

**SELECTED THEMES  
IN ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**FOR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

Edited By:  
Okonkwo S.n

---

**Chapter FIFTEEN**  
**Defining State and Nation as Geographical Entities**  
**by**

**Eboh, R. N., Egbule, P.O. and Olori .O .**

**Introduction**

A clear grasp of the terms, state and nation are necessary, since these terms are used on daily discourse. A state is an organization having formal institutions for regulating the most significant external relationships of men within its scope (Okonkwo 2004). Nation may refer to a large group of people who share a common language, culture, ethnicity, descent or history. Nation can refer to “a group of people, race or tribe; those having the same descent, language and history.” Webster's New Encyclopedia Dictionary defines nation as “a community of people composed of one or more nationalities with its own territory and government” and also as “a tribe or federation of tribes (as of American Indians)”. Nation carries varying meanings, and the connotation of the term has changed over time. A nation may be considered as a group of people with the same language, culture, and history who live in a particular area under one government.

**Instructional Objectives**

At the end of the chapter, the student should be able to:

1. Define the term “state”
2. Explain the characteristics of a state
3. Explain the functions of a state
4. Define the term “Nation”
5. List and explain the features of a nation

**The Concept of State**

Essentially, the term “State” has been described in various ways by different political philosophers and academics. Johnson (2003) defines state as a politically organized body of people

occupying a definite geographical territory with an organized government entirely free from external control and with coercive power to secure obedience from its citizens and others. Dibia (2007) sees state as a politically organized body of people inhabiting a defined geographical entity with an organized legitimate government. The state in this respect is free from external control. The power of a state is also guaranteed with coercive power to secure obedience from the citizens. Nigeria, Ghana, Benin Republic, U.S.A, Canada are good example of states. Oyeleye (2009) defines state as a politically organized body of people occupying definite geographical territory with an organized government. Such body of people should be free from external control and backed with the power and authority to enforce decisions and compel obedience from the citizens.

A state, therefore, is a community of people living permanently on a defined territory and who have a common independent government. It, therefore, means that such community of people has power and authority to enforce decisions on their members but they are free from external control. Conclusively, a state is seen as a political community of people who have a common government with a definite territorial demarcation or boundary, whose members have willingly agreed to come together for their common advantage and general wellbeing.

### **Characteristics of a State**

According to Anyaele (2003), the above definitions of a state possess the following characteristics or features:

1. **Population:** One major attribute of a state is population. For a state to exist there must be a given number of people which has no minimum or maximum that will occupy it.
2. **A Defined Territory:** A state must have a defined territory

---

with a limit to its size. It must have clearly defined boundaries separating it from others.

3. **Government:** A state must have machinery called government that will steer its affairs. Government performs its functions on behalf of the state. The existence and survival of a state are maintained by the government.
4. **Sovereignty:** A state must have the supreme power to enable it make and enforce laws. Such a sovereign state must be free from external control.
5. **Recognition:** A state must be recognized both internally and externally. The people of a state must realize and recognize the corporate existence of their state.
6. **Permanence:** A state is relatively permanent. Unlike government which is changed periodically, a state does not change. It is permanent.
7. **Nationalism:** Nationalism may be defined as an awareness by people who share common interest or heritage that they belong to a nation-state. Such awareness usually arouses in the people the desire to be free from foreign rule or domination. Every citizen of a state is expected to be loyal to the state. Loyalty to the state involve political attachment to, identification with, and allegiance to the state. A citizen is usually expected to show love for the state, and be proud of the state at all time.

#### **Functions of a State -**

Oyeleye (2009) provides the following as the functions of the state;

1. The state must protect the individuals against foreign invasion and domestic violence.
2. The state must suppress crime, and if possible eliminate criminals within the society.

3. The state must maintain law courts for the dispensation of justice and protection of the rights of individuals.
4. The state must maintain friendly relations with other states in the world. This involves international organizations, participation of international conference, and joint treaties with other states.
5. The state must provide functional public utilities through the establishment and maintenance of hospitals, schools, post office among others.
6. The state must create a conducive atmosphere for the promotion of agricultural, industrial and commercial activities.
7. The state must develop and utilize the natural resources within the state.

#### **Differences Between a State and other Human Associations**

Although a state is a form of human association, it is a special form of association quite different from any other association in the ways outlined below.

Membership of a state is compulsory for everybody born within the state while membership of other associations is purely voluntary.

Rules made by the state are authoritative and generally binding on all residents of the state. But rules made by other associations are not applicable to non-members of the association.

Although the state has legitimate authority to fine, imprison or execute law-breakers, other associations do not have such authority over their members.

The state can use force to ensure that its citizens obey its laws and regulations, but other associations cannot use force to

guarantee obedience to the rules and regulations of the associations.

5. Although the state is a permanent association, other associations are non-permanent and may disappear and re-emerge.

### **Purpose of a State**

Every state exists for defined purpose(s), which include:

1. Establishment of order
2. Promotion of individuals' welfare
3. Promotion of general welfare

### **Establishment of Order**

The state must protect its citizen from external attack. It is the duty of the state to ensure the security of her citizens.

### **Promotion of Individuals' Welfare**

The state must provide conditions necessary for the individual in the state to develop themselves fully. Such condition must include the protection of liberty by the individuals. In other words, individuals must be given freedom to live as they chose without too many restrictions.

### **Promotion of General Welfare**

The state must strive to ensure happiness for the greatest number of citizens living within the state. In achieving those goals, which individuals cannot achieve, it is the duty of the state to promote united action.

### **The Meaning of a Nation**

Simply put, nations are culturally homogenous groups of people, larger than a single tribe or community, which shared a common language, institutions, religion and historical experience. When a nation of people has a state or country of their own it is called a nation-state. Places like France, Egypt, Germany, and

Japan are excellent examples of nation-state. Oyeleye (2009) defines nation as a group of people living in a large community, with a common descent, language, culture, and or history. Chambers Dictionary (2003) sees a nation as a body of people marked off by common descent, language, culture, or historical tradition whether or not bound by defined territorial limit of a state. A nation is an association or community of people associated with a particular territory, usually speaks a single language, having the same political aspiration and consciousness of unity. In other words, a nation is a group of people with the same language, culture, and history, who live in a particular area under one government. A nation could be seen as a body of people who feel themselves to be naturally linked together, share common ties, believe that they can live happily together, and are not satisfied when they are disunited and cannot tolerate subjection to people who do not share these ties. Similarly, this people share the same language, culture and have the feeling of nationality.

#### **Features of a Nation**

According to Anyaele (2003), any nation in the world is branded by certain characteristics, good or bad.

1. **Population:** one important attribute of a nation is population. For a nation to exist there must be a group of people living in a large community which has no minimum or maximum population that will occupy it.
2. **Territory:** a nation must possess a definite territory which has no limit to its size. This territory must have clear-cut boundaries that will separate it from other nations.
3. **Permanence:** the nation remains a permanent feature. Government can change many times but a nation remains permanent.

4. **Recognition:** a nation must be recognized both internally and externally. The people of a nation must realize and recognize the existence of their nation.
5. **Nationalism:** Nationalism is a foremost characteristics of a nation. Every citizen of a nation is expected to be loyal to the nation. Loyalty to the nation involves political attachment to, identification with, and allegiance to the nation. A citizen is usually expected to show love for the nation and be proud of the nation at all times.

#### **Distinction between the State and a Nation**

For the fact that the state and the nation share in common certain characteristics, increase the tendency for the two terms to be used interchangeably and confusedly. For instance, both the state and the nation are made up of people. The area of difference is that while the people that make up of a nation share homogeneous characteristics, people that make up a state may have homogeneous or heterogeneous attributes. That is to say that a nation is an association or a community of people united by common ties. This community of people associated with a particular territory usually speaks a single language having the same political aspirations and consciousness of unity; it is this consciousness of unity that is referred to as nationalism or a sense of nationality. For a nation to attain the status of statehood, it must gain independence and therefore have supreme power to enable it make and enforce its own laws. Also, even though a nation possesses the attributes of a territory, but unlike a state, a nation has no definite territory. A state in spite of its differences in national historical origins, common language, culture, common ethnicity, common religious belief of its people and still characterized by a strong sense of national unity, is described as a nation-state. Examples of nation-state include U.S.A., USSR the U.K and Switzerland. Anyaele (2003).



## **Conclusion**

A state exist where a territory, a people, a government and sovereignty exist. It may lack the feeling of nationality or oneness among the people and yet remain a state. If nation could be seen as a body of people who feel themselves to be naturally linked together, share common ties, believe that they can live happily together, and are not satisfied when they are disunited and cannot tolerate subjection from people who do not share these ties. The state and nation share certain characteristics and this increase the tendency for two terms to be used interchangeably and often times confusedly. Both state and nation are made up of people. The major area of difference is that while the people that make up a nation share homogeneous characteristics, people that make up a state may have heterogenous attributes.

## **Revision Questions**

1. Explain the term "state"
2. List and explain five features of the state
3. Outline the functions performed by the modern state.
4. Explain what you understood by the concept "nation"
5. Give the distinction between the state and the nation.

### References

- Anyaele J. (2003) Comprehensive Government for Senior Secondary Schools; Lagos: Johnson Publishers Ltd.
- Dibie, C. (2008) Essentials of Government for Senior Secondary Schools. Lagos Tonad Publishers
- Kirk Patrick E. (2003) Chambers Dictionary England: Chambers Harrap Publishers.
- Okonkwo, N. (2004) Fundamentals of Political Science for Tertiary Institutions; Agbor: Krisbec Publications
- Oyeleye O., Humphrey N., Remi A., Femi B., Goodwill O., Adigun A., (2009) New Approach Government for Senior Secondary School; Lagos: Academy press Plc.
- Online Etymology Dictionary.  
Online at tufts.com.