Nestor Makhno is one of the more well-known figures of the civil war in the former Russian Empire and one of the few to have a degree of folk hero status. He was the leader of a movement that brought into being one of the few experiments in world history with the establishment of anarchist social organization in territory under anarchist military and political dominance. *Makhno and Memory: Anarchist and Mennonite Narratives of Ukraine’s Civil War, 1917-1921* examines the Makhnovist movement’s civil war-era (1917-21) encounter with Mennonite colonists, descendants of Mennonites offered opportunities to live with special privileges in the Russian Empire starting in the 1700s, living in the Makhnovist movement’s area of operation in what is now southeastern Ukraine. Although for some he is a regional hero or intriguing anarchist freedom fighter, in the memory of these Mennonite colonists and their descendants, as author Sean Patterson tells us, Makhno is often (though not only) portrayed as an evil, even demonic, bandit responsible for the murder, rape, and dispossession of thousands of their fellows.

*Makhno and Memory* is a meditation on violence and a primer on Makhnovist-Mennonite relations during the civil war in the former Russian Empire as well as on these groups themselves. Patterson tries to understand what drove both Makhnovists and Mennonites to engage in serious violence against each other, particularly in conversation with particular ideological aspects of each group, the Makhnovist ideas of revolutionary justice and discipline, and the Mennonite ideas of martyrdom and pacifism understood as *Wehrlosigkeit* (roughly “defenselessness”). Patterson seeks to expose arguments, found primarily in Mennonite cultural memory, that the Makhnovists targeted ethnic Germans like the Mennonites specifically because they were ethnic Germans or because they were simply a band of wanton bandit-murderers. Patterson, importantly, draws attention to the presence of ethnic Germans among the Makhnovists (including ones who participated in massacres of Mennonites) and, even more con-
sequentially, to the discrimination against the Makhnovists’ Mennonite victims based on class. A plethora of convincing examples of landless Mennonites spared violence, seeming to occur extremely frequently if not almost without exception, aptly demonstrates Patterson’s contention that painting the Makhnovists as purely wanton murderers does not hold water. Makhno himself is also taken down a peg as a central figure in these massacres in Mennonite memory, as Patterson demonstrates significant involvement of the local Ukrainian peasant population in the violence (and plunder), Makhno’s very uneven control over his forces, and the lack of Makhno’s actual presence at the massacre he pays most attention to, the Eichenfeld massacre of November 1919.

Also important is the discussion of the Makhnovists’ understanding of events. Patterson draws attention to the pattern of significant portions of the Mennonite colonist population welcoming and collaborating with the 1918 Austro-German occupation of Ukraine (following Central powers deals made with the nascent Ukrainian People’s Republic and Soviet Russia) and the generally anti-revolutionary White Army. This included the forming of armed self-defense units (Selbstschutz) that were also involved in active punitive actions against Makhnovists and peasants seen as collaborating with them. Patterson convincingly argues that this solidified the Mennonite colonies as centers of counterrevolutionary sentiment and anti-Makhnovist punitive activity in the eyes of Makhnovists and revolution-inclined peasants in general. The author also goes further back in time, and there is also crucial discussion of socioeconomic contexts in which Mennonites were an insular, quite small, and generally much wealthier group surrounded by vastly greater numbers of mostly far poorer Ukrainian peasantry. This added context and the strong example-driven discussion thereof complements the discussion of anti-revolutionary activities and alignments of many Mennonites and their communities during the revolutionary and civil war period to provide invaluable background against which to try to think about the violence of the Makhnovists toward the Mennonites.

The author hopes that more nuanced and historically reflective memories of this small piece of the civil war can emerge from an examination such as his, which tries to see the situation from both sides and give ideological motivations and socioeconomic contexts their due. While executing this well, Patterson also explicitly and convincingly rejects any moral justification for the violence at hand, which is refreshing.

Patterson’s focused evidence and example-driven approach are effective for untangling interwoven local histories and memories and at least laying the findings out on the table, unclouded by an overabundance of theoretical deliberations. This is a fundamentally solid work of historical writing and investigation that does not aim to be nearly exhaustive. Indeed, some of the historical background discussion may feel somewhat limited in its depth for those who might be very familiar with the history of Makhno and his movement. The book is slight in length and its coverage of its subject matter also does not dwell on any particular topic for too long. This is very economical, and holds the reader’s attention nicely, but also means that there is sometimes a sense that there is much more to be said or more the reader wants to hear about (for example, about relations between Mennonites and the Austro-German occupation). Ultimately, this book offers an accessible, careful, and well-researched analysis of the general relationship between Makhnovists and Mennonites during the civil war in the former Russian Empire, making its deepest analytical mark in its discussions of violence, its dynamics, and its possible contexts. It is highly readable, at times engrossing, and great for drawing out concrete examples.

Makhno and Memory is also an important work in that it spends time on aspects of the Makhno movement that have implications for the study of the non-Bolshevik Left during the civil
war across the former Russian Empire, and particularly in Ukraine. The discussion of the Makhnovist kontrrazvedka (counterintelligence) and its excesses brings to mind the Bolshevik Cheka, sparking opportunities to think about how that terror arose in forms neither Red nor White, as well as why this Makhnovist “Black” Terror arose and whether this could have been avoided. Most studies of Makhno will bring up interesting questions about what anarcho-communism looks like in practice, and this book is no exception, revealing the attempt to establish a network of local elected soviets as well as a ferocious commitment to class warfare that serves as an important reminder that while this was an anarchist movement, it also had a relatively (perhaps surprisingly?) rigid class-oriented worldview and vision for how society should be ordered that was in many ways resonant with Bolshevism. Further exploration of Makhnovist realities on the ground could be fruitful for thinking about revolutionary violence beyond Red and White, while the exploration of the Makhnovist-Mennonite topic in particular offers abundant examples of the utter chaos, contingency, and sometimes idealism of the revolutionary and civil war periods in the Ukrainian territories of the former Russian Empire.

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