

An Analysis of Three Distinct Levels of Studying Africa in International Politics

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Abstract: *The role and positions of Africa as a continent in international politics may be systematically studied on three distinct political levels. The focus of the study of Africa may fall on:*

- a. *the individual states within the continent;*
- b. *the continent may be sub-divided into five regional areas, each representing a focal point; or*
- c. *Africa as part of the international or global system. This article examines each of the levels.*

Keywords: *international politics, role and position, three distinct levels, individual states, sub-regional areas, and global system*

I. Introduction

In our studies of Africa in international politics three distinct levels may be identified for political science examination.

II. The purpose of this article

The purpose of this article is to:

- a. identify the three distinct levels of studying Africa; and
- b. give a descriptive assessment of each of the identified three levels.

III. Three distinct levels of studying Africa

3.1 Hypotheses and propositions for the levels of study

According to S. B. M. Marume [1985:34 – 35, and 2015], the quest for knowledge is a progression from lower to higher and from higher to ever higher levels of generalizations. However, the number of possible levels is indefinite. The important role of generalizations is related to the two chief aims of scientific endeavour, namely,

- a. the provision of explanations and
- b. or predictions of the connection between phenomena or variables.

The construction of generalizations must continue in order that the process of explanation and prediction may be pursued to the maximum possible extent. Ultimate knowledge is verified theory at the highest level of generality.

3.1.1 Hypotheses and propositions for the study

What is the underlying proposition and hypothesis of the three levels of studying Africa?

However, in the light of the limitations discovered in the comparative studies on political regions [Marume: op.cit.], it appears that one of the most appropriate and efficient methods of studying Africa in international politics is probably to view the continent in a regional context. This statement, however, needs to be carefully qualified. The entire African continent may be studied as a regional system within the context of the international political system.

There are, serious risks and obvious limitations, if the whole African continent is seen as one regional system. Certainly, we are likely to run the greatest dangers of overlooking the extremely significant characteristics and differences occurring within the continent. This may readily give rise to meaningless and platitudinous generalizations. This danger may to a larger extent be averted if the continent were seen as consisting of several regional systems, rather than of one independent regional system. This statement does not in any way deny intercommunications, relations, and interdependence

between and amongst regional systems. For this particular reason, this study will be of such a nature that it illuminates the special place and critical role of regional systems in a scientific study of contemporary Africa in global politics [Marume:2015].

3.1.2 Scientifically constructed operational frameworks

a. Formulation of working proposition

In order to proceed with the research study with a progressive sense of direction a workable proposition has been formulated. And according to Goode and Hatt [1952] and hypothesis/proposition is seen as a tentative generalization the validity of which has still to be proved. The proposition for this study is stated as follows:

- It appears that one of the most appropriate and efficient method of studying Africa in international politics is probably to view the continent in a regional context. This statement, however, needs to be carefully qualified. The entire African continent may be studied as a regional system within the context of the international political system.
- However, if the whole African continent consisting of 57 states plus a number of dependent territories is seen as one regional system, then we are likely to run the grossly risks of grossly overlooking the extremely significant characteristics, peculiarities, and differences occurring within the continent. This may readily give rise to meaningless and platitudinous generalizations; thus giving erroneous picture of the pragmatic international political dynamics and situations in Africa.
- On the other hand this danger may to a larger extent be averted if the continent were seen as consisting of several regional systems, rather than of one independent regional system. For this particular reason, this study will be of such a nature that it illuminates the special place and crucial role of regional systems in a scientific study of contemporary Africa in international politics.

b. Operational techniques and realities of manageability

Operationalisation, according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary [1959], means conversion of ideas into practically strategic actions. Thus, Africa may be looked at on three distinct levels, described as follows:

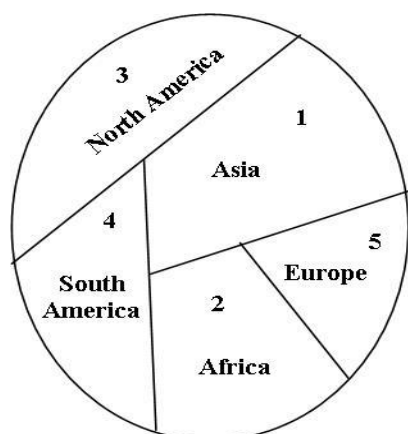
3.2 Three distinct levels of studying Africa

Africa's role and position in international politics may be studied on three distinct levels. The focus may fall on: (a) Africa as part of the global system; (b) the continent may be subdivided into various regional areas, each representing a focal point; or (c) the individual states within the continent [Marume:2015]. An increasing descriptive assessment of each of the identified three levels of studying Africa in international politics is briefly made as follows:

3.2.1 Africa as part of the global system

According to this approach, the whole African continent consisting of 57 independent states plus a number of dependent territories is viewed as one regional system of the international or global system as demonstrated in the figure 1 below

Figure 1: International system and regional systems



Comments

When Africa as part of the global system is studied as a one regional system, it presents problems and challenges. For example,

- a. We are most likely to run the greatest risks of grossly overlooking the extremely significant characteristics, peculiarities, and differences occurring within the continent;
- b. This may readily give rise to meaningless and platitudinous generalizations; and
- c. Thus giving erroneous picture of the pragmatic international political dynamics and situations in Africa.

This global approach to the study (globality, universality) is not advocated due to obvious limitations.

3.2.2 Africa in terms of sub-regional systems

The term system, according to the functionalists approach, [R. K. Merton:1964], is seen as being made up of interrelated and interacting parts, which parts have consequences for the whole system or some other part(s) of it, and there is a feedback of the consequences of a part for whole system or some other part(s) on that part. There is a relationship of parts into making a whole system of which they are parts.

The term regional system' [Cantori and Spiegel:1970:6-7] consists of two divisions, namely, an internal system which also consists of two sub – systems designated as the core sector and the peripheral sector, and an external system.

According the Lousi J. Cantori and Steven L. Spiegel (1970;6 – 8] a regional system is one state, or two or more proximate and interacting states which have some common ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social and historical bonds, and whose sense of identity is sometimes increased by the actions and attitudes of states, external to the system.

Thus Africa; which may be subdivided into five regional systems: North Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa; may have each of the five regional systems analyzable into (a) an internal system consisting of two – sub – systems as the core sector and peripheral sector, and (b) an external system [Marume, 1985, and 2015].

Comments

Professors Lousi J. Cantori's and S. L. Spiegel's [1970:6-7] regional approach (regionality, regionalism or model] is viewed as manageable, appropriate and suitable.

3.2.3 Individual states within the continent as focal points

When this approach is adopted the focus is on individual states within the African continent. Currently Africa consists of 57 diverse independent countries plus a number of dependent possessions which may be described as micro – African states in military strategic terms.

Comments

The individual state approach to studying Africa in international politics may be:

- too narrow, simplistic, particularistic and numerous to be of any general use;
- unmanageable, inappropriate and unsuitable, and
- therefore, not considered for application for use in this study.

IV. Conclusion

Three distinct levels of studying Africa's role and place in international politics are identified as (a) Africa as part of the global system; (b) the continent may be subdivided into various regional areas, and (c) the focus may fall on the individual states within the continent.

The conclusion is therefore made that the regional system appears to be the most appropriate. Thus, the approach which focuses on the regional areas in Africa is most suitable in this study. By focusing on the regional areas, we are by no means excluding other possible approaches and methods of studying the role and position of the African continent in global politics.

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Section B

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