

Introduction: Italy's 150th Anniversary

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As with most political anniversaries, the 150 years of a unified Italian state celebrating the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in Turin in 1861, meant more for today's leaders and issues than for the issues that led to unification or those which proceeded from it. On 17 March 2011, it was curious and ironic to watch senior prelates celebrating the anniversary of an event which had been led mainly by masons whom the churchmen abhorred then and still do and for the foundation of a state that the Church refused formally to recognise for almost 70 years. For the anniversary, the Pope himself complimented Italy and claimed that Roman Catholicism has been the glue which had held the country together. All the official participants were also proven republicans celebrating the birth of the new kingdom. The Northern League's presence in government at the time created further contradictions; an essential component of the Italian government was explicitly working for the breakup of Italy. Their deputies walked out of the Chamber when the national anthem was played while their ministers stayed in the cabinet. Silvio Berlusconi's reliance on Umberto Bossi and the Northern League for the survival of the coalition meant that the previously non- or anti-nationalistic left wrapped itself in the tricolour, sometimes literally. Left-wing leaders appeared on television talk shows with a tricolour rosette.

The anniversary itself was a celebration of a very short moment of the Risorgimento, a process that took a century. It was above all an affirmation of national unity today. For the first time outside a football World Cup match, tricolours were flown in the streets and on houses from Sicily to Lombardy and many are still there a year later, faded but a statement nonetheless. The period between the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy and today was also obviously analysed by scholars from many disciplines seeking answers to the many questions posed.

The articles in this symposium are dedicated to the 150th anniversary of Italian unification. The contributions, deriving from a conference held at

the American University of Rome in April 2011, look at the history of the process which led to unification and at how the process continued after the formal proclamation of the kingdom of Italy. They also look at the ways in which interpretations of the Risorgimento have changed over the last century and a half.

So many discussions of Italian unity start from two hoary old clichés and however hackneyed, they are actually good meters to assess 150 years of a single Italian state. The first is the remark attributed to Massimo D’Azeglio and quoted in more than one of the papers in this collection: “We’ve made Italy, now we must make the Italians”. The second, from *The Leopard*, is equally well-known: “in order for everything to stay the same, everything must change”.

The year of celebrations, commemorations and analyses showed that there are indeed ‘Italians’, not actually such a remarkable observation despite the Northern League’s separatism but one which the anniversary has underscored in a way that was not immediately obvious beforehand. They have also shown that despite remarkable constants in Italy, the country does change. In almost any other country, it would hardly be of interest to point out that the country created a national identity in a century and a half and that it changed over that period but the received wisdom for Italy tends to presume the opposite both at a popular and academic level.

This introduction looks at some of the meanings of the Risorgimento today and how the idea of Italy has changed since 1861 and it then introduces the articles and their contributions to the analysis of the history and historiography of the Risorgimento.

The *Economist’s* special issue on Italy began with an article entitled “Oh for a new Risorgimento” (Prideaux, 2011); the article looked more to the present (‘Italy needs to stop blaming the dead for its troubles and get on with life’) and future than the past but it is significant that the term itself was taken positively and as a process relevant to today’s Italy.

The remarkable feature of the anniversary debate and most of the preceding scholarly and popular debate is the lack of any discussion over the differences between an Italian state and the nation. In one sense, D’Azeglio’s question was completely irrelevant. Italy was not just Metternich’s “geographical expression”, it was also a culture despite the massive differences across the peninsula and for the educated classes in Italy and abroad, something called ‘Italy’ existed long before 1861.

Today, according to the 2011 Eurispes *Rapporto Italia* (Eurispes, 2011), the majority of Italians like the idea of Italy but believe that the country is still fundamentally divided. The old stereotypes are slow to die with northerners perceived as cold, hardworking, good albeit sometimes racist citizens while southerners are more generous and creative but are workshy swindlers even though most of these distinctions are less sharp than a decade ago. It is interesting and significant that even though two thirds

reckon that Italy is still a divided country, a growing majority (over 70 per cent) of those surveyed consider unification a positive value to be defended. Italians still prefer the idea of a unitary state despite (or perhaps because of) the regional differences.

The popular view of Italy as a fundamentally and irremediably divided country is also reflected in some of the scholarly work (two recent contributions which follow this line of argument are Gilmour (2011) and Graziano (2010)). Despite the undoubted divisions, there are many elements which suggest that Italy is actually much more unified than popular and some scientific wisdom suggest.

The anniversary itself underlines the fact that the Italian state is one of the older ones in Europe; in western Europe, Italy is older as a state than Germany, Ireland, Norway and Iceland. In central and eastern Europe, it is older than all except Greece. The presence of a centralising authority has created a national identity for better and for worse through the armed forces, taxation and education. In the 20th century, the mass media and internal mass migration accelerated this process.

Ernest Gellner distinguished between those nation-states with navels and those without; some modern states refer back to an ancient or mediæval state and like newborn babes, draw sustenance from that 'mother'; some, like Estonia, are products of modern nationalism and have no parent state. Italy was neither; there was no single mediæval state presented as a precursor and the Roman empire was too large and lasted too long to be a single 'mother' though various parts of it were indeed used to bolster the identity of the new Italy. Nonetheless, the Italian culture and elements of unity had existed in reality and in myth for centuries. It was on the part real, part mythical 'Italy' that the architects of the Risorgimento built the Italian state.

Even divisions united Italy paradoxically. The debate known as '*la questione della lingua*', the language question, over the 'correct' Italian predated unification by centuries and continues today. In 1861, few Italians actually spoke a mutually intelligible 'Italian', but the few that did speak or write Italian considered themselves 'Italian' along with their other identities. In a similar way, the bitter divisions over the role of the Church have defined objectives within the country rather than dividing it. The status of the Church, the 'Roman Question' both united and divided the country until 1929. Since then, the two Concordats have had a similar role, provoking sometimes bitter debate but always within a national community.

The movement of people is also a contradictory constant which helped unite the country. For more than the first hundred years, millions of Italians left the country as Calabrians, Sicilians, Veneti or Friulani and for the most part were perceived as Italians when they arrived even if many could speak no standard Italian and had only sketchy ideas about their

country. Internal migration also created 'Italians' especially in the industrial triangle but also elsewhere. And now over the last 30 years, immigration has forced 'old' Italians to look to their identity as Italian rather than regionally. The immigrants themselves have taken on regional or city loyalties but the debate over how they should acquire citizenship has underlined the Italian aspect of identity.

Another issue has engaged Italians for the whole period of unification; the Southern Question and related to it, the presence of organised crime is almost as old as the state with Cavour on his deathbed sure that just a few years of good, Piedmontese, government would solve the economic and social differences between north and south. Once again, a division has actually served to unite the country.

In international relations, the concern over the role of powerful neighbours was fundamental to the creation of the Italian state and has been an issue in Italian foreign policy ever since unification. Even though it is true that none of Italy's wars brought the whole of the country together while they were being fought, creating a national identity and unity, as is often the case in other countries, they are now part of an historical heritage even for those on opposite sides of the wartime divisions. And even if the whole country did not support intervention in World War I, as Wanda Wilcox demonstrates in her article in this issue, the very presence of millions of young men in the army did actually 'make Italians'.

Eugenio Di Rienzo (2011) too, argues that the writing and rewriting of history is in itself part of the creation of 'Italy'. This is a topic that Nick Carter covers by considering the historiography of the Risorgimento.

The Risorgimento has become part of the Italian narrative both by scholars and in the popular vision. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi used his presidency (1999-2006) to burnish the memory of the Risorgimento and bring it back into popular knowledge and acceptance starting with the reopening of the Altare della Patria (Forlenza and Thomassen, 2011). It is not only Garibaldi whose name is actively part of the Risorgimento narrative. Italy's first aircraft carrier was called 'Garibaldi', its second, launched in 2009, is called 'Cavour' (and not 'Luigi Einaudi' or 'Andrea Doria', the other possible names), another official reminder of the Risorgimento along with the hundreds of streets and statues and dozens of schools which bear his name.

These are all issues addressed in different ways by the articles themselves. One considers Risorgimento historiography; one the changing use of the most enduring symbol of Italian unity, Giuseppe Garibaldi; one is an empirical study of the role of the army in World War 1 in 'making Italians' and two consider the importance of literature in the Risorgimento.

The way in which history is written is clearly part of the nation-building process both contributing to it and conditioning it. Nick Carter analyses the main threads of Italian historiography and their importance in

how Italian unification has been considered. He describes how for most of the 20th century, historians were heavily judgmental about the processes of the Risorgimento and later. They divided between the liberals – who argued that the process had been successful despite the great inherent difficulties – and the mostly Marxist historians who pointed out how Fascism was the inevitable consequence of the liberal period.

The revisionism of the last few decades uses the greatly increased empirical base of historical research to create a synthesis of the liberal and anti-liberal schools without the suggestion of blame assessment associated with previous analyses.

Carter's picture of Italian historiography describes a process familiar in other major historical moments. As the chronicle of events moves towards 'history', the debates of the process itself are woven into the historical analysis and layered into contemporary events. In the Italian case, it has taken more than a century since unification, more than half a century since Fascism and World War II and the political and ideological changes in Italy since the end of the cold war to create a synthesis of previous historiography. The result, though, is a strong argument that Italians have indeed been made and that despite *The Leopard*, there has actually been change.

Similar points are made by Rosario Forlenza and Bjørn Thomassen in their article on the ways in which the symbol of Garibaldi has contributed to the Italian identity. Without doubt, Garibaldi is the most enduring myth of a united modern Italy, one of the many nationalists or national symbols who were in some way foreign with respect to the nations they came to represent from Napoleon to Hitler to Stalin. Not only was Garibaldi from the periphery of Italy, his early career and fame was completely foreign to any single region of Italy and the Italian part of the career covered a good proportion of the whole country. His politics too, were sufficiently undefined and polyvalent to be rendered attractive to almost anyone. Together with his charisma, charm and military skills, Garibaldi represented the Risorgimento far more than Cavour, Mazzini or Victor Emmanuel II both at home and abroad.

Forlenza and Thomassen deal with the elaboration of memory and explain how a single figure could be a crucial element in the construction of two opposing narratives. Like Carter with Italian historiography, they use Garibaldi to describe and analyse opposing views of the country and its formation. Their argument is that 'Garibaldi was turned into myth, and myth, as we know, links to ritual and ritualistic memory politics. That myth came to sustain political reality, which in turn mythologised itself. The story about Garibaldi is therefore, in more ways than one, a true myth about Italy, a mytho-poetic political community celebrating itself in 2011; a nation telling a story about itself' (p. 53) They give a detailed description of how Mussolini and Fascism incorporated the myth of Garibaldi into the

myth of Fascism carefully and accurately obfuscating the Risorgimento itself with its contradictions. In particular, Victor Emmanuel II's role was played down so as not to emphasise the institutional tension between Mussolini and Victor Emmanuel III.

It is certainly remarkable and almost unique that a single individual from the recent past was used to symbolise two opposing ideologies. This is a trait which has continued to the present day when Garibaldi and Garibaldini associations are not the property of a single political or regional grouping.

At the other end of the military scale, Wanda Wilcox describes how the military did indeed help to create a sense of Italian-ness, not so much anti-Austrian as in the forced mixing of soldiers from all parts of the country. As in other accounts of World War I, the camaraderie of the trenches was a much more powerful glue than the grand patriotic ideas presented by politicians and generals.

Right from the beginning of united Italy, the army was consciously used to foster national unity. Rather than recruit soldiers into regionally based units which creates a much stronger *esprit de corps*, the general staff decided that, apart from the alpine regiments where the soldiers all came from one area, units should be regionally mixed. For the vast majority of conscripts this was the first time they had left their home villages. Normally, they would serve their time in garrison towns where they had no family contacts and often they would go on leave to other parts of Italy. It was a strong socialising force which helped create a sense of Italian identity at least among young males and continued to do so until national service was stopped in 2005.

Wilcox uses letters written by (or for) First World War soldiers to describe the degrees of patriotism and consciousness of Italian identity among the soldiers and argues that despite the limitations in the number and type of source, there is strong evidence that a sense of *italianità* did indeed develop during the First World War.

The last two articles use literary material to describe the road towards an Italian identity. Patrizia Piredda also looks at the First World War comparing the different positions of Gabriele D'Annunzio and the literary critic, Renato Serra, while the second, by Claudia Gori compares four couples from different backgrounds writing over the better part of the 19th century. As literate members of the upper or upper middle-classes, the writers took their 'Italian-ness' for granted at one level though they all expressed it in different ways.

Piredda considers what two men of letters and soldiers made of 'being Italian'. On the one hand, Serra was an anti-nationalist while D'Annunzio was the opposite. Serra considered nationalism in some way as being anti-Italian, 'a sort of selfishness disguised as literature, a sort of pompously overblown materialism, or sadism' (Raimondi, 1964: 59). She contrasts this

with the aggressively nationalistic views of 'Italian-ness' proposed by D'Annunzio. Serra had an idea of wholly rational choice over the war and the idea of Italian identity while D'Annunzio emphasised visceral and irrational elements. 'In the war, D'Annunzio sees the possibility of a general renewal of Italian society from an idealistic standpoint, as the fulfilment of the entire historical course of national unification' (p. 97).

Despite their two very different standpoints, the Italian identity is not questioned, merely the way in which it should be expressed. This was a dichotomy present right from the beginning, sometimes conflicting in the same person. Some of the *Garibaldini* were fighting for ideals like 'freedom', others for liberal values like a constitution and some were democrats. On the other side, there were the nationalists looking to conquer land and peoples for the greater glory of Italy. Some of the first and their political heirs became republicans, others socialists while the nationalists provided the ground for Fascism or actually became Fascists. The Serra-D'Annunzio comparison illustrates this difference around World War I.

The four couples examined by Claudia Gori illustrate how the Risorgimento was seen by aristocrats before unification, bourgeois immediately afterwards, a socialist couple and a Jewish couple. The first see the Risorgimento as an opportunity to create new ways of developing personal as well as political relationships; in contrast, the upper middle-class couple describe a society rigidly divided by class and gender while the socialists see the new Italy, or the developments of the newly unified country, as being able to break down these barriers. Finally, the Jewish couple, like most middle-class Italian Jews lived the Risorgimento as a part of their emancipation. The examples illustrate different views of the importance of gender and class which were present over the period, making it very clear that the differences could be clear and striking.

Taken altogether, the five articles give a variegated picture of what the Risorgimento and unification actually meant - both at the time and subsequently. They show that despite the great economic and cultural differences in Italy then, and to a much lesser extent still now, the two old clichés should be laid to rest, though of course they won't be. Italians and the nation have been made and were made as is usual more by the state than vice versa. As for *The Leopard*, while many elements of Italy have taken a long time to change, the changes have been substantial and not just superficial.

No state is eternal but there is a good chance that Italians will be celebrating 200 years of unification in 2061 firmer in their national identity than many others in Europe. Even if the President conducting the celebrations is black, female and not Christian, she will still be Italian.

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