Global Digital Capitalism: Mark Zuckerberg
in Lagos and the Political Economy of Facebook in Africa

TOKS DELE OYEDEMI
University of Limpopo, South Africa

In 2016, Facebook cofounder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg traveled to Lagos, Nigeria—the first stop on his first visit to sub-Saharan Africa. The trip was a commercial endeavor, a digital capitalist exploration of the potential of Africa's largest nation. Zuckerberg's visit provides a critical lens for examining the colonizing tendencies of global media corporations and the context of Africa in the circuit of digital capitalism. Africa is emerging as a market for digital tools, with increasing penetration of mobile telecommunications services, including mobile Internet. However, it is estimated that about 60% of the continent's population will still be unconnected in 2020. This low penetration provides an opportunity for digital enterprises such as Facebook to explore the African market. Through benevolent capitalism, Facebook is attempting to capture a huge market in Africa. The lack of investment in an Internet infrastructure in Africa provides both challenges and opportunities for digital capitalists who, in their benevolent pursuit of digital capital, aim for global domination.

Keywords: Facebook, Nigeria, Africa, political economy, benevolent capitalism, digital capitalism

Critical studies of the political economy of Africa in the global digital economy often describe the traditional forms of capitalist exploitation of Africa with a narrative that limits the place of Africa as the supplier of raw materials for technological devices (Frankel, Chavez, & Ribas, 2016; Grespin, 2010; Sharife, 2008) and as a dumping ground for the developed world's used technological devices (Pucket, Westervelt, Gutierrez, & Takamiya, 2005; Schmidt, 2006; Sullivan, 2014). However, other forms of capitalist exploitation of Africa need to be studied to understand the current nature of global digital capitalism. One such form is the trend of benevolent capitalism, a mode of capitalist exploitation designed as charitable acts in the pursuit of capital. As Africa emerges as a market for digital tools and services, it attracts the attention of global digital technology corporations and their leaders, who, under the guise of charitable offerings, explore the market potential of Africa's digital economy. One such corporation is Facebook.

In August 2016, Mark Zuckerberg, cofounder and CEO of Facebook, made his first trip to sub-Saharan Africa. The first city on his itinerary was Lagos, Nigeria, and the aim of the visit, as Zuckerberg put it on his Facebook page, was "meeting with developers and entrepreneurs, and learning about the startup ecosystem in Nigeria" (Zuckerberg, 2016). Importantly, he visited Andela, a start-up in which he

had invested $24 million. Andela was founded with the goal of "solving the global tech talent shortage while catalyzing the growth of tech ecosystems on the African continent" (Andela, 2019, para. 2). Andela was started in Lagos, incorporated in the United States, and headquartered in New York City. It has locations in Africa in Lagos, Nigeria; Nairobi, Kenya; and Kampala, Uganda (Aboyeji, 2016). The company trains African developers and places them in U.S. technology companies.

To understand Zuckerberg's visit to Africa, and Nigeria specifically, it is necessary to revisit the traditional form of capitalist exploitation of Africa in the global digital economy and examine a newer form of capitalist strategy, benevolent capitalism. This approach makes it possible to critically explore Africa's place in global digital capitalism, the political economic nature of Facebook, and the role of benevolent capitalism in this process. It also allows for the exploration of two critical questions: What is the emerging pattern of exploitation of the potential of Africa's digital economy? And how does Zuckerberg's visit to Nigeria operate in this pattern of exploitation and the global nature of digital capitalism? Engaging these two questions allows a critical analysis of what Willems (2016) ponders: whether Africa will gain from Zuckerberg's visit or whether Zuckerberg will gain from Africa. This question leads to the broad aim of this article: to examine ways that digital capitalists use benevolent capitalism to exploit Africa and the potential of its emerging digital economy.

Africa and the Global Political Economy of the Digital Revolution

To understand Africa's position in the global network of digital capitalism, in which Facebook operates, it is essential to take historical and critical perspectives in analyzing the political economy of global technological innovations. This type of approach requires revisiting the historical exploitation of Africa in modern innovations as shaped by capitalist motivations and exploring how the common narratives of the place of Africa in the current era of digital revolution continue the exploitative capitalist trajectory. Africa is seldom a huge market for global capitalist products and commerce. In the history of capitalism, the continent has always been a supplier of resources—both human and mineral—that fuel innovations in global commerce. Although Africa as a market may form an interesting narrative in the digital mobile phone industry, this has not changed its role as a supplier of raw materials for global capitalist innovations. Africa is essential to the global workings of capitalism—from colonial exploitation to the postcolonial free trade neoliberal ideology that shapes the universalism of current configurations of capitalism.

It is, then, critical to consider that Africa, as a supplier of resources for capitalist innovations in the current epoch of digital communication, has a historical precedent dating back to colonial exploitation that fueled many innovations in the West. An illustrative example is the case of innovations in automobile manufacturing in the 1920s in the United States and the desire for rubber in that process. Mitman and Erickson (2010) note that Americans owned 85% of the world's automobiles and consumed 75% of the world's rubber; most of the United States' consumption of rubber, about 80%, went into manufacturing automobile tires. However, the United States produced only 1% of the world's rubber, while Britain, with its colonial and imperial network, controlled about 77% of the world's rubber production largely due to production in its colonies. The Firestone Company (a U.S. enterprise) started operating a rubber plantation in the West African country of Liberia in 1926, which by 1955 accounted for 70% of Liberia's total export revenues (Mitman & Erickson, 2010).

But the menace of Belgian King Leopold II in the late 19th century in Congo remains one of the world's worst atrocities and a painful example of the colonial history of capitalism and imperialism in Africa. When the worldwide demand for rubber boomed, Leopold exploited the Congo for this resource in an extremely violent manner. Villagers were set quotas of rubber to produce, and an armed police force collected the quotas. Villages that failed to meet the quota suffered immensely, with hostages taken, villages looted and burned, people enslaved and killed, and women raped. To ensure that the armed police did not waste their bullets hunting for food, they were forced to produce the severed hands of their victims (Stanley, 2012). The death toll of this period was estimated to be 10 million people (Hochschild, 1998), almost half of Congo's population at the time (Braeckman, 2004). The mining of natural resources such as gold, diamond, copper, colton, bauxite, and platinum fueled colonial capitalist exploitation, and today Africa remains a huge mineral producer for global industries. Innovations in human communication with the technological revolution in information and communication has placed Africa prominently in this globalized capitalist structure as a supplier of raw materials and as a dumping ground for used and obsolete digital technological devices.

Where Technology Begins: Africa as Supplier of Raw Materials

Just as the rubber from colonial Congo was necessary for automobile innovations, the natural riches of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have become necessary for a new global innovation, this time spurred by the ICT revolution. Again, Congo bears the brunt of this innovation with its natural abundance of tantalum—a heat-resistant derivative of colton (columbite-tantalite) and a rare metal component that is essential in many modern electronic devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, laptops, DVD players, and MP3 players. As Sharife (2008) opines, "Nothing in our world today can survive without tantalum" (p. 26). It is estimated that 80% of the world's colton reserves are in Africa, with 80% of this in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Grespin, 2010; Sharife, 2008).

Unquestionably, the minerals of the Congo are essential to the digital revolution. For example, the global need for cobalt is driven by the mineral's importance as a component in the production of the rechargeable lithium-ion batteries that power most modern technologies such as Apple and Samsung smartphones and laptops (Frankel et al., 2016). Frankel and colleagues assert that lithium-ion batteries are so essential that:

> Smartphones would not fit in pocket without them. Laptops would not fit on laps. Electric vehicles would be impractical. In many ways, the current Silicon Valley gold rush—from mobile devices to driverless cars—is built on the power of lithium-ion batteries. (para. 22)

About 60% of the World's Cobalt Originates from the Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's mineral riches continue to play a critical role in global technological innovations. It is argued that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is potentially the richest country in the world, with its untapped mineral treasure estimated at $24 trillion—surpassing the gross domestic products of Europe and the United States and eclipsing the $18 trillion total value of Saudi Arabia's oil reserve (Noury, 2010). But this wealth has brought immense pain and destruction to the Congo. Just as

the innovation in automobile manufacturing drew attention to rubber in Congo in the 1920s, and the colonial mining of rubber led to the deaths of millions of people, the mining of colton has brought death, pain, misery, and underdevelopment, and it has fueled and financed civil war (Braeckman, 2004). Cases of child and inappropriate labor practices have been reported, and the mining exposes local communities to levels of toxic metals that are linked to sicknesses related to breathing problems and birth defects (Frankel et al., 2016). The abundance of colton has brought multinational corporations and unscrupulous capitalists to the mines of Congo. With the socioeconomic challenges faced by the local residents of mining areas, artisanal mining with crude utensils becomes a source of livelihood for many people to stave off poverty.

Africa as Technology Dump

Africa's place in the global political economic network of the digital revolution is not only as a source of raw materials but also as a dumping ground for the world's used electronic products. The rapid production of digital gadgets and alluring marketing efforts to create demand result in technological devices quickly becoming obsolete and old devices being disposed of. In many cases, used electronic devices end up for reuse, but mostly as electronic waste (e-waste) for recycling in developing countries in Africa and Asia. Africa has become a destination for obsolete electronic equipment (Schmidt, 2006), and Nigeria is a major receptacle for the developed world's unwanted electronic devices as cargo loads of e-waste arrive daily (Sullivan, 2014). As far back as 2005, it was estimated that 500 shipping containers of used electronic goods enter the city of Lagos, the economic hub of Nigeria, monthly (Pucket et al., 2005; Sullivan, 2014). Sullivan (2014) observes further that of the estimated 8.7 million tons of e-waste created annually in the European Union, about 6.6 million tons are not properly recycled; much of it arrives in Lagos as "functional" equipment for the secondhand market but eventually ends up in the dumps and scrapyards of Lagos. The dumping of e-waste has led to a booming industry in Lagos. The Lagos "computer village," where used electronics are refurbished and sold, teems with artisan entrepreneurs working in the refurbishment and sales of used digital devices.

A similar story unfolds in Ghana, where, as Boateng (2011) observes, the city of Accra has become one of the largest repositories for toxic e-waste from around the world. Agbogbloshie, a commercial district, has become a dumping ground of e-waste where young boys can be seen burning the world's e-waste to extract and scavenge metal minerals from electronic devices to make a living. Inhaling burning chemicals from the electronic equipment is bound to have a long-term harmful effect on people in the area who are directly and indirectly exposed to the chemicals that are released into the environment. Toxins released by e-waste dumping and by the burning of electronic equipment to extract metals have seeped into plants, soils, and water around e-waste processing areas. Metals such as cadmium, lead, mercury, and copper are thousands of times more concentrated in the open waters of Lagos lagoons than the levels in industrial areas without e-waste disposal problems (Aderinola, Clarke, Olarinmoye, Kusemiju, & Anatekhai, 2009; Sullivan, 2014). Agbogbloshie in Ghana has been ranked as one of the world's 10 worst toxic threats (Heacock et al., 2016). Despite counterarguments that the bulk of e-waste imports in developing nations are not waste but rather working or repairable equipment and that domestic waste contributes to electronic discards in developing countries (Lepawsky, 2015), abundant evidence shows that Africa is the world's current destination for obsolete electronic equipment (Schmidt, 2006).

Africa and the Digital Revolution Market

Another aspect of the place of Africa in the political economy of the digital revolution is as a potentially burgeoning market. This notion connects to the underlying rationale that culminated in Zuckerberg's visit to Africa in 2016. While Africa has benefited from innovations in cellular mobile networks, prior to the current era of public access to mobile telephones, the state of telephony in Africa was grim. Castells (2010) recalls a time when:

> There [were] more telephones lines in Manhattan or in Tokyo than in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. In 1991, there was one telephone line per 100 people in Africa, compared to 2.3 for all developing countries, and 37.2 for industrial countries. In 1994, Africa accounted for only 2% of world's telephone lines. (p. 95)

The era that Castells describes was during the dominance of fixed-line telephony. And although the statistics of fixed-line telephony have not changed much in Africa (and, in fact, have mostly decreased), mobile telephony has allowed many Africans to communicate electronically. As of 2015, about half of the African population of 1.2 billion people subscribed to mobile service, with an estimated growth to reach 750 million by 2020 (GSMA Intelligence, 2016). The growing penetration of the mobile phone has led to various uses of the phone for fund transfer, health-related information, education, and many other social uses. The growth in mobile phone penetration is also contributing to growth in mobile broadband Internet access. Although Internet access remains low in global comparisons, with only about 35.9% of Africans connected (Internet World Stats, 2019a), Internet access increased 10,402% from 2000 to 2019—the highest growth rate in the world (Internet World Stats, 2019b). For many Africans, access to the Internet occurs through smartphones. In 2015, mobile technologies and services generated 6.7% of Africa's gross domestic product (about $150 billion of economic value), and it is estimated that this will increase to more than 7.6% of gross domestic product ($210 billion) by 2020. The mobile industry supported 3.8 million jobs in 2015. This includes workers directly employed in the ecosystem and in jobs indirectly supported by the economic activity generated by the mobile sector. The mobile industry also contributed about $17 billion in 2015 in the form of taxation. It is estimated that these contributions will grow by 2020 to about 4.5 million jobs and $20.5 billion in taxation contributions (GMSA Intelligence, 2016). Although the adoption of mobile Internet continues to grow, and the number of mobile Internet subscribers tripled from 2010 to 2015 to about 300 million with an estimated growth to about 550 million by 2020, it is estimated that about 60% of the African population will still be unconnected by 2020 (GMSA Intelligence, 2016).

The growth of mobile phone penetration and mobile broadband Internet, the observation that many access the Web for the first time on smartphones, and the large untapped market of those who are still unconnected have opened up the potential of the African market for cell phone corporations and other digital technology corporations to cash in on the potential of this market. Facebook, for example, has launched the Free Basics app in 22 African countries to corner the African mobile Internet market potential. Free Basics gives free access to selected websites and services, usually without videos or photos. Working with local telecom operators to provide access without data, the idea is to provide a free sample of the Internet to those without access in the hope that they will eventually value buying data to

access the Web and information that will benefit them (Solon, 2017). The idea is that many people who use Free Basics will desire to see the complete assortment of multimedia information available on the Web and that they will be motivated to buy data to access the full range of Facebook and the Web in general. Critically, the success of Free Basics depends on providing an incomplete Web and Facebook experience that leads to consumers' longing for full access, thus resulting in data purchases.

The average amount of data used by a subscriber monthly in Africa is projected to grow from 0.3 GB in 2015 to 4.3 GB in 2020, with mobile Internet accounting for 40% of total Internet traffic (GMSA Intelligence, 2016). Not surprisingly, Facebook intends to cash in on this potential by providing Free Basics, a service that makes Facebook synonymous with the Internet in much of Africa. This is an example of how benevolent capitalism works and how it is emerging as a form of capitalist exploitation of Africa's burgeoning digital economy.

Benevolent Capitalism: Postmodern Capitalism and the Facebook Enterprise

Facebook's Free Basics provides an entry point for analyzing the political economy of Facebook as an enterprise. Understanding Facebook this way is important for contextualizing Zuckerberg's visit to Africa, and specifically his visit to Nigeria. Facebook is a commercial entity, a multinational corporation with an almost global reach. For Facebook to be a successful corporation in capital agglomeration, it needs people to be connected to the Internet. Zuckerberg's role in Internet.org, a project to connect billions of people to the Internet, is a laudable and benevolent effort. However, this seemingly altruistic goal of connecting many people to the Internet is highly relevant to the economy of Facebook. The billions of people without access to the Internet represent a potential market to be captured. In many developing nations, access to the Internet is hampered by a lack of technological infrastructure and ignorance about what the Internet offers. Facebook tries to address both of these issues with Free Basics by providing free access to a few selected websites through a Facebook app in partnership with local cell phone network companies. For the people who use the app, Facebook becomes their entry point to the Internet. Literally, Facebook becomes the Internet. Providing limited but free access is a benevolent and creative economic strategy. As Grossman (2014) puts it, once people experience the Web, "they'll want more and be willing to pay for it. In other words, data is addictive, so you make the first taste free" (p. 35).

The myth of free access becomes a lure derived from the human needs to communicate and socialize. Digital corporations accumulate users within the collapsed context of time and space, who in turn become commodities offered to marketers and advertisers. The myth of free access describes a culture of charitable acts in the pursuit of capital. This culture permeates many deeds by technology corporations; it draws on benevolent acts to pursue broader objectives of capital gain. This form of benevolent capitalism has been labeled in euphemistic terms capitalist philanthropy, creative capitalism, and philanthrocapitalism. Wilson (2015) notes that philanthrocapitalism, unlike previous forms of philanthropy, infuses its projects with mechanisms of capitalist enterprise. It is a new form of philanthropy that is popular among a new generation of the very rich who use their capitalist entrepreneurial skills to fix the world's social problems (Chuang, 2015). This new form of philanthropy is a neoliberal capitalist deed that is both politically and ideologically committed to market-based social investment and to making the market work better for capital (Morvaridi, 2012). Philanthrocapitalism is attractive to technology

billionaires who use their wealth and entrepreneurial aptitudes to address social problems. It is a form of creative capitalism, which Bill Gates defines as "an approach where governments, businesses and nonprofits work together to stretch the reach of market forces so that more people can make a profit and gain recognition doing work that eases the world's inequities" (Chugani & Zhao, 2010, p. 338).

But technological and commercial innovations have always been essential to philanthropy and capitalism. In the United States, the charitable projects in the new for-profit philanthropy are often built and funded by capitalists with deep pockets of new wealth derived from fortunes generated by new and transformative technological and commercial innovations (Rana, 2013). For technology corporations, the new paradigm of capitalist charity works by allowing corporations to reach untapped poor markets by providing seemingly free access to technology platforms or a basic second-grade product that is affordable to the poor. The people at the bottom of the economic pyramid gain access to these technologies, and the corporations increase their market base and potential market growth.

Mark Zuckerberg's interest in helping people connect to the Internet, which included a failed attempt to launch a satellite into space, is a laudable idea. Considering that about half of the 7 billion people on Earth do not have an Internet connection (Internet World Stats, 2017), Facebook's partnership in the Internet.org initiative with companies such as Nokia, Samsung, and Ericsson to provide connectivity to the Internet is a commendable idea. Through the Facebook's Free Basics app and local telecom operators, many people in the developing world can gain basic access to selected sites on the Web. But is Internet.org an altruistic philanthropic endeavor to connect the unconnected or a strategic capitalist act to increase market growth? The initiative provides basic access to people who are already connected to a telecommunication network and not to people who are unconnected (Talbot, 2013). By providing access to selected sites through Facebook, the Free Basics app makes Facebook the platform for gaining access to the Internet, which means that many users will understand Facebook and the Internet as the same thing. Facebook's effort to connect people to the Internet is essentially a strategic business plan to increase the number of Facebook users and thus Facebook's market and revenue. The strategy contradicts the Internet's core values of openness, equality, and access to information once a user connects via Facebook. The breaching of these values, encapsulated in the net neutrality ideology, is primarily why Facebook's Free Basics was not allowed in India.

Philanthrocapitalism raises critical and ethical concerns. It has been criticized for placing a huge degree of faith in market-based solutions for development and inequality challenges, taking a top-down technocratic approach, and disregarding local complexities that shape the experiences of the beneficiaries by abstracting them from the political economy of global inequalities that make their benefactors so wealthy in the first place (Wilson, 2015). Philanthrocapitalism as benevolent capitalism is too deeply embedded in the economic and political status quo of global capitalism, neglecting what ails the social and economic systems that produce endemic inequality and poverty (Chuang, 2015). But as Chuang (2015) observes, philanthrocapitalists use their wealth to amass control in shaping agendas and policies in the recipients' political systems. Business and philanthropy are two sides of a capitalist coin; both are about meeting people's needs, and to succeed in either of them requires commercial innovations and skills. This is not surprising, as Rana (2013) notes, highlighting the paradox of the United States as the most commercial nation and also the most philanthropic. If capitalism is to continue existing, there must be a

constant search for untapped potentials and markets, even if that means being benevolent to those at the bottom of the economic pyramid to lure them into the market. But Facebook's benevolent capitalism should be contextualized against the backdrop of Facebook as an enterprise.

Postmodern Capitalism and the Facebook Enterprise

The capitalist system of the digital revolution, in which Facebook is a critical player, typifies the nature of postmodern capitalism. Today's capitalism has been reshaped and repurposed from its historical trajectories in Euro-American modernity. While the goal of capitalism has always been the same—the accumulation of wealth—its mechanisms change with and adapt to various eras. In the nascent era of Euro-American empire building and modernity, Mignolo (2011) argues the hidden agenda was coloniality, which is constitutive of modernity. The progress of capitalism and scientific revolution and innovations relate to the idea of modernity. However, obscured in the history and rhetoric of modernity—the ideas of salvation, innovation, and newness that typified European achievements during the Renaissance—is the expendability and commodification of human life (the economic rationale of slavery) and the colonization of spaces and time (Mignolo, 2011; Nanni, 2012). The colonization of spaces involves territories and the exploitation of resources of colonized territories. But while coloniality of time and spaces continues to influence global capitalism—and specifically digital capitalism in the sourcing of materials for digital devices—postmodern capitalism has expanded and fragmented elements of historical capitalism.

The expendability of humans is no longer based solely on physical human commodification and labor but also on the fragmentation of the unitary self. Subsequently, human traits of age, gender, location, marital status, interest, utterances, community, and communication are codified as raw materials and sold as commodities to advertisers (Bolin, 2010; Jin & Feenberg, 2015). Pleasurable activities have become labor (digital playbor) in the coproduction and prosumption of digital materials. The collapse of times (local/national/international) and of spaces (public and private spheres) has become an avenue for capital generation. Fuchs (2012) argues:

> Capitalism has traditionally been based on a separation of private and public spheres. Facebook is a typical manifestation of a stage of capitalism in which the relation of the public and the private as well as labor and play collapse, and in which capital exploits this collapse. (p. 146)

In this era of capitalism, information is produced every second from human behavior, and it is marketed; information, including personal information, has become a product. Human collective intelligence has become collective unpaid labor through the acts of liking, rating, tagging, and evaluating and reviewing products, places, and services online. All these actions are perpetuated under the guise of free access to digital platforms.

But nothing is free on the Internet. Users pay by giving away their information; personal data are valuable products of the digital revolution. In the digital technology economy, if you are not paying for it, then you are the commodity (Purkayastha, 2016). As in the nature of digital technology and media economy, advertising is a huge source of income. Facebook is a large advertising machine (Fuchs, 2012).

In the second quarter of 2017, Facebook's total revenue was US$9.32 billion, of which nearly all (US$9.16 billion) was revenue from advertising (Facebook Investor Relations, 2017).

Personal private data on Facebook are commodified and sold to advertisers. These personal private-public data generated by users who post photos; write, share, and like posts; comment; create communities of friends; and browse friends' pages create a user commodity that is sold to advertisers for targeted advertising. Unlike the audience commodity critique of media industry (Smythe, 1977), digital technology users are both producer and consumer—prosumers (Tofler, 1980)—whose user-generated content is commodified. Fuchs (2012) notes that Facebook sells its prosumers as a commodity to advertisers on the rationale that their exchange value is based on produced use values derived from personal data and interactions.

But rather than seeing audiences as working for (social) media to create a commodity for advertising, scholars have argued that it is critically more useful to see them as raw materials coded in statistical representations and shaped into commodities by marketers and sold (Bolin, 2010; Jin & Feenberg, 2015). But as Fuchs (2012) notes, the working and labor aspect of social media is digital playbor (play + labor; see also Kücklich, 2005). Playbor, Fuchs (2012) explains, is a form of exploitation that is based on the breakdown of the distinction between work time and playtime, where workers are expected to be having fun while working, and playtime becomes productive and work-like. As a result, "play time and work time intersect and all human time of existence tends to be exploited for the sake of capital accumulation" (p. 146). Social media users do have fun while creating content and personal information that are commodified and monetized. Jin and Feenberg (2015) describe this well: "SNS users are counted, packaged, and sold to advertisers and industrial capitalists while actively engaged in pleasurable activities, among which various forms of self-presentation play a key role" (p. 56).

In addition to content and user commodification, Facebook's dominance of the social networking domain and capital accumulation strategy is almost monopolistic. Although technically the social networking sites industry operates as an oligopoly, Facebook's control of the social networking platform does have a monopolistic tendency. Three of Facebook's products and platforms dominate the top four social network sites worldwide: Facebook, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger (Statista, 2019). Baird (2016) observes that one in seven minutes spent online is on Facebook. In many parts of Africa, where voice telephony on a mobile network is costly, many have resorted to texting, especially among the youth. Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp (both owned by Facebook) have become dominant alternatives to the pricey short message service provided by cell phone operators. The situation is similar in India, where Maney (2016) notes that the top three phone apps in India are owned by Facebook (Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp). This monopolistic tendency is a direct result of the culture of mergers and acquisitions that shapes the political economy of the digital revolution. Technology corporations in a typical capitalist system tend to buy competitors to ward off competition. This leads to vertical and horizontal integrations in which corporations merge with or buy out corporations to provide services in the direct path of its core business and in similar competing services, respectively. This is true of Facebook's $1 billion purchase of Instagram and its $19 billion purchase of WhatsApp in 2014, which helps consolidate Facebook's control of messaging apps. WhatsApp as a competitor, either by itself or if bought by another tech company, would have had a serious impact on Facebook's competitive edge. Various

options for monetizing WhatsApp are in the offing, ranging from negligible subscriber payments to exploring business uses of WhatsApp. These trends are typical of Silicon Valley technology giants; for example, Google dominates the search engine and video-sharing (through YouTube) platforms.

The previous sections have provided both historical and theoretical contexts for engaging Zuckerberg's visit to Nigeria. Analyzing Africa's place in the nature of global capitalism is relevant to this analysis, and critical to understanding Zuckerberg's trip to Africa is a consideration of digital capitalism, the political economic nature of Facebook as an enterprise, and how benevolent capitalism works in all these areas.

Nigeria and Its Potential for Facebook

To understand Zuckerberg's visit to Nigeria, it is critical to understand the enormous scale of the market in Africa. Nigeria offers entrepreneurs a huge market for potential revenue because of the country's vast population. Various estimates of the Nigerian population put it in the range of 180 million to 200 million people, with the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics estimating it at 193 million. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh largest nation in the world (Worldometers, 2017). This market potential has attracted many corporations to Nigeria, including telecommunications companies. For example, the South African telecommunication company MTN dominates the voice telephony market in Nigeria with a 37% share of the subscriber population (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2017). MTN's Nigeria operation is its most lucrative market.

Nigeria has the most mobile phone subscribers in Africa. Currently numbering around 143 million, Nigerian subscribers account for 15% of Africa's subscriber share, and this is estimated to reach 18% by 2020 (GMSA Intelligence, 2016). The country ranks among the world's top 10 mobile subscribers by country (see Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). There are about 226 million smartphone subscribers in Africa, with growth estimated to reach 720 million by 2020. While Egypt, Kenya, and South Africa have contributed to the growth, the sheer population of Nigeria positions the country as a large market for smartphones. There is increasing growth in mobile broadband in Africa, and for many people, the mobile phone provides their first contact to the Internet. At about 111 million users, Nigeria has the highest number of Internet users in Africa (Internet World Stats, 2019a). The technology diffusion in Africa potentially positions Nigeria as a lucrative telecommunications market, and Nigeria offers the largest market for telecommunications in Africa. The country holds huge potential as a market for the future of Facebook in Africa—a potential that Facebook (and Mark Zuckerberg) has noticed.

The market potential of Nigeria for Facebook lies not only in the diffusion of technology in the country; it is evidenced by the reality of Facebook usage in Africa. In digital capitalism, users define the extent of the market and the potential for revenue. If users are commodities that are sold to advertisers for revenue, users' data that are generated through posting and sharing comments, photos, and videos; creating online communities of friends; and browsing friends' pages also cumulatively become a commodified product that can be sold to advertisers for targeted advertising. No other country in Africa offers the potential number of Facebook users than Nigeria. With about 17 million Facebook users, Nigeria has the most Facebook users in sub-Saharan Africa (Masinde, 2016), but the nation ranks third in Africa,

behind Egypt's 35 million users and Algeria's 19 million users (Internet World Stats 2019a). Hence, there is an economic rationale to mine the potential Nigerian market.

With a population of about 1.2 billion people and only about 158 million Facebook subscribers, Africa offers a significant potential market for Facebook. Likewise, Nigeria is an attractive market in Africa, with a relatively meager 17 million Facebook users compared with the nation's population of about 190 million. The lack of infrastructure to support the Internet and the cost of data remain hurdles for Facebook in growing this market. This explains Facebook's attempt to draw people to the Internet and, of course, to Facebook; hence, the company's introduction of Free Basics in Africa. Concerns about net neutrality due to Free Basics allowing only limited exposure to selected websites amid the millions of sites on the Internet seem not to faze the African countries currently allowing Free Basics. Concerns over net neutrality were a major reason for shutting down Free Basics in India, delivering a blow to Facebook's effort to capture the large and potentially lucrative Indian market. Nothing is free on the Internet. The altruistic and benevolent strategy of connecting people to the Internet by providing a free taste of the Web through preselected basic websites has a catch; it is literally a bait to lure the unconnected to become paying consumers, a philanthrocapitalist strategy of accumulating wealth.

In addition to its population and potential market base, Nigeria—like other parts of Africa, such as Kenya—has a burgeoning youth-driven technology entrepreneurial environment. Zuckerberg asserted during his visit, "I wanted to come to Lagos first, because of the vibrant developer and entrepreneurial ecosystem that you guys have here" (Tech Events, 2016, 0:20 [video]). A suburb of Lagos called Yaba has become a district of choice for technology start-ups. Nicknamed "Yabacon Valley" (after the U.S. Silicon Valley), this district is home to many emerging enterprises that are creating technological solutions and to young entrepreneurs creating digital apps and software to provide social and economic solutions. Similar districts can be found in other parts of Africa, such as Kenya's "Silicon Savannah," South Africa's "Silicon Cape," and Rwanda's "KLab" (Africa Strictly Business, 2015). Among these burgeoning start-ups is Andela, where Zuckerberg invested $24 million from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. Zuckerberg's investment in Andela provides an example of the philanthrocapitalism ideology and a benevolent capitalist agenda. Andela reveals the nature of global structure of the political economy of digital capitalism and exploitation as it trains young talented African developers and places them in American technology companies, thereby meeting the American demand for software developers. Andela is a breeding ground for young technology talent for international (American) technology companies. It makes economic sense for Zuckerberg to visit Lagos, where Andela started before being incorporated in the United States, and to talk to potential developers.

But in a more critical analysis, if such talent exists in Nigeria, and in Africa generally, it would be more essential and beneficial for these indigenous developers to provide alternatives to global digital platforms such as Facebook. But an African-created version of a social networking platform would present potential competition to Facebook, especially in a large market like Africa. It is noteworthy that Facebook has failed to enter the lucrative Chinese market (with a population of about 1.3 billion people), because China has local alternatives to global (American) social media platforms. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Google services such as Gmail are blocked in mainland China. Instead, local Chinese social media

alternatives are available. Such a scenario in Africa would hamper American social media corporations' (including Facebook's) global market domination.

As Facebook explores the African market, it has begun the process of converting the human numbers and their digital labor into monetary value. Millions of small businesses have signed up to advertise on the social networking site, and Facebook is building a dynamic team of young executives to source advertising dollars from small and medium enterprises across Africa (Alfreds, 2015; Masinde, 2016). Not surprisingly, the head of Facebook Africa is a seasoned advertising guru.

Zuckerberg's choice of Nigeria as the first country to visit during his first trip to sub-Saharan Africa was a calculated strategy. As the largest country in Africa with a thriving entrepreneurial spirit, Nigeria still struggles with many social and economic challenges. The lack of a stable supply of electric power and a good transport system remain challenges to any foreign investor and local enterprise. While the Nigerian population offers an attractive market for Facebook and other multinational corporations, due to the nation's poor infrastructure, it failed to attract Zuckerberg as a location to operate Facebook Africa. Instead, South Africa, a more technologically developed country with better infrastructure, was selected as the official home of Facebook Africa.

Conclusion

Mark Zuckerberg's visit to Nigeria in August 2016 marks an important point in the inclusion of Africa into the global political economy of the digital communication revolution. No longer viewed only as a source of raw materials for the manufacture of digital devices or as a dumping ground for used electronic gadgets, Nigeria is now seen as a burgeoning market for digital communication products. With about 1.2 billion people, Africa represents the next frontier in the global telecommunication and digital communication markets. And Nigeria, with its large population, represents the growth of the telecommunications and digital tools markets in Africa, exemplified by the increasing access to mobile phones and digital tools and apps. Zuckerberg's visit gives credence to this market rationale and highlights Facebook's interest in growing its market operation in Africa.

Facebook, like any other media enterprise, operates on the capitalist strategy of commodification and advertising revenue. The success of the commodification and advertising strategies depends on numbers—high numbers of users. The commodification of information—both public and private—depends on many people willingly providing this information by engaging with media content or by creating and sharing information on digital platforms. Recruiting users from the 1.2 billion people in Africa is important to Facebook's success of marketization and monetization, but there is a challenge: more than half of this potential market is not connected to the Internet. To address this obstacle, Facebook has adopted the market-driven altruism of benevolent capitalism, or philanthrocapitalism, which involves investing in public good for private capitalist goal. Facebook implements this strategy by providing a free sample of the Internet through its app Free Basics with the goal of eventually turning the users into data consumers who can become targets for local advertisers. Facebook's Free Basics project in Africa is essential to the global growth of the company, given that Facebook is proscribed in China and Free Basics is banned in India, two of the largest markets in the world.

The political economic approach of market consolidation through mergers and acquisitions is essentially an effort to forestall competition and centralize ownership. Facebook's acquisition pattern can be seen as a way to forestall competition, and Zuckerberg's benevolent investment in start-ups that mine talent in Africa is a long-term strategy to forestall the organic development of continental competition to Facebook.

Africa can borrow technically from China and move toward decolonizing the current colonization of its digital technology environment. The preclusion of global (American) social media corporations in China has led to indigenous Chinese digital innovations. Today, Baidu is an alternative to Google; WeChat supplies Chinese global competition for WhatsApp; RenRen is a popular Chinese social networking site and alternative to Facebook; Weibo is a Chinese version of Twitter; and QQmail is a popular e-mail platform that replaces the blocked Gmail. But while the Chinese model of alternatives to Western social media platforms projects a challenge to the colonizing nature of American social media corporations, several serious caveats and concerns about this model should be engaged. The Chinese model is the antithesis of the core principles of the Internet: openness and interconnection. The Chinese model lacks interconnection with Western platforms, thereby highlighting the protectionist and insular nature of the Chinese social media sphere, euphemistically referred to as the "Great Firewall." The model creates both an information divide and a geographical divide, as users in China do not have access to the American social media platform. China's pursuit of online and network sovereignty is an affront to the interconnectedness ideology of the Internet. This leads to concern about government online censorship, by which the authorities can surveil and censor citizens' private communication. Through intense regulation and laws, Chinese authorities have immense power to control social media platforms, resulting in freedom of speech violations to monitor social dissent.

Rather than allowing global philanthrocapitalists to harvest African talent, African governments and investors should invest in African start-ups to create alternatives to the colonizing trend of foreign digital and social media platforms in Africa. African software developers should create applications that are effective and that rival global applications in efficiency while equally making the applications interoperable and interconnected to other digital media platforms. Such privately created alternatives will challenge the global monopolies of American social media platforms. The interconnection will allow an individual using Facebook, for example, to interact with friends using an alternative social networking platform and vice versa. And the interconnection of local and global applications highlights the interconnectedness and openness ideologies of the Internet.

African governments need to build public infrastructure and allow for private development of infrastructure. Public WiFi should be accessible throughout Africa. Access to the Internet is a citizen's right (Oyedemi, 2015), and it is the dominant utility for the 21st-century knowledge economy. This goal is achievable; cell phone networks have reached a broad coverage of people across Africa, and this has contributed to the upsurge in cellular telephony in Africa. Building a network of WiFi connection should be a priority for African countries. Not investing in young African entrepreneurial energies and failing to provide an accessible infrastructure to support the Internet will result in Africa continuing to be a hunting ground for digital colonialists whose benevolent pursuit of digital capital nevertheless aims at global domination.

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