

Workshop Beyond Eurocentric

Beyond Eurocentric Memory Models: Political Repression and Remembrance in Mongolia



Time: 10 December 2025

Location: University of Warsaw, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, 4 Zurawia St., room 108

Focusing on Mongolia's experience of Soviet-era political repression, this panel brings together perspectives on transitional justice, lived memory, and theoretical frameworks. The papers examine how international law shapes national responses to historical violence, how repression is remembered within Mongolian society, and where Western memory theory fails to capture Mongolia's historical and cultural specificities.

Free entry.

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The event is organised as a part of:

- **Marian Malowist seminar series** ([more](#) [2])

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- **Postcolonial Perspectives – Postdependence Entanglements seminar series** ([more](#) [3])



[Poster to download](#) [4]

Workshop Program

13:00 – 13:10 | Welcoming Speech

[Tomasz Rakowski](#) [5] (University of Warsaw), Director of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

13:10 – 15:00 | Panel

Political Repression and Remembrance in Mongolia

Moderator: Margaret Comer (University of Warsaw)

- **Zbigniew Szmyt** (Adam Mickiewicz University) *Memory Regimes in Post-Socialist Mongolia*
- **Zolzaya Nyamdorj** (National University of Mongolia) *How were Soviet/Russian political repressions experienced in Mongolia and how are they remembered in contemporary Mongolian society?*
- **Battogtokh Javzandolgor** (National University of Mongolia) *Transitional Justice and Memory: How International Human Rights Law Frames Mongolia's Response to Soviet-Era Repressions?*
- **Zuzanna Bogumi?** (University of Warsaw) *Limits of Western Memory Theory in the Study of Political Repression in Mongolia: In Search of New Conceptual Tools*

15:00 – 15:15 | Coffee Break

15:15 – 16:30 | Plenary Discussion

Politics of Memory: Researching Soviet Repressions in the 21st Century Mongolia

- **Moderator and first comment: Ivan Peshkov** (Adam Mickiewicz University)
- **Maria Vyushkova** (Cambridge University) *Intervention: Soviet Repressions, the War in Ukraine, and Medieval Mongol Conquests Memory*

Book of Abstracts

Zbigniew Szmyt (Adam Mickiewicz University), *Memory Regimes in Post-Socialist Mongolia*

The presentation examines how collective memory of early-twentieth-century communist repressions is assessed and negotiated in post-socialist Mongolia. Drawing on selected case studies, it identifies the key social actors and guardians of public memory, as well as the main arenas in which memory conflicts unfold. In contrast to Poland – where the communist period and Soviet influence are unequivocally evaluated as an era of subjugation and dependence on the USSR – in Mongolia the institutions and individuals responsible for communist-era crimes are simultaneously regarded as co-founders of modern Mongolian statehood. This ambivalence is neutralised through the division of memory regimes among actors within the political field.

Zbigniew Szmyt is a Professor at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Between 2017 and 2019, he conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Mongolia, Tuva and Buryatia focused on public history.

Zolzaya Nyamdorj (National University of Mongolia) *How were Soviet/Russian political repressions experienced in Mongolia and how are they remembered in contemporary Mongolian society?*

The Soviet-backed repressions of the 1930s–1950s left profound and lasting scars on Mongolian society. More than 30,000 people were executed, imprisoned, or exiled, and over 1,000 monasteries were destroyed, reshaping Buddhism, intellectual life, and social structures. This paper examines both the historical experience of these

purges and the contemporary politics of remembering them. It traces how post-1990 rehabilitation efforts, monuments, commemorations, and oral histories intersect with grassroots memory practices and political debates. Drawing on archival research, scholarship, and civil society monitoring, I argue that memory of repression in Mongolia remains simultaneously national and local, official and contested.

Bringing together academic and human-rights perspectives, the paper considers how remembrance contributes to democracy-building, transitional justice, and the prevention of future repression. It also reflects on family memory—my great-grandfather, a Buddhist monk, survived the purges by hiding in the mountains—to illustrate the intimate, intergenerational impact of repression on ordinary Mongolians.

Zolzaya Nyamdorj is a Master's student in International Relations at the National University of Mongolia. She works in the nonprofit sector with a focus on human rights and peacebuilding, currently serving as Board Director of the Freedom Wing NGO, which advocates for the rights of refugees in Mongolia. Her interest in political repression and memory is also informed by her own family history: her great-grandfather, a Buddhist monk, survived the Stalinist purges by going into hiding, a story passed down through her grandmother.

Battogtokh Javzandolgor (National University of Mongolia), *Transitional Justice and Memory: How International Human Rights Law Frames Mongolia's Response to Soviet-Era Repressions?*

Mongolia's geopolitical position and socialist past have profoundly shaped its engagement with international human rights law and its contemporary response to Soviet-era political repression. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mongolia began a democratic transition aimed at strengthening national sovereignty and aligning its legal system with global human rights standards. Yet the legacy of Soviet legal doctrine - particularly a model that subordinated individual rights to state interests and granted security services broad extrajudicial powers - continues to cast a long institutional and cultural shadow. From the 1920s to the early 1990s, Mongolia operated under a system that restricted civil liberties, property rights, and the rule of law, drawing on the legal theories of Soviet jurists such as Andrei Vyshinsky.

This presentation explores how contemporary human rights politics and transitional justice initiatives attempt to confront, reinterpret, or dismantle these inherited frameworks. It assesses the extent to which international human rights law enables meaningful accountability for past repression, and where entrenched legal norms continue to hinder the full realization of justice and remembrance in Mongolia.

Battogtokh Javzandolgor currently serves as a Professor in the Department of International Relations at the School of Political Science, International Relations, and Public Administration, National University of Mongolia. She has published over 50 academic articles in leading international journals and conference proceedings, focusing on international law, human rights and analyses of international agreements concluded by Mongolia.

Zuzanna Bogumi? (University of Warsaw), *Limits of Western Memory Theory in the Study of Political Repression in Mongolia: In Search of New Conceptual Tools*

This paper examines whether dominant Western memory theories adequately capture the dynamics of remembering Soviet political repression in Mongolia. Recent commemorative practices—such as the 2022 monument in Ulaanbaatar modeled on the Komunarka memorial in Russia, or the stupa at Hambo ovo inspired by Cambodian temples displaying the bones of Khmer Rouge victims—raise important questions about how global memory forms circulate, are appropriated, and are transformed in Mongolian contexts. Do these examples fit concepts such as Astrid Erll's travelling memory or Michael Rothberg's multidirectional memory, or do they point to analytical blind spots in existing theory?

Drawing on fieldwork, interviews, and comparative memory studies, I argue that Western memory frameworks only partially grasp the conditions shaping Mongolian remembrance. I outline the limits of current approaches and propose directions for developing new conceptual tools capable of interpreting how memories of Soviet repression operate across post-Soviet spaces.

Zuzanna Bogumi? is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw. Her research focuses on memory of Soviet repressions across post-Soviet spaces, and the intersections of memory, religion, and decolonization. She is currently a PI of an international academic project "[Memories of Soviet Repressions in Post-Multi-Colonial Post-Soviet Spaces](#) [6]".

Maria Vyushkova (Cambridge University) *Intervention: Soviet Repressions, the War in Ukraine, and Medieval Mongol Conquests Memory*

Maria Vyushkova is a PhD computational scientist, Buryat activist and expert in how Russia's ethnic minorities are involved in Russia's war in Ukraine. Currently she is MPhil student in Social Anthropology of the University of Cambridge. Her research interests are historical imagination of the 13-15 century Mongol conquest in the context of war in Ukraine.



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- [1] https://uw-edu-pl.zoom.us/meeting/register/6T4gA3VeS1-H_U-8Lx6L_w
- [2] <https://globalhistory.idub.uw.edu.pl/pl/2025/11/beyond-eurocentric-memory-models-political-repression-and-remembrance-in-mongolia/>
- [3] <https://etnologia.uw.edu.pl/soviet-memories>
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