

LIBERAL POLICY AND THE PEASANT CONDITION IN GARIBALDI'S SICILY,  
1860

by  
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Too often, studies on *il Risorgimento*, and on modern Italian history in general, tend to undermine or fail to acknowledge the efforts and agency of the peasantry in the critical moments of Italy's history, and the extent to which these contributions (however unwittingly) paved the way for various political ends. This thesis thus seeks to give credit to and shed light upon the unsung heroes of *il Risorgimento* and Italian history, the masses of hard-working, faithful individuals that have always striven tirelessly against the historical injustices that have plagued that ill-fated peninsula.

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## ABSTRACT

ROBERT CORBAN: Liberal Policy and the Peasant Condition in Garibaldi's Sicily,  
1860

(Under the direction of Chiarella Esposito)

This study seeks to document and detail the historical narrative and experience of the Sicilian peasantry at the time of Italian unification or, as the entire movement is commonly called, *il Risorgimento*. Focusing principally on the period between Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi's successful expedition in the first few days of April 1860, throughout the next six months during his brief prodictatorship and on into the months and years immediately following Sicily's annexation to Piedmont-Sardinia, this thesis represents a much-needed contribution to the new school of revisionist scholarship on *il Risorgimento*. It does not refute the findings of previous revisionist interpretations of this movement, and indeed reiterates the conclusions of a number of scholars and historians' works before it in that it finds that the actions and liberal policy decisions of Garibaldi's prodictatorial regime resulted in the further perpetuation of the already-impooverished status of the peasantry in Sicilian society. However, it does draw upon new sources to assert that the peasantry's choice to revolt in April 1860 as well as in the six years following the annexation to Piedmont-Sardinia in October was indeed a rational decision, and one that signals the achievement of some level of political and social consciousness that was not present or realized before this time. These sources include the correspondence of the British consuls stationed in Sicily at this time, a series of agricultural reports commissioned by the Italian parliament and a diary from one of

Garibaldi's troops, as well as a range of secondary literatures. This thesis also offers a critique of the essentialist practices and scholarship of proponents of *meridionalismo*, or the rough equivalent of Edward Said's 'orientalism' as manifested in the southern half of the Italian peninsula. It also presents the theoretical concept of a 'collective social defense mechanism' embedded in Sicilian society, which has been brought to life and cemented at the center of Sicilian culture by a number of actors and occupying powers throughout history. This mechanism accounts for the state of poverty endured by the Sicilian peasantry throughout much of the nineteenth century as well as the gross levels of crime, corruption and injustice that are still apparent on the island to this day.

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## INTRODUCTION

This project was born out of the naïve intention of discovering the fundamental, root causes of *il Problema del Mezzogiorno* and of answering the perennial *Questione Meridionale*, both of which refer to Southern Italy's apparent inability to 'modernize' along the same lines as its northern counterpart. Understanding the reasons and meaning of the general lack of economic development in Southern Italy has confounded scholars, politicians and citizens of Italy for centuries though, and the solution to this problem and the answer to this question do not emerge in a form that any remotely concise work could hope to encompass. In examining this problem, one is faced with an intricate, nuanced dynamic of historical forces and actors that have manifested themselves in the very localized manner that historical themes and continuities so often do in Italy. In this regard, a drastic narrowing of scope and limitation in temporal and spatial context is a critical prerequisite in conducting scholarship on the *Mezzogiorno*.

One exemplary avenue for exploring these issues is Sicily, the sublime, sun-baked isle whose inhabitants have for centuries suffered the most from the socioeconomic and political deficiencies that have long characterized the southern half of the Italian peninsula. In many respects, this island also constitutes and exemplifies some of the gross impediments to success in the modern global economy that greater Italy suffers from. Indeed, the famed Italian sociologist Luigi Barzini framed it as such, stating that



“Sicily is the schoolroom model of Italy for beginners, with every Italian quality and defect magnified, exasperated and brightly coloured.”<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, while both Italy and Sicily’s problems prove recurrent throughout their respective histories, certain moments exist wherein opportunities for sociopolitical development seemed to have been most egregiously missed. Foremost among these is *il Risorgimento*, the nineteenth-century movement for unification that resulted in the creation of the nation-state now bearing the name Italy. However, until the last half century or so, a great historiographical divide has hindered the interpretation of this event. Driven forward by the teleological interpretations of liberal and Marxist historians alike, a great, mythic narrative of the Italian *Risorgimento* has developed to prevent its accurate representation. The liberal camp espouses a story of an unbridled and revolutionary nationalist vigor, driven forward by a united body of skillful diplomats, politicians and revolutionaries: the legendary Garibaldi, the skillful and cunning Cavour, and the proud and elegant King of Savoy. Its Marxist opposition frames this movement as something quite different: a story of factionalism, regionalism and political *trasformismo*,<sup>2</sup> a story of clandestine diplomacy and political subversion, veiled by the birth of nation and nationalism. For Marxist historians, the *Risorgimento* marked the construction of a mere façade of political unity, an egregious practice in ‘unconditional

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<sup>1</sup> Luigi Barzini, *The Italians: A Full-Length Portrait Featuring Their Manners and Morals* (New York: Touchstone 1996) 252.

<sup>2</sup> Marxist scholar and founder of the Italian Communist Party Antonio Gramsci discusses this term in his most renowned work, breaking it down into two types of “trasformismo,” the relevant case in this instance being that of “molecular” transformism, or the manner in which “individual political figures formed by the democratic opposition parties are incorporated individually into the conservative-moderate ‘political class’ (characterized by its aversion to any intervention of the popular masses in state life, to any organic reform which would substitute a ‘hegemony’ for the crude, dictatorial ‘dominance’)” Antonio Gramsci, Ed. Quintin Hoare. Trans. Geoffrey Nowell Smith. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 58.

unitarianism,<sup>3</sup> and the ultimate perpetuation of the social and political divisions that have plagued peninsular Italy since the fall of the Roman Empire. For the Marxists, *il Risorgimento* represented a flawed attempt at a true revolution, a “passive revolution,” as the school’s founder Antonio Gramsci declared it. Indeed, national unity stood as a noble gain and accomplishment, and one that would prove to alter the course of European and world politics for years to come, but what were the social consequences for the masses of this Italian brand of *Realpolitik*? What *could* have happened differently? *Could* Cavour or his opposition in Giuseppe Garibaldi or Giuseppe Mazzini have acted in such a manner as to prevent the calamitous social consequences that resulted from this process? Indeed, if they *could have*, why did they choose not to?

The Marxists have been unable to depart from these sorts of counterfactual endeavors. Both of these approaches have also been influenced and their findings obscured by the presence of a certain *meridionalismo*, or the rough Italian equivalent of Edward Said’s ‘orientalism’ as manifested and bestowed upon the inhabitants of the southern half of the Italian peninsula.<sup>4</sup> *Meridionalismo* and its prophets (‘*meridionalisti*’) have served to perpetuate images of southern difference and ‘backwardness,’ as well as southerners’ supposedly inherent ‘vulgarity’ and ‘criminality.’<sup>5</sup> It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that a group of revisionist historians were able to transcend *meridionalismo* and build upon and learn from these earlier counterproductive

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<sup>3</sup> This term was first applied by the Italian revolutionary and later member of Parliament Agostino Bertani located in *Della opposizione parlamentare* [Milan, 1865]. 15. as cited in Raymond Grew, “How Success Spoiled the Risorgimento.” *Journal of Modern History* 34.4 (1962): 239-253. 251.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House 1978)

<sup>5</sup> See John Dickie’s *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (New York: St. Martin’s Palgrave Macmillian 2009) and Jane Schneider’s edited volume *Italy’s ‘Southern Question’: Orientalism in One Country* (London: Berg Publishers 1998) for two recent attempts to problematize and debunk this logic and approach.

historiographical debates to unravel some of the mythologized and politicized dimensions of the *Risorgimento*. Utilizing a methodological framework that seeks to account for localized reactions and causalities within the old meta-historical interpretations,<sup>6</sup> this new generation of scholars and historians has paved the way for a refreshing approach to the study of the *Risorgimento*. British scholars John Davis and Lucy Riall, both of whose works will be consulted throughout this essay, represent the foremost of the Anglo-American revisionists. With each of these new studies comes a new understanding of the many social consequences of the study in pragmatic politics that is Italian unification. Standing out amongst these consequences is the fate of the Italian peasantry, the majority of the Sicilian population, a segment which one early Italian sociologist characterized as “the backbone of the country, and . . . perhaps, the *best* element of the population.”<sup>7</sup>

A focused study of the Sicilian peasantry helps to magnify some of the historical sentiments and experiences of the *Risorgimento*, and in doing so provides a much needed contribution to this innovative new historiographical approach. In order to conduct such a study, one must narrow the temporal scope to the months just after the landing of Garibaldi and his *Mille* (‘Thousand’) on May 11, 1860, the brief period during which Garibaldi was hailed as prodictator of all Sicily. Although, as the reader will see, Garibaldi was not present as an active administrative agent for much of this time, the various actors and figures that came to assume many of the administrative posts in Sicily

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<sup>6</sup> See Lucy Riall *The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society and National Unification* (New York: Routledge Publishing 1994), for a comprehensive examination of this new school of interpretation and Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris’s edited work *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited* (Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press 1997) for an introduction to the specific questions that have been raised. Raffaele Romanelli provides a similar, albeit more concise, analysis to the same effect in his “Political Debate, Social History, and the Italian Borghesia: Changing Perspectives in Historical Reseach” *The Journal of Modern History* 63.4 (1991), 717-739.

<sup>7</sup> Luigi Villari, *Italian Life in Town and Country* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons 1902), 187. My emphasis.

at this time combine to forge an adequate model for examining *il Risorgimento* and all of its sentiments, benefits and discontents. Furthermore—much like the role of the Sicilian peasantry in general—this critical moment represents something that is generally neglected and amalgamated in the history of modern Italy.

This thesis thus serves as an original, albeit minute contribution to the school of insightful revisionist historiography that has fortunately come to characterize many of the recent interpretations of the fateful moments that saw the birth of the modern Italian state. Much in the same temporal and theoretical vein as Denis Mack Smith's famed work *Cavour and Garibaldi*, this thesis provides a portrait of the previously neglected role of the peasantry in *il Risorgimento*, or the "background to the struggle," and the "raw material on which Cavour and Garibaldi had to work in the decisive phase of this revolution," as Mack Smith has put it.<sup>8</sup> The following contribution does not refute traditional Marxist or revisionist hypotheses that the institution of the Piedmontese constitution, the *Statuto Albertino*, further disenfranchised the already-impooverished peasantry. However, it draws upon new sources to offer a systematic and detailed analysis of the various liberal elements of Garibaldi's prodictatorial regime, and explains how each of its policies predated, but also worked in conjunction with the blanket application of the Italian constitution and the localized elements in Sicily to further distance the peasantry from the necessary resources to achieve social, political and economic viability. At the same time, it seeks to emulate the *microstoria* popularized by Italian historians of the 1960s and 1970s and accentuate the role of specific relationships, networks, actors and individual decisions throughout this process, and thus highlight the

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<sup>8</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *Cavour and Garibaldi 1860: A Study in Political Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1986), 2.

critical elements of agency, causality and rational action that are generally missing from previous approaches, whose logic too often falls into that of their characteristically monolithic approach. What emerges from this study is a narrative that closely adheres to Lucy Riall's interpretation of the same period, aptly entitled "Ill-Contrived, Badly Executed [and] . . . of no Avail"? Reform and its Impact in the Sicilian *Latifondo* (c.1770-1910),"<sup>9</sup> for the brief period of Garibaldi's dictatorship was nothing if not a tragic lesson in administrative and governmental mismanagement and a case study in the devastating effects of liberal reforms on local economies in Southern Italy. From their attempts to implement and enforce a policy of conscription to their approach regarding land reform and the confiscation and misappropriation of ecclesiastical property, Garibaldi's regime was an egregious failure for which the Sicilian peasantry paid the ultimate price of another century of poverty, anguish and '*miseria*.' Contrary to the liberal and Marxist interpretations of this movement, then, this thesis will conclude that the violent reactions of the peasantry, the 'plague' of *brigantaggio* ('brigandage') and the civil war that raged on the island for almost a decade after Italy's political unification can in no way be attributed to any sort of inherent rebelliousness or lawlessness embedded in Sicilian culture. Rather, these events must be examined and understood as the product of a *collective social defense mechanism*, of sorts, driven forward by rational forces and the beginnings of a social consciousness amongst the Sicilian peasantry.

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<sup>9</sup> Lucy Riall "Ill-Contrived, Badly Executed [and] . . . of no Avail"? Reform and its Impact in the Sicilian *Latifondo* (c.1770-1910)" from Dal Lago, Enrico, and Rick Halpern. *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History*. (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002).

In drawing these conclusions, this thesis will consult a range of primary sources often cited in early accounts and interpretations of the movement. Among these are Garibaldi's Secretary of State Francesco Crispi's memoirs and the agricultural reports of Sidney Sonnino and Leopoldo Franchetti, whose exhibition to Sicily in 1876 marked one of the first official investigations into the dire social, economic and political conditions of the island at this time. However, this study will also examine the diary of one of Garibaldi's troops and the correspondence of the British Consuls in Italy. These latter documents will provide important context, as well as offer relatively detached, objective and fresh accounts of the revolt and discord that raged in Sicily following the declaration of the newly-united Kingdom of Italy. The range of revisionist secondary literatures cited in this text works toward a similar end, and it is also to these sources that this thesis and its author are heavily indebted.

## I. THE PEASANT CONDITION IN SICILY IN 1860

Geography and topography serve as two of the principal forces throughout Sicily's long history. The island covers an area of 9,830 square miles a mere two miles off the tip of the boot of the Italian peninsula, and is the largest island in the Mediterranean as well as what amounts to the basic epicenter of the great sea.<sup>10</sup> Hailed since antiquity for its raw beauty, Sicily's position in the center of the Mediterranean has functioned to cast the isle as a perennial setting in the many dramas that have played themselves out upon the great European lake. Inevitably, too, its inhabitants often took the form of the victims—the victim of a relentless villainy—a mass of oppressors coming from every direction. Sicilian culture has retained souvenirs from each of these encounters and subsequently developed into a rich and idiosyncratic cultural landscape of nearly unparalleled proportions.<sup>11</sup> However, these oppressors have left a much less generous legacy in terms of the political and sociological effects of their respective occupations, as a profound and renowned distrust of the state seemed to cement itself, perhaps justifiably, within Sicilian culture in such a manner that persists even to this day. This sentiment was omnipresent during *il Risorgimento*, and this pervasive notion has come to be recognized as one of the most characteristic elements of the Sicilian

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<sup>10</sup> Figures taken from "Sicily" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 30 Jun. 2012  
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/542800/Sicily>>.

<sup>11</sup> For a recent attempt at accounting this storied past, see Sandra Benjamin's *Sicily: Three Thousand Years of Human History* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth 2006).

condition. One could reasonably hypothesize that such a central location might have resulted in Sicily flowering as a commercial hub, but this indeed was not the case, and Sicily's geopolitical location facilitated instead its exploitation by a variety of historical actors.

The island's topographical characteristics have been inextricably intertwined with the region's development as a sociopolitical unit and have historically lent themselves to what many great civilizations have hoped to exploit for agricultural production and surplus. The Romans most notoriously utilized the island as nothing more and nothing less than their vast, living-and-breathing granary. Sicily's agricultural output served as an important component in the lifeblood of Roman and subsequent civilizations while also providing for the subsistence of the Sicilian native population, as grain and wheat products have long proven a staple of the Sicilian diet. Such prosperous and fruitful practices slowly dwindled following the death of antiquity, however, and a very different picture began to emerge. The content of the rich soil that housed the great Sicilian wheat plains remained the same, as natural geological processes continued to wash the topsoil down from the mountainous terrain in portions of the island, but a force of a very different nature emerged to counteract the potential benefits of these natural processes and gave birth to what one observer described as such:

. . .in the uplands of the interior one comes face to face with a sun-baked, treeless and waterless soil which in its asperity and poverty seems to defy the will of man—a will which, if present, is sometimes malevolent and bent upon the perpetration of grave social injustice.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Survey of Southern Italian Economy* (Rome:SVIMEZ, 1950) 5. My italics



Successive foreign occupations by Germanic, Muslim, French and Spanish peoples gave birth to a class of resilient, opportunistic landowners who would come to dominate the island for centuries.<sup>13</sup> This human element of Sicily's agricultural history will serve as the focus of this portion of this essay, and the central question: with such favorable geographical and topographical conditions that had allowed for the general welfare and prosperity of its population for centuries, what happened to Sicily to give rise to the deplorable state which became increasingly, and painfully, evident in modern times? And furthermore, how was this state of affairs perpetuated and this practice allowed to continue in the democratic epoch?

Lying at the very heart of these questions is the historical nature of agricultural organization and production in Sicily. The vast, desolate stretches of land referred to as the *latifundia* had, by the nineteenth century, firmly situated themselves in the rural Sicilian landscape and rendered the island an oasis of static and essentially feudal agricultural practices which defied the dynamic modernizing forces surrounding it. So all-encompassing and pervasive was the influence of the *latifundia* that some historians have found them to dominate over half the island's landscape.<sup>14</sup> The notoriously low yields and levels of productivity that accompanied these vast stretches of land prevailed, and were understood by observers as 'natural' developments due to the historical lack of capital and poor agricultural conditions on the island. Denis Mack Smith describes the variety of agriculture practiced in Sicily as such:

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<sup>13</sup> See Benjamin's *Sicily* for an introduction to this story, as well as a relatively concise overview of these occupations and this historical development.

<sup>14</sup> This estimated figure is taken from Denis Mack Smith's "The Latifundia in Modern Sicilian History" *Proceedings of the British Academy* 51 (1965): 85-123, 86.

For centuries they had grown cereals alternating with rough pasture, and in such a predatory manner that the land gave only one crop of wheat in three years and usually less than nine bushels an acre. This low yield was though quite natural by most farmers, for Sicily's economic dilapidation over the centuries had been generally accepted with the hopeless resignation of the *Gattopardo*, and it was assumed that the laws of nature—climate, soil, lack of capital—left no alternative to this extensive kind of agriculture.<sup>15</sup>

This sort of agricultural organization had crucial implications for not only economic production, but also for the structure of the social hierarchies and systems of power in the Sicilian countryside, which in turn ensured its continuity.

In the early nineteenth century, cultural and social resonance generated by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic occupation of Italy resulted in an upsurge of political awareness among the Italian middle class and from this ensued a series of concurrent investigations into the feudal state of agricultural and social organization in the *Mezzogiorno*.<sup>16</sup> These investigations resulted in calls for land reform, particularly from Professor Abbé Balsamo. Combined with the abolition of feudalism and heightened levels of agricultural production during the British occupation of Sicily from 1806 to 1815, Balsamo's reports exposed some of the damages wrought by the oppressive social hierarchy.<sup>17</sup> These investigations revealed a system of ownership wherein largely absentee landlords and aristocrats, many of whom resided far away from their estates in Palermo, Messina and at times as far as the mainland, reaped the benefits in prestige

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 87. Mack Smith is using the term '*Gattopardo*' here as a reference to the protagonist in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's famed work *Il Gattopardo*. Don Fabrizio Corbera, Prince of Salina, represents the archetypal Sicilian landowner, whose habits of absenteeism and general neglect for his land are exemplars of this group's agricultural practices. Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa *Il Gattopardo* (Milan: Feltrinelli 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Grew "Finding Social Capital: The French Revolution in Italy," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29.3 (1999): 407-433. 426.

<sup>17</sup> Mack Smith, "Latifundia in Modern Sicilian History," 90-92.

gained from owning such large tracts of land.<sup>18</sup> They enforced this status quo through a system of patronage, clientelism and often violence that ultimately perpetuated the drastic disparities in wealth and equality in the ungoverned Sicilian interior. Central to the maintenance and upkeep of this oppressive system was the parasitic third party of the *gabbellotti*, the managers of the estates and ultimate “arbiters of the destiny of the rural poor.”<sup>19</sup> These individuals often subletted each tract of their landowners’ territory as much as two or three times and required and enforced exorbitant rates of interest upon the peasantry in such a manner that barely allowed for subsistence.<sup>20</sup>

This cyclical process yielded a most precarious and unstable state of living for the peasantry, in which the typical risks assumed by nineteenth-century European farmers represented the least of their concerns. One observer characterized this state of affairs as such even at the beginning of the twentieth century:

The peasant has no security or tenure, and may be deprived of his holding on the shortest notice, so that he has no interest in keeping the land in good condition; and as his share is so small he has no incentive to work hard or well. He merely works because he knows that his landlord will not actually let him die of hunger, lest there should be no one to plough the fields.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, the landowners had little interest in improving the lot of the peasantry or the state of Sicilian agriculture. As Mack Smith states

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<sup>18</sup> Sidney Sonnino and Leopoldo Franchetti offer one of the first vivid accounts of this network in their groundbreaking 1876 two-volume Parliamentary investigation *La Sicilia nel 1876* (Firenze: 1877).

<sup>19</sup> John Davis *Conflict and Control: Law and Order in Nineteenth Century Italy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988). 85.

<sup>20</sup> Sonnino’s account offers a detailed analysis of these contracts and their regional and localized manifestations throughout Sicily, referring to their arbiters and enforcers as “il grosso gabellotto” (243), extracting and exploiting the labor of “il vero impresario dell’industria agricola . . . i contadini” (243).

<sup>21</sup> Villari, *Italian Life*, 195.

To them the land was a symbol of prestige and so could not lightly be transferred to more active and capable hands. Instead of intensifying production to meet the needs of a growing population, they preferred to extend still further up the mountain-sides with the same superficial and semi-nomadic cultivation which characterized the *latifondi*.<sup>22</sup>

These ‘latifondists’ thus enjoyed an anachronistically but distinctively feudal dominance over the peasantry. Sonnino characterized these relations as such:

The *latifondista* was always baron-like, and not only in name: the way the worker stood in relation to the landowner remained that of a vassal in relation to a feudal landlord.<sup>23</sup>

The landowners employed and utilized the *gabbellotti* as a means of maintaining the status quo in the countryside. These *gabbellotti* were often found occupying the ranks of the middle classes in the hierarchy of Sicilian society, and their aspiring attitudes and practices often mimicked those of their aristocratic employers. Sonnino goes on to describe this class with great disdain.

the bourgeoisie, not very numerous, there like everywhere else, is hungry for gain, and imitates the aristocratic classes only in their foolish vanity and lust for domination.<sup>24</sup>

These individuals, many of whom would assume roles as *mafiosi* following unification, combined with other members of the landowning classes to prevent (at times violently) the emergence of a class of small landholders. In doing so, they prevented any

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<sup>22</sup> Mack Smith, “Latifundia in Modern Sicilian History,” 91.

<sup>23</sup> Sidney Sonnino, *La Sicilia nel 1876: I Contadini* (Firenze: 1877). 176. Translated text: “Il latifondista restò sempre barone, e non soltanto di nome: e nel sentimento generale la posizione del proprietario di fronte al contadino, restò quella di feudatario di fronte a vassallo.” My italics.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 176. Translated text: “Vi è poi la classe della borghesia, non molto numerosa, e là, come dappertutto, avida di guadagno, e imitatrice della classe aristocratica soltanto nelle sue stolte vanità e nella sua smania di prepotenza.”

significant gains in the efforts for land reform enacted by the Spanish in 1792, the British in 1812 and 1815 and the Bourbons in 1824 and 1841. These reforms sought to eradicate the remnants of feudalistic practices, but ultimately only increased the legitimacy of these relations in Sicilian society by privatizing property.<sup>25</sup> This allowed landowners and *gabbellotti* to continue utilizing their strong-arm tactics and influence, and solidified the latifundium and its exploitative and oppressive social dynamic at the center of Sicilian society.

The subject of this thesis involves yet another instance of flawed state intervention in 1860: one of the many failures of Garibaldi's revolutionary regime became the most exemplary case of *gattopardismo*.<sup>26</sup> However, before moving forward, a note on the nature of patron-client networks in rural society is necessary, as these sorts of relationships and their impact on the behavior and condition of the peasantry function as one of the principal determinants in the ineffectiveness of reform in the case of Garibaldi's prodictatorial regime.

John Duncan Powell claims that certain basic patterns of individual and group relations emerge within peasant and agricultural societies which peasants attempt to use as a means of gathering resources and capital in response to a foreign threat.<sup>27</sup> These include the maintenance of extensive kinship networks and the establishment of clientele

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<sup>25</sup> Denis Mack Smith's work referenced above provides evidence and testimony to this fact in a more extensive fashion. 85-123.

<sup>26</sup> *Gattopardismo*, literally translated as "leopardism," is again a reference to Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's aforementioned work *Il Gattopardo* in which he illustrates in beautiful prose the dynamics of social change at the time of *il Risorgimento*, summed up in the character Tancredi's infamous line, "Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga com'è bisogna che tutto cambi."

<sup>27</sup> John Duncan Powell "Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics," *American Political Science Review* 64.2 (1970): 411-425; 411-412.

and patronage systems with those of differing wealth or status.<sup>28</sup> Duncan Powell also asserts that state centralization and market expansion serve as the two processes most responsible for the flourishing of these relations, and that such liberal elements further transform these relationships and systems into politicized power-brokering mechanisms by which the patron in the relationship can extract the continuing political support and material dependency of the client.<sup>29</sup> These generalized characteristics of peasant societies are clearly evident in the Sicilian case, as these power mechanisms had become firmly entrenched within Sicily's socioeconomic hierarchy by the time the movement for Italian unity began. In this manner, the Sicilian peasants were effectively captured within a vicious and inescapable cycle of poverty and oppression, and their only apparent rational economic response was to remain within it, borrowing money in times of need from their patrons at exploitative levels of interest that combined with the debts suffered from their original contracts. Sonnino describes the state of the peasantry and their suffering at the hands of this *usura*, unchanged ten years after Garibaldi's expedition, in the bleakest terms:

Usury renders impossible for the Sicilian peasant any savings, any improvement of his lot; and worse still, it keeps him in a continuous state of legal subservience and moral depression, and it takes away every liberty, every sense of true dignity. The Sicilian peasant is almost constantly indebted, either to his master or to strangers. . . . And whoever gathers *per fas aut nefas*, just a nest egg of some several hundred lire, is able not to work at all, live in idleness and in vice, usury exercises an unbridled influence on the peasants: a useful member of society become *ipso facto* a dangerous parasite to the social body.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Duncan Powell, 412. The argument could be further extended to include some of those practices and attitudes deemed 'amoral familism' or 'nepotism' as rational and evolutionary responses to the same sorts of pressures. See Barzini's classic *The Italians*, particularly the chapter entitled "The Power of the Family" for an interesting take to this point.

<sup>29</sup> Duncan Powell, "Peasant Society," 413.

<sup>30</sup> Sonnino, 182-183. Translated text: "L'usura rende impossibile al contadino siciliano ogni risparmio, ogni miglioramento della sua sorte; e peggio ancora, col tenerlo in un stato continuo asservimento legale e di

However, a second rational option and course of action existed for the Sicilian *contadino* ('peasant'): revolt. In 1860, the failure of past agrarian reform combined with these endless systems and networks of social servitude, as well as with a great and renewed detest for the brutal Bourbon police systems, to forge a vehement popular hatred for all systems of authority and the beginnings of a mass movement in Sicily unprecedented since the Sicilian Vespers in the thirteenth century. Similar to the Vespers, which were a reaction against oppressive French authority, the Sicilian countryside arose in 1860 in what appeared to the world as a desperate cry for help and deliverance, and what appeared to all of those Italian patriots and partisans seeking Italian unification to be a revolutionary powder keg to be tapped and exploited for their own means and ends.

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depressione morale, gli toglie ogni libertà, ogni sentimento della propria dignità. Il contadino siciliano è quasi costatemente indebitato, o verso il padrone o verso estranei . . . D'altra parte basta a chiunque di aver raccolto per fas aut nefas, un gruzzolo di qualche centinaio di lire, per non lavorare più affatto, e per vivere nell'ozio e nel vizio esercitando l'usura la più sfrenata sulla classe campagnuola: costui da membro utile della società, diventa issosfatto un parassita dannoso del corpo sociale." Italics in text.

## II. The Expedition of *I Mille* and the Rise of the Revolutionary Peasantry

*The City was beset with numerous troops awaiting, but in vain, the expected descent of the peasants from the mountains in full force. The Signal of revolt was given from the Gancia convent, the bell of which loudly rung brought together a motley and ill armed crowd wearing tri-coloured cockards and crying “Viva Italia e Vittorio Emmanuele!”<sup>31</sup>*

Such a riveting account of revolution and insurrection as recalled by John Goodwin, the British Consul at Palermo, certainly gives color to the grand narrative of the *Risorgimento* and its origins in the countryside of Palermo. However, this report neglects and obscures some of the basic facts of the peasant revolts occurring in Sicily at this time, and furthermore exemplifies and foreshadows the egregious politicizing of such a courageous display for the means and ends of the liberal revolutionary regime. In fact, this revolt in particular, and the rise of the peasantry in April 1860, were both devoid of any sense of a unified political program, particularly of one that involved the King of Sardinia. This basic fact holds a number of great implications for not only the purposes of this essay, but also for the course and development of the Italian historiography of the *Risorgimento* on both sides of the Marxist-liberal divide, as both the movement and the myth became associated with a fabricated sense of unified public opinion in favor of Italian unity under Victor Emmanuel II, when indeed the reality was quite the contrary.

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<sup>31</sup>Letter from Consul Goodwin. Public Records Office (PRO). FO 70/322. 210-211.



A number of nineteenth-century politicians as well as more recent historians agreed with Goodwin's account of the revolt of the Sicilian peasantry in 1860.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, to the objective viewer, and to the avid, idealistic nineteenth-century revolutionary, the appearance of such popular participation would not be unexpected, as Napoleon had effectively transplanted the ideals of the French Revolution throughout much of Western European continent by this time, particularly throughout the Italian peninsula, and the memories of 1848 were quite fresh.<sup>33</sup> However, those ideas of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and their legacy of civic engagement and social and political consciousness did not develop in the southern provinces as they did in northern Italy.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the revolutionary vanguards in past uprisings (such as 1848) had failed to mobilize the Italian peasantry as a revolutionary force in any way that would have itself provoked or influenced the revolt of 1860.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the widespread illiteracy and relative physical isolation of the peasants of the Sicilian interior meant that the promulgation and dissemination of any political program in the countryside was next to impossible.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it can be concluded that the revolt of the Sicilian peasantry in 1860 involved social and material grievances arising out of mounting frustration at the seemingly inexorable plight

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<sup>32</sup> For a compelling example of such revolutionary idealism and unfounded generalization of popular sentiment in favor of a unified Italy, see the excerpts featured in H. Nelson Gay's "Garibaldi's Sicilian Campaign as Reported by an American Diplomat." *American Historical Review* 27.2 (1922): 219-244.

<sup>33</sup> For a well-written and extensive documentation of this fact, see Raymond Grew's "Finding Social Capital: The French Revolution in Italy." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29.3 (1999): 407-433. The recorder of Francesco Crispi's memoirs likewise attested to this general feel of nationwide revolutionary idealism, most evident in documenting the public opinion surrounding Garibaldi's departure, claiming that "the country in general, and especially the youth of the nation, in whom ideas of liberty and of nationalism were fomenting hotly, saw only the heroic beauty of the action, and knowing little of the true state of Sicilian matters, anticipated not bloody defeat but splendid victory." Francesco Crispi. *The Memoirs of Francesco Crispi*. I: *The Thousand*, ed. T. Palamenghi-Crispi, trans. M. Prichard-Agnetti. (3 vols.; London, 1912-14), 237.

<sup>34</sup> Grew, "Finding Social Capital," 431; Denis Mack Smith's *Victor Emanuel, Cavour, and the Risorgimento* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 194.

<sup>35</sup> Grew, "Finding Social Capital," 429.

<sup>36</sup> Mack Smith, *Victor Emanuel*, 195.

in which the peasants found themselves. It was the hated grist-tax, *il macinato* (which had already started one revolution in 1848<sup>37</sup>), the crippling consequences of faulty Bourbon agrarian reform,<sup>38</sup> the despised *gabbellotti*, the idle, decadent aristocracy, and the brutal Bourbon authorities to which all of the peasant's hatred was geared. The peasants' motives were not to be found in any sort of grandiose liberal discourse or in any party doctrine. This revolt was a brutal cry and a struggle for survival, and the first stage in the development of fledgling social and political consciousness. As this thesis will argue, Garibaldi would not make the mistake of failing to initially engage the peasantry on these grounds, with promises of bread and land-- promises which would, due to no particular fault of Garibaldi's, go largely unfulfilled.

Thus the narrative of *il Risorgimento* begins, when on April 4, 1860, Palermo exploded in a month long period of turmoil and insurrection that eventually climaxed in Garibaldi's legendary *Spedizione dei Mille* ('Expedition of the Thousand') and the beginning of the most dramatic and decisive stage of the whole *Risorgimento*. Revolt having almost completely engulfed the whole of western Sicily following the famous 'Gancia' insurrection (as described above by British Consul Goodwin),<sup>39</sup> Garibaldi's initially quixotic and piratical venture quickly found success in the state of anarchy that

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<sup>37</sup> Mack Smith, *Victor Emanuel*, 199.

<sup>38</sup> Lucy Riall explicitly details the beginnings and origins of this unrest as found in the revolutions of 1848 in her essay "Garibaldi and the South," taken from John Davis ed. *Italy in the Nineteenth Century: 1796-1900* (Oxford : Oxford UP, 2000), stating that "peasant agitation over the expropriation of land created even greater tension. Especially in the grain-producing areas (*latifondi*), peasants were angered by the government's failure to protect them from the consequences of agrarian reform. In particular, the failure to compensate the peasantry for the abolition of customary rights (such as grazing or wood-gathering) and the enclosure of common land caused terrible hardship; bad harvests, exploitative landlords, and an inequitable tax system further intensified popular resentment." 134.

<sup>39</sup> A number of primary as well as secondary sources document the state of lawlessness that prevailed at Sicily for the duration of this long month. See Lucy Riall's *Sicily and the Unification of Italy: Liberal Policy and Local Power, 1959-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), or the section entitled "The Peasants' Revolt in Sicily, 1860" of Mack Smith's *Victor Emanuel, Cavour, and the Risorgimento* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) for comprehensive accounts of such.

prevailed across this half of the isle. This succession of unexpected victories, which began in Marsala and gained momentum in Salemi and Calatafimi before finally arriving to Palermo,<sup>40</sup> drew the undivided attention of a number of European leaders, particularly Camillo Benso Count of Cavour, the shrewd Piedmontese diplomat who watched fearfully as his relentless adversary Garibaldi won the hearts and arms of the Sicilian insurgents.<sup>41</sup> The question arises, as it surely did for Cavour at this time: how could Garibaldi so effectively mobilize such a formidable revolutionary mass? And what sort of implications would this mobilization have for the greater success of Garibaldi's campaign and for the whole of the effort for Italian unification?

The tactical and political strategies employed by Garibaldi and his regime took the simple form of several concessions and promises, the nature of which this essay will examine in the section below. However, it stands as of the utmost importance to acknowledge the sudden resurgence in enthusiasm for Garibaldi's endeavor and his army, and the manner in which this excitement aided *I Mille* and garnered not only the temporary support of the Italian peasantry, but that of a number of international entities.

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<sup>40</sup> Sandra Benjamin's *Sicily* offers a concise account of the logistical points of the expedition on pages 306-314. For a more detailed account see the extract from a diary in Crispi's *Memoirs* which provides almost up-to-the-minute updates of the affair.

<sup>41</sup> The section entitled "Cavour and the Thousand, 1860" in Denis Mack Smith's *Victor Emanuel, Cavour, and the Risorgimento* reveals Cavour's apparent attitude throughout the duration of Garibaldi's embarking for the island, ranging from ambivalence to anger to encouraging. It is important to note, in this case, the difficulty in dissecting and understanding Cavour's motives and feelings throughout the initial stages of this endeavour, as he found himself in the middle an intense game of diplomatic chess in which he sought the favor of a number of different groups and individuals, many of which held conflicting views and interests, most notably the French and the Neapolitans, as well as his own King and constituents. For all intents and purposes, though, and beyond the various interpretations of Cavour's most controversial action of putting out a warrant for Garibaldi's arrest, the general conclusion can be reached that Cavour in no way tangibly or financially supported or assisted the initial stages of the Expedition in any way.

The effect of a resurgent nationalism on the Italian was apparent, even if hyperbolic in some instances, and varied in strength from region to region. Francesco Crispi's memoirs declare the upsurge in such romantic terms as these:

. . . a great flame of enthusiasm swept the peninsula. The impulse to hasten thither, to have a part in the glory, to help in some way, seized one and all, for all now knew that the time had come when Italy would indeed be made.<sup>42</sup>

Encouragement and assistance, however veiled and relatively dubious in their manifestations, arrived from all corners of the Western world.<sup>43</sup> Most notably, such assistance and general sympathy for the Italian cause came from Britain.<sup>44</sup> The British had grown increasingly impatient with the repressive means pursued by the Bourbons as they attempted to maintain order on the island, as well as (and perhaps most importantly) the manner in which these practices interfered with British economic interests in the area.<sup>45</sup> British vessels thus lay silently and strategically in the harbor at Marsala, with the likely intention of safeguarding the mission should it be intercepted by the Bourbons.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 237.

<sup>43</sup> H.N. Gay details one of these exchanges in his presentation of John Moncure Daniel's account of the Garibaldinian expedition, recalling an instance in which "Garibaldi sauntered up to Palmer [American Captain of the *Iroquois*, a warship stationed at Palermo to protect American interests] in an unsuspecting manner as possible . . . and whispered in his ear, 'Can you let me have a little powder?' But this would have compromised the neutrality of the United States, and Captain Palmer therefore replied, 'I'm sorry I can't; but I think I can tell you of a friend of mine who can', at the same time indicating with his finger an American merchantman that chanced to be in the harbor. Garibaldi took the hint, went to the vessel, and obtained what he wanted." A.S. Bicknell, *In the Track of the Garibaldinians* (London, 1861), p. 236, as quoted in H.N. Gay, 238.

<sup>44</sup> Garibaldi would later be received in England as a hero and a saint, as people flocked to his person even in 1864, four years after his revolutionary endeavor and relative departure from politics. An account of this trip, as well as a brief overview of British perceptions of Garibaldi is presented in Derek Beales' essay "Garibaldi in England: the politics of Italian enthusiasm" taken from Eds. John A. Davis and Paul Ginsborg's edited volume *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento: Essays in Honour of Denis Mack Smith*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Riall, *Sicily and the Unification*, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin, *Sicily*, 310.

Most notorious among contemporary observers as well as histories composed since then, though, was Garibaldi's ability to appeal and inspire courage and the flames of Italian nationalism within the common man, as seen in the declarations of undying love and loyalty of his soldiers<sup>47</sup> as well as the actions of those commoners he interacted with and influenced. This exchange will be viewed more in depth below, as Garibaldi's successful landing and his first proclamation represents one of his first appeals to the peasantry, in an attempt to depict his political program as one principally aimed at mitigating their material anguish. For now, though, it is important solely to acknowledge the presence and effectiveness of this charismatic ability, and the extent to which Garibaldi and his regime were able to generate mass appeal and manufacture Italian nationalism. These notions are of the utmost importance and centrality to this essay, as they contributed to the ability of Cavour's liberal regime to wholly and ultimately hijack the unification effort for itself by playing upon these themes to amalgamate the myriad of diverse interests of the inhabitants of Sicily in 1860.

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<sup>47</sup> An excerpt from poetic private Giuseppe Abba's famed *The Diary of One of Garibaldi's Thousand* exemplifies such adoration: "What could we, a few thousand men, have done if he had not been our leader? Could all the Generals of Italy rolled into one, with all their skill, have done what he has done? There was need of a heart like his, perhaps of a head like his, and that face that makes one think of Moses, of Charlemagne, of some Warrior Christ! You only had to see him to be won over." Giuseppe Cesare Abba, Trans. E.R. Vincent *The Diary of one of Garibaldi's Thousand* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962)

### III. Garibaldi's Dictatorship and its Deficiencies

*'You mean, one territory; as far as the people are concerned, one or many, they are bound to suffer and they go on suffering and I have not heard that you want to make them happy.'*

*'Of course! The people will have liberty and education——'*

*'Is that all?' broke in the friar. 'Liberty is not bread, nor is education. Perhaps these things suffice for you Piedmontese but not for us here.'*

*'Well. What do you want then?'*

*'War! We want war, not war against the Bourbons only, but against all oppressors, great and small, who are not only to be found at court but in every city, in every hamlet.'*<sup>48</sup>

This conversation between one of Garibaldi's *Mille*, Giuseppe Abba, and a Sicilian friar, encapsulates the sort of misplaced liberal, idealistic rhetoric heralded by the revolutionary regime, as these wrongfully imposed notions of nineteenth-century liberalism served to overshadow and discredit the many voices, opinions and desires of the Sicilian populace. However ignorant Abba the romantic revolutionary was of the state of affairs in Sicily, as well as of the position of the peasantry therein, Garibaldi's prodictatorial regime was not. Immediately upon the regime's consolidation, the new rulers sought an explicit policy to win over the hearts and swords of the peasantry by issuing proclamations making promises of bread and land. These promises, however, directly conflicted with and were ultimately subordinated to the aim deemed by the regime more critical to the success of the revolutionary effort: the support of the

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<sup>48</sup> Abba, *Diary*, 54.

landowning classes. This portion of this essay concerns itself primarily with those critical months and the decisions and oft-contradictory policies sought by the newly-declared prodictatorial regime of Garibaldi, his unwavering Sicilian aide and Secretary of State Francesco Crispi, and the multitude of allied administrative actors and agents underneath them. Although operating under potentially irreconcilable external constraints, these figures effectively exploited the Sicilian peasantry as a revolutionary mass in order to expel the Bourbons, yet ultimately favored the interests of the landed elites to such an extent that the peasantry were left with no material gain from their massive contributions to the effort for Italian unification.

To provide for an adequate and thorough examination of this process, this essay will present the historical narrative first so as to illustrate the nature and origins of the policy sought by the prodictatorial administration and to introduce the individual actors who played a part in its construction and implementation. This essay will then further analyze various pieces of legislation and demonstrate that indeed, they elicited no improvement in status of the peasantry, but instead further separated the members of this peasant class from any means or resources that could provide for social or economic mobility.

Mere hours after the crews of the *Piemonte* and the *Lombardo* disembarked at Marsala around noontime of May 11, 1860, Garibaldi and Crispi summoned a gathering of the municipal council of Marsala at the town hall where the two issued the first of a

number of decrees and proclamations declaring Garibaldi's status as Dictator of Sicily.

Crispi's memoirs record the "invitation" as such:

Proclaim Victor Emmanuel King of Italy, and his representative, Garibaldi, Dictator of Sicily. Invite all cities and towns of the Island to follow your example. Your proclamation will be the starting point of the political transformation of our country.<sup>49</sup>

These calls to action would be heard days later in Salemi and Calatafimi, and from these epicenters calls to expel the Bourbons reverberated throughout the island. Chaos erupted, administrative bodies disintegrated entirely, and those individuals representing any brand of authority found themselves in mortal peril and at the mercy of the anarchic climate of the isle.<sup>50</sup> This state of disorder would later come to influence a number of the decrees and policies of the prodictatorial government, and ultimately functioned as one of the most insurmountable impediments to effective administration and reform. At the time, though, the victory on May 15 in Calatafimi against a sizeable Bourbon force gave credibility to Garibaldi's regime as a legitimate alternative to the oppressive Bourbons, and with this victory the charge of government and administration began. The first set of dictatorial decrees were issued on May 17, and in this manner the process of transforming the social revolt of the Italian peasantry into a political revolution for a unified Italy officially began.

Garibaldi's first dictatorial decree created the office of Secretary of State and appointed Crispi to the post.<sup>51</sup> On the same day, Crispi, demonstrating sufficient knowledge and awareness of the failure in organizational structure of the 1848-49

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<sup>49</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 174.

<sup>50</sup> Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi: 1818-1901: From Nation to Nationalism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.) 192.

<sup>51</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 178; Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, 192.



revolt,<sup>52</sup> developed the outlines of the new administration. Crispi passed laws pertaining to conscription for all of those capable of bearing arms between the ages of seventeen and fifty and, most critically, abolished the tax on flour and duty on cereals, thus directly appealing to the peasantry so as to solicit their confidence and support.<sup>53</sup> A day later, while marching toward the ultimate military goal of Palermo, Crispi submitted to Garibaldi a decree for the appointment of a Council of War, which would serve as a court martial to try any crimes committed by soldiers or civilians during the revolution, thus “safeguarding the honor of the revolution.”<sup>54</sup> However, as this essay will argue, this body concurrently served to legitimize arbitrary acts of coercion and violence enacted at its own discretion, particularly to the effect of punishing acts against private property and ensuring the support of the landowners.<sup>55</sup> This act represented the first in a series of decrees which displayed a gradual change in direction of administrative policy and intent, which would only be further altered following the victory at Palermo on May 27.

Garibaldi’s troops caught the Bourbons off guard, and, after much street-fighting, erecting of barricades and bombardment, the insurgents had decisively driven back the troops of Francis II by that afternoon.<sup>56</sup> That same day, and the day after, Crispi presented for Garibaldi’s approval various acts promulgating the creation of a *Comitato generale* (‘General Committee’) and its division into various subcommittees dedicated to the management of the municipality of Palermo.<sup>57</sup> On June 2 and June 4, Crispi issued his

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<sup>52</sup> Duggan, *Francesco*, 189.

<sup>53</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 179-182.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>56</sup> Duggan, *Francesco*, 196.

<sup>57</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 222.

last conciliatory gestures and promises to the masses, ensuring their unfaltering support in favor of the revolutionary regime, proclaiming on June 2 that

whoever has fought for his country shall receive his part of the communal lands to be divided among the inhabitants, in accordance with the law (of 1849, now re-established), without being obliged to draw lots for the same, and that in case where the soldier has been killed, this right shall pass to his heirs.<sup>58</sup>

On June 4, Crispi issued a decree assuring the nurturing, education and reparation by the state of the children, widows and soldiers who incurred personal losses during their participation in the revolutionary effort.<sup>59</sup> Crispi also abolished the residual feudal elements of Sicilian society such as the title of *Eccellenza* ('Excellence') and the custom of hand-kissing which served as symbolic impediments to the progress of the peasantry.<sup>60</sup> These acts and promises were met with jubilation and renewed dedication from the now 'revolutionary' peasantry and 'volunteers.' On June 6, the Bourbon officials signed the armistice, rendering the peasantry's military role a decisive one in what Denis Mack Smith characterized as "Italy's most notable military success in the whole risorgimento."<sup>61</sup>

Tommaso Palamenghi-Crispi, Francesco's nephew and the editor of his memoirs, characterizes the capitulation of Palermo and the passing of these pieces of legislation as the climax of the first stage of the revolution, as the Garibaldinian administration was now faced with a much more difficult task, that of ensuring order and creating the proper climate for pursuing their political aims on the island and the peninsula. Crispi's nephew describes the regime as successful in its initial stages, and reveals the way it had

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 222

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>61</sup> Mack Smith, *Victor*, 195.

effectively gained the favor of the revolutionary mass as a catalyst in the victory at Palermo;

Up to the second of June, Crispi had impersonated the government, legislating and exercising full power. This unity of direction and initiative was of inestimable value during that first period of revolution, *when radical and decisive measures were necessary in order to establish the new political system upon the ruins of the odious system of the past.* The country's acquiescence in the action of Garibaldi and his Thousand, which could not have been dispensed with, was all the more enthusiastic and steadfast because the people immediately felt the hand of government in the removal of the tax on bread, felt that their needs were understood, knew that their losses would be made good, and protection afforded them. And all this they owed to the Dictatorship and to Crispi, who lent it intellect, heart and energy.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, Garibaldi's charisma and Crispi's political preparedness and decisiveness had secured the confidence and support of the urban and rural masses, and in doing so had secured the success of the effort to expel the Bourbons from Sicily. Indeed, for the most part, Garibaldi's provisional government initially met with general popular consent, as the regime and its administration stood as one "which the people all acknowledge and obey with pleasure."<sup>63</sup> As Denis Mack Smith puts it, "It was long since anyone had been able to say so much of any government in Sicily."<sup>64</sup>

Following these decrees, however, and beginning in early June, Crispi began employing a vastly different policy-making strategy, as reflected in a statement he would make much later in life:

Revolutions are of course made with whatever people you have available. The important thing for a statesman is to know *how to get rid of certain elements subsequently and send them home. Sometimes their natural home is prison.*<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 221-222. My italics.

<sup>63</sup> 21 May, Commander Marryat to Admiral Mundy (F.O. 70/326) as cited in Mack Smith, *Cavour*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Mack Smith, *Cavour*, 11.

<sup>65</sup> A. Guiccioli, 'Diario del 1888', *Nuova antologia*, 12/11/1938, p 126 (2/11/88) as cited in Duggan, 190. My italics. Crispi even conveyed this sentiment earlier in the revolutionary effort, writing in a letter in 1856

Such contempt for the peasantry and the urban masses and their undeniable contributions to the nationalist cause became increasingly evident in the regime's policies. Many of the administration's actions came to reflect those of a police state which favored order rather than social revolution. The regime implemented such a policy in order to appease and win the support of the landed elites, thus preventing the development of counter-revolutionary Bourbonist sentiments and ensuring the 'efficiency' of political administration. While the steps detailed below and the policies certainly appear 'necessary,' in this respect, one must also note their damaging consequences in implicitly subordinating the interests of those individuals who the landowners exploited for their profits to their particular understanding of a united Italy. This change in policy came as a result of the apparent and relative dominion over Sicily achieved by the victory at Palermo, but also in light of new international developments. Crispi now had to concern himself with Cavour's impending attempts to hijack the now politicized revolution for the liberal camp, which distracted him from any sort of sympathetic social tendencies or intentions Garibaldi's prodictatorial regime may have possessed.

Indeed, it should be noted that Crispi may have held some convictions for the cause of social revolution, or at the very least reform,<sup>66</sup> being that he was indeed a revolutionary democrat. However, any of these concerns seem to have been swept aside when Cavour's encroachment on administrative affairs in Sicily began. The divisiveness and subsequent mismanagement and discord created by the Cavourian elements and

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to the point that "Now, to hold the Sicilians, it is necessary, for the present at least, to respect their traditions, good or bad as the case may be, using them to the best possible advantage the cause of the national Risorgimento to which we are all working." Crispi, *Memoirs*, 66.

<sup>66</sup> Mack Smith, *Victor*, 219.

agents, most specifically the antagonistic relationship between Crispi and Cavourian Minister Giuseppe La Farina, represents the first of a number of catalysts that drew Garibaldi's attention away from advancing the social cause of the peasantry and from enacting any sort of effective legislation whatsoever. Those all-too-familiar echoes of the 1848-49 revolution could be heard, in this instance, as those nightmarish political divisions which resulted in a brutal Bourbon counterrevolution seemed to be reemerging in similar forms.<sup>67</sup> In many respects, the beginnings of the political movement in 1860 mirrored those of 1848, as the revolt born out of social concerns brought to light political differences which fatally compromised the movement's success.<sup>68</sup> These memories only increased the sense of urgency surrounding the effort for Italian unification.

Just a day after the Bourbons signed the armistice in Palermo, Cavour's envoy La Farina arrived on the shores of Sicily and immediately began to sow the seeds of discord, rallying around him a party opposed to the administration of Crispi, whom he despised and envied as a result of Crispi's close relationship with Garibaldi.<sup>69</sup> A dispatch headed for Turin, dated three days after La Farina's arrival, although rife with faulty assertions, accounts and assumptions, serves to demonstrate both the aims of Turin and the vanity and malice with which they would be pursued. La Farina spoke of his former friend and fellow exile Crispi's "utter incapacity" and the people's gross disregard and disrespect for the government, claiming that "No one believes it can endure, and its authority is laughed at."<sup>70</sup> La Farina only further damaged his own credibility as a truthful observer, claiming that "all come to me for advice and direction. In the streets I am greeted with enthusiasm,

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<sup>67</sup> Riall, *Sicily and the Unification*, 81.

<sup>68</sup> See Denis Mack Smith. *A History of Sicily: Modern Sicily After 1713* (New York: Dorset Press, 1968), 415-425 for a concise summation of this story.

<sup>69</sup> "The Breach Between Garibaldi and the Annexationist Party." *The Economist* 21 July 1860: 783-84.

<sup>70</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 247-248.

while no one thinks of saluting those in power,”<sup>71</sup> and that “disorder is great, and might easily discourage one not born in Sicily, but I feel myself sufficiently strong to conquer it.”<sup>72</sup> One cannot help but marvel at the audacity and explicit pretension of such a figure, particularly when he ends his rash dispatch with a statement to the point that “I cannot allow Sicily to be ruined by machinations of rascally or foolhardy individuals,”<sup>73</sup> as if the whole of the effort for unification depended on the participation of this man. However, as this essay will demonstrate, in some ways it did.

All accounts indicate that Garibaldi received La Farina with coldness, giving him every assurance that his administration was in control and that his services were indeed, unnecessary.<sup>74</sup> La Farina received scant attention from the dictator until a month after his arrival, when Cavour’s agent had brought about enough discord and popular discontent with his propaganda and libelous accusations of Crispi that Garibaldi dismissed him from Sicily. The official release, as reported in a July 21, 1860 issue of *The Economist* states that Garibaldi banned La Farina for

...conspiring against the actual order of things. The Government, which is vigilant for the public tranquility, and should not be the least disturbed, could not any longer tolerate the presence amongst us of such individuals, who had come here with culpable intentions.<sup>75</sup>

However, La Farina had succeeded in his mission, and this fact cannot be overstated. By conducting a largely successful smear campaign against Crispi and his government, La Farina firmly implanted the plausibility of annexation to Piedmont firmly within the popular Sicilian consciousness, going so far as to persuade the civic council of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 244; 255.

<sup>75</sup> “Breach,” 783.

Palermo to register an official motion for annexation (which an infuriated Garibaldi in turn firmly rejected).<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, La Farina was a significant impediment to effective administration in Sicily, and in this way La Farina himself gave some truth to his accusations of governmental inefficiency, leading to a distinct decrease in support for the prodictatorial regime. Likewise, his ability to capitalize upon and proliferate the rumors of ‘Mazzinianism’ and ‘class war’ circulating among the urban elites in the streets of Palermo, inspired enough fear and discontent to ultimately deal a deafening blow to the credibility and ability of Garibaldi’s government. This led to Crispi’s forced resignation on June 27, and although July 7 marked La Farina’s permanent disappearance from the island, an irreparable wound had been inflicted upon the democratic cause.

Although Crispi remained largely influential during the subsequent Secretariat of Depretis, and indeed small successes were had by the democratic front in July, any republican cause at this point was lost. With Garibaldi being forced to leave Palermo to attend to military matters on the isle and the mainland, whereby the island lost the man around whom the *Risorgimento* was fixated, the political climate in Sicily became increasingly polarized, and the isle’s administration all but forgotten. A complete analysis of this greater political and diplomatic narrative stands outside of the scope and breadth of this essay, but the most critical element to understanding the nature of these proceedings is the role played by La Farina, whose subliminal and destructive influence in Palermo served as a catalyst in preventing the effectiveness by which the Garibaldinian administration could carry out reforms or enforce laws during that critical month of June

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<sup>76</sup> Mack Smith, *Cavour*, 45.

1860.<sup>77</sup> Scarcely covered in scholarship on the *Risorgimento*, La Farina in this respect deserves recognition as one of the most influential figures in the whole of the effort for Italian unification.

Garibaldi's administration was also forced to act within the external constraint of a gross lack of finances and resources. Lack of sufficient ammunition haunted Garibaldi's troops from the beginning,<sup>78</sup> and upon the capitulation of Palermo this translated into an inability to effectively enforce and ensure the upkeep of law and order on the isle, particularly when all arms available had been diverted to the liberation front. Abolition of the *macinato*, however critical for the gathering of peasant revolutionary support, meant the elimination of what had been the largest source of governmental revenue on the island for the Bourbons.<sup>79</sup> This simple quandary in and of itself is an adequate example of the sort of inherently contradictory policy sought by Garibaldi's regime. Reintroducing this policy, or attempting to levy any other sort of new taxation, would have proved disastrous, and certainly unsuccessful, as the lack of arms or general semblance of order prevented the establishment of any legal authority to which the Sicilians could be expected to respond. On June 9, Crispi, in light of the barren state of the Exchequer in Palermo, attempted to pass such tax measures to benefit those incurring losses due to the revolution and Bourbon bombardment.<sup>80</sup> But, as much of the city had been destroyed by this bombardment, and normal commercial activity not yet restored, it can be reasonably

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<sup>77</sup> D. Mack Smith's *Cavour*, in its entirety, is dedicated solely to the political and diplomatic maneuverings of these critical months, and serves as the authoritative survey of this complex game of political chess played between the Cavourian and Garibaldinian regimes.

<sup>78</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 197.

<sup>79</sup> Riall, *Sicily and the Unification*, 94.

<sup>80</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 223.



assumed that these policies were merely symbolic, at best, and perhaps a last effort at encouraging the Sicilians. Given the severe poverty still being endured by the mass of the populace, and the uncertainty and fear of class war felt by the elites in light of the revolution, charitable donations to the nationalist cause were nonexistent.

Bearing these political and economic limitations in mind, following the sealing of the armistice at Palermo on May 29 (and what essentially amounted to that of the entire island other than Messina), the provisional government embarked on a radically different path in terms of policy. As mentioned previously, this strategy departed from the earlier one pursued during the ‘radical’ stage of the revolution. Crispi, and even more so his successor to the secretariat, Agostino Depretis, now understood that their initial policy represented one in which the two aims of mobilizing the support of the masses, on one hand, and ensuring order, political success, and the prevention of Bourbon counterrevolution, on the other, represented a contradiction in practice, and that the interests of the landed class of rural elites needed to be weighed more heavily if success was to be achieved. In practice, this policy translated into the creation of a National Guard, the institution of ‘mobile columns’ of volunteers and *carabinieri* to police the countryside, and a period of unprecedented violence, military justice and repression in the Sicilian interior. At times indistinguishable from the roaming bands of deserters and bandits plaguing and wreaking havoc throughout the island, and at other times utilized as mere extensions of the power of local elites, these forces clashed with centuries-old, local family disputes and local rivalries in what became a bloody civil war. Simply put, one could not easily distinguish from the small armies now employed by the fearful

landowners, the legal authorities of the newly established regime, and the *brigantaggio* ('brigandage') now rampant in the countryside.

This policy of coercion began on May 29, when upon the capitulation of Palermo many of the laws proclaimed in Salemi on May 14 were instituted. These included those laws pertinent to the *leva* (conscription) and the construction of the Council of War and the national militia. Capital punishment was also mandated for murder as well as theft and pillaging, the latter two acts, it should be noted, being related to private property, and thus only relevant for those landowners who could suffer such losses.<sup>81</sup> Popular discontent swelled, and became directed against all means of authority, including the new government, as the peasantry realized that the promises made by Garibaldi would go unfulfilled. Whereas previously Garibaldi had been able to control and even direct the frustrations of the peasantry, he now perpetuated their discontent and gave it new cause. The introduction of liberal free-trade legislation later would only exacerbate these tensions and heighten the number of riots and popular demonstrations.<sup>82</sup> Crispi's nephew, sympathetic as his bias most certainly is, claims that from this point forward, "Crispi never failed to impress upon the authorities he was gradually instating that all attempts on property must be punished with relentless severity."<sup>83</sup>

Most demonstrative and notorious of these cases of military justice stands as that of Bronte, an insurgency crushed by one of Garibaldi's most ruthless generals, Nino Bixio, then serving directly on the Council of War. Bixio, a man characterized by British Consul Goodwin at Palermo as "for harshness and severity is unexampled in Sicilian

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>82</sup> Davis, *Conflict and Control*, 183.

<sup>83</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 188.

history”<sup>84</sup> embarked upon a bloodthirsty purge of the villages surrounding Mount Etna in early August and arrived at Bronte, where, according to Abba, “terrible rioting had broken out,” resulting in “arson, vendettas, fearful orgies” and “division of property,” (the latter of which should be noted as bearing strong resemblance to those promises made by Garibaldi a mere three months before).<sup>85</sup> Bixio took swift action, declared Bronte in a state of siege, confiscated all arms under pain of death, disbanded all forms of municipal organization, issued a war tax (unlikely to be affordable or paid), and sentenced the allegedly guilty parties to a court martial, resulting in what some accounts declare six executions<sup>86</sup> and others, as many as thirty.<sup>87</sup> Abba describes among those executed a sixty-year-old man and “cultured, gentle young men in red shirts; doctors, artists and the like.”<sup>88</sup> The historian and Italian deputy Giuseppe Ferrari would later characterize these individuals as “the first victims of a social war.”<sup>89</sup> Bixio went on to enact similar punishments in Randazzo, Castiglione, Regalbuto, Centorbi and other municipalities,<sup>90</sup> warranting this description by Abba:

They called him a savage brute, but they dared not do more. However far the fortunes of war take us away, the terror of witnessing this man’s tempestuous wrath will suffice to keep the population of Etna quiet. If not, this is what he has written: ‘We won’t waste words; either you keep orderly and quiet or, in the name of Justice and Country, we’ll destroy you as enemies of humanity.’<sup>91</sup>

Bixio’s dangerous jump to declare the interests of the country (and his particular understanding of the country) as the same as those of humanity represents, in this case, a

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<sup>84</sup> Letter from Consul Goodwin FO 70/322. 369.

<sup>85</sup> Abba, *Diary*, 124.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Consul Goodwin FO 70/322. 372.

<sup>88</sup> Abba, *Diary*, 125.

<sup>89</sup> In parliament, 11 Oct. as cited in Mack Smith, *Victor*, 195.

<sup>90</sup> Abba, *Diary*, 125.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

perilous and fatal view that would have direct consequences for the Sicilian peasantry. These matters were of little importance to the provisional government, though. More vital was the appeasement of those landed classes and assurance of “a complete restoration of good order”<sup>92</sup> necessary for securing the success and permanence of the effort for unification. Doubtless certain circumstances and cases emerged when such force was necessary, but one cannot help but speculate as to how many cases of unwarranted wanton violence occurred from such pretences when in reality circumstances may have been much as those described by Abba, when upon arriving upon the scene of an apparent bread riot at a baker’s shop, he related:

I said to Bozzani, ‘We’d better hurry before they sack it.’ On reaching it, however, we saw there was no rioting; people were taking their loaves, paying for them, and making way for others. A gentleman told us that his family had eaten nothing since the previous day as they had been caught by the revolution without provisions in the house.<sup>93</sup>

Regardless, as the next decade reflects, these measures, similar to all of those implemented by the regime, proved largely ineffective, as chaos remained the order of the day.

The creation of the National Guards did not mitigate this problem, as the responsibility of their construction was left largely to those officials appointed to the heads of local councils by Crispi (a concerted and in this context relatively successful

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<sup>92</sup> This quote is excerpted from a detailed complaint filed by an British resident of Sicily with holdings in the Trapani and Palermo provinces, who went on to praise the oppressive actions of Bixio as “effective measures” and nothing more. Attached letter Consul Goodwin FO 70/322. 406.

<sup>93</sup> Abba, *Diary*, 70.

effort at winning the favor of local elites which will be explored later in this essay).<sup>94</sup>

This resulted in the bestowing of legal authority and legitimacy to both the pre-existing agrarian power structures and the violent bands of thugs they employed to assure order.<sup>95</sup>

Referencing the Garibaldi's administrative priorities at this time, Denis Mack Smith states:

His first need was for stable government, and hence he welcomed that the National Guard should develop out of private security organizations employed by the landowners, even though this might eventually mean capitulation to one side in the social struggle which was now cutting across the political fight for freedom.<sup>96</sup>

These measures thus only effectively fomented the already anarchic state of the interior, as all of these localized loyalties and clientelist patronage networks clashed with the brigands in what manifested itself as an essential class war which would eventually give birth to what we now refer to as the *mafia*. At this juncture, it should be noted that these were indeed rational responses and reactions to the imposition of these laws rather than behavioral deviations as the *meridionalisti* might presume (more on this below). In any event, despite the use of brute repression, the Garibaldinian administration was still unable to enforce any sort of legislation it concocted, regardless of its intent or the audience to which it catered, the peasantry or the landed elites. This utter failure manifested itself most apparently in the government's embarrassing inability to enforce the *leva*.

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<sup>94</sup> Riall, *Sicily and the Unification*, 102.

<sup>95</sup> Mack Smith, *Victor*, 221.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

One of the first pieces of legislation passed by the provisional government, this attempt to recruit a militia was met with open defiance and in some instances blatant disregard from the beginning. In fact, many scholars credit this attempt as one of the foremost causes of the popular discontent that plagued the isle.<sup>97</sup> Crispi's biased nephew declares the unwillingness to serve the state as something engrained within Sicilian culture, claiming that "The Sicilians were not accustomed to compulsory service, and considered it an intolerable burden."<sup>98</sup> This essentialist and generalizing explanation does not seem to hold up, though, as a number of peasants had aided the expedition in Palermo, and support did not begin to wane until July, when all hope for social reform was lost.<sup>99</sup> In any event, this edict met with so much repulsion and neglect that the government was finally forced to make concessions and modifications to the law in the hopes of gaining any support at all. Crispi, still hoping to salvage any authority and pride the administration had left, wrote to one of his governors:

The regulations concerning conscription must be obeyed. We are willing, however, to modify the clauses that are at variance with popular prejudice. Substitution will be permitted and only sons exempted. I demand one thing only, that these modifications be made to appear as already inherent to the law, and not as concessions on the part of the government, whose authority must be safeguarded.<sup>100</sup>

Unfortunately, Crispi would never learn that arrogance and disillusionment do not make for effective administration, and the above concession and the provisional

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<sup>97</sup> "Popular discontent was first focused on Garibaldi's conscription." *Victor*, 210; "Conscription also played an important role in increasing crime and disorder . . ." in *Conflict*, 183.

<sup>98</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 224.

<sup>99</sup> Abba's account on pgs 102-103 recalls a few instances in early July in which peasants began to desert the expedition. "On mustering we find that about fifty of the Sicilians who came with us from Palermo have deserted, some even taking their rifles with them. They are peasants who blaze up like straw and then lose interest." Abba, 102.

<sup>100</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 228.

government's inability to enforce conscription on any level, serve as exemplary cases of this Italian patriot's administrative denial and mismanagement.

These policies of the provisional government combined with fundamental elements of nineteenth-century liberal reforms in a manner that proved fatal for the peasantry. That is to say, Garibaldi's administrators, in the following instances, was not guilty *per se* of blatantly and consciously subordinating the needs of the peasantry for reasons of greater political significance, but were instead merely naïve, in a sense, as to the historical circumstances and condition of the Sicilian peasantry. However, this naivety and the subsequent misplaced imposition of liberal educational, religious and agricultural reforms resulted in equally catastrophic consequences for the peasantry as did those policies of intentional coercion and oppression. It was in light of the failure of these reforms that the notion of 'Piedmontization' began to appear incompatible with the case of Sicily and particularly with that of the Sicilian peasant. At the very least, these efforts at instituting liberal reforms arrived too late in the revolutionary process. The provisional government's attempts at educating the masses prove extremely relevant, in this case.

The *Casati* law established compulsory education along Piedmontese lines, but proved irreconcilable with the peasant condition in Sicily. Given the chaotic state of the interior, and the lack of effective economic or agricultural reform (detailed more below), the peasant child remained on the farm with his or her family, continuing in assisting and aiding the family's meager attempts at subsistence just as he or she had before the

revolution. Evidence of this can be seen in Sonnino and Franchetti's report, as in 1871, 87 percent of the total population of Sicily was illiterate, a percentage that, by Sonnino's estimate, was entirely composed of peasants.<sup>101</sup> In the same respect, as in the past, the landowner and agriculturist had no vested interest in improving the state of his human capital as a means of increasing agricultural production through education. As Denis Mack Smith characterizes it: "*latifondisti* not only were content with a 2 per cent return on their money; they often seem to have made it a point of class pride to leave their estates derelict and barren."<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, any attempts at educating the masses would only lead to revolt. As Sonnino puts it:

Was it perhaps this neglect by the upper class only due to carelessness and indifference, or did it rather stem from the instinctive consciousness that instruction given to the peasant in their present conditions would only ferment discontent and could become a stimulant to the spirit of rebellion and future disruptions?<sup>103</sup>

Thus, the liberal notion of mass education proved incompatible with the pre-existing state of the Sicilian peasantry, as no effective social or economic legislation had been passed to liberate these individuals from their responsibilities at home and their feeble attempts at subsistence. To make matters worse, any charitable institutions through which the peasantry could have attained these sorts of resources were abolished with the passing of liberal, anti-clerical reforms. These measures were to be found among the first of Crispi's edicts, as he dismissed and abolished the Society of Jesus and the Order of

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<sup>101</sup> Sonnino, 196.

<sup>102</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *History of Sicily*, 458.

<sup>103</sup> Sonnino, 196-197. Translated text: "È forse questa trascuranza delle classi agiate solo effetto di spensieratezza e d'indifferenza, oppure non dipende piuttosto dalla istintiva coscienza che l'istruzione data al villano nelle condizioni attuali non farebbe che l'ufficio di lievito al malcontento, e potrebbe diventare uno stimolo allo spirito di ribellione, ed un fomite di future sconvolgimenti?"



Redemptorists from the island, “in consideration of the fact that the Jesuits and Liguorians were the most steadfast supporters of despotism during the unhappy period of Bourbon occupation.”<sup>104</sup> He then nationalized their vast holdings of land, which covered a tenth of Sicily.<sup>105</sup> Garibaldi and Crispi, both notorious anti-Catholics,<sup>106</sup> instituted these reforms with such stringent sentiments of anti-clericalism that they neglected to account for the rather idiosyncratic, pervasive and vital positions of the priests in Sicilian society, and the role they played in initially supporting the peasants’ social revolts.<sup>107</sup> This relationship differed markedly from the perceptions held by both Garibaldi and the liberals, undoubtedly influenced by their experiences and observations of the parasitic clergy in other, wealthier parts of Italy. Even Abba, young and innocent as his musings are, held this disdain for the Church, particularly the Augustinian monks, stating;

They did the honours of their monastery dresses in black cassocks, sleek and greasy. The monastery is secluded, a tranquil backwater, a place to grow fat in. The monks are like trees in a garden whose soil drains all the good from the rest of the village.<sup>108</sup>

Sonnino paints a vastly different picture of the priest in Sicily, hailing him as one of the only social services available to the island’s populace.

The priest is the only person who consoles him [the worker or peasant] with words of affection and charity; at least, if he doesn’t help, sympathizes with him when he suffers; treats him like a man, and talks to him of future justice that will make up for the present injustices. Religious worship is the most sacred part of peasant life: apart from that he only knows work, sweat and misery.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Crispi, *Diary*, 224.

<sup>105</sup> Mack Smith, “The Latifundia in Modern,” 102.

<sup>106</sup> Mack Smith, *History of Sicily*, 436.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 435; 456.

<sup>108</sup> Abba, *Diary*, 108.

<sup>109</sup> Sonnino, 191. Translated text: “Il prete è la sola persona che si occupa di lui con parole di affetto e di carità; che almeno, se non lo aiuta, lo compiangere quando soffre; che lo tratta come un uomo, e gli parla di una giustizia avvenire per compensarlo delle ingiustizie presenti. Nel culto religioso sta tutta la parte ideale della vita del contadino: all’infuori di quello, non conosce che fatica, sudori, e miseria. . .”

Sonnino goes further to express his liberal opinions in regards to the harmful effects of religious superstition in general and the manner in which these customs and the Church will “forever rule the masses.”<sup>110</sup> However, he acknowledges that, given the lack of sufficient social and economic reform in Sicily, the liberation from these forces represented a temporary impossibility, and that the state had only served to remove the material benefits of these charitable institutions. This meant the jobs of an estimated 15,000 laymen alone in Palermo, as well as those services of the Church that catered to the poor and destitute, were lost.<sup>111</sup>

The policy aimed at Church and the nationalization of its lands is inextricable from the land reform undertaken by the Garibaldinian dictatorship. This project’s utterly egregious failure generated grave social and economic consequences that fatally undermined all of the regime’s liberalizing efforts and ultimately sealed the fate of the Sicilian peasantry. This agrarian program consisted of several radical measures and phases. These edicts were first issued on June 2, and thus probably bore the same stamp as the other promises made to the revolutionary peasantry at this time. However, if put into practice with the proper accompaniments, this program had the potential to be effective, and could have avoided infringing on the established rights of the landed elites, with great implications. Denis Mack Smith regards it as such:

agrarian reform, quite apart from considerations of political expediency and social justice, would have been an indispensable prerequisite for making the revolution of 1860-1 into the real turning-point of Sicilian history which many people had hoped.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Sonnino 191.

<sup>111</sup> Mack Smith, *History of Sicily*, 458.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

Needless to say, it was not put into practice in such a manner, as the elements of ‘Piedmontization’ seeped in to destroy such prospects, and the program only made matters worse in Sicily. The first phase of reform promulgated the redistribution of Crown land among the peasantry on June 2.<sup>113</sup> The island’s new prodictator, Antonio Mordini, initiated an even more radical and concrete measure in October, allowing for the transfer of 230,000 hectares of Church and Crown land into leases meant to provide for a class of smallholders to emerge.<sup>114</sup> Cavour’s eventual political *coup d’état* in October thwarted this effort though. Realizing these lands could be auctioned off at higher prices, the new political class enlarged the units of land to be sold. Abuses and gross monopolization of holdings ensured, as financial gains enjoyed precedence over the assurance of holdings or justice for the peasants.<sup>115</sup> It is not hard to imagine how the violent means of the *gabbellotti* and the nascent *mafia* (in most cases indistinguishable from one another) and the established clientelist and patronage systems came into play, in this regard. Any peasants who were willing and able to stand up to these pressures were without the adequate credit facilities to do so.<sup>116</sup> As one scholar states, “A piece of land is only a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to allow the peasant to escape the world of *la misera*.”<sup>117</sup> The result: the consolidation and preservation of the pre-existing power structures of the Sicilian agrarian hierarchy. Sonnino and Franchetti demonstrate in detail the proceedings of the auctions in their reports, but they can be accurately be summed up in Sonnino’s introductory statement:

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<sup>113</sup> Riall, *Sicily and the Unification*, 87.

<sup>114</sup> Riall, “Ill-contrived,” 142.

<sup>115</sup> Mack Smith, *History of Sicily*, 457.

<sup>116</sup> Mack Smith, “The Latifondia in Modern,” 106.

<sup>117</sup> Duncan Powell, “Peasant Society,” 420.

with rents and falsified contracts, here just as in the communal allotments of the whole of Sicily, all of the lots went into the hands of the rich landowners. As for the land surveyed by the ecclesiastical board, there was never any need for falsification, and in the whole of the island, all of the surveyed lands went to the rich landowners and capitalists.<sup>118</sup>

The only way to perhaps reconcile these liberalizing, profit-seeking measures by the state with the interests of the peasantry would have been the reintroduction of the ‘promiscuous rights’ of grazing, hunting and wood-collecting on the common lands. As Sonnino describes,

For the peasant landowner, the small holder, and also the simple laborer, these rights were a veritable wealth, and a source of well-being all the more invaluable because they were not affected by the passing crisis, because these rights were inherently communal and inalienable.<sup>119</sup>

However, with all of Cavour’s emphasis on privatization, there was no hope for these prospects. In the end, all of these lands passed on to the class which now, according to Sonnino, “horded all of the things once deemed as communal.”<sup>120</sup> Again, this failure revolves around the similar quandary facing the measures pertinent to compulsory education (which were undoubtedly well-intentioned) involving the nature of the Sicilian ruling class, and the manner in which the liberal regime prized their political consent and the content of their pocketbooks above all else. In sum, Lucy Riall details the harsh reality of the situation:

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<sup>118</sup> Sonnino, 138. Translated text: “. . . con fitti e contratti simulati, qui come nelle quotizzazioni comunali dell’intera Sicilia, tutti i lotti sono andati in mano dei ricchi proprietari. Quanto poi ai terreni censiti dell’asse ecclesiastico, non vi è stato in alcun luogo nemmeno bisogno di simulazioni, e in tutta quanta l’Isola, tutte le terre censite sono toccate ai ricchi proprietari e capitalisti. . .”

<sup>119</sup> Sonnino, 189. Translated text: “Per il contadino proprietario, il piccolo censuario, e anche il semplice lavorante, quei diritti eran una vera e propria ricchezza, ed una fonte di benessere tanto più preziosa in quanto non poteva disseccarsi per effetto delle crisi passeggere, perchè quei diritti eran inerenti alla qualità di comunista ed inalienabili.”

<sup>120</sup> Sonnino, 190. Translated text: “ha in mano tutte le cose comunali . . . della classe agiata.”

As a result, the chances of land reform succeeding in Sicily depended on a group of men whose entire livelihood depended on the reform failing. Agricultural diversification was entrusted to class grown rich on grain, who drew a substantial profit from rent and who would perceive little material benefit from commercializing their crop. Men whose wealth and security derived from ‘the frenzied exploitation’ of a debt-ridden labour force were expected to allocate land to the peasantry, thus freeing them from exploitation. The disappointing, even disastrous, results of land reform in Sicily can largely be traced to this fundamental fallacy.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, the act of legislatively bestowing legitimacy to this powerful, oppressive class and the injustices suffered by the peasants that resulted from this process represent the most critical elements to understanding the consequences of Garibaldi’s provisional government in Sicily. Crispi’s administrative delegation of authority gave political legitimacy to these traditional agrarian hierarchies, and transformed them into powerbrokers who cemented the fate of the Sicilian peasantry. This action represented the final nail in the coffin for the chances of Sicilian democracy and popular participation. This, it should be noted, was a conscious decision by the provisional government, to favor the interests of the elites and to appoint them to various administrative posts to gain their political backing. Undoubtedly, the chaotic, anarchic state of the island factored greatly into this decision. The rural elites seemed at this point to be the only element able to influence, control and subdue the rebellious activity in the countryside. However, this logic operates on the premise and *a priori* notions that the radical factions of the Sicilian populace were incapable of independently adhering to and participating in governmental procedures. Scant evidence exists that would support this hypothesis, as in the failed political experiment of 1848 all radical elements (even those

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<sup>121</sup> Riall, “Ill-Contrived. . .,” 142.

from the upper classes) were excluded from the interim parliament's proceedings.<sup>122</sup> Likewise, speeches and reports given in the Italian Chamber of Deputies in 1861 indicate that violent crimes subsided following the capitulation of Palermo and only intensified when the peasantry began to comprehend the new trajectory of the regime's policy in late June and July of 1860.<sup>123</sup> Crispi's choice to favor the landed elites thus represented the triumph of faulty logic which favored expedience and subservience over liberty and equality.

It was in this general line of reasoning that on May 17, Crispi appointed governors to all twenty-four districts of the island, and bestowed upon them all administrative authority in their respective lands.<sup>124</sup> These structures bore much similarity to the Piedmontese administrative system.<sup>125</sup> The majority of these appointments proved themselves to be poor decisions on the part of Crispi, to say the absolute least. Nepotism, the pursuance of personal vendettas and rivalries, and gross abuses of power of all sorts became the norm in such a way that "gravely compromised every principle of bureaucratic rationality and centralized control"<sup>126</sup> and gave unprecedented power to these local elites. As Franchetti reports:

The extremely small class that had already dominated in large part public and private affairs, came necessarily to power with a new authority and influence given by the Government, and the more its power grew the more is used it to assume the characteristics of a direct monopoly that exclusively benefited themselves.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Mack Smith, *History of Sicily*, 420.

<sup>123</sup> Speech given by Minister of War Della Rovere in Chamber of Deputies. PRO. FO 45/9 346-347.

<sup>124</sup> Duggan, *Francesco*, 192

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>126</sup> Riall, *Sicily and the Unification*, 97.

<sup>127</sup> Franchetti, 141. Translated text: "La scarsissima classe che già prima dominava in gran parte le relazioni d'indole pubblica e privata, venne per la forza delle cose in potere anche della nuova autorità ed influenza

Why, then, would Crispi choose such figures to serve as leaders in the new, liberal State? As John Davis says, “to ensure the political success of the mission.”<sup>128</sup> Such a decision, and its devastating social outcome, showcases the consequences of this sort of pragmatic politics. Crispi’s faulty appointments thus combined with Depretis and Mordini’s centralizing and ‘Piedmontizing’ efforts to perpetuate the rise and prevalence a wealthy rural political class and a decisive and self-serving voice in the forging of the new state. These sorts of political entities, based on largely on clientelist networks and reliant on largely-illiterate peasant constituencies, consistently prove to be what one scholar deems ‘accommodating’ “flexible” and “pragmatic.”<sup>129</sup> In this case, these phrases function as mere euphemisms for the harsh realities that were ‘parasitic,’ ‘opportunistic’ and ‘undemocratic.’ These elements quickly became so powerful and so pervasive that not even the Italian State could check their power, and instead the state itself became an instrument of the wealthy. Franchetti, in infamous terms, offers this morbid eulogy of the death of liberty and democracy, and the failure of the new Italian State:

This is how the Government, in searching for the favor of the local elements, saw its concessions turn into its loss, and where they sought to use the dominant classes as an instrument, the government became instead an instrument themselves; to the point that at the times they seemed to have any power, it signified they were controlled by a local party.<sup>130</sup>

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conceduta dal Governo, e più crebbe il potere di questa classe, più l’uso che da essa ne veniva fatto assunse il carattere di un monopolio diretto ad esclusivo beneficio di chi lo esercitava.”

<sup>128</sup> Davis, *Law and Order*, 52.

<sup>129</sup> Duncan Powell, “Peasant Society,” 422.

<sup>130</sup> Franchetti, 382. Translated text: “Così il Governo, nel cercare di affezionarsi gli elementi locali, vede le sue concessioni voltate a suo danno, e dove cerca di farsi della classe dominante uno istrumento, diventa invece istrumento di lei; al punto che se talvolta sembra aver forza alcuna, vuol dire che è venuto in mano ad un partito locale.”

This transition of power came with its expected consequences for the Sicilian peasantry. Once in place, successive local governments abandoned all calls for land or social reform that would have benefitted the peasantry.<sup>131</sup> In fact, they tended to do just the opposite, and local taxes on land were all but eradicated, whereas those on food were exponentially raised, the burden of which fell upon the peasantry.<sup>132</sup> Plans for the development of public works programs were abandoned, and instead geared toward the creation of lavish theatres and status symbols in the name and under the auspices of the wealthy landowners.<sup>133</sup> These actions resulted from the power, authority and legitimacy ultimately and originally bestowed upon them by the Garibaldinian administration. Years later in 1877, Leopoldo Franchetti would try to call attention in the Italian Parliament to these continuing injustices in these compelling terms:

And the more a ministry boasts of being liberal and progressive and governing according to the will of the country, the more it governs Sicily in every detail according to the interests of the extremely small class that dominates there. . .<sup>134</sup>

This state of affairs would be solidified and cemented at the center of Sicilian and Italian politics when the plebiscite for annexation to the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia was held on October 21, an event with legal and social ramifications that would lead to almost a decade of bloody, civil conflict and a full-fledged class war on the island, whose consequences can be seen to this day.

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<sup>131</sup> Mack Smith, "Latifundia in Modern," 99.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>134</sup> Franchetti, 383. Translated text: "E quanto maggiormente un ministero si vanterà di esser liberale e di governare secondo la volontà del paese, tanto più governerà la Sicilia secondo gl'interessi della ristrettissima classe che vi domina, e transigerà con lei l'ogni particolare."



#### IV. The Plebiscite, the ‘Piedmontization’ of Sicily and Civil War

*Away with all political strife! No party has the right to force upon our country any one particular set of social guarantees. This right belongs to the nation alone, and when the nation has conquered it may be trusted to establish just that constitution which will secure to it the fruits of victory for ever.*<sup>135</sup>

Francesco Crispi, *Memoirs*

These romantic words written by Crispi mere months earlier undoubtedly seemed in October as though they were transcribed in another lifetime. By this time, the radical cause was all but lost. Garibaldi now faced a mandate to hand over his spoils to Victor Emmanuel II, who was to be named the first king of a united Italy, a decision the disenchanted revolutionary announced on October 15.<sup>136</sup> The plebiscite in Sicily, conducted six days later and resulting in a resounding ‘*si*’, put the first of a series of finishing touches on the shape of the new Italian state. However, this vote represented a mere formality and another step in what would become a prolonged and extensive process of unification that in many ways remains incomplete. The façade of Italian unity had been effectively created, but did not fit as comfortably upon some regions of the peninsula as it did others, Sicily being a case in point. With this façade’s imposition as well as that of its accompanying laws and regulations came an intensified level of upheaval and unrest on the island to such an extent that martial law and a ‘state of siege’

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<sup>135</sup> Crispi, *Memoirs*, 7.

<sup>136</sup> Mack Smith, *Cavour*, 382.

had to be declared twice in order to suppress the conflict.<sup>137</sup> The purpose of this section is thus to examine the nature of the plebiscite in Sicily, the beginnings of the attempted ‘Piedmontization’ of the island, and the rational responses (of both the peasantry and other groups) and long-term consequences that resulted from this process.

The days leading up to October 15, 1860, marked some of the most tense in the whole *Risorgimento*. Crispi, still influencing political affairs on the island to the best of his ability, delayed the declaration of a plebiscite until the latest possible moment, awaiting Garibaldi’s response to Victor Emmanuel’s ‘invitation’ to join a free and united Italy.<sup>138</sup> Following the general’s affirmative response, word was sent to all corners of the island that a plebiscite was to be conducted six days later. Registered Sicilian voters were to respond with either a ‘*si*’ or a ‘*no*’ to the proposition that ‘the Sicilian people desire to form an integral part of Italy one and indivisible under Victor Emanuel as their constitutional king.’<sup>139</sup> Purposefully crafted without reference to ‘annexation’ of any sort and carried through in a manner so as to elicit the unanimous response desired by the Piedmontese regime, the plebiscite represented a mere formality, in this respect. For this reason, Cavour and his underlings gave little thought to extending ‘universal suffrage’ to all literate Sicilians. While such an action could have appeared perilous in its application to such an uneducated, easily-influenced populace, Cavour by this time understood Sicilian politics as a mere extension of the networks of power, patronage and clientelism so deeply entrenched in the island’s sociological landscape. Likewise, voting was

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<sup>137</sup> Riall, “Garibaldi and the South,” 150 taken from Davis, *Italy in the Nineteenth*.

<sup>138</sup> Mack Smith, Cavour 380.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

performed publicly in the town centers for all to see, and in this manner subject to every kind of external influence.<sup>140</sup> It takes little imagination to understand how this translated and intensified in the smaller, more remote villages. Denis Mack Smith description places the few qualified Sicilian peasant voters in context:

Outside the big towns, in areas where villages were still feudal and where landowners had made up their minds that Piedmont offered the best hope of restoring order, the publicity which surrounded the voting meant an almost compulsory ‘*si*’. In some places, for instance Trapani. . . the ignorant peasantry fled to the mountains, under the impression that the voting was only a plot to inveigle them into an ambush and then press them for military service.<sup>141</sup>

In this sense, all that was required in order to achieve the intended results of the plebiscite was the proper and successful production of an elaborate show, of sorts, and a hearty celebration to follow. The liberal regime succeeded, in this regard, and the results yielded a nearly unanimous vote in favor of annexation. Mack Smith places the final vote in Sicily at 432,053 to 667, with 238 of the 292 voting districts having no negative votes whatsoever.<sup>142</sup> A few days of widespread public jubilation followed, even if its participants did not know or understand the cause of their celebration. As one observer recalled: “the affirmative vote meant to the great majority the inauguration of an age of economic and social prosperity: no one then imagined it could conceal a new slavery.”<sup>143</sup>

This simple fact was soon realized, as upon the implementation of the Piedmontese constitution, the *Statuto Albertino*, the reforms the majority of the Sicilian populace had grown to detest under the Garibaldinian administration were given

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 385.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 385. Italics in text.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 389

<sup>143</sup> L. Natoli, *Rivendicazioni attraverso le rivoluzioni siciliane del 1848-60*, 1927, 208. taken from Mack Smith, *Cavour*, 435.

legitimacy and a permanence that they never had before. The widespread response to the reinstatement of these policies took on that of a state of unprecedented revolt and (now that Italy existed as an independent country) ‘civil war.’ *Brigantaggio* flourished, and any semblance of order or government disappeared from the countryside. The disenfranchised Sicilian peasants geared their discontent and defiance at the same targets it had before the plebiscite, such as the officials and institutions supporting the despised *leva*. However, their response now took on the form of a reaction against the liberal elements embedded in the Piedmontese constitution, including free trade legislation and new systems of taxation. The disbanding of the Bourbon army as well as Garibaldi’s revolutionary force only exacerbated these tensions and increased the level of disorder prevalent on the island.<sup>144</sup> In order to adequately account for and understand the nature of these reactions, each of these elements and occurrences must be analyzed individually, beginning with the policy of conscription.

As this essay has demonstrated, the *leva* occupied a particular place in the Sicilian public imagination as an exemplary manifestation of their treatment and exploitation at the hands of the state, and thus made for a prime target and outlet for their anger and frustration. Secretary Crispi’s concessions and modifications to its enforcement had appeased the Sicilians to some extent, but these alterations were thrown out upon the implementation of the new constitution in October. Protests ensued, and the new government had little success in enforcing this mandate over the course of the next decade. As early as December, speeches in the Italian Chamber of Deputies forecasted the prospects of the law’s implementation as such:

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<sup>144</sup> Letter from Consul Hudson. PRO. FO 45/9. 380.

As for the ‘Leva’ in Sicily, I believe that we shall meet with still greater difficulties in its accomplishment than at Naples. I say this with regret, for when I was in Sicily I thought matters were in vain to facilitate these operations; but for some time past, a degree of agitation has been produced. . . I hope that this agitation will soon subside, that we may without any serious difficulties effect the ‘Leva’ and that we may exhibit to Europe this grand fact that the Southern Provinces have contributed to the Army of Italy upwards of 45 or 50 thousand recruits in one year. . . I trust that when this agitation is appeased, the ‘Leva’ will be carried out. I trust in the patriotism of Sicilians.<sup>145</sup>

As the next ten years would demonstrate, this trust would prove to be misplaced, as Sicilians, particularly those in the countryside, still did not have an accurate conceptualization of the workings of the new Italian state or their roles or responsibilities within it. Their only past experiences with the state featured it as an oppressor which constantly fed upon and demanded vital human and material resources of its constituency. The oft-cited quotation of Italian author Carlo Levi’s from his *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (‘Christ Stopped at Eboli’) could not be more applicable, in this respect, as “Nothing had ever come [from Rome] but the tax collector . . .”<sup>146</sup> This sentiment preoccupied Sicilian brigands to an almost fanatical degree.<sup>147</sup>

The sustained and legitimized enforcement of methods of taxation favoring landed elites and members of the parliament continued to spark public outrage. As John Davis describes this was the “greatest single cause of rural discontent,” and that

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<sup>145</sup> Speech of Minister of War Della Rovere in the Chamber of Deputies. Letter From Consul Hudson. PRO. FO 45/9. 353-354.

<sup>146</sup> Levi, Carlo *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (USA: Levi Press 2008). 132.

<sup>147</sup> As noted in a convention in Palermo on Sept 27<sup>th</sup>, 1864 by one of the British Consuls, the question of moving the capital from Turin to Florence, an issue that sparked debate throughout the peninsula, was only regarded by all classes of Sicilian society in relation to how it may potentially allow for the suspension of the *leva*. Letter from Consul Hudson. PRO. FO 45/9.180.

. . . nowhere was the nature of the compromises forced on the new state more evident than in the continuation of a fiscal system that discriminated strongly against the countryside and the rural population. Under pressure from the landed interests, the new state adopted a fiscal system in the 1860s that was based on a land tax that weighed more heavily on small farms than on larger estates, while the rural population bore the brunt of indirect consumption taxes which were levied on most basic necessities.<sup>148</sup>

This combined with a governmental interest to prevent urban disorder to bring the bulk of the weight of taxation on the rural population.<sup>149</sup> Finally, the decision in 1868 to reinstitute the *macinato*, whose abolition had given life to the peasantry as a revolutionary force less than a decade earlier, ignited a flame of discontent that would not be easily quelled.<sup>150</sup>

New taxes worked with other fiscal and commercial policies to fatally compromise the position of the Sicilian peasantry in the new Kingdom of Italy. The disappearance of the Bourbon protective tariffs and the extension of Piedmontese free trade legislation crippled the Sicilian economy on a number of levels. The few large-scale industries that did exist and provided a means to supplement the meager incomes of the peasants, such as those found in cotton textile mills, were decimated.<sup>151</sup> The effects on local trade and commerce were felt in both the urban and rural spheres, as artisans and smallholders could not keep up with such drastic changes and the pressures that

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<sup>148</sup> Davis, *Conflict and Control*, 190.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>151</sup> A'Hearn, Brian "Institutions, Externalities, and Economic Growth in Southern Italy: Evidence from the Cotton Textile Industry, 1861-1914." *Economic History Review* 51.4 (1998): 734-762. 750.

accompanied the sudden rise in prices.<sup>152</sup> This resulted in workers' strikes in the cities and widespread bread riots in the countryside.<sup>153</sup>

These uprisings and the general state of unrest that prevailed on the island dealt a massive blow to the credibility of the new Italian state, and thus legitimized the regime's brutal use of their newfound authority in mitigating the conflict. In 1862, the Italian government instated the Pica Law, bestowing upon the local authorities military powers of arrest and detention, powers which were abused by the elites who occupied these positions to an egregious extent.<sup>154</sup> Summary executions, the besieging of entire villages, torture and the taking of hostages became commonplace, as the authorities sought to eradicate the scourge of *brigantaggio*.<sup>155</sup>

However, closer examination reveals that *brigantaggio*, whose connotations in Italian Parliament became those of a plague that had infested and wrought havoc on the Sicilian interior, was in fact welcomed by all segments of the island's population. In fact, the individual brigand, whether he hailed from the peasant class or the urban working class, assumed the characteristics of a certain popular hero for both the peasants and the landed elites, depending on the spatial context.<sup>156</sup> As Sonnino evocatively demonstrates:

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>154</sup> Riall, "Garibaldi and the South," 150 taken from Davis ed., *Italy in the Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>156</sup> It is important to note, here, that the bands of brigands that roamed the Sicilian countryside at this time were in no way monolithic or uniform in their composition, backgrounds, or attitudes toward the new Italian state, the Sicilian peasantry or the new or old classes of landowners. As suggested by Sonnino, individual brigands could perform a number of roles, whether those were as appendages of the landowning classes or as 'Robin Hood' figures, of sorts, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. See the debate surrounding what Eric Hobsbawm refers to in this latter instance as "social banditry," discussed in more detail below as well as in Anton Blok's critique in his "The Peasant and the Brigand," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14.4 (1972), 494-505. and Hobsbawm's response in his "Social Bandits: Reply," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14.4 (1972), 503-505.

And is it perhaps surprising that the brigand finds trusted and devoted friends everywhere? While the landowners aid him out of fear or to use him as an instrument of their passions, the peasants are his natural allies, because the brigand, embodying the popular sentiment, taxes the landowner and is generous to the poor, and thus represents both a proud protest against social oppression and an affirmation of their individual dignity.<sup>157</sup>

In his study of “primitive” and “archaic” social movements among “pre-political” people in Western and Southern Europe, Eric Hobsbawm underscores these reactionary figures and movements as those characteristic of “social banditry,” and the predecessors of modern mass political movements. He elaborates upon this concept as follows;

*Social banditry*, a universal and virtually unchanging phenomenon, is little more than endemic peasant protest against oppression and poverty: a cry for vengeance on the rich and the oppressors, a vague dream of some curb upon them, a righting of individual wrongs. Its ambitions are modest: a traditional world in which men are justly dealt with, not a new and perfect world. It becomes epidemic rather than endemic when a peasant society which knows of no better means of self-defense is in a condition of abnormal tension and disruption.<sup>158</sup>

While scholarship on social movements such as these has been relatively limited, Hobsbawm hails these sorts of spontaneous outbursts as the “pre-history of modern labour and peasants movements,” and in this sense worthy of serious introspection and analysis. However, while Hobsbawm’s theorizations provide a necessary groundwork and foundation for further discussion, his Marxist schema and theoretical framework does not regard such protests against oppression and poverty as

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<sup>157</sup> Sonnino, 177-178. Translated text: “È forse da sorprendersi che il brigante trovi da per tutto così facilmente amici sicuri e devoti? – Se a lui i proprietari si prestano per terrore, o alcuni perchè egli si offre come strumento alle loro passioni; nei contadini invece egli trova altrettanti alleati naturali, perchè il brigante, accomodandosi al sentimento popolare, tassa il proprietario ed è prodigo coi poveri, e perchè apparisce alle loro menti come una fiera protesta contro l’oppressione sociale ed un’affermazione della loro dignità individuale.”

<sup>158</sup> Eric Hobsbawm *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (New York: Norton & Norton Company 1959). 5. Italics in text. Hobsbawm dedicates a significant portion of this text to the description and application of this concept to the particular context of Sicily in both this work and its latter adaptation *Bandits* (New York: The New Press 2000).



political acts in and of themselves. The Sicilian peasants were not “pre-political” people, but—on the contrary—they were very political, albeit in different, simpler ways than urban-based, modern mass labor movements.

The other responses to this ‘Piedmontization’ were many and varied in terms of their lasting consequences for the fate of Sicily and the new Italian state. While the majority of disenfranchised Sicilians took to the mountains, and revolted in spontaneous fashion against the government, other reactions took on a more organized and at times distinctively politicized dimension. Hobsbawm differentiates between these two responses as being “revolutionary” and “reformist,” the latter of which refers to the group’s willingness to “accept the general framework of an institution or social arrangement, but consider it capable of improvement or, where abuses have crept in, reform.”<sup>159</sup> The emergence and organization of the *mafia* as a means of protecting property and restoring order to the countryside easily fits within this definition, and is in fact cited by Hobsbawm on a number of occasions as *the* prime example of such a movement. An early Italian sociologist describes the development of the *mafia* as “a sort of vast mutual-help society, to which an indefinite number of people belong, and whose object is to acquire influence and power by any means.”<sup>160</sup> Recruited from the middling ranks of society, particularly from the class of *gabbellotti* (already skilled in the brutal tactics of intimidation), these organizations came to play a massive role in the affairs of liberal Italy. As one group of scholars states:

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<sup>159</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 10-11.

<sup>160</sup> Villari, *Italian Life*, 7.

. . .the state relied on them [the *Mafiosi*], only pretending to police their unauthorized use of violence. Thereafter, a succession of governing regimes in Italy looked the other way as mafia ‘families’ proliferated, especially along the ‘bandit corridor’ that extended through Sicily’s western mountains and in the commercially rich orchard district surrounding Palermo. . .<sup>161</sup>

In many of the towns, these families and organizations dominated communal councils, controlled the awarding of public contracts, bribed and intimidated judges, swayed elections, and ultimately monopolized the administration of liberty and justice in Sicily.<sup>162</sup> This parasitic class thus became a crucial piece in the governmental apparatus of the new Italian state in such a resilient manner that its influence can still be seen to this day.<sup>163</sup>

The second form of ‘revolutionary’ response beyond that of spontaneous social banditry was a number of attempted Bourbon and Republican counterrevolutions orchestrated by various individuals which occurred frequently throughout the bottom half of the Italian peninsula for the first five years after Italian unification. The disturbances in the Basilicata region in Southern Italy were the foremost of the pro-Bourbon movements, as a couple of bands succeeded in dismissing authorities and occupying cities for brief periods of time.<sup>164</sup> Bourbonist demonstrations were principally limited to the mainland, as the regime had never enjoyed much support in Sicily. The disturbances in Sicily took on a more ‘red’ or ‘Mazzinian’ character, though the legendary Italian nationalist’s involvement in these disturbances is dubious, at best. However, as John Davis states, it was Mazzini’s republicanism that served as the “first and foremost the politics of the

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<sup>161</sup> Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, “Mafia, Antimafia, and the Plural Cultures of Sicily,” *Current Anthropology* 46.4 (2005), 501-520; 505.

<sup>162</sup> Villari, *Italian Life*, 8.

<sup>163</sup> See John Dickie’s *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005) for one of the most comprehensive surveys of this subject by one of its foremost contemporary authorities.

<sup>164</sup> Riall, “Garibaldi and the South,” 148. taken from Davis, ed., *Italy in the Nineteenth Century*.

discontented”<sup>165</sup> throughout Italy both before and after unification. Major “Mazzinian” disturbances took place in Bologna, Florence and Naples, among other large cities in peninsular Italy.<sup>166</sup> Counterrevolutionary republicanism enjoyed particularly fertile ground in Sicily among the middle and lower classes who rightly felt as though they had not received their due promises from Italian unification. Davis points out the populism embedded in Mazzinian republicanism and its utility as an inclusive counterrevolutionary ideology:

The combination of nationalism, anti-establishment protest, virulent anti-clericalism together with a firm emphasis on the value of inter-class cooperation made republicanism a suitably vague yet comprehensive catch-all programme that was capable of encompassing many disparate discontents and resentments.<sup>167</sup>

These sentiments and discontents came to a head in Palermo in 1866, as the city exploded in a state of revolt unseen since the legendary Gancia insurrection six years earlier that had acted as the sparkplug for *il Risorgimento*. A British consul offers one of the most authoritative accounts of the event, beginning with a description laid forth by a Paris newspaper:

‘It is proof of serious discontent in Sicily,’ says a Times Paris Correspondent, ‘that a city of 200,000 inhabitants, with a garrison of 15, 000 men allowed itself to be taken possession of by two or three thousand armed brigands’ . . . The union with Italy and the approach of war brought about an unpopular change. Exemption from the ‘Leva’ was discontinued, and consumption duties were enhanced . . . It was resolved at private meetings to effect a revolt by means of brigands and outlaws . . . Early in the morning of Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> Sept. about 400 armed men came down and took the city by surprise. Entering the smaller gates and overpowering the guards, they pushed on unresisted to the centre of the city. By 9 a.m. all the gates except one which adjoined the royal palace were in their hands; by noon they had broken up the pavement and erected barricades, by 8

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<sup>165</sup> Davis, *Conflict and Control*, 193.

<sup>166</sup> Letter from Consul Hudson. PRO. FO 45/9. 103-104.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

o'clock they had occupied certain monasteries with the consent or connivances of their inmates. The P.O., the military hospital and, after two days finally the Town Hall fell into their power. . . Reinforced by traitorous guards, and by the rabble of the town until their number was swollen to some thousands . . . For six days the insurgents were masters of the city, on the 7<sup>th</sup> they were driven out.<sup>168</sup>

Although these counterrevolutions were ultimately prevented, and order restored, these attempts at the very least reveal some critical implications as to the divisiveness of public opinion in Sicily, the general lack of regard and respect for the new Italian government and an exemplary case study of what Hobsbawm refers to as “the problem of how primitive social movements ‘adapt’ to modern conditions,”<sup>169</sup> or, in this case, their imposition.

The final and perhaps most devastating response to the ‘Piedmontization’ of Sicily was the first and largest instance of permanent emigration seen in the island’s history. Estimated in 1876 to be 300,000 a year from the country as a whole, the bulk of this flight came from Sicily and other regions where the new forms of taxation devastated agricultural industry and where poverty served as the most influential factor.<sup>170</sup> Much of the potential source of human capital on the island thus departed for brighter shores in North and South America, where socioeconomic mobility appeared more possible.<sup>171</sup>

Thus, the brigandage, revolt and destruction that took place in Sicily and throughout the whole of the Southern Italian peninsula cannot be attributed to any sort of

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<sup>168</sup> “Seven Days of Disturbance in Palermo.” Letter from Consul Goodwin to Consul Elliot. October 9, 1866. PRO. FO 45/90.

<sup>169</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 8.

<sup>170</sup> Villari, *Italian Life*, 212.

<sup>171</sup> Davis, *Conflict and Control*, 189.

moral quality or inherent rebelliousness of the people,<sup>172</sup> but must be located within the context of the application of this utterly detrimental liberal legislation. ‘Piedmontization’ gave way to the formation of criminal organizations such as the *mafia* in Sicily and the former Neapolitan provinces on the mainland, bloody counterrevolutions, social revolt, brutal reprisals and a massive flight of emigrants, all of which would prove enduring in their consequences. This civil war and the formation of the *mafia* thus cannot be attributed to the peculiarities and particularities of Sicily and its inhabitants as so much essentialist scholarship of various *meridionalisti* would have its readers believe. Rather, one must examine the way the island has been treated and administered, as these occurrences and organizations were born in relation and out of a reaction to the state and the imposition of this legislation that worsened the already dire state of poverty of the Sicilian peasants and their urban counterparts.

One can thus deduce these developments in rural Sicily as direct, and even *rational* responses to one underlying cause: poverty. As Luigi Villari states:

In Sicily, however, it [crime] still flourishes, and every year a very large number of murders and robberies are committed by bands of armed freebooters, who infest the rural districts. The motives of the brigands are not always robbery; revenge and local feuds are often as much answerable for the murders as the desire of gain. *Still, want is at the bottom of this form of crime, as poverty is the chief cause of the social and moral degradation of the people of Sicily . . .*<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Speeches in Parliament and some subsequent historiography indicated as much, as the British Consul recounts: “He [a Rightist representative from Bari] then made a somewhat lengthy but perfectly fair Statement of the Causes of discontent to be in the nature of things, and neither in the incapacity nor in the ill will of the King’s Government.” Letter from Consul Hudson. PRO. FO 45/9 379.

<sup>173</sup>Villari, *Italian Life*, 7. My italics.

## Conclusion

*. . . all the phenomena studied in this book belong to the world of people who neither write nor read many books—often because they are illiterate—who are rarely known by name to anybody except their friends, and then often only by a nickname, who are normally inarticulate, and rarely understood even when they express themselves. Moreover, they are pre-political people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world. Though their movements are thus in many respects blind and groping, by the standards of modern ones, they are neither unimportant nor marginal.*<sup>174</sup>

E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*

*They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.*<sup>175</sup>

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

Neither side of the liberal-Marxist divide that has characterized the historiography of the Italian *Risorgimento* has had much to say about the Sicilian peasantry's catalyzing role in the effort for unification. The former, lengthy passage above, extracted from Hobsbawm's larger work on the subject of 'archaic' social movements, represents one of the first attempts by a Marxist from the West to engage this sector of the population on revolutionary terms, as Marx himself had no patience (at least, not until his later years)

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<sup>174</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 2.

<sup>175</sup> Karl Marx *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (USA: Feather Trail Press 2010). 29.

for this conservative force “incapable,” as he states, “of enforcing their class interest.”<sup>176</sup> The latter excerpt, of course, is one of the few and expectedly one of the most well-known lines the legendary German thinker dedicated to the demographic this thesis has been particularly concerned with. Popularized to the point of academic cliché by Said’s prolific classic *Orientalism*, neither this line, nor Hobsbawm’s passage that precedes it could prove more applicable in this case, for while a concerted aim of this work has been to give voice or at least shed light upon the experience of the group of people Luigi Villari called “the best element of the [Italian] population,”<sup>177</sup> it has sadly failed, in this respect. Besides the intrinsic and seemingly insurmountable impediments to cultural representation so skillfully posed by Said, the generally deplorable state of the archives in Italy, the limited number of sources at hand for this thesis’s undergraduate composer, and the basic nonexistence of primary source materials applicable for the purposes of documenting the case of an illiterate subject have all prevented serious discussion. However, it is the author’s sincerest hope that this brief essay has at least drawn some attention to this forgotten and most marginalized of groups in history, as time, modernity and generally irresponsible scholarship have seemed to pass them over and relegate these individuals to the dry confines and (at best) the margins and footnotes of Italy’s grandiose political histories.

However, while this essay has failed in fully illustrating and representing the whole of the life, experience and condition of the Sicilian peasant at the time of Italian

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Villari, *Italian Life*, 187.

unification, it has at least offered magnification of the various consciously-imposed liberal administrative and legislative reforms that, combined with age-old networks of power and patronage in the Sicilian countryside, to perpetuate the impoverished condition of the peasantry. In this respect, this work has at least assisted in some manner in the chipping-away of the thick façade of *meridionalismo* that has plagued far too many studies of the *Mezzogiorno* and its myriad of problems. Sicily and Sicilians are not ‘incapable of modernization,’ and if they did prove incapable at this particular juncture in history, it was only as a result of what can be called a ‘collective social defense mechanism,’ of sorts, which has developed in response to centuries of foreign domination of the island. This mechanism consisted (or consists, rather) of sophisticated networks of patronage and clientelism, a profound distrust of the state and its appendages and a great value placed on the family, the latter of which so many *meridionalisti* have referred to as ‘amoral familism.’<sup>178</sup> This collective social defense mechanism can also account for the lack of economic and industrial development in the South, and in turn the consequences of these deficiencies on the northern and national economies. As one author notes:

This particular system of social integration [patronage and clientelism] had a limiting effect not only on the diffusion of capitalism in the south but also on the national accumulation of industrial capital, as monetary consumption was held back by the persistently miserable conditions of the landless peasants and capital investment obtained better returns outside the country or went into land speculation.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> One must question the use of the word “amoral” in particular, here, as the only code of ethics being broken is that which is being imposed by an opportunistic, shrewd, malicious, and duplicitous liberal regime whose only concern was to impose a capitalist framework in order to better their own economic and political position.

<sup>179</sup> Enzo Mingione “Italy: The Resurgence of Regionalism” *International Affairs* 69.2 (1993): 305-318. 313.



In the same manner, this mechanism and its activation upon being ‘Piedmontized’ can account for the proliferation of crime that persists to this day in both Sicily and the whole of the *Mezzogiorno*, and the ugly, essentialist stereotypes of individual criminality that accompany this basic trend. Again, the same scholar, though writing decades later, illustrates its effects

. . .the reality of the situation is that the patronage-oriented system of social integration, an employment and economic structure strongly characterized by irregular arrangements, untenured jobs, black labour market activities and youth unemployment, and the lack of adequate legal protection for all forms of social interaction together form an extraordinarily fertile ground for the growth of crime.<sup>180</sup>

Crime and corruption have now become basic facts of life in Sicily and southern Italy. However, these conditions, as well as those characteristics of *meridionalismo* listed above can in no way be credited to Sicilian or Southern Italian ‘difference,’ ‘distinctiveness’ or ‘backwardness,’ but only to the actions of the state that have historically generated these responses.

This thesis has also served to at least partially fill a large gap in the revisionist approach to understanding the *Risorgimento*.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, while much of this revisionist scholarship has uncovered and espoused economically “rational” actions and reactions as some of the principal determinants in the shaping of modern Italy, its focus has been primarily on the decisions of the elite, the landowners and the *opportunisti* like the *mafia*,

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>181</sup> It should be noted that many scholars in the latter half of the twentieth-century have become increasingly concerned with the plight of the peasantry in Italian history. The representatives of this trend for the Anglo-American readership are Denis Mack Smith and Lucy Riall, both of which also deserve recognition and appreciation here.

rather than the peasantry. Without a doubt, if nothing else this essay has determined that the general unrest during Garibaldi's dictatorship and the civil war that raged throughout Sicily between 1860 and 1866, can be directly attributed to "rational" reactions of a group and sectors of the population whose only means of bettering and improving their economic condition was indeed revolt or, as Hobsbawm calls it, by exercising "social banditry." Whether these individual or collective reactions were to the *leva*, the *macinato*, or 'Piedmontization,' in general, they can in every respect be viewed as being determined by 'rational' thought processes, deductions and understandings of their social situation, and can in this sense be seen as the development of a social consciousness. Hobsbawm's contribution is critical, here, as his understanding of these social movements and the process of examining "the adaptation of popular agitations to a modern capitalist economy,"<sup>182</sup> in addition to his body of work at large, have proven immensely applicable, influential and inspiring in the development of both this thesis and its author. However, one must take serious issue with Hobsbawm's use of "pre-political," which if nothing else represents the profound limitations inherent in the Marxist theoretical framework in this particular instance. Hobsbawm, the Marxists and Marx himself failed to realize the "political" nature of peasant protest, as the peasantry as a group does not fit within their limited understanding of what constitutes a social class. In this respect, "pre-political" must be excised from the quotation that opens this section, for while the Italian peasantry were a "people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations," their struggle to find the language and framework within which to act out their desires—though "blind and

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<sup>182</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 9.

groping”—was in and of itself a politically significant act.<sup>183</sup> Perhaps it is fitting that this work departs and ends its conversation of the peasantry with a quotation of Hobsbawm’s:

The reader of this book is not required to sympathize with revolutionaries, let alone primitive ones. He is merely advised to recognize that they exist, and that there have been at least some revolutions which have profoundly transformed society, though not necessarily in the way planned by revolutionaries, or as utterly and completely and finally as they may have wished.<sup>184</sup>

Finally, a word of apology is in order. While this essay has attempted to draw attention to the generally depreciated contributions of certain groups and individuals to the effort for Italian unification, be they the peasants, the malicious Cavourian agent Giuseppe La Farina or the semiotic function of the Sicilian priest or the Sicilian brigand, it has left out certain populations entirely. Most notably, these include Italian women, who enjoy even less recognition in scholarship on the *Mezzogiorno* and the *Risorgimento* than do the peasants. In reality, these individuals bore the brunt of the effort for unification, and continue to carry the heaviest burden of the scholarship circulated and disseminated by *meridionalisti*. As scholar Giovanna Fiume describes scholarship prior to more recent developments,

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 12.

The backwardness of the South was represented in the stereotype of the peasant woman, illiterate, forever pregnant, a supporter of the Christian Democrats [a particularly scathing stereotype, one might add], religious to the point of superstition, custodian to the honour of the men in her family. If in the beginning of this stereotype had a conservative matrix, it later significantly joined intellectuals, liberals and Marxists in a common view of women as obstacles to change in a peasant society that was gradually adapting to modernity.<sup>185</sup>

While this study, like those that have proceeded it, has failed to feature Italian women as much as its author would like, and is thus prevented from purporting to have captured, to any extent, the entire essence of the peasantry's experience of the *Risorgimento*, it is important to at least acknowledge and pay tribute to these individuals and their most marginalized of places in Sicilian and Italian society. In grave terms, Villari describes this position,

But in Southern Italy the position of women is very different, and not unlike that which they enjoy in Mohammedan countries. In some rural districts, when the husband goes out he shuts up his wife in the house until his return. Were he to omit to do so, she would look upon it as slight. One may know a man intimately for twenty years without ever having seen his wife and daughters.<sup>186</sup>

After having finished recounting this narrative, like Mack Smith I feel as though one more apology is due. In outlining this story, it has been the author's intention to call attention to the administrative mismanagement that characterized much of the time during which Giuseppe Garibaldi was hailed as prodictator of Sicily. However, to level such a critique is unfair if it does not contain a well-pronounced acknowledgement to the unparalleled and courageous contributions of this Italian patriot, for whatever this

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<sup>185</sup> Giovanna Fiume "Making Women Visible in the History of the Mezzogiorno," from Dal Lago and Halpern, *American South*, 173-193.

<sup>186</sup> Villari, *Italian Life*, 122.

legendary individual lacked in administrative capability, he more than made up for it contributions to the heart and soul of modern Italian identity. As Mack Smith skillfully illustrates, in a sort of eulogy for the death of the bearded revolutionary and his dream of a united and truly free Italy,

For all that he could be vulgar, irreverent, headstrong and blustering, he was a great man in his own way, and instinctively recognized to be such by the common people. In courage and capacity for energetic action he was second to none; but he combined with an earnestness of purpose, a disinterested love of his country, a zeal for social reform, and a simplicity of character and absence of ostentation or personal ambition, all of which endeared him to the multitude.<sup>187</sup>

Garibaldi's intentions and sympathies, as Mack Smith states, had always been with those of the common man, as "he believed that Italians should at all costs redeem themselves by their own initiative, and should not have to rely on French soldiers and diplomatic bargaining to win their battles for them."<sup>188</sup> Unfortunately, in some circles his contribution is only viewed as that which is summed up in by Mack Smith once again: "He had saved the revolution from petering out, but he had also captured it for a political programme."<sup>189</sup> The current study in no way intends to subscribe to this view beyond its having resulted from the connivances of the liberals in Turin, whose shrewd diplomacy outlasted Garibaldi's courage and initiative in the end.

It is to the efforts of Garibaldi and the peasants that this study has in some way hoped to do justice to and confer due recognition upon, for their unparalleled contributions undoubtedly left an indelible and virtuous mark on the course of Italian history

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<sup>187</sup> Mack Smith, *Cavour*, 16.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

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