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Patriotism and Internationalism in the ‘Oath of Allegiance’ to Young Europe

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Abstract: This article examines the ‘Oath of Allegiance’ of an international semi-secret society, Young Europe. The society’s programme defined the struggle to create democratic republics throughout Europe in the first half of the 19th century. Its founding documents and charter in 1834 represented radical shifts in both the ideas and practice of European republicans on the principles of liberty and equality, and in the conceptualization of a trinity that linked republican patriotism to both nationalism and internationalism. The society also offered new understandings of both fraternity and humanity. The doctrine combined the working of international and national organizations as the blueprint with which to construct republics. The emergence of Young Europe signified a change in both the ideological language and in the core values of republicans. It also represented a break in its organizational principles; in its conception of the nation and the nation’s role within the republic; and in the appreciation of the international role of republicans.

Key Words: Europe, internationalism, nationalism, patriotism, republicanism

A momentous conflict raged between republicans and empire throughout 19th-century Europe. Republicans from all over the continent organized together in various ways to attempt to overturn an order they found both unjust and immoral. The programme of one of these associations, an international society called Young Europe, defined the struggle to create democratic republics throughout Europe in the first half of the 19th century. Its founding charter, The Pact of Fraternity, was signed at Berne in Switzerland in the spring of 1834; The General Instructions for Initiates emerged soon afterwards. These two documents represented radical shifts in both the ideas and practice of European republicans on the principles of liberty and equality, and in the conceptualization of a trinity that linked republican patriotism to both nationalism and internationalism. The society also offered new understandings of both fraternity and humanity, explaining the type of ties and links that held people together on a local, national and international basis. It was a doctrine which combined the working of international
and national organizations as the blueprint with which to construct republics. Accordingly, the emergence of Young Europe signified a change in the ideological language and in the core values of republicans. It also represented a break from the past in other ways: in its organizational principles and the practical means with which to obtain republican goals; in its conception of the nation and the nation’s role within the republic; in the appreciation of the international role of republicans and the correct structure within which to operate internationally.  

All these ideas will be explored through the key themes in Young Europe’s Oath of Allegiance, sworn by all initiates to the society, that is to be found at the end of the General Instructions. Yet the oath itself cannot be understood except in terms of a distinct methodological approach which seeks to retrieve a lost discussion, using new archival sources, and a delineation of the many contexts in which republicans operated. This debate was part of a tradition of thought and practice that has been elided from the history of political thought. In seeking to recapture these voices, the aim here is to portray the very moment and the means by which influential ideas first emerged in the public sphere – what Franco Venturi described as the search for the ‘active moment’ of an idea, when notions such as liberty, patriotism and fraternity were generated and defined. This cannot be achieved by relying upon ‘seminal texts’, but rather by an approach that locates these debates within the political and intellectual spheres where they operated: both the locally based societies and associations, and their pamphlets, declarations and doctrines, as well as the actual physical battlegrounds of insurrection, rebellion, conspiracy and other arenas where the practical attempts to apply the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity were being forged. Furthermore, this was not a conversation that was being held exclusively within closed political communities, but most critically one that took place across national and state boundaries – one of the reasons, perhaps, for its concealment. Thus what we find here are not the roots of national primacy or transnational cosmopolitanism, but rather an entirely new conception of the nation; one that is enhanced yet entirely subsumed within the framework of the republic, and within the universal principles of republicanism.

This eruption of new ideas had been developed and defined in republican associations through the wars, insurrections and revolutions of the previous few years. The members of Young Europe belonged to several distinct national and political communities, and had developed their ideas by drawing on a wide cross-current of republican thought and practice from all over Europe. For republicans in Europe, the early 1830s was a time of secret ‘fraternal’ action, above all. This fraternal action was conducted in diverse ways, mostly through various networks. First were the political networks that existed between republican national organizations in the different towns across Europe, especially the large towns of the eastern borders of France, such as Mulhouse, Strasbourg, Besançon, and towns of West Germany, such as Frankfurt, and Swiss towns such as Berne and Lausanne.

Refugees of various nationalities congregated in precarious situations, often
expelled by the authorities, constantly moving to take up exile, in locations where they were, as yet, unknown (except amongst underground republican networks). The towns in northern Italy, under the multiple regimes of kings, princes and popes, such as Genoa, Bologna, Livorno, Alexandretta, were connected in a stream of fragile webs with capitals and centres of empire everywhere (Paris, Geneva, Vienna), industrial capitals such as Lyon, and ports such as Marseilles. Another layer of network existed through the supra-national organizations that operated in these towns and were used by republicans of different national aspirations, for both distinct and united republican goals, including soldiers and exiles as well as local republicans in local associations.

The other means of exchanging ideas was through the vast republican production and dissemination of leaflets and brochures, and petitions, declarations and tracts of different republican associations and societies. Amongst this broad, but uneven and scattered, array of documents that have survived, and are to be found in national libraries and local archives across Europe, one can trace vibrant debates concerning notions of liberty, social equality, the rights of labourers, republican virtues, war, insurrection and revolution, and other issues of concern to those engaged in the struggle to establish democratic republics in place of empire. Fraternal action through these networks was created and developed between individual members of different national organizations, and was often initiated by those who had already fought together for republican goals in Russia, Spain, Greece or (especially) conquered Poland. This fraternal action across boundaries was central to republican philosophy, and understanding this is essential to appreciate the republicanism of the period, as well as the meaning of patriotism and internationalism. So Young Europe grew out of a complex and highly developed debate on political organization, and was itself rooted in several distinct national and supra-national secret societies.

The first types of organization were the nationally directed secret societies. There were a number of them, and they evolved and splintered and amalgamated with great regularity during the 1830s, all of them writing charters, manifestos, and each containing particular organizational principles, codes, oaths and rituals. They worked in far closer association with republicans from other national groups than has been previously assumed. Many of these nationally based societies had formal agreements with other republican national societies. The French Société de Droits de l’Homme, one of the leading republican associations of the early July Monarchy, had informal links with German, Polish and Italian societies as part of the 1833 European-wide revolutionary conspiracy. The Polish refugee republicans in Switzerland created their own branch of this French society, using it officially as an educative and reading circle between 1833 and 1834, but secretly as an insurrectionary unit with links to the French republicans in Lyon. Buonarroti’s Veri Itali was closely linked to the Apofasimeni, which worked for Italian unity but was made up of both Greek and Italian patriots, and Mazzini’s Giovine Italia had an international section with Poles, French, Scandinavians and
Germans in it. The secret societies of the Poles were in the main both military and conspiratorial in character, but also reliant on international fraternity. These republican societies were driven by the central aim of installing a republican form of government. This was to be achieved through military coup or popular insurrection, and they saw these organizations as the central means for obtaining this goal. Articulating the shape of both associational power and organizational structure was thus, for republicans of the 1830s, a core imperative; the obvious benefits of secrecy and military command were contested by claims that the introduction of open debate and democratic structures were the necessary prerequisite for the establishment of democratic republics.

There were two great cosmopolitan societies of the period in Europe; they had existed for a long time, and they provided a ‘shelter’ or a ‘cover’ for republicans. Not entirely republican in either character or structure, these great societies catered to republicans’ essential needs – secrecy; mobility; lack of rigid principles; and providing the resource of an already existing organizational infrastructure on both international and national levels. The freemasons were the first to be exploited – Polish, German and Italian republicans often used their own national lodges as insurrectionary meeting places in the 1820s, and, particularly after the Great Polish Emigration of 1831, Polish refugees moved through republican circles within particular French lodges throughout France after the defeat of the insurrection. The second great organization was the Carbonari: it too was not exclusively republican, but it was used as an international coalition by republicans. Unlike the freemasons whose core values could be seen as broadly sympathetic to republicanism, the most useful attribute of the international Carbonari was that they were dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Holy Empire. What also distinguished the Carbonari from the freemasons was that their declared purpose was conspiratorial action, rather than progressive enlightenment. Yet the Carbonari were increasingly seen as a brake on republican action rather than its initiator, as they were characterized by elitism and obscurantism, and permeated with spies and adventurers. In the words of Trélat, the founder of the 1820s French Charbonnerie, it was no more than an ‘intermediate phase between the despotism of empire and the reign of publicity’. The creation of Young Europe was an attempt by the republican democrats of the period to break free of the Carbonari, and their ‘cosmopolitan jesuitism’, a move away from a hierarchical, elitist and closed order of submission. This captured the deep rift then emerging among European republicans between emancipation through authority and centralized control, and emancipation through participatory decision-making and equal associational membership.

All the secret societies of the early 1830s had general principles and articles of faith, sets of organizational rules and instructions; all had oaths and initiation rites attached to them. These last were created mainly in order to bind members to the secrecy necessary in their struggle against the empires’ armies and police. Lives were continually jeopardized, republicans thrown into prison or sent into...
exile, many years of careful planning destroyed by the activities of spies, or by those who betrayed their former friends. But many of these oaths represent far more than the simple need to express loyalty to an order or to maintain security. They cast light on the principles held by the individuals who took these oaths, and as such they open a window into the distinct conception of patriotism to which its members were committed.

At the moment of its founding in the spring of 1834, the republicans who formed the society of Young Europe set out their doctrine in the *Pact of Fraternity* and the *General Instructions for Initiators*. This was not simply the creation of yet another new society. It was an act which severed its founders from the many national and international societies of which they had been central members until that moment. This was a serious step, and accordingly the oath itself was carefully constructed, its precise wording negotiated among republicans from significantly different national positions. The Oath of Allegiance, coming at the end of the *General Instructions*, although redolent with the symbolism and language of republican societies of the early 1830s, was also a fundamental departure from those societies. It asked the individual to swear:

I, XXX, Believe:

That by the law of God, and of Humanity all men are equals – That all are free – That all are brothers. Equal in rights and duties, Free in the exercise of their faculties, For the good of all. Brothers walking in a common accord towards the conquest of this same good and to the accomplishment of human destinies.

Believe:

That virtue is itself action. That wherever there is inequality, oppression, or violation of human fraternity, it is the right and the duty of each man to oppose it, to work to destroy it, and to assist all oppressed against their oppressors. Convinced that the Union makes strength and that the league formed by oppressors can only be vanquished by an alliance of oppressed of all countries. Having faith in the future, I give my name to Young Europe, Association of the oppressed of all countries against the oppressors of all countries, and marching with them towards the conquest of liberty, equality, and human fraternity. I devote my thoughts, my faculties, and my endeavours to the struggle that the Association is waging, against all those men, castes, or peoples who violate the law of God and Humanity, challenging by force, artifice, and privilege over equality, liberty, and fraternity of men and of peoples. I associate to all its endeavours everywhere, and for all, under the direction of those who represent the Association. I recognize as my brothers all members of Young Europe and commit towards them all the duties of fraternity in whatever place and time they ask it of me. I promise to reveal to no one all that would be confided by the Association under the seal of secrecy. This I swear, ready to seal, if needs be, my faith with my own blood. And if I were to break my Oath, may I cast out, with infamy and shame, from the ranks of Young Europe – may my name be synonymous with that of traitor – and may the evil that I do fall back on my head.

Various ideological sources are apparent in this oath, gathered together from what normally are seen as four very distinct political traditions. The concept of fraternity (and its associated term, humanity) was deployed in a number of intellectual frameworks by the 1830s: the radical republican, which prioritized social
equality over constitutional freedom and individual liberties; the Kantian/cosmo-
politan, as articulated in Sismondi and the writings of Maurice Mochnacki, which
aspired to create an international community which transcended national and
state boundaries; the national, which thought any meaningful fraternity could
only operate within the boundaries of the political community; and the Saint-
Simonian, where the emphasis was upon a religious spiritual redemption of
humanity, similar to the Polish ‘mission’ strand, such as Mickiewicz, and the
liberation theology of the French priest Lammenais.\textsuperscript{16} To have elements from
these four strands juxtaposed was entirely unprecedented. Yet their fusion proved
not only possible for the republicans of Young Europe, but entirely viable as well
as necessary.\textsuperscript{17}

Furthermore, although it actually drew from these four strands, the Oath of
Allegiance was not simply an amalgamation of them, but something entirely dis-
tinctive. It was new in the way it synthesized these principles and also in how it
juxtaposed them – an ordering which shaped the meaning of the principles them-
selves. The notion of fraternity was conjoined by another, crucial conception, that
of humanity, which attempted to define what lay beyond the sentimental borders
of one’s own people and also the associational framework in which to view this
sentiment. It concerned the type of attachment to nations not your own, and
defined the relationship to them, both as an individual and as a national group.
Additionally, it articulated the linking between these two attachments, that of a
people to all other peoples. Finally, the overall structure that operated as a ful-
crum for the attachments between republican individuals and between republican
nation states – the society of Young Europe – was the body to which one held the
ultimate attachment, and provided the mechanism for their expression.

Accordingly, one of the main innovations here were the levels of commitment
and duties that were to bind members of Young Europe to each other, and then
their own national communities, as well as to other communities, and the
individuals therein. More precisely, these commitments were not defined con-
centrically, as an ever decreasing circle of commitments and duties, as usually
advanced in claims for ‘liberal nationalism’. Rather they were a web of lines which
crossed and recrossed, binding the individual, the group and other peoples, as well
as a link from individuals to all individuals beyond the nation state. These attach-
ments were made up of spheres and tiers of responsibilities at the individual, asso-
ciational, national and supra-national levels. These affiliations were what defined
the many public spaces where one practised republicanism as an individual, and
lived in the republic (even before its creation as a republican society), and worked
in an association with republicans from other nations. This vision of the nation
was sacred, but it was one where the nation was not the ultimate horizon of human
existence. It was a vision of humanity which began in the particular, the individual.
Yet it was a republican sentiment that expressed itself in a dual capacity to extend
love to the homeland and to all humanity equally. The oath celebrated a ‘devotion’
to ‘equality, liberty, and fraternity of men and of peoples’. 
Within the phrases of this oath can be found the principles and values that united the members of Young Europe, and which they sought to implement through the application of republican virtues. The principles of national independence; of fraternal and free relations between nations; of liberty, equality and humanity; of mutual defence, solidarity, progress and development; and the dual preservation of the individual's and the nation's freedoms could also all be found here. These ‘points of faith’ were comprehensive, no compromises or conditionality were introduced in this broad and generous vision of necessary components. This goal was to be attained through action – indeed, virtue was itself described as action – for the members of Young Europe, the central endeavour was to reach this vision, rather than theorize about it. Although it was the primary virtue, action was to be practised within a family of others, fraternity foremost amongst them, and combined with others, such as courage and hope. Relying upon these virtues was what made this group of international republicans so confident that they could overturn the old order. At the heart of the society’s doctrine was the understanding of their current predicament as one of oppression, and that struggle was the essential means by which to relieve themselves of it. Finally, at the centre of this oath was an attachment to a complicated and sophisticated set of allegiances that were required of its members, the implications of which will now be outlined.

In grasping the texture, complexities and structures that underpinned a body politic where these types of associational and individual links were possible – indeed common – we are thus brought to explore a range of philosophical and theoretical understandings hitherto concealed. In recapturing these lost debates about patriotism, fraternity, liberty and humanity which were set within a comprehensive political sphere, the questions we can draw from this discussion have altered substantively, since the scope of the scholarly arena under analysis has both deepened and expanded. Accordingly, the way to understand this oath and its exact meaning is to appreciate it as the product of an intellectual, ethical and territorial framework. The theory of patriotism which this oath reflected emerged directly out of the situation these republicans found themselves in – the state of political order of their countries, of the societies they belonged to in order to overturn this order, the political and military challenges they faced, their experiences of recent defeats and failed insurrections. It is, further, a reasoned, expressive and theorized response to their predicament, and was set out as a practical solution to it. This theory of patriotism was an attachment to republican institutions and values, but was not grounded in identification with official state institutions, which were producing a patriotic literature based on a loyalty that was embodied either in the monarch/emperor or the nation.

What did the Oath of Allegiance mean in concrete terms? For a republican like Alexander Dybowski, founder member of Young Europe, it offered an articulation of the type of republicanism he then practised, which was rooted in deep and inextricable sentiments and commitments within the structure of republican
societies, as well as across national lines with other republicans. Dybowski was exiled from Poland at the age of 20 for participating in the national insurrection, where he won a medal for patriotism and bravery. For him, the oath reflected the first experiences of a political refugee and was shaped by the particular discussions and debates then ongoing within French, German and Swiss republican associations. It was more than a tangible consequence of the months of association and networking with French Carbonari and local freemasons in Besançon where he and other Poles had taken refuge, and the frustrations that most republicans were experiencing with these older organizations. Rather, the oath distilled and defined a particular outcome to these consequences, being intricately related to them, and represented an advance in ideas that emerged from these discussions. It was, equally, a reaction to the debates outside the republican fold of many of his compatriots; on nationalism, and on the virtues of immediate republican military action over a current of conformity with (and acceptance of) the current balance of power – a conformity based on a pessimistic rejection of the chances of creating change, and the possibilities of successful mobilization.

Young Europe’s thinking was highly innovative in other areas as well. Once understood to be an outcome of theorizing about a political predicament, it has much to offer and to contribute to other areas of the history of thought about republicanism, as well as modern political theory.15 It can thus engage with current debates about social justice, citizenship, nationalism and patriotism, and the traditions in which these debates emerged in the 19th century. Notions of liberty and independence from slavery, both at the individual and state level, of the centrality of war in the construction of republics, and the structure of organizational mobilization and future political societies; all these were developed and advanced within the thought and actions of these small movements and associations, entering the republican intellectual mainstream once they had been forged in the crucible of republicanism itself.

Notes


3. The 1830 July Revolution in France had triggered revolutions abroad, in Belgium and Poland in particular (the latter leading to a year-long national insurrection against

4. Most of the Carbonari in local towns were branches of friendship societies, especially solidarity associations with the Poles. This activity was initiated by La Fayette, who sat on the Haute Vente of the Carbonari. Other international societies with local branches were the Amis des Peuples, and the Société du Droits des Hommes et du Citoyen. Local voluntary militias were the other locus of underground republican activity amongst French, Italian and German soldiers. Archives Nationales, Paris, CC619 Correspondance Communiquée par le Garde des Sceaux et le Ministre de l’Intérieur, Dossier 9. Letter from the head of police. Préfecture du Bas Rhin, Strasbourg, 16 April 1833.


6. The republican leader and writer Garnier-Pagès, a mason, carbonaro and founder of the society Aide toi le Ciel t’aidera, worked with the Polish republican leadership to direct Poles beginning to arrive in France at the end of 1831, after the defeat of the national insurrection of 1830–1. Bibliothèque Polonaise, Paris. ‘Documents pour servir a l’histoire des sociétés populaires sous la monarchie de juillet. La Societé Aide toi le ciel t’aidera’, La Révolution de 1848. 1914–16, p. 375. Other French republican leaders, such as Godefroy Cavaignac and Armand Marrast, signed cooperation agreements for revolutionary insurrections with both Italian and Polish republicans in early 1833. At the Hamburg festival in 1832, German, Swiss, Scandinavian, Italian, French, Hungarian and Polish republicans made fraternal agreements which they implemented through conspiratorial action and insurrections between 1832 and 1834.


9. The Vengeance of the People, created after the French government closed the National Committee in Exile in Paris in 1833, was an amalgam of two societies, including ‘The Nameless One’ created to implement a project to begin a new insurrection in Galicia under the command of Colonel Joseph Żalewski, in coordination with associated actions in Lyons and Frankfurt, and with help of French, German and Swiss republicans. Memoire sur un Plan de Campagne pour l’Insurrection de la Pologne préparée en 1833,
BP 466, Dossier F. Gordszewski, Bibliothèque Polonaise, Paris. See also Adam Lewak (1920) *From Carbonari Unions to Young Europe, the Polish Emigration and the Legion in Switzerland* (Od zwiazków weglarskich do Młodej Polski, dzieje emigracji i legjonu polskiego w Szwajcarii). Warsaw: Biblioteki Rapperswalskiej.


13. For example, Binder, one of the most successful spies of the Austro-Hungarian empire, filing constant police reports to Vienna. W. von Binder (1843) *Diplomatische Geschichte der polnischen Emigration*, p. 89 (appendix 3). Stuttgart: J.F. Cast. The devastating role of Accursi, trusted friend of Mazzini, who betrayed the Giovine Italia expedition to liberate the Savoy by Italian, Polish and German Republicans, only came to light over a century later, through a discovery in the Papal State archives. See also the memoirs of France’s Chief of Police: Lucien de la Hodde (1850) *Histoire des Sociétés Secrètes et du Parti Républicain de 1830 à 1848*. Paris: Julien Lanier et Cie.


15. The Act of 15 April 1834, on the Foundation of Alliance between three nations, Poland, Italy and Germany; Profession of Universal Faith; and the Pact of Fraternity, Młoda Polska, file Młoda Polska, PPS 105/II/63, pp. 98, 98a, 98b. Archiwim Akt Nowych, Warsaw.


18. On the broader principles of the Society of Young Europe, see Mazzini (n. 1), vol. 3.


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