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Historical policy and memory policy in Ukraine: the evolution of discourse through the narratives of decolonization and mnemonic sovereignty

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The article examines contemporary trends in historical policy and memory politics in Ukraine in the context of war and resistance to Russian aggression. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the interaction between state institutions, civic initiatives, and international discursive practices in shaping the narrative of the past. In particular, the study explores approaches that combine the development of a national historical narrative with global trends in decolonization discourse. At the same time, the article points to the potential transformation of the original logic of the decolonization approach: instead of ensuring polyphony and multiplicity of experiences, it is sometimes used to consolidate a single state narrative. A key analytical concept is mnemonic sovereignty, which reflects the right of each group and individual to form their own vision of the past, preserve personal memory, and represent it beyond standardized or dominant models. The article presents contemporary theoretical approaches to memory politics and historical policy, as well as an analysis of Memory Studies concepts, including decolonization discourse, which is considered a methodological basis for polyphony and the multiplicity of experiences. The research demonstrates that the contemporary Ukrainian memory space is shaped by complex transformational processes, where the interaction of local, national, and transnational practices creates a potential tension between the aspiration for a unified narrative and the logic of preserving multiple voices. The article emphasizes that the methodological problem of decolonization discourse is an important factor for understanding current trends in memory politics and the formation of national identity, as well as for assessing the influence of theoretical models on practical memory policy in Ukraine. The author notes that contemporary Ukraine actively implements inclusive state initiatives in the culture of memory – from memorials and media projects to digital platforms – which combine the commemoration of past heroism with the representation of ongoing war events. The process of constructing memory policy highlights the importance of balancing the right to collective memory with the risk of monopolizing symbolic power. Such a balance creates a space for scholarly reflection, discussion, and the potential development of a more polyphonic approach, where diverse voices, experiences, and perspectives can coexist in the public sphere, forming a democratic culture of memory.

Key words: memory politics, historical policy, decolonization discourse, political process, Ukraine, local and national narratives, mnemonic sovereignty.

Introduction. In the contemporary Ukrainian political and societal context, the issue of historical memory has gained particular relevance due to profound transformations of the memory space under the influence of Russian aggression, the transnational decolonization discourse, and the growing public demand for rethinking the past amid historical, civilizational, and spatial disorientation and chaos. Historical policy and memory policy have become multilayered, encompassing a wide spectrum of actors – from state institutions to local initiatives, expert communities, and marginalized groups – resulting in narrative competition and diverse models of interpreting events.

The transnational trend toward the expansion of the decolonization discourse, which represents the third stage in the development of Memory Studies, is oriented in the countries of the developed West toward ensuring polyphony of voices, multiplicity of experiences, and interaction among different forms of memory, rather than establishing a new hierarchy or hegemony. Within this discourse, the concept of mnemonic sovereignty signifies the right of each group or individual to preserve and cultivate their own memory, enriched by personal recollections and experience,

to form their own vision of the past, and to interpret it in their own way. This right enables memory to exist beyond imposed “single” or standardized models and underscores the value of living, personal memory that is not subordinated to any dominant group or official version of history.

Analyzing mnemonic sovereignty makes it possible to understand how a coherent, institutionally embedded narrative of the past is formed and how the interaction of historiographical and memorial practices influences the modernization of memory policy in Ukraine.

The study aims to analyze the evolution of the discourse of historical policy and memory policy in Ukraine through the lens of decolonization and mnemonic sovereignty, particularly to identify the specificities of the formation and institutional consolidation of mnemonic sovereignty and to assess its impact on constructing memory policy models that ensure the polyphony of voices and the multiplicity of individual and collective memories.

The methodological framework of the study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines historiographical analysis, theories of collec-

tive and cultural memory (M. Halbwachs, P. Nora, J. and A. Assmann), P. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, and comparative analysis of historical policy models in various countries. The research employs structural-functional and discourse-analytical methods to examine the interaction among institutional actors, historical narratives, and memory practices; includes analysis of political conflicts surrounding history (such as the Historikerstreit); and problematizes the relationship between scholarly history and socially constructed forms of memory. This methodology makes it possible to reveal how official instruments of historical policy interact, compete, or conflict with broader societal processes of memory politics.

Historical policy and memory policy occupy a central place in political discourse

According to H. V. Kasianov, approaches to understanding the relationship between history and memory can be reduced to three: 1) history and memory are equated; 2) history and memory are contrasted, even viewed as incompatible phenomena; 3) history and memory are treated as forms of understanding, interpreting, and representing the past that exist in a state of constant interaction and mutual complementarity [3, p. 119].

The first approach – equating history with memory – is typical of socio-political, journalistic, and ideological discourses, while the other two are characteristic of academic research.

According to H. Kasianov, the idea of opposing history and memory was formulated most radically by the French scholar Pierre Nora, who viewed history as a representation of the past grounded in objectively proven facts – one that often debunks the myths of memory and reconstructs the past according to the principles of objectivity and critical analysis. Memory, on the other hand, operates selectively and subjectively, making it vulnerable to censorship; it can survive either in codified (and recognized by history) traces and remnants (*lieux de mémoire*) or by being integrated into historical narratives [31, p. 3]. With the disappearance of living “*milieux de mémoire*,” the need arises to create “sites of memory” that artificially replace them. Interaction and interpenetration of history and memory do occur, but only in the era of archives, “sites of memory,” and professional historiography. Studying *lieux de mémoire*, historians turn not to the past itself but to its representations.

Meanwhile, American historians P. Hutton and A. Megill, reflecting on the relationship between history and memory, emphasized that historians work not with the past as such but with its images represented in memory [21; 29]. Megill identified three types of historiography – affirmative, didactic, and analytical – arguing that it is affirmative historiography that tends to equate history with memory, striving to “affirm and glorify a certain tradition,” which leads to mythologization. Didactic history, oriented toward “lessons

from the past,” departs from this logic but still relies on memory [29]. Only analytical history positions itself in opposition to memory, seeking to distance itself from conflicting recollections in the pursuit of objectivity.

According to H. Kasianov, in the process of constructing political systems, different uses of historiography can be observed. For example, in post-Soviet societies the affirmative model prevails; in Central and Eastern Europe there is a combination of affirmative and didactic models with selective use of analytical history; in Western Europe conflicts between analytical history and politicized versions of the past are common – from the German Historikerstreit to the French movement “Liberty for History!” [26]. Thus, historical policy rarely corresponds to “pure types”; rather, it reveals situational disproportions and competition between different historiographical models.

As for the term “*historical memory*,” it is inherently contradictory, since individual or group recollections rarely coincide with what any unified historical narrative proposes. This discrepancy was noted as early as the 1940s by Maurice Halbwachs, who emphasized that history inevitably ignores the diversity of memories held by individuals and groups. He introduced the concepts of “*social frameworks of memory*” and “*collective memory*,” thereby underscoring that *historical memory* is merely a subtype of the broader notion of collective memory [20].

The ideas of *social memory* were further developed at the beginning of the 20th century by the Annales School historian Marc Bloch [11]; the German art historian Aby Warburg [18; 3, p. 123]; the British philosopher R. G. Collingwood [4; 1]; and in the second half of the 20th century by the French historian Pierre Nora, who introduced the concept of “*sites of memory*” into scholarly discourse [31; 32]. Significant contributions were also made by: Jean-Louis Le Goff, a proponent of the concept of a unified European history and a representative of the “New History” school [25]; American historian P. Hutton, who argued that historical scholarship is merely one form of collective memory – an officially recognized memory [21]; British anthropologist P. Connerton, who investigated not only how societies remember but also how they forget [13; 14; 15]; American sociologist Jeffrey Olick, who distinguished between *collective memory* as a system of representations maintained by institutions, and *collected memory* as a set of individual memories [33]; German scholars Jan and Aleida Assmann, who differentiated between communicative memory – linked to everyday individual experience – and cultural memory, which is institutionalized, normative, and applied in political practices [9]; French philosopher Paul Ricœur, who viewed memory as a selective construction capable of performing both destructive and emancipatory functions, where mechanisms of forgetting serve to renew cultural memory and prevent its oversaturation [35].

Equally significant are the works of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu [12], who approached memory not merely as an intellectual act but as a form of social discipline and a kind of political capital, access to which is unevenly distributed among actors. These actors employ *symbolic power* to transmit the “correct” ways of remembering through rituals, language, gestures, temporal frameworks, and disciplinary practices [12, p. 89].

In the context of distinguishing between the concepts of historical policy and memory policy, it is important to recognize that various theories of collective memory – from M. Halbwachs’s “social frameworks” and P. Nora’s “sites of memory” to the cultural memory model of J. and A. Assmann – demonstrate the polycentric and multilayered nature of representations of the past. Against this background, historical policy emerges as the state’s institutional attempt to organize and normatively consolidate a particular version of collective memory, either integrating or neutralizing other forms of mnemonic practices.

Memory policy, by contrast, encompasses a broader space in which the state, scholars, local communities, media, and civic initiatives interact. It reflects the diversity, competition, and conflictuality of interpretations of the past, shaping a polyphonic symbolic landscape. This is precisely where Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power becomes evident, as it determines which versions of the past gain legitimacy and which become marginalized.

Thus, historical policy is only one form of memory policy but is distinguished by its state-centered and instrumental character. Memory policy reflects the dynamics of societal representations and often enters into tense interaction with official historical narratives. This makes the field of memory a space of struggle over the interpretation of the past, while historical policy functions as a mechanism for regulating this struggle.

According to the German historian Stefan Troebst, the related notions “politics of history” (German: *Geschichtspolitik*, English: politics of history) and “politics of the past” (French: *politique du passé*) became widespread in academic discourse in the late 1990s–early 2000s, reflecting the growing European attention to the political uses of history [43].

At the same time, H. Kasianov emphasizes that the term historical policy has a nearly fifty-year history, beginning with the work of the American historian Howard Zinn carrying this exact title (1970) [48; 3, p. 122]. Zinn criticized the academic establishment’s claims to “objective” history and called for “radical history,” socially engaged and responsive to contemporary challenges. The term gained broader popularity later, in the 1980s, during the German *Historikerstreit* (1986–1989) – a major public dispute sparked by a controversial article by the historian of fascism Ernst Nolte, who questioned the notion of Germany’s unique

guilt for Nazi crimes, relativizing them by referring to similar practices (genocide, camps, deportations) in other countries during 1933–1945; claimed that Nazi death camps were a reaction to Stalin’s Gulag (a thesis supported by historian Michael Stürmer, adviser to Chancellor Helmut Kohl); argued that the post-war narrative imposed on Germans deprived them of a “normal” collective memory; insisted that Germans deserved a past they could take pride in.

This position was sharply criticized by left-leaning and liberal intellectuals, especially Jürgen Habermas, who saw it as an attempt to revise German responsibility for Nazism and to articulate the official stance of the ruling neoconservatives. The debate soon escalated into a nationwide conflict [17; 10].

In this context, according to Troebst [43], the term historical policy was first used by historian Klaus Meyer, who referred to G. Schmidt’s claim that the term had already appeared in journalistic writing of the 1930s in connection with manipulations of the past for political purposes [38; 17; 3, p. 127].

In his 1999 work “*Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Der Weg zur westdeutschen Erinnerung, 1948–1990*,” Edgar Wolfrum offered the first scholarly definition of historical policy as a type of activity through which various actors use history for legitimization, mobilization, scandalization, politicization, or delegitimization; and where the key question concerns who politically actualizes the past, by what methods, and for what purpose [46].

In the early 21st century, the term became firmly established in academic vocabulary, its growing relevance linked to the EU’s enlargement and to the widespread processes of reconceptualizing the past in Central and Eastern Europe [42]. This trend became especially pronounced in Poland after the right-conservative party Law and Justice came to power in 2005, proclaiming the idea of a “new historical policy” (*polityka historyczna*) as a state project aimed at strengthening national identity [41; 23]. The director of the Institute of National Remembrance, Jan Kurtyka, advocated turning to Poland’s historical experience and its special role dating back to the 16th century, and called for “normalizing” the national past [34]. Debates surrounding this project, in both scale and intensity, resembled the German *Historikerstreit*.

As H. Kasianov notes, “the irony of history lay in the fact that in Germany the term ‘historical policy’ was used in public discourse mostly by critics of such policies, carrying a negative connotation and marked by irony and sarcasm. In Poland, by contrast, the promoters of ‘historical policy’ invested it with affirmative meaning in their quest to elevate national identity” [3, p. 129].

In Ukraine, discussions about historical policy began in the late 1980s–early 2000s. H. Kasianov identified three potential models of such policy [22]:

– *Exclusive model*, aimed at removing from “common” memory those myths and representations of the past that obstruct the formation of a “proper,” homogeneous version of memory – i.e., cleansing memory of “foreign” elements. In Ukraine, this manifested in the confrontation between nationalist and Soviet-nostalgic narratives. By its nature, this model presupposes conflict and a sharp “us versus them” divide, functioning as a form of cultural or political tribalism.

– *Inclusive model*, based on integrating diverse versions of memory into a unified memorial space and consolidating them into a broader narrative (e.g., of civic patriotism). According to Kasianov, collective memory of the Revolution of Dignity bears features of this model, as does the recognition of the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people (Verkhovna Rada resolution, 2015).

– *Mixed (ambivalent) model*, involving the coexistence of incompatible versions of memory due to a lack of societal interest or due to policies aimed at neutralizing their ideological content. A visual example is Kyiv’s Ivan Mazepa Street, where symbols of Soviet and national narratives coexist in the same urban space.

According to Kasianov, historical policy in Ukraine has been shaped by the interaction of all three models. In the late 1980s–early 1990s, the conflict between two exclusive versions predominated; in the 1990s–2000s, the mixed model prevailed, accompanied by a latent conflict between the aforementioned exclusive variants. The period from 2005 to the present is characterized by the intensification of the conflict between the two exclusive models of memory, escalating into “memory wars” that have shifted from the symbolic and political realms into the sphere of armed conflict [22].

A similar chronology in the development of memory policy is followed by the Ukrainian scholar A. Kyrydon, who identifies the following stages: 1980s–1990s – the awakening of interest in the national past at the end of the Soviet period; 1990s–2000s – eclectic combinations of Soviet and national historical paradigms during President L. Kuchma’s tenure; 2005–2010 – the nationally oriented course of V. Yushchenko, marked by the institutionalization of historical policy through the establishment of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory; 2010–2014 – a memory policy aimed at the restoration of Russo-centric and “internationalist” narratives under V. Yanukovich; 2014–2019 – a memory policy defined by decommunization and the condemnation of the crimes of the totalitarian regime [2, pp. 244–249].

Continuing Kyrydon’s chronological logic, the Ukrainian researcher I. Vdovychyn proposes distinguishing a sixth stage—from 2019 to the present – as a period of the revival of approaches characteristic of the second half of the 1990s, with their inherent

fluctuations and indecision. According to him, this indicates state weakness, unresolved worldview issues, hesitancy of the ruling class regarding the foundations of Ukrainian subjectivity, and the uncertainty of identity policy [2, p. 281].

I. Vdovychyn proceeds from the understanding that “historical memory” is the ability of social consciousness to reproduce the past, objectified in cultural forms and shaping the historical consciousness of the nation. The full-scale war launched on 24 February 2022, in his view, clearly demonstrated the need to revise and renew Ukraine’s state memory policy, since it exposed serious problems in the selection of historical reference points and highlighted the weakness of the state’s identity framework [2, pp. 241–242].

Vdovychyn criticizes “objectivist” approaches to defining historical memory, particularly the concepts of H. Kasianov, “who interprets it as a mythologized form of group representations of the past, functioning through stereotypes, symbols, and sites of memory, and acquiring in the information society the status of hyperreality” [2, p. 134]. According to Vdovychyn, such interpretations risk becoming tools for delegitimizing national memory under the rhetoric of “scientific objectivity,” downplaying the importance of historical narratives that enable society to respond to contemporary challenges.

Vdovychyn’s position exemplifies the defense of a politically engaged history – one intended to serve the national need for consolidation and mobilization. In this model, a significant role is played by new actors – civil society representatives, who increasingly assume the function of articulating a “nationwide position,” as codified in the 2022 Law “On the Basic Principles of State Policy for Affirming Ukrainian National and Civic Identity.”

Such dynamics were described by Pierre Bourdieu as mechanisms of “performative representation” and “the alchemy of representation,” wherein “the spokesperson, endowed with the authority to speak and act on behalf of the group (the nation), becomes a substitute for the group itself” [12, p. 106]. In this context, memory politics becomes a struggle for symbolic power – renaming, revising toponymy, dismantling imperial monuments, or altering historical canons as part of the fight for the right to classify and define [12, p. 105].

In colonial structures, the right of representation was historically usurped by imperial elites, who imposed their own interpretations and classificatory schemes on subordinate groups. Today, memory decolonization is understood as the process of returning the right of representation to the group embodied in the individual – the right “to cease being a fictitious construct of the imperial discourse” and to construct alternative collective memory.

Vdovychyn emphasizes that discussions about the “mythological nature” of historical memory are

often intended to diminish its significance. In a context where three types of historical memory – Ukrainian, Russian, and Communist – continue to coexist and compete, attempts by some Ukrainian authors to “balance” historical memory, in practice, may blur the criminal nature of the totalitarian system and foster misleading perceptions of its supposed “effectiveness” [2, p. 211].

From his perspective, memory policy must proceed from the historical fact that Ukrainian lands were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for much longer than under Moscow rule, where – despite estate-based limitations – legal practices existed that were fundamentally incompatible with Muscovite despotism. The principle “no one shall be imprisoned without a court verdict” was in force [2, p. 211]. Therefore, Vdovychyn argues that Ukraine’s memory policy should be structured around a clearly articulated distinction between the European legal type of memory and the tradition of arbitrary power characteristic of the Russian political space.

At the same time, as Bourdieu notes, within the construction of historical policy the danger lies in the fact that a spokesperson may “consider themselves” to be the group they represent, creating a risk of monopolizing symbolic power. In memory politics, this manifests in the tendency of states to speak “on behalf of the nation,” effectively constructing it in a hierarchical way. Meanwhile, the right to memory is a central element of mnemonic sovereignty – the ability of different social groups to define their own past and establish their own boundaries between remembrance and forgetting. For memory politics, this means that renaming, revising toponymy, dismantling imperial monuments, or changing historical canons are not merely symbolic gestures but forms of political action aimed at restructuring the perception of the past.

The Ukrainian discourse on historical policy and memory politics is embedded in the contemporary so-called “third wave of Memory Studies,” in the context of decolonizing history, symbolic struggles for mnemonic sovereignty, and for the “power to name” and “to create social reality,” through processes of selecting facts and narratives that are recognized as “history” [19].

However, while the global wave of decolonial discourse, according to E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe, proceeds from the assumption that history is not a single rational process and that classical notions of universal collective memory projects have lost their self-evident status due to the “plural and polymorphic character of social struggles,” where this very polyphonic nature opens the way to decolonization as a transformation of the very structure through which history is signified [24, p. 2], national versions of decolonizing memory (including the contemporary Ukrainian one) often implement a simple replacement of symbols

or canons, transforming the structures that regulate the regimes of remembering and forgetting – something Foucault warned about [19, p. 142]. For example, Indian scholar B. Sarkar [37], analyzing the transformations of India’s memory politics, emphasizes that under the slogans of decolonizing memory, the country is witnessing an obsessive romanticized reconstruction of Hindutva as a politicized and simplified past, instead of the expected decolonization that requires a pluralistic understanding of heritage and tradition, and the realization of multidirectional memory following M. Rothberg’s concept [36].

A genuine discourse of decolonizing memory, understood as a global process of the transnationalization of memory, is built upon ideas of coexistence and interaction among local, regional, national, and transnational versions of memory. This is precisely the focus of works by A. Sierp [39]; A. Sierp and J. Wüstenberg [40]; A. Littos-Monnet [27]; L. Neumayer [30]; P. Verovšek [44], among others. These authors highlight transcultural orientations in contemporary memory cultures that challenge the dominance of national structures, as well as the shift from methodological nationalism to multilayered and polyphonic constellations of memory, demonstrating the erosion of the monopoly over national historical narratives.

The legal and ethical dimension centers on the balance between the right to privacy and society’s right to information. The concept of the “right to be forgotten,” established in the practice of the European Court [16], is at the center of debates concerning the protection of dignity and privacy [45] on the one hand, and freedom of expression and historical truth [28] on the other. The scholarly discourse in this context is shaped between two approaches: the first protects the individual against the “tyranny of memory,” while the second warns of the dangers of a “gap-ridden history.”

Multilayeredness as the Basis of the Decolonial Discourse of Memory Politics in Ukraine

The multilayered nature of the historical discourse of memory politics in Ukraine is shaped through the interaction of local, national, and transnational levels, which together determine the dynamics of decolonial processes and contribute to the restoration of historical subjectivity.

At the local level, models of memory have remained regionally fragmented: in Galicia, a national and nationalist narrative associated with the legacy of the liberation movement dominated; in Donbas and Crimea, a Soviet-nostalgic model prevailed, emphasizing “labor heroism” and the symbols of the Soviet victory; in Central and South-Eastern Ukraine, synthetic, mixed models emerged in which Ukrainian and Soviet elements overlapped and coexisted. Local communities adapted their mnemonic practices to their own historical experiences, so narratives often acquired a hybrid character – for instance,

in the varied interpretations of the UPA's role or in the diverse local forms of commemorating the victims of the Holodomor.

At the national level, the decolonial discourse manifested itself in attempts to create a unified historical narrative that would overcome imperial and Soviet interpretations of the past. A telling example of this process is the construction of memory about the Holodomor of 1932–1933, interpreted as a form of “restoring historical memory,” with historiography itself serving as an instrument for shaping collective memory after decades of Soviet silencing. The expansion of a shared symbolic field – from the heroes of liberation struggles to large-scale national tragedies – was intended to integrate regional variants of memory into a broader Ukrainian context and strengthen historical-cultural autonomy.

This logic underpinned, for example, a special media project launched in 2008 on the Inter TV channel – the Ukrainian version of the “Greatest Nationals” format – under the title Great Ukrainians, in which viewers selected “the greatest Ukrainian of all time” through telephone and SMS voting. After the first stage, a list of one hundred candidates was compiled and later narrowed to a final ten. Yaroslav the Wise won the competition, receiving over 648,000 votes – about 40% of all votes cast in the final round. His main competitors in the final ranking were Mykola Amosov and Stepan Bandera, while Taras Shevchenko and Bohdan Khmelnytskyi took fourth and fifth place. The top ten also included Valeriy Lobanovskyi, Viacheslav Chornovil, Hryhorii Skovoroda, Lesia Ukrainka, and Ivan Franko.

This list demonstrates that the competition for the status of “national hero” involved figures from various epochs, social groups, and spheres of activity: from the princely era (Yaroslav the Wise), through the Cossack and hetman periods (Bohdan Khmelnytskyi), to the classics of culture and science (Shevchenko, Franko, Skovoroda, Lesia Ukrainka), as well as twentieth-century political, intellectual, medical, and cultural leaders (Bandera, Chornovil, Amosov, Lobanovskyi). Yaroslav the Wise's victory carried symbolic significance, reflecting the desire of part of Ukrainian society to return to the Kyivan Rus' roots and emphasize the historical depth, statehood, and cultural-civilizational foundations of national identity. At the same time, the structure of the final ranking revealed that conceptions of the national hero in Ukraine remain highly diverse and consist of multiple, often contradictory, elements of collective memory.

Since 2014, the culture of memory in Ukraine has been represented through state-established “sites of memory,” including the Maidan of 2013–2014, where the Memorial to the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred in Kyiv has become a key space for both state and public commemoration of the participants in the Revolution of Dignity. Since 2022, projects hon-

oring the heroism of defenders have been actively developing in Ukraine. A particularly significant initiative is the creation of the Memorial of Ukrainian Heroes, which serves as a physical symbol of remembrance for those who gave their lives for the country's independence and territorial integrity. In addition, numerous cultural and media initiatives document and popularize the heroism of those killed or affected by the war that has been ongoing since 2022. Documentary series and films, such as *Ukrainian Heroes and Cities and Their Heroes*, tell the stories of contemporary defenders, while online memorials, such as the *Zavdyaky* platform, record information about fallen soldiers, providing digital preservation of memory and broad public access. Inclusive cultural initiatives, such as *The Strength of the Nation: Heroes and Children*, bring together veterans and children, creating educational and cultural spaces for transmitting experiences and values of heroism. The contemporary national memory discourse forms a unified system of symbolic representation of the struggle for freedom and statehood.

At the transnational level, Ukraine's memory policy operates under conditions of both competition and interaction among different historical narratives that cross borders. Ukraine integrates the European model of commemoration, which emphasizes a broader international context of World War II, rejects the triumphalist Soviet myth, and highlights human losses and the crimes of totalitarian regimes. In this sense, state policies have been implemented to commemorate the Holocaust, transition to the European model of May 8, and reinterpret May 9 as the Day of Victory over Nazism. The 2015 decommunization legislation institutionally formalized the departure from the Soviet and imperial legacy, systematically transforming public spaces through the dismantling of Soviet symbols.

The decolonization of memory politics has primarily focused on processes of derussification and de-Sovietization, involving the removal of symbols, signs, monuments, and toponyms that represented Russian presence. In 2015, a series of laws was passed banning Soviet symbols and encouraging renaming initiatives. Since then, over 51,000 objects have been renamed, and thousands of monuments dismantled. After 2022, Ukraine actively renamed toponyms, removed Russian symbols, and withdrew Soviet and Russian literature from libraries and schools. In 2023, the Law of Ukraine On the Condemnation and Prohibition of Russian Imperial Propaganda in Ukraine and the Decolonization of Toponymy was enacted, prohibiting geographic names that glorify Russia, the empire, or totalitarian practices [7]. The national narrative is built on the premise that “Ukraine is not Russia,” as articulated in the book of the same title by Ukraine's second president, L. Kuchma, and on the understanding that the Russian invasion is carried out not only on the bat-

tlefield but also in the realm of historical memory—a sphere in which Ukraine faces an existential threat of de-Ukrainization and Russification.

In European countries and the United States, the decolonial discourse—accompanied by demands for the removal of symbols of imperial domination and figures representing the heroization of colonizers and slave traders (such as Christopher Columbus, Jefferson Davis, and Robert E. Lee in the USA; Edward Colston and Cecil Rhodes in the UK; Leopold II in Belgium, among others) – has recently found expression in government policies such as Retain and Explain [47]. For example, a government guideline in the United Kingdom (October 2023) proposes leaving monuments in place while supplementing them with extended historical explanations – contextualization based on consultations with local communities – while still allowing relocation or other interventions if carried out through a fully transparent planning process. This Retain and Explain policy represents an attempt to regulate tensions between heritage preservation advocates and proponents of decolonization (removal). Critics argue that it serves as a tool to block calls for representation, whereas supporters view it as a means of protecting historical heritage.

In Ukraine, the issue of removing monuments containing imperial and Soviet symbols is regulated by the 2015 Law of Ukraine On the Condemnation of the Communist and Nationalist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and the Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols and the 2023 Law of Ukraine On the Condemnation and Prohibition of Russian Imperial Policy Propaganda in Ukraine and the Decolonization of Toponymy. The 2023 law prohibits glorification and justification of Russian imperial policies, the use of products containing symbols of Russian imperialism, and the public denial of crimes and repressions against the Ukrainian people [6]. The Expert Council of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine on Overcoming the Consequences of Russification and Totalitarianism supported the determination of local authorities to comply with these laws. The Ukrainian Institute of National Memory published on its official page Recommendations on Monuments and Memorials Related to Russian and Soviet Imperial History. The Institute recommends that authorities, when addressing issues related to monuments and memorials associated with the history of the Russian Empire and the USSR, adhere to current legislation and Ukraine's international obligations, particularly concerning cultural heritage and UNESCO World Heritage sites; preserve monuments of historical and artistic value in museums or in contextualized form; remove propagandistic markers by replacing Soviet and Russian terms with historically accurate ones; maintain World War II military memorials, emphasizing the contribution of the Ukrainian people to the victory over Nazism; and use memory sites for

educational and outreach purposes, avoiding unauthorized demolition or destruction [8].

Since 2022, civil society organizations and initiatives in Ukraine have become increasingly active in transforming public spaces through the removal of Soviet and Russian/imperial symbols. Among the new actors in memory politics are NGOs such as Decolonization. Ukraine, the Freedom Space Movement, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, We Make You Nervous, Green Leaf, and others.

For example, in Odesa, the City Council allocated UAH 200,000 for the development of project documentation to dismantle twelve such monuments. On the eve of his resignation, the former Head of the Department of International Cooperation, Culture, and Marketing, Ivan Liptuga, explained the reasons for delays in this demolition at the request of the NGO Decolonization. Ukraine:

«Out of respect for the families of fallen heroes, the veteran community, and all those participating in the defense of Ukraine regarding alleged manipulations of UNESCO status and calls for my dismissal, I want to emphasize that the city of Odesa's decisions regarding any monuments are not acts of allegiance to imperial symbols or law evasion. All actions were coordinated with current Ukrainian legislation and the state's international obligations, including the 1972 UNESCO Convention, its Operational Guidelines, and national norms on cultural heritage protection. Delays in demolition were due to the need to follow procedures ensuring the preservation of outstanding universal value, polyphonic representation of history, and integration of monuments into the concept of a 'Museum of Contested Memory' as a civilized alternative to removal. No decision on relocation or demolition could be made without the approval of the World Heritage Centre, as this would have violated both international and national law and undermined Ukraine's reputation as a state that adheres to the principles of *pacta sunt servanda*» [5].

Conclusions. Historical policy and memory politics in Ukraine occupy a central place in the political discourse, serving as key instruments for shaping collective identity and regulating socio-political processes. At the same time, they perform different functions: while historical policy is largely state-centered and instrumental, aimed at creating a coherent narrative of the past, memory politics reflects a polyphonic social space in which the state, scholars, local communities, and civic initiatives interact. The concept of “historical memory” is multidimensional and contested, formed through the interaction of collective, communicative, and cultural memory, as well as through “sites of memory,” representations, and symbols that create a context for public discussion and identity formation.

In Ukraine, historical policy manifests in different models – exclusive, inclusive, and hybrid – depending on the period and political context, reflecting

struggles over the interpretation of the past and competition among “wars of memory.” The decolonial discourse of memory politics unfolds against the backdrop of efforts to restore national historical subjectivity and reassess the Soviet and colonial legacy. Unlike the European experience, where historians strive to protect a broad plurality of narratives and memory voices, the Ukrainian practice – especially within state programs of decolonization and derussification amid the Russian military invasion –transmits a single, nationwide narrative. This is facilitated by the activities of specific state institutions, civic organizations, and expert councils that coordinate the implementation of the state memory standard and monitor its enforcement. Such an approach creates a coherent system of symbols and narratives aimed at consolidating citizens and reinforcing national identity.

Contemporary Ukraine actively implements inclusive state initiatives in memory culture –from memorials and media projects to digital platforms that combine the commemoration of past heroism with the documentation of current events of the 2022 war. The process of constructing memory politics underscores the importance of balancing the right to collective memory with the risk of monopolizing symbolic power, demonstrating the interconnectedness of history, memory, and political mobilization. At the same time, it opens a space for scholarly reflection, public debate, and the potential development of a more polyphonic approach, where diverse voices, experiences, and perspectives could coexist in the public sphere, fostering a more resilient and mature democratic culture of memory.

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Історична політика та політика пам'яті в Україні: еволюція дискурсу через наративи деколонізації та мнемонічного суверенітету

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У статті розглядаються сучасні тенденції історичної політики та політики пам'яті в Україні в умовах війни та протидії російській агресії. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу взаємодії державних інституцій, громадських ініціатив та міжнародних дискурсивних практик у формуванні наративу минулого. Зокрема, розглядаються підходи, які поєднують розвиток національного історичного наративу із глобальними трендами деколонізаційного дискурсу. Водночас стаття вказує на потенційну трансформацію початкової логіки деколонізаційного підходу: замість забезпечення багатоголосся та множинності досвідів він іноді використовується для консолідації єдиного державного наративу. Ключовим аналітичним поняттям є мнемонічний суверенітет, що відображає право кожної групи та кожного індивіда формувати власне бачення минулого, зберігати особисту пам'ять і репрезентувати її поза рамками стандартизованих або домінуючих моделей. У статті представлені сучасні теоретичні підходи до політики пам'яті та історичної політики, а також аналізуються концепції Memory Studies, включно з деколонізаційним дискурсом, що розглядається як методологічна основа поліфонії та множинності досвідів. Дослідження демонструє, що сучасний український простір пам'яті перебуває під впливом складних трансформаційних процесів, де взаємодія локальних, національних та транснаціональних практик створює потенційну напругу між прагненням до єдиного наративу та логікою збереження множинності голосів. Стаття підкреслює, що методологічна проблема деколонізаційного дискурсу є важливим чинником для розуміння сучасних тенденцій у політиці пам'яті та формуванні національної ідентичності, а також для оцінки впливу теоретичних моделей на практичну політику пам'яті в Україні. Автор зазначає, що сучасна Україна активно реалізує інклюзивні державні ініціативи в культурі пам'яті – від меморіалів і медіа-проектів до цифрових платформ, які поєднують вшанування героїзму минулого та відображення актуальних подій триваючої війни. Процес конструювання політики пам'яті підкреслює важливість балансу між правом на колективну пам'ять і небезпекою монополізації символічної влади. Такий баланс створює поле для наукового осмислення, дискусії та потенційного розвитку більш поліфонічного підходу, де різні голоси, досвіди та перспективи могли б співіснувати у суспільному просторі, формуючи демократичну культуру пам'яті.

Ключові слова: політика пам'яті, історична політика, деколонізаційний дискурс, політичний процес, Україна, локальні та національні наративи, мнемонічний суверенітет.

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