

4 The Making of Germany and Italy

4.1 Germany – Can the Army be the Architect of a Nation?

After 1848, nationalism in Europe moved away from its association with democracy and revolution. Nationalist sentiments were often mobilised by conservatives for promoting state power and achieving political domination over Europe.

This can be observed in the process by which Germany and Italy came to be unified as nation-states. As you have seen, nationalist feelings were widespread among middle-class Germans, who in 1848 tried to unite the different regions of the German confederation into a nation-state governed by an elected parliament. This liberal initiative to nation-building was, however, repressed by the combined forces of the monarchy and the military, supported by the large landowners (called Junkers) of Prussia. From then on, Prussia took on the leadership of the movement for national unification. Its chief minister, Otto von Bismarck, was the architect of this process carried out with the help of the Prussian army and bureaucracy. Three wars over seven years – with Austria, Denmark and France – ended in Prussian victory and completed the process of unification. In January 1871, the Prussian king, William I, was proclaimed German Emperor in a ceremony held at Versailles.

On the bitterly cold morning of 18 January 1871, an assembly comprising the princes of the German states, representatives of the army, important Prussian ministers including the chief minister Otto von Bismarck gathered in the unheated Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles to proclaim the new German Empire headed by Kaiser William I of Prussia.

The nation-building process in Germany had demonstrated the dominance of Prussian state power. The new state placed a strong emphasis on modernising the currency, banking, legal and judicial systems in Germany. Prussian measures and practices often became a model for the rest of Germany.



Fig. 11 – The proclamation of the German empire in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, Anton von Werner. At the centre stands the Kaiser and the chief commander of the Prussian army, General von Roon. Near them is Bismarck. This monumental work (2.7m x 2.7m) was completed and presented by the artist to Bismarck on the latter's 70th birthday in 1885.



Fig. 12 — Unification of Germany (1866-71).

4.2 Italy Unified

Like Germany, Italy too had a long history of political fragmentation. Italians were scattered over several dynastic states as well as the multi-national Habsburg Empire. During the middle of the nineteenth century, Italy was divided into seven states, of which only one, Sardinia-Piedmont, was ruled by an Italian princely house. The north was under Austrian Habsburgs, the centre was ruled by the Pope and the southern regions were under the domination of the Bourbon kings of Spain. Even the Italian language had not acquired one common form and still had many regional and local variations.

During the 1830s, Giuseppe Mazzini had sought to put together a coherent programme for a unitary Italian Republic. He had also formed a secret society called Young Italy for the dissemination of his goals. The failure of revolutionary uprisings both in 1831 and 1848 meant that the mantle now fell on Sardinia-Piedmont under its ruler King Victor Emmanuel II to unify the Italian states through war. In the eyes of the ruling elites of this region, a unified Italy offered them the possibility of economic development and political dominance.



Fig. 13 — Caricature of Otto von Bismarck in the German reichstag (parliament), from Figaro, Vienna, 5 March 1870.

Activity

Describe the caricature. How does it represent the relationship between Bismarck and the elected deputies of Parliament? What interpretation of democratic processes is the artist trying to convey?

Chief Minister Cavour who led the movement to unify the regions of Italy was neither a revolutionary nor a democrat. Like many other wealthy and educated members of the Italian elite, he spoke French much better than he did Italian. Through a tactful diplomatic alliance with France engineered by Cavour, Sardinia-Piedmont succeeded in defeating the Austrian forces in 1859. Apart from regular troops, a large number of armed volunteers under the leadership of Giuseppe Garibaldi joined the fray. In 1860, they marched into South Italy and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and succeeded in winning the support of the local peasants in order to drive out the Spanish rulers. In 1861 Victor Emmanuel II was proclaimed king of united Italy. However, much of the Italian population, among whom rates of illiteracy were very high, remained blissfully unaware of liberal-nationalist ideology. The peasant masses who had supported Garibaldi in southern Italy had never heard of *Italia*, and believed that *La Talia* was Victor Emmanuel's wife!

Activity

Look at Fig. 14(a). Do you think that the people living in any of these regions thought of themselves as Italians?

Examine Fig. 14(b). Which was the first region to become a part of unified Italy? Which was the last region to join? In which year did the largest number of states join?



Fig. 14(a) — Italian states before unification, 1858.



Fig. 14(b) — Italy after unification.
The map shows the year in which different regions (seen in Fig 14(a)) become part of a unified Italy.

4.3 The Strange Case of Britain

The model of the nation or the nation-state, some scholars have argued, is Great Britain. In Britain the formation of the nation-state

was not the result of a sudden upheaval or revolution. It was the result of a long-drawn-out process. There was no British nation prior to the eighteenth century. The primary identities of the people who inhabited the British Isles were **ethnic** ones – such as English, Welsh, Scot or Irish. All of these ethnic groups had their own cultural and political traditions. But as the English nation steadily grew in wealth, importance and power, it was able to extend its influence over the other nations of the islands. The English parliament, which had seized power from the monarchy in 1688 at the end of a protracted conflict, was the instrument through which a nation-state, with England at its centre, came to be forged. The Act of Union (1707) between England and Scotland that resulted in the formation of the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain’ meant, in effect, that England was able to impose its influence on Scotland. The British parliament was henceforth dominated by its English members. The growth of a British identity meant that Scotland’s distinctive culture and political institutions were systematically suppressed. The Catholic clans that inhabited the Scottish Highlands suffered terrible repression whenever they attempted to assert their independence. The Scottish Highlanders were forbidden to speak their Gaelic language or wear their national dress, and large numbers were forcibly driven out of their homeland.

Ireland suffered a similar fate. It was a country deeply divided between Catholics and Protestants. The English helped the Protestants of Ireland to establish their dominance over a largely Catholic country. Catholic revolts against British dominance were suppressed. After a failed revolt led by Wolfe Tone and his United Irishmen (1798), Ireland was forcibly incorporated into the United Kingdom in 1801. A new ‘British nation’ was forged through the propagation of a dominant English culture. The symbols of the new Britain – the British flag (Union Jack), the national anthem (God Save Our Noble King), the English language – were actively promoted and the older nations survived only as subordinate partners in this union.

Activity

The artist has portrayed Garibaldi as holding on to the base of the boot, so that the King of Sardinia-Piedmont can enter it from the top. Look at the map of Italy once more. What statement is this caricature making?

Box 2

Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-82) is perhaps the most celebrated of Italian freedom fighters. He came from a family engaged in coastal trade and was a sailor in the merchant navy. In 1833 he met Mazzini, joined the Young Italy movement and participated in a republican uprising in Piedmont in 1834. The uprising was suppressed and Garibaldi had to flee to South America, where he lived in exile till 1848. In 1854, he supported Victor Emmanuel II in his efforts to unify the Italian states. In 1860, Garibaldi led the famous Expedition of the Thousand to South Italy. Fresh volunteers kept joining through the course of the campaign, till their numbers grew to about 30,000. They were popularly known as Red Shirts.

In 1867, Garibaldi led an army of volunteers to Rome to fight the last obstacle to the unification of Italy, the Papal States where a French garrison was stationed. The Red Shirts proved to be no match for the combined French and Papal troops. It was only in 1870 when, during the war with Prussia, France withdrew its troops from Rome that the Papal States were finally joined to Italy.



Fig. 15 – Garibaldi helping King Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia-Piedmont to pull on the boot named ‘Italy’. English caricature of 1859.

New words

Ethnic – Relates to a common racial, tribal, or cultural origin or background that a community identifies with or claims