



## Illusions of Location Theory: Consequences for Blue Economy in Africa

edited by Francis Onditi and Douglas Yates, Delaware, Vernon Press, 2021,  
456 pp.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Illusions of Location Theory: Consequences for Blue Economy in Africa**, edited by Francis Onditi and Douglas Yates, Delaware, Vernon Press, 2021, 456 pp.

This book was conceptualised in response to pressing concerns arising in Africa related to land and maritime boundary disputes, the fragility of landlocked countries and how these issues of “location” – in its broadest sense – impact on the development of the blue economy in Africa. This also relates to concerns about the “limits to growth” expressed nearly fifty years ago by the Club of Rome (Meadows et al. 1972, 23) as follows:

If the present growth trend in the world population, industrialization, pollution, food production and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years. The most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable declining in both population and industrial capacity.

The blue economy (also known as blue growth) has emerged as one of the alternative models of development to ensure inclusive growth and prosperity in the world (see Attri and Bohler-Muller 2018). Editors Onditi and Yates essentially focus on the intersections between location theory and the blue economy by gathering the viewpoints of scholars and practitioners across numerous disciplines, including experts in international relations and international law, political science, geography, environmental studies, economics, African affairs, and peace and development studies, aimed at understanding these complex and intertwined concepts in a world facing food, water and energy insecurity and increasing regional and sub-regional conflicts. *Illusions of Location Theory* tackles these issues in three parts: Section I: Coastal–Hinterland Epistemologies; Section II: Coastal–Hinterland Continuum; and Section III: Smart Blue Economies. The dominant theme in Section I, which shapes the book, is around re-thinking location theory to include aspects of inter-state relations, and the impact of divisions, inequality, spatiality and geopolitics on the blue economy.

Although there is no consensus across and within disciplines about the meaning of the blue economy, the World Bank (2017, p. vi) acknowledges various aspects in the following definition:

Although the term “blue economy” has been used in different ways, it is understood here as comprising the range of economic sectors and related policies that together determine whether the use of oceanic resources is sustainable. An important challenge of the blue economy is thus to understand and better manage the many aspects of oceanic sustainability, ranging from sustainable fisheries to ecosystem health to pollution.

It should, however, be noted that chapter authors highlight different perspectives and thus place emphasis on different aspects of location and the blue economy. Notably, in Chapter 7 Francis Onditi summarises the purpose of Section I by proposing a reconceptualisation of the blue economy as a part of the ‘heartland’ theory, which, simply put, is a convergence between the physical environment and global politics (regional and international power relations). As he puts it, “[i]n other words, geographical characteristics (such as distance and climate) influence the economic and behavioral organization of human societies” (210). This shifts focus to the need to pay attention to (i) resolving maritime disputes and (ii) building a smart blue economy based on new and innovative technologies, elements that Onditi

believes are missing from the current conceptualisations of the blue economy that ignore divisions, resource scarcity and unequal power relations between and amongst African states.

Whereas Section I is densely written and highly theoretical, the rest of the book looks at practical applications of the theories posited. In this “21st Maritime Century,” cooperation at regional and international levels is a precondition for promoting mutually beneficial blue partnerships. International and regional systems of cooperation based on the principles of equity and inclusiveness need to be developed, and space created for architectures of blue governance to exploit resources within countries’ respective exclusive economic zones (EEZs) while keeping in mind the future and the effects and impacts of exploitation.

It should go without saying – and is well illustrated in this book – that maritime peace and security are necessary pre-requisites for the promotion of the blue economy. Limited resources (e.g. food, water and energy) cause conflict between the resource wealthy and the poor. With the help of country-specific studies, this book covers the need for a cooperative, collaborative, equitable and inclusive regional architecture for blue governance in line with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Peace is recognised as a precondition for prosperity in the African region, and a discourse around the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, for example, has been re-opened (see the UN Resolution of 1971).

Many potential socio-economic benefits arise out of the implementation of the blue economy, including the employment potential of fisheries and aquaculture, oil and gas exploration, tourism, growth in trade and the development of ocean renewable energies and other innovative blue (smart) technologies. The blue economy therefore offers tangible gains to the region provided there is mutual cooperation and benefit. Adopting best practices would allow for the efficient realisation of the blue economy, and some are discussed in chapter contributions.

The sixteen chapters contain unique perspectives, theoretical constructs and case studies (including Kenya, Gabon, Malawi, South Africa on the continent, and the inevitable role of China) in a subject area that is gaining more traction. In the past few decades, it has become clear that as the population of the world expands, humanity is placing more pressure on the Earth and its ecosystems on which this very humanity depends. Unfettered growth and the destruction of ecosystems have caused immense damage to the land, and as humankind turns to the oceans for food, energy, and other resources there is a danger that the damage will continue unabated unless there is sufficient governance in this area.

The ideas in this tome advance our understanding of complex topics that will provide a wide audience of stakeholders – academics, diplomats, policymakers, public relations experts and practitioners – with a better picture of the implications of location, spatiality, divisions, resource scarcity and unequal power relations for the blue economy (and vice versa).

## Disclosure statement

I Narnia Bohler-Muller wrote the Foreword for the book under review, namely *Illusions of Location Theory: Consequences for Blue Economy in Africa*, edited by Francis Onditi and Douglas Yates, Vernon Press, 2021, 456 pp. My thoughts in this book review are not a repetition of the Foreword and constitute an overall impression of the published work.

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