

Nationalism



The concept of nationalism is quite complicated, and many scholars still debate about it in academic circles. Nationalism has been defined differently by scholars who have developed various schools of thought about it. “Nationalism involves a proper classification of a group of people with a political unit stated in national terms” (Allan, 2004). It can also be explained as a unifying factor since it aims at uniting a group of people who share common social and cultural values. Many historians believe that nationalism began in the post medieval period in Europe. According to Kohn, nationalism began in 1642, while Acton believes that it started developing during the partition of Poland in 1772. However, Kedourie contends that it began in 1806 in Berlin.

Many scholars believe that it originated during the French Revolution that took place in 1789. “This is because the French Revolution introduced the aspects of nationalist ideas, which were brewing up during the past two centuries” (Smith, 2001). Trevor Roper traces the origin of nationalism in Germany, and Hungary. From these territories, it was spread to Eastern and Southern Europe by intelligentsias. The idea of nationalism later spread to Asia and Africa. This paper seeks to discuss how nationalism led to European interest in both Africa and Asia.

Nationalism became one of the major developments that took place during the period of 19th century. “During this period, nationalism was witnessed in various European territories such as Italy, Germany and France” (Allan, 2004). The 19th century was also characterized by despotic regimes like Germany, which dominated international politics. In 1871, there was a significant development in Germany, which changed its role in world affairs.

In this case, it became unified, and this made it more stable than before. Just like other freshly formed states, Germany increasingly became nationalistic, and it wanted to assert its self both politically and economically. In this case, Germany had to seek extra territories overseas. This condition was exacerbated by the fact that the German merchants wanted more commercial opportunities abroad. Hence, they encouraged their government to acquire more territories on their behalf. This trend prevailed among other European powers including Britain.

France also found it necessary to engage in overseas expansion owing to the circumstances it had found itself in during the Franco Prussian War. Due to the humiliation it suffered during this war, France decided to replace its lost provinces by seeking territories overseas. Hence, France shifted its focus to Africa. For example, it occupied Egypt for sometime before the British it.

On the other hand, Britain keenly examined these new developments, and it became concerned about the increased European activities in Asia and Africa. Thus, it went a head and established more territories in Asia and Africa. For instance, it annexed India due to its commercial potential. It then annexed Egypt and the East African Coast because they were strategic.

Other than commercial interests, possession of many colonies was associated with pride and power. Consequently, many European powers strived to acquire many colonies in order to prove their political strength. Indeed, this was a significant aspect of nationalism during this time frame. Lastly, nationalism also coincided with industrial revolution, and this caused a great need for markets and investment opportunities in foreign territories.

Conclusion

The spread of nationalism did not stop at the end of 19th century, but it continued even in the 20th century. Many African countries fought for self determination after the Second World War, and they mainly used the nationalist ideologies. Nationalism is still being practiced even at present. For example, a wave of nationalism recently emerged in Arab countries such as Egypt Yemen, Tunisia, and Libya. These revolutions clearly demonstrate that despotic regimes still exist, and many people are still fighting for nationalism even after achieving independence. Nationalism, therefore, remains one of the greatest developments that started in 19th century.