

CHAPTER 8 THE TWO WORLD WARS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN

AFRICA

Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- explain the reasons that led to the two World Wars;
- explain why Africans were forced to participate in the war;
- discuss the impact of the two World Wars on Africa.

Introduction

Most events which can be considered important in the out break of the two European wars popularly called World Wars are so peculiar to the European societies. For example, the issues of secret alliances, balance of power arrangement, quest for territorial acquisition and struggles for huge money found among the big powers in Europe cannot be ruled out.

However, when it occurred, Africans were forced to be involved in matter they knew nothing about. The objective answer to this issue is the fact that Africa was in their colonial bondage. For this singular reason, they could be used as slaves.

Meanwhile, we shall try to look at the events that led to the outbreak of these wars, how and why Africans were brought into the matter and the changes which latter occurred in the European colonial relationship with Africa.

8.1 The Causes of the First World War and African Involvement

- i. Nationalism became an important factor in international relation after the French revolution. This proved to be both unifying and a divisim factor. German and Italian reunification took place as a result of national aspiration. Nationalism was also responsible for the dissolution of Turkish empire and demands for national independence in the Balkans and other East European nations. Various groups and peoples in Europe had developed the myth that they were superior to all other nations. Britain talked of the 'white man's burden' and Germany pressed upon the 'superiority of the Aryan race'. This kind of sentiments created tension and conflicts which resulted to struggle for supremacy.
- ii. Economic imperialism was another cause of the First World War. Colonialism and imperialism during the 19th and 20th centuries were the direct outcome of industrial revolution in Britain and rapid industrialization all over Western Europe. Each of these countries tried to expand its overseas empire. Each one of them wanted to buy raw materials at cheaper rates, labourers who could be treated as slaves and market where finished goods could be sold. This

led to the struggles for empire building. The empire building had its impact on European politics. European countries aspired for more land outside Europe and more economic, military and political power inside the continent. Imperial rivalries were natural and these prepared grounds for the First World War

- iii. There was tension between Germany and Britain, which erupted first during the South African war when Germany supported the Afrikaner, and the Daily Telegraph Affair. A number of international crises heightened the tension, notably in Morocco (Algeciras and Agadir) and Zabem (Saverne). The last but not the least, Europe was destabilized by the fragile multi-ethnic state of Austria-Hungary, paralyzed by its own bankrupting and the forces of nationalism. It's aggressive chains over Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia ultimately produced the immediate cause of the war. After the assassination in Sarajevo by Serbian nationalists of the heir to the Austrian throne – Archduke Francis Ferdinand, Austria declared war on Serbia on 28th July, 1914. The conflict spread beyond the Balkans through German assistance to Austria.

Germans' declaration of war against Russia (August 1) and France (August 3). Again, Germany's aggressive stance was the result of a sense of weakness, whereby it did not have the resources to compete for long in the arms race which it had helped to precipitate given the international tensions, which had increased since 1900. The German political and military leadership believed that war was inevitable. Thus, the Germans were keen to strike before a relative decline of their military power could take place and in the hope of dividing the triple Entente.

***Note:** Colonial Africa came to be involved mainly because their colonizing countries were involved. So it was an obligation for them to come in defence of such empire.*

8.2 The Second World War (Causes and Africa's Involvement)

- i. **Treaty of Versailles:** The peace treaty of Versailles was lopsided and most of the participants had no sincerity of purpose, so what it ended up producing was a dictated treaty of peace imposed on Germany.
- ii. **Failure of Collective Security System:** This agreed system could not work as leaders were much concerned with their own national issues.
- iii. **Failure of Disarmament:** After the First World War, at the peace treaty of Versailles, it was agreed that countries should reduce their armaments to a level that should be consistent with their national defence. But they did not heed to the directives, yet they allowed Germany under Hitler to build up her armament.
- iv. **World Economic Crisis:** The world economic crisis which started in 1929, affected most European countries like Germany who were into rapid industrialization with borrowed loans

from the American finance house. When the USA stopped giving such loan because of the economic crisis, they were seriously undermined.

- v. ***Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis:*** On the eve of First World War, Europe was divided into two hostile camps. The same division repeated itself again with the formation of an alliance of Germany, Japan and Italy concluded through the anti-comintern pact during 1936/37. It was a combination of an anti-communist fascist powers.
- vi. ***The Problem of National Minorities:*** This minority nationalist were asking for the implementation of the Wilson principle of self-determination.
- vii. Appeasement by Britain and France.
- viii. Failure of League of Nations.
- ix. ***European Belief in the Concept of Balance of Powers:*** This belief had always created room for their formation of alliances.
- x. Germany's attack against Poland on 1st September, 1939, which was extended into a global war by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

It must be stressed here again that a careful study of both the remote and immediate causes of the wars shows that Africans had no good reason to be involved in wars which looked more of European affairs. But considering the fact that the imperial states who had maintained colonial possessions in Africa were deeply involved, they therefore placed it on their African colonies as an obligation to rise up to the challenges of defending their imperial empire for which they had been attached to. The war propaganda of the imperial powers was that they were fighting Germany to have democracy and to enforce the right of every nation to self-determination. This appealed to Africans, who were themselves, under colonial bondage. During the first war, German colonies in Africa became battlefields.

The British had formed the West Africa frontier forces with African soldiers recruited from British West Africa. A regiment of the force was stationed in each of the four British colonies (The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone). From 1915, these troops were sent to fight the Germans in Togoland and Cameroon.

However, from 1917, some of them were moved to Tanganyika in East Africa where the German colonial army was putting up a strong resistance.

Similarly, the French forced African regiments to fight in the war. Chiefs were paid to help in the recruitment and there were forced conscriptions of able bodied youths. The Germans built up African corps in their colonies.

8.3 Socio-Political Changes in Africa

It is no longer in doubt that the two great World War were mainly fought in Europe but had so many tremendous socio-political effects here in Africa.

The first and major impact which the First World War brought to Africa was the demystification of the African thought and believes of the Europeans. Thus, before this period,

Africans had perceived every average European as a semi-god. This belief simply accounted for their total submissiveness to their instructions and rules. But unfortunately, some of the Africans who fought at the first and Second World Wars were able to see these Europeans in their true self and colour. From that very moment, African ceased to see Europeans as super human beings. It was this group of Africans who started to question the right which they had to dominate and rule over Africa.

During the wars, the Europeans usually made some promises to the Africans in order to enlist them. Some of these promises were indicating that Africans would be granted self rule after the war. Beside this, the war propaganda had always presented Germany as an oppressor of the rights of man and that other nations were fighting for the right of every nation to self-determination. So at the end of each war, the colonial powers especially Britain, were forced to make some concessions.

The war period also exposed the Africans to so many socio-political developments in British colonies in other parts of the world, especially in India and South Africa. The National Congress of British West Africa was formed in 1920 by the Nationalists. Governor Clifford of Nigeria was forced to grant a constitution in 1922, allowing three elected representative in the legislative council. Sierra Leone was granted a similar constitution in 1924.

In Egypt, revolts broke out demanding that the British should leave, and upon the recommendation of the Lord Molner Commission, Egypt was granted independence in 1922.

The Second World War in particular, forced the colonial powers to embark on programmes of social developments. This may have resulted from various political agitations that followed the war and the economic boom experienced by Africa during and after the war. The British enacted the colonial development and welfare Act of 1945, under which provisions were made for building of schools, universities, hospitals and roads. In West Africa, during the war period (1939 – 1945) with the prevailing economic boom, mainly in southern Nigeria, Gold coast (Ghana), and Kenya, communities opened primary and secondary schools in large numbers. After the war, the nationalists were able to force the colonial government to take greater interest in education. These agitations led to the establishment of the University College of Ibadan, and the University of Ghana in 1948. In Kenya, the colonial government began to establish schools for Africans and before 1945, education had turned out to be an entirely missionary affairs.

In the health sector, the British colonial government started to establish hospitals and health centres with funds made available under the welfare Act.

The Second World War provided a far greater impact on the political developments of Africa. It was such that even the dormant French colonies woke up. This situation came about due to the French participation in the war. Hitler had successfully invaded and occupied France in 1940 and set up a pro German administration, the Vichy government. But General De Gaulle fled the country and set up a government in-exile (the free France) which later received the support of French West African colonies.

When Germany was finally defeated, France was committed to make changes in her colonial policies. It follows therefore that in 1946, nationalists from French West and Central Africa started organizing political parties. This was something that had been forbidden before the war.

In British West Africa, the Richards constitution in Nigeria and Burns constitution in Ghana were hurriedly drawn up in 1946, but when they received serious criticisms from the nationalists, they were replaced by constitutions which prepared the way for independence.

The North Africans were not left out in all these socio-political developments. In North Africa, as a result of the active role played by the Sanusiyya in driving out the Italian from Libya, they were able to force the allied powers to grant independence to Libya in 1951.

In Morocco, the road to independence only began in 1947 when the French were forced to appoint Moroccans as Ministers into the colonial government. Perhaps, it was only in Algeria that the settlers blocked attempts at reforms and this triggered off the bloody wars of independence which lasted till 1962. Summarily, we can say that the wars led to greater African participation in the colonial governments, constitutional reforms, formation of political parties and processes that led to independence.

8.4 Formation of Political Parties and Nationalist Movements in West Africa

The two World Wars (1914 – 1918) and (1939 – 1945) directly and indirectly played important roles which led to the formation of political parties and encouraged nationalist movements throughout West Africa.

The war time created a very good opportunities for the elite nationalists of West Africa to meet with others in other continents of the world like India, Asia and Canada, who had already gained their own independence. Through their success stories, the nationalists from West Africa were able to package themselves properly for the battle ahead. A good example was the strong and militant nationalist movements known as National Congress of British West Africa (NCBW) was formed under the leadership of J.E. Casley Hayfor, a Gold Coast lawyer in 1917. The congress comprises all the four British colonies of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia. This congress and others that came after it gave the colonial government serious pressure that eventually forced them to hand over power to Africans.

Another important World War issue that gave a very big boost to the formation of political parties and nationalist movement was the Atlantic Charter of 1941. This charter was designed by the allied powers at Placentia Bay in New Found Land under the leadership of the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill and the American President, Franklin Roosevelt. This Charter guaranteed ‘the right to all peoples of the world to choose their own form of government’, The right to self determination, passed by the Charter gave a boost to the nationalist who became bolder in their agitation for self rule.

Britain lost its pride and prestige woefully in 1941 in the far East when they were defeated by Japan. Because Britain did not do anything to obtain a redress, the defeat therefore became a psychological blow to her before most of her colonies who felt that since small Japan can defeat

Britain, they can not be safe in the hands of Britain in the face of any aggression. For this reason the nationalists became courageous in their demand for independence.

Summary

- The two World Wars were caused by too many factors which were peculiar to the Europeans, such as the struggle for capital in Europe.
- Africans would not have had anything to do in the wars, if not that they were under colonial bondage and so had no other option than to go in defence of their master's empire.
- The wars resulted to some socio-political changes in the relationships existing between the colonized and the colonizers.
- The wars demystified the Europeans who before this time were seen by the Africans as semi-gods.
- The wars created very good opportunities for Africans who later made good use of these opportunities to fight for their independence.

Objective Questions

1. The Second World War started with German's attack of _____.
 - A. France
 - B. Poland
 - C. Greece
 - D. U.S.A
2. The immediate cause of the 1st World War was Serbian assassination of _____.
 - A. Archduke Francis Ferdinand
 - B. Hitter Adolf
 - C. Prime Minister Chamberlain
 - D. Joseph Stalan
3. The Second World War started on _____.
 - A. 1st September 1939
 - B. 28th July 1993
 - C. 2nd September 1945
 - D. none of the above
4. Britain was woefully defeated in far East in 1941 by which country
 - A. France
 - B. Greece
 - C. Japan
 - D. Russia
5. National congress of British West Africa was formed under _____.

- A. Dr. Azikiwe
 - B. Chief Obafemi Awolowo
 - C. J.E. Casley Hayfor
 - D. Dr. J.C. Vaughan
6. NCBW comprises of Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia and _____.
- A. Somali
 - B. Ethiopia
 - C. Sierra Leone
7. NCBW was formed in _____.
- A. 1917
 - B. 1918
 - C. 1919
 - D. 1920
8. The British formed West African frontier force with soldiers drawn from Sierra Leone, Ghana, The Gambia and _____.
- A. South Africa
 - B. Mali
 - C. Nigeria
 - D. Somali
9. Egypt was granted independence in what year?
- A. 1922
 - B. 1930
 - C. 1912
 - D. 1914
10. Japan's unconditional surrender in the Second World War was a result of _____.
- A. Japan lost the confidence of her allies
 - B. the allied forces used atomic bomb on her cities
 - C. Japan was no longer interested in the war
 - D. none of the above

Essay Questions

1. What are the reasons behind Africa's involvement in the two World War?
2. The two World Wars gave moral and intellectual boost to Africa's nationalism. Discuss.
3. List and discuss the socio-political changes which Africans experienced at the end of the Second World War.
4. Discuss the immediate causes of the First World War in 1914.
5. Examine and discuss the events considered paramount in ending the Second World War.