

## **NATION-STATE**

Nations and states may seem identical, but they are not. States govern people in a territory with boundaries. They have laws, taxes, officials, currencies, postal services, police, and (usually) armies. They wage **war**, negotiate treaties, put people in prison, and regulate life in thousands of ways. They claim **sovereignty** within their territory. By contrast, nations are groups of people claiming common bonds like language, culture, and historical identity. Some groups claiming to be nations have a state of their own, like the French, Dutch, Egyptians, and Japanese. Others want a state but do not have one: Tibetans, Chechnyans, and Palestinians, for example. Others do not want statehood but claim and enjoy some autonomy. The Karen claim to be a nation trapped within the state of Burma/Myanmar. The Sioux are a nation within the boundaries of the United States. Each of these nations has its own special territory, rights, laws, and culture, but not statehood. Some imagined nations are larger than states or cross-state boundaries. The Arab nation embraces more than a dozen states, while the nation of the Kurds takes in large areas of four states. Some people assume that states are fixed and permanently established across most of the globe. But in fact states are in flux.

State boundaries are often changed – by war, negotiation, arbitration, or even by the sale of territory for money (Russia sold Alaska to the United States, for example). A few states have endured, but others may be here today and gone tomorrow. Over the past decade a number of states have disappeared – Czechoslovakia, East Germany, North and South Yemen, and of course the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Diplomatic **recognition** confers legitimacy on a new state (or on the government of a state) but sometimes there is a lack of consensus within the international community. For example, the Palestinian people are largely under the jurisdiction of other states, although they are seen by the majority of the international community as having strong claims to independent statehood. Other nations claiming the right to independent statehood fail to win backing and are dismissed as frivolous or illegitimate (such as Kosovo). When the **United Nations** was founded, it was composed of just 51 member states. Today there are nearly 190. The great majority of today's members were then either colonies (as in most of Africa) or parts of other states (such as those that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union).

The classical nation-states in Northern and Western Europe evolved within the boundaries of existing territorial states. They were part of the European state system that took on a recognizable shape with the **Peace of Westphalia** in 1648. By contrast, the 'belated' nations – beginning with Italy and Germany – followed a different course, one that was also typical for the formation of nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe; here the formation of the state followed the trail blazed by an anticipatory national consciousness. The difference between these two paths (from state to nation *versus* from nation to state) is reflected in the backgrounds of the actors who formed the vanguard of nation and state builders. In the former case, they were lawyers, diplomats, and military officers who belonged to the king's administrative staff and together constructed a state bureaucracy. In the latter case, it was writers, historians, scholars, and intellectuals who laid the groundwork for the subsequent **diplomatic** and military unification of the state. After the Second World War, a third generation of very different nation-states emerged from the process of **decolonization**, primarily in Africa and Asia. Often these states, which were founded within the frontiers

established by the former colonial regimes, acquired sovereignty before the imported forms of state organisation could take root in a national identity that transcended tribal differences. In these cases, artificial states had first to be filled by a process of nation-building. Finally, with the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the trend towards the formation of independent nation-states in Eastern and Southern Europe has followed the path of more or less violent **secessions**. In the socially and economically precarious situation in which these countries found themselves, the old ethno national slogans had the power to mobilize distraught populations for independence.

The nation-state at one time represented a response to the historical challenge of finding a functional equivalent for the early modern form of social **integration** that was in the process of disintegrating. Today we are confronting an analogous challenge. The **globalization** of commerce and communication, of economic production and finance, of the spread of technology and weapons, and above all of ecological and military risks, poses problems that can no longer be solved within the framework of nation-states or by the traditional method of agreements between sovereign states. If current trends continue, the progressive undermining of national sovereignty may necessitate the founding and expansion of political institutions on the supranational level.

Some observers believe that the role of the nation-state has been reduced to that of a municipality within the global capitalist system, responsible for providing the necessary infrastructure and services to attract capital investment. However, this is much too simplistic. Societies also demand identity, and the nation-state has sometimes been successful in providing this where other identities have been weak. It can therefore play an important part in expressing to the outside world a unique identity

associated with a particular locality. The nation-state is less successful in those situations where the population is fragmented between several large groups who do not wish to surrender portions of their different identities in order to produce a national identity. Malaysia, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia are just a few particularly good contemporary examples. In these cases, the national ideology for various reasons fails to assimilate large sections of the population, causing an ongoing crisis of belief within the society, that is generally responded to with the use of (sometimes violent) coercion by the apparatus of the state and by the dominant group.

The cultural effects of accelerating globalisation have brought with them disintegrating factors that tend towards the atomization of societies, and towards the breakdown of older social, political, and cultural units, including that of the nuclear family unit. This tendency is most pronounced in the economically advanced nation-states of the West, and has tended to reduce the authority, importance, and relevance of the nation-state as an institution.

Alongside this atomization within societies, especially Western societies, has come a seemingly contradictory tendency towards **regionalism**. The surrender of many of the economic functions of nation-states to regional entities has been a feature of this latest round of globalisation. Perhaps more significant has been the growth of global cities and their increasing independence from the nation-state to which they ostensibly belong. New York, London, and Tokyo have been identified as being global cities of the first order, whilst Los Angeles, Frankfurt, Zurich, Paris, Sydney, and Singapore, among a dozen or so others, can be considered second-order global cities. The relationship of these global cities to national governments

is changing, especially in critical areas such as monetary policy, interest rates, commercial treaties, and immigration.

The development of global cities has been accompanied by the growth of territory that has become peripheral from the major social and economic processes, and which cuts across the boundaries of rich and poor countries. Whilst including much of what was known as the **Third World** and the countries of the former **communist** bloc, this peripheral economic wilderness now includes large regions within the developed countries themselves. However, it should be remembered that controlling population movements has become a key function of the modern nation-state, and keeping the poor immobile has become a principal concern, especially for those wealthy regions of the world that do not want their cities 'flooded' with people – usually unskilled – for whom their economy has no useful purpose.

In the next century we may witness the further decay of the nation-state as the all-powerful and sole centre of power, and with that we will see the further growth of non-state organizations and the concentration of actual power within the global cities. Some of these organizations stand above the state – for example, the **European Union**. Others are of a completely different kind, such as international bodies and **multinational corporations**. What they all have in common is that they either assume some of the functions of the nation-state or manage to escape its control. Being either much larger than states or without geographical borders, they are better positioned to take advantage of recent developments in transportation and communications. The result is that their power seems to be growing while that of the nation-state declines.