

# Nationalism and the road to independence

We have seen that most of the African people were opposed to colonial rule. Some of the communities fought the Europeans. The Africans lost the wars because the Europeans were more organised and had modern weapons. The Africans also lost the wars because the different African communities were not united against the Europeans.

## Nationalism and Patriotism

Africans were loyal to their traditional nations of Buganda, Toro or Bunyoro. However, with the colonialists creating new nation states such as Uganda, Ghana and Kenya; Africans began seeing themselves more as Ghanaians, Ugandans and Kenyans and collectively fought as Ugandans or Kenyans against colonial governments. This led to the development of **African Nationalism**.

**Nationalism** is the great love and pride for one's country. It refers to the desire by Africans for freedom from all forms of oppression, exploitation and humiliation.

Nationalism is seen when the people of a given country come together to fight for their cultural, economic and political freedom. It is a desire by the people of the same race or origin to form an independent country. The people of a given country who support nationalism are called **nationalists**.

The love for one's country and willingness to defend it is known as **patriotism**. A person who loves his or her country and is ready to promote its interests and defend it against enemies is called a **patriot**.

**Pan-Africanism** is a movement whose major aim was to promote unity among Africans and among the people of the African origin. It was a form of nationalism which was for the whole of Africa by black people from different countries.

## The work of Pan-Africanists and Nationalists

In Africa, nationalism began in major towns and cities. After the end of the Second World War, many urban areas such as Kampala, Accra and Cairo were developed. This led to thousands of people to migrate to urban areas to take up jobs in the expanding urban centres. But it was difficult to get jobs. Africans were also subjected to racial segregation by Europeans. For instance, in South Africa and Kenya, the Europeans lived in specific parts of the town gazetted as European quarters while Africans were confined to overcrowded slum areas of these towns. The unemployed or job seekers and other oppressed Africans began to participate in political activities like demonstrations and riots demanding for the expulsion of Europeans to enable

Africans to attain their independence. Such political activities led to the growth of nationalism in Africa.

The growth of nationalism in Africa was also facilitated and led by African elites such as teachers, doctors, lawyers and politicians who had received colonial education. For example, the elites founded a number of newspapers, magazines and radio stations. Through these, they published the atrocities committed by colonialists against Africans to rise up and demand for their independence. In West Africa, Nandi Azikiwe started a newspaper called “the West African pilot” and also published a number of magazines.

African nationalism increased in the 1920s after the First World War (1914–1918) because all the injustices suffered under colonialism had increased. Africans were opposed to unfair taxation, loss of land, racial discrimination, forced labour and economic discrimination.

The Africans who fought as soldiers in the First World War had learnt the importance of unity and organisation. They also learnt that the Europeans were ordinary human beings who could be fought and be defeated. They then formed nationalists association to fight against colonial rule.

The Second World War (1939 – 1945), like the First World War, brought together many young Africans from different parts of the continent to fight for their colonial masters. They fought in Africa and in the Far East. The war provided African soldiers with an opportunity to meet and discuss about their countries. They realised that they are oppressed and exploited at home. They had been told that they are being recruited to fight for peace, freedom and democracy yet the Africans themselves did not have freedom and democracy at home.

During the war, African soldiers saw that a lot of the things that were said about whites were not true. The Africans had believed that Europeans could not be defeated in war by non-whites. But they saw the British being killed by the Japanese in the Far East. The soldiers also learnt fighting skills in the war. If these skills could be used to defeat the enemies of the colonialists, they could also be used to defeat the colonialists themselves.

In order to persuade Africans to fight in the wars, the Europeans had promised them many changes when the war ended. They had promised, for example, that Africans would be represented in the Legislative Councils (LegCo) and their land problems would be solved. But after the war, there was little change. In most of the African countries under colonial rule, one or two people were nominated to the Legislative Councils, which were dominated by Europeans. In some countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, the colonial governments continued to encourage white settlement. Former European soldiers who had fought in the two world wars were given land while African soldiers were ignored.

After the Second World War, the United Nations Organisation (UNO) was formed to preserve peace in the world. It also stressed the need for independence for all peoples who were under colonial rule.