



Dr. Bbosa Science

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Uganda East Africa
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Unit 1: History of Africa Since 1800

Topic 8: The Rise of African Nationalism

Competency: The learner demonstrates an understanding of African nationalism by analysing its growth and development to appreciate its impact on independence and post-independence struggles in Africa

8.1 Key Features of African Nationalism

African nationalism is a political and cultural movement rooted in the desire of African people to reclaim control over their own lands, governments, and identities after centuries of colonial domination. It emerged strongly in the 19th and 20th centuries as Africans sought to **end foreign rule, assert self-determination, and build independent nation-states**. Its main features are:

- 1. Opposition to Colonial Rule:** Strong resistance to European imperialism, exploitation, and racial discrimination. Rejection of foreign domination, forced labor, land alienation, and over-taxation.
- 2. Leadership by Educated Elites:** Led by Africans educated in missionary schools or abroad, who understood colonial injustices. Figures like **Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Jomo Kenyatta** used their education to mobilize the masses and articulate nationalist ideologies.
- 3. Demand for Self-Determination and Independence:** The central goal was to achieve full political sovereignty and end colonial rule. Slogans like *"Self-government now!"* captured the urgency and spirit of the movement.
- 4. Promotion of African Identity and Cultural Revival:** Emphasis on reviving African heritage, languages, and traditions. Rejection of colonial narratives that portrayed African cultures as inferior.
- 5. Pan-African Solidarity:** Inspired by Pan-Africanism, African nationalism promoted unity across ethnic and national lines. Advocated for continental cooperation and the liberation of all African nations.
- 6. Mass Mobilization and Popular Participation:** Involved broad participation from workers, students, women, and rural communities. Protests, strikes, and political rallies were common tools of resistance.
- 7. Militancy and Armed Struggle (in Settler Colonies):** In places like Kenya, Algeria, and Zimbabwe, nationalism took a militant form due to extreme repression. Movements like the **Mau Mau** and **FLN** used guerrilla tactics to fight colonial forces.

8. **Push for Social and Economic Reforms:** Advocated for education, healthcare, land redistribution, and economic independence. Sought to build equitable societies free from colonial exploitation.
9. **Formation of Political Movements:** Nationalist parties and liberation movements emerged across Africa for example; **ANC** in South Africa, **CPP** in Ghana, **MPLA** in Angola and **PAIGC** in Guinea-Bissau
10. **Military coups:** military coups are common in many independent African states initiated by discontented military men with hope to guard and preserve independence e.g. that of Uganda led by Idi Amin Dada in 1971 and Libya in 1969 by Gaddafi.
11. **Dictatorship:** The nationalists that come to power manipulate the constitutions to remain in power for example Obote abrogated the 1962 constitution of Uganda while Amin and Gaddafi declared themselves life presidents.
12. **Corruption:** Nationalists are characterized by wide spread corruption for example Abacha of Nigeria and Mubutu of DRC were among the most corrupt leaders in Africa
13. **Resistance to Neocolonialism:** African Nationalism aims at resisting economic and political practices that continued to exploit African nations even after formal independence.
14. **Religious and tribal conflicts.** African based on tribal line for instance, in Nigeria the first political parties were based on tribal lines for example Yoruba in the west formed Action groups, Hausa and Fulani in the north formed Northern People's Congress while the Ibo of south formed the NCNC under Namdi Azikiwe. In Uganda religion was a dominant factor in African nationalism, for Democratic Party (DP) was for Catholics while UPC was for Protestants.
15. **Urban centered:** Nationalism in many African nations was concentrated in urban areas such Kampala, Nairobi Lagos etc. Due to high concentration of people and associated discontents propelled the appreciation of the struggle for self-governance.

8.2 The Factors Responsible for the Rise of African Nationalism

The rise of **African nationalism** was driven by a powerful mix of internal and external factors that reflected deep discontent with colonial rule. Understanding these factors not only reveals the roots of the independence movements but also helps us appreciate the broader conditions that can cause social and political unrest among people.

Key Factors behind the Rise of African Nationalism

1. **Colonial Exploitation and Oppression:** Forced labor, land dispossession, and heavy taxation **created widespread resentment.** Africans were treated as second-class citizens, denied basic rights, and subjected to racial discrimination.
2. **Western Education and Exposure:** Missionary and colonial schools produced a new class of **educated African elites.** These individuals—like Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, and Julius Nyerere—became vocal critics of colonialism and champions of self-rule.
3. **World War II Experience:** African soldiers who fought in WWII returned with a heightened awareness of **freedom, democracy, and self-determination.** They questioned why they were denied the same rights they had helped defend.

4. **Urbanization and Infrastructure Development:** Colonial investments in **roads, railways, and schools**—intended for exploitation—also facilitated communication and the spread of nationalist ideas. Urban centers became hubs for political activism and organizing.
5. **Oppressive Colonial Policies:** Harsh laws, censorship, and political exclusion fueled anger and mobilized resistance. The lack of representation and justice created fertile ground for nationalist movements.
6. **Pan-Africanism and Global Solidarity:** Inspired by thinkers like **Marcus Garvey** and **W.E.B. Du Bois**, Africans embraced the idea of unity across borders. Pan-African congresses and solidarity with anti-colonial movements worldwide strengthened the cause.
7. **Role of Political and Social Movements:** The formation of nationalist parties, trade unions, and youth organizations helped mobilize mass support. These groups organized protests, strikes, and campaigns demanding independence.
8. **Influence of the Soviet Union and Global Ideologies:** The success of the **Russian Revolution** and the spread of **Marxist-Leninist ideas** inspired many African nationalists to challenge imperialism and envision alternative governance models.

What this teaches us about discontent

These factors show that **discontent arises when people feel exploited, excluded, exposed and denied dignity**. Whether in colonial Africa or modern societies, the conditions that spark unrest often include:

- **Economic inequality**
- **Political repression**
- **Cultural marginalization**
- **Lack of opportunity and voice**

When these pressures build, people seek change—sometimes through protest, sometimes through revolution.

Case studies

Example of nationalistic movements in Africa

African nationalism took many forms across the continent, with movements emerging to challenge colonial rule and demand independence. Here are some **notable examples of nationalistic movements** in Africa:

1. **Convention People's Party (CPP) – Ghana**

- **Leader:** Kwame Nkrumah
- **Founded:** 1949
- **Goal:** Immediate self-government for the Gold Coast (now Ghana)
- **Impact:** Led Ghana to become the **first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence** in 1957.

Contributions of Convention People's Party (CPP) to achievement of Independence in Ghana

The **Convention People's Party (CPP)**, founded by **Kwame Nkrumah** in **1949**, played a **decisive and revolutionary role** in Ghana's journey to independence. It wasn't just a political party—it was a mass movement that galvanized the entire nation. Here's how the CPP contributed to Ghana's liberation from British colonial rule:

- (i) **Mass Mobilization and Grassroots Activism:** The CPP was the **first political party in Ghana to mobilize ordinary citizens**, including workers, farmers, women, and youth. Nkrumah's slogan, *"Self-government now!"*, electrified the masses and created a sense of urgency and unity. The party organized **strikes, boycotts, and protests** to pressure colonial authorities, making independence a national demand.
- (ii) **Electoral Victory and Political Legitimacy:** In **1951**, Ghana held its first general elections under **universal adult suffrage**. The CPP won overwhelmingly, and **Nkrumah became Prime Minister of the Gold Coast**, giving the independence movement formal political power. This victory proved that the CPP had the mandate of the people and could govern effectively.
- (iii) **Radical Political Messaging:** The CPP's platform was bold and uncompromising: **immediate independence, social justice, and African unity**. It rejected gradualism and elite-led negotiations, instead pushing for **direct action and mass participation**.
- (iv) **International Advocacy and Pan-Africanism:** Nkrumah and the CPP used global platforms like the **United Nations** to rally support for Ghana's independence. The party aligned itself with **Pan-African ideals**, inspiring other African nations to pursue liberation.
- (v) **Social and Economic Reforms:** After gaining political power, the CPP launched reforms in **education, infrastructure, and healthcare**, laying the groundwork for a sovereign state. These efforts demonstrated the party's capacity to lead and helped build confidence in self-rule.

Outcome: Ghana's Independence

- On **6 March 1957**, Ghana became the **first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence**, with the CPP at the helm.
- Nkrumah declared independence at the historic Polo Grounds in Accra, marking the triumph of African nationalism.

The CPP didn't just fight for independence—it **redefined how it was won**, through mass mobilization, political strategy, and visionary leadership.

2. National Liberation Front (FLN) – Algeria

- **Founded:** 1954
- **Goal:** Liberation from French colonial rule
- **Impact:** Led a bloody war of independence, resulting in Algeria's freedom in 1962.

Contributions of National Liberation Front (FLN) to achievement of Independence in Algeria

The **National Liberation Front (FLN)** played a central and transformative role in Algeria's struggle for independence from French colonial rule. Founded in **1954**, the FLN became the **driving force behind one of the most intense and violent decolonization movements** of the 20th century. Here's how it contributed to Algeria's liberation:

- (i) **Launching the Armed Struggle:** On **November 1, 1954**, the FLN initiated the **Algerian War of Independence** with coordinated attacks on French military and civilian targets. This marked the beginning of an **eight-year guerrilla war**, with the FLN using hit-and-run tactics, sabotage, and ambushes to challenge French control.
 - (ii) **Organizing the National Liberation Army (ALN):** The FLN established the **ALN (Armée de Libération Nationale)** as its military wing, led by **Col. Houari Boumedienne**. ALN forces operated both inside Algeria and from bases in **Tunisia and Morocco**, providing logistical support and training.
 - (iii) **Unifying the Nationalist Movement:** The FLN emerged from the **Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action (CRUA)**, which aimed to reconcile fragmented nationalist factions. By **1956**, nearly all Algerian nationalist groups had joined the FLN, giving it **political legitimacy and organizational strength**.
 - (iv) **International Diplomacy and Pressure:** The FLN actively lobbied at the **United Nations** and built alliances with other liberation movements and sympathetic governments. Global condemnation of French tactics—including torture and mass detentions—helped isolate France diplomatically and increase pressure for a resolution.
 - (v) **Establishing a Provisional Government:** The FLN created a **provisional government-in-exile**, which functioned as a diplomatic and political representative of the Algerian people. This helped frame the conflict as a **legitimate war of national liberation**, not just a rebellion.
- **Negotiating Independence:** After years of brutal conflict, France signed the **Évian Accords** with the FLN in **March 1962**, agreeing to a ceasefire and future cooperation. A **referendum on July 1, 1962**, saw Algerians vote overwhelmingly for independence, which was officially declared on **July 3, 1962**.

Legacy

- The FLN became Algeria's **ruling party** after independence and remained the only legal party until 1989.
- Its success inspired other African and global liberation movements, proving that **armed resistance and international solidarity** could defeat colonial powers.

3. Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)

- **Founded:** 1956
- **Goal:** Independence from Portuguese rule
- **Impact:** Angola gained independence in 1975 after years of armed struggle.

Contributions of Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) to achievement of Independence in Angola

The **Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)** was the **driving force behind Angola's independence** from Portuguese colonial rule. Founded in **1956**, the MPLA transformed from a small urban-based political group into a formidable liberation movement that led Angola to freedom on **November 11, 1975**. Here's how it made that happen:

- (i) **Formation and Ideological Foundation:** The MPLA was formed by merging several nationalist groups, advocating for **Marxist-Leninist principles** and a **non-racial, non-tribal approach** to liberation. It aimed to end Portuguese exploitation and build a socialist Angola rooted in equality and unity.
- (ii) **Peaceful Beginnings and Political Mobilization:** Initially, the MPLA used **peaceful methods** like petitions and protests to demand reforms and the release of imprisoned leaders such as **Agostinho Neto**, who later became Angola's first president. It mobilized **urban workers and intellectuals**, especially in Luanda and northern provinces, to raise political awareness and challenge colonial rule.
- (iii) **Shift to Armed Struggle:** After violent Portuguese crackdowns on peaceful protests, the MPLA launched an **armed resistance**, forming military bases in **Kinshasa** and **Eastern Angola**. It carried out attacks on strategic targets like **Luanda prison**, using guerrilla tactics to weaken Portuguese control.
- (iv) **International Support and Alliances:** The MPLA secured backing from **Marxist countries** such as the **Soviet Union** and **Cuba**, which provided weapons, training, and troops. It also gained recognition and aid from the **Organisation of African Unity (OAU)**, strengthening its legitimacy as Angola's main liberation movement.
- (v) **Declaration of Independence:** As Portugal's colonial grip weakened following the **Carnation Revolution** in 1974, the MPLA seized control of **Luanda** and key oil-rich regions. On **November 11, 1975**, **Agostinho Neto** declared the **People's Republic of Angola**, with the MPLA as the ruling party.
- (vi) **Post-Independence Role:** After independence, the MPLA became Angola's **dominant political party**, shaping its early governance and development. Though it faced internal conflict with rival groups like **UNITA** and **FNLA**, the MPLA maintained control and transitioned Angola into a one-party socialist state.

4. African National Congress (ANC) – South Africa

- **Founded:** 1912
- **Goal:** Fight racial discrimination and apartheid
- **Impact:** Played a central role in ending apartheid and ushering in democracy in 1994.

Contributions of African National Congress (ANC) for the Liberation of South Africa from apartheid rule

The **African National Congress (ANC)** was the **cornerstone of South Africa's liberation struggle**, leading the fight against apartheid from its founding in **1912** until the country's first democratic elections in **1994**. Its contributions spanned peaceful protest, armed

resistance, international diplomacy, and grassroots mobilization. Here's how the ANC helped dismantle apartheid:

- (i) **Founding and Early Resistance (1912–1940s):** Originally called the **South African Native National Congress**, the ANC was formed to **unite Black South Africans** against discriminatory laws. Early efforts focused on **petitions, delegations, and legal appeals** to challenge land dispossession and political exclusion.
- (ii) **Mass Mobilization and Civil Disobedience (1950s):** The ANC organized major campaigns like the **Defiance Campaign (1952)** and the **Freedom Charter (1955)**, which declared that *“South Africa belongs to all who live in it.”* These movements **galvanized national support** and laid the ideological foundation for a non-racial democracy.
- (iii) **Formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) – Armed Wing (1961):** After peaceful protests were met with violent repression—especially the **Sharpeville Massacre (1960)**—the ANC formed **Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK)** to carry out **sabotage and guerrilla operations**. MK targeted infrastructure, avoiding civilian casualties, and became a symbol of **armed resistance**.
- (iv) **International Advocacy and Global Pressure:** ANC leaders like **Oliver Tambo** and **Nelson Mandela** built global support through the **United Nations, OAU**, and **anti-apartheid movements** worldwide. Their efforts led to **economic sanctions, cultural boycotts**, and **diplomatic isolation** of the apartheid regime.
- (v) **Underground Operations and Exile Leadership:** While banned from 1960 to 1990, the ANC operated **underground and in exile**, maintaining morale and organizing resistance. ANC radio broadcasts, literature, and secret meetings kept the movement alive inside South Africa.
- (vi) **Negotiations and Transition to Democracy:** In the late 1980s, the ANC engaged in **negotiations with the apartheid government**, culminating in the **release of Nelson Mandela (1990)** and the **unbanning of the ANC**. These talks led to the **1994 democratic elections**, where the ANC won and Mandela became **South Africa’s first Black president**.
- (vii) **Legacy and Nation-Building:** The ANC helped draft a **new constitution**, emphasizing **human rights, equality, and reconciliation**. It became the ruling party and led efforts to heal divisions, though challenges remain.

8.3 The Challenges Faced in the Independence Struggles in Africa to appreciate the efforts of freedom fighters.

The independence struggles in Africa were marked by **immense sacrifice, resilience, and courage**. Freedom fighters across the continent faced a wide array of challenges—political, social, economic, and military—that tested their resolve and shaped the course of history. Understanding these challenges helps us truly appreciate the **heroism and determination** behind Africa’s liberation.

Major Challenges Faced During African Independence Struggles

- (i) **Brutal Colonial Repression:** Colonial powers used **military force, imprisonment, torture**, and **massacres** to suppress nationalist movements. Examples include the

- Sharpeville Massacre** in South Africa and the **Mau Mau Uprising** in Kenya, where thousands were killed or detained.
- (ii) **Limited Education and Political Experience:** Most Africans were denied formal education under colonial rule, leaving freedom fighters with **limited access to political tools** and governance knowledge. Leaders had to **learn on the front lines**, often relying on oral traditions, underground networks, and trial-and-error organizing.
 - (iii) **Economic Exploitation and Poverty:** Colonial economies were designed to extract resources, not empower locals. Freedom fighters operated with **minimal funding**, relying on donations, foreign allies, or self-sufficiency. Economic hardship made it difficult to sustain long-term resistance movements.
 - (iv) **Ethnic and Regional Divisions:** Colonial borders grouped diverse ethnic communities into single states, creating **internal tensions**. Some colonial powers exploited these divisions through **“divide and rule” tactics**, weakening nationalist unity.
 - (v) **Lack of International Support (Initially):** Early independence movements were often **ignored or condemned** by global powers who had economic interests in Africa. It took years of advocacy, media exposure, and Cold War dynamics for international support to grow.
 - (vi) **Armed Struggles and Guerrilla Warfare:** In settler colonies like Algeria, Angola, and Zimbabwe, freedom fighters had to engage in **guerrilla warfare** against well-equipped colonial armies. These wars were long, bloody, and devastating—often involving **civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure**.
 - (vii) **Censorship and Propaganda:** Colonial governments controlled media and education, spreading propaganda that painted freedom fighters as “terrorists” or “rebels.” Nationalists had to **counter misinformation** and build awareness through underground publications and word-of-mouth.
 - (viii) **Political Fragmentation:** Multiple nationalist groups sometimes competed for leadership, causing **internal rivalries** and weakening the collective struggle. In countries like Angola and Zimbabwe, rival factions (e.g., MPLA vs. UNITA, ZANU vs. ZAPU) complicated the path to unity.

Why These Challenges Matter

These obstacles highlight the **extraordinary efforts** of African freedom fighters who:

- Risked their lives for justice and sovereignty.
- Built movements from scratch with limited resources.
- Endured imprisonment, exile, and assassination.
- Inspired future generations to defend human rights and dignity.

Effects of independence struggles on Africa's Unity

The **independence struggles across Africa** were heroic and transformative, but they also left behind a complex legacy that deeply affected the continent’s **unity**. While these movements succeeded in ending colonial rule, they also exposed and sometimes intensified divisions that continue to shape Africa’s political and social landscape.

Positive Effects on Africa's Unity

- (i) **Shared anti-colonial identity:** The fight against colonialism fostered a **pan-African consciousness**, where Africans saw themselves as part of a broader liberation movement. Leaders like **Kwame Nkrumah** and **Julius Nyerere** championed **continental solidarity**, inspiring the formation of the **Organisation of African Unity (OAU)** in 1963.
- (ii) **Cross-Border Support and Collaboration:** Liberation movements often received support from neighboring countries, creating **networks of solidarity**. For example, Tanzania supported fighters from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, reinforcing regional unity.
- (iii) **Rise of Pan-Africanism:** The independence era gave momentum to **Pan-African ideals**, promoting unity among African nations and people of African descent worldwide. Cultural festivals, intellectual exchanges, and diplomatic summits helped build a sense of shared destiny.

Negative Effects on Africa's Unity

- (i) **Ethnic and Regional Divisions:** Colonial borders grouped diverse ethnic groups into single states, leading to **internal tensions** and **civil conflicts** post-independence. In countries like Nigeria, Sudan, and Rwanda, these divisions undermined national cohesion and regional trust.
- (ii) **Rivalry among liberation movements:** In some countries, multiple nationalist groups competed for power, leading to **infighting** and **fragmentation**. Angola's MPLA, UNITA, and FNLA fought not just colonial forces but each other, weakening unity even after independence.
- (iii) **Cold war interference:** Global powers exploited African liberation movements for strategic gain, supporting rival factions and fueling **proxy wars**. This external interference deepened divisions and delayed regional integration.
- (iv) **Rise of nationalism over continentalism:** After independence, many leaders prioritized **national sovereignty** over continental unity. Economic and political interests often clashed, slowing efforts to build **regional blocs** and **continental institutions**.

Lasting Impact

- The independence struggles created a **shared legacy of resilience**, but also revealed the **fragility of imposed borders and political systems**.
- Today, institutions like the **African Union** continue to work toward unity, but must navigate the historical divisions left by colonialism and liberation-era rivalries.

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