

4.6 The State

A primary definition and Western understanding of ‘the state’ was that of Max Weber’s in his 1919 essay, titled *Politics as a vocation*; he surmised, it is a political structure wherein coercive force is monopolized legitimately (Weber, 2015). From Weber the concept of state has evolved dynamically; not one definition suffices for a wide range of situations and phenomena (Vincent, 1987). As Vincent put it, it is one of the most profound that can be asked in politics (ibid.). What has been widely accepted is that a state is not a unified entity but a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Held, 1983, Wu, 2007); an idea which manifests itself in either temporal or concrete forms and ways of expression.

4.6.1 Rationale of a state

Because it is a mental conception, a state is not easy to ignore (du Pisani, 2010). In real life we stumble across its force and make own response however and whenever we confront it. The state has become an integral part of many people’s lives that on a practical level, life without it is difficult (Vincent, ibid.). Du Pisani (2010) pointed out the state’s inevitability due to the role it plays on behalf of society. Such a role involves a body of attitudes, practices, behavioural codes, and so forth, that shape the lives of its subjects. Giddens (1985) ties the same influence on resources for example, the state as a ‘power container’ with a high concentration of resources to disperse (ibid., p. 8).

Various models of a state are promoted (Fukuyama, 2014). The focus is on the modern state; the state within society; constituted by society and bound together inextricably by forces that are unique to any such environment (Dauvergne, 1998). The state has come to represent the apparatus of government, and for those adopting a democratic framework. The common features of the state are described generally across those lines of shared values and principles promoted by many Western liberal democracies. For my purpose, the concept of state refers mainly to its disciplinary, civic, and symbolic roles of which apparatus and institutions are its visible representations. The premise is, when a government exercises power on behalf of the state, it is doing so for the benefit of the people. This is the underlying purpose of statehood. The concept of state also highlights a political demarcation between the old and new; a modern state and rule of law and traditional authority and own norms of accepted behaviour, bound to past authorities or old principles (Jessop, 2007).

4.6.2 The ethics of governance

Weber's understanding of power relations is a classic example in terms of its organisational and moral-legitimate structures. It describes the impact of power not just on human relations at a personal level but larger dynamics such as groups, organisations and even governments (Weber, 1978; Capra & Luisi, 2014). The three-component theory of stratification is attributed to him. He argued that a person's power can be shown in the social order through their status; in the economic order through their class, and in the political order through their party (Bourdieu, 1986; Hurst, 2007). Wealth, prestige, and power all interplay to provide a multi-dimensional understanding of a person's influence in the social strata. Weber stated that there are two basic dimensions of power: the possession of power and the exercise of power (1978). Possession of power derives from a person's ability to control the social resources. This includes economic possession (land, money, etc.), social (respect, prestige, etc.), and intellectual capital. Exercising power according to Weber, means the ability to get your own way with others, knowing they have the ability to resist. Hence the role of moral legitimation in structures, to facilitate the ethics of governance in power relations.

Modern relationships irrespective of structures are meant to describe power as a dynamic force that influences the quality of human life directly (Yonk, 2011). Quality is understood as both ethical and legitimate; which concerns are underpinned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which basic human rights, measured according to quality of living as lived or experienced, is the purpose and essence of political activity (Hayward, 2012; Yonk, *ibid*). As such, power relations can be understood in any context in which quality of life is promoted freely (Navarro, 2002).

4.6.3 The idea of a strong state

Basically, the idea of a strong state is upheld on the premise that only in such environment can democracy thrive in terms of the rules of law and supporting institutions that facilitate the balance of power (Fukuyama, 2014). As a chief proponent, his core argument is that for a well-ordered society three building blocks are required: a strong state, the rule of law and democratic accountability (Runciman, 2014). In real life, it is rare to find such a society, as the Economist 2018 has strongly attested to (refer page 86). But as Fukuyama argued, democratic institutions can only function effectively when a strong state is put in place first and foremost. Democratic institutions are but one

component of political stability. The rule of law is another. None of the two can function either without the guarantee of a stable political environment. For Fukuyama, there is a place of a strong state in a positive sense in which democracy can flourish. Fukuyama traced modern democracy to its inception at the end of the 18th century (2014). Since then, the world has witnessed a dynamic unfolding that brings out the best and the worst in its adoption and readaptation in many forms by many peoples. The Samoan government, subject of this study, is perceived as “strong” by many of its citizens, both in its positive and negative connotations. The presumption is that the political party in power, the HRPP, by upholding a strong stance in governance, has managed to maintain political stability this long for a bureaucratic government to function normally (So’o, 2012).

4.6.4 The state in society

Defining ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ is problematic (Dauvergne, 1998); there are various other state forms in this continuum, each with own unique features; including in some, striking variable factors such as culture, ideology, technology, all of which prescribe to supporting either side or even both. Dauvergne (ibid.) argued that the concepts can be misleading. His is a dynamic view that both strengths and weaknesses of a state are essential; that we must accept the multiple dimensions of strength and weakness; the importance of perspective, and continual change over time (ibid.). He contended that a state-in-society approach “provides a more refined understanding of state strengths and weaknesses than treating states and societies as dichotomous and undifferentiated, or as mere products of the dominant social group” (ibid., p. 125). In his observations of some of Asian-Pacific states he was concerned less with the extent of state autonomy and more with the question of how a state is woven into its society. A definition of state strength thus involves:

the willingness and ability of a state to maintain social control, ensure societal compliance with official laws, act decisively, make effective policies, preserve stability and cohesion, encourage societal participation in state institutions, provide basic services, manage and control the national economy, and retain legitimacy. Strength or weakness is seen as arising from how all levels of the state interact with various social groups. The particular features of a country—such as its political system, military and police, bureaucracy, precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial histories, economic structure, cultural traditions, and relative position in the regional and international systems—shape the extent of state control over social groups and the extent that social forces reshape, reinforce, or undermine state strength (Dauvergne, 1998, p. 125).

Dauvergne (1998) cautioned against simplistic analyses and conclusions particularly where certain contexts may appear different from the norm. Pouligny (2010) too argued that due consideration be given to these variables that are inherent in certain societies, as they are crucial to understanding power relations in many developing contexts (Ratuva, 2019). For instance, the impact of these factors on policy and action can be crucial for national development (Ratuva, *ibid.*; Pouligny, *ibid.*). They can also be detrimental for development planning when shunned or taken for granted (*ibid.*). Dauvergne also pointed this out, weaknesses may be strengths in one person's count, thus perspective is important.

Ties to social forces can be a key source of state strength; but they can also be a decisive source of weakness. In this view state strength is much more than just organisational cohesion, coordination, centralisation, or financial capacity—although of course all of these may help maintain a state's ability to impose rules and norms (*ibid.*, p.125).

How urban-based politicians view development may not be the view of ordinary people in the country. The ideal is, that a strong state is a synthesis, a convergence of many things by which human relationships facilitate power at its best. On the other hand, the question of whether this can be realized in its totality is part of this discussion.

4.6.5 State responsibility

In political development, the concept 'power in relations' means many things to many societies adopting democratic systems. Many modern democratic societies though allude strongly to the state and the way it plays its role in relation to other stakeholders of power. Such expectation has a lot to do with the people's societal needs or those of other species; which in essence are associated with other temporal demands such as strong governance, an effective rule of law, and an efficient system of checks and balances within a democratic framework (Fukuyama, 2011; Foucault, 1979). These various needs are usually attached to fundamental democratic values of equity, equality, and freedom in which basic human rights take centre stage in global declarations and international treaties. A life of an individual person or society is deemed important in this context of global human governance and expectations. Hence the modern state through a central executive authority is called to account for their upkeep and perpetuity.

The concept of human security has become more popular to describe relations of power holistically (Ratuva, 2019). It is considered an ideal approach to understanding power relations, by which people have taken centre stage as opposed to traditional approaches to national defence and hard security only. Such a shift in perspective from national to global in which physical security to issues of human poverty and deprivation are all part of the strategy (King et al., 2002). Hence quality of life is reviewed from a global viewpoint of obligations of countries to their citizens, as they cater to life satisfaction in terms of well-being (physical, mental, and spiritual), family, education, politics, employment, wealth, safety, security, freedom, beliefs, and the environment” (Hayward, 2012; Yonk, 2011).

Many of these factors are considered as the modern functions of the state whether it be civil, military, or indigenous. In political sociology reference to the term human security is promoted in literature as consistent with good and healthy relations within an organisation or state for that matter (Ratuva, 2019; King, et al., 2002; Yonk, 2011). The primary evidence is high voter turnout in local and national elections or rallying to support good candidates for community committees; or enabling group capacity to accommodate a wide range of political narratives within the context of pluralistic multicultural societies (Yonk, *ibid.*; Hayward, *ibid.*). Mostly it turns out that each society has own social arrangement and mechanism through which power is harnessed as a political tool for leadership, management, and motivation (Fukuyama, 2014).

4.7 Democratic aspiration and the modern situation

Democracy is still favoured by many societies around the world (Fukuyama, 2014). Political participation is progressively promoted by the United Nations and its agencies because it hinges directly upon its moral aspiration to improve the quality of life not for just a few but everyone. Quality of living for all demands strong leadership and effective working relationships, but for the majority of the world’s democracies, it is an ideal to strive for. Poverty is a factor. Abuse of power is a factor. Corruption is a factor.³⁰ Resource distribution is a factor. All these impact on power relations one way or another. Monopoly of power by the state or church or a certain group even a language

³⁰ “Corruption breeds disillusion with Government and governance and is often at the root of political dysfunction and social disunity,” Secretary-General António Guterres told the 15-member Council, which bears the mandate for the maintenance of international peace and security. The meeting took place in September 2018. The global cost of corruption according to UN data is \$2.6 trillion per year, about 5 percent of the worlds GDP.

are political realities for many developing democracies (ibid.). The system still serves the interests of an elite group or a few (Naidu, 1988; Hauggard, 2012). Hence the call for mitigating factors is always the moral catch-cry so that such extremes can be avoided as much as possible (Teachout, 2015).

Real life experience has taught us the diverse nature of political realities. For example, in the case of many developing democracies, access to information can be a major obstacle. It is apparent that quality is a matter of exposure to a good political education regime and promotional resources in support. Raising public awareness to make the people's voices count or at least make sound choices in terms of picking candidates is no easy task. This leads to the question of who controls the media has always been synonymous with power. For developed countries with unequal wealth distribution, it may be the issue of political apathy that stands out, the reluctance to vote; as in the case of the United States, a conscious attitude by voters against what they interpret as a system supporting inequality. The difference between domination and relationality is becoming ever more apparent, as power domination by one group or sector of others has become the norm (Clegg, 1989; Cooper, 1994).

In its tenth edition the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index (EIU hereafter) suggests that things aren't getting better. The index, which comprises 60 indicators across five broad categories - electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, democratic political culture, and civil liberties - concludes that less than 5% of the world currently lives in a "full democracy." Nearly a third live under authoritarian rule, with a large share of those in China. Overall, 89 of the 167 countries assessed in 2017 received lower scores than they had the year before. It concludes that this unwelcome trend remains firmly in place (The Economist, 2018). Even the label 'flawed democracy' when attached to old 'model' democracies like France's own is striking and leaves much interpretation to the imagination (ibid.). Simply put, what the EIU Index tries to tell us finally is, power is still unevenly distributed; also, the balance of power which is the cornerstone of liberal democracy is a misnomer in many democratic states; all of which point to the issue of power legitimacy, the question of how human relations can be described or justified in such dualistic and dubious environment of power domination.