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French Revolution and Making of Nationalism in Europe

The concept of nationalism emerged in Europe during the nineteenth century, marking the decline of feudalism and the beginning of the Renaissance, which means 'Rebirth'. Nationalism was vividly illustrated by French artist Frederic Sorrieu in 1848 through a series of prints envisioning a world of democratic and social republics free from absolutist rule. The ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity, and nationalism dominated the social and political landscape of 19th-century Europe.

Before 1789, France was under absolute monarchy, where the monarch held unlimited power. The French Revolution of 1789 was a pivotal event that led to the formation of a constitutional monarchy, reducing royal and feudal privileges and transferring sovereignty from the monarch to the people. The revolution introduced the ideas of 'la patrie' (the fatherland) and 'le citoyen' (the citizen), and the Estates General was renamed the National Assembly, elected by active citizens. French armies spread revolutionary ideals across Europe in the 1790s.

Napoleon Bonaparte ruled France from 1799 to 1815, assuming absolute power as First Consul. He introduced the Napoleonic Code in 1804, establishing equality before the law,

abolishing privileges based on birth, ending feudal systems, and freeing peasants from serfdom. He also improved transport and communication but imposed taxation, censorship, and mandatory military service.

After Napoleon's defeat in 1815, conservatism became the dominant political philosophy in Europe, emphasizing tradition and gradual change. However, liberalism, advocating liberty and equality, continued to inspire secret societies and revolutionaries like Giuseppe Mazzini, who sought the unification of Italy through organizations such as Young Italy and Young Europe.

Liberalism and Conservatism

Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy based on liberty, equality before the law, and consent of the governed, aiming to end aristocratic and clerical privileges. Conservatism stresses the importance of tradition, established institutions, and gradual development over rapid change. After 1815, conservatives repressed liberal revolutionaries, viewing them as threats to restored monarchies.

Exam Questions

Q1: What were the main ideals that dominated Europe after the French Revolution?

A1: Liberty, equality, fraternity, and nationalism were the main ideals that dominated Europe after the French Revolution.

Q2: How did Napoleon contribute to the spread of revolutionary ideas?

A2: Napoleon introduced the Napoleonic Code, which established equality before the law and abolished privileges based on birth, and his armies spread revolutionary ideals across Europe.

The Age of Revolutions 1830–1848

Liberalism and nationalism became closely linked with revolutions across Europe, including in the Italian and German states, the Ottoman Empire provinces, Ireland, and

Poland. The first major upheaval occurred in France in July 1830, overthrowing the Bourbon kings. The Greek War of Independence also mobilized nationalist feelings among Europe's educated elite.

Culture, including art, poetry, stories, and music, played a significant role in shaping nationalist sentiments. The Romanticism movement emphasized emotion and shared cultural heritage to foster nationalism. Language was another important factor, with efforts to impose dominant languages like Russian in certain regions.

The 1830s were marked by economic crisis, bad harvests, and poverty, leading to revolts by peasants, workers, and middle classes. In 1848, political associations in Frankfurt voted for an all-German National Assembly. Although conservative forces suppressed many liberal movements, the old order could not be fully restored, and nationalism began to move away from its association with democracy and revolution.

Romanticism

Romanticism was a cultural movement rejecting science and reason in favor of emotion and heart. It aimed to create a shared collective heritage and common cultural past to inspire nationalist feelings.

Exam Questions

Q1: What role did culture play in the rise of nationalism during the Age of Revolutions?

A1: Culture, through art, poetry, stories, and music, helped express and shape nationalist feelings by creating a shared heritage and identity.

Q2: What was the significance of the 1848 revolutions in Europe?

A2: The 1848 revolutions marked widespread demands for political rights and national unity, though many were suppressed, they weakened the old conservative order and changed the nature of nationalism.

Nation States—Unification of Italy, Germany and Britain

After 1848, nationalism was often used by conservatives to promote state power and political dominance in Europe. The unification of Italy and Germany were key examples of this process.

Unification of Germany (1866–1871)

In 1848, middle-class Germans attempted to unite the German confederation under an elected parliament, but this was repressed by monarchy and military forces supported by Junkers (large landowners). Prussia led the unification movement under Otto von Bismarck, who fought three wars against Austria, Denmark, and France. The German Empire was proclaimed on 18 January 1871 in the Palace of Versailles, establishing Prussian dominance and modernizing the new state.

Unification of Italy

Italy was divided into seven states, with Sardinia–Piedmont ruled by an Italian princely house, northern Italy under Austrian Habsburgs, central Italy under the Pope, and southern regions under Bourbon kings. Giuseppe Mazzini formed Young Italy to promote unification. After failed uprisings, King Victor Emmanuel II and his chief minister Count Cavour led the unification. Sardinia–Piedmont allied with France to defeat Austria in 1859, and by 1861 Victor Emmanuel was declared king of united Italy with Rome as its capital.

Formation of Britain/United Kingdom

The British Isles were inhabited by English, Welsh, Scots, and Irish. England grew in power and influence, and the concept of a nation–state centered on England emerged after the 1688 Parliament took power from the monarchy. The 1707 Act of Union united England and Scotland into the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Scotland's institutions were suppressed to promote British identity. Ireland was incorporated into the UK in 1801 after a failed revolt, with Protestant dominance established over Catholics.

Exam Questions

Q1: Who was the architect of German unification?

A1: Otto von Bismarck was the architect of German unification.

Q2: How was Italy unified?

A2: Italy was unified through the efforts of Giuseppe Mazzini, King Victor Emmanuel II, and Count Cavour, with military alliances and campaigns against Austria and other rulers.

Visualising the Nation: Nationalism and Imperialism

In the 19th century, nations were often personified as female allegories by artists to represent abstract concepts. In Germany, 'Germania' symbolized the nation, while in France, 'Marianne' represented liberty and the republic. Marianne's symbols included the fasces, representing strength in unity, and the red Phrygian cap, symbolizing freedom.

After 1871, nationalism in Europe became more competitive and conflicted, with major powers like Russia, Germany, England, and Austro-Hungary using nationalism to pursue imperialist goals. The Balkan region became a hotspot for imperial rivalry, leading to wars and eventually the First World War. Nationalist movements also emerged globally against imperial domination, adapting the European nation-state concept to local contexts.

Exam Questions

Q1: What are female allegories in the context of nationalism?

A1: Female allegories are artistic personifications of nations as women, symbolizing national ideals like liberty and unity.

Q2: How did nationalism contribute to imperialism in Europe?

A2: Nationalism fueled competition among European powers, who used nationalist sentiments to justify imperial expansion and control over regions like the Balkans.

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain the significance of the Napoleonic Code.

Answer: The Napoleonic Code established equality before the law, abolished privileges based on birth, ended feudal systems, and freed peasants from serfdom, laying the foundation for modern legal systems in Europe.

Example 2: Describe the role of Giuseppe Mazzini in Italian unification.

Answer: Giuseppe Mazzini was a revolutionary who founded Young Italy, promoting the idea of a united Italian republic and inspiring nationalist movements despite facing exile.

Practice Set

Easy

- What was the main outcome of the French Revolution?
- Who was the first king of united Italy?

Moderate

- Explain the role of Otto von Bismarck in German unification.
- What were the ideals symbolized by Marianne during the French Revolution?

Challenging

- Discuss how nationalism contributed to the outbreak of the First World War.
- Analyze the impact of Romanticism on nationalist movements in 19th-century Europe.

Answer Key

- The French Revolution led to the formation of a constitutional monarchy and reduced royal privileges.
- Victor Emmanuel II was the first king of united Italy.
- Otto von Bismarck led Prussia through wars and diplomacy to unify Germany under Prussian leadership.
- Marianne symbolized liberty, republic, and the ideals of the French Revolution.
- Nationalism intensified rivalries among European powers, contributing to imperial conflicts that led to World War I.
- Romanticism fostered nationalist sentiments by emphasizing shared culture, history, and emotions, inspiring political movements.

Quick Reference

- **Nationalism:** Loyalty and devotion to a nation-state above other interests.
- **French Revolution:** 1789 uprising that ended absolute monarchy and promoted liberty and equality.
- **Napoleonic Code:** Legal code establishing equality before law and abolishing feudal privileges.
- **Unification of Germany:** Process led by Otto von Bismarck culminating in 1871 German Empire.
- **Unification of Italy:** Movement led by Mazzini, Victor Emmanuel II, and Cavour to unite Italian states.
- **Romanticism:** Cultural movement emphasizing emotion and shared heritage to inspire nationalism.
- **Imperialism:** Extending a country's power through colonization or military force.

Glossary

Absolutism

A system where the monarch holds unlimited power without legal constraints.

Conservatism

A political philosophy valuing tradition and gradual change.

Liberalism

A philosophy advocating liberty, equality before law, and consent of the governed.

Nation-state

A sovereign political and geographical entity representing a nation.

Romanticism

A cultural movement emphasizing emotion and national heritage.

Napoleonic Code

A legal code introduced by Napoleon establishing equality before law.

Imperialism

The policy of extending a country's power through colonization or military force.

Chronology of Key Events

Year	Event	Significance
1789	French Revolution begins	End of absolute monarchy; rise of nationalism and constitutional monarchy
1804	Napoleonic Code introduced	Established equality before law; abolished feudal privileges
1815	Defeat of Napoleon; Congress of Vienna	Restoration of conservatism; repression of liberal movements
1830	July Revolution in France	Overthrow of Bourbon kings; rise of liberalism and nationalism
1831	Mazzini exiled	Continued efforts for Italian unification
1848	Revolutions across Europe	Widespread demands for national unity and political rights
1861	Italy unified under Victor Emmanuel II	Formation of the Kingdom of Italy
1871	German Empire proclaimed	Unification of Germany under Prussian leadership