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CHARISMA AND "POLITICS OF PROXIMITY" IN THE TIME OF THE REVOLUTION AND CIVIL WAR

Annotation

As it radically alters the arrangement of social forces, the Revolution fosters the emergence of new power paradigms distinct from those dominant in the time of relative calm. In particular, the material infrastructural disintegration is often accompanied by the refutation of the bureaucratic authority (in Weberian sense) and the subsequent replacement thereof with the system of power relations designated by the author as the "politics of proximity." In such circumstances, the individual charisma begins to play an increasingly important role, evolving not only into a symbol of the "revolutionary immediacy" (as opposed to bureaucratic mediation), but also into a factor with a power to shape the form of the political modus operandi in the post-revolutionary period.

Key Terms: Revolution, charismatic authority, bureaucratic authority, Civil War, personality cult

Charisma and the Politics of Proximity: Case of Nestor Makhno

The collapse of the Russian state could be narrated, analyzed and interpreted from a whole bevy of perspectives. One approach, no doubt among the dominant ones, places emphasis on the material aspects of this collapse, that is, on the growing wear and tear of the sinews that held the Imperial state once together – army, bureaucratic apparatus, means of communication, etc. The concept of *razrukha* – a hybrid of ruin and chaos – employed with a near pathological insistence by the contemporaries of all political colors in describing the post-Revolutionary reality, adverts to the concomitant effects of the said ‘material’ deterioration. A soldier leaving his position with a *triokhlineika* rifle on his shoulder strap; a middle-level district bureaucrat gaping aghast at the dilapidated and hence desecrated ‘seat’ of his former power; an ammunition factory, no longer animated by the din of continuous work, but rather by the clamor of workers calling for higher wages and shorter hours, loud at first, then subsiding and petering out into the terrible still; a letter sent but never delivered; the profusion of superannuated newspapers, suitable only to proffer the solace of evanescent warmth; septic wagons of the trains, journeying at the rate that gave full temporal dimension to the eternity of Russian spatial expanses – all of these tropes constitute, metonymically if one so wills, the body and spirit of the Russian Civil War. With the restraining forces once overcome, the entropy tended to increase until the Bolsheviks, actively or passively assisted by the populace, temporarily ended a moratorium on revolutionary experiments and successfully restored the state apparatus towards whose destruction they had been known to work with an enviable diligence and animation.

The use of the vision, centered on the changes in the infrastructure, raises few objections. The half-sinusoidal curve of disintegration and restoration marks out the framework within which a plethora of phenomena appear intellectually tangible; to wit, one feels oneself adequately equipped when venturing to explain why it had been easier to obtain monopolistic control over the remaining instruments of power in some peripheral regions of the fallen empire than in others, and thus to shield incipient national projects against the encroachments of the Bolshevik-controlled center. On the level of ideology, the fragmentation of what once had been a uniform informational field into an archipelago of isolated isles, impervious to the news from without and highly resistant to the pressures from within – that development stands in an intimate and direct rapport with the outpouring of fantasies and rumors, tingeing the notion of Bolshevism with the hues of local preferences. Such diverse political revelations as the peasant republic in Ukraine's Medvyn, the brutal comic opera of Baron von Ungern's neo-Genghisid empire, the Cossack Don and Kuban autonomies and Polish expansionist ambitions are brought closer, if not through a community of a cause, but through a commonwealth of a narrative sentiment.

Yet, the symmetric story of dismantlement and rebirth seems to underplay the real difference between the point of departure – one Russian empire on the brink of collapse – and that of arrival – another Russian empire bedecked with a new raiment of purpose and surrounded by a half a dozen of minor successor states. Whatever changes there might have been seem almost epiphenomenal to the striving towards restoring order and rebuilding the state – the sort of diseases of growth, left unattended in a due time and thus uncomfortably tolerated henceforth. One often sees the Bolshevik terror in that light – as a response to the challenge posed by the left S-Rs in July of 1918 institutionalized in the course of the war, temporarily deactivated at the end of the struggle and then brought back at the commencement of the Stalinist revolution. When amalgamated with the secret police, the Terror sheds its 'incidentally novel' nature and dissolves in the seasoned solution of the age-old repressive practices. Such was, to be sure, the interpretation of the non-Bolshevik – and anti-Bolshevik – contemporaries of the Revolution; the aforementioned symmetry is equally implied in the contemporary trend at extending the temporal frontiers of the Revolution backwards – beyond the coups and putsches of 1917 – well into the First World War or even further into the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century [1].

The point, of course, is that the Revolution and the destruction it precipitated, reflect, in many respects, one and the same thing; to put it differently, rather than representing a sanguinary by-product of disagreements anent visions of the post-Revolutionary future – the necessary yet unwanted consequence of the Revolution's inner contradictions, polyphonies and disharmonies – the liquidation of the state and the resistance that it encountered comprised the essential part of a well-articulated plan, so much so that the ensuing calm suddenly loses its crisp and clear lines, retreating into the mist, far more enigmatic than all the dilemmas of the preceding storm. The relationship between chaos and order is thus inversed, the former acquiring connotations of a rule and the latter degenerating into condition of exceptionality.

The idea that the Revolution entailed a search for the new form of politics follows easily from the definition of any revolutionary activity. By contrast, the type of politics that it sought to establish cannot be ascertained without a strenuous effort; neither could the kind of a relationship between the government and the governed that the Revolution aspired to replace be defined with sufficient clarity. However, it could be said that in overcoming the Tsarist state, revolutionaries endeavored to overcome the politics thereof – a system of rule that was growing increasingly bureaucratic and impersonal – ‘rational’ in fact, as Weber would have had it. Having thus availed themselves of the old state and its practices (all told, paradoxically ‘modern’), the competing authorities had to operate in accordance with the principles of a ‘revealed’ or immanent politics, its central tenet consecrating the visibility of authority into an administrative imperative. The power lost to the network of conscientious, yet colorless state functionaries, had to be recuperated by the constellation of charismatic personalities, those paragons of the embodied authority, who appropriated the prophetic voice of the newly-inaugurated age much to the amusement and awe of the refractory and agitated crowd. That relationship, stressing the immediacy of a leader, “to whom obedience is accorded on the basis of a personal trust in the leader’s revelation, his heroism or his exemplary character” [2] had supplanted, if partially, the much-compromised authority of the ‘rational type’ at the time of the Civil War. What is more, that reliance of the governed on the charisma of the governing survived the war with its specific demands, informing the Soviet story with its principal source of suspense, i.e. the insuperable need and craving for the emergency situations, in the course of which normal bureaucratic practices would be suspended, the ‘miracle-working’ abilities of the charismatically qualified leaders tested and the legitimacy of the entire Revolutionary project either gravely weakened or exultantly reasserted.

Without willing to harry the reader with the discussion of the quasi-revolutionary paroxysms, shaking and disfiguring the body of the Soviet citizenry at various points of its troubled life, I would like to make the following contention: the Revolution and the Civil War, by divesting the air-wired words of their ambulatory power, had reinstated the immediacy to the art of governing, hastening the advent of the new type of leaders – visible, audible, strangely, almost hypnotically convincing. Kerensky is one good example; a provincial lawyer, who had once bethought a career of an opera singer, he was described alternatively as the “the sole redeemer of the country,” the “first love of the Revolution,” its prophet and its knight-errant; civilian through and through, he draped himself in a conspicuous military garb, which, bereft of gloss and glitter of the *ancien regime* generalissimos, intimated at his unshakably democratic convictions (in that respect he was a progenitor of a fashion taken up and popularized by the revolutionary leaders of international calling, Stalin, Mao and Castro). Appearing before the lined-up masses of the armed *muzhich’e*, he would exhort them to one last effort, final sacrifice in the name of a renewed, emancipated Russia; great promises were elicited from the soldiers, who seemed to have been personally beholden to Kerensky until hopes so reawakened were dashed by the disasters of the June offensive; withal began to wane the star of the War Minister that had shone so

brightly upon the path of the Russian liberal democracy in the heady days of the vernal freedom.

Trotsky exemplified that same longing of the Revolution for the immediacy and heroism in a plenary manner; the auto of Kerensky was sent veering and careening into the history's boggy roadside as the armored train with the Chairman of Revolutionary Military Council on board breezed noisily by. Trotsky no doubt was more than a mere Hermes dispatched down from the Bolshevik Olympus with a bagful of Party orders and decrees to the beleaguered frontiers of young Soviet Republic. He functioned, in fact, as *the* underwriter of the revolution, manifesting with his too close of a presence the terrible vitality of its unbending will. The words, unleashed by Trotsky upon the heads of fifteen thousand shirkers from the Riazan' province, occasioned the much-anticipated effects:

The new ideas infected them before my very eyes. They were genuinely enthusiastic; they followed me to the automobile, devoured me with their eyes, not fearfully, as before, but rapturously, and shouted at the tops of their voices. They would hardly let me go. I learned afterward, with some pride, that one of the best ways to educate them was to remind them: "What did you promise Comrade Trotsky?" Later on, regiments of Ryazan "deserters" fought well at the fronts [3].

Lenin might have spectrally scintillated as the distant mind of the Revolution, but Trotsky, the unanimously recognized leader, *vozhd'*, of the Red Army, was simultaneously its sharp eye and its iron fist; Bolshevik adversaries, having concentrated the brunt of their imprecations and execrations on the figure of Trotsky, had acknowledged that much.

The Kerensky effect and the charisma of Trotsky are phenomena much too well-known to be given yet another treatment (the task having already been accomplished not in the least by the selfsame protagonists of the Revolutionary drama graced, on top of their numerous talents, by a fair stint of vanity). Their examples and the kind of politics they epitomized – embodied better yet – point in the surprising direction, to the realm populated and dominated by the Ukraine's Civil War warlords, or the *atamans* (*otamans* in Ukrainian) as they were generically known. Treated by scholars [4] and laymen [5] alike, they have been consistently misrepresented, or, rather, represented in a consistently one-sided fashion – as an expression and expulsion of the new Times of Trouble, an epitome of the karamazovian license, "black scum, maddened froth of the muzhik anarchy, all riot and gloom." [6] The urban contemporaries tended to see them as exponents of the revolutionary chaos, fit only to be "reshuffled" into a regular Army (the view upheld by the Ukrainian Bolsheviks up until the fatidic May of 1919) or extirpated altogether, as brigands bereft of any redeeming qualities (views espoused by the Denikin's administrators and the overwhelming majority of the Bolsheviks at the end of the war) [7]. All the same, 'political' or 'social' bandits though they may be – in the style of Hobsbawm or some other theoretician of a primitive revolt – the Ukrainian insurgent atamans operated in the environment of *relative lawlessness* precipitated by the competition between various *law-engendering* systems; that fact alone, so it seems, should fashion them into the makers of political reality, on par with other 'bandits,' including those based in Moscow, Novocherkassk and Yekaterinodar.

Even more so than Trotsky and Kerensky (let alone the White Generals in the southern regions of the empire), the atamans typified the advent of the new attitude to the exercise of governance – an attitude that accentuated proximity, be it real or imaginary, of the followers to the leader. The very existence of the peasant atamans, leading their men in the name of loot, land or liberty (the list is far from being exhaustive) brought into relief the tension inherent in the Russian revolutionary democracy (present perhaps in all modern revolutionary democracies). Whereas in its ‘magisterial’ form – as it dashed forth in the fabled storming of the Winter Palace and stamped for ten long days on the blood-stained pavements of the hibernal Moscow – the Revolution unfolded as a classical *seizure of central power* by a body of committed conspirators, in its ‘radical’ hypostasis, performed along the trenches of the increasingly deserted front-lines, across the immense archipelago of uncountable hamlets, on the market squares of the dusty towns, condemned until now to inescapable oblivion, Revolution progressed as an emancipatory undertaking, the like of which the world had not seen before; its ultimate goal was supposed to have been the end of all oppression (conceived primarily in economic and political terms), the return to the natural state, where all, as the political myth has it, are born equal, self-sufficient and self-transparent - a theoretical promise translating itself in the spread of all-inclusive, semi-formal ‘decision-making bodies’ operating according to the principles of direct democracy (village soviets, soldierly committees, ‘comradely courts’ (*tovarishcheskie sudy*) all belonging to that category). As the proclamation issued in the name of ataman Grigoriev (not the greatest democrat otherwise) put it in colorful if quixotic idiom, the situation in which “one is born a miniature deity (*bozhkom*) and the other a hired laborer (*batrakom*)” proved its incongruity, “simple folk (*narod*)” having realized that “people are people (*liudi est’ liudi*),” that “it can no longer be the slave (*rabom*)” and finally, that “no sacrifice for its freedom is too grand (*gotov na vsiakiye zhertvy*).” [8] That said, the same environment – one, which gaped at the remote authority and its ‘heaven-sent’ appointees through the screen of multitudinous eyes, wary and incredulous at once – nurtured in its interior political creatures, remarkable by their very immunity from the practice of democratic interrogation. The habit made into norm of electing one’s own commanders (*vybornoe nachalo*) prevalent among the Ukrainian Red Army units and the ‘unaffiliated’ peasant bands alike [9] snugly coexisted with the willingness to “follow blindly [and] infallibly thither, whither *bat’ko* (“little father” literally) would lead.” [10] That commingling of the extreme, almost anarchist democracy with the ideals of the patriarchy required the mediation of the third element referred to throughout the paper – i.e. the revolutionary charisma.

Granted, the Bolsheviks themselves saw things in a different light. Refusing to recognize profound ‘morphological’ affinity of the Trotsky phenomenon with that of Grigoriev, Makhno or any other ataman (naiveté or conceit?), they tended to explain *atamanshchina* exclusively in material terms. In a logical involution of singular irony, the leading Party members, those vocational destroyers of the organized state power, blamed the state institutions for having failed to provide for the basic needs of the nascent army and thus to inure the units to the idea of a reliable, benevolent yet exacting center. Grated by Trotsky’s putatively inadequate analysis of the Grigoriev’s

mutiny, Andrei Bubnov, a Ukrainian Bolshevik of the leftist persuasion and a one-time member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Ukrainian Front, wrote:

If there is no proper organization of the centralized supply, [capable of procuring] the army with all the necessities, from cannons to puttees, if the army lives by grazing (na podnozhnom kormu), in that case a thrifty, energetic commander, [equally] skilled in the military art, would always succeed in gaining prominence and in making his troops... dependent upon his will – by means of concentrating in his hands everything that his unit has either obtained [in the battle] or received [11].

One decade later, Bubnov's erstwhile boss and a virtual creator of the Ukrainian Red Army, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko reiterated the testimony of his former subordinate almost verbatim, bringing the train of his thoughts to the anticipated conclusion: "The army lived by grazing (*na podnozhnom kormu*). Hence, the clout of the free (*volnych*) *bat'ki* [plural from *bat'ko*] and atamans-go-getters (*dobytchik*) was strengthened to the extreme despite the transition from the [irregular] parties to the regular regiments. The road to banditry (*banditizm*) would remain therefore wide open." [12] This interpretation undoubtedly captures an element of truth, yet only to the extent of reminding one that the decentralization (or even extirpation of a strong state-provider) was chiseled out on the sacred tablets of the Revolution; in other words, the failure of the supply system conjoined the *atamanshchina* not through the rapport of vertical causality but through that of the parallel consanguinity at the very best (two development with a possible common source). The Party had dismissed rather cavalierly the possibility of the 'masses' – troops of the Ukrainian Army in our case – acting with pellucid intentions, out of an affirmative will, without as much as being propelled by the bovine resentment. Characteristic expression of the elitist distrust of 'popular instincts', the Bolshevik exegesis of the Ukrainian revolutionary warlordism conveniently occluded the fact that the emergence of the insurgent *bat'ki* preceded the arrival of the Bolsheviks in Ukraine. Let the case of Nestor Makhno, the ataman of an uncanny talent and nontrivial ambition, serve us as an illustration.

There shall be no doubt about it: Makhno belongs to that cohort of individuals – 'great men' if I may – who, while attending to the birth of a new political phenomenon, so thoroughly farced it with the very stuff of their vigorous personality that its practice and ideological justification, however overarching and 'transhuman, [13] became somehow unthinkable without constant and imperative reference to a life and deeds of a concrete human being [14]. This dynamic relationship between Makhno's real presence, composed of blood, flesh and bone, and the liberty from the constraints of the moment – the veritable historical transcendence (for the lack of a better word) – recognized in his actions, underscored the character of Makhno's myth and his charisma. On one hand, in his thoughts and habits, Makhno seemed undistinguishable from the peasant masses, whence his insurgent troops were issued. "*Bat'ko* is one of us...he would down a glass of vodka with us, make a good speech, and join us in a skirmish line (*v tsep' poidet*)," – such were the sentiments of the ordinary makhnovite rebels as reported by Piotr Arshinov [15]. The image of *bat'ko*, sitting at the coarse wooden table in the peasant hut, sharing a modest meal of the hosts and quaffing the treacle of their sorrowful conversation is invoked by Galina (Halyna) Kuzmenko, Makhno's female companion, on the pages of her diary often

enough to make one question the innocence of *bat'ko's* intentions or the natural spontaneity of that textual *tableau vivant* [16]. Be what it may, the asserted nearness of Makhno left no one in doubt about the extraordinary motives of his spirit, cohabiting – hypostatically more than dialectically – the ‘*one-of-us-ness*’ in the manner of his quotidian being. “Legends about Makhno are spreading across Ukraine,” wrote Fiodor Sergeev (better known as ‘comrade Artiom’), incidentally an arch-opponent of constructing the Red Army from the building-blocks of the partisan detachments.

The peasants talk about him as of a folk hero, who had hoisted the banner of uprising against the Austro-Germans, the Skoropadsky regime and the Haidamaks. They recount hundreds of stories from his partisan endeavors, adding variations, embroidering them with fiction and even ascribing to Makhno some unusual origin – a mythical one.

Our bat'ko, the Ukrainians say, hobnobs either with Devil, or with God (chi s chertom znaetsia, chi s bogom), but it is certain that he is not a usual man [17].

Makhno was cunning – as the stories of his appearing dressed in an attire of a state functionary amidst his enemies and disappearing unscathed in the fray, laden with spoils were supposed to testify [18]; Makhno was far-seeing, almost clairvoyant, endowed with a skill of predicting the course of events and of acting accordingly; Makhno was invincible – his body, furrowed and crisscrossed with fourteen wounds, one for each fleeting Ukrainian regime, bearing witness to that; Makhno was finally and most importantly practically ineluctable and undefeatable, not only managing to hold his own against the overwhelming odds with his meager force, but even succeeding inflicting upon the Red Army defeats comparable to the rout at Warsaw [19]. Makhno was all that – and more – to his admirers and, as sources happen to intimate, to some of his opponents, [20] a leviathan-like figure, enfolding in his metaphorically prodigious body (he was small otherwise) the swarming little bodies of the common folk.

In the end, the combination of affinity and awe made Makhno if not identical with the movement he led, then an indispensable part thereof. Veritable collective disquietude seized the makhnovites when their *bat'ko* fell ill with typhoid – like a good half of the host for that matter. “Everyone had comprehended that death of Makhno [would be] a loss for the entire peasantry, bereavement begging definition. And the peasants were doing their utmost to prevent this from happening.” [21] The preservation of life of the *vozhd'* (‘leader’) – cognomen utilized by Arshinov as if to draw attention to the foil with other *vozhdi*, Lenin and Trotsky – became one of the highest priorities, all the more so towards the end of the Civil War, when the opportunity of reaching consensus with the Bolsheviki appeared irretrievably lost. In one of the first letters, written upon crossing Romanian border (late August 1921), Makhno recalled how he was saved by the four machine-gunners, who preferred to die than let *bat'ko* fall into the hands of the Reds [22]. They perished, as was expected – putatively in the name of the cause incarnate of the makhnovite revolution – the exact location of their sacrifice having been graced by *bat'ko* in an act of a one-time commemorative pilgrimage; the immolation gained recognition and meaning only in-so-far as it represented an abnegation of one’s life as the most prized ‘earthly’

possession for the sake of another life that, irreducible to such a perception, proffered an access to the barely discernable, almost supernal peasant utopia. It had to be part of the myth [23].

Revolution, as was averred before, had dramatically augmented the importance of the unmediated intercourse between the leading and the led actors. The right to have ‘things’ explained was inscribed in the democratic promise of the nineteen-seventeen. Trotsky and Kerensky had to present themselves to the armed folk, their legitimacy stemming to no small extent from the flair at articulating strivings of the audience as well as the capacity at successfully defending policies either implemented or planned. Makhno was equally susceptible to this novel requirement of the Revolutionary politics. Hardly a stirring speech-maker of the Trotsky’s type, he nonetheless knew in what words to clothe his message and how to deliver it. Visiting units of the Ukrainian Red Army in the fashion of a feudal potentate of yore, Antonov-Ovseenko made the following parenthetical observation about Makhno (then shrouded in glory commander of the 3rd Brigade in the Soviet Transdneprian division): “[His] voice is not strong and slightly husky, [marked by] soft accent – in general, not much of an orator – but how they listen to him!” [24] Stéphane Roger, a deserter from the French Army and a journalist who had seen *bat’ko* himself, gave a more elaborate account of Makhno’s oratory performance and the reaction that he had elicited from his followers:

He ascended the tribune and began to talk. He spoke at length, often interrupted by applause and ovations. His eyes sparkling with faith and enthusiasm, his gestures leaving [powerful] impressions, he talked for about an hour, and I, who did not understand the content of his speech, admired the ease of his language and his inflammatory eloquence. I was enchanted by his gaze and his facial expressions, since I saw that he lived in the words, enunciated by his lips. He succeeded, no doubt, in finding the igniting words, which transported his audience into the state of rapture: at the moment when he was descending the tribune, frenzied incantations exploded. “Long live Revolution! Down with the bourgeoisie! Long live Makhno!” was heard from all sides. Then I realized how great and deserved the popularity of Makhno was in Ukraine. [25]

The precision of words, coarse but infinitely comprehensible [26], the celerity of movements and, as a consequence, the ecstatic delivery should have bespoken of Makhno’s *direct communication* with the Revolution’s own violent specter; more than his mastery of *dzhigitovka* (horse riding stunts), the successful execution of a ‘speech act’ indicated the victory in the *proxy* revolutionary struggle and hinted at the promise thereof in the *actual* struggle to come. The close association between the commitment to the cause of 1917 and the competence in carrying out tasks of a popular tribune, a relationship, idealized in the figure of Trotsky, was, of course, equally relevant for the personality of Makhno. “Good speaker cannot be a bad revolutionary” – the times of the strife should have given birth to that maxim had the verity expressed therein not been all too evident to merit articulation.

Up to this point, the myth of Makhno and the concomitant reality were treated in the same vein, as two undifferentiated aspects of the same phenomenon; the question of their rapport, however complex as it may be, demands to be recognized even if not

answered outright. How, one wonders, does a reputation of the invincible partisan leader, the egalitarian chieftain, the first man of the people relate to the actual performance in front of the admiring troops or the self-satisfied and reflective village elders? Did the magical qualities attributed to Makhno predicate and inform the rapt attention and the enraptured response of the audience to his perorations, or, on the contrary, was it his repeated success in the staged test of a political gathering (and an un-staged one of the battle) that created the need for the mythological ornamentation of his perceived personality? The chain of causes and effects does not lend itself to a facile and quick reconstitution – not so in the case of the peasant *bat'ko* neither that of the Prime-minister of Russia's Provisional government nor that of the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council. They may have all boasted a remarkable gift in convincing revolutionary crowds (suffice it to recall the ironic title of the *glavnougovarivaiushchii*, the Supreme Persuader-in-Chief, given to Kerensky) [27], their renown had still advanced in space at the rate unmatched by an auto, armored train or any other vehicle of preference. At the end of the day, myth and reality, 'image' and 'truth', repute and performance – constituent, yet inextricable parts of the revolutionary politics – worked together in a mutually reinforcing manner, finessing the character and the contours of a charismatic chief and mediating the allegedly unmediated communication between the leader and the followers.

That said, the union of myth and reality could be articulated in terms other than cause or precedence. The advent of the new style politics, in which the carrier of authority had to be (or appear) visible, audible, proximate *tout court* did not imply the disappearance of the politics of *distance*, since orders, decrees and statements, defining the boundaries of the imagined political body were still being issued by – or, in the name of – some distant (and hence unseen) center. What this development signaled, however, was the fact that the above-mentioned politics of distance had been profoundly reconfigured, exposing itself to the massive migration of metaphors from the realm of *proximate* or *immanent* politics; to make it somewhat less abstract, the politics of *distance* had to be conducted *as if* the source of authority, invisible for all practical reason, was present and accessible. This reconfiguration, mysterious as everything pertaining to human spirit is, provides the backdrop for the non-trivial transformation in the meaning and the functioning of the honorific *bat'ko*, which had practically substituted Makhno his given name. According to the Makhnovite sources, the title was given to Makhno sometime in the early October of 1918, when the latter, still acting as a regional law-defying desperado with a small bundle of men (about forty altogether) found himself surrounded by a much larger Austrian punitive force not too far from his native Guliai-Pole [28]. In that manner Makhno was selected – temporarily it seems – to organize and lead the breakthrough against the tightening ring of adversaries. “You had brought us here, now help us to get out,” Aleksei Chubenko, Makhno's head of Staff, reported someone as having said [29]. Brought into existence by a concrete situation of crisis, through a democratically conceived covenant (in an act so redolent of the Cossack past), the title and the corresponding 'office' of *bat'ko* quickly outgrew its strictly practical purpose, gained in a thick patina of mystique and ultimately dissolved itself within the office-holder – all in response to the novel political situation and its exigencies. Similarly, the

apparent domestication of the political distance – the need to make it seem an organic extension of the proximate authority, expressed in either familial (*bat'ko* Makhno, *diadia* “uncle” Voline) or tribal (*vozhd'* as in *vozhd' plemeni*, ‘tribal chief’) terms – produced an environment, inauspicious for the smooth running of the impersonal organs of power. Thus, at one of the conferences of Makhno’s associates, held in November of 1919, Voline, the principal ideologue of the *makhnovshchina*, complained that “the decrees and instructions of the Military Revolutionary Council [of the Makhnovite Insurgent Army] are not carried out for one reason or another.” To egress from the impasse of the administrative powerlessness, he had asked Makhno “to issue an order to the army [to the end of making it] comply with the resolutions of the Revolutionary Military Council.” [30] All told, one had to act under the aegis of *bat'ko* in hope of substantiating one’s decisions with a mite of his charismatic grace.

At the same time, the repudiation of bureaucratic anonymity combined with the transition of the Makhno-led forces from a small, manageable and visible band of armed thugs to a complex army-like organization paved the way for the emergence of the recognized smaller *bat'ki* formally tied to the great one up above. [31] To some extent, the process involved what Weber called the *routinization of charisma*, although it proceeded laterally and synchronically, deviating therefore from the vertical and diachronic model postulated by the German sociologist [32]. A caboodle of Makhno’s associates, placed in charge of brigades and divisions within the Insurgent army, began to construct mythologies of their own, vaguely reminiscent of the panoramic iconostasis around their chief: *bat'ko* Shchus', unscrupulous murderer, whose name was nonetheless “almost as popular as that of Nestor Makhno” [33]; *bat'ko* Pravda, legless cripple, old rustler, “dashing fighter and a convinced anarcho-communist,” [34] to whom the credit for “the most reckless raids on the [Denikin’s] Volunteer Army” [35] is invariably given; *bat'ko* Karetnik, the most likely executor of ataman Grigoriev, Makhno’s closest assistant, endowed with “outstanding military talent” [36]; *bat'ko* Kalashnikov, nemesis of the Berdiansk city dwellers, [37] yet “an unusually courageous and a talented commander” [38] ... The star catalogue of the peasant Heroes needs not be extended much further to let one appreciate the poignancy of the oft-experienced *déjà vu*, for something akin to the *Führerprinzip* in Nazi Germany was graduating into a guiding prescription for the arrangement of the Makhnovite political universe. As a veritable *genie de la révolution*, attuned to perfect concord with the popular will, Makhno could claim inerrancy in selecting his lieutenants, who, as if approbated virtually and vicariously by the rank and file, might have in turn expected unconditional loyalty from the latter for the duration of the peasant *bat'ko*’s benevolence. A symptomatic resolution, passed in early November 1919 at the Congress of Peasant, Worker and Insurgent Deputies subtly intimated at the changing power relations within the Makhnovite Army by institutionalizing the old practice of electing one’s commanders (*vybornoe nachalo*) and simultaneously limiting its application to units no greater than the regiment. From that moment onward, the Military Revolutionary Committee, that is, Makhno with a coterie of the picked devotees gained an exclusive right in designating heads of the largest rebel detachments. [39] Assuredly, *makhnovshchina* was too

evanescent of a phenomenon, marked by a perambulatory life and scanty material output, making it difficult either to establish the immediate response to the formalization of Makhno's charismatic authority and that of other *bat'ki* or to trace the trajectory of its long-term development. Yet one could descry an effort in cracking a cranny between the governed and the governing, leaving the former the few joys of circumscribed direct democracy and rewarding the latter with the responsibilities beyond the purview of political visibility. The anarchist militia was pupating into a primitive state.

The apparent irony of this conclusion is not a summoning to the full-scale attack on the image of Makhno as a committed fighter for the stateless society of the free soviets, a reputation pummeled into shibboleth by certain libertarian and anarchist groups. It does invite, however, to a meditation on the nature of state dismantlement and reconstitution in time of Civil War. It was contended that the collapse of the Tsarist Empire supposed an abnegation of one style of conducting politics in favor of another: the unmediated was preferred to the virtual, the personal to the faceless, and the proximate to the distant. On the surface, the new approach to the decision making procedures reflected democratic and emancipatory agenda of the Revolution as well as its anti-authoritarian (*vlastnicheskii*) [40] bias, the vision of the ungovernable 'masses' susceptible only to persuasion and propitiation offering possibly its most palpable symbol. Yet, that same environment spawned forth a type of a leader, who, by force of his charisma, could claim some extraordinary association with the crowd and herewith a right to mediate the necessity of power to the external world. Exemplified by the Ukrainian *bat'ko* no less than by Trotsky (or, in perspective, Stalin), the revolutionary leader embowered the seed of the future statehood, poised to sprout into a robust plant once the myth of leader's proximity had functionally superceded the corresponding reality. He, who had thus been emancipated from the need to harangue in front of his followers, resembled more an inspirer than a persuader, a knower of his people, an ideal and hence irreproachable subject of the post-Revolutionary world. Raised into a basic legitimizing principle, the cult of the leader, therefore, represented an homage to the accomplished future in the present still incomplete.

References

1 Peter Holquist is, of course, the primary defender of the cause; Orlando Figes represents the popular aspect of this historiographical tradition. See Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U Press, 2002); Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: the Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (London: J. Cape, 1996).

2 Max Weber, *Sociological Writings*, ed. Wolf Heydebrand (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 32

3 Leon Trotsky, *My Life. An Attempt at an Autobiography*. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 412

4 There is no dearth of recent secondary literature on the atamans either in Russian or in Ukrainian – few, however, merit to be mentioned, the early work of M. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina* still remaining unsurpassed (Mikhail Kubanin , *Makhnovshchina: krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v stepnoi Ukraine v gody Grazhdanskoi*

voiny, (Leningrad: Priboi, 1926)); Polish historian Grzegorz Skrukwa produced a long chapter on atamanshchina in his *Formacje wojskowe Ukraińskiej “rewolucji narodowej”* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2008), pp. 339-487), which, its formidable archival basis notwithstanding, unabashedly reiterates clichés of the Ukrainian nationalist (and diasporic) circles; in English, to Adams’ outdated *Bolsheviks in Ukraine: the Second Campaign, 1918-1919* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1973) one could add an even more outdated *The Ukrainian Revolution* of John Reshetar (*The Ukrainian Revolution. A Study in Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1952)), chapters from the *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation* of James E. Mace (*Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U Press, 1983)) and a couple of books on Makhno – that of Michael Palij’s (*The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno. An Aspect of Ukrainian Revolution* (Seattle: U of Washington Press, 1976)) and of Michael Malet (*Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War* (London: McMillan, 1982)). I am not aware of the more recent books on the subject of the Ukrainian atamanshchina or the ‘Bolshevik’ insurgents (*povstantsy*). The latest monograph of Stephen Velychenko on the state-building practices in Ukraine between 1917 and 1923 barely mentions atamans by name, to say nothing of the role they played in Bolshevik and UNR policies during the Civil War (Stephen Velychenko, *State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine. A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2011)).

5 Full list of sources, too long to be presented here, could be provided by the author upon request.

6 the phrase belongs to Evgenii Trifonov (Brazhnev), Political Commissar of the short-lived 3rd Soviet Ukrainian Army (April 1919) and a writer of some flair (Evgenii Brazhnev, *Kalenaia tropa* (Moscow: Moskovskoe tovarishchestvo pisatelei, 1934), p. 179)

7 Trotsky reduced the Ukrainian warlords to “the dissolute scoundrels (who) under the name of atamans and *bat’ki* recruited equally dissolute bands, looted civilian population, destroyed railway constructions, set up train wrecks, ruined hundreds and thousands of human lives.” (Lev Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas’ revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Vysshii Voennyi redaktsionnyi Sovet, 1923-1925), v. 2, b. 1, p. 241); his archenemy, Denikin, wholeheartedly agreed: “[Historical] atavism, typical features of the Russian idea-less anarchism, adjacency and a close interaction with large industrial centers, the vastness of the fields, satiety and withal a hankering after a hateful city... imputed particular color upon the insurgency movement [in Ukraine]. *The despoliation of cities, for instance, was one of the most important driving forces of the makhnovite army.*” (Anton Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty* (Minsk: Kharvest, 2002), v. 5, 89)

8 Rossiiskii Gosudavstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv (RGVA) f 103 op 1 d 531 l 20

9 which constituted most of the Red Army units in Ukraine; in that respect, at least until the uprising of ataman Zelenyi and the Grigoriev mutiny, few units was truly ‘unaffiliated.’

10 Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o Grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Voennoe Izdatel’stvo, 1928-1932), v. 3, 158; this statement taken from the description of the *bat’ko* Vasily Bozhenko, commander of the legendary 2nd

Tarashcha Regiment, is applicable no doubt to the entire gamut of the Civil War *bat'ki* and atamans.

11“O kakich urokakh idet rech'?” article of A. Bubnov in *Kommunist*, nr 68-nr70, found in Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromad'skykh Ob'ednan' Ukrainy (TsDAHOU), f 5 o 1 d 229 ll159-170

12 Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 4, 338

13“Makhnovshchina is permanent and immortal” is a memorable line from Arshinov's history (Piotr Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizhenia* (Moscow: Terra, 1996), p. 170)

14 On the level of an impression, the relationship of Makhno to *makhnovshchina* bears greater similarity to that existing between Stalin, an uncharismatic charismat, to Stalinism than that between, say, Marx and Marxism.

15 Arshinov, 148

16 The diary had often appeared as an appendix to the Makhno-related books, mostly, however, in its varying Russian translations (see Arshinov, *Istoriia Makhnovskogo dvizheniia*, pp. 483-494; or a collection of documents, V. Danilov, ed. *Nestor Makho. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine. 1918-1921: dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: ROSPEN, 2006), pp 828-838); exception is made for the recent Ukrainian edition of Makhno's Russian memoirs, where the diary appears in the original Ukrainian (Nestor Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista* (Kiev: Kniha Rodu, 2008) pp. 606-622).

17 *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine. 1918-1921: dokumenty i materialy*, 101-102.

18 Deposition of Chubenko found in TsDAHOU f 5 op 1 d 153 l 11

19 So says Arshinov: “Three thousand revolutionary soldiers were surrounded by an army of 150,000 strong... Having defeated few Red Army groups and taken more than 20 000 Red Army men as prisoners, Makhno went seemingly in the eastward direction...” (Arshinov, 130). The veracity of this statement is not of concern here – it is the exaggeration of mythic proportion that is of interest.

20 See, for instance, the unpublished memoirs of Anatoly Binetsky, found in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f 6562 o 1 d 5.

21 Arshinov, 108

22 *ibid.*, 133-134

23 Cult of the martyrs among the Makhno followers needs to be thoroughly investigated; suffice it to say that the makhnovite hagiographies, composed by Volin and Arshinov, bear marks of unmistakable similarity with the official biographies of the Bolshevik fallen heroes.

24 Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 4, 110

25 *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine. 1918-1921: dokumenty i materialy*, 143; originally published in *La Vague* sometime in April or May of 1919, this article is given – much to my chagrin – in its Russian translation.

26 A good example of the speech that *bat'ko* could have made is found among the protocols of the Congress of the Peasant, Worker and Insurgent deputies, convened under the auspices of the makhnovite Military Revolutionary Council during the desperate October weeks of the anti-Denikin struggle (found in Tsentral'nyi

Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Vyshchykh Orhaniv Vlady ta Upravlinnia Ukrainy (TsDAVOU) f 1824 o 1 d 3 ll 1-3).

27 See Richard Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky: The First Love of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia U Press, 1987), pp 210-225

28 The story is reported with minor variations in all Makhnovite gospels (Voline's *La Révolution inconnue* excepting); see Arshinov, *Istoriia Makhnovskogo dvizheniia*, p 40, A.Belash and V.Belash *Dorogi Nestora Makhno. Istoricheskoe povestvovanie*, Kiev: Proza, 1993, p. 44; and N.Makhno, *Spoivid Anarkhista*, pp 492-500)

29 TsDAHOУ, f 5 op 1 d 153 l 15; this is a typeset copy of Chubenko's interrogation, a truly unique document thanks to the immediacy of its insights, a quaint yet suggestive language it employs and an unusual, epic sense of narrative progression that it attempt to communicate.

30 TsDAVOU f 1824 o 1 d 2 1 9

31 One shall not however, be led into treating the title of *bat'ko* as a makhnovite exclusive patrimony; *bat'ki* were found all over Ukraine; they were prominent in Russia as well (*bat'ka* in Russian). Even Red Army Commanders, such as Vasily Bozhenko or Vitaly Primakov, were referred to as *bat'ko* and often signed their orders with that appellation in front of their surnames.

32 Weber, pp 37-46

33 Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia*, p 153

34 Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o Grazhdanskoi voine*, v. 4, 112

35 Memoirs of Anatoly Binetsky in GARF f 6562 o 1 d 5, 24

36 Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia*, p. 150

37 TsDAHOУ, f 5 op 1 d 153 l 41

38 Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia*, p. 152

39 TsDAVOU, f 1824 o 1 d 3 1 6

40 The word *vlastnicheskii* is one of the many makhnovite neologisms.

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РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ МЕН АЗАМАТ СОҒЫСЫ ҚАРСАҢЫНДАҒЫ ХАРИЗМА ЖӘНЕ «ЖАҚЫНДАСТЫҚ САЯСАТ»

Түйін

Революция, қоғамдық өмірдің барлық саласын қамти отырып, тыныштыққа дейінгі кезеңнен басқа билік парадигмаларын туғызады. Атап айтқанда, инфрақұрылымның материалдық құлдырауы басқарудың бюрократиялық әдісінен бас тартуға, яки автор көрсеткендей ((politics of proximity), үкіметтік қарым-қатынастар жүйесімен алмасуға әкеледі. Мұндай жағдайда харизманың рөлі әлеуметтік-саяси құбылыс ретінде жоғары деңгейге дейін өседі; харизма «революциялық сипаттылық» (immediacy) ғана емес, революциядан кейінгі кезеңдегі саяси тәжірибелерді айқындайтын белгіге айналады.

Түйін сөздер: революция, харизма, азамат соғысы, бюрократиялық билік, жеке басқа табыну

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ХАРИЗМА И «ПОЛИТИКА БЛИЗОСТИ» В ПЕРИОД РЕВОЛЮЦИИ И ГРАЖДАНСКОЙ ВОЙНЫ

Резюме

Революция, кардинально меняя соотношение сил в общественной жизни, несет с собой парадигмы власти, отличные от тех, что превалируют во времена относительного спокойствия. В частности, материальному распаду инфраструктуры сопутствует отказ от бюрократического метода правления с дальнейшей заменой его на систему властных отношений, обозначенной автором как политика близости (politics of proximity). В данных обстоятельствах роль харизмы как социально-политического явления возрастает до небывалого уровня; харизма превращается не только в выражение «революционной непосредственности» (immediacy), но и в элемент, во многом обуславливающий форму политического действия в последующий за революцией период.

Ключевые слова: революция, харизма, гражданская война, бюрократическая власть, культ личности