PART

I

Concepts and Contexts
Chapter 1

Notions and Definitions

I do not intend to provide a detailed analysis of the vast literature on the relationship between history and memory, history and politics, tradition and culture, myth and scholarship, historical epistemology, and historical consciousness. For this book, I turn to basic notions and approaches with a purely utilitarian goal: I use them to establish the conceptual framework of my own narrative. Drawing on the experience of several researchers who have already offered their perspective on the questions guiding this study, I will formulate my own definitions to form a base for my narrative.

Historical memory

At first sight, the term historical memory seems tautological: memory is about the past, by definition, like history. At the same time, there is an internal contradiction: the memory of individuals or groups may not coincide with history because history suggests a narrative that ignores the memory variations of individuals and groups. This observation was made by Maurice Halbwachs when he revised his ideas on the interaction of history and memory.

Nevertheless, the adjective “historical” is quite relevant when we mean “collective memory” if only because the engineers, promoters, and carriers of this kind of memory often identify it with history (that is, with a specific narrative of the past) and, in a broader sense, with the past in general, sometimes going so far as to erase all borders between history and memory.

Historical memory is usually represented as a variant of collective memory. The ever-growing number of studies dedicated to various types, functions, and embodiments of collective memory, its consumption, and the apparition of “public history” resulted in such a maelstrom of academic, pop-
ular, and pseudo-academic texts that a simple description and enumeration of the principal ideas and suggestions of various disciplines requires a separate study.¹

For this reason, I will only mention those well-known works and figures that have had the greatest influence on the scope of interpretation and cognition of the phenomenon known as collective memory. Citing some of them has become a necessary ritual in any work dedicated to the topic, and I address them to delineate the basic framework of my own study. I deliberately omit the voluminous array of literature² that itemizes, specifies, or expands ideas that form the conceptual base of memory studies. Such an analysis is not on my agenda.

It is customary to trace the intellectual genealogy of memory studies and of the term “collective memory” to the works of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who was the first to articulate such basic notions as les cadres sociaux de la mémoire, (“social frames of memory”) (1926), and la mémoire collective (“collective memory”) (1950).³ It should be noted that the term “collective memory” (as a sociological notion) came into being in the intellectual milieu of the emerging Annales school, but in any case, Marc Bloch was the first to react to Halbwachs’s formulas, and the subsequently established “history of mentalities” is obviously reminiscent of his ideas.⁴


² A sampling of literature in such spheres as cultural anthropology, political science, social philosophy, history of culture, social psychology, museum studies, and so forth proves that the boom of memory studies can rather be linked to the break-up of “big questions” and their reconceptualization within various disciplines.


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Almost synchronously with Halbwachs, German art historian Aby Warburg formulated the notion of *soziales Gedächtnis*, “social memory,” which was quite close to the idea of his French colleague and essentially grappled with the same social framework that shapes the structures of collective memory and acts as its mediator.5 However, Warburg was more interested in the structures of collective memory as reflected in works of art.

Following on the heels of Halbwachs and Warburg is French historian Pierre Nora with his monumental (both literally and figuratively) project *Les lieux de mémoire* (“spaces of memory” or “places of memory”).6 Along with Nora, most diligent researchers also mention his contemporaries and colleagues Philippe Ariès and Jacques Le Goff, who, like him, belonged to the so-called third generation of *Les Annales*.

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed Halbwachs’s triumphant comeback, this time to the realm of English-language humanities. This event coincided with the growth of public and academic interest in the problems of collective memory. For this reason, the ideas of the French sociologist became extremely useful to a new generation of scholars and greatly influenced the development of memory studies.

Over the last four decades, the study of collective memory has flourished. The most relevant scholars for this study are ones that, in a sense, continue Halbwachs’s work. These include American historian Patrick Hutton, with his fundamental *History as an Art of Memory*; British sociologist Paul Connerton, who refreshed the topic with his book *How Societies Remember* and called that attention be paid to the modes of memory transfer through bodily and commemorative practices; American sociologist Jeffrey Olick, who reinterpreted the notion of collective memory; and German historians Jan and Aleida Assmann, who augmented the basic vocabulary of memory studies by adding the dichotomy “communicative–cultural memory.”7

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6 We can dispense with the obligatory link to the results of this mega project, reflected in a seven-volume edition of the same name. Instead, we will cite the English-language edition that includes forty-six (of over 130) articles published in the United States: Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–98).

Jeffrey Olick suggests taking into account the differences between collective memory and collected memory. He believes that collected memory can represent “the aggregated individual memories of members of a group.” At the same time, he admits that the process of “collecting” individual memories that correlate with each other would inevitably lead to the transformation of individual memories under the influence of other versions, even when they are very similar.  

Collective memory, according to Olick, is the opposite of collected memory because instead of individual memories, it is a collection of definitions, symbols, and images common for all members of the community, quite independent of the subjective perception of these individuals. It is easy to discover that “there are clearly demonstrable long-term structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individuals to escape them. Powerful institutions clearly value some histories more than others, provide narrative patterns of how individuals can and should remember, and stimulate [collective] memory in ways and for reasons that have nothing to do with the individual or aggregate neurological records.”

Jan and Aleida Assmann advance a position that is quite similar to that of Olick: they proposed dividing collective memory into communicative and cultural memory (1987). Communicative memory, similar to collected memory, is a phenomenon mostly present in the everyday communication between individuals. It is utterly individualized and not well-structured. It functions within the limits of a small social group whose boundaries are defined by this common memory, generally transferred and modified via verbal communication. It is directly linked with individuals’ social roles inside a group and with the formation of social identity. As a rule, communicative memory survives for three or four generations and then dies out because of generational change and the growing remoteness of its initial forms.

Cultural memory is somewhat contrary to the communicative one. Its formation and functioning are linked to tradition and this tradition is, in turn, connected to authority. Cultural memory is imposed from the outside; in this sense, it runs counter to communicative memory, and, more-

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9 Ibid., 28–29.
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over, the two may conflict. Cultural memory is a part of the cultural identity of groups; in its relations with individuals, it is a form of identity that is defined from outside.

While communicative memory deals with concrete “social” time that can easily be measured through generations, cultural memory measures time through historical periods; in this case, time is mythologized. Cultural memory is elaborated and supported by social or government institutions; it can exist and be transferred for centuries and millennia. The only people to have access to the elaboration, preservation, and transfer of cultural memory are those that are given such powers by society or the state—the mnemonic professionals, from priests to writers, historians, and archivists.10

It is not difficult to see the point where all researchers agree: a juxtaposition and comparison of individual (collected/communicative) and collective/cultural memory (not excluding a possibility of their close interaction) in order to identify as a category of its own the kind of memory that is an object of intentional construction and social, cultural, and political engineering. The collective (cultural) memory presupposes a political interest. It is the very kind of memory that can be identified with historical memory.

It is already well established that the issue of historical memory is closely related to the question of power, whether political power or the power of discourse. A classical statement by Jacques Le Goff might be exemplary of the conclusion that collective memory was and remains an important issue in the power struggle between social groups. He wrote: “To make themselves the master of memory and forgetfulness is one of the great preoccupations of the classes, groups, and individuals who have dominated and continue to dominate historical societies.”11 Historical memory as a form of collective/cultural memory is simultaneously an object and a subject of historical politics and the struggle for power12 and control of society: it is both an end in itself and a means to reach this end. In this sense, historical memory is the principal object of historical politics.

10 These theses were first formulated in the late 1980s. For a brief overview, see Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: de Gruyter 2008), 109–118.
12 The word “power” is used here in a broad sense: political, spiritual, social, cultural, etc., including what is called the power of discourse.
Chapter 1

Historical politics

The term “historical politics” or “politics of history” used in an academic context dates from almost half a century ago. It was popularized by the American historian Howard Zinn in his book *The Politics of History* in 1970. This collection of polemical essays debunked the claims of the academic establishment that there existed a neutral and objective history. The author did not claim to have invented the term, but he used it to articulate the problem of interaction between an academic discipline and society, for instance, the capacity of historians to respond to the demands and challenges of modernity and to be socially active. This is how the term “politics of history” appears to have been coined in a discourse that was more journalistic than academic.

In the 1980s, during the famous “historians’ dispute” (*Historikerstreit*) in West Germany (1986–1989), the term “historical politics” emerged in a different context and with a different meaning. The dispute among professional historians began when Andreas Hillgruber raised the entangled issues of the suffering of German civilians during the final stage of World War II and the heroism of the Wehrmacht, which defended civilians from the Red Army. Hillgruber’s comments quickly acquired nationwide notoriety, and politicians, journalists, and mass media joined the debate. The most controversial article was published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* by Ernst Nolte, a well-known historian and researcher of the history of fascism. In this article, he protested against the premise of specific German guilt in the crimes of Nazism and, according to his detractors, relativized these crimes by calling attention to similar acts in other countries; genocide and sociocide, concentration camps and deportations, argued Nolte, existed well before 1933–45. Nolte’s statement that the Nazi death camps were a kind of response to Stalin’s Gulag only added to the controversy. He was joined by another influential historian, Michael Stürmer, who affirmed that the perception of the past that arose among Germans (or was imposed on them from outside) after World War II essentially robs them of normal collective memory and, moreover, hampers free historical research and discussion. The Germans, he asserted, deserve a past to be proud of, and they should be given such a past.

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Because Stürmer was an advisor to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, left and liberal intellectuals and public figures grouped around Jürgen Habermas and interpreted Stürmer’s position as an official manifesto against the ruling neoconservatives and like-minded right-wingers. Stürmer’s ideas corresponded to the ideological ambitions of the then-ruling political elite, which tried either to restore or reinvigorate German national identity as the basis of cultural/ethnic nationalism. Opponents qualified these actions as “historical politics,” in other words, as an attempt to manipulate history (ideas of the past) to serve immediate interests of a political force.

The term migrated from the vocabulary of journalism to the academic lexicon, losing its negative and ironic overtones. In 1999, Edgar Wolfrum published a foundational study entitled *Historical Politics in the Federative Republic of Germany: A Path Towards a West German Memory, 1948–1990*. This work not only marked the first use of the notion of historical politics in the title of a monograph but also marked the first attempt at articulating a scholarly definition of the concept. According to Wolfrum, “This is a type of activity and a sphere of politics where various actors use history for their specific political goals. It is addressed to society and carries out the tasks of legitimation, mobilization, politization, scandalization, defamation, etc.; the key issue is who actualizes the discussed experience of the past, with what methods, with what intentions and with what results.”

The term quickly took hold in academic vocabulary, as exemplified by a whole cluster of works published in the first decade of the 2000s where it was present both in the titles

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14 Stefan Troebst believes that the historian Christian Meier was the first to use the term “historical politics” in this discussion. See “Geschichtspolitik,” *Docupedia*, https://docupedia.de/zw/Geschichtspolitik, accessed December 12, 2020. He also quotes political scientist Harald Schmid, who pointed out that this term was already in use in journalism in the 1930s, precisely in the context of manipulations of the past in the interest of the present. See Stefan Troebst, “Vom publizistischen Kampfbegriff zum Forschungskonzept: Zur Historisierung der Kategorie ‘Geschichtspolitik,’” in *Geschichtspolitik und kollektives Gedächtnis: Erinnerungskulturen in Theorie und Praxis* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2009), 53–75.


and in the conceptual frameworks of historians, sociologists, cultural studies scholars, and political analysts.\(^{17}\)

In the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, when the phenomenon described by the term “historical politics” intensified both in “old Europe” and in the newly enlarged European Union, which welcomed a dozen new members, it became topical in social and political newspeak.

The fact that it was resuscitated in Poland can hardly be surprising given that issues of history have traditionally enjoyed broad public interest in the country. Right-conservative politicians—specifically the Law and Justice Party and its allies—who came to power at the end of 2005, and along with like-minded representatives of public opinion, announced the necessity of implementing a new historical politics (polityka historyczna) in Poland in order to strengthen Polish national identity and the unity of the nation.\(^{18}\) It essentially meant a total revision of the attitude toward the past and targeted action to restore a collective memory that referenced the romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century.\(^{19}\) Initiators and promoters of the new historical politics declared that Poles should not restrict themselves to the revision of the tragedies and heroism of the twentieth century. Janusz Kurtyka, director of the Institute of National Memory (IPN), suggested pivoting to the experience and special historical role of Poland since the sixteenth century.\(^{20}\)

The discussion that took place in Poland over the new historical politics was reminiscent of the German Historikerstreit both in its scale and in the intensity of its emotions. Their similarity was not, however, only formal. In


\(^{19}\) See Robert Traba, “Polskie spory ob historii w XXI wieku,” in *Istoricheiskaya politika v 21 veke*, ed. Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman (Moscow: NLO, 2012), 69–71. To understand the general historical context of the emergence of the “new historical politics” it is also good to consult Ewa Ochman’s work dedicated to the “regionalization” of historical memory in modern Poland: Post-Communist Poland: Contested Past and Future Identities (New York: Routledge, 2014).

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both cases, it was a problem of formatting or reformatting an identity that triggered the debate. In both cases, there was an attempt to revise the past to further the interests of the present, in this case, the “consolidation” of the nation. Both in Germany and in Poland, the initiators of these attempts hoped to achieve a certain restorative effect on national identity with the help of an imaginary normalization of the past and the restoration of such fragments that, in their opinion, had positive potential for national collective memory. In both countries, the policy was initiated by right-conservative politicians and nationalists. In both cases, the initiators met with strong resistance in segments of society that are commonly referred to as liberal.

Curiously, in German public discourse, the term “historical politics” was negatively coded by the opponents of these policies and deployed with irony and sarcasm. Meanwhile, in Poland during the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, the promoters of historical politics saw it as a redeeming force that could be used for the recovery of national identity. They saw historical politics as a natural phenomenon that was similar to economic or social policy.21 However, unlike Germany, the new historical politics of 2005 did not initially find any support among Polish professional historians.

These debates, among other things, definitely made the term “historical politics” (polityka historyczna) a part of academic vocabulary. In his recent study dedicated to the evolution of the term, Stefan Troebst discovered that similar notions exist in two other global scientific languages: English (politics of history) and French (politique du passé).22 The term secured a foothold in both English and French academic dictionaries between the late 1990s and early 2000s, apparently as a response to social and political challenges. The phenomena described by the term “historical politics” emerged full-blown not only in the “new” Central and Eastern Europe but in the “old Europe” as well.

To sum up, in the 2000s, the term “historical politics” and the manifestations it describes took root both in sociopolitical and in academic research vocabularies. It should, however, be remembered that historical politics as exploitation of history for political ends is an ancient phenomenon. Any his-

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22 Stefan Troebst, “Geschichtspolitik: Politikfeld, Analysierahmen, Streitobjekt,” in Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989, 15–34. This essay is, as of now, the most informative and comprehensive study of the development of the term “historical politics” and its counterparts.
torian can list numerous examples of the use of the described, imagined, and perceived past for the needs of the current moment since the very beginnings of what we call “history” writing. Much of what we currently define as historical politics functioned quite well before the emergence of the term.

The difference between modern historical politics and its earlier prototypes lies in its scale and in the methods it uses. Historical politics is a phenomenon of modernity; its birth and development are inseparable from industrial society, the emergence of the nation-state, mass politics, standardized national languages, and mass education, including historical education. In this sense, historical politics has existed since the moment history became a means of forging mass loyalty, not to a sovereign, but to the largest sociocultural and political community of the modern era, the nation.

Industrial society not only boosts and fuels the emergence of nations but also generates the administrative, technical, and cultural premises for the establishment of homogeneous forms of “collective consciousness.”23 The infrastructure propitious for the shaping of some standard form of mass/collective consciousness (which might be labeled as national identity) results from the proliferation of literacy based on standardized and codified national languages, press, and mass media; from the standardization of education through the opening of schools and then universities to the broader public; and from the industrialization of the means of data storage and transfer. However, this infrastructure is no less propitious for activities that allow for active influence of this process, including historical politics.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the unequivocal use of history and collective memory for the entrenchment of dominant political discourses and for the shaping of a system of loyalties became an integral part of internal and external government policies, a means to establish and legitimize nations, and a tool of political mobilization.24 The invention of traditions, ideological unification and mobilization, the achievement of a certain level of cultural homogeneity necessary to guarantee collective loyalty to the nation and to the state and the conduct of modern war would have been impossible without the manipulation of history and collective memory.

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23 Here I refer the reader to the works of Ernest Gellner and Karl Deutsch, who substantiated these points.
24 The most recent publications on this topic include a foundational study both in terms of volume and interpretation: Stefan Berger with Christoph Conrad, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
The emergence of the term “historical politics” in the 1990s and its public and academic legitimation coincided with a new level of development of the phenomenon expressed by the term. Technological improvements in the sphere of data transfer, storage, and the dissemination of information, a new level of scientific knowledge, and the total penetration of mass media into all spheres of human life and into every corner of the planet made possible an unparalleled manipulation of “collective consciousness.” The development of mass communication rapidly increased the mobilization potential of historical politics. The technological and administrative capacities of governments and other actors engaged in historical politics reached a hitherto unprecedented level.

At the same time, the affirmation of political pluralism, the permeability of cultural boundaries, and the spread of democracy paradoxically increased the conflict potential of historical politics. Political freedoms, together with enhanced access to information management tools, enable any interest group to start articulating and disseminating their own versions of the past in order to organize information and put psychological and political pressure on their opponents. As the number of agents of historical politics exploded, its quality changed.

History and memory

Approaches to the nature of relations between history and memory in different texts can be reduced to three main points: (1) history and memory are contrasted with each other and even seen as incompatible; (2) history and memory are seen as one and the same; (3) history and memory are perceived as two interacting and complementary forms of understanding, interpretation, and representation of the past.

The first and the third approaches are typically and primarily related to research and analysis as they are more characteristic of the academic sphere. The equation of history and memory is more common for political, journalistic, and ideological discourses. However, the formula might also be broadly used in academia.

The most radical statement on the separation and contrast of history and memory belongs to Pierre Nora:
Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies found ed in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic—responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism.25

According to Nora, the divergence, the “civilized divorce” of history and memory, starts with the emergence of the “history of history,” in other words, professional historiography. History that used to serve memory turns to criticism and analysis. History-memory is replaced by critical history.26 At this stage, the historiography essentially disproves and dismisses the right of memory to represent the past adequately. It debunks the myths of memory and puts the past in line according to the rigorous “laws” of historicity, objectivity, and scientific analysis. History pushes memory out of collective representations of the past.

Despite a number of rhetorical exaggerations pointed out by many commentators, Nora clearly articulates the problems associated with separating professional history writing from memory and their interpenetration and interaction in the era of the “acceleration of history,” when memory gradually started fading away. This distinction forms part of the analytical core of this book.

The topic was taken up by Patrick Hutton, who paid special attention to the intellectual history of relations between professional historiography and

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memory. Using the traces of memory to research the past, historians deal less with the past itself than with its images. Memory is not only or perhaps not mostly a part of history as it is a set of representative forms of the past studied by historians, according to Hutton.27

His fellow historian Allan Megill suggests dividing historiography into three types: affirmative, didactic, and analytical.28 Affirmative historiography is especially prone to the equation of history and memory. According to Megill:

Memory-oriented historiography is a special case of a more general category that we can think of as affirmative historiography—affirmative because its fundamental aim is to praise the particular tradition or group whose history and experiences it is recounting. . . . Memory-oriented, affirmative historiography is a version of the “ordinary” or “vulgar” understanding of history. . . . Affirmative historiography subordinates the past to the projects that human beings are engaged in now. It lacks a critical stance on the memories it collects and on the tradition it supports. Indeed, it not only lacks a critical stance on its favored memories and traditions, but actually tends toward a mythification of them.29

Affirmative historiography advances the call for the consolidation and strengthening of a society—a people, a nation, a state, a political or a religious group. As this function coincides with the similar tasks of collective memory, the marriage of history and memory in this case is usually presented as the most legitimate option.

Didactic historiography positions itself between affirmative and critical historiography; it might be added that the sense of its existence is reflected in an old formula coined by Cicero: Historia magistra vitae est. A certain inclination toward analytical history can be observed because in this case, the experience of the past might be at least formally subordinated to a critical

28 I refer to Megill, but he is unlikely to be the author of this classification. Any experienced historian could reason like this.
analysis necessary for learning lessons. At the same time, the role of preceptor played by didactical historiography contradicts its critical function and brings it closer to the affirmative history.

Finally, analytical history/historiography should be distinguished from memory and contrasted to it simply because memory cannot be its own critical test while analytical history is critical toward memory by definition.30

At the same time, Megill does not deny the value and importance of memory for history, first, because the feeling of time is impossible without memory and, second, because history works with facts that would have been unavailable without the work of memory.

These arguments by Megill are very useful if we wish to understand the role of historical politics. Historical politics can be described either as a deliberate, purposeful mixing of history and memory, as a dictate of affirmative historiography, or as an attempt to reconcile history with memory within the limits of didactic history. This framework allows us to be reasonably confident when identifying different variants of historical politics.

These strands of thought, approaches, models, and definitions do not pretend to be universal. However, they are necessary in order to protect this study and its perspective from essentialism, that is, a temptation to fully equate these notions with some eternal, immutable elements. The phenomena, events, and facts analyzed below will certainly transcend the borders of the definitions, schemas, and models proposed above. I will also speak not so much about facts and events themselves but rather about their perception by different subjects and objects of historical politics. In other words, we will be second-order observers (to recall the Nicklas Luhmann formula), interested not only in observing processes but also in observing the process of observation; we will pay attention not only to the texts but also to the contexts—intellectual, cultural, social, and political.

**Basic definitions**

All these approaches are mentioned in the context of the interrelationship between “historical memory” and “collective memory,” “historical politics” and “politics of memory.” Discussions of collective memory, in one way or

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another, inevitably point to the need to define the objects and subjects (bear-
ers, agents) of identity. This in turn involves the necessity of clarifying the roles of institutions and interest groups, which moves the study to the arena of politics and policy, unless it is limited to the narrow and strictly specialized dimensions of art history, ethnography, or culture studies.

Let us draw on the terms provided above and formulate some general definitions both for further speculation and for the organization of a coherent narrative that describes historical politics in Ukraine and in the postcommunist space between the end of the 1980s and 2020.

“Historical memory” is a form of collective or cultural memory which claims the status of tradition (which, of course, is in itself invented and constructed). Historical memory is a mythologized form of a group’s vision of the past, typically existing as a set of simulacra reflected in texts, symbols, visual images and other sites of memory. Under contemporary circumstances, particularly in the context of the development of “virtual reality” in different shapes and forms, it achieves the status of hyper-reality, which influences what is generally thought to be reality.

Historical memory is a relatively stable set of interrelated collective ideas about a group’s past, purposefully designed by means of historical politics, and codified and standardized in social, cultural, and political discourses and stereotypes, myths, symbols, and mnemonic and commemorative practices.

On the one hand, historical memory is a result of cultural, social, and political engineering; on the other, it is also a tool used to shape cultural, social, political, and religious identities then synthetized into one during an era of nationalism. Historical memory becomes an important component of social and cultural resources, or, speaking in broader terms, symbolic capital (to use Pierre Bourdieus’s metaphor). The instrumentalization of historical memory by means of historical politics may result in the sacralization of some of its forms and manifestations that acquire certain attributes of a civic religion.

Historical politics aims to construct historical memory and other forms of collective perception and representations of the past, including professional historiography that advances the political interests of a certain group (social, religious, cultural etc.).

Political, cultural, ethnic, and other social groups use historical politics in their struggle for power as well as for the control and redistribution of symbolic capital. Historical politics is an instrument of mobilization for various social groups for the sake of their homogeneity and loyalty, and is a tool of ideological and political control.

Historical politics may be used for the accumulation or appropriation of symbolic capital that can be conducive to the production of social, cultural, and even economic capital. This is what defines the strength, influence, and attractiveness of historical politics for various agents.

The most significant feature of historical politics is the ideological and political use of both history (i.e., a coherent knowledge and set of ideas about the past) and memory, the pragmatic use of history and memory in internal policy, judicial and legislative practices, and in ideological, diplomatic, and military conflicts. Typically, historical politics is either rooted in existing cultural stereotypes or creates new ones. Historical politics is specialized in the production and reproduction of simulacra; it creates a hyper-reality that not only replaces reality but can strongly influence it. The “politics of memory” is, in this case, a narrower term, mostly embracing practices related to the shaping of collective/historical memory. It does not include interventions in the sphere of professional historical writing and didactical history.

The circle of agents of historical politics steadily grew over the second half of the twentieth century. The sphere that had previously been totally dominated by the state (in all societies, whether totalitarian, authoritarian, or democratic) is currently accessible to civil society institutions; it can be actively influenced by individuals, business structures, churches, local communities, non-state mass media, educational facilities such as universities, and even informal virtual communities (for instance, groups in social networks). The state continues to play a leading role, but its representatives are increasingly forced to attune to public opinion and the interests of non-state institutes and local communities.

I propose to distinguish several types or models of historical memory. It is worthwhile to begin with an important observation made by Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, who proposed their own taxonomy of “memory

The term coined by Jean Baudrillard is perfectly suited to characterize the social and cultural products of historical politics.
regimes” in postcommunist societies. It concerns the instability and volatility of memory regimes caused by a large range of circumstances: a political situation, a change of actors at the helm, etc. The models of historical memory and the corresponding historical politics I describe are different from memory regimes: they tend to be stable and rigid, and at least two of them are not elastic.

I suggest naming the first model exclusivist. First, it affirms and imposes a homogeneous version of historical memory. Second, it expels from this canonical version an array of myths, ideas, and representations of the past that hamper the shaping of its own “true” version. Third, it excludes “alien” elements of the past or stigmatizes them as extraneous and pernicious. Therefore, the agency or actor achieves cultural and political homogenization through exclusion. This model rejects pluralism.

Within the framework of the exclusivist model in Ukraine, two main narratives of memory related to different forms of cultural and political identity confront each other: national/nationalist and Soviet nostalgic. At times, an imperial nostalgic narrative also joins the battle, providing additional support both for the Soviet nostalgic narrative (of which it was, in practice, an ally) and the national/nationalist one (for example, nostalgia for the glamor of the Habsburg Empire).

A “memory regime” is a “set of cultural and institutional practices that are designed to publicly commemorate and/or remember a single event, a relatively clearly delineated and interrelated set of events, or a distinguishable past process.” See Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, eds., Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15–16.

Bernard and Kubik, Twenty Years after Communism, 16.

The “narrative of memory” might exist as a text or as visual image, or the aggregate of them, presupposing the existence of a story. For instance, a monument or a place of memory can include a text. The visual imagery can include a story, as exemplified by the bas-reliefs in the Memorial Complex of the Great Patriotic War in Kiev or by the Soviet monument to Taras Shevchenko in Kharkiv.

Any form of collective memory may contain elements of nostalgia. In this case, the Soviet narrative of memory and history inherited from Soviet times turned into the Soviet nostalgic narrative simply because it became a part of the past.

The conceptual core of the Ukrainian national/nationalist narrative is the idea of uniqueness, singularity, and independence of the community known as the “nation.” The exclusivist model of this narrative holds that the nation is congruent with a homogeneous ethnic/cultural/linguistic community, an ethnos, or people. A distinctive feature of this narrative is its penchant for archaic and antiquarian cultural forms and representations of historical experience, which somewhat paradoxically brings its practices closer to the practices of the Soviet period, which readily reduced Ukrainian national identity to antiquarian and ethnographic forms. I distinguish “national” from “nationalist” for purely instrumental/technical reasons. “Nationalist” is a segment of a broader “national” narrative; however, it identifies itself with a certain movement and ideology that brands itself as “nationalist,” and this semantic difference is important.
Chapter 1

The exclusivist model, by definition, means conflict with those versions of the past that do not fit into its range of ideas and political manifestations. It purports to shape a homogeneous identity by marginalizing or eliminating those representations of the past that do not suit such a homogeneous identity, or by assimilating them. Yet the alternative variants of collective/historical memory are not completely discarded. In the aforementioned conflict, they might be used as representations of the Other, and this Other often plays an important role for defining one’s own national “I.” Representations of the communist era in Eastern Europe that result from the encroachment of an external Other are very important for the perception of the collective “I” as victim. In other words, the exclusivist model retains the Other but only within the framework of its own representations. It rejects the representations offered by this Other.

The second model is inclusivist. It contemplates the integration of different variants of collective/historical memory into one memorial and symbolic space and their unification into one common narrative, for instance unified by the idea of civic patriotism. Cultural and political homogenization is secured through inclusion of non-antagonistic narratives. It presupposes recognition of the formal cultural parity of these narratives. In Ukraine, this model is only used in an ad hoc manner when the changing political situation demands it; it is not the product of a well-considered strategy or articulated need coming from significant and influential social groups. This type of inclusion may tolerate different narratives within a common framework, but it also can contradict pluralism, particularly in its confrontation with the national/nationalist narrative.

For example, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, and Lesya Ukrainka are more a part of the “national” narrative, while Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) belong to the “nationalist” one. The Soviet nostalgic narrative does not have a clearly articulated central idea because it has lost the basic principle of the Soviet model of history, the class approach. It may include elements related to the “leading” role of Russian culture and Russian language. This narrative affirms the supranational unity of historical experience. Because of political instrumentalization, it is reoriented toward the negation of the national/nationalist narrative, especially its radical manifestations.

The imperial nostalgic narrative exists in rudimentary forms and is typically related to regional practices of commemoration and the cultivation of regional peculiarities. In the southern regions (for instance, in Odessa), it is intimately linked to the myth of origin. In the western regions, it is related to the myth of the special cultural political role of the region (for instance, the “Ukrainian Piedmont”), and the Habsburgian imperial heritage is actualized as a sign of cultural closeness to European history.
The third model can be branded as mixed (ambivalent): it is based on the coexistence rather than the fusion of different variants of collective memory, which are sometimes ideologically and politically incompatible but coexist either because of a lack of public interest or the absence of a purposeful policy of neutralization or neglect of their ideological content.

Of course, these typologies are just a tool to define and analyze the main dominating tendencies. There are no pure types in reality. The narrative of memory proposed and imposed by an empire represents an inclusivist model; the same might be true for the Soviet official narrative. However, both would negate the national/nationalist narrative in its politicized form, which gives them some attributes of an exclusivist model. “Common European history” falls under the inclusivist model, but it excludes narratives conducive to ethnocentrism and xenophobia.

The national/nationalist memory narrative rejects the idea of inclusivity given that it is founded on the idea of a singular linguistically and culturally homogeneous ethnic group, that is, on the idea of ethnic/cultural nationalism. In Ukraine, the national/nationalist memory narrative emerged on the basis of the idea of a double antagonism: against the ethnic Other (oppressive ethnic groups) and the political Other (empires and the Soviet Union). This narrative may contain elements of inclusivity (for instance, the appropriation of elements of the Others’ narratives).

Recent works provide a number of notions of and references to the inclusive, exclusive, and ambivalent forms of identity, which represents various taxonomies of memory narratives, etc. Ukrainian researchers and columnists who have addressed this topic include Viacheslav Artyukh, Viktoriya Sereda, Volodymyr Kravchenko, Yaroslav Hrytsak, Yuriy Shapoval, Andriy Portnov, Volodymyr Kulyk, Mykola Riabchuk, Liudmyla Nahorna, and Alla Kyrydon. Of the most characteristic examples, there is Volodymyr Kulyk, who, proceeding from an analysis of discursive practices in the sphere of politics of memory, distanced himself from Eastern Slavic/Soviet and nationalistic narratives. Volodymyr Kravchenko, analyzing various forms of representation of the past through the prism of identities, also proposed distinguishing between identities related to collective memory, such as Soviet, Orthodox Slavic, Ukrainian nativist, and liberal Western, and placing them between the poles of inclusive and exclusive identities. Mykola Riabchuk observed the existence of two projects in the politics of memory: the Ukrainian (or nationalistic) and the “Little Russian,” both opposed to the Soviet one. See Volodymyr Kulyk, "Natsionalistychnye proty radianskoho: istorychna pam’ят v nezalezhniy Ukrayini," September 20, 2012, http://historians.in.ua/index.php/en/istoryiya-i-pamyat-vazhki-pitannya/379-volodymyr-kulyk-natsionalistychnye-proty-radianskoho-istorychna-pamiat-v-nezalezhniy-ukrayini; Kravchenko, "Boy s tenyu: sovetskoye proshloye v istoricheskoy pamiaty sovremennogo ukraninskogo obshchestva," Ab imperio no. 2 (2004): 329–67; and Mykola Ryabchuk, "Kultura pamyati i politika zabeniya," Otechestvenye zapiski, no. 1 (2007), http://www.strana-oz.ru/2007/1/kultura-pamyati-i-politika-zabeniya.
The Soviet nostalgic narrative of memory and history usually stands alongside the imperial (imperial nostalgic) narrative and blends with it not only in Russia, where such a combination looks quite natural, but in Ukraine as well. Speaking of regional identities, the most obvious examples are Donbass and Crimea. However, the experience of historical politics in Ukraine during the last twenty years demonstrates the biting irony of history. The national/nationalist memory narrative can mix well with the imperial, as evidenced by the popular (though not bereft of masochist undertones) cult of Franz Joseph I and his era in Galicia, while the Soviet nostalgic narrative may merge with imperial dreams about the glorious and glamorous past.

The ability of carriers and promoters of the national/nationalist memory narrative to reproduce the cultural patterns and behavioral patterns characteristic of their Soviet nostalgic antagonist is even more impressive: suffice it to say that the methods, forms, rhetoric, and representations of the so-called “decommunization” of 2015–18 are amazingly similar to Bolshevist iconoclastic rage from a century earlier.

The mainstream of historical politics in Ukraine was determined predominantly by the interaction and conflict between two major narratives of memory: the national/nationalist and the Soviet nostalgic. Various regional and local narratives should not be neglected; however, they typically reproduce and reflect these two major competing narratives mentioned above. Of course, ethnic Ukrainians are not the only ones to have an established national narrative: Crimean Tatars, Jews, Poles and Russians as well as others also maintain their own national narratives (See Part III).

An important particularity of Ukraine is the regional dimension acquired by these two narratives. The national/nationalist narrative predominated in the western regions of Ukraine, especially in Galicia. The Soviet nostalgic narrative took hold in the eastern regions and Crimea. The former mostly corresponded to the exclusivist model and the latter to the inclusivist. A mixed model dominated the central part and, to a degree, the southeastern part of Ukraine, with subregional and temporary oscillations either in favor

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39 The Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk regions, and parts of the Volhynian, Rivne, Zakarpattia, and Chernivtsi regions (oblasti). At the same time, Zakarpattia may also be regarded as a nest for two local ethnic narratives (Rusyns and Hungarians), while part of the Chernivtsi region may claim Romanian historical identity.

40 The Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions (oblasti).
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of either the national/nationalist or the expansion of the Soviet nostalgic narrative.\footnote{The regions (oblasts) of Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Chernihiv, Poltava, Sumy, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, Vinnytsia, Khmelnytskyi, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhzhya.} Since 2014, there has been an intense displacement of the Soviet nostalgic and mixed narratives in favor of the national/nationalist one. This shift was followed by the simultaneous expansion of the territory dominated by the exclusivist model of the national/nationalist narrative and the marginalization or elimination of its rivals, especially the Soviet nostalgic narrative (“decommunization”). The inclusivist model functions rather at the level of political declarations or wishful thinking.

Of course, historical politics in Ukraine is not limited to interaction and confrontation between the national/nationalist and Soviet nostalgic narratives. The regional and local accounts mentioned above sometimes fit into the more general scheme and sometimes do not. It is also the placement of national narratives of memory that either run counter to the mainstream narratives or significantly challenge it: examples include Jewish, Polish, Rusyn, Crimean Tatar, and Romani narratives (the last seems to be under construction at the present moment). Holocaust memory conflicts with both national/nationalist and Soviet nostalgic narratives. However, until recently, it has also mostly functioned within the framework of an exclusivist model.