Case Study: Italian Nationalism

Italy was a divided country by the beginning of the 1800s. Many areas of Italy had been dominated over time such as Austria, Spain and France. Austria had control over areas such as Tuscany, Lombardy and the Bourbon family had rule of Modena, Parma and Naples. Part of the North of Italy was ruled by House of Savoy. The State of Piedmont was the only state labelled as natively Italian, the rest of the states were under different foreign control. There were many factors that contributed to the unification in Italy in 1960/61. Napoleon had a dominant role in establishing a united Italy. He partook in campaigns that aided the development of nationalism in Italy, even though Italian unification wasn't his first and main objective, he did help to achieve it. There were other people and factors that helped contribute such as Garibaldi and Cavour. All these factors had a significant role to establish unification.

One of the main factors behind Italian unification was the Revolutions of 1848. Societies secretly created new regimes, and many of this promoted nationalism in Italy. One of these societies was called Carbonari which aimed to liberate Italy through different military uprisings. This was inspired by the French Revolution. The meetings of these societies put them at risk and they were sentenced to death, however despite the risk they continued with the meetings. This still became an issue even after the unification process in 1820. Giuseppe Mazzini participated in this group and also created a new society called Young Italy. This supported Italian Unification and encouraged young men to partake to support unification. This created the movement process called the Risorgimento. The Risorgimento was a literary movement that helped to awaken the national consciousness of people in Italy. Giuseppe Mazzini was a very important nationalist and was truly inspired by Italian unity and did not agree with foreign control and dominance over Italy. He was also inspired by historical achievements to help inspire people to strive for nationalism and pride. His work created the beginning of this spread of Italian nationalism. Mazzini partook is speeches and brought a revolution to Italy and the ideology of unification could occur before political unification. This work aided Cavour's tasks, the increase of enthusiasm for nationalism made and strengthened by Mazzini helped Cavour to start revolts and to unify different small principalities through the use of referendum. This was a main factor behind unification because it led to different political events that liberated the Italian states from foreign control to unite them.

This movement caught the attention of another important figure in the unification process, Giuseppe Garibaldi. They collaborated in 1833 and tried to work together to achieve both their goals. Although Garibaldi fled to South America where he took part in various battles. His stay didn't last long and he returned during the revolutions in 1848. During the first Italian war of independence, he won small victories. Garibaldi took part in the campaign of 1859 where he met with Cavour in 1858 where they discussed gathering volunteers where they hoped this force would trigger the war, by firstly using it as a trigger for a revolution. As the planning continued, huge numbers of volunteers travelled to Piedmont and Garibaldi was given thousands of these, with their presence in the army it created tension with the Austrians. Garibaldi first assigned the task to cross the river of Ticino which was by the border of Piedmont and Austrian Lombardy. They crossed the river and prepared to protect the city against the Austrian army (leaded by Urban). Urban launched his attack in May, part of the large army didn't reach the battlefield and the Austrian's initial attack was rejected. Garibaldi decided to

create a counterattack to force the Austrians back where Urban was defeated. Garibaldi managed to have many successful victories such as the Battle of San Fermo where the Austrians retreated once again and Garibaldi occupied this town and gained lots of supplies. However his combat of Laveno in May 1859 failed, he put himself and others at the risk of becoming trapped however was saved by other events. The battle of Tre Pont in June ended almost as a draw, this shows that although his Alpine Campaign didn't have much of an effect on the war outcome, it showed what Garibaldi was capable of and that he could win over good quality Austrian soldiers.

The next two important figures were probably the biggest influencers behind the unification of Italy, Napoleon III and Cavour. They worked together in many aspects. During the War of 1850, Napoleon wanted to be presented as against the old conservative version of Europe established at Vienna. The nationalising ideas of Cavour seemed ideal. They had a secret meeting at Plombieres in 1858 where they agreed to an alliance and a plan for the war with Austria. They wanted to cause a war and together, defeat Austria in war and create an Italian nation-state. Their plan was for Napoleon to try to isolate Austria and Cavour would attempt to provoke them into a war. The war succeeded for Cavour and the Austrians left Lombardy after the victory of the French at the battle of Magenta and Solferino in 1859 (June). However, Napoleon was worried about Prussian intervention and agreed to a separate peace with Austria in July 1859. Cavour was displeased with the turnout. Lombardy was given to Piedmont and Venetia still under Austrian control. Nice and Savoy would stay with Piedmont. When the breakout of the war began in 1859, duchies rulers went to Austria and their position was taken over by nationalist governments. For the troubles, Napoleon received Savoy and Nice which he had been promised. The first stage of Italian unification was a victory for Cavour, he was only denied Venetia and he surprisingly won the Central Duchies and part of the Papal States. This time frame of 1858-60 showed as war continued, it would remain a key tool in the construction of modern Italy.

Although we see a lot of the factors that aided unification were usually collaborations and mixes of different factors and roles such as Napoleon III and Cavour, there was some tension between figures. When Cavour gained the victory of Nice (the birthplace of Garibaldi) it caused tensions between the two men and it created a bad relationship between them. Garibaldi continued to protest and encourage irredentism, Garibaldi started to conduct a conquest against Sicily and he gained a lot of victory by doing so. By this time Cavour had gained the unity of Modena, Tuscany, Parma and Papal States. However, there was still no success with Rome. Cavour had many fears and worries that Garibaldi, was aiming to replace Sardinia as the unifier of Italy. Cavour was not pleased at all by Garibaldi's goals and ambitions. Cavour decided that he needed to do something to stop Garibaldi, so he sent Sardinian soldiers to the Papal States and Naples. Cavour created a referendum to be able to annex Naples so it was returned to Sardinia. Cavour was successful with this action and Garibaldi was outsmarted by this. Cavour's system of politics was such a powerful action that was used as an assessment of control and power and allowed a nation to express its rights and views. Cavour's quick thinking and sudden annexation of these states resulted in Garibaldi giving up his control of Naples and Sicily to Emmanuel II. We could say that Garibaldi did aid unification however there were moments where he hindered the development to create this nationalism in Italy. Although, if it weren't for this conflict between Cavour and Garibaldi then Italy may not be seen to be the unified country we see today. We can discredit Garibaldi however all the actions leading up to unification in 1861 did help to create this unity, even if it may have taken longer than hoped for due to certain events and attitudes.

To conclude, the official founding of Italy came to be in the beginning of 1861. By the end of the Second War of Independence, all of Italy except Rome and Venetia formed the new Kingdom of Italy. The process was not an easy one as we can see due to the outbreak of revolutions and wars. This victory was aided by Cavour who over the winter of 1859-60 manipulated events and had succeeded in more victories than he had expected to. The unification with Naples and Sicily would never have occurred without Garibaldi. The help of his campaign may not straight away seem to have had the biggest impact, even the smallest of support helped to unite all the states in the end. Napoleon III was vital for unification. Piedmont wouldn’t have succeeded in any other way or got away with defeating the rest of Italy if Napoleon wasn’t so terrified by the nature of the violent war (and also as he reunited Venetia with its home). All these figures may not seem so important individually but collectively, Italy wouldn’t be its united kingdom today if any single figure had not fulfilled their role like they did.