Church. The acceptance of a passive martyrdom would achieve God's forgiveness and ensure the community's survival. It is an extreme interpretation by today's secular standards but one that carried significant weight at the time as evidenced in the *Friedensstimme* editorials and its prevalence in many private reflections.

One might expect the pacifist narrative to have been sympathetic towards the peasantry given its close identification with the persecuted. However, this was often not the case. Certainly, pacifists condemned the more excessive instances of abuse and exploitation, but their critique of Mennonite society remained highly metaphysical and

generally did not deal with larger political or socio-economic issues. Sympathy for the peasant was largely paternalistic, retaining strong elements of the master-servant relationship. Regrets are expressed that more could have done to educate the peasantry and evangelical Mennonites commonly expressed frustration that they were forbidden to proselytize amongst the Orthodox. Pacifist authors understood that in many cases the peasantry was underpaid and that land hunger drove their fury, but never do these authors offer any substantial critiques of the socio-economic system or their own colonial privileges. According to *Friedensstimme* capitalism was the proper economics of God's people and any writer that dared suggest socialism could be compatible with Christianity was hotly condemned.

Thus while pacifist Mennonites did not physically oppose the radical peasantry, their paradigm remained inimical to the world of the peasant. As colonists Mennonites were dependent on an imperial power for their privileges; reliant on a master-servant economy; paternalistic toward the indigenous population; culturally insular and socially segregated. To the peasantry the colonists were representatives of an imperial system that had imposed an exploitive arrangement on a once free people. In many ways the Mennonites seemed unconscious of their role in the spread of Russian imperialism into Ukraine. They were largely unaware of the region's history and could not understand the hostilities they faced. Catherine the Great's invitation to the Mennonites seemed a godsend in the face of Prussian persecution. In southern Ukraine was an "empty" frontier land where separation from the world could be maintained. However, in this very drive to avoid the secular world, and create a peaceable community, the Mennonites unwittingly found themselves co-conspirators in an imperialist agenda itself founded on

violence. Thus, from the beginning the Mennonites were uniquely positioned to draw the enmity of the indigenous population. Economic success without cultural integration only quickened resentments as contact with the peasantry came primarily through master-servant relations. Unaware of the coming storm the Mennonites built their commonwealth as an oasis in the dry steppe; a city on a hill for all to envy.

The bitter root of the conflict is found in imperial Russia's semi-feudal class system whose unique evolution by 1917 made accommodation between Mennonites and the Ukrainian peasantry well nigh impossible. If the massacres were motivated by an irrational ethnic hatred at any level, this in turn was symptomatic of very real class tensions such as unequal land distribution, income discrepancies, radically differing levels of education, and master-servant socio-economics. This is not to deny the presence of a virulent form of anti-Germanism, but rather to assert its symptomatic rather than causative nature.

In the context of these systemic resentments and frustrations violence found expression amidst the breakdown of civil society. For the impoverished peasantry of southern Ukraine, the Mennonite was often the most immediate face of exploitation and the embodiment of the "outsider". War and revolution facilitated the dissolution of law and the pursuit of "justice" frequently gave way to vengeance and terror.

As terror became a logic unto itself all rationalizations for violence served the greater goal of exterminating the "other." Bolstered by archetypal images of the enemy a Manichean stage was set in which the forces of good and evil clashed and where the ends justified the means. In the absence of effective restraints, as was the case in late 1919, any action was possible, and even necessary, to purge the enemy.

The Ukrainian tent missionary Astakhov provides us with a profound insight into the psychology of those possessed by the “logic” of terror. After a Makhnovist describes in detail how he and his comrades massacred a family of Germans, Astakhov asks in desperation: “Pray tell me what was the reason for all this horrible violence and bloodshed? What were your feelings when you mercilessly hacked to pieces men, women and innocent children?” The Makhnovist responds:

The most ferocious beasts could not have acted worse; but we never realized what we did. Afterwards some feelings of pity and sorrow came into our hearts, but it was then too late! If there had been someone amongst us at those moments to have spoken a few quiet, reasonable words to calm us, it might have been different! For instance: I do not know what possesses me (and others will tell you the same) but in those moments of bloodshed there is neither pity, nor thought of consequences, but only the thirst for blood, and still more blood; although now I can speak, and think and reason.<sup>106</sup>

In an inversion of the original revolutionary impulse for justice, terror now became an end in itself with the rhetoric of justice but a convenient handmaiden for the pursuit of death.

Unfortunately, it is often only in a state of mutual brokenness that intractable enemies are able to re-humanize the “other.” In this state the pressures of narrative scripts to make a crude abstraction of the enemy are confronted by the reality of human suffering and, if for a moment, the playing field is leveled in which mutual understanding and even forgiveness is possible. Such a moment arrived for Makhnovists and Mennonites in the face of Soviet oppression in the aftermath of the civil war.

The memoirs of an anonymous *Selbstschützer* serve as a poignant example. Following the typhus outbreak he found himself under Red occupation and enlisted as a medic in the Red Army. He was posted to a hospital in Nikolaiv, where he writes, “many

Makhnovtse were brought in. It was an opportunity to practice love to my enemies. Many died.”<sup>107</sup> Later in his memoirs he recounts how he was mistaken for a Makhnovist and sent to a camp in Siberia. In the camp he became the “best of friends” with a former Makhnovist named Ivan, with whom he successfully planned an escape.<sup>108</sup>

The famous Zaporozhyan oak tree is an apt symbol for both Makhnovists and Mennonites. Seven centuries old the tree provided shelter for both the early Cossacks and the first Mennonite colonists. In the 1930s when the Soviets decided to dam the great Dnieper, the process caused an abrupt rise in the water table, condemning the oak to a slow death through drowning. Today the tree is nearly dead, its largely leafless limbs supported by wired anchors. Yet new beginnings are evident. Acorns of the old oak have been planted in many locations across North America, and in Ukraine shoots from the original oak are carefully tended in the hopes of growing a new tree for a new history.



## Conclusion

The Makhnovist and Mennonite sources in this thesis have been presented as “memorial artifacts,” that is, objects composed of memories, which build historical narratives. Using James Wertsch’s scheme of distributed collective memory, I have argued that these narratives, in relation to each other, can be homogenous, complementary or contested. Neither the Makhnovist nor Mennonite groups presented a singular narrative but rather a series of complementary interlocking narratives, which when laid over each other present a broadly coherent perspective. Still within these broadly conceived narratives, many memories of events were contested.

In both instances there were points at which the overall complementary narrative of a group was internally contradicted. Voline’s critique of Makhno and the army, for example, bore no hostility to the movement and broadly confirmed the narrative of the *Makhnovshchina* as a harbinger of freedom and justice, but his critique momentarily broke from the standard narrative and intimated a radically different narrative. Indeed, his critique of excessive violence and rape within the army gave intimations of the Mennonite narrative. From the other side of the narrative landscape, I have argued that there are Mennonite accounts of positive interactions with Makhno, ones that suggest his concern with justice. Such accounts radically broke from the near homogenous narrative of Makhno as a bandit-terrorist.

What these narrative fissures suggest is that the “other”, or the enemy opposite, were always present, ever haunting the historical constructions of each group. Thus the narratives of each group, as shown in this thesis, were inherently unstable and prone to deconstruction. However, I have not merely identified the opposite narrative contained within each text, but sought to bring them together to present a larger interlocking and multi-perspectival narrative.

This was most specifically attempted in chapter four by re-narrativizing the history of Mennonite-Makhnovist relations through the concept of revolutionary terror. The objective was not to create a hierarchy of narratives but rather bring the sources together under a concept that allowed complementary and contested histories to coexist. By doing so the insularity of Makhnovist and Mennonite historical narratives was broken. The emergent multi-perspectival narrative has suggested a wider lens on the flux of events, hopefully giving the historian and the reader greater freedom for the interpretation of Makhnovist-Mennonite relations.

Each chapter in this thesis reflects the above theoretical considerations. Chapter two of this thesis dealt with Makhnovist narratives as found in the memoirs of Nestor Makhno and Victor Belash, the histories of Voline and Peter Arshinov, and the diaries of Galina Kuzmenko and Lev Golik. The narrative template of the Ukrainian quest for freedom and justice underpins the Makhnovist narrative. The Makhnovshchina is a specific manifestation of this quest, which allied itself with a philosophy of anarchist-communism. All the Makhnovist sources narrativize the movement as a bringer of freedom and justice. Arshinov’s history would be the most untempered expression of this template. A foundational assumption of the

movement, and found in all the sources, is that freedom and justice is achieved through a radical rejection of central authority and the dismantlement of socio-economic privileges in the countryside. To accomplish these ends power is placed into the hands of the toiling population via peasant unions and soviets.

Furthermore, the lands of the *pomeshchiks* [estate owners] are to be seized and redistributed along egalitarian lines, or reestablished as voluntary self-managed communes.

Within this class-based perspective Mennonites were broadly narrativized under the categories of *kulak* and *pomeshchik*. A large number of Mennonites, given the prosperity of the colonies and estates, fell into these class categories. However, the Makhnovists did distinguish between the latter and working-class Mennonites, which included teachers. Within Makhnovist narratives Mennonites were never explicitly named but were most specifically referred to as “German colonists.”

Mennonites as *kulaks* and *pomeshchiks* were narrativized as actual or potential class enemies but never as ethnic enemies.

Their own sources reveal that the initial strategy of the Makhnovists was not the physical destruction of the colonists but the elimination of their socio-economic privileges. This is seen in Makhno’s early order during the disarming of the bourgeoisie, in which he warned his followers not to harm the colonists or plunder their property. Makhno also described his attempts to integrate former landowners into the commune system and provide them with an equal share of land and supplies. Only with the German occupation and the punitive expeditions accompanied by colonist detachments did Makhno adopt a more violent policy.

After the destruction of Dibrivka, in which Makhno attributed the worst excesses to German colonists, a policy of vengeance and collective punishment was followed. Makhno however, described how he wanted to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and issued an order describing the proper procedures for occupying a colony.

Both Makhno and Belash's narratives present Makhno as an individual concerned with justice. With regard to the colonists, he intervened on two occasions to stop the murder of civilians. However, a conflicting narrative of the movement was present in Voline's criticism of the army and in the diaries of Galina Kuzmenko and Lev Golik. Belash's account of the two traveling colonists murdered by Makhnovist guards at a train stop, for example, suggest a darker more vengeful side to the movement.

Makhno's own narrative and the writings of other Makhnovists reveals one of the keys to the enigma of Makhno to be the tension between justice and vengeance. On the one hand Makhno appeared to want to protect civilians, as evidenced by his autumn 1918 order and interventions with commanders guilty of murdering colonists. On the other hand, Makhno sometimes exhibited an impulsive vengefulness, as seen in the raids following the battle of Dibrivka, the Alexandrovsk order declaring death to the bourgeoisie and the massacre in Mariental. It was in this vacillation between justice and vengeance that the root of Makhno's "enigma of personality" – as described by Voline – can be found. The slipperiness of Makhno is characterized by this tension and by extension the Makhnovist movement as a whole. It is suitable therefore that the Makhnovshchina has proven a controversial phenomenon. Depending on who is doing the looking and what they are looking for,

the Makhnovshchina can be equally narrativized as a movement of justice or of terror.

The history of Makhnovist-Mennonite relations exposes this narrative struggle between justice and vengeance. In the Mennonite colonist the Makhnovists were forced to deal with a population that broadly matched their description of the class enemy. Despite Makhno's attempts, the question of how to deal justly with the colonist enemy was never clearly reconciled. As a result, the slip from justice to vengeance within the movement was seen with increasing fury during fall of 1919.

Chapter three explored Mennonite narratives of the Makhnovshchina prefaced by a discussion of the unique context of pre-revolutionary Russian Mennonite life. It argued that a narrative template of "martyrdom and persecution" underpinned the Mennonite narrative. The theology of martyrdom had come to characterize how the Mennonites related to the "outside" world. In Ukraine the template of "martyrdom and persecution" was contrasted by their wide-ranging privileges and economic prosperity. Having integrated themselves into Russia's colonizing project, the Mennonites found themselves closely allied to the ruling powers. Socio-economically this translated into a large-scale servant economy in which Ukrainian peasants worked for middle class farmers and estate-owners. In retrospect many pacifist Mennonites acknowledged the mistreatment of Ukrainian workers as having contributed to later events.

Not surprising, themes of martyrdom and persecution dominated the narratives of the civil war. Both *Selbstschützer* and pacifists, in their own ways, adopted a martyr narrative, venerating self-sacrifice. As I have shown, in the

pacifist's case it was for the spiritual integrity of Mennonite identity; for the *Selbstschützer* it was to protect family and home. Both narratives also represented Makhno as embodying the persecution they faced as Mennonites. Narratively he was a metonymic device standing in for all peasant banditry. He was often held personally accountable for all the atrocities faced by Mennonites and the motivating reason for the organization of the self-defence. In these ways the narratives are complementary, however, contested images of Makhno did appear in accounts of direct encounters with him. Makhno was presented as someone concerned with justice and even personable, but was nonetheless overshadowed by the destructive impulse of his movement.

The same slip between justice and vengeance was discernible in the Mennonite narratives. Particularly in the pages of *Friedensstimme*, the *Selbstschützer* narrative was contested by pacifist accusations of materialism and greed. Furthermore, evidence of aggressive actions by colonists both before and during the civil war undermined representations of Mennonites as innocent martyrs. In the face of robbery a sense of justice compelled some Mennonites to retake their property, but they appeared to have been just as prone to vengeful actions as their enemies.

Chapter four comprised a study of the instigating factors, motives and perpetrators behind the Eichenfeld massacre. Current interpretations of Eichenfeld were also examined and critiqued. I critiqued Natalya Venger's narrativization of Eichenfeld as primarily an ethnic pogrom with Makhno cited as personally responsible for the massacre. I also proposed re-narrativization of Eichenfeld and

the history of Mennonite-Makhnovist relations through the concept of revolutionary terror. Revolutionary terror is a concept I believe communicates the heart of the Makhnovist-Mennonite story by describing the evolution of events between 1917 and 1919. It articulates both the perpetrator's intent – be it grounded in justice or vengeance – and the victim's experience. Finally, it weaves together the collective narratives of Makhnovists and Mennonites into a larger multi-perspectival narrative.

I argued that the Eichenfeld massacre itself contains the tension between justice and vengeance. Makhno, an avowed atheist, gave permission to the evangelical tent missionaries to proselytize in his territory. It can only be assumed that this was a gesture intended on his part to be just, by allowing all groups to freely express their ideas. Yet even Makhno's assent did not prevent their murder. The massacre itself is given a veneer of "justice" by its apparent targeting of male landowners and their heirs. The sparing of women, children and the landless would have helped the perpetrators psychologically justify their actions. But in the end, the massacre, despite its flirtation with notions of justice, can only be characterized as a cruel and vengeful act of collective punishment. It is the logical conclusion of a narrative of revolutionary terror, which had evolved in the shape of a downward spiral throughout the civil war.

Land hunger and the embitterment of servitude clearly were recurring themes in the narratives of both Makhnovists and Mennonites. They were critical initiating factors in the logic of events but alone cannot account for 1919. When in 1917 the peasantry of Makhno's region first seized the land, it was accomplished

without bloodshed. Only after the added element of the colonists' embrace of the German occupation, and then the White army, did the peasantry respond with escalating levels of violence. With each new repossession of the land, the intensity of violence increased, reaching a crescendo in the massacres of 1919. By this is meant the logic of revolutionary terror and its downward spiral. Perhaps by recognizing this logic and listening to the stories of both Makhnovists and Mennonites a new narrative space may be created in the present, which rejects the vengeful impulses of the past in favour of a mutual pursuit for justice.

History can never perfectly recapture the past in all its human complexity. The individual, never mind a consortium of individuals, is infinitely complex and cannot be approached by the generalities and abstractions that history necessarily offers. As the famed Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin wrote, "Individuals cannot be grasped by thought, by reflection, or even by human speech."<sup>1</sup> There is a fundamental impenetrability of personality, which is perhaps what Voline intended when he spoke of Makhno's "enigma of personality." In this manner Makhno will remain eternally unknown. Yet this does not prevent fragments of the past from being heard in the present, or even informing our current actions. Bakunin also believed that the study of history – with its generalities and abstractions derived from human life – could ultimately be employed to service the emancipation of individuals in the present. The study of Makhnovist-Mennonite relations and its potential lessons for today points us in that direction.



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## Chapter 1 Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Russian as opposed to Ukrainian toponyms are used throughout this thesis. This decision is based on a number of careful considerations. First, both Makhnovist and Mennonite primary sources examined in this thesis, use Russian toponyms. Secondly, the inhabitants of southern Ukraine speak a dialect of Ukrainian that has substantial Russian influences. Historically the region has been heavily russified. In the villages “Russian” toponyms are still used today, for places like Gulyai-Pole. Although in very recent times toponyms derived from standard Ukrainian have come into more frequent use. See, Ludmilla Karyaka, e-mail to author, February 24, 2013. My use of Russian toponyms consciously evokes the cultural tensions of the region brought about by its colonial heritage. Makhno himself ethnically identified as Ukrainian but only wrote in Russian. Ultimately, it is the opinion of this author that it should be the native inhabitants of southern Ukraine, and not academics or politicians, to resolve the issue of Russian versus Ukrainian toponyms.

<sup>2</sup> For the historical basis of this legend see: Voline (Vsevolod M. Eichenbaum), “Contribution aux études sur l’énigme de la personnalité”, Vernon Richards Papers, Inventory No. 166, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 21-22; A.V. Skripnik, *Za zolotom Nestora Makhna* (Kiev: Jaroslaviv Val, 2011), <http://www.makhno.ru/lit/book19.php>

<sup>3</sup> Marie Marshall, “Svoboda abo smert’ (3),” September 10, 2010, <http://mairibheag.blogspot.com/2010/09/3.html>

<sup>4</sup> Makhno was an avid follower of the anarchist-communist Peter Kropotkin. In 1918 Makhno met with Kropotkin in Moscow. The two maintained contact and Makhno even supplied Kropotkin with food later in the civil war. In his memoirs Makhno’s remarks that Kropotkin’s philosophy “most closely approach the peasant mentality.” Nestor Makhno, *Under the Blows of the Counterrevolution* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2009), 179; 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> For the official program of the Makhnovists see: “Document No. 2: Draft Declaration of the (Makhnovist) Revolutionary Insurgent army of the Ukraine,” in Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy’s Cossack* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 368-380.

<sup>6</sup> Voline was a pseudonym, roughly translated as “free man”. His real name was Vsevolod M. Eichenbaum [1882-1945]. Voline was of a Ukrainian Jewish background with a lifelong history of active participation in the anarchist movement. He was involved in establishing the first workers’ soviets during the 1905 Revolution. During the civil war Voline was a major figure in the Ukrainian anarchist Nabat Confederation, which provided ideological guidance for the *Makhnovshchina*. He served directly with the Makhnovists on two occasions during the civil war. Most critically Voline was with Makhno from the summer of 1919 to January 1920, at which time the Bolsheviks arrested him. Voline managed to escape Soviet Russia and found exile in France where he wrote his monumental history of the Russian Revolution. In exile Voline had a public falling out with Makhno, only to

be reconciled on Makhno's deathbed. Posthumously Voline published the second and third volumes of Makhno's memoirs. For a detailed biography see: "V.M. Eikhenbaum (Volin): The Man and His Book," in Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 125-136.

<sup>7</sup> Voline, "Contribution aux études sur l'énigme de la personnalité", 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Alun Munslow, "Where Does History Come From?," *History Today* 52 (March 2002): 19.

<sup>10</sup> Yuri Lotman, *Universe of Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Mind* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2001), 221-222.

<sup>11</sup> Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), xviii.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1982), 1.

<sup>14</sup> James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Voline, *The Unknown Revolution* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990), 20.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel L Schacter, ed. *Memory Distortion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), x.

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper and Row Colophon Books, 1980), 33.

<sup>20</sup> Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, 38.

<sup>28</sup> The film has also been made into a two volume novel.

<sup>29</sup> This description of Gulyai-Pole is based upon my own travels through the region in the summer of 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (London: Polity Press, 2011), 38-39.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, "An Interview with Jacques Derrida," interview by Nikhil Padgaondar, May 1997, Universitat de Valencia, <http://mural.uv.es/mibosa/DerridaInterview2.htm>

<sup>32</sup> The Mennonite perspective is far less represented in cyberspace but noteworthy sites include the German language Chortitza.heimat.eu and the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.

<sup>33</sup> Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the efforts of Malcolm Archibald, Nick Heath, Yuriy Kravetz, Vyacheslav Azarov and Nestor McNab.

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<sup>34</sup> Black Cat Press and the Kate Sharpeley Library deserve special mention.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqV0-X5wH-Q>

<sup>36</sup> <http://libcom.org/history/pravda-simeon-batko-pravda-1877-1921>

<sup>37</sup> D.D. Johnston, "The Makhnovists and the Mennonites: War and Peace in the Ukrainian Revolution," *Libcom.org*, [http://libcom.org/history/makhnovists-mennonites-war-peace-ukrainian-civil-war#footnoteref24\\_yefp5wj](http://libcom.org/history/makhnovists-mennonites-war-peace-ukrainian-civil-war#footnoteref24_yefp5wj)

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> A website is currently is under construction by myself that will bring together a wide variety of Makhnovist and Mennonite documents in an interactive environment.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Hayden White, "The Historical Text As Literary Artifact", in Geoffrey Roberts, ed., *The History and Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001), 223.

<sup>42</sup> The Zaporozhian Cossacks were originally run-away serfs that populated southern Ukraine beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They developed a fiercely independent and militaristic culture defending it against all outside forces until the final destruction of their capital by Catherine the Great in 1775. The Zaporozhian leaders were exiled while some escaped to form the Kuban Host. Those Cossacks that remained were enserfed by Russian landlords. The inhabitants of the Gulyai-Polye region were awarded to one Shabelsky. Zaporozhian traditions remained very strong in left-bank Ukraine inspiring certain characteristics of the *Makhnovshchina*. For the relationship between the Zaporozhian Cossacks and the *Makhnovshchina* see V.M. Chop, "Problema tradycij zaporozhkoho kozactva v istoriyi makhnovs'koho rukhu," *Ukrayins'ke kozactvo u vitchyznyanij ta zahal'noyevropejs'kij istoriyi. Mizhnarodna naukova konferenciya* (Odesa: 2005) 69-70. Accessible online at: <http://www.makhno.ru/lit/chop/5.php>

<sup>43</sup> Nestor Makhno, "A Rebellious Youth," 33. From an unpublished English manuscript translation provided by Malcolm Archibald.

<sup>44</sup> Hayden White, "The burden of history", *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 124.

<sup>45</sup> John Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 15, 16.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

## **Chapter 2 Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> This stands in contrast to the Tsarist government's clear differentiation between *mennonisty* and *nemetskie kolonisty*.

<sup>2</sup> Stephane Roger, "Makhno: the Impressions of a French Journalist," trans. Malcolm Archibald. Accessible online: <http://libcom.org/history/makhno-impressions-french-journalist-st%C3%A9phane-roger>. The original article was published in *La Vague* (Paris) March 12, 1919 – May 9, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> *Gut* in German and *khutor* in Russian. These terms properly referred to a land holding of 500 or more dessiatins. Holding of 100-500 dessiatines were considered large farms. Henry Schapansky, "On the Origins of the Mennonite Estates in Russia," *Preservings* 27 (2007): 35.

<sup>4</sup> Voline, *The Unknown Revolution* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990), 701.

<sup>5</sup> Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Nestor Makhno, *Rebellious Youth*, translated by Malcolm Archibald, unpublished typescript, 30-34. The typescript generously provided by Archibald is scheduled for publication with Black Cat Press. Archibald's translation is from a Russian version of Makhno's article "Moia avtobiografiia" reproduced in Alexandre Skirda, *Miatezhnaia iunost'* (Paris: Gromada, 2006). The original article was published serially in the American Russian language periodical *Amerikanskie izvestiia* (*New York*) in 1924. The article republished as "Mon Autobiographie," *La libertaire* (Paris), nos. 50-75 (1926); and as "Meine Autobiographie," *Der freie Arbeiter*, nos. 34, 48 (1927).

<sup>7</sup> Helmut Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, 132.

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, Arshinov's source material was captured by the Cheka on numerous occasions and has yet to emerge from the Russian archives. Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Voline's unpublished writings further explore Makhno's darker side, but fail to provide any verifiable accusations. See Voline, "Contribution aux etudes sur l'énigme de la personnalité," Vernon Richards Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

<sup>10</sup> Galina tragically destroyed Makhno's papers during the Nazi occupation of France. Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno*, 398.

<sup>11</sup> Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, 207-216; Voline, *Unknown Revolution*, 697-700; Nestor Makhno, *The Ukrainian Revolution*, 44.

<sup>12</sup> Nestor Makhno, "The Makhnovshchina and Anti-Semitism", *Dyelo Truda* 30-31 (November-December 1927): 15-18, reproduced in Alexandre Skirda, ed., *The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays by Nestor Makhno*, 32-38; For an examination of the evidence in favour of Makhno see Victor Peters, *Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist* (Winnipeg: Echo Books, 1970), 93-94; Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno*, 338-341.

<sup>13</sup> Michal Przyborowski and Dariusz Wierzchoś, *Nestor Machno w Polsce* (Poznań: Oficyna Wydawn Bractwa "Trojka", 2012), 91. The authors' account is based on the official police report, AP Bydgoszcz, Okręgowa Komenda Policji Państwowej w Toruniu, sygn. 157/303, k. 125.

<sup>14</sup> S.N. Semonov, "Pod chernym znamenem, ili zhizn' i smert' Nestora Makhno" *Roman-Gazeta* 4 (1993): 178-179. Accessible online: <http://www.makhno.ru/lit/book10.php>

<sup>15</sup> It could not have impacted the account of his youth, as that piece was published a year prior to the arrest. Whether his later memoirs were tailored in any way to rebut the charges leveled against him can only be speculated upon.

<sup>16</sup> V.N. Litvinov, "An Unsolved Mystery – The 'Diary of Makhno's Wife'," translated by Malcolm Archibald. Accessible online:



<http://www.nestormakhno.info/english/litvinov-diary.htm>. First published in the journal *Obshchina*, Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists, Moscow (1990), No. 43, p. 6-9.

<sup>17</sup> Galina disclosed in an interview with a local Gulyai-Polyan historian that she had indeed composed the diary in a notebook bearing her friend's name. A.V. Shubin, *Anarkhistskii sotsial'nyi eksperiment: Ukraina i Ispaniia, 1917-1939 g.* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, In-t vseobshchei istorii, 1998), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Both the director of the Gulyai-Pole Museum and a living relative of Makhno expressed to me a firm personal belief in the diary's authenticity. Dr. Felix Schnell, who has consulted the original diary in the Moscow archives, likewise considers it authentic. Dr. Felix Schnell, e-mail message to author, February 7, 2011. The December 1, 1990, issue of *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* published a story entitled "A visit to Makhno's daughter". When the reporter, A. Votchel', asked Yelena what she thought of Galina's diary, which had just been re-published, she replied: "What's written there is all true. Mama said so many times. And the photos show mama and papa the way they were in real life, not the caricatures depicted, especially papa, in movies." Malcolm Archibald, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Since the Makhnovists did not make a distinction between Mennonite and German colonists, it is fair to assume that the Makhnovist narrative for both types of colonists is interchangeable. Therefore, this chapter examines Makhnovist accounts of Mennonite and German colonists, with the intention of determining how Makhnovists broadly understood these colonist neighbours.

<sup>20</sup> This story is taken from, N. Sukhogorskaya, "Gulyai-Pole in 1918," *Nestor Makhno Archive*, February 2002,

<http://www.nestormakhno.info/english/personal/personal2.htm>. This incident is also reenacted in the opening scene of the tv miniseries *The Nine Lives of Nestor Makhno* [2004].

<sup>21</sup> Nestor's parents were Ivan Mikhnenko (later Makhno) and Evdokia Perederi. Ivan died when Makhno was an infant. His siblings were Polykarp, Emilyan, Savva and Gregory. Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>22</sup> While officially a village, Makhno is correct to describe Gulyai-Pole as a small city. Ninety kilometers east of Alexandrovsk, with a population of 16,151 by 1913 the town was the capital of its own *volost* [county]. It could boast of two orthodox churches, a synagogue, three schools, two flourmills and two agricultural implement factories. The town itself was serviced by the Gaichur station, seven kilometres west, a key junction along the Sinelnikovo-Chaplino-Berdyansk rail line.

Throughout much of the civil war Gulyai-Pole bore the brunt of battles along the southern front, exchanging hands some eighteen times. Skirda, *Anarchy's Cossack*, 17; Michael Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War* (London: MacMillan Press, 1982), xix; Victor Peters, *Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist* (Winnipeg: Echo Press, 1970), 16-18.

<sup>23</sup> Makhno, *Rebellious Youth*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Makhno, *Rebellious Youth*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Arshinov's account of Makhno's childhood was the first to furnish these details. It is likely he based this information on interviews with Makhno: "At 12 he left school and family to take a job. He worked as a farmhand on the estates of nobles and on farms of German *kulaks*. Already at this time, when he was 14 or 15, he felt a strong hatred toward the exploiters and dreamed of the way he would some day get even with them..." Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Makhno, *A Rebellious Youth*, 3

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 4

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> J.A. Loewen, and W.L. Prieb, "The Abuse of Power Among Mennonites in South Russia 1718-1919," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 14 (1996): 21.

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed history of the Schönfeld settlement by one of its inhabitants see Gerhard Töws, *Schönfeld: Werde- und Opfergang einer deutschen Siedlung in der Ukraine* (Winnipeg: Rundschau Publishing House, 1939).

<sup>34</sup> Reger and Plett, *Diese Steine*, 348; Schapansky, "Origins of Mennonite Estates," 37.

<sup>35</sup> Helmut Huebert, *Mennonite Estates in Imperial Russia*, (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 2005), 188-189. Prior to the estate's division its average income was 100,000R.

<sup>36</sup> James Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 3 (1985): 11. A *dessiatine* was the most commonly used unit of area in Russia during this period. One *dessiatine* is equivalent to 2.7 acres or 1.1 hectares.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Darch, *The Makhnovshchina: Ideology, Nationalism, and Peasant Insurgency in Twentieth Century Ukraine* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bradford, 1994), 144.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 147.

<sup>41</sup> Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle", 26-27

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Makhno, *Rebellious Youth*, 5-6. There is now a small display dedicated to the Krieger family, who owned the plant at which Makhno worked, as part of the Makhno exhibit at the Guylai-Polye Regional Musuem.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Belash, *Dorogi do Nestora Makhno* (Kiev: REC "Prose", 1993), 13, note 36.

<sup>46</sup> Makhno, *Rebellious Youth*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Makhno's mother intervened with the authorities arguing on the basis of his young age. Although had his true birth date been known it is likely Makhno would have hanged. For Makhno's account of his time on death row see, Makhno, *Rebellious Youth*, 16-21.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> Makhno, *Russian Revolution in Ukraine*, xi; 52.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 30, 31. More accurately the translation should read *volost* and not *raion*. *Volosts*, after the abolition of serfdom in 1861, were administrative units of local peasant self-rule. A number of peasant *mirs*, or “communes”, combined to compose a *volost*. A *volost* assembly consisted of elected delegates from the *mirs*. The assembly in turn elected an elder [*starshina*] and a court of justice. In the 1920s the administrative term *raion* replaced *volost*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, 60. Peasant congresses from the Ekaterinslav, Tauride, Poltava, and Kharkov *gubernias* followed the example set by Gulyai-Pole.

<sup>56</sup> Makhno, *Russian Revolution in Ukraine*, 68.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Letkemann, “Mennonite Victims of Revolution, Anarchy, Civil War, Disease and Famine, 1917-1923,” *Mennonite Historian* 6 (1998), <http://old.mbconf.ca/old/historian/98-06/feature-2.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War*, 120. The Klassen estate was located near Silberfeld neighbouring the Neufeld estate. In early 1919 part of the Klassen estate was renamed the “Rosa Luxembourg Commune” in honour the murdered German revolutionary. For more on the communes see Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Makhno, *Russian Revolution in Ukraine*, 210.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>62</sup> For a first hand account describing the difference between anarchist and non-anarchist redistributions see Ossip Tsebry, *Memories of a Makhnovist Partisan* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 1993), 11.

<sup>63</sup> Makhno, *Russian Revolution in Ukraine*, 187.

<sup>64</sup> Taras Hunczak, “Ukraine Under Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi,” in Taras Hunczak, ed., *The Ukraine, 1917-1921: A Study in Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 71-75. For a general study of the German occupation of Ukraine see O.S. Fedyshyn, *Germany’s Drive to the East and the Ukrainian Revolution, 1917-1918* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971). For a focused study of the Ukrainian peasant rebellion and its various manifestations see Arthur E. Adams, “The Great Ukrainian Jacquerie,” in *The Ukraine, 1917-1921: A Study in Revolution*, 247-270.

<sup>65</sup> Makhno, *Ukrainian Revolution*, 18-22.

<sup>66</sup> A. Herman, “Grazhdanskaya Voina,” *Nemtsy Rossii*, [http://rusdeutsch-panorama.ru/jencik\\_statja.php?mode=view&site\\_id=34&own\\_menu\\_id=4131](http://rusdeutsch-panorama.ru/jencik_statja.php?mode=view&site_id=34&own_menu_id=4131).

<sup>67</sup> Makhno, *Ukrainian Revolution*, 92-98. *Bat’ko* is a traditional Ukrainian title indicating paternalistic respect and authority. In the context of the civil war it was a title commonly given to local military leaders. There is no direct English translation that communicates the title’s full meaning but it is most frequently translated as “little father”.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>72</sup> B. Malynov'skyi, "Zahin N. Makhna u druhii polovyni zhovtnia – na pochatku lystopada 1918 r.," *Hurzhiivs'ki istorychni chytannia. Vypusk 3* (2009): 357. The population at the time of the attack was 75.

<sup>73</sup> Makhno, *Ukrainian Revolution*, 121.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 134-135.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 173. *Tachankas* were spring-loaded wagons originally developed by German colonists. The Makhnovists famously loaded machine-guns on the back of these wagons thus creating improvised mobile artillery units.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>82</sup> Alternate narratives of the battle of Dibrivka are present in Makhnovist literature. Arshinov presents a highly romanticized version of events, which excises the tension between vengeance and justice found in Makhno's narrative. See Arshinov, *Makhnovist Movement*, 65-68. By contrast, Belash accuses Makhno of celebrating the destruction of Bolshe-Mikholaivka in the belief that it would encourage the peasantry to join his insurgency. See Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 42-44. Belash's account is apparently based on Chubenko, but Chubenko's memoirs do not mention the battle. Interestingly, Voline's history, which follows Arshinov so closely, does not mention this battle nor how Makhno received his title of *bat'ko*.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Letkemann, "Mennonite Victims of Revolution, Anarchy, Civil War, Disease and Famine, 1917-1923," *Mennonite Historian* 6 (1998):

<http://old.mbconf.ca/old/historian/98-06/feature-2.html>. Letkemann uses the Julian calendar dates October 26 to December 5.

<sup>84</sup> German toponyms are used for Mennonite settlements. For example Chortitza refers specifically to the Mennonite colony but Khortitsa refers to the broader region of that name.

<sup>85</sup> Klippenstein, "The Selbstschutz," 10.

<sup>86</sup> Arshinov, *Makhnovist History*, 91.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 94-95.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>89</sup> For a description of the joint White-*Selbstschutz* actions see L. Klippenstein, "The Selbstschutz: A Mennonite Army in Ukraine, 1918-1919," 10-12.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>91</sup> Arshinov, *Makhnovist History*, 91.

<sup>92</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 31.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*.

- <sup>95</sup> Silbertal was located ten mile north of Gulyai-Pole. It was established in 1880 and had a population of 262 in 1918. "Zilbertal," *Nemtsii Rossii*, [http://rusdeutsch-panorama.ru/article.php?mode=view&site\\_id=34&own\\_menu\\_id=26806](http://rusdeutsch-panorama.ru/article.php?mode=view&site_id=34&own_menu_id=26806).
- <sup>96</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 128. The memoirs of Alexei Chubenko, a member of the Makhnovist Army Staff, confirm Belash's account, see Danilov and Shanin, *Nestor Makhno: krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine, 1918-1921 : dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005), 739-740.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 216.
- <sup>98</sup> Danilov and Shanin, *Nestor Makhno*, 740.
- <sup>99</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 357.
- <sup>100</sup> Voline, *The Unknown Revolution*, 703.
- <sup>101</sup> Arshinov, *Makhnovist Movement*, 148.
- <sup>102</sup> V. Azarov, *Kontrrazvedka: The Story of the Makhnovist Intelligence Service*, (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2008), 26.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 30.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 11.
- <sup>105</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 349.
- <sup>106</sup> Arshinov writes that the RMC was established at the Second Regional Congress of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents in February 1919. It contained delegates from 32 districts of the Ekaterinoslav and Tauride provinces and was to "carry out all the economic, political, social and military decisions made at the Congress, and thus was in a sense, the supreme executive organ of the movement." Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, 96.
- <sup>107</sup> Cited in Azarov, *Kontrrazvedka*, 30.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 29.
- <sup>109</sup> Voline, *Unknown Revolution*, 705.
- <sup>110</sup> Voline, "Contribution aux études sur l'énigme de la personnalité", 13.
- <sup>111</sup> Ida Mett, "Series I. Correspondence in French, Ida Mett, 1967," Victor Peter Papers.
- <sup>112</sup> Ossip Tsebry, *Memoirs of a Makhnovist Partisan* (London: Kate Sharpeley Library, 1993), 5.
- <sup>113</sup> Galina Kuzmenko, "An Answer to the Article "Pomer Makhno" in *Nova Pora*, September 9, 1934, Detroit, MI," *Probuzhdenie* 50/51 (September-October, 1934: 17-18. Reproduced and translated into English in Victor Peters, *Nestor Makhno*, 120-123.
- <sup>114</sup> Mark Mratchnyi, "Mark Mratchnyi to Peter Arshinov, September 13, 1925" Mark Mratchnyi Papers, Box 1 Folder 1: Correspondence with Petr Arshinov, Special Collections, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. Responses from Arshinov and Makhno are contained in the same collection in which they refute Mratchnyi's charges.
- <sup>115</sup> Boris Yelensky, "In the Social Tempest: Memoirs of the Russian Revolution," Boris Yelensky Papers, Folder 100-101, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands. This memoir is accessible online: <http://libcom.org/library/memoirs-russian-revolution-boris-yelensky>.

<sup>116</sup> Galina Kuzmenko, *Dnevnyk G.A. Kuz'menko: 19 fevral' 1920 – 28 marta* (Moscow: Terra – “Bookstore – RTR”, 1996). <http://www.makhno.ru/lit/Kuzmenko/lit4.php>. For translated excerpts of the relevant dates in Golik's diary see Jonathan Daly and Leonid Trofimov, eds. *Russia in War and Revolution, 1914-1922: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009), 259-261.

<sup>117</sup> Voline, *Unknown Revolution*, 571.

<sup>118</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 607.

### **Chapter 3 Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Description accompanying the clock at the Winnipeg Mennonite Heritage Center.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Lepp, “Field Notes of A Mennonite Pilgrim,” 37. [home.ica.net/~walterunger/Field-Notes-2004.doc](http://home.ica.net/~walterunger/Field-Notes-2004.doc).

<sup>3</sup> For information regarding Makhno's death see Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno*, 285.

<sup>4</sup> Another example has Makhno die of “excessive drink.” Helmut Huebert, *Events and People* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1999), 162. There is no evidence to support this conclusion and is contradicted by those closest to Makhno before his death. For a rebuttal of this myth see “Letter from Ida Mett to Victor Peters,” Victor Peters Papers, Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>5</sup> A partial exception is Victor Peters' biography of Makhno. However, despite his use of Makhnovist sources he does not provide much analysis of the movement's ideology or motivations. Victor Peters, *Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist* (Winnipeg: Echo Books, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Cornelius J. Dyck, *Introduction to Mennonite History* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 1993), 186. Dyck further asserts that, “in [Makhno's] opinion [the Mennonites] had underpaid him and he was now collecting his wages with the help of thousands of peasants.”

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard P. Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment* (Lodi: Gerhard P. Schroeder, 1974), xiii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 41; Josephine Chipman, “The Mennonite Selbstschutz,” (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1988), 89; Chortitza resident and historian David G. Rempel similarly argues that the *Makhnovshchina* was not motivated by philosophical anarchism, accusing the historian Paul Avrich of being a Makhnovist “apologist” for his work on the anarchism of the movement. David G. Rempel, *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 185-186.

<sup>9</sup> In 1918 Makhno expropriated 250,000 rubles from the local bank in Gulyai-Pole of which a portion was used to establish a home for war orphans. Skirda, *Nestor Makhno*, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Schroeder records being elected as a delegate for a congress in Alexandrovsk, but appears unaware of the Makhnovists' role in organizing these elections, attributing it exclusively to the efforts of the “workers from Alexandrovsk and Chortitza”. Schroeder insists: “The [Makhnovists] had no interest in establishing any form of

formal government on the ruins of the old; their main concern was to maintain a state of anarchy as long as possible." Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 105.

<sup>11</sup> For further information on Makhnovist Mennonites see, David G. Rempel, *A Mennonite Family*, 217; 228; 242; 248; Johann G. Rempel, "Mennonite Revolutionaries in the Khortitza Settlement", *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 10 (1992): 70-86.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Alexandre Skirda's assesses the accusations of Makhnovist banditry as follows: "It is consequently noticeable that none of the charges of banditry aired by this one or that, stands up to a serious examination of the facts. In spite of all that, how are they to be explained? Perhaps in terms of the age-old fear that the rural bourgeoisie and squire-archy felt of the dark, nameless peasant mass, these 'yokels' whose wrathful vengeance they rightfully feared." Skirda, *Nestor Makhno*, 337.

<sup>13</sup> The translator Al Reimer is worthy of interest himself. Reimer is a well respected Mennonite novelist and the author of *My Harp Is Turned to Mourning*, which details the life of Russian Mennonites during the civil war. This novel is unique in that certain portions of it are narrated in the voice of Makhno himself.

<sup>14</sup> Lohrenz did however write a fictional novel about a young Mennonite who joins the *Selbstschutz*. See Gerhard Lohrenz, *The Fateful Years, 1913-1923* (Winnipeg: Lohrenz, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> An exception to this rule is the interviews with Selbstschützer conducted for the documentary *And When They Shall Ask*. While I do not cite this source directly it is an important source for my general commentary on the *Selbstschutz*.

<sup>16</sup> Take for example, Jakob Kroeker's address to the World Mennonite Congress in 1925: "The sickle was often more important to us than the sanctuary, possessing the earth more worthwhile than the heritage of the saints in heaven. No longer walking with God, we transferred our allegiance from Christ to a Christian church. Without fellowship with the source of power that comes from God, we contented ourselves with the cultivation of our own powers." Cited in Friesen, *Defence of Privilege*, 497.

<sup>17</sup> For example, John B. Toews writes "In the end the Selbstschutz contributed to more death than it prevented." John B. Toews, "The Origins and Activities of the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* in Ukraine (1918-1919)," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 46 (January, 1972): 39.

<sup>18</sup> James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Palij, *Nestor Makhno*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 47. In 1817 a group of 600 peasants from Gulyai-Pole refused to work on the nobles' estates arguing they were Cossacks who had been unjustly enserfed in 1795.

<sup>22</sup> For the most exhaustive work on this period see Leonard Friesen, *Rural Revolutions in Southern Ukraine: Peasants, Nobles and Colonists, 1774-1905* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Cornelius Krahn and H. Leonard Sawatzky, "Old Colony Mennonites." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/O533ME.html>.

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- <sup>24</sup> Rempel, David G. "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48 (1973): 259-308
- <sup>25</sup> Gerhard Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed*, 27.
- <sup>26</sup> For an English copy of the *Privilegium* see, Rempel, *A Mennonite Family*, 263-265.
- <sup>27</sup> Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, Peoplehood*, 88.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 91.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>30</sup> James Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 3 (1985): 15-16.
- <sup>31</sup> David Staples, "On Civilizing the Nogai," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74 (April 2000): 229-256; Helmut Huebert, *Mennonite Estates in Imperial Russia*, 294; James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 93.
- <sup>32</sup> Gerhard Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed* (Winnipeg: Gerhard Lohrenz, 1976), 17.
- <sup>33</sup> Reina C. Neufeldt, "We are Aware of Our Contradictions: Russlaender Narratives of Loss and the Reconstruction of Peoplehood," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 27 (2009): 132.
- <sup>34</sup> Cited in James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 83.
- <sup>35</sup> Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle," 17.
- <sup>36</sup> For an account of the civil war through the eyes of a young female servant see Anna Baerg, *Diary of Anna Baerg* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1985).
- <sup>37</sup> Dietrich Neufeld, *A Russian Dance of Death* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977), 77.
- <sup>38</sup> Gerhard Lohrenz, *Storm-Tossed*, 50.
- <sup>39</sup> For example see the reports in "Ueber die schaurige Mordgeschichte bei Schönfeld," *Friedenstimme* 74 (December 4, 1918), 7.
- <sup>40</sup> "Unsere Anarchisten," *Friedenstimme* 18 (May 4, 1918) 5.
- <sup>41</sup> Lohrenz, *Storm-Tossed*, 53.
- <sup>42</sup> H.B. Wiens, "Series II. Correspondence in German, H.B. Wiens, 1963," Victor Peters Papers.
- <sup>43</sup> Makhno himself was called "little father" in a manner that positioned him as a type of anti-tsar, retaining aspects of the paternal leader but turning the idea of a tsar above the people on its head. One of the, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, slogans amongst Makhnovists was "Makhno is our God, Makhno is our Tsar, from Gulyai-Pole to Pologi." Ivan Kushnirenko and Volodymyr Zhylyns'kyi, *Hop, Kume, ne Zhury's' ...* (Zaporozhye: Dniprovs'kyi Metalurh, 2008), 5. Schroeder noted this connection remarking, "soon he was dubbed as their 'Batjko Makhno', i.e. their 'Little Father Makhno', not entirely unlike many of the peasants had formerly regarded their emperor as 'Batiushka Tsar', i.e. 'Little Father Tsar'." Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 43.
- <sup>44</sup> The Mennonite Brethren were especially known for their efforts to proselytize amongst the Orthodox. Some General Conference Mennonites feared the MBs activities directly threatened the continuance of the *privilegium*. James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood*, 129.
- <sup>45</sup> Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed*, 22.
- <sup>46</sup> Urry, *Politics and Peoplehood*, 131.
- <sup>47</sup> Neufeld, *Dance of Death*, 78.



- <sup>48</sup> For a detailed study of the 1915 Moscow riot see Eric Lohr, "Patriotic Violence and the State: The Moscow Riots of May 1915," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4 (Summer 2003): 607-626. The riot caused eight deaths, forty injuries and 70 million rubles worth of damage.
- <sup>49</sup> Peter J. Dyck, *Troubles and Triumphs* (Springstein, MB: Dyck, 1981), 13.
- <sup>50</sup> "Aus deutschen Ansiedlungen," *Friedensstimme*, August 12, 1917, 7.
- <sup>51</sup> Peter J. Dyck, *Troubles and Triumphs*, 23.
- <sup>52</sup> Lohrenz, *Stormed Tossed*, 55-56.
- <sup>53</sup> John B. Toews, "Origins and Activities of the Mennonite *Selbstschutz*," 15.
- <sup>54</sup> Al Reimer, "Appendix B: The German Occupation and the Role of the Mennonite Self-Defense" in Dietrich Neufeld, *Russian Dance of Death*, 133.
- <sup>55</sup> A similar argument was made by some Lutheran German colonists who insisted they were ethnically Swiss.
- <sup>56</sup> James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood*, 132.
- <sup>57</sup> For a detailed study of Dutch versus German Mennonite identity constructions see Abraham Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2006): 192-250, 271-302.
- <sup>58</sup> Peter J. Dyck, *Troubles and Triumphs*, 22.
- <sup>59</sup> Neufeld, *Russian Dance of Death*, 133.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Friesen, *Defense of Privilege*, 466.
- <sup>62</sup> Cited in John B. Toews, *Czars, Mennonites and Soviets* (Newton, KA: Faith and Life Press, 1982), 84.
- <sup>63</sup> For example see "Die Bande Machno," *Friedensstimme* 70 (November 19, 1918), 4; "Über die Schaurige Mordgeschichte bei Schönfeld," *Friedensstimme* 74 (December 4, 1918), 7; "Wie man sich bettet, so liegt man," *Friedensstimme* 75 (December 7, 1918), 7. The January 12, 1919 issue counted sixty-eight murders as a result of the autumn raids. *Friedensstimme* 21 (January 12, 1919), 7.
- <sup>64</sup> "Ein bewaffneter Überfall und ein grauenhafter Mord," *Friedensstimme* 65 (November 2, 1918), 7; J. Doerksen, "Aus Deutschen Ansiedlungen," *Friedensstimme* 71 (November 23, 1918), 7.
- <sup>65</sup> "Von der Bande Machno," *Friedensstimme*, November 23, 1918, 7.
- <sup>66</sup> John B. Toews, *Czars, Mennonites and Soviets*, 84-85.
- <sup>67</sup> For one of the first reports of rape by Makhnovists see "Das Räuberwesen in dem Alexandrowsker Kreise setzt sich fort," *Friedensstimme* 78 (December 18, 1918), 8.
- <sup>68</sup> Gerhard Lohrenz, *Fire Over Sagradovka* (Steinbach, Gerhard Lohrenz, 1983), 33.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 33.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34.
- <sup>71</sup> Quoted in Klippenstein, "Selbstschutz," 8.
- <sup>72</sup> *Friedensstimme* first mentions the *Selbstschutz* in its May 18, 1918 issue.
- <sup>73</sup> See "Lichtenau Conference June 30, July 1, 2, 1918," in John B. Toews, ed., *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975), 404-427.
- <sup>74</sup> *Friedensstimme*, July 27, 1918, 4-6. Reports of "compulsory military service" for German colonists and the establishment of armed self-defence units in Sagradovka.

- <sup>75</sup> Cited by John B. Toews, "Origins and Activities of the Mennonite Selbstschutz," 15.
- <sup>76</sup> "What You Sow, You Shall Reap," *Friedensstimme*, December 18, 1919, 7.
- <sup>77</sup> "Aus deutschen Ansiedelungen," *Friedensstimme*, July 2, 1918, 6.
- <sup>78</sup> Makhno, *Ukrainian Revolution*, 19-20.
- <sup>79</sup> Quoted in Toews, *Czars, Mennonites and Soviets*, 82.
- <sup>80</sup> James Urry and Helmut-Harry Loewen, "Protecting Mammon," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 9 (1991): 45.
- <sup>81</sup> Jack Dueck, "Breaking Bread in a Barn," *Canadian Mennonite* (April 27, 2009): 14.
- <sup>82</sup> Anne Konrad, *Red Quarter Moon* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 116.
- <sup>83</sup> Harold S. Bender, "Theology of Martyrdom," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1959.  
<http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/T546.html>.
- <sup>84</sup> Robert Friedmann, "Theology of Martyrdom," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1953.  
<http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M37856.html>.
- <sup>85</sup> *Friedensstimme*, January 24, 1918; September 14, 1919; December 14, 1919.
- <sup>86</sup> A. Kroeker, "Unsere Befreiung," *Friedensstimme*, April 27, 1918, 1.
- <sup>87</sup> Pacifists employed this same argument of collective sinfulness provoking divine punishment during the 1870s military service crisis. See Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, Peoplehood*, 97.
- <sup>88</sup> N.H., "Ihr sollt euch nicht Schätze sammeln," *Friedensstimme*, November 2, 1918, 2.
- <sup>89</sup> "Chortitzer Gebiet, August 1919," *Friedensstimme*, September 4, 1919, 3.
- <sup>90</sup> C.C. Orosander, "Warum geschieht uns solches?" *Friedensstimme*, December 21, 1919.
- <sup>91</sup> Neufeld, *A Russian Dance of Death*, 79-80.
- <sup>92</sup> Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed*, 22.
- <sup>93</sup> "Ein mennonitischer Revolutionär," *Friedensstimme*, January 24, 1918, 8.
- <sup>94</sup> Cited in Reina C. Neufeldt, "We are Aware of Our Contradictions," 134-135.
- <sup>95</sup> A notable exception is Dietrich Neufeld who offers insightful commentary on the socio-economic roots of the 1919 massacres. See Neufeld's analysis of the Sagradovka massacre in Neufeld, *Dance of Death*, 65-88.
- <sup>96</sup> Dietrich Neufeld, *A Russian Dance of Death*, 18.
- <sup>97</sup> Gerhard Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 71.
- <sup>98</sup> Evelyn Roden and Margie Koop, "Janzens: From Tragedy in Russia to a New Life in Canada," *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian* 16 (October 2010): 26-27.
- <sup>99</sup> GRANDMA 7: Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry, "Abram J. Janzen #365724", California Mennonite Historical Society; Yu. P. Khyaz'kov, *Zaporiz'ka Oblast: Historico-Geographical and Toponomical Dictionary* (Zaporizhzhya: 2004), 179-180; Helmut Huebert, *Mennonite Estates in Imperial Russia* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 2005), 188-189.
- <sup>100</sup> Roden and Koop, "Janzens," 26.
- <sup>101</sup> Anna Goerz (nee Neufeld), "Series II. Correspondence in German, Anna Goerz, n.d.," Victor Peters Papers 1966-1973, Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard

University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The stay is also briefly mentioned in A. Chubenko's memoirs. See, "Appendix II: From the Diary of Alexei Chubenko" in Nestor Makhno, *Ukrainian Revolution*, 197.

<sup>102</sup> Anna Goerz (nee Neufeld), "Series II: Anna Goerz, n.d.," Victor Peters Papers.

<sup>103</sup> Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 45-46.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>105</sup> Neufeld, *A Russian Dance of Death*, 31.

<sup>106</sup> H.B. Wiens, "Series II. Correspondence in German, H.B. Wiens, 1963," Victor Peters Papers; Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 118-121.

<sup>107</sup> Neufeld, *Russian Dance of Death*, 45.

<sup>108</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 55.

<sup>109</sup> For example, see how a note from Wiens dissuaded Pravda from following through with an execution. H.B. Wiens, "Series II. Correspondence in German, H.B. Wiens, 1963," Victor Peters Papers.

<sup>110</sup> H.B. Wiens, "What I experienced in the difficult period 1917-1918 and how God has protected me," Series II. Correspondence in German, Victor Peters Papers.

<sup>111</sup> Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 93.

<sup>112</sup> Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 100-101; Rempel, *A Mennonite Family*, 221.

#### **Chapter 4 Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Historians V. Danilov and T. Shanin published a one thousand page volume of Makhnovist documents, many previously unseen from the Russian and Ukrainian archives. None of the documents make explicit mention of the massacres. See V. Danilov and T. Shanin, eds., *Nestor Makhno: Krest'yanskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine. 1918-1921, Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For the typical Soviet perspective on Makhno see "Chapter 5: The Anarchist Federation Group. The Nabat Group and Nestor Makhno. The Illegal Anarchists," in E. Yaroslavsky, *History of Anarchism in Russia* (New York: International Publishers, 1937). Interestingly the Soviets never accused the Makhnovists of atrocities against German colonists. This is perhaps explained by the fact that the Soviets equally considered the colonists to be class enemies.

<sup>3</sup> The paper was published in an edited version as "The Eichenfeld Massacre - October 26, 1919," *Preservings*, 18: 2001, 25-31.

<sup>4</sup> Even the memorial at Eichenfeld uses the old style date of October 26.

<sup>5</sup> N. Venger, "Jewish and Mennonite Pogroms in South Ukraine: An Inquiry into the Typology and Semantics of the Events of 1919," 10. Unpublished typescript translated by Malcolm Archibald. For the original in Ukrainian see N.V. Venger, *Yevreis' kit a menonits' ki pohromy na pivdni ukrayini: do pytannya pro typologiyu ta semantyku podii 1919 r.*, *Humanitarnyi zhurnal* 3-4 (lito-osin' 2011): 138-147.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 357.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 313.

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- <sup>9</sup> Neufeld, *Dance of Death*, 12, 14.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 25.
- <sup>11</sup> David G. Rempel's account of the same events further corroborates this analysis of the dates. See, Rempel, 221-222.
- <sup>12</sup> Marianne Janzen, "The Story of Eichenfeld," 6. Unpublished manuscript in author's possession.
- <sup>13</sup> Letter from Cornelius Heinrichs to Marianne Janzen, 3. In author's possession.
- <sup>14</sup> *Friedensstimme*, September 18, 1919, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> Julius Loewen, *Jasykowo : ein mennonitisches Siedlungsschicksal am Dnjepr* (Winnipeg: E. Loewen, 1967), 41.
- <sup>16</sup> Heinrich H. Heinrichs' Diary Excerpt, Personal Files of Marianne Janzen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- <sup>17</sup> Marianne Janzen, "Story of Eichenfeld," 8.
- <sup>18</sup> Julius Loewen, *Jasykowo*, 44.
- <sup>19</sup> Marianne Janzen, "Story of Eichenfeld," 8.
- <sup>20</sup> Cornelius and Margaret Heinrichs to Marianne Janzen, n.d.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>22</sup> Arshinov, *Makhnovist Movement*, 148.
- <sup>23</sup> Peter Letkemann, "Mennonite Victims of Revolution, Anarchy, Civil War, Disease and Famine, 1917-1923," *Mennonite Historian* 6 (1998): <http://old.mbconf.ca/old/historian/98-06/feature-2.html>. See Belash's description of the typhus epidemic in Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 383. According to Belash, Makhno himself was delirious with typhoid by early January. Belash, 417.
- <sup>24</sup> Malet, *Nestor Makhno*, 91-92.
- <sup>25</sup> Rempel, *Mennonite Family*, 222.
- <sup>26</sup> Like Makhno, Ataman Nikifor Grigoriev led an independent insurgent army during the civil war. He was known for his shifting alliances and anti-semitism. His troops murdered 3000 Jews in Elizavetgrad in May 1919. In July 1919 Grigoriev attempted to recruit Makhno for an uprising against the Reds. At a meeting between the two leaders on January 27, Makhno had Grigoriev publicly executed for crimes against the Jewish community. See Nestor Makhno, "The Makhnovshchina and Anti-Semitism," in Nestor Makhno, *The Struggle Against the State*, 35-37; Peter Arshinov, *Makhnovist Movement*, 138-140.
- <sup>27</sup> Danilov and Shanin, *Nestor Makhno: Krest'yanskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 257.
- <sup>28</sup> From an archival document cited in Mikhailo Koval'chuk, *Bez peremozhstv* (Kiev: Vydavnychi Dim Stylos 2012), 148.
- <sup>29</sup> Voline, *Unknown Revolution*, 644-645.
- <sup>30</sup> Azarov, *Kontrrazvedka*, 24.
- <sup>31</sup> Mikhailo Kovalchuk, "Borot'ba povstankoi armii N. Makhna proty bilohrafdiis'kykh viis'k generala A. Denikina v lystopadi – hrudni 1919 r.," *Kievska Starovyna* 4 (2010): 30.
- <sup>32</sup> Nestor Makhno, *Memoires et Écrits*, ed. Alexandre Skirda (Paris: Ivrea, 2009), 484.
- <sup>33</sup> Koval'chuk, *Bez peremozhstv*, 148. See also Makhno's orders on army discipline between October 9 and November 18, 1919 in Makhno, *Memoires et Ecrits*, 484-486.
- <sup>34</sup> Danilov and Shanin, *Nestor Makhno: Krest'yanskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 261-262.

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<sup>35</sup> RPAU (m) stands for “Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine (Makhnovist)”.

<sup>36</sup> Azarov, *Kontrrazvedka*, 25. The original document is reproduced in full in Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno*, 368-380.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 29. Azarov cites A. Shubin, *Anarchiya – mat’ poryadka*, (Moscow, 2005), 271.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Azarov, *Kontrrazvedka*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> Rempel, *Mennonite Family*, 230-231.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

<sup>42</sup> Neufeld, *Russian Dance of Death*, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 115.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>45</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 370. This scenario and the arrival of the Makhnovists in Jasykovo is likewise described in Julius Loewen, *Jasykowo - Siedlungsschicksal am Dnjepr* (Winnipeg: Regehr’s Printing, 1967), 44-46.

<sup>46</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 223.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 375.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 371-372. Belash cites the November 5 issue of *Put’ k Svobode* as his source for this order. I have been unable to locate a surviving copy of this issue.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 372.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Neufeld, *Russian Dance of Death*, 43.

<sup>52</sup> Neufeld gives the date of November 6 [October 24] for the massacre suggesting that he either entered the date incorrectly initially or backtracked and logged the date incorrectly at a later time. Regardless, Neufeld’s description of the massacre accurately corresponds with reports and may therefore be considered reliable. Neufeld, 44-46.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>54</sup> N.I. Saloff-Astakhov, *Interesting Facts of the Russian Revolution, or In the Flame of Russia’s Revolution with God and the Bible* (New York: 164 Second Ave., 1931), 103. Astakhov, was informed that Makhno was stationed north near Ekaterinoslav, thus further confirming that Makhno was not present in Eichenfeld during the days around the massacre. However, Astakhov does report the arrival of Makhno’s “highest commanding staff” at Nikolaipol a few days after the massacre.

<sup>55</sup> Abram Kröker, *Bilder aus Sowjet-Russland* (Striegau in Schlesien, 1930), 13.

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Epp, *But God Hath Chosen* (Hillsboro: Board of Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1963), 14.

<sup>57</sup> Harvey L. Dyck, et al, *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2004), 34. The authors incorrectly identify this first victim as Heinrich H. Heinrichs. This Heinrichs was not present at the massacre. He later served in the White army before emigrating to New York. Heinrich H. Heinrichs, “Excerpts from the Diary of Heinrich H. Heinrichs,” manuscript provided by Marianne Janzen.

<sup>58</sup> For an official list of victims see Dyck et al., *Nestor Makhno*, 105-112. A further six men and one women were murdered in Eichenfeld in the ten days after the

massacre. A final Eichenfelder committed suicide, bringing the total number of victims to 83.

<sup>59</sup> Dyck, et al, *Nestor Makhno*, 82-83

<sup>60</sup> H.W Klassen., "Remembrances of Eichenfeld-Dubovka, Jasykovo, 1919," translated by Marianne Janzen, in Janzen, "The Story of Eichenfeld," 175. The original was published in German in the Mennonite newspaper *Der Bote*.

<sup>61</sup> David Quiring, "The Reign of Terror", translated by Marianne Janzen, 3. Originally published as David A. Quiring, "Die Schreckenszeit in dem Dorfe Eichenfeld, Sued-Russlan, im Oktober 1919," *Mennonitische Rundschau* 49 (1926) no. 31-41.

<sup>62</sup> Quiring, "The Reign of Terror", 4.

<sup>63</sup> Dyck, et al, *Nestor Makhno*, 84. While this order is attributed to Makhno, no Mennonite eyewitnesses place Makhno at the massacre. Furthermore, according to Belash's account, Makhno was engaged in the battle for Ekaterinoslav at this time.

<sup>64</sup> Gerhard Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 116.

<sup>65</sup> H.W. Klassen, "Remembrances of Eichenfeld-Dubovka, Jasykovo, 1919," 175.

<sup>66</sup> David G. Rempel, "I too was there ... and mead I drank," Personal Files of Marianne Janzen, 5.

<sup>67</sup> One of the attackers is identified by name as Schmidt in Heinrich Friesen, "Bartholomew Night in Eichenfeld", Personal Files of Marianne Janzen, 13. In a separate account an attacker is identified as a "Catholic German" in Quiring, "A Reign of Terror," 164.

<sup>68</sup> Rempel, "I too was there," 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>70</sup> This assessment mirrors Neufeld's conclusions regarding the local context of the Sagradovka massacre. Neufeld, *Russian Dance of Death*, 77-78.

<sup>71</sup> Rempel, "I too was there," 105.

<sup>72</sup> B.V. Malynov'skyi and T.V. Malynov'skaya, "Nemtsy-zemlevladel'tsy v sotsial'nykh konfliktakh perioda ukrainskoi narodnoi respubliki i ukrainskoi derzhavy getmana P.P Skoropadskogo (1918 g.) in S. Bobyleva, ed., *Voprosy germanskoj istorii* (Dnipropetrovsk: RVV DNY, 2007), 136-137.

<sup>73</sup> From the diary of an anonymous Eichenfeld resident. Margaret Krup, e-mail to author, July 8, 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Dyck, et al., *Nestor Makhno*, 30, 35. A temporary armistice was agreed to in September 1919 between Makhno and Nationalist leader Petliura at Peregonovka but there are no instances of Makhnovist fighting under the nationalist flag. False documents were published in the Bolshevik newspapers claiming an alliance between Makhno and Vrangal. These reports caused confusion amongst Makhnovist units caught behind the lines. At least one unit to briefly join the White ranks but at no time did Makhno contemplate an alliance with the Whites. Malet, 61; Skirda, 223.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>77</sup> V. Azarov, *Kontrazvedka*, 23-24. Former Petliurist commanders Matyazh and Levchenko were executed for anti-semitism.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 37-38.

<sup>79</sup> Malet, *Nestor Makhno*, 169. A breakdown of pogroms committed by individual *atamany* is given so it cannot be argued that Makhnovist pogroms are included in broader categories.

<sup>80</sup> Dyck, Staples and Toews argue for a “re-assessment” of Makhno mythology in the face of his army’s depredations. This is a necessary task given the denialism and downplay of Makhnovist violence by certain authors. The Eichenfeld memorial is also to be commended as a symbol of healing and reconciliation. Today the villagers of Novopetrovka voluntarily maintain the memorial. It is telling that none of the Mennonite memorials have ever been vandalized despite the frequent vandalization of public monuments in Ukraine. A sense of sacredness has been achieved and this is to be celebrated. However, we must take care not to re-story events so that they conform exclusively to the Russian Mennonite narrative to the exclusion of other perspectives. Ultimately it is too simple to blame a complex tragedy involving numerous individuals and factors on a single figure. Makhno as a metonym is merely a screen memory that functions to distract us from looking into the deeper causes of violence and murder between communities.

<sup>81</sup> Natalya Venger, “The Mennonite Challenge to the Soviets,” *Preservings* 27 (2007): 14-22.

<sup>82</sup> Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*, 20. The page in question relates an encounter between Makhno and Marusya Nikoforovna in which she exhorts a crowd to acquire weapons for the battle against the bourgeoisie. Alternatively, page 20 in the pdf version of Belash’s book involves a discussion of Kropotkin and Bakunin’s ideology.

<sup>83</sup> N.V. Venger, “Jewish and Mennonite Pogroms in South Ukraine: an inquiry into the typology and semantics of the events of 1919,” trans. Malcolm Archibald, 2011. This is an English translation from the original Ukrainian in the author’s personal files.

<sup>84</sup> Dyck, et al., *Nestor Makhno*, 105-112. Venger may be confusing the details of the Eichenfeld massacre with the one at Münsterberg in which men, women and children were indiscriminately murdered.

<sup>85</sup> Venger, “Jewish and Mennonite Pogroms,” 3.

<sup>86</sup> David Quiring also reports a Makhnovist saying, “everything German should be obliterated” but then goes on to supply evidence that the perpetrators spared the landless colonists.

<sup>87</sup> Venger, “Jewish and Mennonite Pogroms,” 5. Venger reproduces the order somewhat incorrectly. The original does not say “perpetrators” will be shot but that “commanders of the unit to which the criminals belonged” would be shot. The original is found in an article entitled “The Jewish Question” in Nestor Makhno, *Na chuzhbine 1924-1934 r. Zapiski i stat’i*, edited by Alexandre Skirda (Paris: Hromoda, 2004), 47. Makhno goes on to write, “In the event this order was not put into practice I would shoot myself so that I wouldn’t have to see or listen to scoundrels committing inhuman crimes in my name.”

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Gerhard Schroeder, a teacher, was even elected to his local soviet under Makhnovist occupation, although he appears unaware the elections in the region were organized by the Makhnovists. Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, 107.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

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- <sup>91</sup> The Makhnovist themselves categorized their actions against class enemies as “black terror.” Azarov, *Kontrrazvedka*, 31.
- <sup>92</sup> Thomas Perry Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation,” in *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, ed. Harry Eckstein (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 73.
- <sup>93</sup> Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 87.
- <sup>94</sup> I use the terms vengeance and terror interchangeably here, although it could be argued that terror is a more extreme and calculated version of vengeance.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 102.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>97</sup> From the diary of Captain O. Olenin, cited in O. Beznosov “Za ‘Heimatland’: zbroini formuvannia nimets’kykh kolonistiv ta menonitiv Pivdnia Ukrayiny (1918-1921 rr.),” *Viis’kovo-istorychnyi al’manakh* 22 (2011): 15.
- <sup>98</sup> See in particular Gerhard Lohrenz’s semi-fictional novel *The Fateful Years 1913-1923* (Winnipeg: Lohrenz, 1970).
- <sup>99</sup> “Russian Mennonite Immigrants of the 1920s (Ontario), Interview with Henry J. Regehr,” Oral History Russian Mennonite Migration 1920s, Inventory No. 170. Available online: <http://www.mennoniteheritageportrait.ca/Report.php?ListType=Documents&ID=3089>
- <sup>100</sup> Dietrich Neufeld, *Russian Dance of Death*, 80.
- <sup>101</sup> Also see interviews with *Selbstschützer* and pacifists in *And When They Shall Ask* [1983].
- <sup>102</sup> Makar, “Who are the Mennonites?” *Communist* (July 22, 1922) cited in John B. Toews, *Tsars, Mennonites and Soviets*, 104-105; 202.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 93.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 95.
- <sup>105</sup> Anton Sawatsky, “Selbstschutz or Self-Defence or Black Spot on Our History,” Personal Files of Marianne Janzen, 3.
- <sup>106</sup> Astakhov, *Interesting Facts*, 115-116.
- <sup>107</sup> Unpublished untitled manuscript, 3. These memoirs were provided by the author’s granddaughter, Marilyn Heidebrecht.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

### **Conclusion Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2009), 73.