

# giuseppe garibaldi between myth and reality

by gianfranco cresciani

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*Gianfranco Cresciani emigrated from Trieste to Sydney in 1962. He worked for EPT, the Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Ministry for the Arts of the NSW Government on cultural and migration issues. In 1989 and 1994 he was member of the Australian Delegation re-negotiating with the Italian Government the Italo-Australian Cultural Agreement. Master of Arts (First Class Honours) from Sydney University in 1978. Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, from the University of New South Wales in 2005, in recognition of "distinguished eminence in the field of history". In 2004 the Italian Government awarded him the honour of Cavaliere Ufficiale dell'Ordine al Merito for facilitating cultural exchanges between Italy and Australia. He has produced books, articles, exhibitions and radio and television programs in Australia and Italy on the history of Italian migration to Australia.*

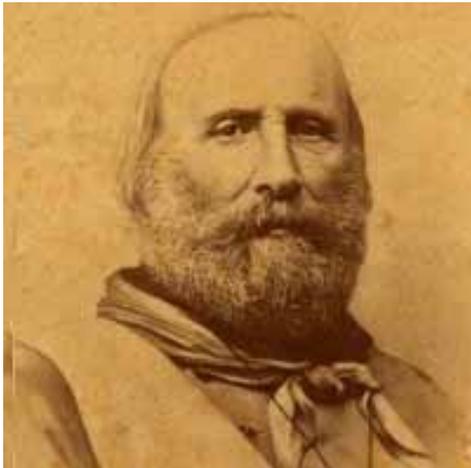


Fig. 1. Giuseppe Garibaldi. Photo sourced from Internet.

THIS YEAR MARKS the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Giuseppe Garibaldi. Born on 4 July 1807 in Nice, a city then under the administration of the Kingdom of Sardinia, throughout his life Garibaldi enjoyed unprecedented popularity in Italy and abroad. In 1864 half a million Londoners lined the streets to cheer Garibaldi when he paid a visit to that city<sup>1</sup> (1) and in Italy his appeal had religious overtones. In many a squalid hovel of peasant Southern Italy, his portrait hung

beside that of the Madonna, and to speak ill of him, (*ha parlato male di Garibaldi*), was tantamount to *lèse majesté*. His admirers eulogised him as the "Hero of the Two Worlds", the *invitto Duce* (undefeated leader), the *condottiero* (soldier of fortune), the *apostolo della libertà* (the apostle of freedom), and what in the Twentieth Century would be called a personality cult was built around his figure. Indeed he was, throughout the history of the *Risorgimento* and of Liberal and Fascist Italy, the most popular and revered member of that triad, together with Mazzini and Cavour, that was credited with engineering single-handedly the unification of Italy, under the paternal approval of that picaresque character who was King Victor Emmanuel II, the *re galantuomo*, the gentleman king, better known as the *re galante*, the gallant king – even though the adjective "randy" might be more apt in consideration of his sexual exploits, worthy of a Giacomo Casanova, among the peasant womenfolk of Piedmont. Garibaldi's greatest triumph was the overthrow, in 1860, of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the event which precipitated Italian unification. In May of that year, he landed in Sicily with a volunteer force of 1,070 men, the famous *Mille* (Thousand). Within two weeks this force had taken Palermo, forcing the capitulation of an army of 20,000 regulars. In August, Garibaldi crossed to the Italian mainland, routed the Neapolitan army

<sup>1</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *Italy. A Modern History*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959, p. 118.

and captured Naples. This feat became one of the great legends of the Nineteenth Century, both because of the skill with which Garibaldi overcame vast military odds and, equally importantly, because of the potent political symbolism of the event in an age in which the process of the nationalisation of the masses had begun, and people increasingly responded to the clarion call of nationalism in a Europe still in the grip of the Holy Alliance.

Garibaldi's fame is also alive and well in contemporary Italy. A survey carried out in July 2007 on a sample of 1002 people by the *Istituto di Studi Giuseppe Garibaldi*, found out that 46.4 per cent Italians still considered Garibaldi by far the most significant national figure, followed by Mussolini (15.5 %) and by Silvio Berlusconi (5.4%). The interviewees admired him for his courage, patriotism, heroism and tenacity, although 41 per cent considered Garibaldi an adventurer and 31 per cent a megalomaniac. His popularity spread across the entire political spectrum; 31 per cent considered him to be a Republican, 21 per cent a Socialist, 11 per cent Communist, 7 per cent Anarchist, 6 per cent a Freemason and one per cent a Fascist.<sup>2</sup>

However, not all contemporary Italians share a positive view of Garibaldi. If in the past he was dubbed "thief on land" and "sea pirate" by clerical diehards, today's fellow-countrymen are even more scathing. On 4 July 2007, during the bicentenary celebrations at the Italian Senate, Roberto Calderoli of the Northern League declared that "we are grieving, because Garibaldi's and the Savoy Monarchy's activities have ruined *Padania* (e.g. Northern Italy) and the South, which previously were very well off as they were" (*stavano benissimo come stavano*). The League's paper, *Padania*, on the same day was venomous in its condemnation of Garibaldi, calling him "a slave-trader, a violent character, a pirate without scruples, a staunch anti-clerical, manoeuvred by the puppeteers of the *Risorgimento's* swindle". Southern parliamentarians levelled similar criticism when they asked the rhetorical question: "Garibaldi a hero? Only a coloniser, a person manoeuvred by the Savoy dynasty, who started the cynical project of plunging the South into poverty. Until unification, in the vaults of the Bank of Sicily and the Bank of Naples there were gold reserves double those in all other Italian states put together. Thereafter, that money was sent North and Southern emigration began".<sup>3</sup> Also in

July 2007, the Lombardy Region printed ten thousand copies of a *History of Lombardy* in cartoons, which was distributed to state schools, in which the name of Garibaldi was not even mentioned. Its editor stated that it was better to speak of the Five Days of Milan in 1848, when its inhabitants fought against the Austrian occupiers, than of Garibaldi.<sup>4</sup> Likewise in the South, on 5 July 2007 the mayor of the Sicilian town of Capo d'Orlando changed the name of the street bearing the name of Garibaldi, justifying his action by saying that "it is a fact that Garibaldi bode ill for Sicily by being involved in crime and violence".<sup>5</sup> Even more scurrilous allegations were advanced on an internet site in Salerno, where it was claimed that "Garibaldi was not tall, was plagued by rheumatism, was stooped and two people had to lift him on his horse ... people in the South say that he wore his hair long because a girl, whom he was raping, bit off one of his ears. This man was not a hero; today we would call him a criminal, a terrorist, a mercenary".<sup>6</sup>

In fact, since Garibaldi's death, people who, inspired by his deeds, carried out guerrilla activities or conspired against the established political order, lionised him. On the contrary, his detractors continued to defame him and to play down his contribution to the history of Italy. Triestine historian Fabio Cusin, in his *Anti-History of Italy*, reminds us that, "in many parts of Italy Garibaldi will be considered a hero for the very reason that his reactionary detractors tried to soil his name by calling him a brigand".<sup>7</sup> In fact, Southern peasants, oppressed under the Bourbon rule, initially saw in Garibaldi the deliverer of their plight, the champion of their rights, a Nineteenth Century version of an Italian Che Guevara. When their hopes were dashed by Garibaldi, as well as by the new Piedmontese rulers, who ruthlessly declared a state of siege and imposed martial law, they turned to a form of partisan warfare that, between 1860 and 1870, saw half of the Italian Army, some 86 regiments totalling 211,500 Italian soldiers, employed in counter-insurgency operations. Twenty three thousand troops died in combat, while the "brigands", as they were disparagingly called by the Piedmontese, suffered 250,000 killed, executed or imprisoned. Half a million of those who offered resistance were sentenced to jail terms

<sup>2</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, 16 July 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, 5 July 2007.

<sup>4</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, 6 July 2007.

<sup>5</sup> *La Sicilia*, 5 July 2007.

<sup>6</sup> [www.infinito.it/utenti/s/s.martino.sannita/Brigantaggio/Personaggi/Garibaldi01.htm](http://www.infinito.it/utenti/s/s.martino.sannita/Brigantaggio/Personaggi/Garibaldi01.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Fabio Cusin, *Antistoria d'Italia*, Mondadori, Milan 1970, p. 74.

and twelve thousand were deported to the North. However, the "brigands" were not destroyed, they found another form of rebellion: emigration.<sup>8</sup>

During the Twentieth Century, both the Left and the Right of the Italian political spectrum *strumentalizzarono* (to use that ugly and much misused Italian verb), took possession of the myth of Garibaldi for their own ends. He became a man for all seasons. During the Spanish Civil War, the Twelfth International Brigade had a Garibaldi Battalion<sup>9</sup> and on 12 November 1941, a group of Italian political refugees in Mexico City, among whom Francesco Frola, a Socialist from Turin, Mario Montagnana, Communist leader and brother-in-law of Palmiro Togliatti, and Vittorio Vidali, the legendary commander of the Fifth Regiment in the Spanish Civil War, founded the *Alleanza Internazionale Giuseppe Garibaldi*.<sup>10</sup> Branches of the *Alleanza* were established in most South American countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Egypt.<sup>11</sup> In an issue of its bulletin, *Informacion Italiana*, the *Alleanza* stated that June was a *mes sagrado*, a holy month for anti-Fascists, because Garibaldi died on 2 June 1882. He was described as "the hero of Italian *Risorgimento* ... a fighter for world freedom ... a hero of a thousand battles ... not an Italian figure, but a universal one, like Washington, Bolivar, Juárez".<sup>12</sup> In 1954, an anti-Fascist organisation by the name *Azione Garibaldi* (Garibaldi Action) was also active in Buenos Aires.<sup>13</sup> In Australia, the first issue of the anti-Fascist newspaper *Il Risveglio* (The Awakening), published in Sydney in August 1944, displayed on its front page a large portrait of Garibaldi.<sup>14</sup> Also, between 1943 and 1945, all Communist partisan formations fighting the German Army and its Fascist collaborators bore the name of Garibaldi Brigades.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.morronedelsannio.com/sud/brigantaggi\\_o.htm](http://www.morronedelsannio.com/sud/brigantaggi_o.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain*, Phoenix 2006, p. 234.

<sup>10</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia. 1922-1945*, Australian National University Press, Canberra 1980, p. 199. Also, Federica Bertagna, *La patria di riserva. L'emigrazione fascista in Argentina*, Donzelli, Roma 2006, p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> Cresciani Archive, Leaflet by the *Alleanza Garibaldi*, dated April 1945.

<sup>12</sup> Cresciani Archive, *Informacion Italiana*, un-dated.

<sup>13</sup> Bertagna, op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>14</sup> Cresciani Archive, *Il Risveglio* newspaper, August 1944.



Fig. 2. *The Garibaldi myth down under. This photograph, taken in Melbourne c.1938, shows members and sympathisers of the Casa d'Italia club during a May Day rally. The placards on the left, probably painted by Australian artist Noel Counihan, contrast 'Garibaldi's Italy' with 'Mussolini's Italy'. © C. Canteri & Italian Historical Society, CoAsIt.*



Fig. 3. *A close-up of the placard representing 'Garibaldi's Italy' shown in Fig. 2. © C. Canteri and Italian Historical Society, CoAsIt.*

From the Right, the Fascist Regime carried out a similar operation of appropriating the Garibaldi myth. On 4 June 1932, at the inauguration of the monument to Anita Garibaldi in Rome, Mussolini stated that "my Black Shirts ... are politically on the same ideal wavelength as the Red Shirts and their *condottiero*".<sup>15</sup> On 16 March 1927, Mussolini received Ezio Garibaldi, son of Ricciotti, leading a group of red shirted *garibaldini*. On that occasion, Garibaldi's nephew, who in 1929 would become a member of the Fascist Chamber of Fasces and Corporations, declared that the Duce was the heir and successor of Garibaldi and indeed, that he was a truer and bigger leader.<sup>16</sup> More importantly, in 1932 the Regime began publishing Garibaldi's complete works. Its editors took pains to emphasise that

<sup>15</sup> Luigi Salvatorelli and Giovanni Mira, *Storia d'Italia nel periodo fascista*, Einaudi, Turin 1961, p. 500.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 386-387.

Garibaldi's ideas acted as forerunners to Mussolini's policy, synthesised in the aphorism *Libro e Moschetto* (Book and Musket).<sup>17</sup>

The representation of Garibaldi, dressed in either nationalist or subversive garb, is reminiscent of an old portrait which has been touched up or even painted over by people who wanted to impose their own interpretative models for their personal or factional interests. In order to restore the work to its original form, the alterations and accretions must by necessity be removed. Likewise, the antiseptic nationalist iconography portraying Garibaldi as a pure, naïve and disinterested hero of Italian unification wilfully ignores the fundamental political and ideological chasm and the ensuing acrimonious relationship that separated him from the two other "apostles", Cavour and Mazzini, and must be rejected. Also discarded must be the extremist image of a Garibaldi criminally committed to subvert the established political and social order. Historical reality is more complex and lies, as often is the case, somewhere in the middle.

Far from being the submissive fellow-traveller of the Savoy dynasty in its ruthless quest to expand its rule to Central and Southern Italy, as the mythology of the *Risorgimento* would lead us to believe, Garibaldi, a staunch Republican, was enough of a realist to see that Piedmont's policy ran counter his plans to establish a Republican dictatorship in the South. The pathetic utterances "*obbedisco*" (I obey) at Aspromonte, and "Sire, I give to you a United Italy" at Teano, put in Garibaldi's mouth by zealous nationalists, were never made. In his *Memorie*, he unambiguously stated that "Cavour's Government cast a net of entrapments, of miserable opposition which beset our expedition to the very end", and further, that "the Savoy monarchy, by nature suspicious, did not act for the common good. Badly advised, it tried to consolidate its hold by trampling on people's rights and causing their misery".<sup>18</sup> In order to explain his apparently contradictory behaviour, he declared in his *Testamento Politico* (Political Will) that, "although Italy has the worst government possible, whenever there is no chance to overthrow it, I believe it is better to abide by Dante's great dictum: Make Italy even with the devil".<sup>19</sup>

Cavour deceived Garibaldi and manipulated him to serve his own interests, a fact that

Garibaldi was well aware of. For instance, at the outset of the Expedition of the *Mille*, Cavour was decidedly hostile, and denied access to guns and money that Garibaldi could source in Milan. However, when the Piedmontese statesman realised that the expedition would go ahead irrespectively, he lent his assistance by putting at Garibaldi's heels a watchdog, Giuseppe La Farina, by supplying money, weapons and ammunition, by corrupting Bourbon public officials and by granting safe passage to Sicily to the two vessels carrying the *Mille*, escorted by the Sardinian Navy. Cavour's unscrupulous use of Garibaldi's volunteer army brings to mind other, more recent episodes of the Italian State's covert and questionable operations, like the Gladio stay-behind scheme, the unlawful manipulation of Right-wing extremists by treacherous members of the Italian Secret Service, the *servizi deviati*, or the less known plan by Defence Minister Paolo Emilio Taviani to supply weapons during the Cold War to Triestine Nationalist associations in the eventuality of an invasion of the city by Marshal Tito's Army.<sup>20</sup> However, when Garibaldi's actions ran against the interests of the Kingdom of Piedmont, he was quickly and ruthlessly brought to order, as in October 1860, when he was forced to relinquish control of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to the Piedmontese Army. Garibaldi's capitulation ended his revolutionary dictatorship. Similarly, in 1862, Garibaldi's attempt to "liberate" Rome from the Pope, who since 1849 was under the protection of a French garrison, was crushed by the Italian army at Aspromonte, when its troops fired on the *garibaldini*, killing a dozen of them and wounding Garibaldi, and summarily executed those who had deserted the Army to join the *garibaldini*. Garibaldi was taken prisoner and jailed in a fortress at Varignano, near La Spezia. Again in 1867, when the general, in his last attempt to wrestle Rome from the Pope, was defeated at Mentana by a French expeditionary corps, the Italian Government did not afford him any assistance, mindful of not further worsening Italo-French relations. Rather than Garibaldi's deeds, it was the complex diplomatic game played by the Savoy Monarchy and the Great Powers that brought about the unification of Italy. British interests in Naples and in Sicily favoured the Expedition of the Thousand. French interests kept at bay Italy's eagerness to conquer Rome until 20 September 1870, when Italian

<sup>17</sup> Giuseppe Armani's introduction to Garibaldi's *Memorie*, Rizzoli, Milano 1982, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Garibaldi, *Memorie*, op. cit., p. 386.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246 and 390.

<sup>20</sup> Silvio Maranzana, *Le armi per Trieste Italiana*, Edizioni Italo Svevo, Trieste 2003, pp. 71-148.

*bersaglieri* breached Rome's walls at Porta Pia and entered the Eternal City, finally putting to an end the Pope's temporal rule. This not so daring act was made possible only because twenty days earlier, on 1 September 1870, the Prussian Army had defeated the French Army at Sedan. Emperor Napoleon III was made a prisoner, thus precipitating the fall of his Empire and, on 4 September, the proclamation of the Republic in Paris. History would repeat itself seventy years later when, in June 1940, another unprincipled Italian Government would treacherously stab in the back a France prostrated by the German *blitzkrieg*, in order, as Mussolini brutally put it, to throw on the negotiating table the weight of a thousand fallen Italians.

Also Garibaldi's romanticised libertarianism must be reassessed when confronted with his actions during the conquest of Sicily in 1860. Courageous, riding a white horse, brandishing a sword and wearing a red mantle, blond and blue-eyed, eating bread and onions, prone to rhetorical flights, he was the physical antithesis of those sombre, black-clothed, black-bearded, *lupara*-branding (gunshot), silent and sad-looking Sicilians who were asking for the protection of their homes and feuds, and protection from social revolution. The Mafia dominated the Sicilian countryside well before the arrival of the Hero of the Two Worlds. At first, Garibaldi sided with the thousands of peasants who enthusiastically rallied to fight for him with their sickles and farming tools, enticed by his promises of land redistribution and cheaper food; but he soon realised that he could not govern without the support of the landlords and the Mafia. When, in August 1860, the *cafoni* (destitute peasants) in the village of Bronte occupied the lands granted by the Bourbons to Lord Nelson and his British heirs, Garibaldi sent Nino Bixio and a detachment of *garibaldini* to re-establish "public order", as well as to safeguard British interests. Two Royal Navy's vessels berthed in the harbour of Marsala, instructed to facilitate Garibaldi's landing and protect British property, like the Nelson estate and the Ingham family owned Marsala wine bottling plant. Bixio arrested the ringleaders and ordered the summary execution in the village square of five "communists" or "communards" as they were called, because they were upholding the local *comune* (Council's) interests. This was the price the landowners demanded in exchange for backing the nationalist revolution. Following this episode of wanton repression, support for Garibaldi waned among Sicilian peasants. Yet again, the Mafia had flexed its muscles, as it

would on 1 May 1947 in a similar instance, when it commissioned the men of another "hero" of Sicilian brigandage, the bandit Salvatore Giuliano, to fire upon "Communist" peasants demonstrating in support of land redistribution at Portella della Ginestra, near Palermo. Nine adults and two children were murdered.

A third aspect of Garibaldi's political philosophy must be put in a proper historical perspective, that is, his rabid anti-clericalism, which transcended his political opposition to the Pope as the Head of a State that hindered Italian unification. At the time, opposition at a popular level found its expression in malevolent satire, like Gioacchino Belli's sonnets, which are a testimony to the rampant anti-clericalism being publicly vented even under the Vatican walls. Beside his valiant role in the episode of the Roman Republic in 1849, on three occasions, in 1860, 1862 and 1867, Garibaldi tried to march on Rome to rid the Eternal City of its clerical government. In doing so, he imitated what Italian historian Luciano Canfora in his recent book *La prima marcia su Roma*<sup>21</sup> described as the very first march, carried out by Octavian, Caesar's adoptive son, who in July 43 B.C. was appointed Consul by the Roman Senate after his army threatened to enter Rome. Garibaldi was a precursor of the many marches, studding modern Italian history, which aimed to overthrow the legally established Government. Gabriele D'Annunzio and his *legionari* in September 1919, Mussolini and his *squadristi* in October 1922, Junio Valerio Borghese and his *guardie forestali* (Forestry Guards) in December 1970 all attempted, the first two successfully, to carry out a *coup d'état*. Even today, this tendency to use the threat of violence for political ends is criminally appealing to some Italians. On 15 June 2007, a member of the Executive of the Northern League boasted that ten million people were ready to march on Rome to overthrow the Prodi Government,<sup>22</sup> and in an interview given to Milan's *Corriere della Sera* on 22 July 2007, the leader of Northern League, Umberto Bossi (convicted, like Mussolini in his Socialist days, for defaming the Italian flag) declared that "millions of people are ready to take to the streets" to bring down Prime Minister Prodi.<sup>23</sup>

Garibaldi's anti-clericalism had its foundations in the fact that he was a Freemason. In 1862 he was bestowed with the

<sup>21</sup> Luciano Canfora, *La prima marcia su Roma*, Laterza, Bari 2007.

<sup>22</sup> *La Repubblica*, 17 June 2007.

<sup>23</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, 23 July 2007.

title of *Primo Massone d'Italia* (First Freemason of Italy) and in May-June 1864 he was elected to the position of Grand Master of the Great Orient of Italy.<sup>24</sup> The fact that most Sicilian politicians of the time were Freemasons, from Crispi to his minder La Farina, even to Don Liborio Romano, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, made Garibaldi's conquest of the South easy by means of corruption and connivance. In his addresses to Freemasons of 18 March and 21 June 1867, he unequivocally spelt out the link between his Masonic credo and his political and military action: "With our example and our unshakeable, constant, heroic practice of the holy principles that Freemasonry put into practice across the centuries, despite barbaric persecutions, we will forge this Italy of ours, with the brotherhood of her peoples, by fastening them in a *fascio* [bundle of rods containing an axe], under the glorious flag of Freemasonry, anticipating political unity. ... I believe the Freemasons to be the elect part of the Italian people".<sup>25</sup>

Garibaldi could count on the financial support of the Freemasons of Italy, Great Britain and other countries. La Farina donated eight thousand lire towards the Expedition of the Thousand,<sup>26</sup> while British Freemasons contributed with a considerable amount of Turkish piastres. Most of the 94,000 lire that financed the expedition<sup>27</sup> were Freemasons' money. Other funds came from the requisition of five million ducats from the Bank of Sicily and from ransacking all churches found on the *garibaldini's* way. Even a diehard anticlerical like King Victor Emmanuel complained to Cavour about Garibaldi's cavalier methods of funding his campaign. In his letter, the King claimed that "this man is not so docile and honest as he is portrayed ... the immense damage that occurred here, for example the infamous theft of all monies from Treasury, can be wholly ascribed to him. He surrounded himself with scoundrels, followed their bad advice and plunged this unhappy country in a horrible situation".<sup>28</sup>

King Victor Emmanuel's scathing remarks were no doubt dictated by his profound antipathy against the general, although it is true that not all of the *Mille* were

irreproachable, blameless characters. Garibaldi himself, with scant regard for the truth, described his followers, in his novel *I Mille*, published in 1874, as "all generally having an awful background, mainly as thieves and, with few exceptions, with the roots of their genealogical tree implanted in the dung heap of violence and murder".<sup>29</sup> Undoubtedly, Garibaldi's outburst was motivated in part by the bitter disillusionment that he felt for the way Piedmont had managed the annexation of the South and by the fact that many of "his" *garibaldini*, despite their past as irregulars, had been forgivingly drafted into the Italian Army. Already after Aspromonte he lambasted Piedmont's policy: "From 1860 to 1863, in less than three years, you have disbanded a national army [that is, his *garibaldini*]. You have caused brigandage to ravage the Southern provinces. You have sold two Italian provinces [that is, his native Nice and Savoy]. You have embezzled some billions in order to carry out these nice schemes. Truly, you really are the incarnation of Italian imbecility".<sup>30</sup>

In spite of his anti-clericalism, republicanism, Freemasonry, internationalism and pacifism, or perhaps because of these beliefs, Garibaldi enjoyed widespread popularity throughout Europe. His fame reached also far-away, colonial Australia. Perhaps the most famous *garibaldino* in Australian eyes was Raffaello Carboni, better known for his earlier role in, and eyewitness account of, the Eureka Stockade revolt in 1854. In 1849, he had taken part in Garibaldi's failed enterprise to oust French troops from Rome. In 1860 Carboni reached Palermo and, allegedly upon recommendation by Garibaldi, was appointed translator in the office of the provisional government's Secretary-General and future Italian Prime Minister, Francesco Crispi. In this capacity, he translated the correspondence between Crispi and British Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell.<sup>31</sup> Another *garibaldino* who landed in Australia was Gian Carlo Asselin, a Neapolitan who had taken part in the liberal uprising of 1848 and in Garibaldi's Roman Republic in 1849, and who would become Italian Vice-Consul in Sydney in 1861.

As in many other countries, also Australia witnessed an inflation of Garibaldi-naming of streets, places and shops, as well as a spate of celebrations honouring the general. In April 1864, Austrian painter Eugen Von Guerard sketched the Garibaldi Claim near Hepburn,

<sup>24</sup> Aldo Alessandro Mola, *Storia della Massoneria italiana dall'Unità alla Repubblica*, Bompiani 1976, pp. 50 and 766.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> Garibaldi, *Memorie*, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>27</sup> Giuliano Procacci, *History of the Italian People*, Penguin Books, Ringwood 1968, p. 318.

<sup>28</sup> [www.infinito.it/utenti/s/s.martino.sannita/Brigantaggio/Personaggi/Garibaldi01.htm](http://www.infinito.it/utenti/s/s.martino.sannita/Brigantaggio/Personaggi/Garibaldi01.htm)

<sup>29</sup> Aldo Alessandro Mola, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>31</sup> Desmond O'Grady, *Raffaello! Raffaello!*, Hale & Remonger, Sydney 1985, pp. 52-65 and 226-244.

Victoria, where there also was a Garibaldi settlement, and a gold mine was named after Garibaldi at Solferino and Lionsville near Tabulam, in Northern NSW. Gough Whitlam, in his book *My Italian Notebook*, comments that the use of the name of Garibaldi was widespread in the Victorian goldfields: "In 1860, Garibaldi Gully was opened between Ballarat and Daylesford and the Garibaldi Lead was discovered at Fiery Creek near Beaufort. Buggins Flat near Wedderburn, where gold had been discovered in 1852, was renamed the Garibaldi Goldfield in 1860. In 1862 a new field near Woods Point in Gippsland was named after him and in 1868 a new lead near Beechworth. In Sydney, John Cuneo built the Garibaldi Inn in Hunters Hill".<sup>32</sup> Records show that in the 1890s a Garibaldi Township was settled by Chinese tin miners in North Eastern Tasmania, and was abandoned during the First World War.<sup>33</sup> On the artistic side, in 1859 the Gawler Institute in South Australia offered a prize for the best musical composition for Caroline Carleton's verse *Song of Australia*. Neapolitan migrant and Garibaldi follower Cesare Cutolo submitted a composition bearing the title *Garibaldi*, to which the judges awarded second place.<sup>34</sup>

In May 1861 the – for the time – remarkable sum of 358 pounds was collected among Garibaldi's admirers in Melbourne. A Sword of Honour, purchased with this money and sent to the British Embassy in Turin, was presented to the general in Caprera on 15 August of that year. The accompanying letter rather bombastically stated that "in you, the subscribers of this sword honour qualities which, while they have enabled you to become the saviour of your country, have entitled you to take the rank with Leonidas in valour, and with Washington in virtue". Garibaldi in reply thanked the organising committee for the gift and, in a thinly veiled reference to the Piedmontese government, said that "I am enraged by the delay interposed by inept and cowardly [government officials] between affronted Italy and my duty".<sup>35</sup> At times, the

<sup>32</sup> Edward Gough Whitlam, *My Italian Notebook*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 2002, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.heritageatrisk.org.au/TAS - Garibaldi\\_Township.html](http://www.heritageatrisk.org.au/TAS - Garibaldi_Township.html)

<sup>34</sup> Desmond O'Connor, *No Need to Be Afraid. Italian Settlers in South Australia between 1839 and the Second World War*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide 1996, pp. 34-35.

<sup>35</sup> Cresciani Archive, *List of Subscribers to the Sword of Honour presented to General Garibaldi by his Admirers in Australia*, Pamphlet printed at the Punch General Printing Office, Melbourne 1861.

name of Garibaldi was unintentionally implicated in tragic events, as was the case in January 1995, when a food poisoning outbreak that killed one child and made others critically ill was traced back to sausages produced by the Adelaide company Garibaldi Smallgoods Pty Ltd. For weeks, the media spoke *ad nauseam* of "the Garibaldi effect" and of the "Garibaldi affair".<sup>36</sup> In Sydney, one of the landmarks frequented by Italians during the 'Sixties and the 'Seventies was Mario Abbiezzi's *Garibaldi Bar*, with its huge mural portraying the general on his white horse. During the Resistance, Abbiezzi fought with the 52nd Garibaldi Brigade and was credited to be among those who captured Mussolini at Dongo in April 1945.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 4. The visit of the Duke of Genoa and the captain and officers of the Italian ship *Garibaldi* to the No. 3 'Band and Albion Consols G. M. Co's' gold mine in Ballarat, 29 April 1873. The *Garibaldi* was probably the first Italian warship to visit Australia after the Unification of Italy. Image courtesy Ballarat Historical Park Association.

The arrival in 1873 of the Italian frigate *Garibaldi* rekindled Australians' interest in the deeds of the general. This interest was heightened in 1882, at the time of Garibaldi's death. On 17 June 1882, Sicilian Socialist Francesco Sceusa organised a memorial service at the Garden Palace in Sydney, attended by over ten thousand people. A large papier mâché bust of Garibaldi towered in the hall. The newspaper *Illustrated Sydney News* highlighted the event in its first page with an artistic impression of the hall. It also reported that "flags and other appropriate emblems

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.agrifood.info/review/1995/Pointon.html>. Also, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/helthrpt/hstori/hr161002.htm>

<sup>37</sup> *La Fiamma* newspaper, 24 March 1986.

were disposed about the building with great effect. In front of the platform there was a colossal bust of Garibaldi, admirably executed by signor Sani in six days, and which occupies a prominent place in our engraving. The whole of the decorations were designed by Signor Francesco Sceusa of the Survey Department and carried out with artistic completeness".<sup>38</sup>

Yet, the most direct connection between Garibaldi and Australia, the fact that the general briefly visited this country, was little known until the late 'Seventies, when the Author mentioned to former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam that Garibaldi, then in command of the vessel *Carmen*, in December 1852 had landed on Three Hummock Island, off the coast of Tasmania. Whitlam was very excited by this piece of information, and wrote an article in *The Sydney Review*. He later reported the story in his book *My Italian Notebook*.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Garibaldi mentioned his brief encounter with Australia in his *Memorie*, waxing lyrical on the idyllic environment found on that lonely island that, as he put it, "deliciously excited my imagination when, sick of the civilised society so well supplied with priests and police agents, I return in thought to that pleasant bay".<sup>40</sup>

A stronger, also hardly known, Australian link with Garibaldi was the presence in Melbourne, from 1875 to 1880, of his son Ricciotti, born to Anita Garibaldi. During the early 1870s he was living with his father in Caprera but, "unable to settle in that chaotic environment, full of lovers, sons, step-children and visitors continuously coming to pay homage to the general",<sup>41</sup> Ricciotti fled to London, where on 2 July 1874 he married Constance Hopcraft, an aristocratic woman, a strong Methodist and a close friend of Florence Nightingale. Seven months later they landed in Melbourne, where they lived for six years in dire poverty. Ricciotti found employment as fishmonger and baker, and worked for the local Council. In Australia, Constance gave birth to five of their thirteen children. Giuseppe, born in 1875, died soon after birth, as did Irene Teresa, while the surviving children, Rosa, Anita Italia and Giuseppe (Peppino) were born in 1876, 1878 and 1879 respectively. In 1880, Ricciotti, Constance and their children returned to Caprera, "because Giuseppe Garibaldi was

dying and wanted to see his sons and grandchildren". It was Constance who would record from the voice of a dying Garibaldi his family history.<sup>42</sup>

Garibaldi's death began that long process of evaluation of his political and historical legacy that is continuing today. On the one hand, it was simpler to manufacture the myth of Garibaldi as a hero *par excellence* of Italian unification. Nationalist canonization served the purpose of sweeping under the carpet all Garibaldi's ideas and actions that were incongruent with, or antithetic to the mythology of unification pursued by the Savoyard Establishment. In some way, what Tancredi said in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*, referring to Sicily's political situation, that "if we want things to remain as they are, everything will have to change",<sup>43</sup> could be extended to the whole process of unification, a unification that was pursued by a small minority. As the Prince of Salina said in *The Leopard*, "in these last six months since your Garibaldi set foot in Marsala, too many things have been started without our being consulted".<sup>44</sup> Garibaldi's radical, revolutionary zeal, his republicanism and internationalism crashed against the immovable force of conservatism, of monarchical and factional interests and of a powerful social and economic structure.

On the other hand, the Left also idealised Garibaldi, without setting in a proper political context his pragmatism, his apparent contradictions, his perceived caving in to the conservative agenda of the Northern bourgeoisie. As Antonio Gramsci shrewdly commented, "the masses remained a passive spectator, cheered Garibaldi, did not understand Cavour, waited for the king to solve the problems besetting them, that is, poverty and economic and feudal oppression".<sup>45</sup> In his letter 'Oppressed and Oppressors', Gramsci again returned on the issue of the masses being a victim of the Garibaldi myth: "We Italians adore Garibaldi; since childhood we were taught to admire him, Carducci enthused us with his Garibaldi legend ... everybody cries 'Hail Garibaldi' and nobody 'Hail the King' without being able to put forward a logical explanation ... in Italy the

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<sup>38</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *Migrants or Mates. Italian Life in Australia*, Knockmore Enterprises, Sydney 1988, pp. 26-7.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Gough Whitlam, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

<sup>40</sup> Giuseppe Garibaldi, *Memorie*, op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>41</sup> <http://digilander.libero.it/fiammecremisi/carneade/znipoti.htm>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1962, p. 42.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>45</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo. 1919-1920*, Einaudi, Turin 1970, p. 329.

Reds, the Greens, the Yellows idolise Garibaldi without truly appreciating his noble ideas".<sup>46</sup>

The fame of Garibaldi, misunderstood hero of Italian unification, a "difficult hero", as Enrico Iachello and Antonio Di Grado qualified him in their lecture at the *Casa d'Italia* in Sydney on 7 July 2007, endures even today. Throughout his life, marked by ambiguities and contradictions, he swam against the current of Great Power politics, well after the revolutionary, the "heroic" era had ended. The period that followed was characterised by a complex and duplicitous process of Savoyard territorial expansion, which took advantage of the opportunities offered by a favourable international situation. In this scenario, Garibaldi was a distraction, an embarrassment, a temporary hindrance to Cavour's scheming, to be *strumentalizzato*, relegated to Caprera or even shot at when his interventionism did not fit the strategic vision of expansionist Piedmont. No doubt, Garibaldi, like George Bush Junior, sincerely believed in the spread of freedom by force of arms, yet his idealism was tempered by the realisation that his almost religious faith in republicanism, internationalism, the abolition of privileges, the disbandment of a permanent army and the elimination of war, ran counter to the *Realpolitik* of the time and all that Cavour, the king and even Mazzini stood for. His understanding of Italian peasantry was utopian and naïve. What the Southern *cafoni* really meant when they were clamouring for liberty was that they wanted bread, land and fewer taxes. In a way, their misconception of what Garibaldi was offering is reminiscent of that manifested by the Russian *kulaks* who, during the December 1825 Decembrist uprising, cried out outside St Petersburg's Winter Palace for the Constitution, believing it was the Tsar's wife. Garibaldi admitted to the devastating consequences of his campaign in the South when in 1868 he wrote to Adelaide Cairoli, that "today I would not take again the road to Southern Italy, fearing of being pelted with stones, as we brought there only misery and stirred up only hatred" (*non rifarei oggi la via dell'Italia meridionale, temendo di essere preso a sassate, essendosi cagionato colà solo squallore e suscitato solo odio*).<sup>47</sup>

The Romantic myth built around Garibaldi is in stark contrast with the prosaic reality of his life and actions. Far from being the faithful

husband of Anita, during his life he collected three wives, eight children and dozens of lovers. In 1859, he was involved at the same time in four torrid affairs. The following year, on 24 January, aged 53, he married Giuseppina Raimondi, the eighteen year-old daughter of a *garibaldino* Marquis. The marriage lasted less than day, as Garibaldi came to know after the ceremony that Giuseppina had an affair with the young *garibaldino* Luigi Caroli. In 1864, he began a relationship with a Piedmontese peasant, Francesca Armosino, who gave him three children, Manlio, Clelia and Rosa. His bigamist relationship was legalised in 1879, when his marriage to Giuseppina Raimondi was annulled, and in 1880 Garibaldi was able to marry Francesca.<sup>48</sup>

Despite his proclaimed love for freedom, having conquered the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Garibaldi proclaimed himself a Dictator. It was an interesting revival of this word on European soil, perhaps a transfer from Latin America. Having no patience with the delays of parliamentary democracy, dictatorship was the natural form of government he had chosen for Southern Italy in 1860. At times, even his notorious anti-clericalism gave way to braggadocio. Denis Mack Smith recalls the episode in 1860, when Garibaldi "presided from the royal throne during pontifical high mass in the Cathedral of Palermo, claiming the royal rights of apostolic legateship, clad in red shirt and with sword unsheathed as the Gospel was read".<sup>49</sup>

Controversy, confrontation and conflict accompanied Garibaldi throughout his life. One would either love him dispassionately or nurture a deep, abiding hatred for his person and actions. There was no middle ground, no compromise. Today, on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, a lot of Italians still pass judgement on his legacy. On 10 August 2007, a symbolic trial of Garibaldi was held at San Mauro Pascoli, a small village in Romagna, famous for having posthumously called to the bar Mussolini and Mazzini. The prosecution was represented by historian Angela Pellicciari, author of the book *I panni sporchi dei Mille* (The Thousand's Dirty Linen), published by Liberal Libri, while the defence council was led by London-based historian Lucy Riall, who recently published the volume *Garibaldi. The Invention of a Hero*, edited by Yale University Press. Pellicciari maintained that Garibaldi was a brigand, the leader of a

<sup>46</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *2000 pagine di Gramsci. Lettere edite e inedite. 1912-1937*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1964, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.andriaroberto.com/garibaldi\\_il\\_proces\\_so.htm](http://www.andriaroberto.com/garibaldi_il_proces_so.htm)

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.italia.it/wps/portal/en\\_channels?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/Tourism+Portal/EN+Speciali/EN+Speciali+2LV/Love+and+War](http://www.italia.it/wps/portal/en_channels?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/Tourism+Portal/EN+Speciali/EN+Speciali+2LV/Love+and+War)

<sup>49</sup> Denis Mack Smith, op. cit., p. 16.

troublesome minority of so-called "patriots", dictatorial, wilfully excluding from power the peasant and Catholic masses, occupying, rather than liberating the South by proxy for Freemasonry's and British interests, a divisive and disruptive national force because of his anti-clericalism.

Lucy Riall, on the other hand, compared Garibaldi to Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, the Roman who was made twice dictator in the fifth Century B.C. and on each occasion resigned his dictatorship to return to his farm. Garibaldi, Riall pointed out, was an extraordinary man of action, a generous and legendary hero. He also withdrew to Caprera after his military exploits. He was politically "ductile", working with the Monarchy in spite of his republicanism, and therefore not so "ingenuous" as the historiography of the Left would want us to believe. He was a courageous leader, a brilliant military strategist, disinterested, incorruptible, a true hero.<sup>50</sup>

The Jury, formed by regional journalists, on the same evening issued its verdict: not guilty. The motivation read as follows: "Although recognising the excesses committed during the *garibaldini* campaigns, the jury decided not to issue a guilty verdict for lack of evidence. Therefore Garibaldi is a hero".<sup>51</sup> A similar verdict was reached on 13 April 2002 by the Jury of another symbolic trial held in Naples at the *Liceo* Garibaldi, where Garibaldi was declared not guilty, in the absence of creditable proof, of having caused "considerable moral, civic and economic damage to the people of the South", but was declared guilty of having invaded a legitimate kingdom without a proper declaration of war.<sup>52</sup>

These verdicts are hotly contested by those Italians who still believe that Garibaldi's deeds, after one hundred and fifty years, continue to have a negative impact on their lives, that the unresolved national problems and the social, economic and developmental disparity between North and South were caused by his pivotal role in precipitating Italy's unification. Another reason why the figure of Garibaldi looms large over contemporary Italian politics is that Italians have never metabolised Fascism's legacy or the tragic events of the civil war that raged in the country between 1943 and 1945. The fact that the Left held a hegemony over

the myth of Garibaldi and mythologised the role of Communist *garibaldini* formations in the Resistance, in order to gain political and moral legitimacy in their quest to radically change Italian society, contributed to the creation of an unrelenting rift between the warring parties. On the other hand, Italian conservative, clerical and capitalist interests indefatigably opposed the Left's political agenda and, as at the time of the Prince of Salina, also in Republican Italy everything changed to remain the same as before. The Right did not and, to date, as amply demonstrated by the Berlusconi government, does not want to subscribe to a shared vision of past Italian political events and is not in the slightest interested in healing the wounds inflicted to a fractured society by opposite ideologies.

In the final analysis, Garibaldi continues to be worshipped as a super hero, as a demiurge of the *Risorgimento* and, conversely, to be demonised and made responsible for the *questione meridionale*, for the problem of the South, that successive Italian governments have been historically unable or unwilling to tackle and resolve. To this effect, Giuseppe Garibaldi was and remains a complex, charismatic, contradictory, controversial and bewildering personality in contemporary Italian history.

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<sup>50</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, 25 July 2007. Also, <http://www.romagnaoggi.it/showarticle.php?articleID=236492&section=news/Cesena>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.romagnaoggi.it/showarticle.php?articleID=238695&storico=giorno&section=news/Cesena>

<sup>52</sup> [http://www.andriaroberto.com/garibaldi\\_il\\_processo.htm](http://www.andriaroberto.com/garibaldi_il_processo.htm)