Re-imagining Communication in Africa and the Caribbean

Global South Issues in Media, Culture and Technology

Edited by Hopeton S. Dunn · Dumisani Moyo · William O. Lesitaokana · Shanade Bianca Barnabas
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Editors

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This book benefits from the goodwill of many who supported and encouraged its publication. In response to the call for chapter proposals, we received over 60 submissions from media, culture and communication scholars in some 15 countries in Africa and the Caribbean. They enthusiastically encouraged the publication of this book to fill an important gap in the resources available in their institutions. While the work of some of these contributors did not eventually find an outlet in this publication, their initial and continued active support of the project is highly appreciated. For those whose work is published in this book, we are grateful for the confidence you placed in the process of completing it, and for your scholarly inputs and attention to detail, in ensuring its highest quality.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Paul Chiudza Banda  PhD, is Assistant Professor of History at Tarleton State University, based at Stephenville, Texas, USA. He has published several book chapters and journal articles. His journal articles were published in The Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives; The Journal of the Middle East and Africa, African Studies Quarterly, The Journal of Eastern African Studies and The Society of Malawi Journal. He is a columnist for The Diplomatist Magazine. His current research interests include British imperialism, the colonial and post-colonial state in Africa, the history of development in Africa and the global Cold War.

Shanade Bianca Barnabas, PhD, is a senior lecturer and Head of the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Johannesburg. Situated within the ambit of cultural studies, key foci of her research include culture, identity, media and representation. Since 2008, she has conducted research together with the!Xun and Khwe San communities of South Africa’s Northern Cape province, publishing book chapters and journal articles on issues of heritage, indigeneity and marginality as experienced by these communities. In teaching courses on communication and media, she is engaged in offering a localised pedagogy within a global context.

Nova Gordon Bell, PhD, is a lecturer at the Caribbean School of Media and Communication (CARIMAC) at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Jamaica, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in communication theories and development. She was previously the Programme Chair of the Communications Arts and
Nicola J. Bidwell  PhD, is an adjunct professor at Namibia’s International University of Management. She is an affiliate researcher with the Digital Ethnography Group, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Australia, and also serves as Gender and Social Impact Facilitator for the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Local Access Project. For the past 22 years, she has lectured and researched in a range of universities in Namibia, South Africa, Australia and the UK.

Itunu Bodunrin, PhD, is a postdoctoral research fellow and member of the Rethinking Indigeneity research team at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. His research work is focused on popular culture and urban indigeneity amongst the!Xun and Khwe indigenous population in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa.

Collen Chambwera is an experienced information and public relations specialist and senior tutor at the University of Johannesburg, where he is pursuing a PhD at the School of Communication, Department of Communication Studies. He holds a Master’s degree in Media and Cultural Studies from the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. His research interests include news production analysis, the impact of social media on journalism, and media freedom and regulation.

Victor Chikaipa is a PhD graduate from Stellenbosch University. He holds a MA degree in Applied Linguistics and a Bachelor’s degree in Education from the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. His research interests are in the fields of digital media, sociolinguistics, popular culture and media, environmental communication and critical discourse analysis. He has published in refereed international journals including the Nordic Journal of African Studies.

Melville Cooke is an assistant lecturer at the University of Technology, Jamaica (UTECH), where he teaches classes in the Communications Arts
and Technology (BCAT) degree programme. He worked previously as a print journalist, specialising in entertainment. His observations of the music sector have significantly informed his MPhil thesis, *Sell Off or Sell Out? Experiential Marketing Using the Massive Jamaican Dancehall Market, 2005–2015* which he completed at University of the West Indies, Mona Campus in 2018. Cooke maintains his research interest in the use of Jamaican popular music as a means of broad-based communication.

**Hopeton S. Dunn** PhD, is Professor of Communications Policy and Digital Media based at University of Botswana. He served for several years as Professor and Director at the Caribbean School of Media and Communication (CARIMAC), The University of the West Indies, Jamaica, where he was founding Director of the Mona ICT Policy Centre. He is also a senior research associate in the School of Communication, University of Johannesburg. Dunn is a former Chairman of the Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, and a former Secretary General of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). He chairs IAMCR’s international panel for the biennial award of the Stuart Hall Prize. His work is published widely on issues of culture, globalisation, broadcasting, telecommunications policies and emerging media.

**Anthony M. Gunde**, PhD, is a research fellow at the Journalism Department, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He is also Senior Lecturer of Media, Communication and Cultural studies at the University of Malawi’s Chancellor College. Gunde has overarching interests in the political economy of mass communications, communicating masculinities and the intersection of religion, media and culture.

**Musonda Kapatamoyo**, PhD, is Chair of the Mass Communication Department at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville. As Chair, he leads the Department in implementing its vision and strategy to improve student outcomes. His research interests lie in big data, focusing on algorithms, data collection, storage, manipulation and dissemination. He is a board member of the Edwardsville, Illinois Rotary Club, where he serves as the Youth Exchange Officer (YEO) and Director of Vocational Service. He is also a board member of Lynne F. Solon Foundation, a group focused on helping children with disabilities and diabetes.

**William O. Lesitaokana**, PhD, is a senior lecturer and Head of the Department of Media Studies at the University of Botswana. He teaches
theoretical and practical courses in media studies, specialising in new media. His research focuses on media audiences, consumption of media technology, cultural sociology and media in Botswana. Recently, he published a co-edited book titled *New Media and Mediatization of Religion: An African Perspective*. He has written extensively in the area of mobile media, mobile communication and youth and society. Some of his works are published in leading journals such as *Journal of African Media Studies*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* and *New Media and Society*.

**Parkie Mbozi** is a research fellow at the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR), University of Zambia. He is a PhD candidate in Media and Communication Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His research focuses on access and readership of online newspapers, their perceived credibility and relevance to audiences and their impact on the established media ecosystems. He has worked for several regional and international organisations and published extensively on issues of communication, HIV and AIDS, and climate change.

**Rachel Lara van der Merwe** is an assistant professor in the Centre for Media and Journalism Studies at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Originally from Cape Town, South Africa, she received a PhD in Media Research and Practice from the University of Colorado Boulder, where she remains a Research Fellow at the Center for Media, Religion, and Culture.

**Seamogano Mosanako**, PhD, is the Head of Communications and Information Services at the Bank of Botswana. Prior to this, she was a lecturer in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Botswana where she taught theoretical and practical courses in media studies, specialising in broadcasting. Her research interests are in the areas of broadcasting, media policy, development communication and the media in Botswana.

**Dumisani Moyo** PhD, is an associate professor and vice dean, academic, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg. His research interests include media policy and regulation in Africa, new and alternative media, political engagement through media in Africa, journalism in the digital era and media and elections. Among his major works are two co-authored

**Daina Nathaniel** PhD, is an associate professor in the Knight School of Communication at Queens University of Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. She teaches a wide range of courses including Global Communication and Culture, Communication and Culture in a Networked Society and Communication, Culture and Food. Her research interests include the postcolonial experience in the Caribbean, the impact of tourism, identity construction using digital media, the spread of digital literacy, cultural representation and creolisation of marginalised communities in the Caribbean. She is a national of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Carol Muñoz Nieves** is a researcher in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. Her master’s thesis engages with the political economy of mobile and internet communications in her home country, Cuba. She has conducted research on digital and data rights in the platform economy; citizen data audits; human capital in digital industries; public dimensions of faculty’s work in the review, promotion and tenure process; open access research; and history of communication research in Cuba. She has also worked as a press analyst, journalist, lecturer and communications specialist for organisations in Cuba and Canada.

**Hagos Nigussie,** PhD, is a lecturer at the Department of Journalism and Communication, Mekelle University, Ethiopia. He holds a PhD in Communication for Development and Media Studies from the University of Queensland, Australia. Nigussie has participated in various research projects related to Communication for Development and Media Studies. He teaches courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and serves as coordinator for Postgraduate Programmes at the College of Social Sciences and Languages, Mekelle University.

**Nicola D. Satchell** is a lecturer in the Department of Government at The University of the West Indies (Mona Campus). She was the Principal Investigator for the ‘Equal Rights and Justice for All’ project carried out by the UWI. Her research interests include political sociology, crime management, youth and development and development studies.
Lloyd G. Waller  PhD, is Professor of Digital Transformation Policy and Governance at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. He is Head of the University’s Department of Government, and serves on several Boards and Committee in Jamaica’s public sector. His research interests include digital transformation, governance, youth and development, advanced research methods and tourism resilience.

Herman Wasserman  PhD, is Professor of Media Studies and Director of the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He has published widely on media, conflict, ethics and democratisation in Africa. His latest book is Media, Geopolitics and Power: A View from the Global South. He is editor-in-chief of the journal African Journalism Studies and of the journal ‘Annals of the International Communication Association’.
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

4IR        Fourth Industrial Revolution
ADCS       Adigrat Diocesan Catholic Secretariat
ADSL       Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Lines
AI         Artificial Intelligence
APC        Association for Progressive Communications
BDC        Botswana Development Corporation
BEST       Black Entertainment Satellite Television
BOCRA      Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority
BTA        Botswana Telecommunications Authority
Btv        Botswana Television
CACR       Caribbean Association for Communication Research
CADECA     Casa de Cambio
CANA       Caribbean News Agency
CARICOM    Caribbean Community and Common Market
CARIMAC    Caribbean School of Media and Communication
CD         Compact Disc
CN         Community Networks
CNBC       Consumer News and Business Channel
COMESA     Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COVID 19   Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CSV        Comma Separated Values
DAW        Digital Audio Workstation
DIY        Do It Yourself
DMC        Diageo Marketing Code
GATT       General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GBC        Gaborone Broadcasting Channel
GDP        Gross Domestic Product
GNI  Gross National Income
GSM  Global System for Mobile
GTV  Gaborone Television
IA   Internet Access
IAMCR International Association of Media and Cultural Research
ICA  International Communication Association
ICT  Information Communication Technologies
IDRC International Development Research Centre
ILO  International Labour Organization
IMF  International Monetary Fund
IoT  Internet of things
ITA  Information Technology Agreement
ITU  International Telecommunications Union
LDC  Least Developed Countries
M&G  Mail & Guardian
MABC Munhumutape African Broadcasting Corporation
MDG  Millennium Development Goals
MFN  Most Favored Nation
MMORPG Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games
MNC  Multinational Corporation
MTV  Music Television
NEPAD New Partnership for African Development
NGO  Non-Government Organizations
NPOs  Non-Profit Organization
NSP  National Strategic Plan
OAU  Organization for African Unity
QCF  Quarter Circle Forward
SABC South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC Southern Africa Development Community
SAP  Structural Adjustment Programmes
SASI South African San Institute
SIDS Small Island Developing States
SONA State of the Nation Addresses
STA Swaziland Television Authority
TB  Tuberculosis
TV  Television
UDF United Democratic Front
UK  United Kingdom
UN  United Nations
UNDP United Nations Development Program
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US  United States
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<td>WACC</td>
<td>World Association of Christian Communication</td>
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<td>WEF</td>
<td>World Economic Forum</td>
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<td>WSIS</td>
<td>World Summit for Information Society</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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<td>ZICTA</td>
<td>Zambia Information Communication and Technology Authority</td>
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<td>ZNCB</td>
<td>Zambia National Commercial Bank</td>
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CHAPTER 1

Re-imagining Communication in Africa and the Caribbean: ‘Releasing the Psychic Inheritance’

Hopeton S. Dunn, Dumisani Moyo,
William O. Lesitaokana, and Shanade Bianca Barnabas

INTRODUCTION

Media, culture and technology, as sub-themes of this book, are interrelated fields of emerging scholarship globally. They are also sites of rapid transformation in the manner in which they are consumed by all demographic groups. The face of media has been revolutionised by the rise of the internet, mobile technology and the deconstruction of the once vaunted role of gate-keeping as an essential control on content...
dissemination. Cultural norms are now under renewed scrutiny as old traditions of knowledge accumulation, social behaviour and professional practice in media undergo their own transformation and reformulation. Colonial inheritances are being questioned and hegemony resisted even in the face of global upheavals.

The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to new thinking on the environment, the emergency remote delivery of education, and the provision of housing and healthcare services for the poorest, all over the world. Major deficits in internet access for such services, especially in the Global South, and in minority and ethnic communities in the North, are cause for renewed data gathering, advocacy and action to preserve human rights and an acceptable quality of life for all.

This volume turns the spotlight on two historically and culturally connected regions—Africa and the Caribbean—that are affected by these global developments. Like other developing regions, these two dynamic areas are in constant search of their own solutions, their own voices and their own analytical tools to better understand the contemporary roles of technology, culture and communication in their societies. Africa and the Caribbean, deliberately selected to be the focus of this volume, are important components of the wider grouping of countries referred to as the Global South. The sub-categories or alternative descriptors to this term include ‘developing countries’, ‘emerging economies’, ‘least developed countries (LDC)’, ‘small island developing states (SIDS)’ and ‘lower to middle income countries’, among others. And while each term has its own special focus, the countries and regions encompassed have been subjected to colonial oppression, economic and political hegemony and exploitation of their natural resources. Nevertheless, they reflect resilience, display economic and cultural diversity, operate differing political systems and deploy available global technologies to varying degrees.

Migrants from many of these post colonies constitute part of the diaspora resident in the North. Economic and social conditions among these demographic and especially ethnic groups living in the Global North often approximate some of the adverse conditions that are to be found in some countries of the South, and these have been exacerbated by the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. In these respects, Africa and the Caribbean share a great deal in common with other parts of the Global South and many ethnic communities in the Global North. There is much to learn from these two developing regions and for each from the other. At the
same time, these lessons will also likely be instructive to scholars and policy-makers in the Global North.

While we focus in this volume on contributions from Africa and the Caribbean, it is our expectation that subsequent volumes will similarly analyse issues of media, culture and technology in Asia, the wider Latin America, the Pacific and the Middle East, and their intersections with other developing regions.

**Africa and the Caribbean**

Africa is one of the most generously endowed regions of the world in creative human populations and diverse natural resources. Its countries, ethnicities and regions have a long history of self-rule and achievements in science, technology, agriculture and art. It is home to some of the world’s great forests and wildlife and perhaps the greatest aggregation of indigenous languages. It also has a history of conflicts, drought and unresolved political challenges for which it has established institutional responses such as the African Union and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, working in association with international counterparts. Being a large continent, Africa has distinct regions, with varied cultures, religions and shifting demographics. While chapters on Africa in this volume are drawn predominantly from Southern Africa, given responses to the call for inputs, the scope of the book also encompasses other parts of the continent, including East and West Africa.

The Caribbean is one of the most beautiful regions of the world, with tourism and cultural products that are in demand globally. Its economies feature the mining of bauxite and petrochemicals, production of agricultural goods and the global marketing of music, fashion, cuisine and other cultural products. Most countries in the Caribbean region have a youthful, educated and tech savvy population, and a workforce that is largely open to global employment and travel. The region produces some of the fastest athletes in the world as well as scholars of global repute. At the same time, some of its countries are beset by high rates of crime and violence, poverty and unemployment, reflecting slow economic growth rates and faltering productivity levels. The human history of the Caribbean dates back thousands of years, with migrant indigenous civilisations which were mostly decimated by European colonial conquests.

Most parts of Africa and the Caribbean share a history of colonialism and European hegemony lasting over centuries. The two regions were
polar sites for the abhorrent human trafficking activities in a slave trade that demeaned all its key actors and victims at various stages of the process: those who facilitated human capture in Africa, the prime enforcers and economic beneficiaries in Europe and the vast number of enslaved Africans whose destinations included not only colonised regions of the Caribbean but also the Americas.

Centuries of the slave trade sought to reduce the proud offspring of Africa to mere human chattel, transported through the so-called ‘middle passage’ and encamped on hostile plantations in the Caribbean and the Americas where they fought incessantly for their freedom. The labour migration system called indentureship, with key similarities to enslavement, saw the later arrival in the Caribbean region of waves of Indian and, to a lesser extent, Chinese labourers, who now make up an important part of the region’s population, in independence.

In parts of Southern Africa, a depraved European colonial system of repression and disempowerment eventually spawned the despicable racist ideology of apartheid. That this appalling repression of the majority black population operated as state policy in South Africa well into the last decade of the twentieth century is a measure of the tenacity of racism and its international capitalist economic support systems.

Despite the indignity, brutality and genocide of British, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Belgian, German, Italian and Dutch colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean, the peoples of these regions have survived. They won hard-fought anti-colonial struggles, some emerging to establish vibrant renewed societies, with diverse cultural and ethnic communities. In the present era, Africa and the Caribbean enjoy numerous affinities and a modern political history of people-to-people solidarity.

As an example of this pan-African solidarity, the great South African novelist, Peter Abrahams, made Jamaica his home for decades. Speaking in an interview in 2004, he remarked, ‘There are places in South Africa where you think you are in Jamaica, and there are other parts of Africa that are like that. Jamaica is Africa to me’ (in Dunn 2011, p. 512). When anti-apartheid hero and South Africa’s first black President visited Jamaica in July 1991, the incumbent Jamaican Prime Minister, Michael Manley, spoke for the entire Caribbean Community (CARICOM) region and perhaps wider afield when he declared of Mandela, ‘When you set foot on our soil, we are welcoming one of the greatest symbols of courage and heroism in our time’ (Gleaner Archives 2017).
Caribbean cultural exponents such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff and Burning Spear campaigned for the liberation of Zimbabwe and South Africa, and heralded African liberation in general, in the tradition of legendary antecedent pan-Africans such as Marcus Garvey of Jamaica, George Padmore of Trinidad and Tobago, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, among others.

New shoots of this historical, political and cultural interaction have been emerging in recent decades, with prospects of societal renewal, and economic and technological transformation. At the same time, ongoing surges in cross-border migration and human trafficking have added complexity to a human process of becoming, that is forever in flux in Africa and the Caribbean. It is akin to an era described by Mbembe as the ‘post-colony’: ‘a period of embedding, a space for proliferation that is not only solely disorder, chance, and madness but emerges from a sort of violent gust, with its languages, its beauty and ugliness, its ways of summing up the world’ (2001, p. 242). Whatever form that African and Caribbean existence takes, the story must be told mainly by those who live these experiences, who observe the unfolding episodes first-hand and who must critically evaluate the journeys of the continent, regions and associated communities. This is what this book is about.

Eminent Caribbean scholar and late Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Rex Nettleford (2007), urged the people of both the Caribbean and Africa to build on the lessons learned in the cauldron of mutual oppression and hegemony. For him, the central lesson for institutions as well as individuals is, ‘the on-going need to facilitate the release of the population from a psychic inheritance of self-doubt’, so that new generations emerging from these regions can ‘shape a civil society based on free will, individual rights, mutual respect, equity and social justice’ (Nettleford 2007, p. 13).

It is also to this mission of anti-colonial re-construction, education and liberation that humanist scholar and Brazilian educational theorist, Paulo Freire, expressed commitment and resolve. He argued that in order to transcend chattel slavery and neo-colonial oppression, there must by a process of self-discovery, knowledge building and of conscious educational development. He explained: ‘Just as the oppressor, in order to oppress, needs a theory of oppressive action, so the oppressed, in order to become free, also needs a theory of action’ (Freire 1972, p. 150). In discussing what he calls cultural invasion, Freire postulates that:
Whether urbane or harsh, cultural invasion is thus always an act of violence against the persons of the invaded culture, who lose their originality or face the threat of losing it. In cultural invasion, the invaders are the authors of, and actors in, the process; those they invade are the objects. The invaders mould; those they invade are moulded. The invaders choose, those they invade follow that choice, or are expected to follow it. The invaders act, those they invade have only the illusion of acting, through the actions of the invaders. (Freire 1972, p. 121)

This volume is about taking responsibility to be narrators of our own stories, to be theorists of our own lived experiences and to empower a new generation of scholars willing and able to help mould the present and future of education, culture, media and technology in countries of the Global South, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

In these regions, many of the indigenous cultural processes and overarching global technologies have not been adequately analysed, researched and documented from the perspective of the South. The ongoing impacts of digital eco-systems, new social networks and machine learning on the culture, language, lifestyles, human rights, audiences, governance systems, intellectual property, ethical norms and civic responsibilities in Africa and the Caribbean remain in urgent need of deeper interdisciplinary study, theorising and renewed critical, contextual analysis.

How are popular or folk cultures in these varied countries being impacted by such developments? How can local media be re-imagined in this constantly changing global context? Can home-grown innovation and cultural resilience be stimulated to resist hegemonic, global constructs and help ‘release the psychic inheritance’? Can these regions generate more indigenous content and devices for popular consumption as part of the post-colonial enterprise? And can the Global South enhance its cultural influence and information counterflow to the North and not simply become recipient societies, mere markets or testing grounds for industrialised countries?

The book does not aim to answer all these questions comprehensively. But it seeks to renew dialogue on these possibilities and to make a modest contribution to addressing some of the gaps. Original work by the contributing authors analyse single countries or span regions, with some
analyses encompassing both Africa and the Caribbean in their scope and implications.

The book includes chapters on the challenges and opportunities facing cultural environments and media systems, and examines the roles being played by civic actors, media practitioners, academics, cultural exponents, governments, regulators, audiences and external players in the transformation of societies in these two regions. While it claims no more than a limited contribution to the global debate on vital communication issues, it seeks to evaluate many of the assumptions that govern the often too uncritical adoption of externally generated theoretical constructs and media content. In this respect, it joins a range of other recent critical contributions on key related issues in the Global South, including Ragnedda and Gladkova (2020), Mutsvairo (2018), Wasserman (2018), and Iqani (2015), among others.

STRUCTURE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The content of this book is presented in four parts, covering chapters on: Conceptualising Research and Technology; Digital Strategies and Transitions; Reforming Media Practices; and Challenging States and Corporations. It captures a combination of theoretical ideas, empirical studies and critical analyses of policies and practices in the countries and regions under study. The 18 other chapters speak of communication and cultural issues across parts of the African continent and Caribbean region, with contributions emanating from the experiences of some 12 of these countries. Sub-regional concerns, media and indigenous populations and the struggles of disadvantaged groups are among the diverse range of issues highlighted. Although there are historical patterns of gender discrimination in the two regions, women continue to play significant roles in the political, social and economic sectors, as they do in contributions to this book. What the chapters have in common is a search for new meaning and alternative approaches to understanding and re-imagining communication and culture in Africa and the Caribbean, with implications for the wider Global South.

We now offer a closer look at the inter-related chapter contributions contained in the four parts of the book.
PART I: CONCEPTUALISING RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

The opening part consists of four chapters reflecting some key conceptual and development issues that pervade the entire volume. A chapter by Herman Wasserman of South Africa concerns itself with the quest for alternative theoretical lenses suited for analysing communication and culture in Africa and the wider Global South. Wasserman urges scholars in Africa and elsewhere to respond to the ethical and epistemological questions raised by digital media ‘in ways that are informed by a deep, textured knowledge of context and social relations’. He calls on a new generation of researchers to resist the uncritical adoption of scholarly agendas and frameworks from elsewhere, and to engage in more critical reflections that extend beyond the machinic, while avoiding a lapse into what he calls “a nativist romanticism”.

Hopeton S. Dunn offers new thinking on the conceptual deficits relating to technology and productivity in Africa, the Caribbean and wider South. He argues that in an era of smart technology, emerging robotics, machine learning and neural networks, countries of the South must re-evaluate how creative processes, economic outputs and education are to be managed in order to achieve greater digital productivity and human well-being. He suggests that at the heart of a needed transformational process for many developing countries is a lack of strategic policy-making. He recommends a deliberate development strategy proposed as ‘Globalisation from Within’.

Writing in the same vein, Gordon Bell exposes the negative impacts of over-dependence on imported communication scholarship, a challenge that ‘has hindered the evolution of a distinctive Caribbean paradigm in communication thought’. As exceptions, she identifies certain Caribbean scholars who ‘have distinguished themselves in the area of media and communication research’. However, her well-placed concern is the need for a more integrated Caribbean paradigm in communication research, analysis and theory building, to counter the still dominant imported European and North American content and ideas. To this end, the chapter calls for a ‘review of the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of European and North American media and communication approaches to theory’. Pointing to ‘the rich institutional and creative potential that exists in the region’, Gordon Bell’s chapter seeks to move Caribbean and other peoples from being mere recipients of knowledge ‘to
being active creators of another perspective for understanding human communication and media’.

Taking decolonisation as a point of departure, Musonda Kapatamoyo offers new insights, especially drawn from Southern Africa, into new ways of tackling technology capitalism and unsuitable transnational strategies at the community and global levels. Kapatamoyo’s chapter makes the cogent argument that imitative and pre-packaged telecommunication policies adopted from global power brokers and transnational agencies served mainly to undermine domestic social and economic development in Africa. He contends that these external ‘influencers’ exerted power in two principal waves that prevented the deployment of appropriate policies fit for the domestic or local contexts. ‘After independence’, he notes, ‘many African countries prioritised legacy telecommunication systems using borrowed pathways from developed countries, with limited success’. Kapatamoyo attributes the embrace of these policies by African governments to the force of what he calls ‘persuaded obligation’, a concept with nuances that go well beyond the associated ideas of ‘soft power’. He concludes that ‘communication technologies are more effective when used in processes that engage stakeholders in the selection of the objectives, key issues and relevant channels’ within a society. Such recommended measures of stakeholder consultation, technological self-determination and indigenous telecoms policy-making seem a far cry from the top-down policy-making and technological dependence that characterised much of what was adopted, often unaltered, by uncritical political leaders and willing bureaucrats in the South.

**PART II: DIGITAL STRATEGIES AND TRANSITIONS**

The second part of the book consists of five chapters, carefully selected for their geographical diversity and yet their commonality in demonstrating the value of alternative approaches in the developmental use of media technology. The section traverses four countries across two global regions in critically examining past and present technology deployments and their potential uses in national development. Ranging in scope from tech innovations and community networks in Africa, to the politically unorthodox policies governing mobile commodification in Cuba, and the challenges of digital gaming technologies in fostering national identity in South Africa, these and other inputs bring original and keenly argued
research work to bear on how developing countries can make better choices in technology use and in national policy-making.

To begin, Nicola J. Bidwell who is based in Namibia offers a textured analysis of community information and communications technology (ICT) networks and their role in building local technology alliances to resist transnational and corporate dominance. In her chapter, ‘Decolonising in the Gaps: Community Networks and Identity in African Innovation’, she argues that these local network alliances fill gaps created by telecommunications capitalism, and foster powerful alternative identities in African innovation. It is a message that goes wider than the African continental scope of her chapter.

The contribution by Carol Muñoz Nieves describes the commodification of mobile communications in socialist Cuba as a state-led strategy to capture hard currency. A motivating factor is that Cuba is dependent on external technological transfers, thus having to pay for these technologies at global rates. Largely, the chapter warns that the exorbitant pricing of mobile communication services in Cuba fuels the social divide between the local ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. This commodification shows a shift in policy, initiated by the Raul Castro administration, to prioritise economic advancement over social gains. It is a commentary on the contradictions faced by a developing Caribbean country with controversial internal policies and confronting hegemonic threats by the decades-old economic blockade unleashed by neighbouring superpower, the United States.

Rachel Lara van der Merwe maps the trajectory of the video gaming sector in South Africa. The chapter focuses on the small but growing video gaming community and analyses whether national identity building was yet evident or consciously projected as part of the creative process. She discovers that the quest for financial viability by the individual gaming projects drove a more global than national approach to character development and storyline. However, she notes that the rudiments of more ‘expressly South African games’ are emerging.

The struggle by San youth of South Africa to produce cultural adaptations of American hip-hop music is the focus of the chapter by Shanade Bianca Barnabas and Itunu Bodunrin. They provide insights into the innovative use of digital media for music production and dissemination, in the face of challenges such as high data charges and limited access to music technologies and to the internet. Adding to growing work on the evolution of low-income digital media production practices, the chapter explores the tactics adopted by these first nation community youth, living on the