Demystifying Digital Development: How the Indigenization of Knowledge-led Economic Competencies Mediates Maturational Economic Outcomes for Africa and the Caribbean

By:

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Introduction

The aphorism “knowledge is power” pithily captures a potent and enduring truth. The existence of knowledge economies intent on (knowledge) access and creation can prove crucial in the overall shape and stride of development ambitions and, most importantly, the hinge upon which success in our current economic dispensation actuates and that which African and Caribbean economic development imperatives rests. Statecraft within our modern (digital)

reality tells of a new paradigm within which one's economic destiny is tied to — the ability of autochthonous techno-economic effort in driving capital enrichment and economic success. This, unfortunately, presages grim prospects for the current nation-state. Coming orthodoxical dictates see a techno-corporeal re-contextualization of Westphalian statehood and a redefinition of post-war interstate machinations, supplanting putatively understood state practice and reframing market participation as one of digital transaction and ubiquitous and (truly) borderless trade. This presents a necessary paradigm shift necessitating the attention of African and Caribbean economic interest leveraging South-South partnerships in building knowledge economies able to enhance maturational outcomes. This explication serves to tell of the shifting stride of global orthodoxy as to consumption and production in this respect, outlining the important role of indigenization in productive and consumptive means, and the likely avenues for partnership, cooperation and otherwise ambitions best-fit to deliver positive economic outcomes across Africa & the Caribbean within this new economic orthodoxy.

Digital Orthodoxy as our Coming Reality

The future of global orthodoxy is orthogonal to our here-and-now. The axis upon which global trade and wider inter-state animation sit are now becoming subject to unprecedented disruption. The putative state's growing anachronism — tethered by institutional inertia and buffeted by orthodoxical headwinds — presents as fallow ground for likely disruption. Digital — being the inveterate institutional iconoclast — after having upended many an industry and made defunct many an enterprise, has now trained its sights on orthodoxical disruption, urging the redefining of the planes of participation — the transactional animatory dimension of inter-state behavior — of global trade, investment and wider (international) relations. The acutely distortive (coming) force of digitalization, in particular relation to global orthodoxy, tracks closely with the noting of social and technological scholarship, surfacing the curious intrinsic (re)definition of the state, its roles and responsibilities, owing to its provenance to the instructiveness of (digital) disruption. This radical redefinition of state machinery foretells a shifting from traditional man-and-state interpersonal interactions to more nebulous, market-focused delivery of state intentions owing to the caprices of extrinsic (international) relationships. Scholarship contends that this societal reorganization has attending

implications for states that lack the requisite (digital) skills, education and social affordances — such as those within the Global South — likely resulting in continued systemic exclusion, the continued attritioning of human welfare, and a worrying and continued absence from the (orthodoxical) morphologic evolutionary adaptation of the state and the wider international system. This curious evolution of state modality adapts the state organism from thriving on the (hitherto) Keynesian reality to the ethereality of binary — consumption and production urged by digital. At this point, we note the locus of current concern; the digitalization of international imperium.

The Techno-corporeality of State Machinery

The domain of the imperial is inarguably digital. The shape of the state is fast transcending the corporeal to becoming metaphysical. The transcendence of statehood, having transmogrified into the being of the elusive, alchemical abstract devices of the American monoliths — GAFAM (Google/Alphabet, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft), related superset FAANG (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google/Alphabet), and the constructions of BATX (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and Xiaomi), Huawei, ZTE, and ByteDance/TikTok, all of Chinese effort — puts into sharp distinction our new techno-corporeal reality and the state-of-play that besets developing states. Most obvious within this clear instantiation of Waltzian contention is the writ large dominance and likely continuance of existing orthodoxical imperium and *ipso facto* the continued systemic disadvantage and wholesale exclusion of the Global South within the seemingly zero-sum struggle for international power. This idea is particularly evidenced by the techno-imperium's pernicious subversion (capitalization) of consumption and production, echoing canonical scholarly articulations from Hans Singer, Raúl Prebisch, Walter Rodney, and Immanuel Wallerstein, which focused on hemispheric (economic) hierarchies and the Global North's historically extractive relationship with the global majority — sitting on the periphery/system edge. This pernicious subversion is driven largely by the inversion of consumption as a form of production, for the propitious capitalization (exploitation) of those that sit at the core and helm of technological imperium, thanks to the rise of data. Levy exposition, in explicating data's relevance as the new 'it' commodity, details how these unforeseen pan-optical products eluded the imagination of theoreticians —Keynesian, Smithian or otherwise — and has now become an ineluctable and

insuperable dimension of 21st-century statecraft that only favors its progenitors, that which coincidentally also possess imperial weight within the international ecclesia. Data — unlike any other tradable commodity — no longer fits within the easily explained bounds of international relations orthodoxy, but more rightly, is better explained as being paradigmatic of digital's esoteric abstractions. More interestingly, data's agglomeration function — urged by every retweet, like, share or subscription — reifies the currency of previous elucidations of exploitative (capitalist) inter-state relations that recognize uncapitalized raw material from the Global South being exported, processed and now — through the power of abstruse algorithms and nebulous mathematical alchemy — packaged as (recommended) goods and services or, more importantly, better used for the more profitable endeavor of selling user's psychographic profiles to third parties, and the use of government agencies that currently possess imperium in the international system, for the purpose of national (global) security. This is precisely the *modus operandi* of intelligence organizations like the NSA, CIA, FSB, Guoanbu, or any other state security operator — desirous of 'critical' intelligence — all having, in some way, a digital etching of almost every human who has ever made a connected keystroke, concerned Google, or Facebook gaffe. This is perhaps the most sobering realization of the ongoing metamorphosis of the modern state organism. Without an immune (indigenous) response, without the ability to capitalize the production of consumption, without the ability to conjure the capabilities necessary to trade digitally, not as a supplement to traditional trade but as the supplanting of traditional trade, there exists little likelihood of African and Caribbean economic success during the incipient Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is, therefore, within the interest of African and Caribbean states to, through efforts and partnership and the intensification of indigenization, focus intentions on arresting the digital (and fortune) divide.

Arresting the Divide: Forging South-South Partnership for Growth in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Technology's insuperability — its embeddedness in (modern) economic modalities, urging the attending wholesale (re)definition of the citizen's plane of participation — tells of the writ large novel dimension of the deepening cleaves between the Global South and North. Owing to the inextricable link between technological use and access, with that of material maturational

outcomes — economic growth, modern literacy, national security and democracy — it is imperative that South-South partnerships target this glaring lacuna in digital statecraft in an effort to arrest the fast-escaping window of opportunity for closing the divide.

Pedagogy in digital state literature universally canonizes indigenization as the key to economic success. The question, however, remains that of the exact mix/extent of indigenous effort — in addition to collaborative laterality — with the (vertical) extrinsic (techno-economic) environment that can truly derive economic success. Our best answer lies, interestingly, in topical conversations surrounding the global effort for widespread COVID inoculations. Recent developments surrounding the abeyance of intellectual property modalities — the domain of Global North biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies — has led to curious admissions that (surprisingly and unwittingly) capture the broad areas wherein the Global South must focus efforts in closing the gap; productive capacity and (product) quality, subtended by local knowledge ownership/access – a herculean task to undertake on one's lonesome. Lateral collaboration, through such like African and Caribbean cooperation, presents a likely path to prosperity, through the leveraging of respective comparative advantages — Africa, being home to over a billion people, and the Caribbean's proximity to key business, financial and logistics centers in the Americas, illustrate numerous greenfield opportunities through which such a partnership can focus its intentions. Of great and equal note is the charge of (productive) capacity building, and quality. Production modalities, as outlined previously, have now taken on the elusive and transcendent (im)materiality paradigmatic of digital. This, coupled with consequent changes in the domains of knowledge and know-how, presents an even greater challenge for non-digital states intentioned on economic beneficence within this new orthodoxical paradigm. To combat this, states, as well as partnerships, must now evolve to contemplate the cultivation of state practice and societal organization, moored to the urging and providence of data. The Global South's writ large absence from global knowledge schemes is apparent in instances like intellectual property and in more quotidian information shares through Google search results or Assistant/Alexa and other such AI voice assistant replies, served largely by open-source repositories like Wikipedia and Wikidata. There, too, also exists a curious congruity with wider echoes of hemispheric inequality and exclusion,

further heightening the urgent need for efforts aimed at closing this gap — chief of which being the goal of building local enterprise, solutions and intellectual property. The stories of Brazilian, Japanese, Taiwanese, South Korean and Indian economic success, in addition to China's rise and now, Waltzian challenge to Pax Americana, vividly illustrate the cruciality of autochthonous effort. Technology has delivered innumerable economic breakthroughs and vastly improved welfare as a necessary pair to trade and the (now) primary means of trade. Most top of mind in this respect is that of Taiwan, which holds supreme importance in global chipmaking thanks to its indispensability within the global supply chain, a phenomenon known as the 'silicon shield'. Being home to silicon heavyweights like TSMC, Taiwan serves as the point at which Global North digital leviathans — Apple, Amazon, Google, and Intel — and otherwise technological ambitions in Automotive, Defense and myriad other industries must be mediated. TSMC's comparative advantage in producing cutting-edge chipsets with transistors as small as 3 nanometers — around 27,000 times smaller than the width of a human hair — provides it with an unmatched technical capacity and knowledge base without equal thanks to its strengths in research and development. Taiwan's rise is of note, particularly for its success, being the result of, *inter alia*, focused investments into R&D on the part of local industry and the government's facilitation of the industry's growth through policy. Their ability to overcome the seemingly insuperable — driven by time and otherwise investments in production, quality, and knowledge access & creation — proves the practicality and durability of knowledge-led economic ambitions as the driving force being positive market maturation outcomes across Africa and the Caribbean.

Conclusion

What exactly can we gather from this explication? The first and chief-most point is that of knowledge as a necessary precondition for production and future African and Caribbean economic ambition. Knowledge is the base upon which anyone state can conceivably articulate its unique advantage (and distinction) within the global market. Development within this knowledge-led domain will require a wholesale ideological rethink — a redefinition of the Global South, no longer the site of economic dereliction purposed of (raw) material extraction by the Global North but, rather, as the location of knowledge for the use of African and Caribbean knowledge-industry market ambition. The importance of

knowledge and digital (technology) as drivers for economic development not only canonizes knowledge as the most crucial comparative advantage in any one state’s economic toolkit but also telegraphs the path of (state) evolution African and Caribbean states must take in individual or partnered initiative. Put simply; knowledge is directly proportional to economic power, which, if left to systemic tailwinds and the unevolved state organism, will continue to remain the remit of those within the knowledge and digital imperium.

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