

The Impact of Pan-Africanism on the
Rise of Nationalism in Algeria up to
1962.

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Pan-Africanism describes a racially conscious movement which emerged out of the African peoples' dispersal to the Americas and Europe through the Atlantic slave trade. It also refers to a unified struggle of African people and people of black African descent against all forms of external aggression and invasion. According to the African-American scholar, W. E. B. Du Bois, Pan-Africanism was essentially a movement that reflected the blacks' emotions and aspirations. It represented a growing ethnic awareness among the descendents of the African slaves in the New World. In its early stages, Pan-Africanism grew as an anti-racist philosophy which came out of the blacks' feelings of persecution, inferiority, and dependency; then it had developed as an anti-colonialist ideology to denounce Western dominance. It espoused pride in the African heritage and solidarity among all peoples of African descent.

Literally, Pan-Africanism means "all Africanism". It is protest movement based on the principle that all the people of black African descent in the African continent and all the blacks dispersed throughout the world in what was historically called the Diaspora, regardless of their ethnicity, culture or nationality share common bonds, history, experiences and objectives and must unify themselves under one force to attain their objectives.

As a movement worthy of the name, Pan-Africanism was coined in America by the Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911) through the organization of the first Pan-African conference at

Westminster Town Hall, London from July 23rd to the 25th, 1900. However, its roots may be traced back at least to the eighteenth century with the blacks' early protests against slavery and the slave trade. In the nineteenth century, Pan-Africanism developed as a reaction to segregation and racial discrimination in America and colonialism, Europeans' exploitation of the blacks' human and natural resources, in Africa.

African- Americans' interest in Africa and Pan-Africanism originated basically out of their struggle to be assimilated, on equal basis, in the American society and their permanent subjugation and rejection by the society's white members. Crushed by the hostility of slavery and the brutality of segregation and racial discrimination, some black Americans yearned for their ancestral homeland "Africa" for the achievement of dignity and self-respect. Nonetheless, others strove to challenge the whites' beliefs of the white race superiority and the black race inferiority by remaining in America, the land where they were born.

It is worth noting that in their fight for the achievement of equality, dignity, and respect world-wide, both the assimilationists and the emigrationists turned their attention upon Africa as the best means for them to promote their own status all over the world.

The black integrationists refused to be physically assimilated to Africa. However, they sought to make cultural, economic, and political ties with Africa¹ and the Africans². They sought solidarity among the blacks all over the world, particularly in Africa to reject the stigma of the blacks' inferiority and backwardness imposed by the whites and encouraged by slavery and segregation, and later perpetuated by colonialism and imperialism. The

The Impact of Pan-Africanism on the Rise of Nationalism in Algeria up to 1962.

black American integrationists evoked the greatness of the African civilisations and Africa's historical past as a proof of Africa's historical glories. Their ideas were strengthened by the writings of black writers and thinkers like Edward Blyden who gave the examples of Ghana and Mali in the middle ages, and James Africanus Horton (1835-1883) who campaigned tirelessly against blacks' inferiority and believed in the equality of all races. In his book, *West African Countries and Peoples*, published in 1868, Horton wrote : " I claim the existence of the attribute of a common humanity in the African or Negro race...there exist no radical distinctions between him and his more civilized *confrère* ..." ³. When provided with equal facilities, Horton claimed, all the races, including the African race, were able to make great achievements. Like the Western world, Horton pointed out; Africa could also rise from darkness to enlightenment. As he put it:

The proudest kingdom in Europe was once in a state of barbarism perhaps worse than now exists amongst the tribes chiefly inhabiting the West Coast of Africa; and it is an incontrovertible axiom that what has been done can again be done. If Europe ...has been raised to her present pitch of civilization by progressive advancement, Africa, too, with a guarantee of the civilization of the north, will rise into equal importance ...we may well say that the present state of Western Africa is in fact, the history of the world repeating itself ⁴.

African-American leaders regarded the promotion of the blacks in the "Dark Continent" as a means by which the African-Americans could improve their own conditions in America. If Africa could progress, the African-Americans

could no longer be regarded as inferior beings and would, therefore, gain respect and equality. Other blacks American leaders like Du Bois believed that there was a relationship between both the Africans and the African- Americans. Both peoples, Du Bois asserted, were under a white domination. A sense of solidarity and unity, therefore, developed and the African-Americans felt the need to fight not only for their own rights, but also for the promotion of the black race worldwide.

Six Pan-African congresses were held periodically between 1900 and 1945. These meetings had been attended by increasing numbers of black and white representatives from the United States, the West Indies, Europe, and Africa to discuss the problems of the blacks worldwide and to raise the blacks' feeling of unity, solidarity, and consciousness. The delegates also denounced colour and race prejudice and the exploitation of the African people.

It was not until the 1940's with the organisation of the 1945 Congress that the Pan-African movement re-emerged on a strong basis to challenge colonialism. The Pan-African leaders' ideologies were radical for the first time in the history of Pan-Africanism. The Pan-Africanists' sole aim was the attainment of independence and self-determination for all the African countries which were under the chains of colonialism.

It was on this basis that sixth Pan African Congress was held in Manchester, England in 1945. The delegates' resolutions were radical for the first time in the history of Pan-Africanism. "We are determined to be free

The Impact of Pan-Africanism on the Rise of Nationalism in Algeria up to 1962.

.... We want the right to express our thoughts and emotions
.... We demand for black Africa autonomy and independence”.⁵

As a matter of fact, these radical resolutions of the diasporan and the African leaders could but strengthen nationalism in Algeria particularly and Africa more broadly. The African leaders came to the conclusion that “to keep pressure on the colonial government, it would be necessary to organise widespread support among the people”.⁶ With the support of African- American leaders, African leaders, therefore, addressed a petition to the United Nations Conference in 1945 claiming “the principles for a free world order” to the colonised countries as laid down by F. Roosevelt and W. Churchill in the Atlantic Charter (1941).

The 1945 Pan African Congress stimulated the organisation of further meetings on the African soil. The first conference of Independent African States held in Accra in 1958 played a pivotal role in the future independence of the African states still under the chains of colonialism.

The conference was held from 15 to 22 April, and was composed of different delegates from eight independent states. Ghana (former Gold Coast) and Liberia represented black Africa in a Pan African context, and Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Libya represented North Africa in a Muslim and Arab contexts. The conference was also attended by other members from Ethiopia.

During the 1958 Conference, the delegates raised the problems of racial discrimination with regard to the African race world-wide. They also stressed on their

African personality and proclaimed a political, economic, and cultural coordination among the different African independent states. The delegates finally resolved for a direct involvement in the future independence of the African states still under the chains of colonialism. The delegates recommended that:

... a definite date should be set for the attainment of independence by each of the Colonial Territories in accordance with the will of the people of the territories and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, ... [and] that all Participating Governments should give all possible assistance to the dependent peoples in their struggle to achieve self-determination and independence ...⁷

The delegates were deeply concerned with what they called “the Question of Algeria”. They denounced the French government’s denial of granting the Algerians their right to independence. In their own words:

The Conference of Independent African states,

Deeply concerned by the continuance of war in Algeria and the denial by France to the Algerian people of the right of independence and self-determination despite various United nations resolutions ... recognises the right of the Algerian people to independence and self-determination; ... to put an end to the hostilities and to withdraw all her troops from Algeria; ... to enter into immediate peaceful negotiation with the Algerian Liberation Front; ... affirms its determination to make every possible effort to help the Algerian people toward the attainment of independence.⁸

The Impact of Pan-Africanism on the Rise of Nationalism in Algeria up to 1962.

For the achievement of their goals, the delegates insisted on the unity of all the independent states through the creation of a permanent body that would defend the common foreign interests of the independent states in world affairs. Furthermore, the delegates also sought support among the nationalist movements of the dependent African states as an important step for the future emancipation of their respective countries.

On August 4-8, 1959, delegates of the Independent African states met in a special session in Monrovia with a delegation from the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic to urge France to recognise the Algerians' right to self-determination, to stop the hostilities, and to withdraw all her troops from Algeria. The delegates also requested all people who were on good terms with the French to say a word about ceasing the bloodshed in Algeria. The delegates finally asked the Governments of the Independent African States to actively organize themselves in order to debate on the Algerian question at the fourteenth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and to keep on supporting effectively Algeria in her struggle for independence from the chains of colonialism. They declared the first of November as "Algeria Day" and an expression of solidarity with the Algerians' fight against the alien rule.

The All African Peoples Organisation (A. A. P. O) was first held at Accra, Ghana from 5 to 13 December 1958. It was a non governmental organisation that grouped together African political parties from different African geographical backgrounds. The A. A. P. O. was held to

stimulate African independence movements to achieve a continental political union among the different political activists from all Africa

About 250 delegates from twenty eight African territories attended the conference. There were representatives from: West Africa, Cameroon, Togo, Mauritania, Dahomey, Senegal, Guinea, Angola, South Africa, Algeria, and Tunisia.

The diversity of the attendees gave a great impetus to the evolution of Pan- Africanism in Africa. In fact, it proved once again the soundness of the Pan-Africanist principles of race solidarity and unity among the blacks regardless of their ethnicity, colour, or religion.

Significant emphasis was placed on the issue of independence in Africa. The delegates claimed that the independence of some African states would be meaningless without the independence of all Africa. However, substantial protests against violence were mounted by the delegates as a means by which Africa would achieve its independence and autonomy and insisted on a non violent philosophy as an ultimate way for the attainment of their objectives according to the principles of Pan-Africanism.

The delegates also raised their Pan-Africanist slogan “Africa for the Africans”. The slogan did not exclude the participation of non black members, but it implied that Africa must be ruled by the Africans. In Nkrumah’s words:

... We are not racialists or chauvinists. We welcome into our midst peoples of all other races, other nations, other communities, who desire to live among us in peace

The Impact of Pan-Africanism on the Rise of Nationalism in Algeria up to 1962.

and equality. But they must respect us and our rights, our right as the majority to rule. That, as our Western friends have taught us to understand it, is the essence of democracy.⁹

The delegates finally resolved to establish a permanent conference secretariat located in Accra to pursue the promotion of the feeling of unity among all Africans, to struggle for the eradication of discriminatory practices, colonialism and imperialism in support of independence, and to work for the establishment of a United States of Africa.

The A. A. P. O. members assembled again in Tunis from 25 to 30 January 1960 and at Cairo from 23 to 31 March 1961 to corroborate the affirmations and the resolutions set up at the first A. A. P. O. at Accra in 1958. They added among other resolutions “Resolution on the Liberation of Dependent Countries”. As a matter of fact, the A. A. P. O. delegates were:

convinced that time has come for intensifying the struggle against Imperialism; ... Demands the immediate withdrawal of all colonial governments from Africa. ... to intensify their struggle to the maximum in order to bring about a speedy liquidation of imperialism and colonialism from Africa ... calls upon all the freedom-loving peoples of the world to condemn imperialism and offer their flinching support to the African freedom fightersAnd proclaims the necessary solidarity of the African People’s Liberation Movements with all the forces of liberty and emancipation throughout the world.¹⁰

The A.A.P.O members in Tunis proceeded to a full study of the situation in Algeria. They acknowledged the progress made by the Algerian People in the war of independence under the leadership of the National front of Liberation (FLN), and praised the efforts of the Algerian combatants as a whole who have always been in the forefront in their struggle against colonialism.

The first resolution of the Second Conference of Independent African States held in Addis Ababa in June 1960 was also deeply concerned with the hostilities in Algeria which were regarded as a great threat to peace and security in Africa and the world as a whole. They insisted that both France and the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic should negotiate the conditions for the implementation of the Algerians' right independence and self-government. They further welcomed General de Gaulle's proposition on June 14, 1960, concerned with immediate discussions with Representatives of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Government about the Algerian problem of self-determination and for a cease-fire.

The second resolution of the Second Conference of Independent African States on Algeria urged all Governments of the Independent African States to support the Algerian cause (materially and diplomatically). The conference members also strove to have the support of all African governments for the Algerian cause at the United Nations as it has been proclaimed before in the Accra Conference.

Further Pan-African gatherings were held between 1960 and 1962 in defence of the Algerian cause. These included the Brazzaville Declaration on December

The Impact of Pan-Africanism on the Rise of Nationalism in Algeria up to 1962.

19, 1960 and the Casablanca Conference on January 3-7, 1961. Among many other resolutions, the delegates called for the African countries' reinforcement of their political, diplomatic, and material support of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic. In addition, they called for the immediate withdrawal of all African troops serving under French command in Algeria; and approved the enlistment of all Africans in the army of National Liberation Front, and the recognition of the existence of Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic.

As a Pan Africanist strategy for emancipation, unity among all African leaders was an effective vehicle by which many African states could gain independence. By the end of 1961, about eighty percent of the African continent became independent including Algeria. Africans' solidarity had grown into a powerful force, big enough to act as a counterweight against white colonialism and imperialism. Leaders of African independence movements of the forties and the fifties understood that their ultimate objective of autonomy and self-determination could be achieved only through unity and solidarity among the different African states. African leaders, therefore, adopted the basic Pan-Africanist ideals of political unity and international cooperation as a rallying cry for independence.

Footnotes:

1 Not all the black assimilationists sought to relate themselves with Africa. Some believed that Africa was responsible for their low status in America. They, in fact, believed in Africa's backwardness. J. A. Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa (1900-1945)*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, p. 18.

2 I. Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*, London: Methuen and COLTD, 1974, p.78.

3 Robert July, "Africanus Horton and the Idea of Independence in West Africa", *Sierra Leone Studies*, 1966, N°18, pp. 3-4.

4 *Ibid.*, P.4

5 R. Oliver and A. Atmore, *Africa since 1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.218.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

7 C. Legum, *Pan-Africanism : A Short Political Guide*, New York, Praeger, 1962., p. 141.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

9 *Ibid.*, pp 43-44.

10 *Ibid.*, 247-48.

The Impact of Pan-Africanism on the Rise of Nationalism in Algeria up to 1962.

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