

The nation state is a
problematic concept



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This essay aims to examine if the concept of the nation-state is problematic. First of all it's necessary to outline exactly what a nation-state is. A nation, according to Joseph Stalin, is "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." The nation-state occurs when this community of people have their own sovereign, independent country.

In Europe the birth of these nation-states can be most concertedly dated with the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. This gave the feudal leaders of the middle-ages the right to decide what religion was practised in their principalities, giving them freedom from the rule of the pope. Before this treaty leaders had had to compete with the pope for secular power over their subjects. This new found mutual non-interference gave the different regions a new level of sovereignty that is comparable to the independence of today's nations and power began to be centralised into individual states, like France and the Holy Roman Empire.

Eventually as Ernest Gellner puts it there was a marriage between nation and state, and nation-states were born. In some places the marriage was fairly simple and the states based on Lisbon, Madrid, Paris, and London more or less corresponds to cultural-linguistic zones anyway (Gellner, 1997, pg51). In others there was a rocky courtship, such as the bloody unification of Germany and Italy. Whatever the circumstances the idea was always to unite one people under the one flag, to achieve the goal of "one nation, one people" This is where the difficulties in the concept of nation state come into existence. First of all a pure nation-state is all but

impossible. There will always be ethnic minorities of some sort within the nation??™s borders unless by some geographical fluke the nation is too isolated to receive any immigrants, borders will also never be stopped just as they enclose all of the members of the nation, borders may enclose those of other ethnic groups our leave some people out who see that nation as their homeland .

In reality nation-states are merely nations dominated by a majority.