

Visiting Professor Activities at the Centre for African Studies (UM6P)

Professor Tarik Sabry
22 April/22 June 2024

I joined the UM6P's Centre for African Studies as a visiting Professor from the University of Westminster, UK, from the 22nd of April until the 22 of June 2024. My stay at CAS centered on three key activities: lecturing, student mentoring and organizing a two-day symposium on the study of contemporary culture in Morocco. The symposium took 5 full months of preparations, starting from the 17th of December 2023, including the circulating of the call for papers, the assessment of abstracts, and liaising with 15 Moroccan scholars from different cities and Universities in Morocco. My activities at CAS had a clear and coherent *telos*: to introduce UM6P students to the field of media and cultural studies and present it as a potential theoretical framework for the study and analysis of different facets of contemporary Moroccan culture, including the arts, music, design, media, and popular culture. To this end, the themes of the lectures I gave, the mentoring of students and the symposium on Moroccan cultural studies formed a conjunctural and relational whole.

During my 8 weeks' stay at CAS, I gave a total of 6 lectures¹, followed by discussion and debate. The lectures covered a range of subjects related to the study of media and culture in the digital age. On Thursday 25 April 2024, I gave a lecture on Medium Theory². The lecture critically assessed 'medium' theory claims, exploring the work of Innis, McLuhan and Kittler who strongly argue that technologies, beginning with writing, television and later the Internet have had major implications on defining what it means to be human in the 20th and 21st centuries.

On Tuesday 7 May³, I gave a lecture for the series: "*The World seen from Africa: Multiple processes of decolonization*" organised by Prof. Ali Benmakhlouf.

The lecture entitled: *De-colonizing media and cultural studies theory* critiqued discourses of 'knowledge decolonization' in media studies and argued for a double critique strategy that submits both local and imported media theory to an epistemic manoeuvre of territorialization and de-territorialisation. Giving examples from the

¹ This included one lecture organised for the students and staff of the Materials, Science, Energy and Nanoengineering Department (MSN) that took place on the 6th of June 2024.

² <https://cas.um6p.ma/?p=12752>

³ <https://cas.um6p.ma/?p=13352>

contexts of Africa, China and the Middle East, this lecture argued against the facile binaries between East/West, Global North/Global South and enunciated a critical media and communication theory that is both contextual (historically and epistemologically) but also and always open the thought of the other. On Thursday 9 May 2024⁴ I gave a lecture entitled Digital Media Audiences and Everyday Life in which I discussed how the concept of everyday life helps us understand digital media audiences. The lecture critiqued totalising and culturalist discourses of the everyday and used different examples from my own ethnographic research to demonstrate how our everyday lives are inextricably connected to our digital media uses. On Thursday 16 May 2024⁵, I gave a Lecture entitled: *Culture, Representation and the Media*. The first part of the lecture tackled the idea of culture from an anthropological perspective, tracing its origins to the 18th century. The second part of the lecture critiqued different interpretations of culture and engaged with the ways in which the media create meanings for their audiences. On Thursday 23 May 2024⁶, I gave a lecture entitled: Foucault, Discipline and Technology. The lecture discussed Foucault's ideas on governmentality and surveillance in relation to our experiences of digital media in the age of the Internet. On the 6th of June, I was invited by Professor Jones Alami to give a lecture to his staff and students at MSN. The lecture tackled the issue of knowledge and decolonization focusing in the main on Abdelkadir Khatibi's work on the topic.

The lectures were attended by intimate, yet extremely engaging and loyal audiences. Audience members included UM6P staff and students but also included members of the public which I thought was a great idea as this gives UM6P and the Centre for African Studies a public service ethos. From the lengthy discussions I have had with the audience after each lecture, I sensed a serious interest and thirst for debating and engaging with the conjunctural relationship between digital media, culture and society. Audiences felt there was a need for an academic platform that engaged with these matters systematically. The telos of the lectures was to showcase media and cultural studies' analytical potential and to demonstrate how media are not just tools of communication but existential phenomena that pose profound questions about what it means to be human.

Mentoring

Many members of the audience who had attended my lectures sought advice about further study, especially PhD study. I had several meetings with 3 UM6P students and two lecturers from the University of Kadi Ayad. In these meetings, I gave advice on how to write a PhD proposal and how to formulate original research questions. I also gave feedback on two drafts of a PhD proposal sent to me by one student from UM6P.

⁴ <https://cas.um6p.ma/?p=13270>

⁵ <https://cas.um6p.ma/?p=13270>

⁶ <https://cas.um6p.ma/?p=13270>

Two-day Symposium 31 May/ 1 June 2024⁷

One of my main responsibilities at the Centre for African Studies was the organization of a two-day Symposium entitled: *Rethinking Moroccan Cultural Studies*. As a full Professor of Media and Cultural Studies, I have published widely in my field and edit the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, a leading international journal on the subject. Over the years, the journal published many Moroccan scholars working on cultural studies. So, in preparation for the symposium, I started a conversation from the 17th of December 2024 with key Moroccan scholars from Fez, Rabat, Meknes and Kenitra working on cultural studies, as well as with Moroccan philosophers from Marrakech working on media theory and the politics of the body. Our discussions evolved into a call for papers and shaped the main themes of the symposium. The preparations for the symposium continued from December 2024 until the event took place on 31 May/1 June at UM6P. The successful two-day symposium inaugurated the field of Moroccan cultural studies. It brought together Moroccan scholars from different disciplines within the humanities to debate the need for a field of research that makes it possible for us to teach, study and research contemporary aspects of Moroccan media, culture, and society in a scientific way. The symposium provided an opportunity for academics and students from UM6P to discuss and debate what Moroccan cultural studies should do, how it can be institutionalized, and what body of theoretical work should inspire its intellectual development. The event asked key questions such as: to what historical moments should the field of Moroccan cultural studies be responding? What theoretical approaches/paradigms should it rely on to investigate aspects of contemporary Moroccan cultures, media and society? How can we advance both theoretical and practical strategies for the grounding of the 'scientific' study of Moroccan contemporary culture in the Moroccan Humanities? The symposium tackled key themes such as: gender politics, Moroccan popular cultures, philosophy of the body, the arts and the political economy of digital media in Morocco. The proceedings of this pioneering CAS event have been recorded and can be viewed on <https://cas.um6p.ma/?p=13270>

Output: The proceedings of the symposium will be published in two special issues of the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*.⁸ I also plan to work with the Centre for African Studies to publish shorter versions of the papers in a journal called: *La croisée des chemins*.⁹

***I am so indebted to the Director of the Centre for African Studies at UM6P, Professor Ali Benmakhlouf, and his assistant, Mrs Wafiya Dardour, both of whom made me so welcome and worked restlessly to make my stay successful and intellectually rewarding.**

⁷ <https://cas.um6p.ma/?p=13270>

⁸ <https://brill.com/view/journals/mjcc/mjcc-overview.xml?language=en>

⁹ <https://lacroiseedeschemins.ma/>