Postcolonial ICT Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

This article has a particular interest in the introduction of ICT in the postcolonial parts of the world. The fundamental arguments for investing in ICT all over the world rest on the view of ICT as a necessity for successful integration into the world economy. ICTs are regarded as having great potential to promote development in key social and economic areas where a shortage of capital, knowledge and local capacity obstructs progress. However, "information itself does not feed, clothe or house the world" (Main, 2001, p. 96), and it remains to be seen whether ICTs in developing countries will create wealth among the poor in those countries or among the already wealthy.

In the promotion of ICTs for development, the introduction of these technologies is mainly discussed in technical terms, considering the problems of electricity, telephone access, and expensive computers. The argument for introduction is also rather instrumental, expecting income generation and economic improvement. At the same time, ICTs are sometimes referred to as revolutionary, but they will travel on existing technologies, modes of communication and (post) colonial relationships.

The introduction of new technologies will not only be regarded as a technical issue. It may also be politically sensitive, if the technology shows signs of disrespect for the local culture, if it promotes only specific groups and ways of life in the local society, or if it bypasses the local society when reaching out for a specific target like a company (see e.g., Redfield, 2002). As for example Weckert and Adeney (1997) argue, the spread of ICTs in diverse cultural settings might very well be regarded as cultural imperialism, given the unequal access to resources for alternative technologies or content. The directions that ICTs lead towards, for example distant communication, may be interpreted as unifying and networking on a global scale between interest groups to their own and society's benefit. ICTs may also lead to an increased spread of (androcentric) American and western ideals and commercial products, increasing the global dominance of the U.S. and other western nations. These examples show the impossibility in treating technologies as neutral tools.

The aim of this article is to develop postcolonial and feminist technoscience requests for context sensitive and distributed ICT processes in relation to the development of ICTs for Tanzania at the University of Dar es Salaam.

BACKGROUND

The position of "having never as much" (Redfield, 2002, p. 810) will for a long time be the position from which people in the Third World will receive ICTs. In his study, Redfield showed what reactions and tensions this position may create. Are ICTs yet another way of imposing control, of deciding what is important to know and to have, of showing who is in charge of globalisation? Are they yet another demand on transfer from national to private and commercialisation of common goods? A tool "to make the poor dream the same dreams as the rich" (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 165)?

Mörtberg (2000) raises the issue of equal access to ICT in a time when we see less of arguments for "technology in a democratic society" and more of arguments for "democracy in an information society". Equal access, referring to gender, class, race, religion, language etc. is by no means inherent in the ICTs. The gender dimension in the case of ICT in the postcolonial context relates to a double burden of men's supposed supremacy in technological mat-

ters, and women's specific barriers in the developing world, including illiteracy, unfamiliarity with English (that dominates the Internet), domestic work load, lack of valuable information on the Internet, and lack of connectivity in rural areas where women primarily live (Gurumurthy, 2004).

The links between equal-level[1] participation and ICT development or ICT policy development are created by means of hard work and tedious dialogues, multidimensional partnership co-evolution with developed and working sensitivity and awareness of diverse interests, gender dimensions and cultural—ethnic pluralism, among other components in an increasingly complex world.

Suchman (2002) argues that the *design from nowhere* is a result of the idea that technical systems could be constructed with a minimal cultural connection "as commodities that can be stablized and cut loose from the sites of their production long enough to be exported en masse to the sites of their use" (p. 140). Suchman also points out that the distinction between designer and user is not straight forward. The designers are users of their own products, and that invisible design-in-use often takes place without rigorous documentation. "Even to keep things going on 'in the same way' in practice requires continuous, mundane forms of active appropriation and adaptation of available resources" (p. 143).

Requests for access to communication (not only information; Colby, 2001), relevant material (e.g., Morley & Robins, 1995) and appropriate modes of communication practices (oral/literal, face-to-face or over distance; Mejias, 2001) highlights the borderline between ICTs supporting imperialism or pluralism. "Our challenge lies in theorizing exactly this interstitial space between agency and the lack thereof, between being constructed within structures of domination and finding spaces of exerting agency" (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 266).

These issues make it necessary to investigate and de-naturalise the discussion of former colonies as nations in need of ICT *transfer*. As Rwandan ICT expert Albert Nsengiyumva has stated[2], all electronic technologies have been brought into the African countries from outside. The new ICTs are often referred to as a sign of the jump from the modern into a postmodern age. Hess (1995) is very critical of the reference to a global postmodern age,

before claiming that "we" are living in a postmodern age, it is worth remembering that not everyone is included in that we. *Cyberspace is an elite space ... There* is *a glass ceiling, and for many in the world a large part of postmodern technoculture lies well above it.* (p. 116)

THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN TANZANIAN ICT DEVELOPMENT

Feminist technoscience with emphasis on ICT is certainly motivated by transformation goals. The needs for transformation are not only seen in the ongoing difficulties of achieving appropriate ICT system solutions especially in low income countries, but also in a more general process of knowledge and technology development (Gibbons et al., 1994; Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2001). The latter urge for transformation not the least within academy and technical faculties (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1997). Feminist technoscience within technical faculties is a driving force for the transformation processes required (Trojer, 2002). The transformation on a deeper level is vital to address appropriateness, access and utilisation not only for women within the academia, but for the majority of women in the local society (Gurumurthy, 2004).

In order to be able to understand and learn about distributed knowledge and technology production you have to be situated in a very concrete, day to day practice as well as achieve broad contextual knowledges. The postcolonial situation carries the potential for distributed knowledge production that are of particular interest in this sense. Experiences from Tanzania and the role of the main university of the country will be used to elaborate on these negotiation processes.

Relevance and Transformation

The University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) is the main university out of five in the country and the only university holding a technical faculty. The challenge for the university as an actor in societal development is huge. High expectations are placed on the implementation of ICT, which can be recognised in strategic documents of UDSM:

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