

## Democracy and the rights of women in the thinking of Giuseppe Mazzini<sup>1</sup>

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Addressing Italian workers in his *Doveri dell'uomo* of 1860, Mazzini unequivocally laid out his thoughts on women's rights. The thinker from Genoa, all the more after his encounters with other political philosophers from different national environments such as Britain and France, saw the principle of equality between men and women as fundamental to his project of constructing first the nation, and second a democratic republic. In his ideas regarding emancipation Mazzini, who spent a good 40 years of his life in exile, was one of a small group of European thinkers who in challenging the established customs and prevailing laws not only hoped for the end of women's social and judicial subordination, but also held that changes to the position of women were essential to the realisation of their political projects. Thanks to this respected group of intellectuals, the issue of female emancipation found a place in the nineteenth-century European debate regarding democracy and the formation of national states. The closeness of the positions of these thinkers, and their commitment in practice as well as theory, mean that it can legitimately be argued that in the course of the nineteenth century a current of feminist thinking took shape. This was born of the encounters between and reflections of various intellectuals who met first in France and then in England, and who came to see women's rights not just as a discrete issue for resolution but as fundamental to their projects for the regeneration of nations, or, as in the Italian case, for the construction and rebirth of a nation.

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### Introduction

In the first half of the nineteenth century a heated debate developed in Europe over democracy and all the forms this might take. Whilst in established national states such as Britain and France this theme was at the centre of political and intellectual activity, in 'Italy' it was closely interwoven with the theme of national independence, and subordinate to this for much of the first half of the century. An interpreter of and advocate for these two linked causes was Giuseppe Mazzini, who had the highest European profile among nineteenth-century Italian thinkers, not least because of the many years he spent in exile.<sup>2</sup> Using articles and leaflets, Mazzini not only launched appeals for the liberation and independence of nations subjected to foreign rule, Italy at the forefront, but also set out his

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project of democracy.<sup>3</sup> Due to the strength of his arguments and his remarkable personal charisma,<sup>4</sup> he soon became a valued correspondent with many European intellectuals of the period.<sup>5</sup>

The specific nature of Mazzini's approach to the theme of democracy will be highlighted by an analysis of his writings. Holding the conviction that humanity could only take the path of progress if all human beings were involved, he sought to act in accordance with this, considering the establishment of equality between men and women, in respect of both rights and responsibilities, among his priorities. This aspect was distinctive of Mazzini, for this equality was not recognised by many of the writers of the period who described themselves as democrats, reproached here by John Stuart Mill:

But if the principle is true, we ought to act as if we believed it, and not to ordain that to be born a girl instead of a boy, any more than to be born black instead of white, or a commoner instead of a nobleman, shall decide the person's position through all life – shall interdict people from all the more elevated social positions, and from all, except a few, respectable occupations. (Mill 1869/1984, 274)

Mazzini's egalitarian convictions had their origins in his family background, as he himself suggests:

I had, unknowingly, already been taught to revere Equality by the democratic customs of both my parents, and by the exact same way they had with anyone, noble or commoner: they looked but for an individual's *humanity* and *honesty*. (Mazzini 1986, 52, emphasis in original)

These, however, developed and strengthened during his long years of exile, not least following his encounters with various men and women who in the second half of the nineteenth century wrote in favour of female emancipation and took active steps to bring this into being. Mazzini himself, moreover, suggests in his autobiographical writings that people who approach his thinking should bear in mind his choices of company and location:

To me it seems that a writer should show himself to his readers not only as he is, but also as he was, and that it will help young people to see the degree to which each man succumbs to the influence of his times and the circumstances in which he acts. (Mazzini 1986, 228)

This article takes its cue from this statement in a reconstruction, thanks to Mazzini's abundant correspondence, of the social and cultural environment in which he lived. In particular, it identifies his British intellectual and emotional bonds: these were undoubtedly a fertile breeding ground for the development of his concept of equality, subsequently fully laid out in his *Doveri dell'uomo*,<sup>6</sup> the work which is regarded as the synthesis of his thinking.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, two letters written after the publication of *Doveri* are analysed. The first was addressed to an Italian woman (Mazzini 1943, 325–7), the second to an Englishwoman (Mazzini 1922, 3: 233–5); both are a convincing demonstration of the consistent interest that Mazzini maintained in women's rights, and his commitment to the resolution of these issues.

### Historical background

Mazzini was forced to choose the path of exile in 1831, and spent the early years away from his native Genoa, mainly in Switzerland and France.<sup>8</sup> In the latter, where much

attention was then being devoted to the delineation and planning of a new society, a heated debate developed over the prospects of democracy and socialism. Mazzini played a part first as spectator and then as contributor, having formed friendships and working relationships with important intellectuals of the period such as Leroux, Lamennais (Roberts 1989, 5), and George Sand.<sup>9</sup> The first writers to be admired and absorbed by Mazzini were Rousseau and Condorcet; from the more important trends in thinking in the first half of the century, Mazzini subsequently favoured Saint-Simonism for its prediction of a profound regeneration of society and politics. He drew less inspiration from Saint-Simon himself than from his followers such as Leroux and Reynard (Roberts 1989, 19), who were at the time engaged in a critical re-reading of their teacher.

Moral and spiritual inspiration, from Saint-Simon, along with the pairing of 'thought and action', run through Mazzini's philosophy which is expressed in relation to various cardinal concepts: association, the people, the *patria* (one's country), and education. Some of these concepts, borrowed from other thinkers, become more developed over the years thanks to Mazzini's attention.

In the Mazzinian project the mission to fulfil the law of progress that envisages a fairer society, in which the prospects for both collective and individual development come together, has as its object the people: simply, a body of individuals linked together by common practices, customs and aspirations, all enjoying equal status irrespective of class or gender:

Country is not a mere zone of territory. The true Country is the Idea to which it gives birth; it is the Thought of Love, the sense of communion which unites in one all the sons of that territory. So long as a single one amongst your brothers has no vote to represent him in the development of the National life – so long as there be one left to vegetate in ignorance where others are educated: so long as a single man, able and willing to work, languishes in poverty through want of work to do, you have no Country in the sense in which Country ought to exist, the Country of all and for all. (Mazzini 1862, 93–4)

In relation to these elaborations of equality, Mazzini argues for the rejection of not only any opposition between classes, which is incompatible with the unifying concept of the people, but also any difference in status between men and women. In the Mazzinian project women rise up to rank alongside men before the construction of the nation and the subsequent establishment of democracy.

At the start of the 1830s Mazzini's philosophical reference points, like his correspondents, were mainly French writers, but with his move to Britain in 1837 his perspectives widened and deepened (see, for example, Duggan 2008). London was in fact the destination and point of reference for major European intellectuals, being a hothouse for reforms and a cauldron of social and cultural ferment. There were also many exiles, able to express themselves and circulate freely in a country that with respect to the rest of Europe was both politically and economically more developed. It was indeed during Mazzini's time in London that his thinking undergoes:

...a shift from the theme of republican rule to that of democratic society. The word 'democracy' enters Mazzini's political language, to the extent that his political project can be defined as 'democratic'. (Mastellone 2005b, 10)

Just as he had in France, the Genoese thinker took an active part in London in the debate on democracy; this had been stimulated by publication of the first part of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, as well as by the reflections of many British intellectuals. An article

by Mazzini, 'On democracy', was published in June 1839 in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*; in this, he explains his interpretation of the concept, emphasising how it must encompass all people irrespective of their class and aspire to equality, while respecting individual liberties. He goes on to identify universal suffrage as the only possible means whereby these aims could be achieved. Finally, he makes specific reference to freedom of association and to the duties of citizens, which must be indissolubly linked to their rights; both these ideas are fully developed in *Doveri dell'uomo*.

Mazzini also addressed the theme of democracy in subsequent articles published in *Apostolato popolare*, the newspaper of the Unione degli Operai Italiani (Italian Workers' Union), an organisation which he had himself created to bring together Italian workers who were in London.<sup>10</sup> However, it was his articles in *The People's Journal*<sup>11</sup> between August 1846 and June 1847 that confirmed Mazzini as being among the most respected European intellectuals (see Lazzarino Del Grosso 2005, 198). In these, using an exhaustive analysis of the variations on democracy within Europe, he sought to define the principles and main objectives of this system, in such a way as to establish common ground on which the various European democrats might acknowledge each other and thus put an end to the multiplicity of their positions.

### **The problem of natural equality**

Within British political and social life, which at that time had been unsettled by reformism, some thinkers extended their critical approach to address the lesser position of women in civil society and politics. Adding the issue of the rights of women to their priorities, these writers demonstrated their preparation of well-articulated plans, with their aspirations to achieve a genuine democratisation of the institutions and society. Such a programmatic approach, in line with its egalitarian ideas, provided a common philosophical platform; this allowed Mazzini to develop bonds of respect, and sometimes of deep affection, with most of the men and women who during the nineteenth century were involved in promoting what for them was axiomatic: the essential equality between men and women.

One of the first thinkers whom Mazzini met in London was John Stuart Mill, through Harriet Taylor (Roberts 1989, 28–9).<sup>12</sup> She had praised Mazzini's moral and intellectual qualities to the English philosopher, urging him to commission some articles for the *London and Westminster Review* from the Italian exile. Clearly, 'for Mazzini... the acquaintance with Mill, even more than that with Carlyle, was very important for his introduction to London's political life and for being able to promulgate his ideas using the most important British newspapers' (Picchetto 2005, 1); it also brought him into contact with a prolific and eclectic thinker who in the course of his life dedicated the greater part of both his intellectual and physical energy to the advancement of two main themes: freedom, and female emancipation.

The relationship between these two was marked by great personal and intellectual respect, evidenced in the words that Mill put in for Mazzini in his private correspondence. When Mill asked Robert Barclay Fox to help a girl in need, he made plain his personal admiration:

I know nothing of the girl or her family personally, but one of the men I most respect is warmly interested for them, Joseph Mazzini. (Mill 1842/1963, 548)

Almost 30 years later, in a letter to Peter Alfred Taylor (an indefatigable friend of Mazzini), he once again confirmed his respect for the Italian, although differing with him over methods:

I have the highest admiration for Mazzini, & although I do not sympathize with his mode of working I do not take upon myself to criticize it, because I do not doubt that to him is mainly owing the unity & freedom of Italy. (Mill 1870/1972, 1759)

When the Italian exile died, Mill, believing that this was a great loss, recalled him in a letter to John Elliot Cairnes:

There is very little pleasant in the state of public affairs either here or in England; perhaps rather more in America, Italy, and Germany. But one mourns to see the persons of the highest worth, and who were individually centres of important influences, passing away one after another. The last few weeks has deprived the world of two such persons, Mazzini and Maurice. The best consolation is that the essential part of their work was done; and the influence of their lives will still be continued by their memory. (Mill 1872/1972, 1880)

From the philosophical point of view, while Mazzini argued against Mill's excessive individualism and his utilitarian approach, the two writers shared a belief in the importance of reforming education and extending it to the whole population; they saw it as an instrument of intellectual and moral development for both individuals and society as a whole. Similarly, they shared views on the issue of women, both regarding this as requiring resolution in order for humanity to progress. Thus they had both read and valued, albeit with minor differences, some aspects of the thinking of those earlier writers who had addressed female emancipation:

In proclaiming the perfect equality of men and women, and an entirely new order of things in regard to their relations with one another, the St. Simonians in common with Owen and Fourier have entitled themselves to the grateful remembrance of all future generations. (Mill 1873/1981, 174)

The emancipation of women was a central element in Mill's venture: he saw it as a specific case to which his general principles should be applied, with the aim of abandoning the old liberalism for a new liberalism that could both hear and respond to the calls for greater fairness coming from a continuously changing society. In this view, this issue was closely connected to collective progress, which could thus not happen without substantial changes to the legal and social situation of women.

Mill's interest in the rights of women took concrete form in his direct involvement in the emancipationist struggles to which he devoted his political activity.<sup>13</sup> It was also expressed in many writings, 'The subjection of women' (1869/1984) being the most well known, thanks to his thorough and detailed analysis of the position of women; it is hard to find anything equivalent by his contemporaries or by subsequent writers.

While Mazzini started from the same position, he was not able to explore the position of women in such detail, as, in contrast to the English philosopher, he was forced by events to dedicate most of his intellectual and physical energy to the political construction of the Italian nation; without this, any theorising about the establishment of a real democracy had little point. However, this need not prevent us highlighting the similarities between the two authors regarding various objectives and the suitable tools to attain these: the correlation between education and the full and conscious participation of the population, including women, in a nation's social and political life;<sup>14</sup> the essential parity between men and women, whose apparent inequality is exclusively due to customs and a lack of

education rather than to nature;<sup>15</sup> and the impossibility of human progress as a whole without the contribution of both genders.

### The 'refuge' in Muswell Hill

John Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet, while highly respected, were just two of the many intellectuals actively engaged in the debate on democracy, and in the various initiatives for its actual realisation in civil and political life, with whom Mazzini formed strong and enduring bonds during his London exile (Mack Smith 1993, 40–51, 129–38). An important role in the consolidation of his ideas on democracy, especially as regards equality between men and women, was played by the Ashurst family, whom he called 'my good, adoptive family' (Mazzini 1922, 2: 74),<sup>16</sup> and by the friends who would visit their house in Muswell Hill.<sup>17</sup>

It had been the head of the Ashurst household who had wanted to meet Mazzini in the period after 'the affair of the letter opening' (Mazzini 1986, 320–5; see also Morelli 1965; Mastellone 1994, 2005a, 2007), which 'made Mazzini the best known political exile in England' (Roberts 1989, 9). William Henry Ashurst was firmly convinced of the principle of equality of men and women and had educated all his children accordingly, so that his daughters Eliza, Caroline, Matilda and Emilie acquired such skills as to enable their intellectual and financial independence. With these women, Mazzini addressed every type of issue, both in discussions at the family home and in the many letters they exchanged. The relationship he established with each sister was different, as they each had their own strong personality, although all the relationships were enlivened by affection and characterised by the sisters' direct involvement in Mazzini's educational and political activities (see for example the letters to Eliza Ashurst in Mazzini 1939, 77–8, 80–1, 91–3).

Mazzini discovered the Ashurst sisters to be women active in the British and international movement for emancipation (see Crawford 2001, 53, 652), as well as helpful disseminators of his thinking (see Morelli 1965, 162, and letters to Matilda and Eliza in Mazzini 1943, 283; Mazzini 1922, 1: 188). While he loved and thought highly of all four, Mazzini formed the deepest relationship with Emilie: their unity of aims and thinking was such that he wrote to her in 1855 as 'you who share my views and feelings like an Italian, I mean as an Italian ought' (Mazzini 1922, 2: 11). He found her to be a courageous companion in the struggle for Italian independence, a worthy intellectual, talented artist and friend. Sometimes fragile, she in particular was nevertheless his 'English voice': it was she who translated most of Mazzini's articles, and involved herself in the publication of his writings in Great Britain.

Commitment to the Italian exile's projects did not stop Emilie from active involvement in the British and international movement for female emancipation. With her sisters, she was among the signatories of the 1866 petition demanding votes for women, and was on the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. Also pursuing other rights for women, she was a member of the Married Women's Property Committee and the Personal Rights Association (Crawford 2001, 697–8). Her greatest efforts, however, went to campaigning for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, through both the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the newspaper *The Shield*, which she edited from 1871 to 1886. Her involvement in this

struggle must have been important and qualitatively significant, as it was recalled in the report of the June 1914 conference of the International Federation for the Abolition of State Regulation of Vice: she was remembered not only as a signatory of the 'Manifesto of the Ladies' National Association' (31 December 1869), which Josephine Butler had put forward to oppose the Diseases Acts, but also as having had 'a marvellous literary and oratorical talent' (International Federation for the Abolition of State Regulation of Vice 1914, 50).

In meetings at the Ashurst home there was certainly no shortage of discussion regarding equality between men and women. This can be seen from a letter of 1846 in which Mazzini clarifies his position on this in response to a specific charge by Eliza; she had objected to one of his phrases, which evidently stemmed more from his gallantry than from any intention to discriminate:

I said only that while I actually abhorred a man who relishes his lunch, not only could I tolerate this in a woman, but sometimes even take pleasure from it. This was considered a violation of equality, as if alluding to the inferiority of women; it was, however, a simple statement, that something disgusting in us can in you be attractive. (Mazzini 1939, 99)

In his private conversations as in his writings, the Genoese exile in fact emphasised on many occasions his strong belief in the equality of all human beings:

Above man and woman there exists something which is common to them both; the one trunk upon which are grafted the two varieties of human nature. Philosophically speaking, there exists neither man nor woman; there exists only that human nature which it is the mission of woman and of man to evolve. (Mazzini 1922, 2: vi)

Among those who were part of the Ashurst family's circle, Caroline's husband James Stansfeld should be mentioned,<sup>18</sup> as should Peter Alfred Taylor and his wife Clementia (see Crawford 2001: 673–7), both for the strong friendships they all made with Mazzini and for their active role in the emancipationist and democratic movement.

Taylor, elected Member of Parliament in the ranks of the radicals in 1862, sat in the House of Commons for 18 years; thanks not least to his commitment to the suffragist struggle, he earned respect during this time, being considered:

... the captain of forlorn hopes, the champion of forgotten rights, the redresser of unheeded wrongs. He is the Incorruptible of the House. In evil and in good report he has striven to subject every issue that has presented itself to the test of general principles of human wellbeing. (Davidson 1880, 25–6)<sup>19</sup>

His wife Clementia, meanwhile, not only did all she could alongside her husband to help Mazzini, but made a particularly valuable contribution to the suffragist struggle over many years: at the age of 90 she was still an active member of the Women's Emancipation Union.

The axiom that Mazzini espoused, and shared with these advocates of female emancipation with whom he formed strong and enduring bonds, was the belief in the essential equality of men and women. From this derived a specific political and social programme that envisaged reform of the institutions and legislation, and above all changes and extensions to the educational system. Many emancipationists shared the view that an equal ownership of intellectual tools was the first and essential step that would allow women to operate with the same degree of competence in politics, just as in the civil world.

### Three inseparable concepts

In Mazzini's socio-political project, the three concepts of equality (in its universal meaning, embracing both sexes), democracy and nation are bound together so tightly that if in practice one of these were not achieved, in his view the others would be pointless.

To reach a 'clear and distinct' idea of how the various intellectual influences and events that Mazzini faced during his wanderings were internalised and developed, and how they contributed to the delineation of his project of social and political regeneration, it is helpful to analyse his *Doveri dell'uomo*, published in 1860, which represents a comprehensive synthesis of his moral, political and social thinking.

In a foreword dated 23 April 1860 this work was dedicated by Mazzini to the working class, the 'sons and daughters of the people' (Mazzini 1862, ix). By 1840, when he founded the *Unione degli Operai Italiani* in London, he had already realised that the working masses were gaining importance in the public sphere, and that this importance was to increase constantly in the following years. Thus it is to them, through this work, that he urges the adoption of those principles that, if acted on, would enable them to pursue in Italy 'a mission of Republican Progress for all your Countrymen, and of emancipation for yourselves' (Mazzini 1862, ix), allowing for the creation on Italic soil of an independent, democratic and republican state, within which the social question could also be resolved.<sup>20</sup>

For the operation of the Mazzinian model, which builds up in incremental stages, the essential starting point is the participation of all individuals in an equal manner in humanity's path towards progress.<sup>21</sup> Mazzini's adoption of this principle was most unusually ahead of his time; not only did he ignore all differences in wealth, family position and social status between individuals, but he also believed in the common human nature of men and women, and therefore argued that they should rank equally in their participation in politics as well as in civil society. In essence, he rejected the entrenched Aristotelian natural hierarchy, the principle that had reigned over the intervening centuries, which regarded men as superior to women because endowed with full decision-making abilities (Aristotle 2007, 27); these abilities allowed men to act consciously and productively in both the private sphere, to which women's activities were restricted by their nature, and the public. In his *Doveri dell'uomo* Mazzini rejects some of the most established prejudices, particularly as regards women having a lesser intellect:

Love and respect Woman. Seek in her not merely a comfort, but a force, an inspiration, the redoubling of your intellectual and moral faculties. Cancel from your minds every idea of superiority over Woman. You have none whatsoever. Long prejudice, an inferior education, and a perennial legal inequality and injustice, have created that *apparent* intellectual inferiority which has been converted into an argument of continued oppression. But does not the history of every oppression teach us how the oppressor ever seeks his justification and support by appealing to a *fact* of his own creation? (Mazzini 1862, 99, emphasis in the original translation)

The oppression of women, in which all men have knowingly participated, engenders unacceptable discrimination and is also divisive:

Now, we men have ever been and still are guilty of a similar crime towards Woman. Avoid even the shadow or semblance of this crime: there is none heavier in the sight of God, for it divides the human family into two classes, and imposes or accepts the subjugation of one class to the other. In the sight of God the Father there is neither *Man* nor *Woman*. There is only the *Human Being*, that Being in whom – whether the form be of male or female – those characteristics which distinguish Humanity from the brute creation are united, namely, the



social tendency and the capacity of education and progress. Wheresoever these characteristics exist, the Human nature is revealed, and thence perfect equality both of rights and of duties. Like two distinct branches springing from the same trunk, man and woman are varieties springing from the common basis – Humanity. (Mazzini 1862, 100–1, emphasis in the original translation)

For a proper understanding of the innovative and revolutionary scope of these passages, which coherently formulate the principle of equality, they need to be put in context. Prevailing nineteenth-century legislation, albeit to varying degrees of exclusion, declared the legal and social inferiority of women; it prevented any woman from acting independently in the public sphere, and placed her under her husband's or father's rule in the private (Bock 2003, 141–214). Access to education was very limited, and dependent on the 'enlightened' attitude of some 'heads of household' rather than on any apparent common need. With his declarations Mazzini thus joined an eminent but small group of thinkers who disregarded the customary belief in female intellectual inferiority and argued for the full rights of women, as members of the human race, to participate in public and private life on an equal footing with men:

Consider Woman therefore as the partner and companion, not merely of your joys and sorrows, but of your thoughts, your aspirations, your studies, and your endeavours after social amelioration. Consider her your Equal in your civil and political life. Be ye the two human wings that lift the soul towards the Ideal we are destined to attain. (Mazzini 1862, 102)

The Genoese thinker places the issue of the rights of women within the wider frame of his project to build democracy, seeing its resolution as one of the fundamental components. Female emancipation cannot and should not be viewed as secondary in relation to the aim of emancipation of all men who live in conditions of poverty, workers at the forefront. It is in fact to them that Mazzini addresses a ringing appeal at the end of *Doveri dell'uomo*, to ensure that the emancipation of women becomes one of the principal objectives to pursue in the immediate future:

Your complete emancipation can only be founded and secured upon the triumph of a Principle, the principle of the Unity of the Human Family. At the present day one half of the Human Family – that half from which we seek both inspiration and consolation, that half to which the first education of childhood is entrusted – is, by a singular contradiction, declared civilly, politically, and socially unequal, and excluded from the great Unity. To you, who are seeking your own enfranchisement and emancipation in the name of a Religious Truth, to you it belongs to protest on every occasion and by every means against this negation of Unity. The *Emancipation of Woman*, then, must be regarded by you as necessarily linked with the emancipation of the Working-man. This will give to your endeavours the consecration of an Universal Truth. (Mazzini 1862, 219–20, emphasis in the original translation)

### Italian and British perspectives

In further confirmation of his absorption of and belief in emancipationist demands, Mazzini had the strong desire to change relationships between the sexes, putting them on an equal level: not just in the more advanced Britain, where he had come into contact with women who thanks to their fathers had benefited from an education equal to that of men, but also and above all in the nascent Italy.<sup>22</sup> In this regard, one letter is

particularly revealing. This dates from Mazzini's time in London and was sent to Eleonora Burelli, a member of an organisation of 'Donne Artigiane' (craftswomen); in it he summarises all his ideas regarding women and their role in politics and civil society, confirming in a private document what he had stated a few years earlier in *Doveri dell'uomo*.

In the introduction to this letter of 1865, Mazzini urges the women of this organisation to follow the path of association, despite their small numbers, as 'now Justice is with the cause you advocate' (Mazzini 1943, 326). There is no ambivalence in his subsequent assessment of the equal worth of male and female activity:

Just as God is true, the human family is one, deriving from God and rising up from Him. On whatever brow shines the mark of human nature, in whatever being exist free will, an educable mind, the capacity for unfettered progress, and the inclination to join with others, moral duties and social and political rights exist together. One day, have no doubt, you will have equality before the law, national education, and the vote.

For Mazzini the denial of this equality would undermine the strength of other demands:

Those who call themselves apostles of liberty, and yet limit this to one half of the human family, reinforce limitation and arbitrary power, and divest their emancipatory activities of the only principle that could make these sacred and unfaltering. (Mazzini 1943, 326)

In addition, probably in response to his correspondent's complaints of discrimination she suffered as a woman, Mazzini urges her to battle constructively against entrenched prejudice regarding female inferiority, rooted in the Old Testament tradition but with no place in his vision of the religion of the Future:

Inequality, which you lament, has its origin in a dogma which started its development in the statement that woman had been created after man and from him, and concluded with a declaration of her inferiority upon earth. Free yourselves from that dogma and from whoever upholds it, not with the absurd and immoral denial of all religions, but in anticipation of a new religious expression. The philosophy of this will confirm the humanity of creation for both you women and us men, the essential harmony between the two varieties of human nature, the end of every dualism and opposition which obstructs this harmony, and the enshrinement and mission of the family in which there is equality between mother, father, and their progeny. (Mazzini 1943, 326–7)

Before closing the letter, Mazzini invites Eleonora Burelli to do her best for her country:

Be worthy, loving your country, teaching love of it, spreading the blessed cry of Venice and Rome, preaching its name to your children; making holy the venture which must free these cities, as best you can; doing your utmost to teach those close to you the worship of freedom, and the belief that, to gain this, one must take a path radically different to that taken hitherto. (Mazzini 1943, 327)

Mazzini was an alert observer of events in Europe as well as Italy, and especially in Britain; until his final years he closely followed the development of the emancipationist movement in which his British women friends and collaborators were actively involved. In a letter of 1870 to Emilie, and probably in response to uncertainties she had expressed, he restates his interest in this issue:

My dear friend, can you doubt me? Can you doubt my watching from afar with an eager eye and a blessing soul, the efforts of brave and earnest British women struggling for the extension of the Suffrage to their sex, or for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which is only an incident in the general question – Equality between Man and Woman – sacred for any

sensible, logical and fearless man who fights for any question involving Equality to whatever class or section of mankind it applies? (Mazzini 1922, 3: 233)

Mazzini writes that his support for these struggles derives from his strong conviction that resolution of the issue of women's rights is related to fulfilment of the principle which he believes should be fundamental to society: the unity of the human family.

Could I ever feel safe in my right and duty to struggle for Equality between the working men and the so-called Upper Classes of my own country if I did not deeply and warmly believe in your own right and duty? Is your question less sacred than that of the Abolition of Slavery in America, or of serfdom elsewhere? Ought it not to be even more sacred to us when we think of our mothers and remember that the most important period – the first period – of our education, is entrusted to you? (Mazzini 1922, 3: 233)

For Mazzini, feminist demands in fact correspond to the divine project which envisages no sort of differentiation between human beings, all called to take an active part in society's progress:

Yes, we are all the children of God, free and equal in Him; and it is high time, after eighteen hundred and seventy years since the word was spoken, and whilst new religious truths are already dawning on the horizon, for its being practically understood and applied in its direct consequences to human life and society. One God, one Life, one Law of Life: this is or ought to be our common belief; and wherever God's baptism lives, wherever the stamp of Humanity is on a created being, there we will find Free-will, Educability, tendency to Association, capability of indefinite progression, a source of the same general duties and rights, a leading principle to legislation in all branches of human activity. (Mazzini 1922, 3: 234)

In the Mazzinian aspiration for the moral and material improvement of peoples, no nation, just as no individual, can be excluded without compromising the general aim. Everyone has been endowed with faculties and the capacity to contribute to progress, and so for Mazzini women's demands for equality cannot be judged of lesser importance or made subordinate to others:

Your claim is the claim of the working man – of Nations cancelled, like Poland, by brutal force from Europe's map: of races dismembered, like the Slavonian, between foreign masters and doomed to silence. Like them all, you want to bring to the common work a new element of life and progress: you feel you have *something* to speak, legally and officially, towards the great problems which stir and torture the soul of mankind. (Mazzini 1922, 3: 234–15, emphasis in the original)

In concluding his letter Mazzini encourages Emilie and all the other women involved in the suffragist struggle to see their own action as part of a wider struggle, and to join with all those who are, like them, victims of injustice:

There is a holy crusade going on through the world for Justice, Freedom and Truth, against Lies and Tyranny. You are – battalion-like – fighting in it. Feel it and act accordingly. Sympathize with all who suffer and bleed, and you will be sympathized with: help and you will be helped. (Mazzini 1922, 3: 235)

## Conclusions

The passages cited leave little doubt regarding Mazzini's emancipationist ideas.<sup>23</sup> These place this Genoese exile within a small group of European thinkers who, in challenging established customs and the legislation then in force,<sup>24</sup> not only hoped for the end of

female social and legal subjugation, but also held that a change in the position of women was an essential measure for the realisation of their own political projects.<sup>25</sup> In the nineteenth-century European debate on democracy and the formation of national states, the issue of female emancipation found a place thanks to this group; with logical and well-researched argument, it dissected the supposed democratic spirit that held sway at the time, carefully analysing all the political, economic and social problems that related to the subjection of women, placing these problems in the wider perspective of the whole community, and giving intellectual and, above all, political dignity to the rights of women. Thanks to the telling closeness of the arguments and the practical as well as intellectual commitment of these writers, it can legitimately be argued that during the nineteenth century a trend of feminist thinking developed from the meetings and reflections of various thinkers; after encounters first in France and then in Britain, they no longer saw the rights of women as an issue to be resolved away from the real problems of politics, but as fundamental to their programmes for the regeneration of nations.

At more than a century after his death, and in rejection of his detractors' description of him as 'a mere Utopian – a dreamer of dreams' (Taylor 1875, vi), one must surely agree with what Mazzini wrote about himself: 'God knows that it is not for the living Italians but for Italy that I am working' (Mazzini 1922, 2: 147). His democratic project, and particularly his argument for the need to recognise equal male and female worth, was in fact only realised with the arrival of the Italian Republic in 1946 and the redrafting of the Constitution, which still regulates Italy's democratic life today. Within this there was no place for any clause that explicitly ran counter to the principle of equality of all human beings.<sup>26</sup>

Translated by Stuart Oglethorpe

## Notes

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2. On Mazzini as a protagonist in the European debate on democracy, see for example King (1912), Morelli (1965), Roberts (1989), Mack Smith (1993), Mastellone (2005a, 2005b, 2009), La Puma (2008).
3. On the cosmopolitan content of Mazzini's democratic project, see Urbinati (2008).
4. A friend of Carlyle and his wife testified to Mazzini's charisma: 'Mazzini was a man whom the hardest heart could not have repelled. When I saw him that first time I ceased to wonder at the religious enthusiasm that he excited everywhere. I understood how for thousands of men and women he was indisputable dogma, why all believed in him, and at his bidding hastened to confront danger and death' (Hinkley 1970, 141).
5. Some recent work has focused attention on Mazzini's thinking and his influence in the European and international sphere: see Bayly and Biagini (2008) and Bonanni (2006).
6. Subsequent quotations from Mazzini's *Doveri dell'uomo* of 1860 come from the 1862 translation into English by Emilie Ashurst Venturi, and page numbers given refer to this translation.
7. Although this work was published in 1860, Mazzini had been developing and refining it for more than a decade: '[t]he four first chapters of this work were published in the *Apostolato Popolare*, a journal issued by Mazzini for the Italian working men in England (1844). It was completed in the *Pensiero e azione* in 1858' (Ashurst Venturi 1875, 259).
8. On Mazzini's decision to choose exile, see for example Sarti (2005, 50–3).

9. The relationship with George Sand was initially characterised by shared ideals and plans, but subsequently compromised by their differing views on French socialism, and in particular on Louis Blanc, venerated by Sand but criticised by Mazzini, who was also unsparing in his criticism of other French intellectuals for their passive observation of Italian and European affairs. Unlike his friend, moreover, Mazzini was absolutely convinced that France's role as the intellectual beacon for Europe was now at an end: 'France no longer holds the initiative. You have closed an era, and others will open the new one: you will contribute to shared thinking, but you won't be at the forefront, putting it into action' (Luzzato 1947, 95).
10. On *Apostolato popolare* and the *Unione degli Operai Italiani*, see for example White Mario (1886), Tramarollo (1972), and Mazzini (1986).
11. The radical *People's Journal* enjoyed the collaboration of important intellectuals, both male and female (including Harriet Martineau), and often hosted articles on the rights of women in its pages; see Modugno (2005, 131).
12. On Harriet Taylor, see for example Crawford (2001), Urbinati (2001), Bock (2003), and Duran (2006).
13. In Parliament in 1867, Mill presented an amendment to Section 4 of the *Representation of the People Bill*, requesting replacement of the word 'man' with 'person', in order to remove any legislative obstacle to female suffrage. According to Mill himself this was his greatest direct contribution to the emancipationist and democratic struggle: 'perhaps the only really important public service I performed in the capacity of a Member of Parliament' (Mill 1873/1981, 285).
14. 'God has created you susceptible of *Education*. Therefore it is your duty to educate yourselves as far as lies in your power, and it is your right that the Society to which you belong shall not impede your education, but assist you in it, and supply you with the means thereof when you have them not. Your liberty, your rights, your emancipation from every injustice in your social position, the task which each of you is bound to fulfil on earth, all these depend upon the degree of education you are able to attain. Without education, you are incapable of rightly choosing between good and evil: you cannot acquire a true knowledge of your rights; you cannot attain that participation in political life without which your complete social emancipation is impossible; you cannot arrive at a correct definition and comprehension of your own mission. Education is the bread of your soul. Without it your faculties lie dormant and unfruitful, even as the vital power lies sterile in the seed cast into untilled soil, and deprived of the benefits of irrigation, and the watchful labour of the Agriculturist' (Mazzini 1862, 139–40).
15. The issue of education and its emancipatory function was a central element in the thought and action of Mazzini and some of the women who worked with him, including Giorgina Craufurd Saffi and Jessie White Mario. See for example Certini (1998) and Gazzetta (2003).
16. Mazzini also recalled this English family with affection in his *Note autobiografiche*: 'I must make mention here of the Ashurst family, a good and beloved family who surrounded me with loving care to the extent that sometimes I forgot my state of exile, inasmuch as the memory of my loved ones, who died without me near them, would permit this' (Mazzini 1986, 303–4).
17. On Mazzini's intellectual and emotional bonds with English women see, for example, Pesman (2006).
18. James Stansfeld (1820–1898), son of a respected judge and member of the British parliament, after studying law went into trade which he thought would be more remunerative than the legal profession. He met Mazzini in 1844 at his father-in-law's house and developed a strong friendship with him, standing by him and supporting him in his dream of unification. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1859 and remained there until 1895. In Parliament he was noted for his attention to the needs of the destitute, but particularly for his attention to the issues relating to female emancipation, to the extent that he should be placed among the leading advocates for the rights of women: 'Nobody looking back at the change which has come over all questions connected with the position of women in the last half-century will doubt Stansfeld's title to a place among the forces that have moulded opinion and events' (Hammond and Hammond 1932, vii).
19. Taylor was not only a prominent member of the People's International League and the Friends of Italy association, but together with his wife made large donations to Mazzinian initiatives. See for example Mazzini's letter to Clementia Taylor of 1856 (1941, 167–9), and various letters to Peter Taylor (Mazzini 1940, 222–3; 255–7; 293–5; 301–2; 1941, 197).

20. On Mazzini's republicanism see, for example, Roberts (1989).
21. According to Mazzini the first step along this path is the formation of free and independent nations, consisting of associations of equals all sharing and accepting a ruling principle. For Mazzini the nation can in fact 'arise only through the action, will, and choices of the subjects who form part of it' (Banti 2008, 59).
22. On women and the Risorgimento see Banti and Ginsborg (2007).
23. Some ways that Mazzini described woman, his sometimes affected and courteous ways of addressing his many female correspondents, indicating his Romantic education, and the contribution of these women particularly in gathering funds, have all led some writers to claim that Mazzini saw women as having a 'private' rather than 'public' role: '[p]ublic duties (politics, war) are the exclusive preserve of the man, while the woman, who, so far as Mazzini is concerned, is "The Angel of the Family" and who, as "Mother, wife and sister", embodies all of "the sweetness of life", inhabits spaces defined by domesticity, chastity, and motherhood' (Banti 2008, 67–8). The passages reproduced in this article, similarly to other work (O'Connor 1998; Pesman 2006), provide an opportunity to reconsider the one-sided nature of this interpretation.
24. Both Mazzini's arguments and his charisma also crossed the Atlantic, as seen in the words of the American William Lloyd Garrison, a journalist, social reformer, and in particular a prominent member of the American abolitionist movement and convinced supporter of female suffrage: '[i]t was because his soul was full-orbed, his love of liberty unlimited by considerations of race or clime, that I felt drawn to him by an irresistible magnetism. In him there was not discoverable one spark of self-inflation, one atom of worldly ambition, one symptom of narrowness towards any people. Spherical as the globe, he deprecated "that spirit of nationalism which retards the progress of our intellectual life by isolating it from the universal life palpitating among the millions of our brethren abroad"' (Ashurst Venturi 1875, 2).
25. Despite there being an extensive bibliography on Mazzini, only a few authors, for example La Puma (2008) and Roberts (1989), have devoted attention to this aspect of his thinking; it has, by contrast, often been ignored or regarded as peripheral. In this regard, see for example Mack Smith (1993); Sarti (2005); Bayly and Biagini (2008).
26. The Constituent Assembly, elected in 1946, was the first national assembly in which women could participate on an equal footing to men, following an election based on universal suffrage, and had the task of drawing up Italy's first republican constitution. On the role of women in this Assembly, see for example Falchi (2001).

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