

Werkstatt Osteuropa

April 2, 2025, 4:15 PM - 5:45 PM

Unitobler F 006

Cécile Druey, post-doc research project

Politics of History vs. Communicative Memory

Controversial Practices of Remembering the Stalinist Deportations in the North Caucasus (1985-1994)

During the years that preceded and followed the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Autonomous Republics of Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia and Chechnya in the south of today's Russian Federation have experienced an intensive movement of civil society mobilisation, nationalist radicalisation and, in case of the latter two, of armed conflict. This research project traces the mobilising role of history and historical memory from the period of reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s to the times of conflict and political unrest, which culminated in the first Chechnya War in 1994. In the focus is the memory of the Stalinist Deportation of various Muslim peoples from the North Caucasus to Central Asia in 1944.

The study draws on extensive primary materials from local newspapers (mid-1980s to mid-1990s) and oral histories (interviews and focus groups, 2019-2021) and postulates that the reinforced interest for historical memory was not per se a cause of radicalisation and conflict.

Rather, it was an indicator of conflict and alienation within and between local societies and governing elites, whereby these processes are closely interwoven with their respective contexts at local, national and international level. The study also has a conflictological aim; it examines the correlation between traumatic historical memory narratives and armed conflict (Ingushetia and Chechnya) and poses the question of the reasons why open conflict does not occur in certain societies despite historical trauma (Kabardino-Balkaria).

The draft introduction to the planned book will be presented for discussion at the Werkstatt Osteuropa on 2 April 2025.

To receive the preparatory materials for discussion, please send an email to derya.bozat@unibe.ch