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CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE STUDY OF POLITICS

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THE STUDY OF POLITICS**

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FOREWORD

The field of Political Science has been impacted upon by several developments that have been witnessed across the World especially reflective in the activities of what people have called professional politicians during campaigns and the actual governance. The repeated failure of politicians to play to the dictates of democratic practice has, no doubt, led people to ask; is the field of Political Science still necessary? This question is germane and touches on the essential stuff of Political Science. The level of frustration which citizen have on the concept of democracy and its practice across the globe have been the propelling force behind the question. For instance, in the available elementary books on government, certain desirable roles have been given to political parties and Nigerians have expected them to play these roles especially when the crusade for democracy peaked in the 1990s in Africa. Some decades after the return to democratic rule, the parties have remained the dark spots contributing less significantly to democratic consolidation. In most cases, they are averse to the rule-based environment that democracy preaches. Even within their own internal organizations, only scant attention is paid to the democratic tenets as dictatorial tendencies manifesting in the imposition of candidates, disobedience to rule of law, violent activities and perpetuation of all forms of electoral malpractice, among others, have been taking place with the active support of parties' leaderships. Also, when one talks about governance, there is also a disturbing trend manifesting in not following rule of law, rendering of inefficient services and the promotion of sectional and/or sectarian interests, all of which have combined to retard the march towards good governance. Based on these and other happenings, people have repeatedly asked; where are the Political Scientists? No doubt, Political Scientists are system people who are more concerned about how a political order performs to the expectations of the people derived from certain principles and laws that guide political actions/activities. For instance, Political Scientists are naturally interested in how a Federal System runs its affairs according to the basic tenets of federalism. Also, they are concerned about the process of election and how the conduct of stakeholders conforms to the laws and principles that have been outlined to guide the conduct of people in the processes. While one would want to argue that a clear demarcation line should exist between Political Scientists and the active political actors

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CONCEPT, FUNCTIONS AND THEORIES OF THE STATE

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The concept of state is a key term in the discipline of political science and it is central to the discussion of other concepts in the field. This is why Laski (1926) is of the view that the study of politics concerns itself with the life of men in relation to the organized state. The study of politics can therefore be regarded as the study of the state. The centrality of the concept attracts keen and controversial debate among scholars in the field as to what is the rationale behind the establishment of the term state. Laski (1926) observes: "The modern state, is territorial security, divided into government and subjects, claiming within its allotted physical area, supremacy over all other institutions". Chris (2008: 56) postulates "state as a politically organized body of people inhabiting a defined geographical entity with an organized legitimate government".

State is a group of people, membership of people, population of people or a political community that occupies a definite or demarcated territory, with a group of people charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order, and in which sovereignty is to be accorded to this group of people in order to prevent both internal and external aggression. "The State is a people organized by law within a definite territory" (Anut, 1996). Anifowose (1999) observes "state as the most inclusive organization which has formal institution for regulating the most significant external relationship of the men within its scope".

State is very central to the discipline of political science. It serves as the unit of analysis at both domestic and international level. Without State, the world will be in a chaotic situation. Aristotle, once observes "He who is unable to live in a state or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or god". State is very central to the maintenance of both domestic and international peace and security. The maintenance of peace and security, political and economic developments and prevention of internal and external aggression rest on the unit called state.

Essentially, except there is establishment of recognized state, power and authority will not be possible to be exercised. The perpetual use of force or ability to force others to behave in a specified manner and ensure commandment of obedience all rest with the State. Anut (1996: 114) observes that:

The state, all the same remains the central subject of the study of Political Science as the whole mechanism of Government emerges from and revolves around this entity. The need for government arises because this had been and there is need for the state. The need for the state is deeply embedded in the compelling necessities of human life and the advantages accruing from dwelling together on a defined territory and sharing benefits of political life.

Features of the State

Basically, there are four basic features of State which includes Government, defined or definite territory, population and sovereignty. However, in the contemporary, additional two features have been identified- universality of the state jurisdiction and compulsory nature of law of the state. The features of state are, therefore, listed thus:

- i. Government
- ii. Population
- iii. Definite Territory
- iv. Sovereignty
- v. Compulsory nature of law of state
- vi. Universality of the state jurisdiction

i. Government

Government is the most powerful and central machinery of state. It consists of few members of state who are charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order. These groups of people are either directly or

indirectly elected by members of a given state. Government is the most principal instrument used by the state to discharge constitutional responsibilities. Chris (2008: 67) further observes "government as a machinery established by the state to organize the state, manage its affairs and administer its functions and duties". It is the machinery through which the wills of the state are carried out. There is no universal model of organizing government, in some states, the responsibility of this organ of state is shared among three arms of government while in some, the task of government is fused in two arms. Notwithstanding, government anywhere in the world performs her task of state stewardship. Therefore, countries such as Nigeria, United State of America, Liberia and others practice separation of powers which involves separate Executive, Judiciary and Legislative arms, performing distinct governmental functions.

ii. Population

This attribute of state is also necessary for the sustenance of state. Population of state is a group of people, membership of people or association of people who occupy the territory of the state. This also comprises of all categories of people living in a state and this may include the poor masses, the rich people, the bourgeois and the proletarians. Population of state is always heterogeneous in nature and this implies that different ethnic groups and nationalities may occupy a state. Population is the nucleus of state and without it there is no state. However, it should be noted that there is no limit to the population of a state and that is why Tuvalu, for example, with just 11,323 inhabitants is regarded as a state the same way China with population of over 1.3 billion is regarded.

iii. Defined Territory

State must occupy a geographically delimited or demarcated territory. A state territory must be clearly shown on a map with neighboring territories and unambiguously demarcated. It is very important for a state to clearly delimit her territory in order to be able to prevent external aggression and avoid border dispute among others. In a way delimitation of territory of states in the world system has also enabled actors in international system to maintain relative peace and order.

iv. Sovereignty

Sovereignty is the absolute and supreme power of state to prevent both

internal and external aggression. The term sovereignty is derived from Latin word "*supremus*" which means supreme. Bodin defines it as the "supreme power over citizens and subjects, unrestrained by law". Hugo Grotius defines it as "the supreme political power vested in him whose acts are not subject to any other and whose will cannot be overriden". Duguit says that sovereignty is the "commanding power of the state, it is the will of the nation organized in the state. It is the right to give unconditional powers to all individual subjects and all over associations of subject". Sovereignty distinguishes state from other political entities so no other entities such as nation or society possesses sovereignty. State's sovereignty is permanent, exclusive, indivisible and all encompassing.

Sovereignty is not a law; it commands law, the subjects and every other institution within the state. It is the supreme, absolute and final power of state regarding the direction of affairs of state. Depending on the system of government adopted by the state, sovereignty always resides with executive who commands the Armed forces. However, in the recent time, we talk about *de facto* and *de jure* sovereignty, titular sovereignty, legal sovereignty, political sovereignty and popular sovereignty. These nomenclature notwithstanding, state alone possesses sovereignty in real sense.

V. Compulsory Nature of Law of State

The law of the state must also be compulsory in nature and irrespective of the status of the citizens the law must be enforced. Law of the state is blind, it has no regards for either rich or poor, and it must be respected by all (citizens and foreigners). Disobedience to the law(s) of the state must be met with serious sanctions.

Universality of the State Jurisdiction

The jurisdiction of the state must also be universal in nature. Once a state is established, its jurisdiction must encompass all her territorial areas and the state must be ready to enforce her law in all her jurisdiction. The jurisdiction of the state covers the air, the sea, and the land that fall within her territory and intruders must either be permitted legally or punished for intruding. It is because of this universality of the state jurisdiction that state establishes the Army, Air Force, Navy and Immigration service in order to enforce her laws and protect it in all spheres. For instance, the Navy is established by Nigeria Government to enforce Nigeria laws on all the seas within her territory. In the same manner, the establishment of Immigration and Custom Services is also

to enforce law within her land and sea jurisdictions.

FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE

The state, as noted earlier, is an embodiment of society and political community; it is the nexus at which the survival of human existence and sustenance are connected. Nobody, including human beings and animals can survive without the regulatory role of the state. Aristotle, one of the foremost philosophers in politics, once observes that, every human being is a political animal irrespective whether he plays active politics or not. This is because his activities are controlled by the state either directly or indirectly. The citizen is nothing except as a member of the state and his whole existence depends on and subjects to the state. The state is supreme and there is no limit to the spheres and functions of the state.

Laski cited in Chris (2008: 56) observes:

The government is the trustees and governors and it is their business to glean the needs of the society and to translate those needs into terms of effective status. The purpose of the state finds its personification in them

The purpose of the State is the ultimate goal for which it exists and it is two-fold; the promotion of individual welfare and the realization of the collective ends of the society. The state is omnipotent and its activities or functions are all encompassing. The State is a means to an end and an end itself. As a means, every citizen must cooperate with the state to achieve their aims and as an end, the State is to create conditions that are conducive for possible development and creative self-expression of its members. Whatever functions the State undertakes and whatever actions of Government thereof, it must be proved that it enables the citizens to realize the best in themselves and it helps ultimately the promotion of happiness and spiritual uplift. Principally, the functions of the State can be grouped into two major headings:

- i. Maintenance of Law and Order
- ii. Provision of Developmental Capacities.

I. Maintenance of Law and Order

Irrespective of the system of Government adopted by any country, be it presidential or parliamentary, Federal or Confederal system, liberal, capitalist or dictatorship State, the main reasons and foremost functions performed by the State is the establishment and maintenance of law and order. In this modern times, State establishes rules and guidelines embodied in the constitution which every citizen strives to preserve. Nigeria is operating amended 1999 constitution which encompasses functions of the three arms of government, duties and rights of both the government and the citizens. It is compulsory for government to include in its constitution provisions that will protect lives and properties of the citizens and the citizens are also expected to be law abiding. In essence, these functions include, guarantee of fundamental human right of citizens, protection of the weak against the strong and preservation of equality of all citizen before the law. For law and order to be maintained in a state, it requires putting in place some enforcement mechanisms. This is why government in every state puts in place law enforcement agencies like the Army and Navy. We also have others like the Police, Custom and Immigration Services. Also, in order to ensure enforcement of the laws of the state, state must put in place an independent and unbiased judicial system where erring members of the state will be tried and sanctioned.

II. Provisions of Developmental Capacities

Apart from maintenance of law and peace, it is also fundamental to the state to provide a conducive environment for the citizens to achieve their private objectives. These developmental capacities include creation of physical and economic environment such as provision of shelter, good road network, hospitals, infrastructural development and access to education by all citizens. Whether the State is a socialist, welfare state, capitalist or bourgeois State, it is paramount to the State to make these provisions available to the citizens in order to guarantee peaceful coexistence. In order to achieve this, the State should be a direct agent of economic life of the community by putting in place economic policies that will ensure that the wealth of the nation is distributed in such a manner that few people will not be in control of it. It is in this manner that peace, tranquility, and development could be guaranteed. This welfareism function is what the utilitarian school of thought which Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mills are exponents, of bear in mind when they argue that state exist mainly to provide "greater happiness for the greater number of people".

The Theories on the origin and Essence of State

There was curiosity among political philosophers and scholars in the discipline of Political Science about the origin of state and what rationale inform the establishment of the union called State. Before now, Anthropologists, Ethnologists and researchers have provided answers to these questions but none is unilaterally suffice to provide adequate scientific explanation to the essence of state.

However, attempts have been made to examine some of the theories postulated by theorists in the past on the origin and essence of the state. This includes:

- 1) The Theory of Social Contract
- 2) The Theory of Force
- 3) Organic Theory of State
- 4) The Divine theory

Though some of these theories are speculative and rejected, they contain some elements of truth and tips for understanding the realm of the past. Also, they help to find out how and why the state came into existence.

Social Contract Theory

This theory makes a profound impact on the rationale behind the establishment of State. Though fictitious, the theory, it makes major inroads on what is State and relationship between State and citizens. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679); John Locke (1632-1704); and John Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) the two British Political philosophers and Rousseau, a French contributed immensely to the development of this theory. While Thomas Hobbes was mainly influenced by the chaos that characterized the reign of King Charles I of Britain, John Locke was on the other hand, influenced by the tyrannical reign of King Charles II. Writing on the state of nature, Thomas Hobbes avers that except citizens surrender their inalienable rights to the authority irrevocably if not the society will live in 'a state of nature' where life is short, brutish, nasty and where there is no account of time nor navigation. According to this theorist, human beings are selfish, quarrelsome, self-seeking, cunning, brutal, covetous and aggressive. Therefore, to avert such state of nature, they must surrender to the monarchy in an absolute manner.

The Theory of Force

The theory of force is another fallacious theory used to illustrate how State came into being. The explanation given by this theory was that State was created historically by conquest, war, and force, with the strongest men or state conquering the weak men or state thereby establishing their authority. According to theorists in this realm, the occupation and counter occupation of States and the subsequent establishment of authority over these territories were as a result of conquest or force. The theory of Force, therefore, traces the origin and development of the State to conquest and justifies its authority by the proposition that might is right. The theory, has thus, four implications. First, force is not a historical factor but it is the present essential feature of the State; secondly, the States were born of force only; thirdly, power is their jurisdiction and *raison d'être* and, finally, the maintenance and extension of power within and without is the sole aim of the State.

The Organic Theory of State

The organic theory of state sees the establishment and functions of the State as a product of complex organization and units within the organization which works together in a mechanical form. The theorists of the organic theory advanced the reasons for the establishment of the State that is was born out of the inability of individuals to achieve their aims without collaborating or cooperating with other individuals or groups of individuals. This theory is also relevant to the evolution of State and offers a useful explanation on interdependence among units of government, institutions and citizens in order to achieve peaceful coexistence by both individual and State developments objectives.

The Divine Theory

This is the oldest of all the theories of state. Theorists of the divine theory were of the view that state came into being through the ordinance of God. That is, God established and governed the state directly by Himself or through some rulers who were regarded as agents or vice-regent of God. The divine theory was of the view that there was once a period of anarchy. On this basis, God deliberately created His grace to save mankind from destruction. It was under these circumstances, according to the theory, that God appointed the king to rule over the people. As a result of this, kings began to justify their ruler-ship over their subjects for being ordained by God. The theory was used to support the absolutism of James I of England. James I,

like other kings of his era, ruled without being accountable to his people.

Conclusion

State is not only very central to discussion in political science given the fact that every other concept in the discipline revolves round it. However scholars have attempted to define the concept in a manner to demonstrate its importance not only within the state context but also in international politics. There are various perspectives or theories that try to establish and justify the reasons, though they are not sufficed for the justification of its establishment but they have gone a long way in shaping the knowledge of the concept.

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