



**Global E-Litism: Digital Technology, Social Inequality, and Transnationality.** By Gili S. Drori. New York, NY: Worth Publishers, 2006. 187 pp. ISBN 0716756730.

In the past few years, many books have been written on technological diffusion and the digital divide at both the local and global levels. But in spite of the abundance of books on this subject, only a handful critically analyzed the concept of the digital divide and access to technologies beyond the level of connectivity and technical access. Gili Drori's book is one of the few to examine the social dimension of technological diffusion and the digital divide from a comparative global perspective.

Drori uses a sociological theoretical framework to analyze technological diffusion within the specific historicity of social, economic, and political inequalities. She argues that the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) follows the line of social stratification. "New technology is first diffused among the rich, educated, well-connected, and globally mobile social groups, while the penetration of new technology among the poor and disenfranchised is dramatically slower" (p. 2).

To this end, the digital divide is simply a subunit of larger social inequalities in the society. In other words, the digital divide merely reflects and makes more active the various societal divides such as gender, race, income, and literacy. The first four chapters of the book's eight chapters are devoted to the exploration of these different layers of "divides" and their intersection with technological diffusion, from transnational and multi-level perspectives.

In the next three chapters of the book, Drori examines the discourse of "ICTs for development" from a global perspective. She questions the grand narrative that positioned ICTs as the solution to the problem of underdevelopment, especially in developing countries. She indicates that ICTs are not magic wands and cannot provide a quick fix to the problem of underdevelopment in the global South, as is being advocated by international development agencies and Washington Consensus groups. ICTs are simply *means*, not an *end* in the development process, she notes.

Drori argues that it is misleading to quantify national development based on the penetration of ICTs, because this obscures the reality on the ground in many countries. She illustrates this point by citing a couple of examples, which show that neither the diffusion of ICTs nor the development of technological hubs within a country has seriously addressed the social aspects of development. One of these examples is the development of technological hubs in Bangalore, India, and in the Silicon Valley in the United States. She states that the development of technological hubs in these countries has not had any serious or significant effects on the reduction of poverty and inequality in these two countries.

What this shows is that the global framing of ICTs as the panacea for underdeveloped countries is flawed. From Drori's standpoint, much of the evidence from international organizations and researchers that links ICTs to economic growth is "still highly specific to particular core and semiperipheral countries, to a particular era of a remarkable economic boom, to particular sectors of ICT investments, mainly in industry" (p. 90). In short, this evidence is still more or less anecdotal, not concrete enough to generalize to all countries, especially the poor ones in the global South.

Despite her criticism of the whole framework behind the "ICTs for development" agenda, Drori sees the possibility for ICT-based economies to thrive if, she argues, "there

is a solid human capital basis set by a quality national education system” (p. 90). She suggests that social issues such as poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to health care should be tackled first or concurrently as a way to fix the societal problems, of which the digital divide is a subset. Hence, she calls for cooperative efforts among the private sector, governments, and civil society organizations to address what she terms the “variety of dimensions that shape human conditions” (p. 150) first because, in her words, the “great impact of technology on humanity and its potential is still in our future” (p. 151).

This book, which got an honourable mention in the book award category of the Communication and Information Technologies Section of the American Sociological Association in 2007, is strongly recommended for anyone interested in the global digital divide and diffusion of ICTs. Like Warschauer (2003) did, Drori repositions the debate about the diffusion of ICTs, the global digital divide, and “ICTs for development” discourse through her lens as a sociologist.

## Reference

- Warschauer, M. (2003). *Technology and social inclusion: Rethinking the digital divide*. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

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