

## **Echoes and Overlaps in Arab and African Thought on Media and Culture: Forging New Directions for Research**

**June 3, 2026**

**University of Cape Town**

### Organizers:

Clovis Bergère (Northwestern University in Qatar)

Marwan M. Kraidy (Northwestern University in Qatar)

Nabil Echchaibi (University of Colorado Boulder)

### Description:

This one-day preconference is jointly organized by the Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South (#IAS\_NUQ) at Northwestern University in Qatar, the Centre for Film and Media Studies and Digital Media Sociology Lab at the University of Cape Town, and the Center for Media, Religion, and Culture at the University of Colorado Boulder, with support from Carnegie Foundation of New York through the Arab Information and Media Studies (AIMS) project at #IAS\_NUQ. This year's preconference continues our deep dive into the intellectual and epistemic common grounds, interactions, and constructive divergences in African and Arab scholarship on media and culture, which began at #ICA2025 as part of the preconference on "Echoes and Overlaps in Arab and African Thought on Media and Culture" held at CU Boulder. Guided by long-standing—and more recent—calls to decolonize and de-Westernize knowledge (see Bosch 2025 for instance), we draw attention to Arab and African scholarship on media and culture which has been, and continues to be, systematically occluded due to its form, location, language, race, nationality, and limited access to journals, funding, or distribution circuits. More than an invitation to talk back to the West, our endeavor is first and foremost driven by a desire to forge new directions for media and communication research by building on persistent—yet often repressed—theories, methods, and literatures within Africa and the Arab world. Building on the promising discussions that took place at #ICA2025, this year's edition will provide the intellectual space and solid framework for a field-defining multilingual publication, either as special issue or edited volume, which we hope to submit soon after the preconference.

### Background:

This preconference focuses specifically on Arab and African thought on media and culture to address inequalities in knowledge production that have occluded Southern knowledges. We hope to consolidate our theories by looking back historically to locales such as Timbuktu, Fez, Baghdad, Beirut, Cairo, the Sahara, and Southern or coastal East Africa as "zones of transactions" between African and Arab thought, between what Senghor (1967) called "Arabité" and "Africanité," which he saw as central to the reaffirmation of Afro-Arab solidarities. Part of our endeavor seeks to disrupt Western modernity's carving out of Africa, between Egypt on one side, North Africa on the other,

and what Hegel termed “Africa proper,” south of the Sahara, reinvented in the colonial imagination as a wall rather than a zone of exchange, material, cultural, intellectual, or otherwise. This also invites us to revisit the revolutionary potential of the “dreams of independence” (Kisukidi 2024) that paved new avenues for the consolidation of new—and old—solidarities and exchange between African and Arab modernities. However, more than looking back to long-standing echoes and overlaps, we are interested in how these continue to live on, alive and well, in the contemporary writings of African and Arab scholars, including in Khatibi’s notion of the “passeur,” Bidima’s “traversée,” Mbembe’s use of Afro-diasporic thought to theorize the planetary, Bachir Diagne’s work on translation, or the seminal writings of Mernissi or Amin, to name but a very few.

#### Submission Guidelines:

We are interested in proposals that address the theme of the preconference in one of three ways. This should be clearly stated in the proposal and reflected in the core focus of the contribution. To forge new directions in media and communication research, we are asking for proposals that:

- 1) Engage seriously with the insights of at least one *intellectual, theorist, or thinker* from Africa or the Arab world who has theorized communicative phenomena in their broader socio-cultural and politico-economic contexts, including—but not limited to—those focused on non-Western knowledges, indigeneity, race, and South-to-South solidarities.
- 2) Examine in depth one or more *concepts or ideas* from African or Middle East studies that have not received wide circulation because of their location, language of expression, and geographical circuitry, to explore how they can illuminate our understanding of media, communication, and culture.
- 3) Center research from *institutions*, based in Africa or the Arab world, that house primary sources, traditions, methodological approaches, and historiographies in media, information, and communication research that have been neglected by the field.

To ensure concrete steps towards a major publication, we will only accept proposals that clearly engage with the guidelines noted above and demonstrate depth rather than breadth. Concepts, ideas, bodies of work, or theories can originate in any language, and we encourage participants to also consider how form, format, discipline, or access can vary greatly, and thus, may need to be reimagined once we move beyond the Western canon towards Southern knowledges. Clearly, we understand the categories of “African” or “Arab” as porous and historically connected, rather than fixed categories or bounded geographies. We see this project as re-opening a space to explore forgotten intellectual alliances and encourage scholarship from within an extended Afro-Arab imaginary that recognizes both relationalities and challenges in nurturing these connections.

Authors should submit an extended abstract of 1,000 to 1,500 words (excluding references) to [ias@gatar.northwestern.edu](mailto:ias@gatar.northwestern.edu) . The abstract should clearly address: 1) the thinker(s), concept(s), or institution(s) engaged with; 2) the broader literatures and scholarship that the paper is in conversation with; 3) as well as an early articulation of the key contribution and/or argument of the proposed paper. In a single PDF, please include: your name, institutional affiliation, email address, title of your proposed presentation, and abstract.

The deadline for submissions is **9 January 2026, 23:59 GMT**.

All accepted participants will be asked to submit a full first draft of 6,000 to 7,000 words by **1 April 2026**. This is required to be included in the final program.

Authors will be notified by **1 February** if their abstract has been accepted. Please note that some limited funding is available to support attendance for scholars located at Global South institutions who would otherwise find it difficult to attend.