YCIE

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Y-Conference

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Closed Panels

Y-Conference: EMPIRES
May 21–23, 2027, Yerevan, Armenia
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Note: Panel descriptions below are presented as submitted and edited by the panel organizers.

CP 24. (De)imperialization Efforts and Neo-Imperial Revisionism in Times of Global Change

Panel organizer: Alicja Curanović

The ongoing global shift of power creates both risks and opportunities for actors in "borderlands" or "shatter zones" and for great powers—often the successor states of former empires. Both seek to leverage this pivotal moment to reinterpret imperial legacies and practices.

Focusing on the interconnected processes of (de)imperialization and (neo)imperial revisionism, this panel presents two distinct but connected perspectives. The first examines revisionist great powers that use justice narratives to project a vision of "fair" international relations—a framework that directly impacts concepts of spheres of influence, rules of conduct, and norms of recognition in international affairs, and traces how such narratives extend into practice, including beyond the post-Soviet space. By framing their actions in terms of fairness, these powers effectively introduce (neo)imperial practices. The second turns to "borderland" or "shatter zone" countries, where de-imperialization is pursued by some actors and contested or reversed by others.

Both perspectives adopt a comparative approach: the great-power revisionism is illustrated by Trump's United States and Putin's Russia, and through the Russian Orthodox Church's expansion in Africa as an extension of Russian revisionism beyond its near abroad; the "shatter zone" perspective draws on paired comparisons—Ukraine and Moldova in the domain of culture, and Ukraine and the de facto state Transnistria in the domain of tourism. Grounded in anthropology, cultural and religious studies, and international relations literature, the four papers analyze both discourse and practice. Together, they advance our understanding of the dynamics within (de)imperialization and neo-imperial revisionism as new rules of conduct are forged between great powers and states within and beyond their spheres of influence.

Tatiana Cojocari *De-imperalization Culture Amid Imperial Ghosts: Comparative Paths of Resistance in Ukraine and Moldova Post-2022*
Magdalena Dembińska *Tourism and (De)Imperialization: Maps and Memory in Ukraine and Transnistria*
Maxime Duchâteau *Justice, Anti-Colonialism, and (Neo)Imperial Revisionism: The Russian Orthodox Church in Africa*
Alicja Curanović *Revisionists Resisting De(Imperialization)? Vladimir Putin's and Donald Trump's Visions of Fair International Relations*

CP 27. Ethnic and Religious Difference as a Method of Governance and Continuity of Imperial Power

Panel organizers: Dzovinar Derderian and Richard E. Antaramian

This panel examines the role of ethno-religious difference, and the discourse about such difference, in the evolution of Eurasian methods of imperial rule and the production of archives. We ask why and how subjects in the Ottoman and Russian Empires negotiated their precarious deployed difference, oftentimes framed in religious terms, navigated imperial power, mediated between the state and different powerholders, and articulated civilizational faultiness that echoed hegemonic discourses in the contemporary era as much as in the historiography. The three papers on this panel explore how modes of ethnoreligious difference organized imperial societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, as a result, generated a vocabulary that still guides scholarly inquiry to this day. In chronological order, the first paper centers the experiences of Armenian and Greek Orthodox communities to reframe the contours of Ottoman imperial contention in the long eighteenth century. As the second paper shows, such sociopolitical dynamics had parallels in the nineteenth-century Russian Caucasus, where the tsarist government outsourced an aspect of its "civilizing mission" to Scottish and Swiss missionaries who sought to convert legally indigenous Muslims and illicitly indigenous Christians. The final paper reads Armenian petitions from the provinces to show how, while negotiating imperial policy, Ottoman Armenians mapped the language of imperial modernity vis-a-vis nomadism onto imperial categories of religious belonging. In so doing, they developed a civilizational vernacular that continues to shape the lines of inquiry that historians pursue up to the present. In sum this panel explores how empires relied on ethno-religious differences among their populations to enhance their state power.

Richard E. Antaramian *Religious Difference and the Ecumenical Order: Ottoman Governance and Political Contention Between the Edirne Incident (1703) and the Abolition of Janissary Corps (1826)*
Stephen Badalyan Riegg *The Ambiguous Position of Scottish Missionaries' Converts in the Caucasus*
Dzovinar Derderian *Language of Difference in the Archive and in Historiography*

CP 30. Interpreting Cases of Social and Inter-Ethnic Violence in Russia and Neighboring Empires

Panel organizers: Vladislav Kretov and Alexei Miller

"The long 19th century" witnessed the collision of developing nationalist and class ideologies with imperial structures of power and popular involvement on the ground. The latter, usually sporadic and unorganized, in its most radical form took the shape of mass violence. Revolutionaries viewed the spread of popular discontent as one of the principal means of creating a revolutionary situation, in Lenin's terms. In practice, however, people were drawn into unrest primarily by problems affecting their everyday lives rather than by political ideals. In some cases imperial authorities manipulated popular emotions to channel mass violence against the noble rebels. The gap between the intentions of political actors and those of ordinary people involved in violent clashes left most cases of violence from below open to interpretation. Political mobilization often followed the sporadic violence from below rather than causing it, while each political party seeking to mobilize its supporters attempted to impose its own interpretation of events. After 1789, every major European power viewed popular unrest as an existential threat. At the same time, empires had to adapt to mass, sometimes violent, participation in politics, just as they had adapted to and eventually embraced nationalist ideologies. While some imperial actors failed to maintain control, others joined the struggle over the interpretation of violent events, seeking to turn hostility between social or ethnic groups against rival empires or disloyal subjects within their own borders. This panel brings together four papers examining how various political actors competed to interpret violence during crises of imperial power, both at the center and on the periphery. The cases include the Polish Uprising of 1863 and the Revolution of 1905 in Russia proper and Transcaucasia; the Galician Massacre of 1846 in the Austrian Empire; and the clashes in Eastern Rumelia in 1885 under Ottoman rule.

Vladislav Kretov *Russian Authorities and Peasant Violence during the Polish Uprisings in the Mid-19th Century: From Threat to Weapon*
Dimitrios Chronopoulos *A Brotherly Clash in Plovdiv (Filippopolis), 1885: Orthodox Heritage as a Field of Clash and Violence between Different National Narratives*
Vadim Prokhorenko *Revolutionary Violence in the Public Discourse of the Authorities in the Russian Empire during the 1905–1907 Revolution*
Anahit Kartashyan *Narrating Violence from Below: Imperial Governance and the 1905 Armenian–Tatar Clashes*

CP 31. Binding the Russian Empire: Elite Groups in the Spaces of Power

Panel organizers: Amiran Urushadze and Stefan Berger

This panel examines the Russian Empire through the prism of its ruling and service elites, exploring how these groups both sustained and challenged the imperial order from the eighteenth century to the eve of revolution. Rather than treating the elite as a monolithic apparatus of state power, the panel foregrounds its internal fractures, cultural diversity, and contested loyalties as key drivers of imperial dynamics. The four papers trace a dual movement. On the one hand, they analyze the integrative mechanisms that transformed disparate noble and clerical groups into elements of a single imperial establishment — from the making of the all-Russian nobility in the 18th century to the co-optation of regional leadership in the southern borderlands. On the other hand, they reveal the centrifugal forces that complicated this project: structural tensions within the metropolitan elite, ecclesiastical intrigues among the Armenian clergy in the Caucasus, and the persistent problem of ethnopolitical loyalty on the imperial periphery. Collectively, the panel argues that imperial stability was not a given but a precarious achievement, constantly negotiated through patronage, coercion, and symbolic recognition. By bringing together cases from the center and the frontiers, from secular administration and religious hierarchy, the papers offer a multi-layered perspective on how identities were forged, contested, and redefined within the imperial system. The discussion will particularly address the interplay between institutional frameworks and individual agency, asking whether the empire's elite ultimately functioned as its backbone or its weakest link.

Denis Sdvizhkov *Imperial Elites in the 18th Century: Integration, Diversity, and the Making of the All-Russian Nobility*
Alexey Miller *Elites in the Russian Empire in the Long 19th Century: The Main Structural Factors*
Amiran Urushadze *The Problem of Ethnopolitical Loyalty in the Southern Regions of the Russian Empire in the Mid-19th to Early 20th Century: Local Elites in Imperial Policy*
Kirill Solovyov *The Political Class of Russia at the Beginning of the 20th Century: Mechanisms of Mobilisation, Structure, Composition*

CP 34. Ideas of Contemporary Empire: Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism in Russian Political Discourse

Panel organizer: Iain Ferguson

Empires are not built on ideas alone, but ideas are how they are expressed, legitimated, and contested. This panel examines how leading actors in Russian political society in the twenty-first century have articulated empire and anti-empire at once. Russia is widely viewed as a neo-imperial power, yet it is also a producer of an anti-imperial vocabulary intended for global circulation. That contradiction is the panel's central concern. We track three linked ideas: 'multipolarity' as geopolitical architecture, the 'world majority' as claimed constituency, and 'traditional values' as moral content. Together they form a discursive field in which anti-Western, anti-colonial, and hierarchical claims coexist — and in which speaking for others can reproduce the representational logics of empire. Four papers approach this Russian political discourse from different angles of vision: From political science, official and expert constructions of the 'world majority'; from media studies, Anglophone expatriate vlogs that recast Russia as a fortress of 'traditional values' against a liberal West; from international relations, the desire for 'multipolarity' in Russian foreign policy as the expression of an anti-imperial, post-Western and progressive realism; from political theory, Carl Schmitt's Großraum as a model of imperial space applied to Russian Eurasianism. Read together, these papers ask how anti-imperial language can underwrite imperial practice — a question that looks different when posed from the Caucasus, a region long structured by competing imperial projects and their afterlives, rather than from Moscow alone.

Yali Wang *Anti-Colonialism and the Power to Represent: Producing the "World Majority" in Russian Political and Expert Discourse*
Panos Kompatsiaris *The Only Fortress of Traditional Values': Discourses of the West in Anglophone Expat Vlogs from Russia*
Iain Ferguson *Multipolarity in Russian Foreign Policy: The Realism and Problem of Ethical Foreign Policy*
Ben Van de Wall *Carl Schmitt's Großraum Theory and Contemporary Multipolarity: The Case of Russian Eurasianism*

CP 36. Creating and Contesting the Postwar Soviet Empire

Panel organizer: Erik Scott

This panel offers new perspectives on Soviet empire after World War II by rethinking the concepts used to describe it, reexamining the nature of center-periphery relations, and showing how empire was both created and contested in economic development, geriatric medicine, and sport. The panelists will serve as discussants for each other's papers before taking questions from the audience. All three papers reveal the unsettled nature of Soviet imperial hierarchies. Brandenberger demonstrates that even as Stalin-era ideologists laid out a program that was both Russifying and centralizing, they took great pains to deny that their project was either imperial or colonial. Grant, in her study of Soviet geriatrics, observes that the USSR's internal dynamics were multivalent, with new initiatives emerging from non-Russian republics. Scott, turning to late Soviet sport, finds a similarly complex set of dynamics at play; while rivalries persisted between Moscow clubs and those in the republics, some sports leagues reoriented toward domestic markets, others looked beyond the Soviet Union, and all struggled to remain economically viable. The papers illustrate the tensions that underlay the creation and contestation of Soviet empire, not only in interactions between center and periphery, but also within the center and among its various peripheries. Brandenberger illuminates how a coterie of theoreticians and economists in Moscow debated Soviet nationality policy and economic development for the periphery during a period of expansion. Grant, looking at the Institute of Gerontology in Kyiv, demonstrates how imperial knowledge production originated in the periphery, sometimes at the grassroots level. Looking across multiple republics, Scott explains why some centralized sports institutions fractured and fell apart, while others successfully reinvented themselves for the post-Soviet period.

David Brandenberger *An Empire in Denial? The 1947 Party Program and its Blueprint for the Future of Soviet Nationality Policy and Economic Development*
Susan Grant *Peripheral Perspectives: The Development of Soviet Geriatrics*
Erik Scott *The Strange Death of the Soviet Sports Empire*

CP 49. The History of Empires in Intellectual Context: Visual Dimension of Knowledge Production

Panel organizers: Tenlik Dalayeva and Aidana Idrissova

This panel investigates empire as a visual epistemology - a system of power reproduced not only through law, administration, and text, but through images. Photographs, maps, textbook illustrations, and AI-generated visuals have functioned as technologies of imperial knowledge production. By tracing this visual genealogy from the late Romanov and Ottoman empires through Soviet pedagogy to the algorithmic present, the panel asks how imperial ways of seeing are constructed, transmitted, and - potentially - unsettled.

Key Discussion Points

• Colonial visuality and the Steppe: How did ethnographic photography and illustrated scholarship at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries produce and naturalize Russian imperial knowledge about Kazakh society and territory?

• Audience and address: Whose gaze did Ottoman state photography under Abdulhamid II anticipate — domestic subjects, European observers, or the sultan's own image of a modernizing empire — and what does this reveal about the politics of visibility?

• Pedagogy and memory: How do Soviet and contemporary Armenian history textbooks visually stage empire, and what shifts in political regime and national self-understanding are legible in these didactic images?

• Algorithmic afterlives: How does generative AI inherit, distort, or reproduce older imperial visual archives, and what new forms of bias and representation does it introduce into historical knowledge production?

• Cross-cutting questions: What continuities link 19th-century imperial photography, Soviet textbook illustration, and AI image generation as visual regimes of power? Can the visual archive be read against the grain to recover the perspectives of the imperial "objects" of representation?

Bringing together specialists in Central Asian, Ottoman, Armenian, and digital history, the panel offers a comparative framework for examining how images have made -and continue to make - empire knowable.

Tenlik Dalayeva *How Did Visual Culture at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries Participate in the Russian Imperial Production of Knowledge about the Steppe Region?*
Faris Sürmeli *The Ottoman Empire in Abduhamid II's Photo Albums in the Late 19th Century: For Whom Was Knowledge Produced?*
Lilit Dadoyan *Visual Representation of Empire in Soviet and Contemporary Armenian History Textbooks*
Aidana Idrissova *Visual Knowledge Production of Empire in the Age of AI*

CP 62. Agency in the Face of (Neo)Colonialism: Navigating Constraint, Autonomy, and Asymmetry

Panel organizer: Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan

Imperial and neo-colonial formations are rarely totalizing systems of passive submission. Instead, they operate as complex, hierarchical spaces where subaltern actors—ranging from unrecognized self-governing units and small sovereign states to educational institutions and local administrators—continuously negotiate, resist, and exploit the boundaries of their constraint. This panel examines how diverse social and political actors exercise strategic agency within asymmetric (neo)imperial structures. Moving beyond binary frameworks of resistance versus collaboration, the papers explore the nuanced mechanisms through which actors carve out maneuverability: leveraging inter-imperial competition to assert sovereignty, negotiating political autonomy without formal international recognition, and mediating imperial socio-cultural policies at the institutional level. Bringing together perspectives from international relations, comparative politics, historical sociology, and education, this panel offers an interdisciplinary examination of subaltern agency, sub-national self-determination, and the pragmatic navigation of imperial power across both historical and contemporary contexts.

Karena Avedissian *Sovereignty Without Recognition: The Limits and Possibilities of Non-State Agency*
Loosineh Markarian *Sovereignty Under Constraint: Armenia's Foreign Policy Amid Russian Imperial Influence*
Hayarpi Papikyan, Lilit Talalyan *Teaching the Mother Tongue of the Soviet Union in Soviet Armenian Schools: Russian-language Policies under Stalin and Khrushchev*

CP 63. Living On: Imperial Afterlives and the Politics of Knowledge from the Mongols to the Colonial Age

Panel organizer: Francesca Fiaschetti

The panel explores the ways in which empires persist beyond their formal collapse, surviving in the form of "zones of fragmentation" and enduring regimes of knowledge that continue to shape the political imagination long after imperial sovereignty has dissolved or been transformed. Spanning a geographical and chronological range from the Caucasus and the Black Sea region in the post-Mongol period, through Safavid Persia, to colonial Bengal, the panel brings together case studies that trace the aftermath of the Golden Horde, the Safavids and the Ottomans, exploring how imperial power extends beyond confessional, ethnic and territorial boundaries. Adopting a comparative approach, the panel examines empires as interwoven systems of governance and knowledge production, which simultaneously structure inter-ethnic and inter-religious differences whilst generating unexpected commensurability between distant regions. Particular attention is paid to the mental maps that outlive their imperial creators, to the practices of translation through which post-imperial political systems are absorbed into broader regimes of knowledge, and to trans-imperial actors who navigate and reimagine the jurisdictions left in the empire's wake. By tracing these afterlives across a broad Eurasian landscape, the panel directly addresses the conference's central question on the persistence of "empire" as a political, cultural, and epistemological force. It demonstrates how these legacies continue to "live on" as infrastructures of memory and knowledge fundamental to understanding both the past and the political imagination of the present.

Francesca Fiaschetti *Empire's Resilience: Historical Geography and Mental Maps of the Post-Mongol Caucasus*
Stefanos Kordosis *Post-Golden Horde Tatars of the Black Sea. The Shamkalate Tatars and Crimea in an Addendum to the Greek Translation of Martino Martini's De bello Tartarico historia (1695)*
Giorgio Rota *Some Notes on Commensurability between Catholic Europe and Safavid Persia: Why Did Europeans in Persia and Persians in Europe (Mostly) "Feel Well"?*
Benedetta Contin *Conceiving Statehood in Transimperial Contexts (or on the Verge of the Empires): Safavid Armenians in British-Ruled Bengal and Their Political Propaganda*

CP 64. Empire and Translation: Constructing Multinational Soviet Literature

Panel organizers: Elena Zemskova and Yuliya Kozitskaya

As an 'empire of nations', the Soviet state both stimulated and set limits to national identity formation in the republics, using literature as one of its instruments for managing national diversity. From the mid-1930s, literary translation became an institutionalised industry and a tool for homogenising imperial culture. Literary translators became pivotal figures in mediating and negotiating between the imperial centre and its national peripheries. The four papers in this panel examine the role of translators in the 'imperial situation' from different perspectives. Two examine the flow towards the centre: the creation of the professional identity of a Soviet translator in the case of Adelina Adalis, and the transformation of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko into a Soviet classic through Russian translation. The other two look outward from the republics at translators and the translation of Western and Russian classics in Armenia and Kazakhstan. Together, these cases demonstrate how translation served to centralise and standardise national literatures while also enabling peripheral actors to pursue their own agendas.

Susanna Witt *Shevchenko and Pushkin in the 1930s–1940s: Translation, Intertextuality, and De/colonization*
Brian James Baer *Translation and the Making of an International Soviet Literature: The View from the Periphery*
Yuliya Kozitskaya *Central Projects in Local Perspective: World Classics in Kazakh Translations of the 1930s*
Elena Zemskova *From Kipling to the Podstrochnik: Adelina Adalis and the Soviet Literary Empire*

CP 67. Soviet Intellectuals and Empire

Panel organizers: Erin Hutchinson and Zukhra Kasimova

The Soviet Union enlisted intellectuals in a project of national and class liberation, promising freedom from the hierarchies that defined the Russian empire. On the eve of the break-up of the Soviet Union, however, intellectuals across the Soviet republics played a key role in the formation in nationalist movements that ultimately called for independence from the USSR. This panel will examine the role of Soviet writers and intellectuals in both maintaining and challenging empire in the late Soviet period. The papers will explore questions such as: How did intellectuals work within Soviet institutions to expand upon, challenge, and express various types of internationalism that did not accord with simple Russian-led hierarchy? How did some Soviet intellectuals come to understand the USSR, despite its official pronouncements of anti-imperialism, as an empire? How did economic systems, cultural institutions, and environmental degradation contribute to the perception that the USSR was imperial or colonial in nature? How can considerations of social class shed light on intellectuals' participation in popular politics in late Soviet nationalist movements? The participants in this panel will analyze the relationship of Soviet intellectuals to empire through case studies from Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Belarus.

Charles Shaw *Rahmon Safar's 1001 Feats: Great Patriotic War Commemoration in Tajikistan as Late Soviet Spiritual Practice*
Rossen Djagalov *From Populist Nationalism to Intelligentsia Anti-Populism: Vasil' Bykau and the Literary Breakup of the USSR*
Zukhra Kasimova *Cotton at the Limits of an Empire of Nations: Ecological Crisis and National Revival in Uzbekistan and Karakalpakstan*
Erin Hutchinson *Soviet Intellectuals and "Empire Consciousness": The Case of Hrant Matevosyan*

CP 75. Writing Empire, Writing Against Empire: Graffiti, Memory, and Post-Imperial Sentiments

Panel organizers: Vjeran Pavlaković and Nona Shahnazarian

What happens to empire after the empire is formally gone? This panel approaches graffiti, murals, and other forms of street art as visual and textual practices through which imperial power continues to inhabit—and is contested in—everyday urban space. Rather than treating graffiti merely as political expression or subcultural practice, we ask what walls reveal about the afterlives of empire: how imperial hierarchies, territorial imaginaries, memories, languages, and political myths are reproduced, challenged, erased, or reconfigured from below.

Bringing together cases from Croatia, Georgia, the UK, Armenia, and Russia, the panel examines public walls as contested mnemonic and political surfaces. From post-Yugoslav war murals and the mnemonic landscapes of Croatia to the politically charged walls of Tbilisi, from Armenian commemorative graffiti dedicated to fallen soldiers to textual interventions emerging under censorship and authoritarianism in Russia, the papers explore how street art engages competing regimes of memory and power.

The panel asks when street art reproduces hegemonic and nationalist narratives and when it becomes a form of counter-memory, vernacular history, or what we conceptualize as counter-history: grassroots attempts to reclaim the authority to narrate the past outside institutionalized regimes of knowledge. We are particularly interested in tensions between commemoration and contestation, visibility and erasure, authorization and illegality, and imperial nostalgia and de-imperial futures.

Placing the Caucasus and post-Yugoslav space in dialogue with Russia and the UK also enables a global comparison between former imperial centres and imperial borderlands. How do walls remember empire differently where imperial power was projected outward from the centre and where it was experienced from the periphery? By bringing these sites into conversation, the panel seeks to decenter conventional accounts of empire and foreground the agency of non-state actors who write, overwrite, erase, and reclaim the city. We propose the wall as an archive of imperial afterlives—and as a medium through which alternative political imaginaries become materially visible.

Vjeran Pavlaković, Eric Ušić *Shifting Symbols and Post-Imperial Graffitiscapes in the Istrian Borderlands*
Tamar Babuadze *Tbilisi Anti-Russian Graffiti Since 2022*
Amalya Dilanyan, Blue Pencil *Empire and Resistance on the Wall: Competing Genealogies of Memory in Russia and Armenia*
Sarah Wilson *Murals of War, Borders of Belonging: Displacement and the Politics of Memory in Armenia*