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Remembering Soviet Occupation in the Modern Northern Caucasus, the Case Study of Collective Memory in one Dagestani Village

The processes of ethnic, social and religious identification in contemporary Dagestan are extremely complex for it is the most ethnically heterogeneous post-soviet republic. The identities of Dagestani people are highly diversified and intertwine on different levels, which results in numerous forms of unofficial competition and conflicts between ethnic and religious groups.

I will demonstrate that the close examination of the historical imagination of one Dagestani community of Akusha village might allow us to disentangle the complex web of identities of modern Dagestani people and therefore improve our understanding of modern ethnic, political and religious situation in the most religious post-soviet Republic.

In the collective memory of Akusha community the two historical events are the most prominent and therefore form the basis of the local identity. These are the Russian Civil War (1917-1922) which led to the creation of the Soviet Union and the Chechen Wars (1991-2009), which marked the dissolution of the Soviet Union for the people of the Northern Caucasus.

I argue that the story of alliance and betrayal between Akusha and Russia during the times of change turns into an ever present explanatory narrative model. This model is employed by the people of Akusha to describe the variety of global and local conflicts from the Middle Ages to our days, juxtaposing Akusha community and the surrounding communities and political entities.

The paper is based on the field materials collected in Dagestan, which include 40 interviews with politicians, academics, village elders and religious leaders.