

Call for Papers | ICA 2026 Preconference – Cape Town, South Africa

Theme: Decolonizing the Visual: Community, Memory, and Resistance

Co-sponsored by: Activism, Communication and Social Justice, Communication History (CH), Ethnicity and Race in Communication (ERIC), Intercultural Communication, Philosophy, Theory and Critique, Popular Media and Culture Divisions

Date: 4 June 2026

(Tentative) Venue: Department of Applied Design, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town

(Estimated attendance: 40)

Preamble

Communication is a site where histories are written, contested, and reimagined. In a world where visual media circulates with unprecedented speed, the legacies of colonialism remain deeply embedded in how people, places, and struggles are represented, erased, and remembered. This preconference invites critical engagement with the project of *decolonizing the visual*—a task that calls not only for the interrogation of representational practices, but for the centering of community-based epistemologies, memory-making, and resistance in visual communication.

Susan Sontag (1978: 126) wrote, “Photography furnishes evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it.” Yet, what happens when the visual itself is shaped by colonial infrastructures? Decolonizing the visual is not merely a matter of image critique; it requires our rethinking of the visual as a domain of power, shaped by *subaltern epistemologies* (Dutta & Pal, 2020)—alternative ways of knowing that challenge dominant, Western knowledge infrastructures, and reorient how justice, memory, and voice are documented, mediated, and archived.

In the age of platforms, today's *semiotic landscapes* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021) are constituted through the circulation of multimodal texts that compress geographies and histories into fragments designed to attract both algorithmic and human eyeballs. These dynamics raise urgent questions: whose memories are archived, whose resistance becomes legible, and who is granted visual presence in global discourse (Hoskins, 2017; Canella & Bock, 2025)? This preconference invites us to reimagine the politics of *seeing* by centering community-grounded visual practices that unsettle colonial legacies and foreground visual storytelling as a form of resistance and repair.

Visual activism—through community murals, digital testimony, counter-mapping, smartphone footage, or platform labor—enacts vernacular witnessing as public truth-telling, resisting state violence, genocidal regimes, and institutional erasure by inscribing marginalized voices into current repositories of audiovisual evidence. As Mitra et al. (2022) remind us, cultural industries continue to shape access to visibility, reinforcing global hierarchies of value, recognition, and belonging. Decolonial visual communication thus requires not only new representational strategies but also a reconfiguration of the power dynamics that govern media production, circulation, and interpretation.

In this preconference, we ask: How do communities deploy visuals to reclaim history, assert presence, and resist ongoing forms of visual coloniality? What methodologies can help scholars, artists, and activists engage in ethical, grounded, and justice-oriented visual research? And how might the Global South lead this epistemic reorientation? We welcome scholars, artists, activists, and community practitioners to help us rethink the politics of seeing, the infrastructures of memory, and the aesthetics of refusal.

We seek contributions that:

- Examine how communities use visual practices to challenge colonial frameworks and reclaim narrative authority.
- Explore the role of visuals in preserving and contesting cultural memory in contexts of erasure, conflict, and displacement.
- Analyze visual activism, art, and journalism as forms of resistance, vernacular witnessing, and counter-archiving.
- Critically engage with platform infrastructures, algorithms, and media logics that shape visibility, legibility, and exclusion.
- Reflect on ethical and methodological approaches to decolonial visual research, including questions of consent, care, and community collaboration

Formats

- Traditional Research Presentations (extended abstracts, max 1,000 words)
- Research Escalator (work-in-progress abstracts, max 500 words; mentees paired with mentors for feedback)
- Interactive Roundtable on Decolonizing Visual Communication Methods and Practices.

Submission Details

- Timeline: Opens January 14, 2026.
- Deadline: February 14, 2026
- Notification of Acceptance: March 26, 2026
- Submission: ashley.stewart@uniport.edu.ng+ tom.divon@mail.huji.ac.il
- Abstracts should be anonymized for peer review.
- Registration is by invitation to ensure thematic coherence and active participation.

Organisers

- Dr. Ashley Ajumoke Stewart (University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria)
- Tom Divon (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
- Visual Communication Studies Division