

ILLUSIONS OF LOCATION THEORY

Consequences for Blue
Economy in Africa

Edited by

Francis Onditi

Riara University, Kenya

and

Douglas Yates

American Graduate School, Paris, France

Series in Politics



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Foreword

Narnia Bohler-Muller

*Human Sciences Research Council; University of Fort Hare;
University of Free State*

This book has been developed out of curiosity and concerns that the growing tensions between states over maritime boundaries, vulnerabilities of landlocked states, and the fragility of seas and coastal spaces are significant factors shaping the success or failure of the renewed efforts in the development of blue economy in Africa. The thoughts and the research inquiry in this work were motivated by the first Global Conference on Blue Economy that was co-hosted between Kenya and Canada in Nairobi, November 2018. Earlier on, in 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (RIO+20) had initiated the debate on the need for an integrated approach to the exploitation of oceans and seas, as the pathway to sustaining regional and international cooperation. The recognition of seas and oceans as the greatest unifier, and the amelioration of state relations through cooperative, collaborative, equitable and inclusive regional architecture appeared to be crucial to the reconstruction of a comprehensive framework for managing the blue economy. At the same time, the research in this volume shows that it is equally perceptible that the relationship between the coastal spaces and hinterland in Africa is atavistic survival of a colonial and post-colonial world in which the colonial masters played an important role in defining the development architectures of these spaces.

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, history, anthropology, sociology as well as political science. The editors were particularly interested in thinking alternative theoretical and practical frameworks for addressing the conceptual limitations of the long-overdue 'location theory.' It is detectable that the analysis of the coastal-hinterland dynamics cannot be exhausted only through the conventional 'location theory', which primarily focuses on industrial comparative advantages of location. Rather, the issues surrounding coastal-hinterland continuum are complexly embedded within the cleavages of state relations, regionalism, international trade and global politics. Thus, authors of this volume had to interrogate the configuration of the modern political-economy of the African coastline and hinterland. The intimate relationship between the political

economy of coastal spaces and state relations raised a host of both normative and empirical questions regarding the efficacy of the current framework of the blue economy: how to deal with maritime disputes; isolation of landlocked states; national power and expansionism; means of tackling maritime security threats; the place of anthropogeography in the study of international relations; and how to apply strategic cultures to forge regional and international cooperation.

Events leading to the development of this volume reinforced the urgency of the issues addressed. As you can see from the list of contributors, editors were particularly interested in having both theoreticians and practitioners focused on the exploring a new theory of location, at the same time provide practical solutions to the development and utilization of coastal-hinterland spaces, using modern technologies (SMART) and innovative strategies for revitalising regional and international cooperation needed for amicably resolving maritime and territorial disputes. One of the contributions of this volume is introducing the principles of political geography in the study of international relations. This objective was articulated during the initial planning for the book that took place at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) premises in Pretoria, South Africa. I was privileged to host the first planning meeting at our offices attended by the first editor, Dr. Francis Onditi, who was then undertaking his research fellowship with the HSRC. Prof. Cristina D'Alessandro joined us from Paris, France through video conferencing. Prof. D'Alessandro was instrumental in advising on salient ways of reconstructing the idea of 'location' in order to sustain the debate within the wider network of academic disciplines - geography, maritime diplomacy, geopolitics, political economy and African area studies. Prof. Douglas Yates's vast experience on issues Africa's geopolitics was instrumental in thinking through the central question of the research. His idea of embedding case studies in this work provided key pointers to the framework for explanations and predictions.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my special thanks to the editors and contributors who all delivered under significant time pressure. Coordinating work of this magnitude, particularly at a time when the entire world was engulfed into the devastating effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, is worth commendation!

Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller, Chair of the IORA Academic Group (2017 – 2019)
Executive Director, Human Sciences Research Council
Adjunct Professor of Law, University of Fort Hare
Research Fellow with the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of Free State.

**SECTION I:
COASTAL-HINTERLAND
EPISTEMOLOGIES**

Introduction

Francis Onditi

Riara University, Nairobi, Kenya

Douglas Yates

American Graduate School, Paris, France

Abstract

This chapter begins by questioning the relevance of 'location theory' in explaining the coastal-hinterland continuum and the implications for the utilization of the blue economy ecosystem in such a contested space in Africa. It pays more attention to territorial contestations, maritime disputes, vulnerabilities of landlocked states, and expansionist policies, as displayed through spatial organizational regimes. The chapter argues that, previously, these areas of investigation have largely been studied from the narrow perspective of 'location', unduly focusing on comparative advantages of 'distance', while neglecting the influence of 'forces' such as technology, ideology, and the power of mental mapping in spatial decision making. The chapter puts forward an argument that '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'. The chapter highlights key strategies discussed in the volume, including SMART blue economies and the infusion of the geopolitical dimension into the management of maritime and territorial diplomacy. The chapter concludes by recommending the new book to students, scholars and practitioners in various subjects of study, including African regional studies, African political economy, political geography, strategic military studies, governance of seas and oceans, and maritime science/diplomacy.

Keywords: Location theory, blue economy, Africa, geopolitics.

To challenge the origin and the essence of the spatial phenomenon is a difficult task, especially when a geographical phenomenon like the location is the subject of investigation. Still, political geographers have, through the centuries, taken the pains to excavate and create knowledge on the secrets of location: how location affects time and space, why human activities are bound by location and who shapes it. In the current work, the notion of space has been conceptualized as

the cumulative outcome of the societal dynamics (Castilhos and Dolbec 2017). Indeed, space cannot only be limited to the physical functions or categories, rather it is a combination of biological, emotional, spiritual, familial, cultural, social and political constructs. In short, the notions of space and location are intertwined. They are, however, pliable, which allows for proliferation of interpretations. This has resulted in an ongoing debate among scholars on their definitions and applications, especially in the era of Fourth Industrial Revolution. In the absence of adequate historical data and functional analysis on location, these debates have moved from one idea to another without pinpointing the impact of the phenomenon on various aspects of the global system, including inter-state relations; how seas and oceans are governed, maritime diplomacy, defense, international trade and geopolitics of things. To Johann H. von Thunen (cited in Chisholm 1961 and Ponsard 2012), secrets of location lies in the three variables: 1) agricultural processes; 2) land uses; and 3) distance. Yet, to others (O’Kelly and Bryan 1996), in the duality between land rent and proximity to the market. Still, others base their definition on a narrow view of consumer behavior and producer’s profit maximization criterion (Birkin and Wilson 1986).

These hypothetical observations have since been largely contested in the light of new world order characterized by technological advancement that has bridged the geographical gap between states and regions of the world (Steenhuis 2006). In his recent book, *‘The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology and Institutions,’* Jeffrey Sachs (2020) reiterates the need for new methods of international governance and cooperation to prevent conflicts and achieve sustainable development. The importance of this set of knowledge in explaining and justifying the existence and nature of states can hardly be overlooked. The problem, however, is not only viewing location as a factor of production, but that there is no framework for building a wholistic consensus on how location influences inter-state relations. The spatial nature of location means that it is often overlooked by scholars in international relations, a field that traditionally focuses on stability and inertia rather than on the transition from one state of affairs to another (Gustavsson 1999). Hitherto, the impact of geographical factors (location) in determining international relations theory and practice remains significant in depth and breadth. As Kevin Cox (2002:1) points out, “territory and territoriality mutually presuppose one another. There can’t be one without the other.” Put it differently, territoriality is the activity of defending, controlling, excluding, while territory is the contested physical space. And so, the relationship between the two disciplines (geography and international relations) can be summarized as the *‘different sides of the same coin.’*

Across various disciplines, ideas are being developed regarding the interdisciplinarity of things, from psychology and conflict, to geography and politics, genetics and violence. This raises questions regarding methods of

studying disciplines such as international relations. While studies of IR without geographical factors (location) limits itself to the *why* a state decides to adopt a change in its foreign policy, the theory of political geography draws attention to *how* the changing geographical factors might shape the future inter-state relations. State relations is however not limited to the politics of things. Classical location variables such as regional development, spatial inequalities and distance (Lall and Chakravorty 2005; Isard 1949) can influence strategic decisions undertaken by the state in time and space. These processes and relationships draw the notion of 'location' closer to the field of IR. Today, the field of international relations is concerned with both the formal diplomatic relationship between states and the processes in society that shed light on the shaping and utilization of spatial organizations and systems. Although the central attention of IR is the state relations and the dynamics of the global system, exclusive attention to it tends to make its analysis static and repetitive, formalistic and sometimes too institutional. Also, important areas of study would be left out of the scope of IR, if attention is narrowly focused on the state behavior. For example, putting more emphasis on logical behaviourism tend to overlook *physicalism*. As a result, although most contemporary scholars of IR accept the ontology of natural science in shaping the behavior of states and politics, many believe *physicalism* to be compatible with the claim that focus on themes such as geopolitics is derailing the discipline of IR to other areas of study, such as political geography. All in all, a modern scientific study of IR can hardly overlook these forces and processes that have an important bearing on the apparatus and behavior of states.

The above variables, and especially, spatial inequalities, have been neglected by the mainstream IR scholarship. Yet, the philosophy of location, space and mind is the scientific basis for studying world politics. Location, in IR studies, would then be defined as a *locality* of human settlement and how physical and social spaces such as seas, oceans and land interact with each other at various levels on both temporal and spatial scales. Another concept associated with location is 'social distancing.' Social distancing can define location, relative to the existing opportunity or repulsing spread of a pandemic illness. In some cases, social distancing can be recommended to terminate or disrupt the spread of undesirable values and norms from one society to the other. The rapid spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19) across the globe, that broke out at the end of 2019 in the Wuhan region of China, attests to the fact that the world is knightly networked in one way or the other. Although the pandemic was a biological problem in nature, its rapid spread across the world not only reflects the interconnectedness of the world, but it also challenges the notion of 'geographical distance.' That, information, materials or even disease-causing microbes can easily penetrate geographical 'walls.' It is the intention of this work to offer alternative thinking frameworks, one that disaggregates the narrow and

micro framework of *location theory* into a set of dimensions that can be given specific definitions and for which concepts might be developed to enhance the study of IR within the rapidly changing geopolitical atmosphere.

It has been more than one hundred and ninety years since Johann Heinrich von Thunen (1783-1850), a German economist and land owner theorized 'location' in relation to economic activities in 1826 (cited in O'Kelly and Bryan 1996). His hypothesis pointed out two important variables: 1) proximity of agricultural production to the market; and 2) cost of production. Since then, scholars in diverse fields of economic geography, political geography, development and economics have applied his concept to understand why spatial inequalities occur (Shefer and Antonio 2012; Abdulai 2016; Blair and Premus 1987). His inspiring publication, '*The Isolated State*,' was and remains a landmark piece not just for its intellectual curiosity, but also in applied fields such as regional and urban planning as well as industrial development. In this age and era, his theory can be contested on various fronts. For instance, scholars who study international relations have shifted towards constructivism and ideation, which means states can still advance cooperation irrespective of the distance between them. Today, leading geopolitical geographers, such as Robert Kaplan (cited in Farhat-Holzman 2014), are certain that human societies are a composition of both physical factors as well as cultural, religious beliefs and norms, all playing a central role in shaping international relations and diplomacy. Constructivism as a philosophy allows people to learn and sometimes overcome barriers presented by environmental and ecological determinism. Over the years, political administrators, political leaders and geostrategists have been reconstructing new modes of interaction based on virtual and learning experiences.

With the technology of things, physical barriers are no longer *sine que non*, in international relations and practical diplomacy. Similarly, the notion of *landlockedness* is no longer a barrier for such countries to access global opportunities such as trade, skills transfer, and cultural exchange. However, the ever-changing human behavior, cognition and technological imaginations have further complicated the notion of 'location.' It is no longer guaranteed that states bordered by seas or oceans are at an advantage; rather, how they approach the learning processes and application of knowledge may be more important. Indeed, advocates of constructivism (Phillips 1995) have reiterated that there is no *tabula rasa* on which new knowledge is etched. On this account, it is not necessarily about the vastness of a country's resources, but how such resources are utilized to generate other sources of wealth in the global space. Hence, in our conception of this work, the notion of *local-global opportunism* will continue to evolve in time and space.

The coastal region was evidently the most vibrant and economically developed part of East Africa. From the very outset in 1895, the British colonial designated the coastal city of Mombasa as the capital of the British East Africa Protectorate, a status it enjoyed until 1905. In fact, the coastal region and particularly Mombasa, was projected as the supreme example of a 'growth pole' model of regional development. In the span of time, other coastal spaces such as Calcutta, Saint-Luis and Rio de Janeiro played a key role in shaping the economic, political, social and cultural history of coastal spaces. Whether one considers these cities as mere military anchor points or as trade centres, each of these coastal cities has, by virtue of its strategic geographic location, played a pivotal role in colonial expansion across the mainland under the colonial administrative system and in European colonial history. Coastal cities saw the birth of the first elites who promoted colonial expansion in their respective countries and even beyond. In the dynamics of their development, these spaces experienced profound social, spatial, architectural, cultural and political transformation and became shining examples of cosmopolitan cities on their respective continents (Holmen 2018). With the diverse nature of their experiences and the adverse effects of economic shift, these historical spaces raise questions about their interaction with the rest of the globe and how it shapes the relations of coastal spaces with global system. Establishing linkages between terms such as "location", "mental map" and "globalism" raises questions on how individuals and communities perceive opportunities in their immediate surrounding or within the dynamic global system. The deficiency of the current international relations framework to explain mentalities and localities within the global system is the focus of this edited volume.

International relations, commonly referred to as international affairs or international studies, is a fairly new field of study. Although some date its origins to the work of Thucydides in the 5th century B.C., it only became a discrete academic field in the early 20th century. Since its establishment as an academic field of study, there has been contestation on whether geographical conditions should explicitly form part of its core framework of analysis. Many geopolitical advisors to states, such as Sir Halford John Mackinder, have reiterated the importance of geography in determining the strategic culture of a state, which in turn influences the foreign policy (Mackinder 1904; Vinha 2012). It was for this reason that Colin Gray, the former advisor to President Reagan's administration, argued that American survival in the dynamic global system was dependent on the prevailing geography. Today, China and the US remain the primary protagonists in different aspects of interaction such as trade, defense, and politics, at the United Nations Security Council. The convergence of IR and political geography scholarship shows how geographical factors such as mountains, seas, oceans or even population constrain or facilitate state relations. Some of the terrible wars in the world have been won, thanks to nature, due to

the geostrategic location of battlegrounds. This work does not limit the framework of location to only distance geometry.

The opportunities and constraints presented by geography at different spatial and temporal scales, all form part of the concept - *location*. As aforementioned, location theory finds roots in the works of von Thunen, Weber, Losch and Palander and others (cited in Hoover 1937). The theory has been developed over time, leading to major decisions on where the country's strategic resources such as ports, harbours, and airports, should be located. However, there exists limited research on linking 'location' to the different typologies of space, such as blue economies, mental, security, defence, and diplomacy of space. The historical and human evolution of coastal-hinterland spaces in Africa can be considered as a classical contestation of von Thunen's work. This contestation has proved extremely important in the digital era, because, while geographers and economists researching on location theory have made attempts to unravel factors influencing regional growth (James 1966; Abler et al. 1971), they have not framed this praxis within the international system equilibrium. The fundamental difficulty has been that the classical theory of location does not exhaustively explain the disparities between coastal and hinterland spaces in the context of Africa in the global system. The purpose of this work is to re-examine the praxis of location theory, its application in various facets of international relations: i.e., location, geopolitics, coastal spaces, spatial relations, and blue economy.

Locational Analysis

The role of 'location' remains a *quid pro quo* in human societies, primarily because human beings interact literally in all aspects of life, trade, transport, cultural exchange, marriages, etc. The importance of location is not however limited to capitalism, but also livable activities. Human beings make location decisions on a daily basis - where to stand on a line, the shortest route to your destination, where your business enterprise is likely to give you maximum returns. All these are acts of decision-making on location. Just like the pilot consults the tower personnel on which route is less turbulent towards the destination, a government section building a new port will make such decisions based on certain geographical considerations; nearness to water, the ruggedness of landscape or whether the piece of land is rocky. The general gradient of the land will influence the efficiency of drainage and so on. When a family man or woman obtains a new plummy job outside the country, the couple will have to weigh on sacrifices and compromises they have to make before relocating. In spatial activities, urban planning and geographical researchers have shown that 'livability' factors, such as functionalities of materials and what people perceive important is key in such decisions (Debin and Jiangang 1998). In some cases, human spatial activities are located where

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Notes on the Contributors

EDITORS

Francis Onditi heads the School of International Relations and Diplomacy, Riara University, Kenya.

Dr. Onditi is the 2019 recipient of the AISA Fellowship awarded by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa, for his tenacious research and scholarly work on ‘positioning African States in the Dynamic Global System’. Dr. Onditi is a widely published pan-African researcher. He has published over 55 research papers in peer-reviewed journals, contributed more than ten chapters in edited books, and authored/co-edited two books in his areas of specialization—geography of African conflict and institutional evolution theory. Dr. Onditi’s current pre-professorial research focuses on ‘exploring the analytical conception of the *closeness centrality* and its implications for a theory of *interactivities* for enhancing understanding of the process of conflict excavators and extractives with the aim of providing an *explanation* of the intrinsic character of *interaction* among human beings, communities, and states as a process of diffusion of power, conflict reversals, and peace interlocutors’.

Douglas Yates is Professor of Political Science at the American Graduate School in Paris (France).

He recently published the fourth edition of the *Historical Dictionary of Gabon* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), which brings the political affairs of this French-speaking, oil-rich, equatorial African country up to date since the accession to power of Ali Bongo, eldest son of Omar Bongo, who died in 2009 after the publication of the third edition. Dr. Yates is an established country expert who has been researching and writing about Gabon since 1993 with his doctoral dissertation at Boston University, later published as *The Rentier State in Africa: Oil-Rent Dependency and Neo-Colonialism in the Republic of Gabon* (Africa World Press, 1996). Since then, he has taught and directed graduate research on African politics at the American Graduate School in Paris and has consulted for the State Department and Defense of the United States government as well as non-governmental organizations, private international investment firms, African studies centers, and European development agencies. Yates is the co-author (with Marquette University’s David Gardinier) of the previous edition of the *Historical Dictionary of Gabon* (2006) and has also authored the annual chapter on ‘Gabon’ for Brill’s Africa Yearbook since its creation in 2004.

FOREWORD BY

Narnia Bohler-Muller is Professor of Law and the Executive Director of the Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES), Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa.

She is also Adjunct Professor at the Nelson R Mandela School of Law, University of Fort Hare and a Research Fellow at the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies at the University of the Free State. Previously, she was Professor of Law at Vista University and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) before joining the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) as research director of social sciences in 2011. Prof. Bohler-Muller has over 100 peer-reviewed publications and has co-edited five books on gender violence, human trafficking, the dynamic of BRICS, the evolution of the Constitution and the Blue Economy. She is an admitted Advocate of the High Court of the Republic of South Africa.

CONTRIBUTORS

Raymond Steenkamp Fonseca is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science (Military) at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Dr. Fonseca teaches International Relations and Political Economy at the South African Military Academy. He was awarded a doctorate from IMT Lucca and has done graduate work at various universities, including 'Sciences Po' Paris, and the University of Bonn. Raymond's research publications focus on the role of security in Africa's socio-economic and democratic development. He has contributed to books on the emerging powers in Africa, maritime geopolitics, and the geopolitics of cyber-space. He is past editor-in-chief of *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies*.

Dan Kuwali is an Extraordinary Professor of International Law, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Prof. Kuwali is also a fellow, Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School and Executive Director and Adjunct Professor, Centre for Strategic Studies, Malawi University of Science and Technology. He is one of the Editors of the *African Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law*, Member of the Governing Council of the African Bar Association and President of the Governing Council of the African Military Law Forum. He has authored the Oxford Bibliography on 'Forceful Intervention to Protect Human Rights'; *Responsibility to Protect: Implementation of Article 4(h) Intervention* (Martnus Nijhoff, 2011); *Africa and the Responsibility to Protect* (Routledge, 2014), *By All Means Necessary: Protecting Civilians and Preventing Mass Atrocities in Africa* (PULP, 2017), among other peer-reviewed articles.

Shadrack M. Kithiia is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

Dr. Kithiia undertook his BSc, MSc, and PhD studies at the University of Nairobi. His research focuses on the impacts of human activities on water resources—especially water quality and management fields—and has published widely in these areas. He is a member of the Hydrological Society of Kenya, Environment Institute of Kenya, and an active member of the International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS), International Association on Water Quality (IAWQ), and International Association for Sediment & Water Science (IASWS) since 1993.

Christiane Rafidinarivo is Associate Professor of Political Science, International Affairs and Geopolitics at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Madagascar.

Prof. Rafidinarivo is President of the scientific council of the IEPM. She completed her Doctorate at the University of Toulouse in 1993 and her Doctorate with Habilitation to Direct Researches in Political Science at the University of La Réunion in 2007. Her main researches are on Comparative political analysis, International Relations, Geopolitics and Indian Ocean areas. She has published a lot in these fields. She is Temporary Senior Lecturer and has been an Associate Fellow at the University of La Réunion since 2000 and the Laboratory of Research on Creole- and French-speaking Areas since 2018. She has been a Guest-Researcher at the Centre of Political Research CEVIPOF CNRS Sciences Po, France, since 2014 where she developed her Geopolitical Conceptual Framework. She was elected President of the Indian Ocean Political Science Association in 2015.

Giovanni Valensisi is Economic Affairs Officer at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Geneva, Switzerland.

Dr. Valensisi is a development economist with more than twelve years of international experience. Prior to his current position, Dr. Valensisi worked on trade negotiation issues at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (Addis Ababa-Ethiopia) and carried out various assignments for UNCTAD, UNDP-Syria, and several international NGOs (in Italy, Guatemala and Ecuador). He holds an MSc in Environmental and Natural Resource Economics from the Toulouse School of Economics, and a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Pavia, where he was a Research Fellow. Dr. Valensisi has published a dozen peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on trade and development issues in Africa and the Middle East.

Alberto Munisso is an Associate Expert at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Geneva, Switzerland.

Mr. Munisso's research focuses on productive capacities, structural change, and security issues in developing, least developed and landlocked countries. Prior to his current assignment, he developed machine learning algorithms at the Food

and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, and contributed to food security with forecasting and other statistical techniques. He holds a Master of Science in Economics from Tor Vergata University of Rome.

James Moronge is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

Dr. Moronge has worked as adjunct faculty at the Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies, University of Nairobi (2017-2019) and at the Schools of International Relations and Diplomacy, Riara University (2019-2020). His research interests and publications are in the areas of industrial restructuring, green manufacturing, environmental impact assessment and audit, urban agriculture, urban resilience nexus, corporate social responsibility, and waste management. He is a registered lead expert in environmental impact assessment and audit with the National Environment Management Authority, Kenya, and lead member of the Environmental Institute of Kenya.

Edmond M. Were is Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Kisii University, Kenya.

Prof. Were has previously worked at the Ministry of Planning and National Development (1984-90), Moi University (1990-2000), Kigali Institute of Education (Rwanda) on sabbatical leave (2000-2008), and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (2008-2015), where he was appointed Head of Department of Peace and Conflict Studies. His current research interests focus on power dynamics in interstate natural resource management and collaborative regional infrastructure development. He has widely published in the two areas and has also mentored several graduate students in Kenyan universities in the disciplines of international relations and diplomacy, and peace and conflict.

Jaimal Anand works at the Department of International Relations and Co-Operation (DIRCO), Pretoria, South Africa.

Mr. Anand is responsible for Research and Analysis in the Branch Asia and Middle East. The specific focus of his mandate is on Regional Organisations and regionalism within the Geostrategic and Geopolitical context in the 21st century. Mr. Anand also served at the South African Embassy in Bern, Switzerland, between 2006 and 2010, and has held a variety of portfolios during his diplomatic career, ranging from the Middle East to South and East Asia. Mr. Anand has written extensively on key policy issues and, in some cases, published on key strategic and policy issues. Mr. Anand is a well-rounded professional with experience and expertise in various elements of South Africa's foreign policy.

Simone M. Smith-Godfrey is Senior Researcher with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Pretoria, South Africa.

Ms. Smith-Godfrey is trained in the M.I.S.E program, where she completed

Maritime Law from Gorreson, Fjieldespiel, and Kierkegaard. She completed both Dry and Wet Chartering from the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers of London. She has authored a number of papers relating to piracy, blue economy, and domestic shipping in Africa.

Vuyo Mjimba is Senior Research Fellow with the African Institute of South Africa of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Pretoria, South Africa.

Dr. Mjimba is an international development researcher who brings commercial enterprise experience and insights into his work. As an analytically clear and innovative thinker, Dr. Mjimba specializes in sustainable industrialization and international development (specializing in global value chain and policy analysis) where he has worked in and with trans, inter, and multi-disciplinary research teams. In this experience, Dr. Mjimba has developed technical, basic financial, marketing and considerable human management skills and experience. The human resource management experience includes managing vertically and horizontally as well as across races, cultures, religions and nationalities.

Israel Nyaburi Nyadera is a teaching assistant at the Department of Government and Public Administration, University of Macau, China.

Mr. Nyadera is also a doctoral candidate at the Department of Political Science, Ankara Yildirim Beyazit Universit. He holds an MSc, International Relations from Middle East Technical University, and a BA Political Science from the University of Nairobi. He has been a visiting researcher at the University of Milan and a Kautilya Fellow with the Indian Foundation. His research interests are International Security, African Affairs and Governance, and he has published widely in these themes.

George Atisa is Associate Professor of Public Affairs and Security Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Texas, U.S.

Prof. Atisa teaches Public Administration courses across programs. He has a PhD in Public Affairs and an MSc in Environmental Sciences both from Florida International University in the USA, an MA in Economics from the University of Nairobi, and a BA from Kenyatta University in Kenya. His research and publications span across governance, public management, political and administrative decentralization in Africa, environmental management and sustainability. Before joining academia, Dr. Atisa worked for WWF-International, Lutheran World Federation, and International Rescue Committee. He is currently a Commissioner with the Commission on Environment, Economics and Social Policy of the IUCN.

Ken Walibora (Late) taught at the School of International Relations and Diplomacy at Riara University, Kenya.

Dr. Walibora was the author of the critically acclaimed Swahili novel *Siku Njema*. He obtained his PhD in Comparative Cultural Studies at The Ohio

State University, in the United States. He worked with various media houses in Kenya before joining Riara University as the head of Global and Language Studies Centre (GLASC), the position he held with dedication before he met the cruel hand of death in Nairobi, April 10, 2020. May his Soul Rest In Eternal Peace.

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