

BOOK REVIEW

## Garibaldi's Radical Legacy: Traditions of War Volunteering in Southern Europe (1861–1945)

by Enrico Acciai, translated by Victoria Weavil, London and  
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In this book, Enrico Acciai, Assistant Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Rome Tor Vergata, condenses a series of studies on war volunteering, in particular regarding groups involved in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–9. He begins with the observation that 'transnational war volunteers played a central role in many nineteenth- and twentieth-century wars'. From this premise, the book 'seek[s] to reconstruct the radical and transnational tradition of war volunteering connected to Garibaldi's legacy in Southern Europe between the unification of Italy (1861) and the end of the Second World War' (p. 4).

The book provides a balanced synthesis of events of this period, properly connected to the wider historiographical debate, and highlights the main periods characterising the phenomenon. The five chapters follow a chronological order, placing the tradition of Garibaldian voluntarism in the various stages of Italian history and highlighting its transnational persistence in the Euro-Mediterranean region. We begin with the Risorgimento period, the events of 1848–9, Carlo Pisacane's ill-fated expedition of 1857, and Garibaldi's Expedition of the Thousand of 1860. During these wars, 'the idea of fraternity among nations and individuals was a central tenet of political narratives' (p. 25): its effects can be found in subsequent conflicts marked by a high rate of mobilisation, such as Greece in 1897, the Balkans in 1911–12, and the Great War. Finally, the book considers the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

Among the documentation used by the author, private writings are of particular interest. Memoirs, personal correspondence, and public speeches offer an effective window through which we may understand the motivations of volunteers and measure the impact of major events upon individuals from the perspective of biographical experience. A polyphony emerges, made up of the voices of volunteers – 'soldiers of conscience' (p. 26) – of different generations who meet, establish networks of relationships, and participate in wars fought primarily by other peoples, with the conviction that this gives meaning to their own value systems.

The period and type of conflicts taken into consideration allow a spotlight to be placed on the continuities and ruptures in personal paths and political cultures. The protagonists of this world belonged to the democratic, republican, socialist and anarchist camps – it is no coincidence that many came from 'red' Emilia-Romagna. Those who adhered to the cause of groups committed to demanding freedom and independence were faced with various political and ideological options. The focus progressively shifts from the terrain

of political freedom and national patriotism to the internationalist, revolutionary perspective, which is imbued with social justice. Bakunin's teachings made themselves felt, typified by the figure of Amilcare Cipriani, the 'colonel of the Commune', whose battles make him a true political celebrity of his time.

The coexistence of political positions is clearly visible in the course of the Great War. Those who opposed the voluntarism rooted in the Risorgimento found it had a residual 'sentimentality' which no longer offered the strength to act as an engine for change. There was no shortage of opportunism, obscurity, and reversals of opinion. The revolutionary socialist Mussolini was initially a severe critic of the Garibaldian tradition, yet he did not hesitate to revitalise and validate it in light of his own interventionist turn, as he would do during the Fascist regime. Similarly, some anarchists such as Massimo Rocca and Mario Gioda first turned interventionist and later national-fascist. A major strength of this book is therefore its focus on the threads – strong or slender as the case may be – that connect the *forma mentis* and militant passion of the various types of war voluntarism with their nineteenth-century roots. In fact, it is necessary to consider that the matrix of Garibaldianism 'would long remain a key element of the internationalist movement for a reason, far from inconsequential: the military capacities of those that had donned the red shirt' (p. 62).

In the first 50 years following the unification of Italy, a more radical Garibaldianism competed against an image of the hero that was managed by monarchical institutions (the 'disciplined revolutionary'): between the two world wars, choices of volunteerism were taken in the context of the conflict between fascism and anti-fascism, thereby taking on broader meanings than the national or patriotic cause alone. This is demonstrated by the 'classic' case of the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigades, as well as by the process of redefinition that took place in the political cultures that constituted anti-fascism in those years (principally, the PCI). It should not be forgotten, however, that Garibaldianism, due to the 'ideological reversibility' that characterises it (see Isnenghi 2010), produced different interpretations, representations, and political uses that opened up further internal differentiations within both the fascist and anti-fascist camps. These divisions ran even amongst Garibaldian followers and were recognisable in their various forms during the Italian Civil War of 1943–5.

Although the book's narrative contains passages that are rather fast-paced and overly descriptive, on the whole, Acciai's book is valuable for its informed exposition, well-organised structure, and engagement with a wide historiography. The sources utilised by the author show 'that the motivations of a war volunteer, especially a transnational one, are far more complex and less linear than they may at first appear' (p. 172). In particular, the personal documents allow the reader to enter into the mind of volunteers, soliciting new questions and research hypotheses. The author himself, on the heels of Nir Arielli (2018), highlights the links between the Garibaldian tradition and phenomena of 'non-state mobilisation' of the present day several times.

The presence of Garibaldian imagery in the Balkan area, of which Acciai finds traces in the resistance movements of the Second World War, is worth further inquiry. More research on the theme of anniversaries (in particular 2 June, the date of Garibaldi's death) would also be welcome. Considering the role that ritual and symbolic practices (such as pilgrimages to Caprera) have had in renewing the legacy of ideals of that tradition, this would be a particularly effective method for exploring the world of volunteers.

## References

- Arielli, N. 2018. *From Byron to bin Laden: A History of Foreign War Volunteers*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Isnenghi, M. 2010. *Garibaldi fu ferito. Il mito, le favole*. Rome: Donzelli.