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**Place and Collective Memory of the Kozak Past
in the Making of Ukrainian Identity: The Battle of Poltava**

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This is a paper about collective memory. While uttering these words it is that easy, locating it and analyzing it, on the other hand, is not that simple. First question is where collective memory lies. If we can find the location of collective memory, only then a ground for analysis can be gained. To this question one can come with a simple answer: memory is simply an individual phenomenon and that there cannot be a place for collective memory beyond individual's brain. Actually, this response is sufficiently sharp and it is so hard to produce arguments against it. It is obvious for us that there is no collective brain used by a group of people, and it is obvious too that memory lies in individual brains. However, this argument refutes the concept "collective memory" and grounds for any further argument for discussion of a collective memory. On the other hand, still how can we ignore the observation that certain memories kept in a similar cut/fashion in individual memories. Therefore, based on the observation that certain narrations of certain events leave similar tracks of memories in multiple individual minds, we should go further and look for reliable grounds for the analysis of collective memory.

To do this I relied on certain concepts, such as sense of space, time, and knowledge. Through these concepts I ended up building a basis first for memory and then collective memory. I will summarize this conceptual framework here only because the body of my paper sits on this basis. Keywords for my conceptual framework are movement, sense of space, time and knowledge. These are closely inter-related. I mark the "movement" as the source of knowledge and therefore, consciousness. Imagine the first movement. That is the moment when the initial data is processed in comparison to the earlier constancy. That is the point when a recognition of a sense "me" and "other" and "inside" and "outside" takes place. Movement is the source of sense of space; while "I am" "here" moving, many "other" beings are "there", positioned against "my position". As "I" move "they", too, move. And movement from one point to another produces the sense of time. And gathered experience in space and time, through the movement, is the story of that being, memory comes into being. And every single human being has his or her own experience and story during the time of movement. When groups of people start to move together they produced common experiences and stories, that is the basis of "us" consciousness. The story of the moving-together (hereby collective memory) of that community becomes the center of community reproduction when new members of that community was transferred, by the holders of memory, all the wisdom produced by that time, by that community. In the course of transfer, certain version of the past is presented and is collectively commemorated which gives a basis to the group identity.¹ Collective commemoration is kept in a certain setting, which might involve festive and ritualistic patterns during which participants are transferred the collective knowledge of the past. Therefore, functionality of the collective memory is attached to the social practices. Ceremonies, commemorations, festivals, heritage sites are then spaces for clashing memories. The physical

¹ Barbara Mitszal. Theories of Social Remembering. Open University Press, 2003, p.7.

sites of memory are extensively loaded with meanings and therefore, its impact is transformative on consciousness. Physical sites, combined with ceremonies, commemorations and festivals, are doubled in their impact and become sites of unarmed confrontations.

As much as physical sites and physical memorials have central importance to forge a collective memory, its impact reaches full capacity with ceremonies in the form of commemorations. Connerton draws attention to the injected “narrative” in the act of commemoration; “[in commemoration] community is reminded of its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative ... its master narrative is more than a story told and reflected on, it is a cult enacted. An image of the past, even in the form of a master narrative, is conveyed and sustained by ritual performances.”² Therefore, physical sites and monuments are largely speechless without ceremonies organized at places with attendance of masses. Attendance, coupled with commemorative acts, reproduces a preferred “narrative”. They, sites and monuments, are then become strong mediums to serve the sets of meanings about the past event in the public realm.

Poltava

Events, which came to be base for collective memories, took place in 1708-09. Three major actors who have caused the way events unfold were Hetman Ivan Mazepa (1639-1709), Tsar³ Peter I (1672-1725) and Swedish King Charles XII (1672-1718). Peter I’s Muscovy was in competition with Sweden over the control of the Baltic Sea. To gain the upper hand over Sweden, Peter ensured support of anti-Swedish Denmark and Poland. Eventually, competition of supremacy led to the Great Northern War (1700-1721). Swedish army proceeded over south Ukraine, and Peter I ordered Mazepa to intercept advancing Swedes. At that moment Mazepa decided to join forces with Swedes. His decision created strong reactions among the Hetmanate elite and in the Church. For those reactionaries Hetmanate was and should have been with the Tsar. Finding little support for his decision, Mazepa joined Charles with a small number of Kozaks.⁴ Mazepa’s decision infuriated Peter who said on 1st of November that “Hetman Mazepa ... betrayed Us, the great Lord, without any reason.”⁵ Peter ordered his commander-in-chief Alexander Menshikov, to punish Mazepa for his decision, to destroy Hetmanate’s capital Baturyn (November 2, 1708). The army of Charles, joined with the Mazepa’s Kozaks, fought a battle with the Peter’s army in Poltava, which the Charles and Mazepa eventually lost.

To change images and meanings stored in space and time for Mazepa a ceremony took place in the aftermath of the Mazepa’s defection. Quoting from November 5, 1708, “...Hlukhiv witnessed a shocking ritual. An effigy of their hetman, Ivan Mazepa, ... was dragged through the streets of the town.”⁶ Ceremony was a culmination of unfolding events followed by the Mazepa’s decision. Ceremony continued on November 5; “[a]t freshly built scaffold, [where effigy was brought] Alexander Menshikov ... read out a list of Mazepa’s crimes and tore the sash of the Order of St. Andrew from the effigy.”⁷ The effigy was then hanged. Soon after the Baturyn’s destruction, Peter

² Paul Connerton. *How Societies remember*. Cambridge, University Press, 1989, p. 71.

³ In 1721 he was acclaimed as Emperor.

⁴ Figures are not clear. Serhii Pavlenko, quotes 1300 based on a mail written during the events. See. Pavlenko. *Zahybel' Baturyna 2 Lystopada 1708 r.* Kyiv: Ukraïns'ka Vydavcha Spilka, 2007, p. 42-43.

⁵ Manifest Petra I do Vsiieï Starshyny i Viis'ka Zaporoz'koho vid 1.xi.1708 p. Z obozu pry Deshi. Chytannia v Obschestve istopii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh. Kn I., Ch. II, M. B. i, 1859, s. 175-176. As Quoted in Taras Chukhlib. Mazepyns'ka Ukraina u Nivnichnii Viini 1700-1721 Rokiv: Osoblyvosti Mizhnarodnoho Stanovyshcha ta Zminy Polityko-Pravovoho statusu. Istorychna Pam'iat. No. 2, 2009, p. 7.

⁶ Serhii Plokyh. *Ukraine and Russia, Representations of the Past*. University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. 66.

⁷ Serhii Plokyh. *Ukraine and Russia*, p. 66. The Order of St. Andrew was ordained by the will of Peter I. Mazepa then once called Prince of the Holy Roman Empire. See, Orest Subtelny. *The Mazepists*, p. 24.

I issued an edict and called Mazepa's decision an "anti-national", "anti-Christian" and a "personal breach of loyalty", and claimed that it aimed "injury of Russia" and "the Russian State".⁸ To further erase the image of the "traitor" Mazepa religious ceremonies designed. Peter I made the Orthodox Church to anathemize Mazepa and damned him till eternity on November 12, 1709. Peter himself took part in the ceremony of damnation which was held in Moscow. The same ceremony took place every year until 1905 in churches of the empire.⁹ Such ceremonies gained large effect both at the level of the elite and the folk that "[l]arge segments of the Ukrainian population joined in the chorus of condemnation and for centuries to come, Ukrainian peasants would not mention the name of Mazepa without appending to it the epithet of accursed"¹⁰

Peter initiated other efforts on the "space". Peter I ordered construction of a memorial church on the Poltava battlefield to the honor of Russian army and the "glorious victory".¹¹ The church named after a Byzantine saint "Sampsonia"¹². Peter did something else. He placed a cross on the graves of the Russian soldiers which said "Pious Warriors, with piety of the blood crowned, the year after the Word of God June 27, 1709"¹³, which later came to be known the "Monument at Brotherly Grave of Perished Russian Soldiers".

Peter's initiatives were followed by the elite's. In 1778, the "Victory Monument" in 1778 and soon later dismantled and rebuilt to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the battle. It was decorated with an eagle and a snake in the eagle's mouth, representing the Russia and the evil enemy i.e. the Mazepa as many read. The fourth monument was placed at the spot where Peter I took a rest the day after the battle.

The 200th anniversary of the Poltava Battle was held with pompous celebrations. Emperor Nikola II personally attended ceremonies. A cycle of commemorative initiatives were planned and many monuments were opened on the anniversary day with foreign delegations, the Emperor and the peasants in attendance.¹⁴ The evidence about the change on the physical space displays an extensive interest in keeping the memory of the war through commemoration and monuments. Evidence also displays a tendency on part of Swedes and Russians towards reconciliation as they commemorate the battle together and as Russian part erected a monument to the memory of the Swedish soldiers. However, on the part of the Hetmanate and Mazepa, as was the case earlier, there is no indication of reconciliation. Sources indicate that nationally conscious Ukrainians were activated by these massive memory-making initiatives. They raised their protestations especially on the erection of Pushkin's monuments at several places in the first decade of the 20th century. All these acts (movements) on the space celebrated the victory of Russia while consolidating a collective memory of Ivan Mazepa as the "evil" hetman of Kozak Hetmanate. The main lines of this collective memory, though, had to face initial attempts by emerging Ukrainian national collective memory.

⁸ Liah Greenfeld. *Nationalism: five roads to modernity* Harvard University Press, 1993, p.195

⁹ Oleksandr Ohloblyn. "Hetman Ivan Mazepa i Moskva." In Ivan Mazepa i Moskva. (ed.) Larysa Bondarenko. Kyiv: Bydavnutsvo Rada, p. 15. See also, O. Vintoniak. Anafema na Hetmana Mazepu. Dnipro, 1991, p. 112. B. Bidnov. Tserkovna Anafema na Ivana Mazepu. Starozhytnosti. 1992, p. 11. See also, Serhii Plokyh. Ukraine and Russia, Representations of the Past., p. 67.

¹⁰ Orest Subtelny. *The Mazepists*, p. 40.

¹¹ See, Указ государя Петра I о построении близь города полтавы, в память одержанной там над шведами баталии, каменного мужского петропавловского монастыря с приделом сампсона странноприимца и пирамиды // маркевич н.а. История малороссии. Т. 4. — м., 1842. — с. 300—301. See also, Елена погосян. Петр Архитектор Российской истории. Искусство СПб, 2001, с. 115.

¹² Елена погосян. Петр Архитектор Российской истории. Искусство СПб, 2001, с. 115.

¹³ http://www.battle-poltava.org/ukr/monuments/russian_soldiers/

¹⁴ <http://www.battle-poltava.org/>

During Soviet times open mass ceremonies marking the event was not there. However, Soviets interpreted the Poltava Battle in their own way. The coming of the 300th anniversary of Pereiaslav Treaty interpreted as the “re-unification” of brotherly people of Russian and Ukraine in 1954 and the same rhetoric of re-unification was underlined when the 250th anniversary of the Poltava battle came in 1959. Capitalizing the anniversary the Soviet discourse was served to public realm through various publications. In those narratives, the battle was introduced as “one of the victorious events in the history of *our* motherland.”¹⁵ Such narratives presented Mazepa as the “traitor” and narrated on how “Ukrainian people” have fought Swedes and “traitor Mazepists.”¹⁶ Once “treason” was heard “All Ukrainian people stood against Mazepists” and fought “traitors” to protect the unity of people.¹⁷ Such interpretations were not surprising given the interpretation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, which perceived Mazepa as a “foolish traitor who tried to tear Ukraine and Russia apart and tried to establish foreign yoke.”¹⁸

One last impact on the space is the monument named “Perished Ukrainian Kozaks” (1994). This is a paradigm shift since this is the first ever monument, in almost 300 year, erected to the memory of the Kozaks at the physical space. It is a narrative turn, which shows a publicly visible production of a new narrative, towards reinstating the honor of the “traitor” Kozaks. Second, indication is that the monument is the first and the last monument for the memory of the Kozaks, which underlines the complex nature of shifting the master narrative of the events.

In the Poltava case, local and regional collective memories, shaped in line with the master narrative, did pose a major resistance against the Ukrainian nationalist attempts to take over the master narrative. The site itself, with the narrative constructed around the monuments, was and still is a source of outrage and insult for the Ukrainian nationalists. How much it hurts the feelings of nationally conscious Ukrainians, large number of ethnic Russians and Russified Ukrainians are keeping the narrative of the Russian and Soviet times. The fact that this narrative is reproduced by the Russian Federation makes the issue further conflictive posing collective memory of nationally conscious Ukrainians against the collective memory of Russians of Ukraine and Russian Federation and Russified Ukrainians.

The clash between two collective memories became fiercer during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010). Russian President Vladimir Putin offered him to hold a joint commemoration (February 12, 2007), including Swedes, Ukrainians and Russians, of the 300th anniversary of the Poltava Battle. While Yushchenko could not openly reject this proposal, however, it was evident to him that Russians would use the occasion to celebrate their “historical triumph.” The local reaction was even further challenging when the head of Poltava City Rada claimed, following traces of reunification of Slavs narrative, that for most of the Council members this Slavic victory will be a source of pride.¹⁹ In response President Yushchenko issued a presidential decree entitled “On commemorations 300 years of events related to the military-political stance of hetman of Ukraine Ivan Mazepa and making of the Ukrainian-Swedish alliance”²⁰ Among many other things most conflictive was the order for erection of Ivan Mazepa’s

¹⁵ Stress is mine. See, Полтава: к 250-летию полтавского сражения: сб. Ст. / Л.Г.Бескровный и др. - м.: изд-во акад. Наук ссср, 1959. - с. 3. See also, маркевич а. Великий подвиг: к 250-летию полтавской битвы. — киев, 1959. — 160 с. Елифанов п.п. Полтавская битва, 1709—1959. — м., 1959. — 32 с. Полтавская победа: из истории международных отношений накануне и после полтавы / отв. Ред. М.б.греков, в.д.королук. — м., 1959. — 265 с.

¹⁶ Порфирьев Е.И. Полтавское сражение. — м., 1959. — с. 38.

¹⁷ Ibid. с. 40.

¹⁸ Oleksandr Ohoblyn. “Hetman Ivan Mazepa i Moskva” in Ivan Mazepa i Moskva. Kyiv. Vydavnytsvo Rada, 1994, p. 16.

¹⁹ http://nezboryma-naciya.org.ua/show_month.php?id=15

²⁰ <http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/cgi-bin/laws/main.cgi?nreg=955%2F2007>

monument in Poltava. Victor Chernomyrdin, then ambassador of Russian Federation, infuriated by the decision of the erection of monuments for Mazepa and Charles XII and said, “Well, imagine now that we erect a monument to Hitler in Stalingrad. How will it look?”²¹ Responding to the concerns of those, whose collective memory identifies Mazepa as the “traitor”, the Poltava City Rada refused the funds which were allocated by the Presidential Administration. Upon the rejection, those who support the erection of the monument have initiated a charity fund to finance the Mazepa monument. The Local Rada, rejecting domestic funds, left itself short funding and signed a memorandum of funding with V. Chernomyrdin to run preparations on Russia funds.²²

When anniversary day came closer people who funded the Mazepa monument through charity, which collected 1 million hryvnias, became anxious to have the opening exactly on the anniversary date (June 27, 2009), which soon proved impossible. City Rada, led by Mayor Ivan Matkovs'kyi, of Block Yulia Tymoshenko (ByuT), blocked the effort and fenced the area where monument would be erected. A right-wing political party, *Svoboda*, responded to the local administration' blockages with placing ads on billboards throughout the city and Ukraine, which reads, “Mazepa Victorious, Ukrainian State Exists”. This, too, was quickly removed by the orders of the Mayor of Poltava.

To the day of anniversary participated Russian, Swedish, Ukrainian, German, Danish, Polish and Turkish delegations. Ukraine was represented by the head of presidential secretariat Mariya Stavniychuk. Russian delegation of 600 was led by the Head of Presidential Administration Serhiy Naryshkin, and Swedes joined with delegation of 200. All participated in the theatrical reconstruction of the battle (Kozaks depicted as half-naked) and opening of the Rotunda Monument for the Fallen Participants of the Poltava Battle²³, which was essentially funded by the Russian side. And it was not a surprise for many that it was the Russian national hymn which was sang in the first place. It was also not a major surprise that only on the second day of the formal ceremonies flowers were to be laid on the Monument of the Perished Kozaks to which Russians did not participate.²⁴ As a part of formal program a memorial service was held at Church of Sampsonia for the perished but Mazepa's name was excluded for that anathema of 300 years was still in the place.

The 300th anniversary marks the attack of the Ukrainian nationalist narrative on the narrative of the Empire and Soviet Union. The evidence displays that the latter posed a solid defense and did not let itself be disposed of its capacity as a master narrative. This case openly shows that the Ukrainian national narrative of the past is far from penetrating to the eastern regions of the country. This fact also displays the power of monuments and the narrative constructed around it through ceremonies, in the way that the teaching of a certain narrative of history in schools is limited in its impact to reformulate collective memories. It is only at movements at physical spaces one can expect a direct and immediate impact on the collective consciousness. However, Ukrainian national narrative seems weak to take on such a task, at least in the Poltava case.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Росія профінансує святкування 300-річчя Полтавської битви, <http://gazeta.ua/index.php?id=217718&eid=dufchxppur>

²³ Plaque on the monument reads, “Time heals wounds, to the eternal memory of the brave fallen soldiers of the Battle of Poltava June 27, 1709.”

²⁴ <http://poltava.info/news/poltava/item/2009/06/26/15-44-12/Programa-osnovnikh-miskikh-zakhodiv-vidznachennya-300richchya-Poltavskoi-bitvi-ONOVLENO.htm>, http://www.rian.ru/poltava_news/20090627/175616671.html