



## **THE THEORIES OF THE STATE: DIVERSE PERSPECTIVE**

**DAMISAH MARYANN OMOKHEFUE (MRS)**

*Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, School of  
General Studies, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study ascertains the diverse perspective of the theories of the state. The State, acting through its agent; government, is an association specifically created to pursue those ends that will promote the temporal well being or interests of its members. Diverse schools of thought were developed to effectively comprehend the concept of theory of state, amongst which are; power, freedom and equality, law and justice and liberty and right. There are three purposes for which the State exists to include the duty to protect society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; the duty to protect subjects from injustice, by establishing a system of justice; and the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and institutions that will cater for the well being of the subjects. The study concludes that, for the State to continuously exist to exploit the exploited, the State sometimes enjoys some form of relative autonomy and assumes responsibility to provide for the wellbeing of the masses. There is need to recommend, therefore, that the chief and basic end of the State and politics in Nigeria and other Third World countries should be focused on the basic needs of the citizenry, in which the desire to provide infrastructural facilities like pipe-borne water supply; good, quality and durable roads network. Also, the State in Nigeria must therefore operate a rule or an ideology with which to tackle its concrete operational responsibilities.*

**Keywords:** *Politics, theory, theories diverse, perspective, the state*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Political thinkers have, up to the first half of Twentieth Century, principally shown concerns in the phenomenon of the State, its evolution, organization and purpose (Vermani, 2005). Several political writers and schools of thought have developed ideas about the nature and purpose of the State according to different points of view. Thus, as pointed out by Gauba (2003), “when new ideas appeared, old ideas were criticized or modified”. In the realm of political philosophy, unlike the natural sciences (such as Physics,

Chemistry and Biology), it is not necessary that old ideas be dead before the new ideas become acceptable because the old and new principles of political theory exist simultaneously, claiming their rightful place. None of the theories can therefore claim absolute authority or validity over another, hence, their merits and demerits need constant examination before arriving at any consistent conclusions.

According to Gauba (2003), an acquaintance with the diverse theories and perspectives on the State would equip one with valuable insights for dealing with public affairs in any society. It is in this direction that this Paper carefully examines the theories of the State in their diverse perspectives with a view to linking them (the theories of the State) with the practical reality in the Nigerian variant of State and politics. This, of course, is aimed at equipping us with valuable insights for dealing with public affairs in the Nigerian State and politics.

The State, acting through its agent; government, is an association specifically created to pursue those ends that will promote the temporal well being or interests of its members. When there is clear evidence that a State is doing its duty... when its actions are in accordance with its purposes, it can always reckon on the willing cooperation and voluntary obedience to laws by its citizens

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research work explores primary and secondary sources of materials in simple random which implies the issues of the theories of the state: discusses perspective, data from textbooks, journals, newspaper, magazine, internet and libraries were made use of.

## **SCHOOL OF THOUGHT ON THE NATURE OF THE STATE**

There is no single universally acceptable definition of the State. Scholars from the two major ideological strands of Liberalism and Marxism have neither agreed on a universal definition of the concept of State. Even within these major conceptions (Liberalism and Marxism), different authors perceive the State not exactly as the other (Shaapera, 2009). Liberal theorizing on the State, as a concept, contends that the State is a political organization of human society that comprises organized attributes of contemporary institutions like the legislature, executive and judiciary, with

respective roles. These are governmental institutions that make and enforce laws that are binding upon the people within a defined geographical territory. Marx initially buttressed that the State is an embodiment of law and freedom; that the State represents the general view of the society. The point of departure from the Liberal theorizing on the State occurred when Marx and Engels jointly expressed in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” that “the executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”, mostly at the expense of the poor.

For Milibrand and Saville (1965), both the economic and political powers of the State are merely the organized power of one class for the oppression of another. The State is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Thus, the capitalist State as where the means of production and other things exist in the private ownership, where both the working class and the peasants are into all or complete subjugation by the propertied class. Meanwhile, the idea of “democracy”, universal suffrage, parliament, elections, policy measures, the fight for national unity and security, etc, are only presented or constituted in a disguise and invariably do not alter an iota of the essential character of the State in being oriented, controlled and directed by the ruling class, purposely used to dominate the other classes in the State.

## **POWER**

For the Marxian Scholars, therefore, the development of the productive forces in the capitalist society produced surplus value and thus the appropriation of property for private use that necessitated the constitution of the State. It is this State that, Marxist Scholars argue, becomes an instrument in the hands of the powerful dominant class for accumulation and exploitation of the dominated members of the society. This kind of State, Fadahunsi (1988) argue, is an organ of exploitation and is not capable of pursuing policies, or invariably politics, that would promote the interest of all. According to Alavi (1979), because of the absence of a fully developed indigenous class, the State (mostly in under-developed economies) has largely remained an instrument of the ruling class in the promotion of capitalist accumulation under the pretext of national development. Public policy is thus determined by International Finance Capital, using the local bourgeoisie in its formulation and implementation in the national economy

## **AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY**

These laws, rules or regulations determinethe basis of the supreme authority in the land. The origin of the authority of State is traced to Marchiavelli who expressed the idea as “the Power which has authority over men”. Marx Webber captures the State, further, as “that authority which gives order to

all but receives from none”. It is the State, therefore, that provides the structures through which people and resources in a society are organized and policy and priorities established.

The foregoing arguments show, from the liberal point of view, that the State has a central role to play in any economy. The operational capacity of the State in an economy, for liberal scholars like Smith (1937), Dahl (1965) and others, depends on the skills and loyalty of the citizens and the revenue available to the system. Liberal scholarship therefore sees the State as an institution for orderly progress of the society and an embodiment of justice for all, not just for a few (Bourgeois class). Liberal scholars regard the State as a neutral arbiter in the contending social classes in the society. This, is obviously to curtail the situation described by Hobbes’ “State of Nature”, where the strong prevailed over the weak in a society and most often caused societal anarchy. Man sought to overcome this near anarchy situation of life by seeking security and self preservation of life through the establishment of social contract, which is the State.

### **FREEDOM AND EQUALITY**

Nevertheless, the classical Marxists equally admit that the State sometimes enjoys relative autonomy and becomes “independent” from and superior to all social classes as the dominant force in the society rather than instrument of the dominant class. This view (relative autonomy nature of the State), therefore, the State is a complete embodiment of the general interests of the whole society as the State stands over and above particular vested interests and consequently appears „independent“, neutral or autonomous of the ruling class.

### **LAW AND JUSTICE**

The question, however, is as to how autonomous or free is the State in choosing its policies in a class-divided society with already established vested economic, political, ethnic, religious and social interests which are completely interrelated and interconnected? It is this problematic of the ambiguity in the relative autonomy of modern States that some scholars of Political Economy (Abbass, 1990) suggest aprior understanding of what the crucial functions of the State apparatuses or structures are meant to serve and are capable of maintaining in the delicate and contradictory balances of political, social and economic relations. For other Political Economists like

Dunmoye (2012), the operational process of the State anywhere can only be understood from the Ideology of a State which is expressed in form of rule and authority that find formal operation in the Constitution and jurisprudence of the State. The State Ideology (Rule and Authority) thus points to why the State (such as Nigeria) behaves the way it does in governance, politics, law-making or policy formulations and implementation, etc.

### **LIBERTY AND RIGHT**

The social contract theory of the origin of the State implies that men, at a time in history, lived or would have lived without any recognized civil law (ie without the State). This stage or life-pattern of men (when they lived without any form of organized civil law) is described as the „state of nature“. The state of nature denotes how men lived or would have lived without the authority of civil law, State or political control. At this stage, there is no industry and no systemic production. Men lived not only close to nature but they had to depend on the bounty of nature for their survival.

It should be noted however, that even the social contract theorists themselves have not agreed on how the State came to be from their different analysis of life in the state of nature and what they differently perceived was the state of nature“. They commonly agreed that the State was a social contract after an unsatisfactory experience in the state of nature. For instance, Thomas Hobbes viewed the contract as being between the people and the constituted authority (State) while Locke says such a contract is “of all with all” but not a contract with government or state. Rousseau supported Locke in this way and emphasized that the contract is designed to provide “collective security”. Life in the “state of nature“, to Hobbes, is a general disposition to war “of every man against every man”, leading to perpetual fear and strife which consequently makes life in Hobbesian “state of nature” to be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”. On the other hand, Lockean “state of nature” is moral and social in character. In it, men have rights and acknowledge duties, just that life in the state of nature (for Locke) is not satisfactory as peace is constantly upset by the corruption and viciousness of degenerate men, which Locke says plagues the „state of nature“ by lack of an established settled down law, lack of known and indifferent judge, and the lack of an executive power to enforce just decisions. These, Locke argued, necessitated the

formation of a civil society (the State) devoid of the evils and hence the social contract.

For Rousseau too, the State is the result of a contract entered into by men who originally lived in a „state of nature“. However, Rousseau emphasizes that there was only one contract called the „social pact“ to which government or the State itself was not a party. Individuals surrendered all their rights to the community and therefore, after making the contract, may have only such rights as are allowed to them by the General Will (i.e. Law). Nevertheless, the arguments of the social contract origin of the State have been criticized of being ahistorical by not taking cognizance of history and chronology of events in human lives. The social contract theorists“ arguments of life in the state of nature is therefore criticized of being too idealistic, Utopia and hence unrealistic as history does not tell us when such a social contract itself took place in human existence as well as the epoch of the state of nature.

### **THE PURPOSES OR FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE**

The purpose or end of the State has been a subject of endless debate among political philosophers. The question of what purposes does the State exist to serve has been asked many times in every age since human existence; and as Anifowose (1999) rightly concurs, “it is indeed the fundamental question of politics” which seeks to examine whether the State should do certain things or refrain from them. Different answers have been proposed by individuals and groups according to their interests.

For Aristotle, in Anifowose (1999), the purpose of the State is „to ensure good life“, while Locke postulates that „the great and chief end of men uniting into common wealth and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property“ which is expressed as lives, liberties and estates.

There are three purposes for which the State exists to include the duty to protect society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; the duty to protect subjects from injustice, by establishing a system of justice; and the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and institutions that will cater for the well being of the subjects.

The essence of the State is connotative of the centrality of the State in improving the lives of the generality of the masses in a society under its control. The State is nothing but a natural institution for preventing one man from infringing the rights of another.

For Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, the best known exponents of the Utilitarian school of thought, the purpose of the State is to provide the greatest happiness to the greatest number of individuals under its jurisdiction. Similarly, Harold Laski, like John Locke, Adams Smith and Spencer, in Anifowose (1999), expresses that the State is not an end itself but merely the means to an end. The State, thus, exists to enable the mass of men to realize social good on the largest possible scale. It exists to enable men to, at least, realize the best in themselves. Therefore, men can be enabled to realize the best in themselves only if the State provides rights, such as the right to work, right to education, right to basic freedoms of speech, press, association and religion; the right to vote and be voted for, etc. The service functions of the State, according to Anofowose (1999), include those activities of the State conducive to the attainment of general welfare or other ends of the State. He acknowledges that it is sometimes difficult to determine the exact boundary between these service and essential functions. However, service functions, he further explains, include many activities which might not exist at all, unless the State undertakes them.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is difficult to do away with the State as a concept in the study of politics. Political theorists are usually concerned with “what constitutes the end of the State”, which is the basis of moral philosophy. The foregoing theoretical extrapolations in this study revealed that the emergence and chief end of the State is to ensure “good life” for a generality of members of the society. Unfortunately, the State, in concrete terms, is often seen, in most cases and in most post-colonial African societies (such as Niigeria), as an instrument in the hands of a privileged few who perpetually dominate, exploit and subjugate the dominated majority of the citizenry. The State, thus, serves the interests of a particular vested class structure rather than the generality of the masses.

Nevertheless, it has also been found that for the State to continuously exist to exploit the exploited, the State sometimes enjoys some form of relative autonomy and assumes responsibility to provide for the wellbeing of the masses. In the third world economies, however, because of their under-developed nature, the State possesses some characteristics that make it to be weak and thus operates under a metropolitan patronage of International Capital; consequently, the State lacks the relative autonomy for auto centric economic development.

In Nigeria, in particular, the State has continued to inherit public policies for national development from the International Capital and thus continues to deny its citizens the right to basic amenities of life for socio-economic development. The Nigerian variant of State is therefore incapable and hence incapacitated in ensuring “good life” for its citizens as the chief end of the State.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is need to recommend, therefore, that the chief and basic end of the State and politics in Nigeria and other Third World countries should be focused on the basic needs of the citizenry, in which the desire to provide infrastructural facilities like pipe-borne water supply; good, quality and durable roads network; constant and regular electricity supply; adequate, quality and affordable housing facilities, quality and affordable health care delivery services and improved access to quality and affordable educational services, etc, should be the chief concerns of the State (Nigeria) in concrete terms.

The State in Nigeria must therefore operate a rule or an ideology with which to tackle its concrete operational responsibilities.

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