
The State: A Conceptual Jungle?

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Abstract: *The idea of the state has been appearing in political thought/theory, with its definition and meaning varying from the time of Plato through Hobbes to Marx, denoting and connoting country, society, nation, government or community. Thus, what is the state? However, the centrality of the state in contemporary political discourse demands that our understanding of the concept of state should have some clarity, in that, the meaning of the state should be more specific, for clearer and more meaningful analyses of political issues. This paper therefore interrogates the idea of the state from Plato to Marx and concluded that scholars have added to the confusion regarding the definition and meaning of the state, because they fail to differentiate the spirit of the state, people being together, from its basic characteristics (identifying it). **The state means the dominant group of people in society, who exercises power through the government.** Therefore, it will not be apt to refer to a country of multi-nationals like Nigeria, India, Ghana, and Kenya as states.*

Keywords: *State, Dominant Group, Natural Theory, Divine Theory, Force Theory*

1. Introduction

What is the state?

This is not a new or strange question in political analyses nor has the question never been answered. The question is coming up because all the previous answers to the question

end with the question. And today, the question is still relevant. So, what is the state?

In political analyses, from the ancient to the modern times, the state, as a concept, has always featured prominently, even today, the dominant issue about politics is the state. And because the state is the central focus in political theory, a fundamental problem in all political inquiries will be to determine the nature of the state (Asirvatham and Misra, 2008). But what is the state? How can we present or describe this abstract concept in such a way that it will be specifically meaningful and not just expressing a nebulous concept, so woolly that it is nothing but a conceptual jungle?

Today, the concept of state is so widely used in an uncoordinated way that one begins to wonder what it means because the way scholars/philosophers/theorists have been using and analyzing the concept makes it so general that it is not specifically meaningful

Now, can there be a country without a state? Can there be a state without a country? Can a state exist without a government? Can there be a state in a nation? Can a government function without a state? And between the state and government, which of them exercises authority? When scholars say state-building, does it mean the same thing as nation-building? Indeed, what is being built or what is to be built? Thus, answering the above questions provokes the question; what is the state?

Indeed, the concept of state features in the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, whether as polis (Plato) or constitution (Aristotle) and also features in the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Kant and Hegel and Marx, Lenin, Alavi and Ake. However, are the above thinkers discussing the same concept of state? If yes, then the state as a mere opacity will not be in doubt but if no, then, what is the state?

We must be able to define the concept of state in such a way that to identify it will not pose a problem. For example, if a question is posed thus, what is a pen? The definition of a pen should make it distinguishable from a pencil, a marker, a paint brush or to say the least, a ruler. But today, what do we mean when we say The Nigerian Country, Nigerian State, Nigerian Nation, Nigerian Society, and Nigerian Government? Thus, how can we define Nigerian Country that it will not appear like Nigerian Society or how can we define Nigerian State and it will not confuse with Nigerian Government or Nigerian Nation?

Thus, can we argue that the concept of state has such a clear definition, without any ambiguity that will convey the meaning in such a manner that it will not confuse the idea with other concepts?

The ways scholars use the concept of state create different implications for its meaning. For example, what is the meaning of the state when it is said that 52 African states gathered at Addis Ababa? However, those who gathered at Addis Ababa were 52 heads of governments or 52 leaders. And what is the difference between African States gathered at Addis Ababa and The Commonwealth of Nations is meeting in Nairobi? Are the Institutions at Addis Ababa different from those Institutions in Nairobi?

Therefore, if the Nigerian President was among those gathered at Addis Ababa and Nairobi which institution in Nigeria was at Addis Ababa and which one was in Nairobi, state, nation, country or government? And this question is pertinent because at Addis Ababa, it was the states that gathered to meet while in Nairobi, the nations gathered to meet.

Again, shall we be ascribing different meanings to such concepts like State, Country, Nation, depending on the context, situation or the preference of the writer? For example, is the state appropriate only to the African continent, for how often do scholars refer to western

countries as states, like the Canadian State, The British State, The French State, The Japanese State or The Indian State? Is the concept of Nation meaningful only as a unit of analysis in international relations? Or do we use Country only in the context of diplomacy? Or shall we be using all the concepts interchangeably which will portray scholars as incoherent? For example, Joharis(2006) says that the state and the government are intertwined because state and government are generally taken as inter-related and interchangeable. While Sadoro(2008) says that a state is a government that has authority over a national population living in a specific territory. Quite a number of theories have been propounded, which aim at explaining the evolution, emergence or origin of the state. We have such theories like patriarchal, evolutionary, historical, matriarchal, anthropological, Marxist, force, social contract, divine, and natural. However, a cursory survey of the above theories will conclude that all the theories can logically be grouped under four dominant theories as follows,

Natural theory

Divine theory

Social Contract theory

Force theory.

Thus, we shall here attempt to look and examine the above four dominant theories to see how logically, rationally and thematically the theories have explained the emergence of the state, in such a manner that the concept takes a definition that explains the concept of state and makes it convincible and distinguishable from related concepts.

The argument is simple. If a theory is a systematic set of statements intended to explain some aspects of social life or enrich our sense of how people conduct and find meaning for

their daily lives (Rubin and Babbie, 2008), then a theory should help us make sense of and see patterns in diverse observations, and also help us direct our inquiry into those areas that seem more likely to show useful patterns and explanations (Rubin and Babbie, 2008). Although all the above mentioned theories are normative in their implications, the purposes for which they were intended (propounded), they should, at least, normatively exist as theories that are adequate for the task before them (Babbie, 2005).

Consequently, if a theory is found deficient in its explanation of a phenomenon (concept) then ipso facto, that phenomenon or concept stands incorrect, untrue or unacceptable. It is therefore against this background that the four dominant theories will be examined to see how their explanations (presentations) of the evolution and meaning of the state will be convincing and will in turn inform us of the proper use of the concept.

2. Theories of State

Natural Theory of State

The natural theory defines the state in philosophical terms, seen as an organic entity, an independent community, organized as government and governed and supreme within a defined geographical area. The theory explains the state as an evolving organism that develops naturally according to some inherent dynamic of growth (Rodee, Christol, Anderson, and Green, 1983).

The theory explains the state as society, organized as a sovereign political body, a natural phenomenon, superior to and more valuable than the individuals who are its citizens (Weldon, 1962). The natural theory conceives of the state as an integrated organism, set above individuals, a whole greater than its component parts (Goodwin, 1982). The best way to describe the state according to the theory is not to see it as man-made or a kind of machine but a living body, a biological kind of thing (Rodee, Christol, Anderson, and Green, 1983).

To Plato and Aristotle, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual since the whole is of necessity prior to the parts (Plato, 1970, Ebenstein, 1960). This is why Aristotle claims that the proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated is not self – sufficing and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole.

Aristotle also says that men are social beings by nature who gather together to form a community with the formal organization of the community being the state. Hence, to Aristotle, man is by nature a political animal (Aristotle, 1984). Consequently, the state becomes a precondition of man's achieving his rational end and is therefore logically prior to him.

Hegel says that the state is the march of God in the world” and therefore the state is an end in itself which has supreme authority over the individual. The state, again, according to Hegel, is the creator of morality and leaders are chosen by the indescribable forces of nature with the leaders not responsible to anyone (Leeds, 1975).

Thus society, conceived as a means to the realization of personal interest, is civil society whereas, conceived as a legal and moral order in which men acquired their interest and to which they grow attached is the state (Plamenatz, 1970). It is against this background that Hegel sees the state as having developed from and stood above the civil society. Although the state, to him, is higher than the community, it reconciles the individual and the civil society. In other words, when Hegel says the state he means the rationally organized community in which the unreflective ethical spirit has given way to the reflective and man has ceased to be the plaything of nature and instead has realized the life of the spirit (Sibley, 1970).

The natural theory of state, believes that the state has a single unifying interest on all matters, which should not be interpreted as an arrangement between different and conflicting interests of individual groups of classes (Weldon, 1962). To Aristotle, The state is a union of families and villages, having for its end, perfect and self sufficient life

(Cited in Malajan, 2008). Thus, as argued by Rousseau, in his concept of general will, Thomas Aquinas and his idea that personality is completed only in the community, to Mussolini who argued that the state is something greater than the sum of its parts, the state becomes natural outgrowth of man's most distinguishing qualities, namely, physical and intellectual. For Burke and Aristotle, the state is understood to be essential goods, enabling mankind to realize itself through the development of its highest qualities (Rodee, Christole, Anderson and Green, 1983). One other merit of the natural theory of state is that it represents an attempt to merge value and fact, the prescriptive with the descriptive study of political.

Divine Theory of the State

The divine theory of state deals with the community and the ruler. In the time of antiquity politics merged with religious beliefs but more significantly was the fact that there was no method of evolving sanction against the kingship than through the divine will. That was because the notion that the ruler was God's appointed agent on earth legitimated the king's power and made it unquestionable (Rodees, Christole, Anderson and Green, 1983). Consequently, the theory is based on an assumption that some people are God's chosen ones. The divine theory has two elements namely, **ontological** and **anthropomorphic**.

First, in explaining the existence and interrelationship between spiritual power and temporal power, early Christian theologians use the concept of divine origin of the state to their own advantage. The church fathers St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, and Gregory the Great, all said that spiritual and temporal powers were separate but that both came from God (Baradat, 1984). Also, to the church fathers, human society is divinely ordained to be governed by two authorities, the spiritual and the temporal. While the first authority is wielded by priest the other is wielded by secular rulers both in accordance with divine and natural laws. Herein lays the ontological explanation of the divine theory of state

The anthropomorphic attributes sees the state in terms of a community chosen to be led by a ruler appointed by God. This aspect of the theory seems to see the community and the king as one.

In contemporary African societies, where there are Kings, we find the most explicit concept of God as King and Ruler. The King is regarded in his capacity as King, Ruler, Lord Master and Judge. All these title indicate that all respect and honour must be done to Him and man's attitudes to Him must be humbleness and submissiveness (Mbiti, 1969). For example, the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria refer to their King as "*Iku Baba Yeye, Alase Igbakeji Orisa*" i.e. the person that has power of life and death, he, who is next to the Creator (God). The Barundi in Central Africa regard God as their supreme Ruler and Governor, the Baluba address God as the Great King who rules or reigns over all things. The Akan say that God is the ruler of the sky, earth and underworld. Indeed, in Africa, a king is a representative of God on earth and he symbolizes the community (Mbiti, 1969, Bodunrin, 1985).

Again, the idea of the state had featured in Islamic political thought, even though the Muslim, traditionally, rarely studies politics in isolation from related disciplines. Thus, problems such as the nature of the state, the varieties of government and the qualifications of rulers and their limitations used to be discussed as part of jurisprudence and theology. Such ideas were securely within the unassailable walls of the shariah (Enayat, 1982). And that is because Islam is not only a religion, but it is also a political, social, legal and economic order qualified to build institutions of a state (Rababa'a, 2012)

To (Mawdudi, 1972) the purpose of the Islamic state as the essence of Islamic political theory is built on the foundations of *twalid*, *risala*, and *khilafa* i.e. unity of God, the prophet-hood of Muhammad and the caliphate. Again, the holy Quran clearly explains that the aim and purpose of the state is the establishment, maintenance and development of those virtues which the creator wishes to enrich human life.

The state in Islam is not intended for political administration only, nor for the fulfillment through it of the collective will of any particular set of people, the state is expected to ensure that the qualities of purity, beauty, goodness, virtues, success and prosperity which God wants in the life of His people are provided. The Islamic state also abhors exploitation, injustice and disorder which in the sight of God are ruinous for the world (Mawdudi, 1976).

From the above, the natural theory helps to stabilize the political process, by providing a sense of group cohesion and collective purpose and that is probably because the divine theory, in particular, was propounded as a necessary arrangement because man was emerging from semi-civilized conditions and was not accustomed to obedience to a secular authority and therefore the doctrine of Divine origin of the state became a powerful factor in preserving order (Asiirvathau and Misra, 2008).

Perhaps the persuasive power of the theory is what makes it to survive till today. Thus, Morocco is still intact with a Monarch and Britain with a Queen. Even the Christians still cite the New Testament, Romans 13:16 where Christians are directed to subject themselves unto higher powers because the powers that be are ordained by God. And also in Luke 20:25, Jesus himself said that the Jews should give unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and this was probably because in John Chapter 1:1 it is said that in the beginning it was God and therefore whatever the emperors did was regarded as being God's will.

Critique of the Natural and Divine Theories of the State

The natural and divine theories of state were propounded at a period of man's deliberate efforts to order, direct, and control his collective affairs and activities; to set up ends for society, to implement and evaluate those ends (Sibley, 1970). It was a period when societies were mere collectivities of individuals and the need was recognized for a common value to engender a common bond especially as the frontiers of communal characteristics were being expanded. Thus, philosophers postulated the state in terms of a certain purpose, i.e. to describe the necessary and sufficient

characteristics of the ideal state, the good state or the perfect state (Nnoli, 1986).

However a critique of the theories can be done under three perspectives namely, that they are merely conjectural and speculative non-explanatory and non-predictory.

The theories see the state as a special entity, pure and beautiful. The state becomes the product of artistic imagination, arising from the assiduity of the concern for, not only a harmonious community but a community that will epitomize bliss, justice and happiness. Plato, for example, describes politics as an art and like a good artist, he tried to visualize a model of a community that will see the truth of what is beautiful, just and good. Karl Popper says that nowhere do we find aestheticism more strongly expressed than in Plato (Popper, 1966). Exponents of the theories are philosophical rationalists, who must be understood in the true sense of political mysticism (Nisbet, 1982)

Finally, the theories lack predictive capacity because they are not informed by history. They are not products of critical evaluations of the past but what just sprang from the minds of philosophers. The theories do not adequately explain the characteristics of the contemporary states such that, not only are we able to philosophize about them but are able to change them and use them to change man's life.

The natural and divine theories of state are also unsatisfactory because when it comes to the question of the proper ambit of the state authority or the right mix of private and public activities, no coherent set of principles have been produced (Barry, 1981). That also explains why it can be argued that the theories are metaphysical because the state is seen as a special thing' that represents the common good' or some other value which is qualitatively superior to those individual values (Barry, 1981).

To the early Greeks thinkers, the state was indistinguishable from society and that was because the identification of state with society was because of the circumstances, of the state at that time, when the city state

was so small that citizens knew one another personally and met together in common assemblies (Asirvathan and Misra, 2006).

However, the question of power, the position of the individual in society, particularly the concern for his freedom, the relationship between the state and society were not of prime importance in the theories and they were not explained. In other words how do we know the difference between the state, the community and the society?

It is clear that the theories merely tried to create models to describe what was on the minds scholars. But a model, according to Dye, must identify what is significant, provide meaningful communication, direct research and suggest explanations (Cited in Onyeoziri, 2005), which both natural and divine theories fail to do.

Therefore, both theories fail to provide a definition of state that will not equate society or community. In that case, whichever type of state is described by both theories will fall short in providing some clarity with regards to the meaning (definition) of the state.

The Social Contract Theory of the State

The social contract theory, by emphasizing the human nature makes it different from both the Natural and Divine theories. The central theme of the theory is that the ruler and the ruled agreed on their respective roles and had obligations to one and another. In other words the social contract theory was based on the concept of popular sovereignty in which the ultimate source of the power of the state was the people (Baradat, 1984).

The contract theory was formulated to take care of the problems of authority and individual freedom in society which are the master problems of politics (Unger, 1976). The contract theorists seem to recognize that although men are desiring beings, who are blind creatures, they are nevertheless capable of objectively understanding the world. So, they seek comfort, freedom, honour and power. But because of the objective scarcity of materials to meet those

things that men desire and because men cannot foresee what would happen to them in a free for all fight for the good things of life, the state is therefore needed to perform a crucial function of being the policeman on the concern whose very presence reminds citizens to keep their aggression (Rodee, Christol, Anderson and Green, 1983).

The theory embodies ideas which, as argued by (Bertrand Russell, 1949) try to see how we can combine that degree of individual initiative which is necessary for survival, taking into consideration human impulse

The state emerged, according to Gamble, as a public power that is both independent and secular; and instead of the state being identified with the royal household and regarded as part of the King's own possessions and domain; the state is now seen to exist independently of the King (Gamble, 1976). Locke argues that the contract creates the state which is a contract of individuals in the state of nature in order to regulate and protect the individual's natural rights, especially the right to property. And Rousseau argues that the state is a social order in which membership is a sacred right which in turn is the basis of all other rights (cited in Nnoli, 1986).

And also because politics is a battle, a constant struggle for power, it is only with the establishment of a sovereign authority that we can arrive at an objective rule of right and wrong (Minogue, 1985).

Thomas Hobbes is a believer in the absolutist idea because to him man's life in the state of nature is solitary, poor nasty brutish and short, and in such conditions there could neither be wrong nor right justice nor injustice. Men therefore contract with one another to leave the state of nature and enter the civil society where the equality in nature gives way to the subordination to the ruler. Thus, in Hobbes state of nature, only the strongest power can hold in check humanity's suicidal impulses.

With the social contract the state becomes something co-extensive with society but as a special form of organization within it (Weldon, 1962)

Critique of the Social Contract Theory

The critique of the social contract theory can be viewed from four perspectives. First, from epistemological point of view, second from its emphasis on individuals interest and not necessarily the interest of the society, third from its emphasis on freedom and order to that there will be a stable social order to enable the dominant class maintain domination and fourth its lack of attention on the relations of production especially the conflict between social classes in the process of social production.

From epistemological point of view, one can ask the question that when was the social contract negotiated? And again, once the government and the state are set in motion by the contract, how is it that subsequent generations are bound by the decisions of their predecessor? (Rodee, Christole, Anderson and Green, 1983) Consequently how often the contract should be reviewed? Must the contract be continually or periodically renegotiated? Or can we say that the contract is negotiated and sealed with continued residency in the states territory or voting at elections?

The contract theory can be interpreted to mean that citizens purposefully create the state because they expect to gain some advantage. It is therefore logical to argue that the contract makes the state a utilitarian phenomenon i.e. the state is based on citizens' judgment of what is useful to them at a point in the time, when the contract was negotiated. Will the citizens then have the right to destroy the state if they no longer find the state useful? Or, do citizens have the right to enter or leave the state at will?

Again another aspect of the epistemological puzzle of the theory is the question of whether the state arose as a result of a common aim or common purpose of all citizens. The contract therefore only implies that there exists within society a special piece of action machinery which is convenient to call the state (Weldon, 1962). The state becomes simply the exercise of compulsory organizing power by a selected body of individuals within the community. Again the theory fails to explain how those in authority achieve their position or how many they should be and more importantly the method of selecting them in the community.

The social contract emanated from the time of the enlightenment and it is no more than an ideology of domination when the dominant class began to see their class interest as being synonymous with the general interests of all. The contract is constructed, as argued by (Poggi, 1978) to favour and sustain, through its act of rule the class domination of the bourgeoisies over the society as a whole. For example, the state attached to all individuals, abstractly equal faculties to freely dispose their own resources especially their labour power. And the reason for this is that the capitalist mode of production requires labour power to be sold for wage through individual employment contracts. In fact, with the social contract theory of state, we cannot understand the modern state except that the state will be nothing but “population, government and geography”.

The contract theorists look at society only from the point of the view of production, distribution and consumption of things. Hence, they talk of social harmony and peaceful social order in order for material production to continue. They forget that what is crucial is the social relations and social organization that develop in the production of material things (Hansel, 1976). They seem to forget also that people cannot carry on social production without entering into definite relations of production and those relations of production cannot be maintained without the appropriate ideas and institutions (Comforth, 1962). At best, the social contract is a doctrine that directs attention to the place of consent in any system (Johari, 2007).

The social contract, at best, is an agreement between the rulers and their subjects, resulting in the institution of a particular government which, in no way, describes a state. A contract between the rulers and their subjects does not constitute a state; both the rulers and the subjects are already in the state before the contract was signed. The contract theory, therefore, interprets the explanation for the evolution of the state backwards (Asirranthan and Misra, 2008). And therefore cannot be accepted as proper description or definition of state. At best, the social contract is a doctrine that directs attention to the place of consent in any system (Johari, 2007).

Perhaps the contract theorists are not aware that the social classes that are created by the forces of production need to be maintained and kept in their respective domains. This is because the class that reaps the surplus from materials production has its *raison d'être* in the perpetuation of the social order.

In all, however, there is neither an existing model nor a theory between the natural, the divine and the social contract that captures and presents the state in a way that will not confuse the concept with other concepts, like society, community, government, institution, nation or country

Force Theory of the State

The force theory of the state to begin with, is devoid of the religious myth of the divine theory, the philosophical rationality and phenomenological appearance of the natural theory and also the metaphysical and romanticism of the social contract theory. The force theory appears to be a doctrine that has the subtlety of two bull elephants engaged in mortal combat (Rodee, Christole, Anderson and Green, 1983). The force theory does not see the state as the natural expression of the whole of an evolving society, nor a community chosen by God or an organized community based on contract but as the means by which a small number of people impose their will on a more reluctant majority.

The theory considers the emergence of the state in terms of events and actions that arise in the process of social production, unlike the way the contract theorists tie it to idealism, which explains the state and its formation in terms of the conscious efforts of the people to organize the community. This is because the historical development of the state had little to do with representative institution; rather, the state is something through which the will of the ruling class is imposed on the rest of the people (Burns, 1957).

Again, the theory believes that it is always a particular class which plays the leading part in establishing and then consolidating a given economic system and this particular class is able to do so because of its ownership of the means of production and its control, through the state. Thus, Marxists see the state, its powers, with its corresponding

ideology as what is established as guardian of property (Comforth, 1962). This is the theme of Marxism, as a paradigmatic scheme or as a scientific explanation for analyzing society, and in defining and formulating a theory of state.

With the force theory, the state ceases to be co-extensive with society and become more closely identified with what is called the ruling class (Weldon, 1962). The state in every social formation, functions as an ideological weapon in the fighting out of class conflicts and where also there is class struggle (conflict), there is need for a state (Lukais, 1991). And Drake (2010) believes that an outcome of progressive social evolution is the development of the modern state which is seen as the necessary complement of economic development. Thus, the state produces hegemonic ideology in terms of exercising a dominance of ideas in society.

Therefore, the two dimensions seem to be saying that in human affairs, force, not law, is what decides. Proponents of the first dimension are strictly concerned with ensuring political stability. Thus, Machiavelli seeks a Prince who knows how to put political unity in the place of an Italy that was fragmented by political division while Hobbes expounded his Leviathan because he was terrified by the consequences of the English civil war (Rodee, Christole, Anderson and Green, 1983). Therefore, to Hobbes, all the good things of life depend on security of life itself and if there is no government no state, no security. Hence, the power of the sovereign must be absolute and backed with force because man is ultimately ruled by their passions and these passions are poor guides to conduct (Weldon, 1962). The second dimension of the force theory is held by the Marxists who see the state as an instrument of the ruling class. To the Marxists, the state was not built on any contract neither can it be an organic unity but it is built on force and usurpation because society is an imbroglio of class conflict of which the state's very existence is symptomatic (Goodwin, 1982; Lukacs, 1991).

And therefore, the state becomes the best organized aggressor against the persons and property of the mass of the public (Rothbard, 2012).

Marx Weber argues that force is a means specific to the state and the state is a human community that claims that

monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. And that is because the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate violence. Thus Weber argues that if the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the power that be (Gerth and Mills, 1972)

However, both Hobbes and his group and the Marxists agree that there is dictatorship because while the first set of theorists favour an absolute monarchy, the Marxists aim at a dictatorship of the working class. But the two sets of theorists differ because the first deplures revolution against any *de facto* regime, while the second sets are revolutionaries. Again, the first set sees the state as being based on a rational decision of the governed while the second set regards the state as an instrument of oppression of the weak by the strong (Weldon, 1962).

It is most logical to see the force theory as one, from among the four theories examined, that best explains the concept of state, but that is in so far as the economically powerful group controls the means of production because without production in society, governance will be difficult if not impossible. It can therefore be argued that property owners created a force within the society, and the force became the instrument that is used for governance. For, without force, a country will not exist and governance will not be possible because there must be force to implement taxation, to ensure obedience to the law and for policy implementation.

However, the force theory, even though comes closest to explaining the concept of the state, it is difficult to accept that it was force that was responsible for the creation of the state. Rather, it is more logical to argue that the state was created by the dynamics of socio-economic production but maintained and sustained by force.

4. The State Interpreted

From the available theories of state, particularly about its evolution, emergence, description, definition and functions, confusion ensues, with regard to the specific meaning of the

state because scholars fail to differentiate the spirits of the state, people being together, from its basic characteristics (identifying it). And that is why contemporary scholars confuse the state with other concepts like society, community, nation, institution, government or country. Also, that is precisely why, when contemporary scholars discuss the state, it is in terms of a description like developmental state, failed state, state autonomy, state building but we must first understand what the state is and means, precisely because the concept of state has come to mean different things to different authors and theorists alike.

Thus, from all the theories so far examined, the state can be interpreted in the following ways.

- The State as society
- The state as community
- The state as nation
- The state as country
- The state as government
- The state as a group
- The state as institution

However, society is more of a large group of organized people(s). A community is more of a small group of people with non-complex interaction and more or less homogeneous people. A nation refers to a people with cultural, linguistic, and other identities that can tie people together (Hauss, 2009). A country is more of a territory of sovereign people. A government is a set of institutions and people, authorized by formal document, such as a constitution to pass laws and issue regulations (Hauss, 2009) and formulate policies. A group is a small set (collection) of people either volitional or ascribed (Srivasa fara, 2013). Also, an institution is an organized body of people with specific purpose and objectives.

Thus far, we can see that the above concepts (society, community, nation, country, government, group and institution) are different both in meaning and in their particular elements. Perhaps, these are products of the times at which periods the concepts responded to the arrays of ideas and dominant socio/political theories. For example, the state means both society and community when anthropologists and philosophers provided the theoretical thinking, and government and country during modern

theoretical thinking, while institution and group emerged with contemporary thinking. For example, the state in the ancient times meant the community (Plato and Aristotle) in modern political thought, it means an organ or an individual (the sovereign) (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau). Or social class (Marx) and in contemporary ideas, it means a group (Gramsci, Polansa, Milliband, Ake, Alavi).

In the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, the state equates a community. And both of them argue that the state is prior to the individual because men are social beings who gather in a community and the formalization of that community is the state. Thus, Aristotle describes the state as an association and says that every state is an association and while all associations aim at some good, that association which is the most sovereign among them all and embraces all others aim highest. That is the association we all call state (Saunders, 1981). Again, to Aristotle, the final association, formed of several villages, is the state and while the state came about as a means of securing life itself, it continues, in being, to secure the good life (Saunders, 1981).

Again, it appears like scholars add to the confusion with the way they define, describe and even interpret the state. For example, Ramaswamy, (2007) describes the state as an association like other associations in the sense that it is a union of human beings. And Johari (2012) describes the state as a synonym of the government and goes further to say that government is the soul of the state and it is government that protects the people against conditions of insecurity because a government maintains law and order and makes good life possible. In addition, he says that the state has its purpose limited to the maintenance of peace, order and security to the people. Thus, what is the distinction, between government that (maintains law and order) and the state that (maintains peace, order and security)? Also, (Gaubas, 2008) says that governments exercise all authority and functions on behalf of the state which makes government an essential element of the state. And to Laski (2007) the state is, for the purposes of practical administration, the government. Duguit, says that a state is a human society in which there exists a political differentiation, that is, differentiation between the government

and the governed (Cited in Mahajan, 2008), and only the state can guarantee social unity and collective purpose, and therefore state and society must be one (Mayhew, 1971). Even Giddens uses state and society interchangeably. For example, he says that “The traditional state was the only type of society in history, before the emergence of modern industrialism...” (Giddens 1993: 51). Again, Giddens (1993) argues that a state exists i.e. governmental institutions such as a court, parliament or congress, plus civil service officials, ruling over a given territory, whose authority is backed by a legal system and by the capacity to use force to implement its policies.

Johari (2012) says that the state is a human association, having four essential elements, population, territory, government and sovereignty. Johari may need to describe the elements of a country and also tell us what is meant by state-building. Is it those elements of state, population, territory, government and sovereignty that should be built or that are being built?

Mussolini, in describing the state, seems to combine the qualities (functions) of government and those of a nation, when he says the state is the guarantor of security both internal and external, but it is also the custodian and transmitter of the spirit of the people, as it has grown up through the centuries in language, in customs and in faith (cited in Smith, 1979). However, as we know, it is the government that provides both internal and external securities in society and the nation is the custodian and transmitter of the spirit (culture) of the people.

Mahajan (2008) says that the state possesses the power of coercion, and that if a person violates the law, that person is punished accordingly. However, it is the government (the legislature) that makes laws and enforces (the executive) the laws. It is also the government that deploys the means of physical violence and mobilizes the armed forces. Srivastava and Mukhi, (2007) argue that when we talk of state railways we mean government railways or by government school, we mean state school.

Describing the state as institution (Joharis, 2012), says that the state is a permanent institution which survives until its sovereign power is destroyed by the invasion of some other state. Also, the state, to Kukathan (2008) is an institution through which individuals and groups seek to exercise power and also the institution that exercises power over individual groups.

Thus far, we have seen how scholars use the state with the state taking the character of society, community, nation, government, institution or group. How do we now use the state in such a way that it will take its own form and will not be confused with any of the above concepts?

In political analysis/theory, of concept of state appears to be “something” that possesses authority, power, force, aims/objectives and interests. But society, community, nation, institution or groups can not possess all the above properties at the same time, when they all exist in the same society (country). It is only the government, legitimately constituted within a country that is equipped with authority, power and force (constitution).

Thus, a country uses government to function. And aside from chaos and anarchy that can “kill” a government in a country, a country will function normally with a government. Therefore, within the same geographical confine (territory), with population, government and sovereignty, the state and government cannot possess the same properties. How then do we describe the state in order to be able to define it?

From the above, i.e. the different ways by which scholars have described and defined the state, it is obvious that the state is made up of a “group of people” but who are the group of people and what do they do that gives them so much prominence in political theory? Based on the political prominence of this “group” they appear to possess, authority, power, force, aims/objectives, interests and some level of human consciousness. However, most of these elements, if not all, are usually enunciated in a constitution while the constitution is operated by the government. Thus, “the group” *imp so facto*, rationalizes some of those properties

(aims, objectives interests) and articulates them into what is known as constitution.

How is that done? A constitution is never the idea of everybody (citizen) in a country, but the product of a few individuals, who are selected to or who, on their own, draw up the constitution. Those that select the few individuals are the most prominent in (business, politics, professions, civil society) that makes up “the group”. Consequently, “the group” becomes very powerful and wields so much influence and, in fact, determines, directly or indirectly, the policy direction (interests) of the government and by implication, the country. The dominant group becomes the state and that is because government is constituted by the dominant group, either through electoral democracy or authoritarian rule. For, who organizes elections, by determining electoral laws, rules and conditions? That, then, answers the question, who rules? Although Robert Dahl will frame the question as “Who Governs?” Those that rule constitute the state and of course, it is not everybody that rules and therefore, everybody cannot be part or belong to the state. (the state as the dominant group) Thus, to Rothbard (2012), the state is constituted by the ruling elite i.e. the full time apparatus, the king, politicians, and the bureaucrats who man and operate the state and the groups who have maneuvered to gain privileges from the state.

However, the state is the dominant group of people that exercises power and authority, through the government.

However, “the group” may not be as united and cohesive as it has been simply explained, because most time they may be in factions and whenever they are not united, a faction becomes dominant and the government represents the dominant faction. Therefore a situation may arise when “the group” is unstable making it difficult for a united “group” to emerge but all the same “the group” exists in an amorphous form which makes it difficult for a government to be consistent with a policy direction (interest) as any faction of “the group” that emerges ensures that the government pursues its own policy direction (interest). Thus, the nature and character (conditions) of “the groups” determine the

nature and character (conditions) of the state. A sovereign country can therefore exist without a solid coherent and cohesive state which means that the country will face some crises of sort. Such as lack of coherent policy direction (interest) that will affect development efforts.

However, whenever the “dominant group” is referred to as the state, a clarification must be made and that is that the state and state structure must be separated for proper analysis. While the core of the state is the dominant economic group, state structure is made up of state agents. For example, while the generals in the armed forces, the inspector general of the police, the governor of central bank, the head of prisons service, the chief justice of the country and the country ambassadors do not belong to the core of the state, they occupy the state structure. This is in so far as they function to legitimize state hegemony (domination).

Fig. 1

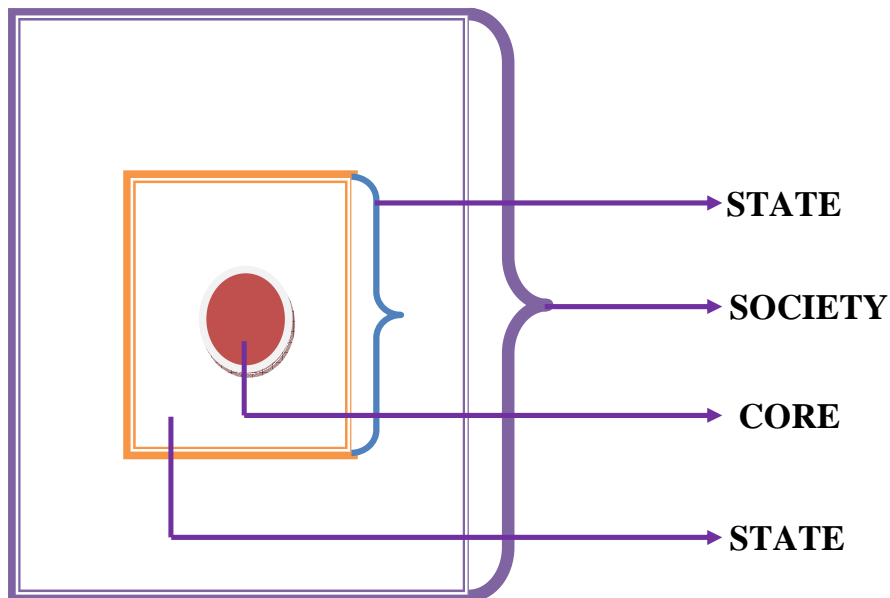


Figure 1: State and Society

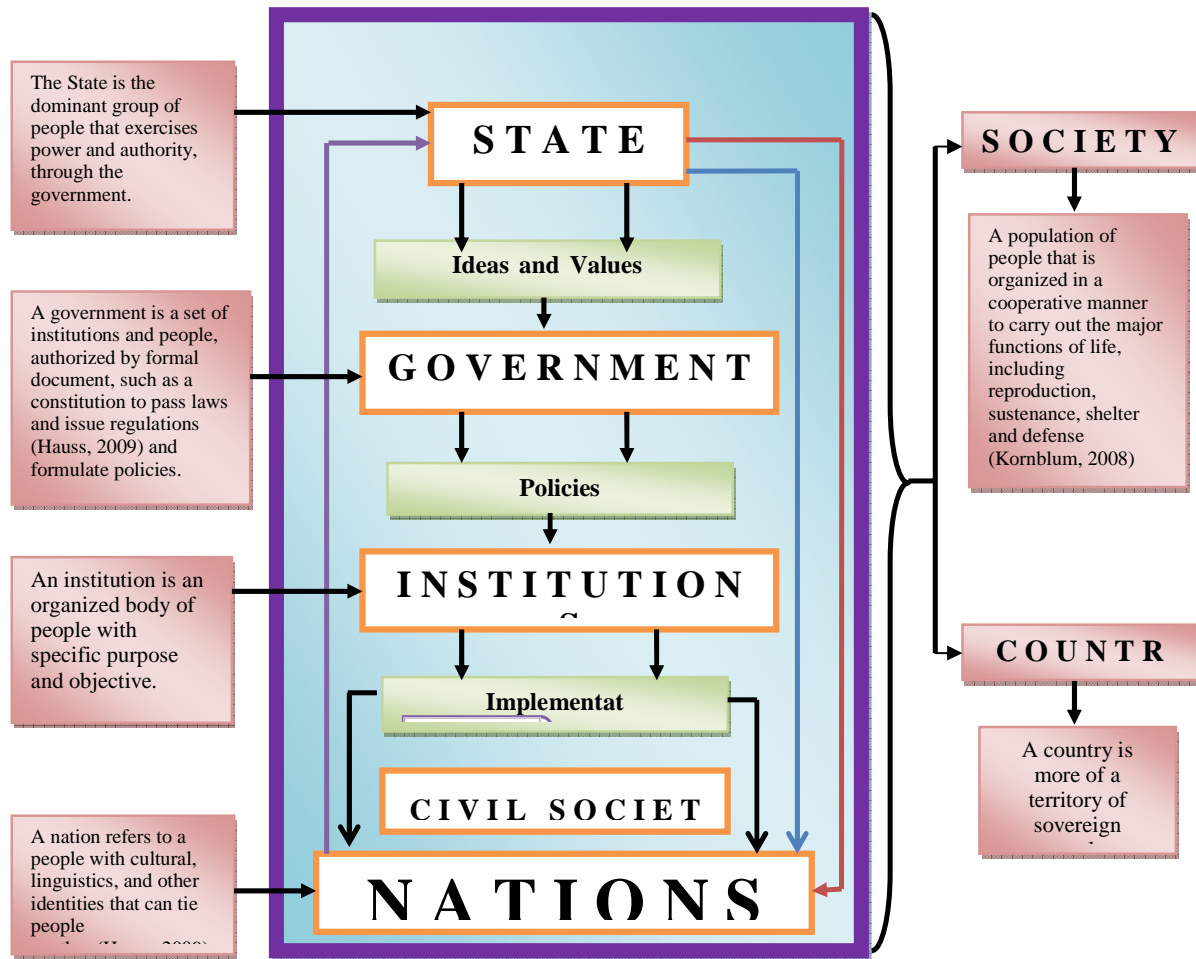


Fig. 2: The Composition of Modern Society/Country

From fig. 2, above, what the state does in society is to provide ideas and values which are the ideas and values of the dominant group and which is carried out through the activities and policies (functions) of the government. The policies of government are subsequently implemented by government agencies and the bureaucracy. Specifically, most countries/societies are composed of state, government, institutions, and nations, where the nations are their bed rocks and the state their power house.

However, the nations have influence on the state and vice-versa, but that of the state on the nations is much greater. The influence of the nations on the state is manifested in tribal pressures (demands) and of the state on the nations is manifested in hegemonic construction (order), provision of hegemony i.e. leadership and domination. So, where a state lacks the cohesion to enable it perform the above role (providing the hegemony i.e. the necessary ideas and values), then the nations become strong and the state is weak. This is why Marx says that the state need not represent the whole of a class but only of a section of that class (McClellan, 1994). In such a situation, the society is thrown into some rondo of crises (uncoordinated values, objectives and plans) because as many nations in the society will be operating without a common value. Thus, such a crisis like, factional struggle within the state will ensue, as a faction will want to capture the state and such a situation will engender anomic political culture because the different cultures of the nations will generate some entropy in the society. Also, such struggles will lead to uncoordinated direction (dominant class interest) which, in turn, will lead to crisis in development efforts.

The above theory, for example, explains the problem with African countries. For, the dominant group in African countries are not cohesive and are plagued by factional struggles for power, while the incohesiveness leads to uncoordinated efforts, hence crisis of development

5. Conclusion

Our endeavour in this paper is an attempt to examine the concept of state which is so vague in the ways scholars use it that it now means the following concepts, society, government, community, institution, country and a group of people, thus becoming too general to be specifically meaningful. Perhaps it is because of these ambiguities that Easton came to the conclusion that the word 'state' ought to be abandoned entirely (cited in Gauba, 2008).

However, this confusion may have been with political theory for a while, we believe that because the concept of state is now so central to political (theory) science, there is need to attempt a narrowing down the meaning so that it becomes more specifically meaningful and also becomes more apt in analyzing and explaining political issues.

Thus, we have seen how the state cannot possibly mean the same thing as society, community, government, institution, nation or a country. Consequently, the concept of state should not be used to refer to a country or a nation, as it is commonly being denoted.

From our analysis thus far, the following deductions can be made.

First, it will be more appropriate to see society, country, state, government, institution and nation as distinct concepts that exist in a society. Therefore, no one concept should be used to mean all the concepts or some of them, which usage will be determined by on the preference of the author.

Second, the state does not mean the country nor does it stand for the society, rather, it refers to the dominant group who exercise power and authority through the government. As a result, whenever we say Nigerian state, it does not stand for the country known as Nigeria. For, the Nigerian state refers to the dominant group and not the entire Nigerian society because a state does not represent the whole population. And Head of State will also refer to the head of the dominant group, if there can be one. It is therefore an anomaly to refer to Nigeria's political leader as Head of State.

Third, referring to a country as a nation will not be apt because however cooperative nations may be within country (sharing citizenship, anthem and flag) nations will still maintain their identities, uphold their cultures, speak their different languages and keep their traditional values. It is therefore a fallacy to assume that because all the peoples of Nigeria share the same constitution, speak English language

and have one president, Nigeria is a nation, because there is no Nigerian nation and there cannot be one.

Fourth, the concept of nation -state will be most appropriate as *multi-nations*. Thus, instead of saying Nigeria is a nation – state, it will be more apt to say that Nigeria is a multi-nations i.e. a country that is made up of many nations. Also, the United Nations Organizations should be *Global Union of Sovereign Countries (GUSC)* while the Commonwealth of Nations should be the *Commonwealth of Sovereign Countries*. And this is because if scholars are not to be sounding incoherent, the UNO is not made up of nations but sovereign countries. For example, the Yoruba in southwest Nigeria are a nation; the Igbo in eastern Nigeria are a nation but these nations are not represented in the UNO. And in all its material particular, Nigeria is certainly not a nation, how then should Nigeria be admitted into UNO and be referred to as a nation. If the UNO is for nations it should admit Yoruba nation, Igbo nation, Ijaw nation, otherwise the UNO is a forum of sovereign countries and its name should be so reflected.

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