

Abstract: 'Massimo d'Azeglio and his brothers'

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In the Italian Risorgimento, family provided an important basis for political belonging for Left and Right, and in both practical and symbolic terms. The family was a source of material support and emotional comfort, and a powerful image of political and/or religious belonging. In this respect, the boundaries between public and private in the Risorgimento became (or remained) blurred and women acquired an active, albeit indirect, political role as the mothers and sisters of male patriots.

Yet, perhaps precisely because of the importance of family in the public arena (and the extent to which Left and Right shared a reliance on kinship ties) these boundaries between public and private life also shifted constantly and, in some cases, the politics of the nation divided families. Appeals to the union of family and nation could fall on deaf ears, and members of the same family might take up opposing positions on the issues of nationalism, liberalism and the struggle between Church and state. Familial discord over politics was perhaps an especially strong feature of noble families that had long enjoyed traditional ties to the Restoration monarchies, but with members of a new generation that saw the French Revolution as in some way a positive experience. Within the post-1815 noble generation, younger brothers proved especially prone to acts of rebellion, and they joined the republican cause, called for constitutional change and/or agitated for reductions in the power of the Catholic Church

In my paper, I focus on relations within three adult brothers in one noble family, the Piedmontese Taparelli d'Azeglio and their response to the political changes of the Risorgimento. Roberto, Prospero and Massimo d'Azeglio's relationship survived physical separation, quarrels over the use of the family name, divergent lifestyles and markedly different political and religious beliefs. Their personal attachments, as well as the disputes between them, reflect the complexities of public and private in the Risorgimento as well as the awkward

transition in nineteenth-century Italy from ancien regime to the more democratic politics of the French Revolution

At the same time, a study of the relationship between the three brothers points to the importance of considering generic symbols of national belonging, such as family and brotherhood, together with their individual impact and reception. Thus, the intense, detailed correspondence between the three brothers, and especially the affection between Massimo, the moderate liberal, and Prospero, the Jesuit priest, challenges a now common assumption that political passions were the only thing that mattered in the Risorgimento, or that its protagonists were enslaved to the appeal of 'deep' political images derived from basic emotional impulses. If, in public, Massimo was obliged to choose between loyalty to the nation and the call of God, in private, he negotiated this dilemma with relative ease.

Granted, the political rivalries and alliances of the Risorgimento were important. However, we should not confuse a political rhetoric that exalted the all-embracing bonds of national belonging with the realities of particular lived experience. Massimo and Prospero d'Azeglio derived private pleasure from their political quarrels and both proved more than able to distinguish between the demands of public ambition and the ties of intimate love. Moreover, they took great pains to confine their relationship to the private sphere, and their relationship points to the existence of a restricted, private space in the Risorgimento that provided a loving refuge from the heartlessness of public life, but it equally suggests that this domestic sphere was not exclusively the domain of women. Prospero and Massimo's enduring friendship is a testament to the importance of studying the personal lives of public figures. It should also remind us that the aspects of patriots' private life that were kept hidden from the public gaze are, for historians, often more illuminating than those parts of their private life they employed in the pursuit of political goals.