

Special conceptual problems and challenges which emerge when the regional system is regarded as the focal point in a study of Africa in international politics

Dr. S. B. M. Marume¹, R. R. Jubenkanda², C. W. Namusi³, N.C Madziyire⁴

¹Department of Public Administration, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

²Dean Commerce and Law, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

³Department of Management and Business Studies, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

⁴Education, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

Abstract: This article specifically studies certain particular conceptual problems and challenges that emerge when the regional system is regarded as the focal point in a study of Africa in international politics then making the study special in various ways.

Keywords: regional system, special study, conceptual problems and challenges, focal point, and international politics

I. Introduction

Africa in international politics has been studied on the regional systems basis recently [S. B. M. Marume; 2015]. In the study a hypothesis has been developed that special conceptual problems and challenges arise when the regional system as a novel methodological approach is regarded as the focal point in a study of Africa in international politics. The argument advanced in the study has certainly not been to violate the taxonomy, but rather to ensure that the extremely significant special problems and challenges to be dealt with on their own are not eclipsed in a general examination of methodological approaches

Purpose of the article

The precise purpose of this article is; to examine in meticulous detail the special conceptual problems and challenges that emerge when the regional system is regarded as the focal point in a study of Africa in international politics.

Questions regarding conceptual problems and challenges of the regional system

There is a host of fundamental conceptual problems and challenges that arise when the **regional system** is regarded as the focal point in a study of Africa in contemporary international politics. In order to deal with these issues in a satisfactory manner, let us raise the following thematic issues as follows;

Legitimate conceptual questions: which we need to try to answer: These are listed as follows:

- a. What makes something special and more so in a scientific study of this nature?
- b. What are the special problems and challenges that arise when the regional system is regarded as the particular focal point in a systematic study of Africa in a global/international politics?
- c. What does a *regional system* consists of in international politics?
- d. What are the criteria for the *delimitation of regional systems* in international politics?
- e. What is the special problem regarding boundaries and sizes of a *regional system*?

Possible answers, explanations and illustrations to methodological questions:

What makes something special and more so in a scientific study of this nature?

Possible answers and explanations

This question is answered in a separate article 22 on a survey on methodologies on Africa and here only additional information is given as being complementary.

What clearly distinguishes this study as special are its four interrelated characteristics, namely, *its special purpose; its special method of operation; its high – level – sophistication, and its high degree of complementarity.*

- a. **Its special purpose:** is ascertaining its *truth [veracity]*, that is, it concerning itself with aspects of *reality, proof/evidence, facts and truth* [A. Brecht 1967: 48 – 54]. Therefore, proof of facts depends upon more than observation, description, and measurement. It depends on
 - i. acceptance of the empirical observation as sufficiently exact to support the report made on it;
 - ii. acceptance of the report as sufficiently correct and adequate; and
 - iii. acceptance of the apparently observed facts as actual facts.

- b. **Its special method:** that is, *scientific method*, which involves observing nature, asking relevant questions, collecting proper evidence with which to answer these questions, formulating and testing propositions and hypotheses in order to explain the data and modifying those propositions and hypotheses in the light of new data and discoveries; and also the intelligent use of a variety of methods in a coherent manner.
- c. **Its high-level sophistication:** which pertinently refers to the comprehensiveness of its subject – matter, the generality of its results of investigations, and the universality of its knowledge system.
- d. **It high degree of complementarity of elements:** which refers to the special relationship of elements, which means that each particular element stands in a special relationship to other elements. This special relationship must reveal unity, inter – connectedness, or coherence, that is, demonstrating the factors of rationality, high order and objectivity.

The deliberate activity of acquiring and establishing new knowledge, testing existing one, presenting that knowledge logically and guiding proper action is called scientific research process, but before results obtained can add to the content of the relevant system of knowledge, research itself must comply with the requirements of the scientific method such as: empirical observation and collection of data; systematic arrangement of collected data into definite groups; and formulation and verification of generalisations in the light of available information and data.

What a regional system comprises in international politics

- a. What does a regional system consist of in international politics?
- b. When scientifically studying the special conceptual problems and challenges which inevitably accompany this methodological question, it soon becomes evident that the answer to the question is much more complex and complicated than it appears to be at the first glance:
 - i. a regional system as an objective phenomenon?
 - ii. is it something to be pursued?
 - iii. Has it been created by research scientists in an endeavour to find their way through a maze of data, and thus to facilitate their tasks?
 - iv. More specifically: does a regional system indicate a factual situation, a situation to be pursued, or merely a means of analysis?

In a certain sense a simple answer may be found to the initial, as well as to the resulting questions. It may namely be argued that the answer is dependent on the subjective considerations of the social research scientist. Although this is true to a certain extent it is a most unsatisfactory answer from a scientific angle, since it robs the term '*regional system*' of all its meaning. The following quotation aptly describes this state of affairs:

Much talk, both by scholars and premiers, about regional ... political integration is based upon presumed homogeneity, or interdependence, or loyalties, which may exist only in the mind of the beholder.

The problem cannot be solved, on the other hand, by adopting a highly dogmatic stand in respect of any of the above three distinguishable possibilities. This would rather give rise to a large number of other problems. It is probably also not necessary to adopt a dogmatic stand in this regard. Since the three possibilities are entirely and mutually exclusive.

Scientifically seen in this light, the concept '*regional system*' thus contains factual, normative, and analytical elements which stand in an interlaced, rather than a conflicting, relationship to one another.

Although the foregoing exposition indicates a number of elements which are probably to be found in a definition, it does not as yet provide an answer to the original question, that is:

What does a regional system consist of in international politics?

Since, as will become evident from our subsequent discussion, social scientists, scholars and writers have not yet reached an agreement regarding the *most suitable criteria for determining a regional system*, we must of necessity search for that definition which is most applicable to the circumstances and objectives of our study. The definition presented here has not been chosen purely subjectively, but its selection has been based on the most important aspects of a large number of other definitions contained therein. *J. L. Cantori and S. L. Spiegel [1970:6]*, two of the leading contemporary American political scientists, define *a regional system* in international politics as:

'One state, or two 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'.

Although this may be accepted as an operational definition for the purposes of the study, it does not solve all the differences of opinion which exist in respect of various aspects. It will appear from our subsequent discussion of criteria for the delimitation of regional system in international politics just how difficult it is to compile a satisfactory definition.

Criteria for the delimitation of regional systems in international politics

As may be logically deduced from the foregoing exposition, reference is often made to particular regional systems, without any attention being paid to the distinguishing criteria [standards] which have been used to systematically classify a group of states as such. To provide a more scientific basis for the usage of the term 'regional system', or referring to a *specific regional system*, it has now become necessary to pay attention to a *number of criteria* which may be used for this purpose. These criteria include:

Geographical isolation

Perhaps the most obvious criterion which may be applied is that of the delimitation of separate states according to *geographical boundaries*. Although this criterion contains the obvious advantage in that it simplifies the situation to large extent, it is unsatisfactory in view of the fact that it does not take account of differentiating and common aspects.

Homogeneity

The relative homogeneity in respect of physical conditions and economic and social conditions may also be used as a criterion. However, problems often arise in regard to the degree of relativity which has to be provided for.

Interdependence

The *interdependence* of states may also serve as criterion, but here, too, the question arises: how much, and of which type?

Ad hoc problems

Regional systems are often grouped on the basis of *ad hoc problem or problems*. The main objection to this criterion lies in the fact that it is usually of a more subjective nature than the other possibilities. In certain circumstances, however, it may be extremely serviceable.

It should be evident from the foregoing examination of a few of the criteria which may be used for the delimitation of regional systems that a study regarding the existence, or absence, of a regional system may be rest on a considerable number of criteria. The safest point of departure would, therefore, probably be to assume that there is a large number of justifiable criteria, and that the delimitation of a particular regional system will ultimately depend on the criterion or criteria which are used.

Political relevancy

Although the premise of the previous paragraph certainly represents a safe point of departure, it does not tell us which criterion or criteria are most suitable for the delimitation of various regional systems in international politics in this particular study.

The only criterion which can provide a fully satisfactory answer to this problem is *political relevancy*. By employing the latter criterion, the various considerations arising from an application of the above – mentioned criteria are not completely ignored, but are placed in their proper perspective. It can, however, only be done by qualifying the concept political relevancy as indirect or direct.

- a. When indirect *political relevancy* is used as a criterion, certain factors come to the force which, although they play a determining role in the delimitation of regional political balance within the political system concerned. We are thinking here, for example, of geographical, historical, and to a lesser degree of certain social factors. In a certain sense the use of indirect political relevancy illuminates the more static aspects to be considered in a delimitation of regional systems in international politics.
- b. The criterion of *direct political relevancy* emphasizes those factors which are representative of the dynamic aspects clearly reveals a continuous interaction between political and economic factors in particular, and to a lesser degree also certain social factors. For the purposes of this study we regard this interaction as the most important criterion in the delimitation of a regional system.

We shall in the following chapter discuss the factors which are indicated by the *criterion of political relevancy*, as well as their classification.

The special problem of boundaries and sizes of a regional system

Although, strictly speaking this cannot be regarded as a conceptual problem, problems which are related to the boundaries and sizes of a regional system are closely related to the foregoing discussion. We should, therefore, pay brief attention to this aspect.

Since the national state consists of the entity from which a regional system is constructed, it is customary to equate the boundaries of a regional system with the boundaries of the particular national state. It often immediately strikes one that a particular national state belongs to a particular regional system, regardless of the criterion of criteria which were used in the delimitation. Sometimes, however, the situation is much more

complex, and gives rise to considerable problems. As a result, there is some justification for the conclusion that the boundaries to be drawn in this regard will in most cases be arbitrary. In order to overcome this hurdle, it may be asked whether it is at all possible to classify a particular state under another regional system. It will in most cases be found that the considerations which justify the incorporation of a state with one regional system overshadow the considerations in favour of an alternative classification under another regional system.

There may also be a difference of opinion regarding the size (magnitude) of a regional system. Writing on the *subordinate state system* of Southern Asia, M. B. Brecher, for example, regards a minimum of three members as essential before one can speak of a regional system. On the other hand, **Cantori and Spiegel** provide solid arguments for maintaining that a single state may form a regional system of relative magnitude, whereas a considerable number of states may form only a relatively small regional system. However, as in practically all the points under discussion, it should probably also be assumed here that there is no objective solution to the problem. It may, however, be overcome to a large extent if the social research scientist does not initially adopt a dogmatic stand, but rather allows himself to be guided by the nature of the perceptible interactions in the political, economic and social spheres.

Systematic evaluation of achievements so far made in the study.

When considering all the foregoing special conceptual problems and challenges, it may rightly *be asked whether any thing whatsoever is to be gained from studying Africa from the viewpoint of regional systems*. Although there may also be considerable differences of opinion in regard to these questions, the following obvious advantages are distinguishable in respect of our study:

It creates an intermediate unit for analysis, and thus reduces the number of African states from + 56 to five analysable units, namely North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa [Marume;2015].

It forms a more balanced approach for the study of international politics than approaches which are directed merely at the global political systems. It eliminates the danger of regarding all events in international politics as being merely part of the international struggle for power between the Great Powers, whereas in reality the Great Powers often do not play, or merely play an incidental part.

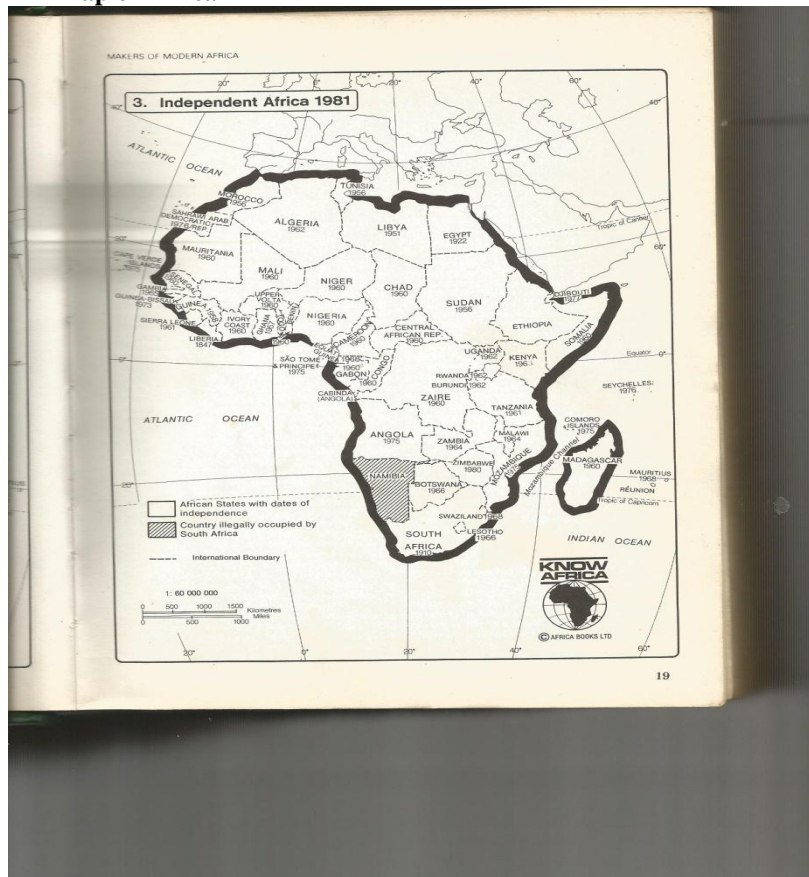
It provided a clearer image of the interaction between the various components of the international political system, as well as of the interaction on different levels of the international political system.

It needs to be fully appreciated the novel scientific division to follow a regional approach as a special contemporary methodological in the study of modern Africa in international politics, however, does create and present a host of special conceptual problems and challenges that are of an epistemological, semasiological, methodological and terminological nature.

Bibliographical references

- [1] L. Binder, *The Middle East Subordinate international system: World Politics*, volume, 1958, pp 408 – 429.
- [2] L. J. Cantori and S. L. Spiegel: *The international politics of regions*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice – Hall, 1970.
- [3] K. Kaiser, *the interaction of regional sub theme: some preliminary notes on recurrent patterns and the role of superpower: World politics*, volume XXI, 1968, pp. 84 – 104.
- [4] J. N. Roseau (ed), *Linkage politics: Essays in the convergence of National and International Systems.*, New York: Free Press, 1969.
- [5] O. R. Young *Political Discontinuities in the International system: World politics*, volume XX, 1968, pp 369 – 392.
- [6] S. B. M. Marume: *Public Administration: special contemporary problems and challenges: opportunities and prospects: and status of theories, methods and approaches: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing: Berlin, German [ISBN 978 – 3 – 75883 – 6]*
- [7] S. B. M. Marume: *Pre-colonial political history of Shona Great Zimbabwe States: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing: Berlin, Germany 2015 [ISBN 978 – 3 – 659 – 77410 – 2]*
- [8] S. B. M. Marume: *International Politics; Africa on sub – regional systems basis: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing: Berlin, Germany 2015 [ISBN 978 – 3 – 659 – 80183 – 2]*
- [9] S. B. M. Marume: *Epistemological and methodological aspects of African social research studies: unpublished PhD degree programme: California University for Advanced Studies.*

Map of Africa



1
PROFILES OF CONTRIBUTORS AND PHOTOGRAPHS



Samson Brown Muchineripi Marume: a former senior civil servant for over 37 years in various capacities and 10 years as deputy permanent secretary; ten years as a large commercial farmer; well travelled domestically within Zimbabwe, regionally [SADC countries: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritius, Swaziland, South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and DRC]; and Africa [Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Libya, Uganda]; and internationally [Washington, New York and California in USA; Dublin and Cork in Ireland; England in United Kingdom; Netherlands, Spain (Nice), France, Geneva in Switzerland, former Yugoslavia-Belgrade; Rome and Turin in Italy; Cyprus – Nicosia; Athens – Greece; Beijing – China; Singapore; Hong Kong; Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Okayama in Japan]; eight years as management consultant and part – time lecturer for BA/BSc and MA/MBA levels with Christ College- affiliate of Great Zimbabwe University, and PhD/DPhil research thesis supervisor, internal and external examiner; researcher with Christ University, Bangalore, India; currently senior lecturer and acting chairperson of Department of Public Administration in Faculty of Commerce and Law of Zimbabwe Open University; a negotiator; a prolific writer; vastly experienced public administrator; and a scholar with specialist qualifications from University of South Africa, California University for Advanced Studies, United States of America: **BA** with majors in public administration and political science and subsidiaries in sociology, constitutional law and English; postgraduate special **Hons BA** [Public Administration], **MA** [Public Administration]; MAdmin magna cum laude in transport economics - as major, and minors in public management and communications; **MSoc Sc** cum laude in international politics as a major and minors in comparative government and law, war and strategic studies, sociology, and social science research methodologies; PhD summa cum laude in Public Administration .



Roy Robson Jubenkanda: 2008, DPhil (Currently pursuing DPhil pursuing DPhil studies with (ZOU); 2000, MSc in Strategic Management – University of Derby, U. K; MSc. Econ. In international Economics, Banking and Finance- University of Wales, Cardiff College of Business Studies, U.K.; 1983, BSc (Hons) Degree in Economics – University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe; 1976 Business Studies Diploma – Solusi University, Zimbabwe; 2005, Certificate in Distance Education Practitioner (UNISA); 2011, Certificate in Higher Education Management in Southern Africa (University of the Witwatersrand) Johannesburg, South Africa.



Cornelius Wonder Namusi: current studies: DPhil (candidate) in Public Administration; 1991, Master of Public Administration (UZ); 1982, Bachelor of Administration Honours (UZ); 2011, Certificate: Module Writing; 2011, Certificate: Managing the training programme – ESAMI, Tanzania; 1990, Certificate advanced work study (Canada); 1986, Certificate: Organisation and methods O & M), Institute of Development Administration IDM – Botswana); 1983, Certificate in Labour Administration, African Regional Labour Administration Centre (ARLAC) (Nairobi); 1964, Primary Teachers Higher Certificate (PHT) Waddilove Teacher Training Institution, Marondera, Zimbabwe



N. C. Madziyre: current studies; DPhil (candidate); Master of Education (Educational Administration) (UZ); Bachelor of Education (Curriculum studies and Teacher Education) (UZ); Diploma in Teacher Education (Dip TE) (UZ); Primary Teachers' Higher Certificate (St Augustines); I am senior lecturer in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University; I serve as a Programme leader for The Bachelor of Education in Youth Development studies; I am also responsible for developing Distance materials for distance learners; I write, content review and edit modules in the Faculty.