

# **Local Memory, Global Ethics, Justice: The Politics of Historical Dialogue in Contemporary Society**

**December 11-14, 2012**

The Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability (AHDA) at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights will hold its first annual conference in New York City, December 11-14, 2012. The conference will be co-hosted by the Guantanamo Public Memory Project, and will also feature the Guantanamo Public Memory Projects' first traveling exhibit and digital media as a shared international challenge in historical dialogue.

Historical dialogue and accountability is a growing field of advocacy and scholarship that encompasses the efforts in conflict, post-conflict, and post-dictatorial societies to come to terms with their pasts. In contesting nationalist myths and identities, in examining official historical narratives, and opening them to competing narratives about past violence, historical dialogue seeks to provide analysis of past violence grounded in empirical research; acknowledge the victims of past violence and human rights abuses; challenge and deconstruct national, religious, or ethnic memories of heroism and/or victimhood; foster shared work between interlocutors of two or more sides of a conflict; identify and monitor how history is misused to divide society and perpetuate conflict; enhance public discussion about the past.

This conference seeks to consider questions relating to these topics, and the state of the relatively new field of historical dialogue and its relationship to other discourses such as transitional justice, memory studies, oral history, historical redress and religious studies. Little consideration has been given to the intersections of these discourses, and how these can be employed as tools in understanding the root causes of conflict. The conference thus seeks to explore the possibilities and limits of these concepts and methods, searching for unexplored connections and elaborating upon how historical analysis can be employed to resolve long-standing sectarian conflicts.

We seek to explore the genealogy of the discipline of historical dialogue as well as research emanating from it: how do the memory and history of past violence evolve over time, and how do they influence a given society in the present day? What is the relationship of advocacy to knowledge production and the relationship between history, memory, and contemporary society? What is the relationship of historical truth to testimonies in truth commissions, and how do truth commissions construct historical truth? How can the tensions that exist between dialogue and accountability be understood, addressed or reconceived? In what ways can one compare historical narratives in post (identity) conflict to post authoritarian regimes? What is the role of subjects such as gender, religion, human being and citizen in understanding historical narrative, memory, dialogue and accountability? Finally, the conference seeks to be a space of interaction and the exchange of ideas between scholars and practitioners who often do not have the opportunity to collaborate, and we welcome papers that address this divide or reach across these boundaries.

## **About the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability (AHDA) Program**

AHDA is based at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR) in New York. As a convening body, it is the first interdisciplinary global network for scholars and practitioners working in historical dialogue. AHDA provides its affiliates with a forum for constructive interdisciplinary interaction and exposes them to available resources. In doing so, AHDA focuses historical dialogue into a well-defined field and raises awareness for it as an innovative mechanism for reconciliation, peacebuilding, and democracy promotion. By facilitating the exchange of knowledge between and within disciplines, AHDA assists its affiliates in shaping a society's discussion of past violence.

- **Fellowship for Historical Dialogue and Accountability 2012:** This competitive fellowship program enables a group of practitioners who come from conflict, post-conflict and post-dictatorial societies to come to Columbia University for a semester to engage in training, networking, project work, and academic study.

- **Network/Database/Archive:** AHDA is creating a network of affiliates, assessing their practical and substantive needs, and building a database of resources for their use.
- **Mapping:** AHDA will collect case studies and research in order to map instances of historical dialogue globally. With the support of our affiliates, AHDA will hold conferences and publish papers that will analyze and present the degree of historical dialogue reached in different societies.

**About the Guantánamo Public Memory Project:** In 2009, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience launched the Guantánamo Public Memory Project (GPMP) to make its history visible by collating different archival, visual and oral histories of GTMO, and to foster public dialogue from multiple perspectives on what the past suggests for the future of this place, its people, and its policies.

Reflecting on the mosaic of memory projects created thus far, speakers at the conference will debate the politics, potential, and pitfalls of creating a public memory of Guantánamo. What do we need to remember? Who needs to remember – what are the varying implications for Americans and others around the world? What does it mean to confront Guantánamo as an enduring and integral part of American policy and politics? How can we acknowledge GTMO’s liminal legal status, while firmly locating it in the geography and politics of Cuba and the Caribbean? What larger issues – from immigration to national security to the limits of democracy – has GTMO shaped? What is the relationship between public memory and public policy – how can remembering foster international public engagement and action on shaping the future of this place and its impact on the world?

## Planned Program

### Session formats:

Each session will address an area of historical dialogue from a different geographical or thematic perspective, and its relevance in a larger context as well.

- Three plenary sessions with prominent scholars in the field of historical dialogue and memory studies will initiate discussion on each day of the conference.
- Smaller group sessions: following the plenary session, we will have break-out sessions, with three simultaneous panels which will consist of three scholars each, who will speak for 15-20 minutes. The talks will be followed by Q&A for 30 minutes during which time panelists and audience members can discuss questions and comments.
- On the final day of the AHDA conference, we will collaborate with the Guantanamo Public Memory Project, both to consider the ways in which historical dialogue and the Guantanamo Project contribute to the work of the other, and also to explore the interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary modes in which historical dialogue can inspire discussion and research.

### Tuesday, December 11, 2012, Columbia University

9:15-11:15	Plenary Session (on historical dialogue)
11:30-1:15	2-3 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue (3 -4 panelists/session)
1:30-2:15	Lunch
2:30-4:15	2-3 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue (3 -4 panelists/session)
4:15-4:30	Coffee Break
4:30-6:15	2-3 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue (3 -4 panelists/session)

### Wednesday, December 12, 2012, Columbia University

9:15-11:15	Plenary Session (on historical dialogue)
11:30-1:15	2-3 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue (3 -4 panelists/session)
1:30-2:15	Lunch
2:30-4:15	2-3 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue (3 -4 panelists/session)
4:15-4:30	Coffee Break
4:30-6:15	2-3 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue (3 -4 panelists/session)

### Thursday, December 13, 2012, Columbia University

9:15-11:15	Plenary Session (Guantanamo focused)
11:30-1:15	1-2 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue; 1 Guantanamo session (3 -4 panelists/session)
1:30-2:15	Lunch
2:30-4:15	1-2 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue; 1 Guantanamo session (3 -4 panelists/session)
4:15-4:30	Coffee Break
4:30-6:15	1-2 concurrent sessions on historical dialogue; 1 Guantanamo session (3 -4 panelists/session)

Evening Guantanamo exhibit opening at NYU with keynote speaker

### Friday, Dec 14: Kimmel Center for Student Life, New York University

9:30-11:30	First session (Guantanamo focus)
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-2:30	Second session (Guantanamo focus)
2:45-4:45	Third session (Guantanamo focus)
5:00-5:30	Closing with keynote.