



---

## DOSSIER

### Guerras civiles, violencias y construcción del Estado

#### *Civil Wars, Violences and State Building*

---

**RE-BUILDING THE NATION-STATE:  
THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR IN A  
TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

**RECONSTRUIR EL ESTADO-NACIÓN:  
LA GUERRA CIVIL AMERICANA EN  
UNA PERSPECTIVA  
TRANSNACIONAL**

**Daniele Fiorentino**

Università Roma Tre

[daniele.fiorentino@uniroma3.it](mailto:daniele.fiorentino@uniroma3.it)

Recibido: 25/10/2014. Aceptado: 20/12/2014

---

**Cómo citar este artículo/Citation:**

Fiorentino, Daniele (2015). Re-building the nation-state: the american civil war in a transnational perspective, *Hispania Nova*, 13, pág. 201-217, en <http://www.uc3m.es/hispanianova>

**Copyright:** © HISPANIA NOVA es una revista debidamente registrada, con ISSN 1138-7319 y Depósito Legal M 9472-1998. Los textos publicados en esta revista están –si no se indica lo contrario– bajo una licencia [Reconocimiento-Sin obras derivadas 3.0 España](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/es/deed.es) de Creative Commons. Puede copiarlos, distribuirlos y comunicarlos públicamente siempre que cite su autor y la revista y la institución que los publica y no haga con ellos obras derivadas. La licencia completa se puede consultar en: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/es/deed.es>

---

**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza la lectura que se hizo de la Guerra de Secesión en Europa y cómo fue interpretada esta guerra en los diferentes países europeos. Subraya la dimensión internacional de este conflicto e insiste en la idea de que la Guerra de Secesión alimentó las luchas llevadas a cabo en el continente europeo durante el siglo XIX

**Abstract:** This article analyzes the reading of the American Civil War in Europe, how this conflict was perceived. It shows the international dimension of this war and insists on the idea that it fed the reflection on the European fights.

**Palabras clave:** Guerra civil; Estados Unidos; Liberalismo; Italia; Transnacionalismo; Diplomacia..

**Keywords:** Civil war; United States; Liberalism; Italy; Transnationalism; Diplomacy.

Right at the beginning of the American Civil War and then in its midst, two of the most prominent European fighters for Freedom of 1848, wrote about the meaning of the war in the context of the worldwide struggle against tyrannical power and for emancipation.

In a letter addressed to the American Minister in Turin, George Perkins Marsh, Giuseppe Garibaldi, who had just led the campaign for Italian independence and unification, turned down an offer for command of a Union regiment, writing: "I would go with my friends. And we would appeal to all the democrats across Europe in order to make them join you in the saint battles. In such a call for arms, however, it would be necessary to point out for them the principle that moves us – the emancipation of slaves, and the triumph of universal reason."<sup>1</sup> In the Summer of 1863, this time in a letter addressed directly to Lincoln, the Italian general praised the Emancipation Declaration calling Lincoln the "great Emancipator."<sup>2</sup>

In January 1861, Carl Schurz, the German Forty-eighter who had fled to the United States after the failure of the revolution, anticipating the impending war wrote to his wife:

*We live in a wonderful time... the age of conscience-ruled men who dominate affairs by the force of honesty and shatter all opposing obstacles... I thank fate that I am precisely at the right age at a time when in Europe Garibaldi comes forth as knight errant, fighting for an ideal; Garibaldi, man of unshakable faith and determined will... And if now, in America, the rise of a tyrannical party and the lawless attempts of an antisocial element break down under the honest will-power of a simple man [Lincoln], it is not a proper ambition to want to be worthy of such a time?*<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of the American conflict was clear to most of the protagonists of those events, and its international import stood out. Although overtime the latter was partially lost to many analysts, the American Civil War was part of a worldwide movement for freedom and nation-building. The present essay intends to reassess the transnational relevance of an event often considered only a crisis of regional consequence. In fact, it is not by chance for example that many recent immigrants from Europe, or fighters in the revolts of 1848 or in the recent Italian independence, volunteered to fight either in the Union or in the Confederacy, considering the event part of a more general struggle. On the one hand, the fighters for the Union stressed the similarities of the Union's claims to those of the liberal republicans against the monarchies of the old world, on the other, the Confederates pointed out that their struggle was for self-rule and independence, like the ones of Ireland, Hungary and Italy. Both sides appealed to the transnational vocabulary of the time and were well aware of the potential consequences of their victory.

Over the decades, however, and with the progressive consolidation of moderately liberal nation-states, this awareness lost ground and credibility, not only among politicians but even among

<sup>1</sup> Garibaldi a Marsh, 5 ottobre, 1862, in *L'unificazione italiana vista dai diplomatici statunitensi* (hereafter *diplomatici statunitensi*), Howard R. MARRARO ed., vol. IV (1861-1866), Roma, Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1971, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe GARIBALDI, *Scritti politici e militari: ricordi e pensieri inediti*, Domenico Ciampoli ed., Rome, E. Voghera, 1907, Vol. I, p. 350.

<sup>3</sup> *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz, 1841-1869*, transl. and ed. by J. Schafer, "To his wife January 29, 1861," Madison, State historical society of Wisconsin, 1928. "American Memory," p. 240, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/lhbum:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(lhbum09286div145\)\)#N263-01](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/lhbum:@field(DOCID+@lit(lhbum09286div145))#N263-01), last accessed 27/9/2014. Schurz would soon be appointed United States' Minister to Spain, *passim*.

historians. To Americans the Civil War thus became a domestic affair with some international spill over; it was mainly a national question in which nationalistic ideals found their application. In the end, it served the purpose of completing the construction of the American nation-State in its exceptionalist sense. Even its international significance, in what was then called “the concert of nations,” was played down.

Actually, the international resonance of the conflict had been clear from the beginning. Technology played an important part in the outcome of several battles both on land and at sea. Many observers flocked from Europe to witness the “first modern war” that included the employment of trains for the transportation of troops, of telegraph lines for communication, of observation balloons and ironclad warships. Moreover, the Civil War entailed an intense diplomatic work both on the part of the Union and of the Confederate States. While the former had to convince foreign countries that the secessionists were actually rebels, and that no official act could lead to their recognition, the latter had to prove they were gaining independence and were worthy of national sovereignty. As well illustrated by Howard Jones, there were several diplomatic crises that contributed to tip the balance of power politics on one or the other side without ever managing, nonetheless, to provoke any kind of intervention by foreign nations.<sup>4</sup> But what was altogether removed from collective memory was the political meaning of the war in the contemporary world. Many intellectuals and political agitators of the time, in fact, perceived it as yet another conflict for national assertion, and many fighters for freedom who had served in Italy, the German States and central Europe since 1848 joined the struggle, mainly on the Union side.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, historiography began contributing some new interpretations of the Civil War as an event of global resonance and consequence, which culminated in the first decade of the new century, and especially with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1861. Several American scholarly journals dedicated special issues to the event, stirring a debate that is still going on to this day. Nowadays, most historians share the idea that what was once considered a time of isolationism in U.S. history, witnessed instead a good degree of international interaction and transnational cross-fertilization. This placed the federal republic and the Civil War within a worldwide process of transformation that was then taking place at least across the Atlantic, if not at the global level.<sup>5</sup>

From a methodological point of view beyond comparative, transnational or global historiographical approaches, I think it is important to regain the perspective of the nation and its interplay with other realities of a similar kind. Often, pushing the interpretive issue to the point of making it become the center of our reasoning risks obfuscating the actual intent of our study. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink the national cultural context and place it within its natural transnational, global or entangled interplay. Because today we know that there is no national history that is independent from any other. As observed by many scholars, a global and international meaning of the events unfolding in the United States between 1848 and 1865 was clear to most of those involved and to many observers; it was rather the later reading by politicians, and by some

---

<sup>4</sup> Howard JONES, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher A. BAYLY, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford, London, Blackwell, 2004, especially pp. 134-167.

scholars in the service of nationalism that narrowed down the whole import of the Civil War.<sup>6</sup> It is true that most foreign observers attached a particular meaning to the Civil War to make it pertain to their own national view of international affairs, as Paul Quigley states in the “Interchange” of the 2011 issue of the *Journal of American History*: “Nationalism and Internationalism in the Era of the Civil War.”<sup>7</sup> For this reason it is necessary to understand first of all the perspective of the Americans at war to then entangle it with other perceptions. Each and everyone of the international actors reasoned in terms of their national experience, as it is natural, to then make the connection; so did Americans in the Civil War as their predecessors had done with the war of 1776.

Focusing too much on different, comparative or entangled realities may remain superficial and not relevant enough. If one instead concentrates most of the attention on the country, the people, and their interactions with other realities, be them near or more distant, it will be possible to understand better all the factors at play, because the subject of the inquiry remains one which is in turn naturally connected to other factors. In sum, it is necessary to “deprovincialize” national histories. Any analysis should consist of a combination of local and wider centers of reference that can contribute to clarify the interplay of the many factors that “make history.” The national thus is only a useful dimension that, although construed rather late in history, represents an intermediate focus and one particularly appropriate for the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Of the many methodologies elaborated in the last decades by historians to understand the past and analyze it in a diachronic perspective, the transnational is possibly the most apt. But I would suggest that it should be used along with national and entangled history, as well as the diplomatic one, in order to achieve a good degree of appreciation of what actually happened in such an eventful time of American history. Historiography needs a range of action as wide as the history it analyzes, but at the same time it must take into account the local reality in which that history unfolds.

Therefore, the Civil War finds its meaning not only within the country but also in the international scenario, because it was a war to promote both liberal ideas and a modern capitalist worldview against consolidated landed interests and slavery, and because it had international implications, considering the weight of American cotton and corn exports at the time, and the ascending role of the American maritime trade. Moreover, one must take into account the transnational relevance of a war that carried different meanings for the foreign nationals who enlisted on both sides, and for freedom fighters in Europe. Depending on their nationality, foreign combatants assimilated the Civil War to their own fight for independence. German unionists were Forty-eighters who promoted liberal republicanism, Italians were for the Union from the very beginning, while most Irish Forty-eighters enlisted in the Confederacy. As pointed out by Andre Fleche:

---

<sup>6</sup> See “Interchange: Nationalism and Internationalism in the Era of the Civil War,” *Journal of American History*, Sept. 2011, Downloaded from <http://jah.oxfordjournals.org/> by guest on November 5, 2014, pp. 455-488.

<sup>7</sup> QUIGLEY in “Ibidem,” p. 468.

<sup>8</sup> See “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History” By C. A. BAYLY, Sven BECKERT, Matthew CONNELLY, Isabel HOFMEYR, Wendy KOZOL, and Patricia SEED *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 5 (December 2006), pp. 1441-1464. Especially Bayly, p. 1449. Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Historical Association; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/ahr.111.5.1441>. Accessed: 08/11/2014.

*Forty-eighters, revolutionaries, and like-minded Europeans who supported the Confederacy's bid for independence stressed the self-determination of peoples and the rights of national minorities to self-government. Their Unionist counterparts fought for liberty and civil rights threatened by a despotic, landed, slaveholding aristocracy.*<sup>9</sup>

## **1. THE ATLANTIC SCENARIO**

In the complex Atlantic interplay of the years following 1848, and with the Italian unification process in full gear, especially in the aftermath of the Crimean war of 1856, the events taking place in the United States after the election of James Buchanan and the ominous Supreme Court Decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* of 1857, led to the polarization of sectionalism. Progressively the two sides of the country began a process of identification with what was happening in the Atlantic space, but claimed their rights also within a wider spectrum of political ideals and goals. Sectionalism turned into a confrontation that made constant reference to the events taking place overseas. As the confrontation between North and South deteriorated, European powers found themselves in the position of making eventful decisions concerning the American crisis as well as the Italian one; the two reached their peak at about the same time. Since 1848, Italy had found sympathy abroad and namely in England and in the United States. The struggle for unification, which carried with it also the possible end of the Pope's temporal power, excited liberal minds to the point of making some claim that what was happening in the United States and in Italy was part and parcel of one single battle. In September 1860, speaking of the Garibaldi campaign which was moving from the South of the Peninsula, the "Chicago Press and Tribune" drew a similarity that reflected the spirit of the time:

*We like the prospect. It foreshadows an anti-slavery triumph greater than that of Lincoln's election. Let us hope that the mischievous power of the Pope, and the not less iniquitous power of American Slavery, as a controlling element of this government, by one of those coincidences by which Providence signalizes great events may come to and end on one and the same day.*<sup>10</sup>

Neither event had yet taken place (the end of the papal kingdom would require ten more years), but the author foresaw a victory of the forces of liberty on tradition and conservation. The American press in the northern states began equating the rule of the king of Naples and of the Church to the oppression of slavery in the South. The European powers found themselves caught in a diplomatic quagmire, some wishing to weaken the growing strength of the American republic, others concerned about the demise of the State of the Church. While both the nascent Italian kingdom and the Union needed international support to strengthen their claims vis-à-vis the enemies of change, the United Kingdom hesitated despite its sympathies for the government in Turin which was leading the unification of the peninsula. In the previous twenty years London had given shelter to several refugees from the Italian States including the ideological leader Giuseppe Mazzini, considered a terrorist by many European chanceries. The two major Catholic powers on the continent, France and Austria-Hungary intended to preserve the Papal States and saw the weakening of the United States with some favor. Both occurrences could give them more leverage in the geopolitical setting.

<sup>9</sup> Andre FLECHE, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2012, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Good News From Italy*. «Chicago Press and Tribune», 19 settembre, 1860, *Chronicling America: HistoricAmerican Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/175111768?accountid=33949>, last accessed 24/9/2014.

Moreover, London's position toward the fracture in North America remained ambivalent, with many aristocrats leaning more on the side of the South.

In January 1861, "The New York Daily Tribune" was invited by some foreign observers to think over its position about the rebel states. After all, the Southern claim for independence could be assimilated to similar declarations then promoted by some in Europe. Traditionally supportive of the European revolts, the paper fiercely condemned secession. Replying to its detractors, a columnist, or possibly the same editor Horace Greeley who had initially upheld a favourable position on a peaceful separation, proclaimed:

*This parallel is not exact. The revolutions which we have applauded in Europe, some of them futile and others successful, have always been intended to promote Liberty. The rebellion now on foot in the Cotton States has for its object to consolidate and extend slavery. Garibaldi revolutionizes Italy to emancipate, elevate, and bless mankind. South Carolina strikes at the American Union that she may aggrandize and strengthen the most atrocious and the most pernicious of human institutions. The one history will cover with glory; the other she will bury in execration.*<sup>11</sup>

As highlighted by Robert May, from a diplomatic point of view neither side in the United States was happy with the position taken by the UK and France. "By proclaiming neutrality, - he continues- European nations recognized the Confederacy's belligerent status, which meant that the Confederacy had the right to arrange loans and buy arms abroad."<sup>12</sup> Italy instead immediately took a position supportive of the right of the Union to suppress the revolt, assimilating the Confederacy's struggle to the resistance of "ancien régime" forces, namely the Pope. On the other side of the Atlantic, Confederate Secretary of State Robert Toombs reacted to the unification of the Italian States: "The recent course which the British Government pursued in relation to the recognition of the right of the Italian people to change their form of government and choose their own rulers encourages this Government to hope that they will pursue a similar policy in regard to the Confederate States."<sup>13</sup>

Despite the growing domestic problems the Union had to face, the government dedicated special attention to foreign policy, balancing between an extreme realism and an idealism based on the republican and liberal values expressed in the Constitution, and then partly modified by the transnational influence of liberals coming from Europe.<sup>14</sup> Starting in the 1830s with the arrival of the first exiles, this influence expanded progressively, especially after 1848, for two main reasons: the presence within the country of expatriates who were welcomed in intellectual circles that had supported the revolts from afar or during a visit on the continent; and the internal destabilization

---

<sup>11</sup> *New-York daily tribune*. (New-York [N.Y.]), 15 Jan. 1861. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1861-01-15/ed-1/seq-4/>. Last accessed, 15/10/2014.

<sup>12</sup> *The Union, the Confederacy and the Atlantic Rim*, Robert May ed., West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 1995, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in *Ibidem*, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Giorgio SPINI, *Le relazioni politiche tra l'Italia e gli Stati Uniti durante il Risorgimento e la Guerra Civile*, in *Italia e Stati Uniti nell'età del Risorgimento e della Guerra Civile, Atti del II Symposium di Studi Americani*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1969, pp. 121-185.

suffered since the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso in Congress.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the United States was still concerned about the influence the great powers could play on their politics, and especially on their freedom of trade. Therefore, the role of ministers plenipotentiaries became important at the outset of the war. They could closely monitor the slightest shifts in attitude of the European governments and raise their attention to the similarities of the Union claims with the national pronouncements of Europe.

The appointments of William Dayton, and after his death of Consul John Bigelow, to Paris and of Charles Francis Adams to the post in London in 1861, were strategic decisions that helped Lincoln deter the two powers from any involvement in the Civil War. Along with the UK and France, there was another European power that looked sympathetically to the claims of the Confederacy: Spain. In the early 1860s, under the leadership of Prime Minister Leopoldo O'Donnell, Spain was trying to revive its international sway through a show of military strength upon the oceans.<sup>16</sup> Spanish interests in the Americas, namely its position in Cuba and its concerns in Mexico, made the country consider open support for the South. For this reason, Lincoln decided to appoint first Carl Schurz and, after his request for a command in the Union army, Gustave Koerner, two German revolutionaries who had fled to the United States after the revolts of the 1830s and '40s. They managed to restrain the Kingdom of Isabel II from taking any action.<sup>17</sup> Trustworthy and dependable unionist republicans in key-posts in Europe were essential elements of Lincoln's strategy to isolate the Confederacy. Like their colleagues in Madrid Dayton, the first republican to run for vice-President with John Frémont in 1856, and Adams, the son of John Quincy, who joined the Republican Party from its foundation soon to become a representative in Congress, were reliable northern republicans. So was George Perkins Marsh, a scholar and a republican since the party's birth, who was chosen for the post in Turin. Despite the work of the ministers in London and Paris, the two countries came close to intervention twice, and on the side of the South. Spain waited for their initiative and stayed put. Marsh instead contributed to make the new Kingdom of Italy a secure ally of the North. Often, in his correspondence the Vermont naturalist turned diplomat, compared the battles raging in the country with those recently led in Italy for the unification of the national fabric.<sup>18</sup> Thanks to the work of Marsh and of his Italian counterpart in Washington, Giuseppe Bertinatti, Italy became a strong supporter of the Union's claims to regain the rebel states. A special relationship developed between the two countries; and Italy, with its recent unification, proved the validity of the Union claims. It must be added, however, that the late Count of Cavour, Prime minister of the unification process, who died shortly after its completion, had already defined the position of the Union as absolutely reasonable.

---

<sup>15</sup> Daniele FIORENTINO, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'unità d'Italia, 1848-1901*, Roma, Gangemi, 2013, pp. 32-53.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne H. BOWEN, *Spain and the American Civil War*, Columbia and London, University of Missouri Press, 2011, pp. 38-44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 60-61, 129-130. On the attitude of Spain at the time and the role of O'Donnell, also: Carl SCHURZ, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz, Volume Two, 1852-1863*, New York, Doubleday, 1913, pp. 293-297. See also James W. CORTADA, *Spain and the American Civil War, Relations at Mid Century*, (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 70, part 4), Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1980.

<sup>18</sup> G. P. Marsh a William Seward, "Privata e confidenziale," Sept. 3rd 1861; Marsh a Seward, Sept. 4, 1861, pp. 62-64; especially "appunto per William H. Seward" attached to letter of Sept. 4, in *diplomatici statunitensi*, vol. IV (1861-1866), pp. 65-71.

Marsh became a useful and up to date informant on the positions of the European powers. His post gave him the liberty to correspond with friends and scholars across the continent and report on the changes of attitude of leaders and the public opinion regarding the American war. In September, in two letters, one addressed to Secretary of State William Seward, the other to his friend and colleague, Charles Eliot Norton with whom he kept a constant correspondence throughout the war, he lamented the damage caused by the defeat in the battle of Bull Run. Such a massacre could not find any justification since it did not rest upon any moral value. Many in Europe could not understand the stubbornness of the Union in not recognizing the choice of the South given that "...this is a quarrel which involves no principle and that the government and the people of the North deserve the sympathy of Europe as little as the rebels."<sup>19</sup> While the people of England and France seemed to sympathize with the North, the British and French leading elites seemed rather mischievous and were supportive of the Confederacy not so much because of its claims, but because they were against the Union. The final outcome of the war could be a test of the actual chances a modern democracy could stand in the future vis-à-vis the established order of the courts of Europe. It is interesting to note, however, that while Napoleon III had his good reasons to fear the victory of the Union, the prevailing British interests seemed to be mainly commercial.

On the other hand, the only European power that showed clear and outright support for the North was Russia where Lincoln appointed a southern abolitionist like Cassius M. Clay. He contributed a great deal to strengthen Russian friendship, but Seward's policy and the intentions of the Union were already apparent at the outset of the war. In his letter of direction to the newly appointed minister, the Secretary of State pointed out the similarities between the two countries and the progress made by Russia, in a way that announced future developments on both sides and the consolidation of the two nation-states:

*Russia like the United States, is an improving and expanding empire. Its track is eastward, while that of the United States is westward. The two nations, therefore, never come into rivalry or conflict. Each carries civilization to the new regions it enters, and each finds itself occasionally resisted by states jealous of its prosperity, or alarmed by its aggrandizement.*

From an ideological point of view, however, the Union could say little. Most of the Russian freedom fighters were persecuted and had left the country, but Czar Alexander II was providing Seward's policy with arguments capable of justifying a friendship that was strengthened by the Civil War: "Assure his Imperial Majesty that the President and the people of the United States have observed with admiration and sympathy the great and humane efforts he has so recently made for the material and moral improvement of his empire by the extension of telegraphs and railroads, and by removing the disabilities of slavery."<sup>20</sup> Russia showed great interest in the preservation of the Union; although fearing democracy, it considered the United States an essential partner in countering the power of the United Kingdom over the oceans, and especially on the Pacific.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> G. P. Marsh to Charles E. Norton, Sept. 16, 1861, Folder 16, Box 4 (1861-1865), The George Perkins Marsh Papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont (hereafter GPMP); G.P. Marsh a W. Seward, Sept. 14, 1861, in *diplomatici statunitensi*, vol. IV (1861-1866), pp. 76-77.

<sup>20</sup> Mr. Seward to Mr. Clay, Washington, May 6, 1861, Foreign Relations of the United States, (hereafter FRUS), 1861, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/>, p. 293.

<sup>21</sup> N.S. HINIAPINA, "Russia and the U.S. Civil War," in *Russian-American Dialogue on Cultural Relations, 1776-1914*, Norman Saul and Richard McKenzie eds., Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1997, pp. 93-106, p. 99.

## **2. DIPLOMATIC CRISES AND LIBERAL SUPPORT**

Friction with the United Kingdom and France continued unabated well into the war until the “Trent Affair” contributed to increase it, while disentangling the United Kingdom from the marshes of some diplomatic missteps made in Europe and especially in the question of the temporal power of the Pope. Traditionally, in the post-Napoleonic period, London had given shelter to several refugees from Italy who were outspoken enemies of the Church, among whom stood out Giuseppe Mazzini. The seizure by the USS *San Jacinto* of the British Royal Mail Steamer *Trent*, aboard of which were two representatives of the South on a mission to convince European leaders of the rights of the Confederacy, stirred indignation and rage all over the continent.<sup>22</sup> The already tensed relations between the Union and the British reached their peak. The “Trent Affair” was discussed widely and not only in England and France. It appeared as a violation of international law that had not even the slightest humanitarian foundation.<sup>23</sup> James Mason e John Slidell, the two emissaries heading for London and Paris, were treated as illegal smuggling from the rebel States. Only the strong protest of London and Lincoln’s political realism favored a solution short of war to the deadlock.

At last, Mason and Slidell could resume their trip and were able to reach Europe, but the South’s diplomatic initiative had been compromised at least for awhile. From this very case, the nations of Europe learned how it would be appropriate to stay neutral in a confrontation that carried with it very peculiar aspects of international law. In fact, any initiative of the South at the international level, was to the North nothing but a violation of federal foreign policy. By acknowledging the right of the Confederacy to send emissaries overseas, European countries risked accepting “ipso facto” the existence of a new nation. Furthermore, such an attitude could lead to a reaction of the Union government and eventually to war. The United Kingdom remained neutral but did not give up on business. It began producing battleships for the South, actually applying new technologies that enabled the confederacy to bring great damages to the Union Navy, as in the case of ironclad warships. This caused a friction that continued well after the end of the war and was solved only in 1871 by an arbitration committee guided by a prominent Italian man of law who had been indicated by the United States and at the suggestion of Minister Marsh, as president of the commission in the “Alabama Claims”.<sup>24</sup>

The “Trent Affair” brought England on the brink of war, but as John Stuart Mill readily noticed in an essay in “Harper’s Magazine,” the British risked siding with the wrong ally. The war was in fact, clearly, a struggle for freedom and emancipation: “The world knows what the question between the North and South has been for many years, and still is. Slavery alone was thought of, alone talked of. Slavery was battled for and against, on the floor of Congress and in the plains of

---

<sup>22</sup> JONES, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, pp. 103-105.

<sup>23</sup> In Italy the case was widely discussed and used as a case-study in university courses. A very interesting example is the transcribed lesson by Giovanni DEGIOANNIS, from the University of Cagliari, Sardinia: *Sull’arresto dei commissari americani del sud Mason e Slidell a bordo del legno inglese Trent, Fatto da Wilkes capitano del S. Giacinto, nel giorno 8 novembre 1861*, Cagliari, A. Timon, 1862.

<sup>24</sup> Letters and instructions by H. Fish to G.P. Marsh, July 18, July 25, August 8, 1871, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State 1800-1906, Italy, May 2, 1838 – October 31, 1876 (hereafter Diplomatic Instructions), RG 59, M 77, roll 101, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA). Protocols of the Conference of Arbitrators, Protocol I, vol. IV, FRUS, 1872, pp. 15-16, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS>.

Kansas.”<sup>25</sup> In the same essay the English philosopher argued about the more general issue of freedom rights and the struggles to advocate them:

*I do not scruple to say that I have sympathized more or less ardently with most of the rebellions successful and unsuccessful, which have taken place in my time. But I certainly never conceived that there was a sufficient title to my sympathy in the mere fact of being a rebel;...Neither rebellion nor any other act which affects the interests of others, is sufficiently legitimated by the mere will to do it. Secession may be laudable, and so may any other kind of insurrection; but it may also be an enormous crime.*<sup>26</sup>

The revolts against an iniquitous power were the only legitimate ones, the revolts against the suppression of human liberty and of individual rights entitled their protagonists to transnational support. They were led in the name of universal values shared across the world, at least the Atlantic one, and the Southern secession was not to be considered part of the movement of people and ideas that cut across continents. At the same time, the Italian agitator Giuseppe Mazzini who did not like the American form of republicanism which, from his point of view, did not protect the rights of the citizen workers moved progressively on the side of the Union. It was only the Emancipation Proclamation that convinced him to support the right of the North to suppress the rebellion. He warned, however, that slavery was “only one of many forms of oppression.”<sup>27</sup> For this reason, toward the end of the war, and thanks to his friendship with the abolitionist and Unitarian minister Moncure Daniel Conway, Mazzini tried to set up what he called the “Universal Republican Alliance.” A transnational organization formed by democratic republicans of Europe and America which had the aim of fighting the monarchies and authoritarian governments; the Alliance had to be guided by the United States. The Republic, regenerated by the war, had to take her leadership “...in the great battle being fought the world over between good and evil, justice and injustice, equality and privilege, duty and egoism, republic and monarchy, truth and falsehood, God and the idols.” The first undertaking of America should have been that of destroying “...that ‘outpost of Caesarism’ the Mexican Empire established along her own frontiers.”<sup>28</sup> Finally established in 1866, the Alliance did not have the success Mazzini wished, also because of the Italian’s extreme radicalism which was not well received in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

A very different reception was instead reserved in the United States to the other leader of Italian independence and unification, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Already well known in the country since the 1840s and celebrated as the international combatant for the liberty and rights of human kind,

<sup>25</sup> John STUART MILL, *The Contest in America*, Boston, Little; Brown and Co., 1862, reprinted from *Harper’s Weekly*, <https://archive.org/stream/contestinamerica00mill#page/28/mode/2up>, p. 13. last accessed, 16/10/2014.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>27</sup> Eugenio BIAGINI: “‘The Principle of Humanity.’ Lincoln in Germany and Italy, 1859-1861,” in *The Global Lincoln*, ed by R. Carwardine, J. Sexton, Oxford, NY; Oxford Un Press, 2011, pp. 76-94, p. 82.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Joseph ROSSI, *The Image of America in Mazzini’s Writings*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1954, p. 138.

<sup>29</sup> Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe holds that actually Mazzini’s view was that Italy, and not America, was the right locus of the leadership of an international strife to obtain the fundamental liberties of mankind. Marcella PELLEGRINO SUTCLIFFE, *Victorian Radicals and Italian Democrats*, London, Royal Historical Society Studies in History, 2014, p. 131.

especially after his exploits in South America and the Roman Republic of 1849, he was perceived as a veritable transnational hero.<sup>30</sup> The role played by Garibaldi in the completion of Italian independence with his astonishing “Expedition of the Thousand” attracted the attention of American liberals at a time when the nation was suffering one of its greatest traumas in history. Garibaldi’s campaign began in the Spring of 1860 and was completed at the beginning of the following year when, in the month of March after the final surrender of the King of Two Sicilies Francis II, the Kingdom of Italy was officially constituted. Only a few weeks later the fall of Fort Sumter precipitated the United States in the Civil War. However, the Italian general still had his own mission to accomplish, the conquest of Rome, considered by many liberals in Europe and the United States the only real shortcoming of Italian unification. Anti-Catholicism was still strong among republicans and liberal protestants, and the Catholic Church had come to represent a symbol of authoritarianism and backwardness. Moreover, the initial illusion given by Pope Pius IX upon his election in 1846, had given way to irritation and opposition among those liberals who had thought for a moment he could be a reformer.

During his short retirement on the island of Caprera, after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, Garibaldi received a first invitation by an American diplomat in Vienna to join the Union army in what he considered a fight for liberty and emancipation. The story of the command offered to Garibaldi by Lincoln has been told many times, often without the appropriate evidence. The invitation was not extended by Lincoln, the President rather had to follow up on a single-handed initiative by an American public official posted in Europe who was prone to unilateral initiatives. What matters here, however, is not how the whole story unfolded, but rather its symbolic meaning in a transnational perspective. When, in 1862, Garibaldi, as he was starting a new march against Rome at the head of a group of volunteers, was wounded by the Italian Army on the mountains of Aspromonte, an international public outcry ensued. Marsh, the American Minister in Turin, reported fully to Secretary of State Seward on the plight of the Italian hero. His popular renown was such, he wrote, that the government fortunately would not take any further action against him.<sup>31</sup> The new initiative by Garibaldi in southern Italy, however, raised some tension between the government in Turin and the United States since, as it had already happened in 1848 and again in 1861, an American warship had offered assistance and some Americans were ready to volunteer in the ranks of the “garibaldini.” For a short time, the otherwise excellent relations between the new Kingdom and the Union experienced some friction due to the Italian concern over the potential role the United States could play in further revolts in the country. Despite the Civil War was by then in full swing and the second Bull Run occurred in the very same days of the Aspromonte debacle, the monarchies of Europe still feared the revolutionary ideas coming from the United States and their republican potential.<sup>32</sup> Secretary Seward gave instructions to reassure the Italian government while condemning the “inopportune” decision of Garibaldi. He called upon the Italian Minister Bertinatti to reassure him of the intention of the United States to stay out of any domestic upheaval of another country

---

<sup>30</sup> See Lucy RIAL, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero*, Neh Haven, Yale University Press, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> G.P. Marsh a W. Seward Sept. 1, 1862; Despatches, Microfilm M90, roll 11. Renato Mori, *La questione romana, 1861-1865*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1963 pp. 137-139; Mary, TRAUTH, *Italo-American Diplomatic Relations, 1861-1882. The Mission of George Perkins Marsh*, Washington, Catholic University of America, 1957 pp. 22-23.

<sup>32</sup> G.P. Marsh a W. Seward, September 1, 1862, *diplomatici statunitensi IV (1861-1866)*, p. 157; W. Seward a G.P. Marsh, September 13, 1862, *Ibidem*, p. 161.

and, especially in this case, a very friendly one. In a private conversation, however, Seward questioned the Italian diplomat as to what extent Italy realized that major powers were plotting to deny Italy its natural capital. While Austria and France worked hard to defend the last vestiges of the Pope's secular reign, the United Kingdom and France toyed with the possibility of finding a diplomatic solution to the confrontation taking place in North America. The consolidation of the two nation-states was matter of concern for the great powers, also in light of the possible outcome of the American Civil War.<sup>33</sup>

Once again European diplomats talked about the need for the North to acknowledge the claims of the Confederacy, given the course of the conflict. If the Union acceded to peace proposals, argued Lord John Russell, Foreign Minister of the Palmerston government, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Prussia and Italy would follow suit.<sup>34</sup> However, a few European countries, and Italy first, could not ignore how the war in North America connected to their recent battles against the landed aristocracy and the interests of absolute rulers. The very concept of the nation was changing its meaning also for Americans:

*Indeed, the American republic –writes Andre Fleche- had reached a crossroads by the middle of the nineteenth century. The founders had imagined a union of semisovereign states, held together by mutual self-interest. This conception of the country appeared outdated to many thinkers in the North by the time of the Civil War. Instead, they began speaking of an organic “nation,” that could share with powers like Britain and France all the trappings of a modern, unified state.*<sup>35</sup>

After all, wrote William Seward to Minister Charles Francis Adams in London, governments in Europe had recently suppressed revolts in the name of national and state authority and this was exactly what the United States was doing with the rebels in the South.<sup>36</sup>

The offer of a charge to Garibaldi pursued its course and embarrassed the high ranks of the armed forces that considered addressing a foreign officer an implicit proof of the inadequacy of the Union Army. At the end of 1862, the issue was entrusted in the hands of Minister Marsh as representative in Italy, thus avoiding any further international argument that involved minor diplomats in other European countries. An intense correspondence between Marsh and Seward followed, and the American Minister even paid a visit to the Italian general in Caprera. The dealing included also the possibility of enlisting about two-thousand men who had previously fought in different European war theatres, although most of them had done so under the leadership of Garibaldi himself. In his first year in Turin, Marsh had to deal also with the numerous requests coming from the “garibaldini” of different nationalities who offered to serve in the Union Army. Soldiers who had fought in the revolts of 1848, and then in Crimea, to end up on the side of Garibaldi in the Italian campaign of 1859-1861, waited for a call from the American legation. Most of them were turned down, but officers like Francesco Anfossi, a colonel in the Savoy Army after his discharge

<sup>33</sup> Giuseppe Bertinatti a Giacomo Durando, 10 Novembre 1862, in “La guerra di secessione americana nei dispacci del rappresentante italiano a Washington,” Gaetano ARFÉ ed. *Annuario dell’istituto storico italiano per l’età moderna e contemporanea*, vol. XIII-XIV (1961-1962), pp. 183-349, p. 296.

<sup>34</sup> JONES, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, p. 212.

<sup>35</sup> FLECHE, *The Revolution of 1861*, p. 70.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 71.

from the Thousand, the Hungarian Fulop Fygyelmessi, and Colonel Gustave Paul Cluseret, who were later naturalized American, joined the army as officers. Cluseret who would have reached the rank of Brigadier General, left the United States in 1867, to join the Irish irredentist insurrection and after a death sentence inflicted on him by England escaped to participate in the Paris Commune of 1871.<sup>37</sup> In those eventful times, across the Atlantic travelled liberal-republican ideals as well as people ready to fight for what they considered one international cause. There were others, however, who after the defeat of the Neapolitan Army against Garibaldi joined the Confederates, stressing once more how the confrontation between North and South was part of a greater battle of freedom against the forces of conservation.<sup>38</sup>

Eventually Garibaldi turned down for good the offer, despite the positive attitude of the Department of State, thus relieving the Union commands from any critical consequences that could derive from his employment. However, a regiment formed by four companies, made up of European nationals willing to fight on the side of the Union and, as many of them said, ready to combat slavery, was set up: it took the name of “Garibaldi Guard.”

### **3. FREEDOM AT LAST!**

In the meantime, the international pressure and domestic concerns on the possible developments of the war convinced Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Slaves in the territories liberated by the Union troops were to be freed. Such a measure contributed to change the international perception of the reasons of the North; to the Europeans who had joined the forces of the Union it was the proof of the real meaning of the war. Minister Marsh immediately reported to Washington on the probable positive effects of the Declaration. After the confusion ensued from the mishandling of the invitation to Garibaldi, most liberals in Italy began questioning the real intentions of President Lincoln and of the Union; rumors had spread across Europe on the actual purpose of the war since the North seemed not to care enough about emancipation. Actually, after the first announcement by Lincoln that he would order the emancipation of all slaves in any state not willing to put an end to the rebellion by January 1, 1863, Italian Minister Bertinatti had been very timely in September 1862 writing to the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

*That force of judgment that moved the Italians toward the unification of the peninsula, once the peace of Villafranca had prevented them from laying their hands on the Adriatic sea, pushed in turn President Lincoln to issue the proclamation...thanks to which, while it is possible to proclaim that “alea jacta est” [the dice is cast], he manages to give shape and direction to the biggest social revolution ever on this continent, and maybe of this century, so rich in ongoing revolutions and of revolutions in the making.<sup>39</sup>*

<sup>37</sup> G.P. Marsh a W. Seward Sept. 16, 23, 24 1861; W. Seward a G.P. Marsh, Oct. 10, 15 1861, *diplomatici statunitensi* IV (1861-1866), pp. 78-96.

<sup>38</sup> Howard R. MARRARO, “Volontari d’Italia per l’esercito di Lincoln” *Il Ponte*, vol. 12, n. 19, 1963, pp. 1546-1561.

<sup>39</sup> Giuseppe Bertinatti a Giacomo Durando, 23 settembre 1862, “La guerra di secessione americana nei dispacci del rappresentante italiano a Washington,” p. 289. The Peace of Villafranca (1859) was the agreement between Napoleon III and Francis Joseph of Austria over the Lombardo-Veneto. The French were fighting on the side of the Kingdom of Sardinia when, breaking a previous treaty, decided unilaterally to accede to the Austrian requests for peace, renouncing the region of Venice, on the Adriatic Sea, originally included in the pact with Sardinia.

The Minister added a comment to his statement, drawing the parallel often used by his American counterpart, George Perkins Marsh, between the power of the Church of Rome and that of slavery. He underlined how Lincoln's proclamation could be compared in its consequences to an unlikely announcement by the Pope that he would renounce his temporal power. To him, the theocratic power brought to bear an influence on politics and on the people comparable to the "...slavocratic one that can never come to terms with its opposite."<sup>40</sup>

Bertinatti's statement may sound rather strong today, but at the time the temporal power of the Church of Rome and its influence on American Catholics played a role, especially in the first years of the war. Although choosing neutrality, Pope Pius IX, repeatedly stressed the need for a peace that recognized the rights of all the parties involved, claiming that as much as he loathed slavery he could not intrude in the political choices of other countries. Through his prominent Secretary of State, Giacomo Cardinal Antonelli, he repeatedly offered a mediation by "an unimportant power...that had neither army nor navy, and whose very humbleness made the offer of her services acceptable."<sup>41</sup> However, later in the war and despite the role played by some prelates in the North in favor of a peaceful solution, in an 1863 exchange with Jefferson Davis, the Pope addressed him as "the Honorable President of the Confederate States of America." Pius IX thus implicitly acknowledged the existence of the Confederacy.<sup>42</sup>

Actually the correspondence originated with a letter sent by the Pope to the bishops of New York and New Orleans in order to invite them to take some initiative in the interest of peace. Davis saw an opportunity to look for some kind of support from a foreign power, although a little one politically. He wrote to Pius IX asking the Vatican to take some kind of initiative, aware of the attention Rome reserved to the South in consideration of the number of Catholics living in the Confederacy and the sympathy that the Church had showed for their plight from the very beginning. Pius IX's answer underlined the commitment of the Church wishing that the "other Americans" could understand the tragic outcome of what was happening and could change their course. He did not take a clear position while pointing out the political aspects of the issues at stake without mentioning slavery, although at the beginning of that year Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Even though opposed to the "peculiar institution," Pius IX feared the possible outcome of a mass emancipation and condemned instead the American clergy that supported abolitionism. This enabled Perkins Marsh to denounce how "...between the great enemy of African liberty in America, and the great enemy of all liberty in Europe, a sympathy exists which is not shared by the people of the North or the Government which represents it."<sup>43</sup> The struggle for liberty and republicanism was one across the oceans.

Great Britain stayed out of these quarrels and also withdrew from the discussions going on in embassies and governments on the future of the State of the Church, leaving France the freedom to

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 297.

<sup>41</sup> Leo F. STOCK, "The United States at the Court of Pius IX," *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 9, n.1, (1923), pp. 103-122, p.112. *United States Ministers to the Papal States. Instructions and Despatches, 1848-1868*, Leo Stock ed., Washington D.C., American Catholic Historical Association, 1933, p. xxxvi; Blatchford a Seward, *Ibidem*, 287-290; 312-314; Giacomo MARTINA, *Pio IX (1851-1866)*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1985, pp. 489-492.

<sup>42</sup> Blatchford a Seward, *Ibidem*, 287-290.

<sup>43</sup> G.P. Marsh a W. Seward, January 8, 1864, *diplomatici statunitensi IV (1861-1866)*, p. 220.

act in the confrontation between Rome and the new Kingdom of Italy. Since 1849, in fact, Napoleon III had become the protector of the Pope and French troops stationed permanently in the Papal capital.<sup>44</sup> Actually the tension still existing between the Union and the UK reached well beyond their borders. The long war ignited a serious economic crisis, and by 1863 the British and French reserves of cotton were drastically diminished while several factory workers were laid down. Social unrest threatened the establishments of the two European powers, and Napoleon III, always in search of expanding markets and international political influence, initiated two actions that resulted in embarrassing and amateurish outcomes. The so called “Mission of M. Mercier” was an ill attempt, possibly initiated by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to act as an intermediary between the North and the South. In 1862, Henry Mercier, French Minister in Washington during the Civil War, asked for permission to visit Richmond on account of some bales of tobacco stuck in the confederate capital. Actually, his purpose could be either to find a solution to the long war or to bring a diplomatic answer to the irreconcilable sides. Although initially some papers considered it a reasonable initiative to put an end to the hopeless obstinacy of the insurgents, the mission turned out to be a mishap also on account of the supposed sympathies of Mercier for the South.<sup>45</sup> William Seward became enraged with France because likely the mission had other goals. It was possibly connected to Napoleon III’s concurrent intervention in Mexico. Between 1861 and 1862 Britain, Spain and France took military action to force Mexico pay back its debts. After the withdrawal of London and Madrid, however, Napoleon III strengthened the expedition under the command of General Forey to establish French control and a friendly regime under the leadership of Prince Maximilian of Hapsburg.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, France was manoeuvring to put an end to its military commitment in Rome. Although small, the presence of French regiments to defend the capital of the Pope from Italy, weighed on the finances of the Empire and represented a distraction from more urgent matters in the international arena. While Maximilian accepted the throne of Mexico in 1864, the French emperor managed to find a compromise with Italy by which the Kingdom renounced once and for all to Rome and transferred its capital from Turin to Florence.<sup>47</sup>

While avoiding any direct confrontations with France the Union put a stop to the French-Hapsburg enterprise. Maximilian’s overtures to the Confederates caused the immediate reaction of Lincoln and Seward whom, despite the cumbersome engagement in the Civil War, threatened to attack also south of the Confederate border. The Austrian Prince soon reconsidered, while Congress refused to recognize the new Mexican government.<sup>48</sup> The Mexican question, however, remained opened until 1867, adding instability to the difficult situation in the South in the period of Reconstruction.

---

<sup>44</sup> MORI, *La questione romana*, p. 58-59.

<sup>45</sup> The Mercier mission was discussed in “The New York Times”, May 28, 1862. After an initial favor, the diplomat encountered growing hostility in the American press. Seward changed his mind about Mercier when he realized the French had sympathies for the confederate government. See also: Daniel B. CARROLL, *Henri Mercier and the American Civil War*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971.

<sup>46</sup> Josefina Z. VAZQUEZ, *The United States and Mexico*, London-Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1985), pp. 66-71.

<sup>47</sup> MORI, *La questione romana, 1861-1865*, p. 60. Actually, in 1870, when Napoleon was engaged in the war with Prussia, Italy seized the eternal city to make it its capital.

<sup>48</sup> JONES, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, pp. 315-316.

As the war drew to a close, Lincoln's assassination brought consternation all over the world. The fierce struggle between the two sections of the country culminated with the emancipation of the slaves thanks to the approval of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution and with the death of its protagonist. Lincoln left a legacy that indicated the road toward "a new birth of freedom" as he had wished in the Gettysburg address. It was time to consolidate the nation-state and to complete the unification of the American people, slowed down by the divisions on slavery. All the chanceries of Europe sent their message of mourning to the United States; in Italy politicians, agitators and intellectuals shared the sorrow of the Americans for the "liberator" as Lincoln had come to be called in the years of war. The Papal Secretary of State Cardinal Antonelli called on the American chargé in Rome, Rufus King, to forward Rome's condolences to the U.S. government.<sup>49</sup> But it was Garibaldi whom, a few days before Lincoln's assassination, had best celebrated the American president in a personal letter to Minister Marsh. The Italian general showed all his admiration for the American president pointing out how he embodied a sense of the international solidarity in the struggles for liberty. The occasion was the birth of his grand-child, son of his daughter Teresa, whom he asked to be christened Lincoln:

*My dearest Mr. Marsh,*

*The name of Lincoln like the name of Christ marks the beginning of a glorious era in the history of humanity, and with pride I asked to perpetuate his name in my family; the name of the great Emancipator. The papers and the men who opposed the cause of the great Republic are those whom, like the jackass of the story that kicked the fallen lion, but now sees him rise again in all his majesty, will soon change their language. The American question is vital for the world over, and now its near solution must make honest souls rejoice.<sup>50</sup>*

The Civil War was catalogued among the fights for liberty and for the reinforcement of democratic ideals and of the nation-state. The nation came to be considered as much a political asset as an essential instrument for the further development of the economy. The Federal Republic like the new modern states of Europe represented a reference for the new elites that emerged from the nation-building process of mid-century. Moreover, nationalism became the ideological and political instrument of progress. As well pointed out by Thomas Bender, "...the international significance of the United States was transformed, over the course of the nineteenth century it evolved from being a political alternative to monarchy to becoming a place of economic opportunity and startling economic energy."<sup>51</sup> The Civil War and Reconstruction contributed a good deal to this transformation and to the process of nation-re-building.<sup>52</sup> The national discourse became essential to the strengthening of the geopolitical position of the country. During the war, after all, both sections had used the language of national aspiration to justify their actions. The North claimed its right to restrain a rebellion that threatened the very foundations of the nation and the sovereignty of a government instituted by the revolt against the tyrannical power of England; the South appealed to

<sup>49</sup> Rufus King a William Hunter, April 29, 1865, *U.S. Ministers*, p. 335.

<sup>50</sup> Garibaldi to Mr..Marsh, March 27, 1865, Folder 62, Box 4 (1861-1865), GPMP. The baby's full name was Lincoln Canzio (1865-1870).

<sup>51</sup> Thomas BENDER, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*, New York, Hill & Wang, 2006, p. 115.

<sup>52</sup> See Richard F.BENSEL, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

its entitlement to an independence that had been claimed by several people in the previous decades, including the United States. In both cases reference was to other nationalistic movements. In order to support their claims, both sides had used the idea, shared by many at the time, of the right of people to construct their nation according to their own needs and expectations. Self-rule, a basic ideal of American democratic individualism, was applied to national discourse and modified according to a transnational vision of freedom and of the relationship between the government and the governed. What neither side could reclaim, although arguments in this sense were raised, was an organic view of the nation as indicated by some European experiences. What dominated, therefore, was what Eric Hobsbawm calls the idea of a shared past, a commonality of culture, and economic and military capability.<sup>53</sup>

After the war the creation of a new sense of nationalism acceptable to both sides, proved to be a hard task. Reconstruction appeared more like an imposition of northern values and political choices, but the compromise of 1876, that put an end to Reconstruction, offered the possibility of reconnecting the United States to the “transnational discourse of nationalism.” This entailed at the same time an acceleration and an extension of modernization and a redefinition of liberalism and of national memory that could progressively include the South. Once slavery had been excluded, a new sense of belonging could be construed according to the needs of the regenerated nation. Once again the public debate over the identity of the new nation proceeded, as it was the case in Europe, by inclusions and exclusions. The transnational movement of liberal ideas, and Lincoln’s connection of nationalism and liberalism which was part and parcel of that movement, called for territorial unity and for a nationalism able to reconstitute a cultural and political community. This resulted in a progressive inclusion of Southern whites and the exclusion of African-Americans and American Indians. Nationalism was the connecting credo that, by definition excluded those who were “not ready to participate” in the shares of modernization. Like the revolts of the previous decades this process took place across the Atlantic. Nationalism, writes Liah Greenfeld, presented itself as a by-product or a reflection of modernity.<sup>54</sup> The new American nation-state that emerged from the war had to balance itself between two opposing tropes: the European system of nation-states, with absolute monarchies at its center, and American Indians. The completion of the Italian unification and the reconstruction of the American Union represented the ultimate victory of a liberal bourgeoisie over a traditional and absolute rule that constrained the freedom and creative potential of the individual and of the nation.<sup>55</sup> Still part of that transnational web of nationalism, change and modernization that had favored the success of the Union over the Confederacy, the United States progressively became the center of a new process of consolidation of the nation-state that set aside the more radical forms of nation-building to give prominence to a moderate liberal reorganization of the public structure. The transnational liberal connection of mid-century was soon lost to the interests of the international expansion of markets and to the renewed imperial ambitions of European powers and the new seaborne empire of the United States.

---

<sup>53</sup> Eric HOBBSBAWM, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, pp. 91-92.

<sup>54</sup> Liah GREENFELD, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> This analysis is put in a historiographic perspective by: Enrico DAL LAGO, “La Guerra civile americana, il Risorgimento italiano e i nazionalismi europei dell’Ottocento: histoire croisée histoire comparée,” *Giornale di Storia costituzionale*, 22/II semestre 2011, pp. 143-161.