ICA 2027 pre-conference

Race, communication and repair: Confronting dehumanising pasts

co-sponsored by the Communication History Division and the Activism, Communication and Social Justice Division

DATE: Thursday 3 June 2027, 8.30am-5pm
VENUE: Civic House, 26 Civic Street, Glasgow G4 9SH

Reparation has regained visibility in the public domain in recent years as a way to address the dehumanising pasts associated with historical harms inflicted through genocide, enslavement and colonialism. This preconference explores how media have harmed people and what reparative approaches to communication and research in communication studies might look like, i.e. approaches that acknowledge past harms while reorienting how humans relate to and understand one another as communities across the world grapple with uncertain futures. It examines the intersection between reparation and communication through the role of communication and communication studies in inflicting and repairing historical harms as well as the role of media in framing global reparation activism.

The CARICOM Reparations Commission and the African Union recently launched a partnership to demand formal apologies, financial compensation, and debt relief from former European colonial powers for the transatlantic trafficking in enslaved people. Both prior to and in the wake of #BlackLivesMatter, racial justice activists in the United States, Europe and Australia advocated for reparations to address the legacy of enslavement and colonialism and ongoing systemic racism and racial inequalities. Journalists have a responsibility to report on these calls for reparation but frequently have been caught up in fierce contestations over history as part of ideological 'culture wars'.

Media institutions, especially in the Minority World, have in different ways confronted their own implication in historical injustices through official apologies, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programmes, or specific reparative initiatives such as *The New York Times*' 1619 Project and *The Guardian*'s Cotton Capital Project. Such critical moments in media reckoning call for closer attention to the modes of repair being undertaken, to how media reform intersects with goals of racial and reparative justice, to how mainstream media have framed these initiatives, and to the implications of these initiatives for audience trust.

Aside from media institutions, attention has turned to academia's historical harms and its complicity in perpetuating harms in the present. #RhodesMustFall protests drew attention to the different ways in which the lack of post-Apartheid racial transformation at the University of Cape Town inflicted pain on Black students and staff. Student encampments highlighted the role of universities in contributing to the genocide in Palestine. The death of Professor Jason Arday raised questions about the complicity of both universities and media in ongoing racial harms. Fields such as media and communication studies have reflected on the way in which our own disciplinary pasts have dehumanised, silenced and harmed particular groups of people through academic scholarship, canonical texts and scholarly practices.

Calls for reparation are made amid significant global uncertainty. The rise of populism and disinformation on digital platforms, the growing influence of far-right media, and the mounting rhetoric against DEI initiatives have challenged reparative projects —and academia itself— through increasingly polarised political discourses. Social media have been instrumental to those advocating for reparation but have also caused harm through hateful content targeting marginalised communities. Harms of the past are perpetuated in the present through algorithmic practices, AI's distortion of Indigenous knowledges and misinformation, and big tech data extraction practices in the Majority World.

The aims of this pre-conference are to examine the intersection between reparation and communication through (1) the role of communication and communication studies in inflicting and repairing historical harms; and (2) the role of media in framing global reparation activism. We encourage scholars to discuss how communication itself might be turned towards repair through emerging concepts such as 'reparative media' and 'media reparations' and 'algorithmic reparations', which could offer ways of rethinking epistemic injustices.

We invite contributions that:
-explore the conceptual dimension of the intersection between reparation and communication
-examine the role of communication in inflicting or repairing historical harms
-discuss reparatory justice in relation to journalism, media institutions, social media platforms or artificial intelligence
-provide reparatory histories of media institutions, communicative practices or publics
-interrogate the role of media and communication studies in inflicting or repairing historical harms
-investigate the role of legacy and social media in framing global reparation activism

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
A 350-word abstract and a 150-word bio should be submitted to communicationreparation@gmail.com by 29 January 2027. Participants will be notified by 26 February 2027 on the outcome of their submissions. We expect to have space for 15-20 papers as part of this pre-conference.

REGISTRATION FEE
The conference registration fee is USD 25. You do not have to be an ICA member or register for the main conference to attend this pre-conference.

ORGANISING COMMITTEE
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