

Call for Proposals:

Historical Past and Contemporary Propaganda in the Global Context

June 7–8 2024: Berlin, Germany

The Gagarin Center at Bard College and the Smolny Beyond Borders Initiative at Bard College Berlin is soliciting proposals for the international conference Historical Past and Contemporary Propaganda in the Global Context to be held in Berlin, Germany, on the June 7–8, 2024.

Memory studies is an established academic discipline; however, the issue of propaganda poses a new set of research questions particularly in relation to the problem of the operational character of memory and propaganda. They mutually operationalize the mechanisms of instrumentalization of history through practices of commemoration and forgetting across different institutional, geographical and social contexts.

As a modern communication tool, propaganda became well known as a 20th century phenomenon after the First World War, when it transitioned from a practice predominantly associated with warfare to the social milieu of promotion and public relations. Paul Rutherford (2000) considered propaganda as ‘both the language and the instrument of power’, he also argued that it is hard to separate and distinguish propaganda from marketing, public relations and advertising. Nancy Snow (1998) and Patricia Aufderheide (2007) consider propaganda in relation to its powerful sponsors: official state institutions, large organizations and corporations. But despite the volume of research devoted to propaganda, the connection between memory utilization and propaganda has yet to be systematically covered. This conference intends to fill the gap in addressing how memory plays a role in understanding propaganda.

Memory has always been an important aspect of political history as a way in which history is preserved and obfuscated. At the same time, procedures of commemoration and forgetting are applied together as a propaganda tactic. The conference and proposed volume will focus on the examination of the complex structure of memory and propaganda as part of the agenda of the instrumentalization of history during the last century in the global context. The purpose of the conference is to bring together scholars working on issues of memory and propaganda in order to discuss their work and prepare a special issue of a journal or a volume of essays to be published with a leading academic publisher in 2025. The longer-term objective is to build a network of scholars in order to develop research and teaching in this field, leading to funding bids, joint publications, etc.

Conference:

We are seeking proposals related to different aspects of the contemporary practice of memory and propaganda in the global context.

The conference will serve as a platform for debating various approaches to memory and propaganda in the global context, including Europe, Asia, and Americas. There are two main questions that should be discussed in all proposals/papers:

What kinds of characteristics (if any) distinguish the politics of propaganda and the politics of history?
Which factors beyond political regimes determine how propaganda has been implemented in the past?

We envisage the planned special issue/volume will be structured around these five areas:

Propagandistic use of memory during war and military conflicts:

Propaganda may be considered a competition to see whose story triumphs in the crowded global theater of influence. This section will concentrate on the issue of imaginary victories as well as tools and techniques of the production of military victories. Propagandistic utilization of claims for personal and collective safety together with the rhetoric of commemoration influence the decision-making process

and become a burden of securitization (in terms of Copenhagen school of security studies).

Propaganda, memory and the political process:

Propaganda has always been an influential instrument of political life across various political regimes and contexts including manipulating history for political debate and argument. On the other hand, propaganda is part of memory constructing, since mnemonic constructs use various tools of propaganda. Politics and memory mutually influence each other. For example, in this context the idea of 'patriotism,' which has been discussed in political and intellectual communities, is part of historical discourse as well a propagandistic concept, since patriotic education is a goal of the state. The particular question in this part of the project will be on the utilization of memory in imperial/regional propagandas.

Media, propaganda and ideologies:

This section of the volume will investigate how media (national and transnational, traditional and digital) exploited mnemonic narratives for propaganda goals during the 20th century. Propaganda relies on centralized information control, private or state monopoly, and such centralization of information is a prerequisite for any analysis of cultural and historical forms of the interinfluence between memory, media and propaganda including digital media and artificial intelligence as a contemporary tools of media functioning.

Academic and teaching practices:

The humanities is the academic sphere which is most involved in the constructing of senses. Professional history-writing, literature-studies as well as the education system and practices are instruments for manipulation and using collective memory for propaganda goals. We are seeking papers analysing propaganda in academic and educational practices in various cultural and geographical contexts such as the humanities and social sciences, professional and public knowledge, schools and university education systems, as well as various levels of such utilization – institutional, individual, ideological etc.

The Arts:

Collective memory, especially memories of struggle, conflict, and terror are exploited today to impact / manipulate our interpretations of the past and present and this makes it a fruitful instrument of propaganda. In this section, we will explore how policies of commemoration/forgetting/nostalgia are represented in official and informal art practices aiming to mobilize people. Traditional states attempted to commemorate in the form of monuments, but today we increasingly witness all kinds of society-driven efforts to "counter-commemorate" traumatic experiences through a variety of art forms. This tendency represents the symbolic exercise of mobilizing the present through diverse commemorative practices and is used as an instrument of propaganda.

All of these areas overlap. However, for future planning purposes, please indicate in your proposal which area you think your research best covers.

A limited number of travel grants to cover the transportation and accommodation of conference participants is available on a competitive basis.

Please send your proposals to: HYPERLINK "mailto:gagarincenter@smolny.org" \t "_blank"
gagarincenter@smolny.org.

ANTICIPATED TIMELINE

Extended abstracts (500 words in English) are due on February 1, 2024

Draft essays (3,000–4,000 words in English) are due on May 12, 2024

Conference June 7–8, 2024

Final papers are due on October 15, 2024

Submission to publisher February 15, 2025