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Jim Murphy and Padraig Carmody, Africa's ICT revolution: technical regimes and production networks in South Africa and Tanzania.

Article (Accepted version) (Refereed)

Original citation:
Mann, Laura (2017). *Jim Murphy and Padraig Carmody, Africa's ICT revolution: technical regimes and production networks in South Africa and Tanzania.* Africa: the Journal of the International African Institute. 87, (2) pp. 435-437. ISSN 0001-9720

DOI: 10.1017/S0001972016001145

JIM MURPHY and PADRAIG CARMODY, *Africa's ICT Revolution: Technical Regimes and Production Networks in South Africa and Tanzania*. London: Blackwell (pb £24.99 – 978 1 118 75132 9). 2015, 288 pp.

The concept of disintermediation posits that information and communications technology (ICTs) weaken intermediaries and flatten global markets. In global debates about this idea, a handful of studies, notably Jensen's 2007 work on South Indian fishermen and Aker's 2010 work on Niger farmers, are repeatedly cited to argue for a broad applicability. However, by tracking the impacts of ICTs on small-scale producers in the tourism and wood product industries of South Africa and Tanzania, Jim Murphy and Padraig Carmody paint a much more nuanced picture of ICT-enabled economic change in contemporary Africa.

Chapter one, written with Bjoern Surborg, examines the evidence base behind the idea of ICT4D, i.e. information and communications technology for development. They cite a World Bank study that reveals a 75per cent failure rate in the Bank's attempts to grow ICT sectors in developing economies. Despite this depressing figure, proponents continue to push ICTs as the key to growth. Murphy and Carmody explain that ICT4D may serve as a Trojan Horse for e-business and suggest that ICT is part of broader effort, along with micro-finance and 'bottom of the pyramid' business models, to open up African markets to global capital.

Chapters two and three set out the theoretical foundations of the book. One of the book's strongest contributions is its differentiation between imminent and immanent development. Imminent development refers to productivity improvements at the individual or firm level. This is the focus of most ICT4D programmes. If such impacts are indeed transformative, development becomes a matter of access, thus placing ICT4D into a broader 'inclusive markets' paradigm in which poverty is imagined to be the result of market disconnection. Yet, the authors suggest, this understanding may be misleading as imminent development often results in a 'double movement' of capital, with some profits flowing 'downwards to direct producers' but others 'upwards to global corporations' like telecommunications and payment companies (20).

In contrast, Murphy and Carmody join a growing group of scholars who argue that African economies need deeper, structural transformation. They term this development 'immanent' and describe how it requires 'thicker' forms of ICT integration. In their analysis, the main vehicle for such structural change is strategic coupling: attachments between well-organized local industries and global lead-firms that result in learning, local innovation and eventually greater domestic value capture. Although firmly situated in economic geography, their analysis shares terrain with political economists interested in state-led industrial policy. For example, in reference to the tourism industry, Murphy and Carmody stress the importance of Destination Management Organizations (DMO) in advancing the collective interests of local tourism firms. Although their theoretical chapters focus on the importance of more strategic intervention, the empirical chapters somewhat lack detail on how this might be accomplished. Nevertheless, Chapter Two will be a useful resource for teachers seeking more critical approaches to ICT4D while

Chapter Three offers a more technical analysis for economic geographers.

Chapters Four and Five document overall impacts in the cases examined in this book. They argue that while there have been wide-scale imminent economic improvements (in terms of efficiency and productivity increases), producers have struggled to coordinate and use ICTs for economic upgrading. The next two chapters zoom in one sector in turn, demonstrating that ICTs ‘do not have any independent causative power’ across sectors (131). Chapter Six focuses on wood sectors in Dar es Salaam and Durban. Liberal trade policies have spurred competition from Asian imports and have led to downgrading within local industries. These changes have been partly facilitated by ICTs as importers have been able to better coordinate with their Asian counterparts. One response by local producers has been differentiation into higher-end markets. Here face to face interactions remain important and thus digital connectivity appears to be a complement, rather than as a substitute to geographical proximity and mobility. Chapter Seven focuses on tourism in Cape Town and Zanzibar. Rather than ICTs leading to disintermediation and greater power for small-scale producers vis-a-vis international competitors, better connectivity has resulted in re-intermediation through the emergence of online platforms such as tripadvisor. The analysis brings to mind recent contributions on platform economies in advanced economies. The authors illustrate how these platforms create seemingly ‘virtual or seemingly placeless power, which may be more difficult to contest than those associated with other older forms of intermediation’ (183). Such neo-intermediation has further resulted in ICT-enabled extraversion, as platforms not only concentrate market power but also serve to re-enforce negative perceptions of place and deepen distrust of local competitors.

While the book is an extremely thoughtful contribution to ICT4D debates, it lacks some depth in the analysis of local politics and collective organization. We see traces of the importance of such details in Chapter five, where the book discusses conflicts within the Tanzanian tourism industry. Also, the book occasionally slips into a narrative about African states being 'powerless' (142) vis-a-vis more organized international capital. One might ask whether African states really lack power or whether divergent interests within the state and within domestic business communities make industrial policies less feasible or effective. It would have been nice to have seen more attention paid to the connections between industry actors and local ICT communities and state authorities. What would a more pro-active and strategic digital industrial policy for Africa look like? We are left with a good sense of what Tanzania and South Africa have not done well, but we have less idea of what they should or could be doing better. Despite this caveat, the book will be eagerly consumed by scholars of development and technology and by teachers eager to get students thinking more critically and concretely about ICT-enabled economic change.

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