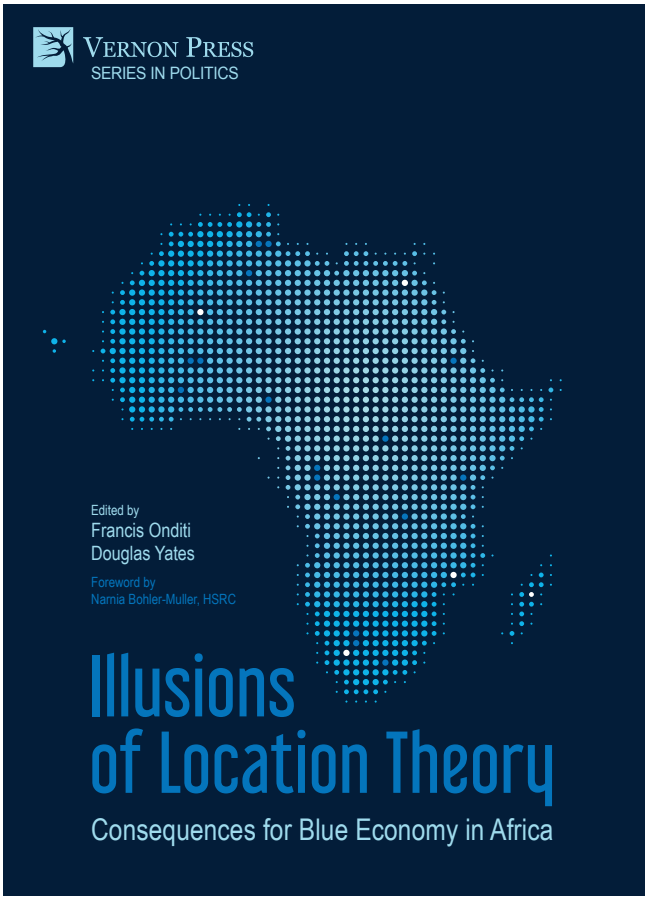
New Book

Ideas and Actionable Steps for Scaling Africa's Blue Economy Strategy

By Francis Onditi, Douglas Yates, and Narnia Bohler-Muller | Books

Introducing the New Book

Ilusions of Location Theory: Consequences for Blue Economy in Africa, a new book edited by Dr. Francis Onditi and Prof. Douglas Yates, with a foreword by Prof. Narnia Bohler-Muller, is finally published and can now be ordered from global leading platforms, including Amazon.



The subject of the blue economy is fast emerging both as a concept and practice. Within the African Union development envisioning, the blue economy ecosystem is considered as a strategy towards revamping the Agenda 2063. Due to its expansion in the policy realm and the academy, the scope and debate have considerably widened. This evolution has triggered fundamental questions: What does it mean for environmental sustainability? What does it mean for inclusivity in the exploitation of the blue economy ecosystem? These are some of the questions the current blue economy framework and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (established in 1982) seek to address (Bueger, 2017). However, there is more to the shareability and exploitation of the blue economy than these policy and legal frameworks, an extra dimension that can be housed in the geopolitical and diplomatic works that showcase the experiences of landlocked states and how states are/or aren't resolving disputes emerging from the changing boundaries and resource locations triggered by natural forces and environmental change. Though some anecdotes and books on the blue economy have already been published, we felt we needed a book which could provide a comprehensive framework on the blue economy regarding territorial contestations, maritime disputes, vulnerabilities of landlocked states, and expansionist policies, as displayed through spatial organisational regimes. The current blue economy framework is overly environmental and economic resource focused (Attri, 2016), unduly focusing on comparative advantages of distance. However, to cope with the widening nature of debate and demand from the academic community and the demands from the implementation of the 2019 *Africa Blue Economy Strategy*, it became necessary to expand the framework of debate by introducing new dimensions and enlarging existing ones. Some new ideas building into the framework included: SMART technologies, the power of mental mapping in spatial decision making, diplomatic approaches, and portal hegemony. Thus, the book puts forward an argument: 'the harmonious relationship between states, and efficient exploitation of the blue economy ecosystem in ways that promote peace between states lies not only in the structural transformation of markets, but also, in bridging the spatial and social *divide* between the coastal and hinterland societies.' Thus, this work proffers possibilities for a holistic regime for managing Africa's coastal-hinterland continuum through the aforementioned innovative strategies within the broader framework of what we coin as the Maritime, Security, and Blue Economy Continuum (MASEBEC). Many important model frameworks such as IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) (Doyle, 2018), as well as lessons for the African regional integration story have also been included in the new book.

We are confident that the combination of theoretical and empirical analysis, buttressed by in-depth case studies of what works and what does not in the management of the blue economy ecosystem, makes this volume ideal for researchers, students, and practitioners interested in African regional studies, African political economy, political geography, international relations, strategic military studies, the governance of seas and oceans, and maritime science/diplomacy. Thus, this book shifts the debate from the question of sustainability and inclusivity to geopolitics and diplomacy.

The Exploitation of the Blue Economy Ecosystem and Relations Between States

When we look at the African blue economy with our eyes on the future, that is, on the entire duration of the 21st century, from a vantage point of remote sensing imagery from outer space – the infrastructural gutters that drain African resources to the ports, the foreign fleets that destroy fisheries, drill and spill oil, attract pirates, marginalise local communities, exhaust beach sands, the bleached reefs, the hurricanes and typhoons – the need for international cooperation may look, from that airy vantage point, like something of an afterthought. If we leave this to the great powers, we have the lessons of history to teach us what to expect. Neither the Chinese nor the Americans will come to the assistance of the continent, although they will frame their pursuit of their national interests in the old language of development assistance and aid. But everything that has ever happened that was good in Africa was created by Africans. The solution to these largely foreign brought problems will surely come from below. Therefore, a local explanation is required to explain how a '*global opportunism'* works and not necessarily cause-effect explanations. In explaining the validity of such an explanation to the discipline of international relations, it is important to consider how much each state and community occupying the coastal and hinterlands can benefit, and not how much global explanations exclude local explanations or typologies that could also provide an alternative explanation of how human behaviour is altered by changes in location or distance from global opportunities or lack thereof. In any case, such a perspective may provide useful explanations for the undisclosed aspects of international relations and political geography. Before we outline the various themes discussed in this book, we shall briefly revisit the characteristics of the emerging African coastal-hinterland continuum, and take note of their linkages to various geopolitical processes: maritime disputes, access to port facilities, landlockedness, as well as the utilisation of the blue economy ecosystem.

In this volume, we interrogate continuities and change within the coastal-hinterland spaces of Africa and neighbouring geographies. We observe that the risks of increasing the exploitation of planetary resources is not limited to economics and sustainability. The transnational nature of development continues to create inter-state tensions and contestations over unclear boundaries and the responsibility to protect the environment (R2PE). The ongoing Kenya-Somalia diplomatic spat over the 42,000-square km piece of maritime space within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) continues to elicit controversy between the two states. Moreover, the lack of mechanisms in burden sharing of liabilities incurred during exploitation of marine resources increases the likelihood of inter-state tensions and risks of what we frame as the '*blue economy wars*.' But also, the notion of *hinterland* has become a contested space among states, with some scholars predicting uncertainties in the future relationship between land-locked and portal states (Lahiri and Masjidi, 2012).

In spite of the interconnectedness of coastal areas to global opportunities through ports and other modern facilities, the spatial and social inequalities continue to deepen (Boone and Simson, 2019). The persistent economic disparities between the coastal regions and hinterlands of African countries raises pertinent questions as to whether the visualisation of global opportunities is an observed reality or simply a *theoretical* construct? To a large extent, this work aims at addressing this conceptual question by drawing mental maps of the communities inhabiting African coastal and hinterland spaces to evaluate the locational significance of the region versus perceptive images of opportunities. Mental maps are important in visualising geographies and social settings, including attempts to have efficient utilisation of spaces based on their cultural branding. In some cases, *mental mapping* may create spaces with limited statehood.

The 'expansionist' policies and the politics of 'containment' are important considerations if Africa were to develop a comprehensive framework of maritime diplomacy (Wilson, 2009), blue economy, and geopolitics. From this standpoint, geopolitics is therefore the means for states to enhance diplomatic cooperation within the broader regional and international economic framework. As such, the blue economy cannot continue to be defined and framed in the narrow margin of economics, but should encompass geopolitical dimensions – power, control, environment, and military strategy – in a network of relationships. As aforementioned, militarism is at the core of the relationship between blue economy and maritime surveillance and enforcement requirements

“In other words, the blue economy model was designed to complement the ‘green economy’ movement. However, as this volume has demonstrated, this approach is a minimalist token to handle the contemporary global politics around seas and oceans. To address these concerns, the editors of this volume decided to assemble a group of scholars who approached the issues from interdisciplinary perspectives”

(Bueger and Stockbruegger, 2016). A befitting framework will therefore have both the military and civilians addressing multiple threats. It is therefore inadequate for states to establish economic links through the blue economy model without considering protection of such wealth through various means: military and other diplomatic cooperation strands.

Hence, ignoring the political power of geography in the future of Africa’s international relations debate is like a farmer who drives his livestock into a hyena-infested area without any guard (Rimmer and Ward, 2016). In other words, the blue economy model was designed to complement the ‘green economy’ movement. However, as this volume has demonstrated, this approach is a minimalist token to handle the contemporary global politics around seas and oceans. To address these concerns, the editors of this volume decided to assemble a group of scholars who approached the issues from interdisciplinary perspectives including international relations, strategic studies, military science, policy, law, history, political geography, spatial geography, anthropology, sociology, as well as political science.

Contributors’ Ideas and Actionable Steps

The introductory chapter provides a critique of the classical locational theoretical framework, and links this to an analysis of the three key ingredients that define African coastal-hinterland space. The central dilemma is the peril of envisaging the future of Africa on a narrow conception of the blue economy, without consideration of the geopolitical contours shaping this relationship. Instead, a number of principles are proposed that seek to challenge the notion that the exploitation of resources or access to such resources is largely determined by locational factors. Potential channels of reconfiguring the coastal-hinterland relationship proposes an integrated approach: linking together maritime diplomacy, geopolitics, and the blue economy. This renewed configuration is the conceptual framework guiding contributors to this volume.

In Chapter 1, Francis Onditi proposes the central plank of the reconfiguration discourse as the need to relook into the conceptual framework of the blue economy. In practice, this configuration is dependent on a radical shift in the structure of the blue economy as key to the evolution of the coastal-hinterland space. In other words, the blue economy cannot thrive in the absence of geopolitical and diplomatic considerations. The link between political geography and international relations is further explored in Chapter 2 by Christiane Rafidinarivo, who utilises the principles of territoriality to understand why and how people do not benefit from contested territories and their resources. However, as Valensisi and Munisso in Chapter 3 note, despite the technological advancements witnessed in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), landlocked and island economies are disadvantaged, and international patterns of trade squeeze them further into vulnerabilities. In Chapter 4, Vuyo Mjimba identifies multiple barriers to the transformation of the blue economy in the developing world, including complexities associated with global production networks, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and supply chains.

The rationale for the development of the geo-economic assets analysed by Raymond Fonseca in Chapter 5 lies in the reality that critical geopolitics and maritime space are conceived by states according to a logic of territoriality. The dilemma of the coastal-hinterland divide, reinforced by spatial inequality and obstructed by frozen mindsets, is also well illustrated by attitudes of resource (mis)management on the Kenyan coast, as demonstrated by James Moronge in Chapter 6. A common response to this sort of ‘resource curse’ and ‘spatial inequalities’ is reconfiguring the structure of the blue economy to include mechanisms for interactions with the global system. Mental maps are crucial tools for insights into the ability of ordinary people to make sense of the world. This visualisation is directly linked to the efficient utilisation of spaces

based on their cultural branding and perceptive factors. In Chapter 7, Onditi illustrates how the mental and physical struggle for space is part and parcel of the global social organism, where species and human activities compete for space.

In Chapter 8, Edmond Were introduces the concept of 'contested portal hegemony', to illustrate how the competition over the perceived and projected dominance of sea ports in the provision of maritime services has expanded in the advent of the hinterland, becoming less captive to the dominant Mombasa port. The economic structure of the hinterland is drastically changing due to the increase in foreign direct investment flows and the discovery of high impact natural resources. Despite these infrastructural transformations and the renewed development initiatives on the continent, the coastal-hinterland divide continues to widen, as revealed by Shadrack Kithiia's discussion in Chapter 9. An analysis of location choices as it relates to economic integration is also key in understanding why some countries experience skewed concentration of industrial production, regardless of whether or not they have rights of access to the sea or ocean; Chapter 10 addresses this issue through the lens of the UNCLOS. Ken Walibora, in Chapter 11, grapples with the question of space contestation, and unravels the various excitements, resistances, and identity issues along the Kenyan coast. Yet again, for states to harness the assets of the continental waters, they must have a maritime security strategy (Larsen, 2015). However, as demonstrated by Atisa in Chapter 12, although coastal spaces are endowed with rich natural resources, communities on the Kenyan coast continue to languish in abject poverty due to poor planning and the (mis)management of resources.

Today, many industries produce products whose raw materials are not necessarily extracted in the vicinity. In other words, Weber's model did not consider other variables, such as the influence of technology in bridging the gap between time of production and distribution. On this account, Smith-Godfrey in Chapter 13 argues that deploying appropriate technologies, coupled with effective Marine Spatial Planning, can revolutionise the entity of the blue economy. In Chapter 14, Douglas Yates underlines that the strong and complex connections at the intersections of energy-led development, urban growth, and energy are particularly useful in moving beyond resource-dependency. Kuwali, in Chapter 15, takes a legal perspective to understand the Malawi-Tanzania border dispute, linking it to customary international law and noting that, by engaging instruments of maritime diplomacy, this dispute could be resolved through a peaceful and pragmatic resolution mechanism for the benefit of communities from both sides of Lake Nyasa. The analysis of ecumene and the *emptiness* of space goes beyond Africa, as exemplified by China's awakened interest in Africa. In Chapter 16, Onditi and Nyadera coin the term *geostrategic axis* to image the future relationship between China, Africa, and the GCC. This conceptualisation of future global relations challenges the theory of location by suggesting that the future of international relations does not necessarily depend on geographical proximity as much as on the ideological orientation of states.

Conclusion:
Thinking Through the New MASEBEC Framework

A holistic Maritime, Security, and Blue Economy Continuum (MASEBEC) framework will require international cooperation, which is one of the hardest things to do in a world of sovereign states who accept no common power. International law has been the main instrument for large scale multinational cooperation in maritime matters, from the earliest days of serious writings on the 'freedom of the seas' by Hugo Grotious, to the UNCLOS convention in force today (Gordon, 2008). However, geopolitical considerations clearly still take precedence over international agreements, as the world system turns in the widening gyre of American imperial decline and the peaceful rise of China. The marine space is punctuated with illegal activities of pirates and dominant multinational corporations (MNCs), threatening elusively mapped national maritime boundaries, poorly regulated fish-factory fleets, and global armadas of merchant marines. In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, the thinly dispersed blue water navies are incapable of effectively protecting the sea, either due to a lack of legal instruments or to capacity issues. These kinds of systemic challenges have been the subject of indigestion for decades. At the beginning of the millennium, Helen Thornton (2004) posits an interesting question: 'how does the nation's sovereignty over the sea affect the freedom

of navigation, trade and fishing for other nations?' Therefore, a mix of idealism and realism in mitigating the effects of geography (location) on the exploitation of blue economy assets is surely in order.

The most realistic idealist, to use an oxymoronic expression, might propose the creation of some regional treaties incorporating the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic, and their counterparts on the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, with their coastal-hinterland spaces integrated as signatory partners, establishing a new type of global naval force, perhaps an international coast guard, legitimised by the UN, AU, ECOWAS, SADC, and EAC, providing collective security with blue water naval forces that, realistically, would have to be provided by the world's great powers who are, after all, the main beneficiaries of Africa's new blue economy. For this, the great powers would have to do some mental mapping of their own, and not the pin-on-the-map kind that the European colonial imperialists imposed when they laid down the fractured foundations of the 'Curse of Berlin' (Adebajo, 2010).

References

Adebajo, A. (2010). *The Curse of Berlin: Africa After the Cold War*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Attri, V.N. (2016). An Emerging New Development Paradigm of the Blue Economy in Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA): A Policy Framework for the Future. [online] Indian Ocean Rim Association. Available at: https://www.iora.int/media/23838/the-blue-economy-and-iora-2016.pdf

Boone, C. and Simson, R. (2019). Regional Inequalities in African Political Economy: Theory, Conceptualization and Measurement, and Political Effects. Department of International Development: London School of Economics and Political Science. Working Paper Series No. 19–194. London.

Bueger, C. (2017). Concepts in Practice: The Case of the 'Blue Economy'. Cardiff University.

Bueger, C. and Stockbruegger, J. (2016). Pirates, Drugs and Navies. *The RUSI Journal*, 161(5): 46–52.

Doyle, T. (2018). Blue Economy and the Indian Ocean Rim. *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 14(1): 1–6.

Gordon, E. (2008). Grotius and the Freedom of the Seas in the Seventeenth Century. *Williamette Journal of International Law and Dispute Resolution*, 16(2): 252–269.

Lahiri, B. and Masjidi, F.K. (2012). Landlocked Countries: A Way to Integrate with Coastal Economies. *Journal of Economic Integration*, 27(4): 505–519.

Larsen, J. (2015). Towards Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean: The Case of Seychelles. *Island Studies: Indian Ocean*, 3: 50–57.

Rimmer, J. P. and Ward, G. (2016). *Geography, Power, Strategy and Defence Policy: Essays in Honour of Paul Dibb*. Edited by Desmond Ball and Sheryn Lee. ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

Thornton, H. (2004). Hugo Grotius and the Freedom of the Seas. *International Journal of Maritime History*, 16(2): 17–38.

Wilson, B. (2009). Naval Diplomacy and Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean. *Strategic Analysis*, 33(4): 488–497.