

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.

Okonta refutes all three as either flawed or incomplete, providing convincing historical evidence in each case. He argues that the racial theorists' claim that the European race is intellectually superior is false, and this is evidenced by the millennia of scientific discovery from various regions around the world that preceded Europe's technological prominence over the last 500 years. By the same token, Okonta maintains that geographical theories fail to account for the role played by human ingenuity, good leadership and cultural institutions in development, and that location does not determine developmental outcomes. He points to the fact that it was Europeans who conquered the Americas. Had location been a factor, the opposite would have been equally likely. Finally, and more importantly, he disputes the case against dependency theory, essentially the main argument of the book: the successive colonization and exploitation of the African continent is a consequence of its historical underdevelopment, not a cause.

The central thesis of the book is presented in the two chapters titled 'Africa's historical indifference to technological progress' and 'Monarchs of "the encounter" and their feeble responses to Europe's superior technology'. In them, Okonta presents several historical examples of instances of failed leadership, from Ancient Egypt in the sixteenth century BCE to the Zulu elites of the 1600s. He argues that the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt, who formed the ruling priestly class, were preoccupied with the afterlife and did not take account of the technological developments in warfare occurring around them. This made them vulnerable to conquest; indeed, the northern delta was conquered and ruled by the Hyksos, an invading army from the East, from 1640 to 1532 BCE. Similarly, in 1506 Alfonso I of Congo did not make any effort and 'took no deliberate and determined steps to remedy [the] imbalance' (p. 96) in military power between his army and the invading Portuguese. Okonta presents similar examples of intransigence in the face of extreme adversity by the leaders of the Zulu against the Dutch and by the Ashanti ruling class in their first encounter with the Portuguese, and the failure of Mansa Musa of the kingdom of Mali to invest in scientific development and military technology. Throughout history, Okonta argues, these bad judgements left African kingdoms vulnerable to conquest.

Okonta then presents several examples of 'cultural receptivity' (p. 113) and deliberate investment in technological development. He argues that the Ancient Greeks consistently borrowed from the Egyptians; the Arabs invested in institutions to transfer knowledge from the Greeks, Indians, Chinese and Byzantines; and the Europeans acquired, and translated, many scientific texts from the Muslim Arab world, China and India. In addition, Okonta presents the Meiji Restoration in Japan as a modern example of deliberate steps taken by the political leadership to ensure technological development. Japan's industrialization, he argues, was provoked by its fear of humiliation and loss of sovereignty.

Okonta puts forward several forceful arguments against what he categorizes as an 'anti-modernist' view of development, which constitutes ideas propounded by several African thinkers, including Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor and George Ayittey. This view of development, first popularized by the founders of Negritude, rejects industrial and scientific development as a Eurocentric model that exalts European culture and vilifies non-European values. This view, he argues, was adopted by several of Africa's independence leaders to the detriment of the continent.

While the evidence is convincing, Okonta's 'blueprint for Africa's development' (Chapter 6) is lacking. Okonta argues that industrial development is not contradictory to African culture, but he falls short in suggesting a conciliatory path. Okonta's blueprint is highly reliant on Eric Reinhart's 'toolbox' of development, which is, quite simply, to industrialize. Okonta argues, in passing, that a strong central state with a strong mandate to industrialize is necessary for African countries to develop; and, to achieve that, mass political mobilization is necessary. In that sense, there is nothing new. In summary, the book's major contribution is a historical examination of Africa's persistent underdevelopment. With insightful examples of how other regions managed to avoid Africa's reality, it offers an alternative explanation that is worth thinking about.

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Areej ElSayary and Abdurashed Olowoselu (eds), *Overcoming Challenges in Online Learning: Perspectives from Asia and Africa*. London: Routledge (hb £100 – 978 1 032 37867 1). 2023, 196 pp.

The advancement of science and technology in Asia and Africa is proceeding at an accelerated pace. The internet and artificial intelligence, in particular, enable a quantum leap in the quality and accessibility of learning resources. Meanwhile, the Covid-19 pandemic dealt a severe blow to conventional educational models, prompting a widespread shift to virtual classrooms. This promoted the popularization of digital learning and distance education. Nevertheless, people are also facing many new challenges in the post-pandemic era. This raises a critical question: how can educators and students effectively navigate the newfound challenges in the educational landscape? *Overcoming Challenges in Online Learning: Perspectives from Asia and Africa* examines four distinct areas of education in Asian and African regions that were adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and addresses the challenges and barriers arising from the transition to online learning. It offers a visionary perspective that aims to inform and prepare educators, policymakers and researchers for the road ahead, ensuring that they are equipped to harness the potential of digital education while addressing the inherent challenges.

By artfully weaving together insights from China, Malaysia, Nigeria and UAE on online education and by analysing the current problems of online education, the book proposes creative solutions to learning challenges during and in the aftermath of a pandemic. It consists of four parts, each comprising four chapters. Part 1 explores situational leadership theory and its practical application in the field of educational management and leadership and discusses the challenges of and barriers to managing education for school improvement. Part 2 investigates aspects relevant to teaching practices and teachers' knowledge, beliefs, autonomy, meta-cognition, etc., and