

understand the shared emotions and feelings of Guinean people coping through unsettling times. They also provide fruitful explanations of the politics of silence and the cautious attitude that Guinean artists so often endorse. Finally, the two books remind us of the dire need to reconstruct the history of postcolonial Guinea, and to illuminate the disputed feelings stirred up by the revolution. In that respect, and from a historian's point of view, one may regret that the historicity of the revolution remains a blind spot in both books. The Touré era tends to be analysed as a whole, and although Guineans may remind themselves of 'the revolution' as one and the same moment, it was in fact made up of different episodes and times. Additionally, the musicians' and dancers' experiences could have been more clearly put into perspective with those of other groups, especially educated elites, who tend to be more critical of the revolution's legacy. Highlighting the diverse experiences, including intergenerational tensions, and controversial memories of the revolution could help us better understand social change before and after 1984.

Essential reading for researchers specializing in Guinea, *The Revolution's Echoes* and *Infinite Repertoire* may also enthrall anyone interested in cultural nationalism, post-socialism, urban modernity or the interaction between politics and culture in contemporary Africa, and beyond.

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Angela Lewis, *Chinese Television and Soft Power in Africa*. Abingdon and New York NY: Routledge (hb £135 – 978 1 0323 2883 6). 2024, 142 pp.

Angela Lewis explores Chinese influence in Africa through the prism of satellite television. Specifically, she analyses how StarTimes, a private pay-television company, provides programming in markets that Western companies consider unprofitable, and how it has successfully become a Chinese diplomatic instrument that reaches 30 million Africans. While a private company with a different approach from Chinese state media, it remains supported by Chinese banks and fits into China's broader foreign policy strategy. Drawing on a dataset of media publications about StarTimes from 2015 to 2020 and interviews conducted in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia, Lewis shows how public diplomacy can be 'unstable territory' shaped by struggles between vested interests within an influencing country, the realities of a target country, and the objectives of a non-state company (p. 6).

The book has six chapters, including an introduction and conclusion. Lewis begins the book by discussing the framework, which situates StarTimes as a 'hybrid' actor: a 'non-state, private company' driven by profit but nevertheless connected to the Chinese 'government through public-private-partnership (PPP) deals' (p. 4). Ultimately, the company's programming, access to television and employment

opportunities contributed to African perceptions about China, including views about Chinese assistance to Africa, and presented China as an alternative to the West. She also explains the book's methodology and reasons for focusing on the period between 2015 and 2020, when StarTimes became a Chinese government contractor, and she discusses her interview process, which she uses to understand receptivity in rural Africa.

Moving to the broader context, Lewis examines branding and how public diplomacy cannot be perceived as propaganda because audiences would be less receptive to state-run media. She argues that the StarTimes case study shows the 'alignment between the company and China', reflecting a convergence of company-country image building (p. 29). Turning to specifics, Lewis explores the Access to Satellite TV 10,000 Villages Project, which provided satellite infrastructure and solar energy to African villages that lacked them – starting in Saina village, Kenya – and African views of the project. Drawing on press articles and interviews, she found that the news coverage was positive but shaped by publicity material, while the village respondents praised the initiative, citing the quality of content and price. Building from this, Lewis explores StarTimes' public image by looking at how African and, to a lesser extent, international press framed the company's operations as forging relations with African filmmakers, rather than as a tool of the Chinese government. She highlights StarTimes' 'positive image in the news' but notes that there is 'a lack of stories regarding the China link', while there is largely negative sentiment from media professionals who associate 'StarTimes with China' (p. 96).

Likewise, Lewis demonstrates the power of 'sport diplomacy' by describing how StarTimes' sponsorships of domestic football teams (despite some scandals) gave viewers as well as sports journalists positive perceptions of the company. Indeed, sponsoring sports in less developed areas of Africa has the potential to earn long-term rewards vis-à-vis broadcasting rights and intellectual property. She writes: 'Findings suggest that public diplomacy credibility necessitates real sharing of responsibilities and power, for instance granting greater space for African agency in decision-making regarding the direction of the company' (p. 116). Lastly, in the book's conclusion, Lewis explains how StarTimes is a successful symbol of Chinese engagement in Africa whereby both China and Africa receive benefits from the company's work. She notes that, while African agency in China's Africa media has grown, the power ultimately resides in Beijing, and companies such as StarTimes remain a tool for Chinese soft power.

This book successfully uses StarTimes as a case study for understanding China's soft power. Moving away from state-operated media, the author demonstrates how private companies fit into the broader Going Out policy, which encourages Chinese business to engage in foreign activities. Furthermore, this examination of StarTimes shows Africans' positive receptivity to Chinese media, highlighting how both China's public diplomacy and Africans have received benefits. Yet Lewis predicts that such perceptions may change: 'StarTimes has managed to keep a low profile, but as its projects are spreading its influence and the subscriber base grows, that will not remain the case' (p. 126).

Lewis's analysis sheds light on the themes and narratives surrounding a hybrid private-government actor, which is influencing African perceptions of China while also offering a much needed service to rural Africa. Yet the book has some limitations: it focuses on just one company and – as Lewis acknowledges – the interviews with customers come from just one village. Indeed, a wider analysis of other Chinese companies or other countries' soft power media projects would provide comparative

research to highlight further complexities, competitions, successes and failures. Likewise, how this effort fits into the great power competition in Africa is not well explored. Nor does the book delve into African opposition to foreign influence in detail, only briefly mentioning Nigerian criticism about Chinese films replacing local culture. Nonetheless, this book is a recommended study for scholars of public diplomacy, soft power and foreign relations.

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Ike Okonta, *The Failure of Leadership in Africa's Development*. Lanham MD and London: Lexington Books (hb US\$105/£81 – 978 1 7936 1235 7). 2020, 202 pp.

The Failure of Leadership in Africa's Development is one of many recent books that seek to explain the underlying causes of Africa's underdevelopment. The book argues that existing theories on Africa's underdevelopment – namely, Africa's unfavourable geography, the racial inferiority of Africans and colonial extractive practices – are flawed. Instead, Africa's underdevelopment, the book argues, is a consequence of the indifference of its ruling classes to scientific and technological development.

Ike Okonta, Professor of Philosophy at Winston-Salem State University, maintains, in a candid and scholarly manner, that there has been a persistent pattern of 'incompetence' in the drive for technological development among African leaders since antiquity; yet, he argues, the only path to development is through deliberate action by the state. And to address this contradiction, leaders must be held accountable through organized political action. Okonta's arguments are passionate and driven by a deep concern for Africa's future. His arguments are made based on a small number of cases spanning over 3,500 years of history, which might not make them generalizable; yet this does not take away from his scientific approach to the question.

The book refers to the three 'most common' (p. 31) theories of Africa's underdevelopment. The racial theory – which Okonta argues came about to account for differences in the level of development between Africa and Europe – contends that there is a hierarchy of races, with the 'Caucasoid' race sitting at the top and the 'Negroid' at the bottom. Geographical theories, on the other hand, explain differences in development outcomes through reference to place. One geographical theory contends that Africa's benign environment was favourable to a sedentary life with a low likelihood of conflict. Another makes the opposing argument: that an inhospitable environment (namely, the Sahara desert) isolated sub-Saharan Africa from the Mediterranean, which was a centre of technological progress for millennia. Yet a third geographical theory, proposed by Jared Diamond in *Guns, Germs and Steel*, argues that, due to the continent's orientation, there were not enough domesticable plants and animals to spur agricultural development. Finally, there is dependency theory, which refutes the first two theories and asserts that Africa's underdevelopment is a direct consequence of colonization.