

# **Cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol from 1919 to 2019**



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**'Cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol from 1919 to 2019'**

### **Short abstract**

This thesis concerns the multilingual border province of South Tyrol, annexed by Italy in September 1919 following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It covers the period between 1919 and the centenary of the annexation in September 2019.

The primary research questions are:

- a) Is it possible to speak of a South Tyrolean cultural identity and, if so, how can it be defined?
- b) What is the precise nature of South Tyrol's multilingualism and its impact on South Tyrolean cultural identity?

The thesis uses an external perspective – independent of the individual language groups in South Tyrol – to explore the tensions between competing views of the province as a haven of multilingualism, a province irreconcilably divided along cultural and linguistic lines, or a transit land between Italy and the German-speaking world. The thesis examines how far the distinctiveness of the three main language groups – German, Italian and Ladin – precludes their influence on each other. It considers the differences *within* language groups, looking at how different identities can co-exist as part of the same broad language community. It brings together fictional and non-fictional written contributions, oral interventions, and artefacts of memory culture to model an

approach to debates on cultural identity and multilingualism which integrates the perspectives of groups and individuals that have previously not been addressed in detail or only in isolation from the broader discussion.

The thesis argues that in order to develop an understanding of cultural identity in South Tyrol, it is necessary to analyse the particular constellation of factors which affect the cultural identity formation of the individual groups, their interactions and their development over time. These include geographical factors, historical and political factors, cultural and social factors, and not least the linguistic and literary expression of the different groups that participate in the province of South Tyrol.

## Long abstract

This thesis concerns the multilingual border province of South Tyrol, annexed by Italy in September 1919 following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It covers the period between 1919 and the centenary of the annexation in September 2019. The thesis title reflects the significance of language as a key aspect of cultural identity. South Tyrol's status as a multilingual border region is a major factor characterising the debate around identity in the province. Moreover, the particular circumstances of South Tyrol's multilingualism further differentiate the province from other multilingual border regions, in that South Tyrol's multilingualism is the result of a politically-imposed change of borders. It was annexed by Italy despite the fact that, according to the last census conducted before the annexation, less than 3% of the population was Italian-speaking.<sup>1</sup>

The primary research questions are:

- a) Is it possible to speak of a South Tyrolean cultural identity and, if so, how can it be defined?
- b) What is the precise nature of South Tyrol's multilingualism and its impact on South Tyrolean cultural identity?

The thesis uses an external perspective – independent of the individual language groups in South Tyrol – to explore the tensions between competing views of the province as a haven of multilingualism, a province irreconcilably divided along cultural and linguistic lines, or a transit land between Italy and the German-speaking world. It examines how far the distinctiveness of the three main language groups – German, Italian and Ladin –

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<sup>1</sup> Gregorio Gobbi and Katrin Schenk, eds, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', *Landesinstitut für Statistik*, [https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz\\_2019\(3\).pdf](https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz_2019(3).pdf) [accessed 12 June 2021], p. 19.

precludes their influence on each other. It explores the differences *within* language groups, looking at how different identities can co-exist as part of the same broad language community. The significance of the fact that the German, Italian and Ladin-speaking communities all share cultural and linguistic allegiances with communities outside South Tyrol is also considered, specifically when exploring the possibility of shared identities beyond national or provincial borders. The thesis brings together fictional and non-fictional written works, oral interventions, and artefacts of memory culture to model an approach to debates on cultural identity and multilingualism which integrates the perspectives of groups and individuals that have previously not been addressed in detail.

This thesis makes cross-cultural and cross-language connections between historical narratives, literary works and political developments, areas that have mostly been addressed separately and from the perspective of one particular language group. It analyses the significance of political developments for relations between language groups and considers the importance of written works by authors and cultural commentators, both as a response to these political developments and as a space for facilitating intercultural negotiation and exchange. The thesis specifically focuses on the evolving influence of South Tyrol's multilingualism on questions of cultural identity in the province, stressing how the use of language as both an exclusive identity marker and a tool of oppression has complicated its influence on identity formation. The role of memory culture in mediating between complex cross-cultural, cross-language narratives is discussed in Chapter Six. The importance of geographical factors is considered throughout, particularly their role in shaping and limiting interactions between language communities.

The thesis contributes both to wider moves towards transnationalising Modern Languages research and to scholarship on South Tyrol. The *Transnational Modern Languages* series has highlighted how aligning multiple aspects of cultural life with a particular nation state and language is a powerful yet problematic construct which can suppress diversity. This issue gains particular importance in the volume *Transnational German Studies* (2020), where Rebecca Braun and Benedict Schofield observe that ‘the transnational is certainly a term which invites reflection on a stable concept of nation-based identity’.<sup>2</sup> Using South Tyrol as a case study for looking at discussions surrounding cultural identity and multilingualism emphasises how a complex province which is influenced by different cultures, languages and identities and which does not correspond to conventional geographical, cultural and linguistic borders can be subject to a sense of ongoing instability. This instability is in fact intrinsic to South Tyrol’s value as a case study for the wider field of German Studies: the particular situation of the province demonstrates how approaching topics from a cross-border, cross-cultural and cross-language perspective can lead to new, more nuanced insights which might be missed by a monocultural, monolingual approach that gains its definition from national borders.

Most scholarship specifically concerning South Tyrol has so far focused on particular aspects of the province in isolation, such as its complex twentieth-century history, political developments, fictional writing by South Tyrolean authors and, more recently, its developing memory culture in the twenty-first century. Moreover, many

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Braun and Benedict Schofield, ‘Introduction: Transnationalizing German Studies’, in *Transnational German Studies*, ed. by Rebecca Braun and Benedict Schofield (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 1-13 (p. 4).

contributions approach South Tyrol from a perspective informed primarily by linguistics. The thesis does consider the specific role of language in identity formation, mainly in Chapter One. However, this question is primarily pursued by examining how the distinctive role of language within identity formation is discussed in contemporary written works by German, Italian and Ladin-speaking South Tyrolean authors. Furthermore, much research on South Tyrol has focused on the situation of one of its language groups or is written from the perspective of a particular community. This thesis, by contrast, is primarily concerned with the interaction between different language groups.

This study is broadly situated in cultural history and specifically offers a contribution to research on identity formation in multilingual communities. A key purpose of the thesis is to demonstrate the importance of attending to a wide range of cultural fields, interventions and artefacts when investigating contested cultural identity, and the corresponding need for a variety of research perspectives.

Due to its focus on the specific cultural diversity of South Tyrol, this present study has been partly inspired by the work of previous researchers discussing the specificities of South Tyrolean literature, what distinguishes it from work by writers in Austria, Germany and the rest of Italy, and if there is even a South Tyrolean literature at all. Throughout the thesis, similar questions are explored in relation to the particularities of cultural identity formation in the province. The thesis will initially explore the cultural and linguistic dynamics of South Tyrol before going on to consider the complex constellation of factors which have influenced the formation of cultural identity. From the second chapter onwards, a broadly chronological approach will elucidate the

development of identity in South Tyrol, analysing a variety of written genres before focusing on twenty-first century developments in South Tyrolean memory culture in the final chapter.

While multilingualism and cultural identity are connected, the overlap between them is not absolute. The thesis shows that in order to develop an understanding of cultural identity in South Tyrol, it is necessary to analyse the particular constellation of factors which affect the cultural identity formation of the individual groups, their interactions and their development over time. These include geographical factors, historical and political factors, cultural and social factors, and not least the linguistic and literary expression of the different groups that participate in the province of South Tyrol.

The fictional and non-fictional works, oral interventions and artefacts of memory culture examined in this thesis each advance the debate surrounding cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol. The thesis focuses on interventions from different time periods which changed the dynamics of the debate, also placing them in a wider cultural, linguistic, historical and political context. The cross-cultural, cross-language approach adopted in this study articulates key moments which shaped the development of South Tyrolean cultural identity, from the province's annexation in September 1919 through to Arno Kompatscher's pivotal speech marking the centenary of the annexation in September 2019.

The first chapter, **'Cultural identity and multilingualism in the light of political developments, 1919 to 2019'**, provides the historical and political context for the arguments of the thesis. It also refers to research on the province, insofar as it is relevant to the focus of this particular study. The chapter explores key events in South

Tyrol's history since 1919 that prompted debate surrounding cultural identity and multilingualism. A framework of four phases illuminates the dynamics of the debate between 1919 and 2019. These four phases show that what might appear to be an unstructured debate is in fact shaped by particular turning points which often correspond to political events but are not fully explained by them. This framework shows that as well as being linked to political events, the changing character of the debate is influenced by individual voices and cultural developments which may not be crucial to a historical study of South Tyrol, but which are highly pertinent when analysing cultural identity and multilingualism.

The second chapter is entitled '**The languages of South Tyrol: contemporary literary perspectives and their impact on identity**'. Using fictional and non-fictional texts by authors from each of South Tyrol's three main language groups, it proposes that an understanding of South Tyrol's specific linguistic and cultural dynamics – and particularly the evolving nature of multilingualism in the province – is essential to understanding the overall development of cultural identity in South Tyrol. The first part of the chapter outlines the complex and distinctive role of language in identity formation within each of the province's three main language communities from a perspective informed by linguistics. The second part focuses on how the protagonists in four selected texts perceive the role of language in their own cultural identity. The texts analysed are Toni Colleselli's semi-fictional short story collection *Reden: Siebzehn Sprechgeschichten aus Südtirol* (2011); Maxi Obexer's semi-autobiographical essay *Europas längster Sommer* (2017); Alessandro Banda's autobiographical travelogue *Due mondi e io vengo dall'altro* (2012) and Roberta Dapunt's Ladin poetry volume *Nauz* (2012).

The third chapter – entitled **‘The depiction of cultural identity between 1919 and 1945 through memoirs and diaries from South Tyrol and the surrounding area’** – considers the roots of cultural and linguistic conflict in South Tyrol by examining constructions of identity in memoirs and diaries which reflect on the momentous events between 1919 and 1945. The chosen texts are Claus Gatterer’s memoir *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (1969), Franz Thaler’s memoir *Unvergessen* (1988) and Fortunato Favai’s diary *Opzioni, guerra e resistenza nelle valli ladine* (2000). Their individual perspectives collectively give a sense of the cumulative effect of four key political measures on cultural identity formation in the province and surrounding area: the annexation and subsequent Italianisation, the *Option*,<sup>3</sup> and the Nazi occupation.

The fourth chapter is entitled **‘The debate on cultural identity from 1972 to 2019’**. It articulates how the contrasting interventions of two cultural figures helped to reshape the wider debate on cultural identity in South Tyrol. It compares the essays of politician and activist Alexander Langer from the 1980s and 1990s with the travelogue *Sangue e suolo* (1985) by journalist and author Sebastiano Vassalli. Langer’s and Vassalli’s contributions are used to explore how perceptions of intercultural and interlinguistic relations have developed since the period covered by the autobiographical sources discussed in Chapter Three. Langer’s and Vassalli’s differing responses to the societal changes facilitated by the Second Autonomy Statute (1972)<sup>4</sup> demonstrate how the shifting emphases of cultural identity formation following the Statute represented a

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<sup>3</sup> The *Option* of 1939 required all German and Ladin speakers in South Tyrol and the neighbouring province of Belluno to choose between remaining in their homeland and being subject to further Italianisation, and emigrating to the German Reich.

<sup>4</sup> The Second Autonomy Statute (1972) aimed to address the shortcomings of the First Autonomy Statute (1948), which was criticised by South Tyrol’s German and Ladin-speaking communities as being excessively favourable towards the province’s Italian speakers.

significant break with the time prior to its implementation, yet still retained the undercurrents of tension and mutual distrust between language groups which marked the post-war period.

The fifth chapter – **‘Identity and belonging in twenty-first century works by South Tyrolean authors’** – advances the exploration of cultural identity both chronologically and thematically. It considers how the issues of intercultural, interlingual harmony and belonging highlighted by Langer and Vassalli are treated in three creative literary texts published in the twenty-first century: Sabine Gruber’s novel *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* (2011), Stefano Zangrando’s Italian novel *Amateurs* (2016) and Ladin poet Roberta Dapunt’s poetry collection *La terra più del paradiso* (2008). The chapter explores how the undercurrents of disharmony between language groups highlighted by Langer’s and Vassalli’s work in the 1980s and 1990s have since commanded much wider interest and prompted more broadly based debate.

The sixth and final chapter is entitled **‘Memory culture in South Tyrol: Marking the centenary of the province’s annexation in 1919’**. The chapter uses the centenary of South Tyrol’s annexation as a reference point for considering what the province’s evolving memory culture reveals about the evolution of cultural identity formation between 1919 and 2019. The chapter initially focuses on two twenty-first century South Tyrolean artefacts of memory culture in Bolzano. The exhibition underneath the Fascist Victory Monument in Bolzano (2014)<sup>5</sup> and the *Stolpersteine* memorials to victims of Nazism (‘Stumbling Stones’, 2015) are notable for marking a new approach to the

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<sup>5</sup> The exhibition in Bolzano is situated underneath the Victory Monument, which Mussolini ordered to be built in 1926. It explores both the controversial and divisive history of the Victory Monument, and South Tyrol’s complex history between 1918 and 1945.

province's history which explicitly engages with its complexity. The chapter subsequently explores how far the notion of challenging established interpretations of history was later integrated into mainstream political discourse during commemorations to mark the centenary of the annexation in September 2019. Particular attention is afforded to a speech given in Meran by South Tyrol's German-speaking governor Arno Kompatscher, which challenged the deep-rooted notion that all South Tyroleans were victims of both the Fascist and the Nazi regimes, known as the *Opferthese* ('victim theory').

The centenary commemorations are key in shaping both the questions asked throughout this thesis and in determining how they are approached. They highlight that there is a set of questions concerning cultural identity and multilingualism that need to be addressed in an integrated way, an approach largely sidelined in the past as prominent individuals were caught up in particular groups, concerns and historical events. Following the marking of the centenary, it has become possible to see the whole century of complex and often acrimonious debates as part of an ongoing process in which key questions around cultural identity, multilingualism and complex historical narratives continually return and generate different responses.

Kompatscher's willingness in his Meran speech to allow seemingly contradictory perceptions of history to co-exist by addressing the dual taboo of the annexation and the *Opferthese* raises fundamental questions about memory culture in South Tyrol which are explored in the course of the thesis. Particularly pressing issues include who is doing the remembering and from which perspective, who has the right to remember, and what exactly is being remembered. The first five chapters of the study provide the

necessary context for these questions to be considered. They are then addressed directly in Chapter Six, where South Tyrol is identified as a case study for other areas grappling with questions of collaboration and complicity.

## Introduction: Cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol from 1919 to 2019

This thesis concerns the multilingual border province of South Tyrol, annexed by Italy in September 1919 following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War. It covers the period between 1919 and the centenary of the annexation in September 2019. The thesis title reflects the significance of language as a key aspect of cultural identity in South Tyrol. South Tyrol's status as a multilingual border region is a major factor characterising the debate around identity in the province. Moreover, the particular circumstances of South Tyrol's multilingualism further differentiate the province from other multilingual border regions, in that South Tyrol's multilingualism is the result of a politically-imposed change of borders. It was annexed by Italy despite the fact that, according to the census of 1910, less than 3% of the population was Italian-speaking.<sup>6</sup>

The cultural and linguistic tensions caused by the annexation were exacerbated by two crucial measures. The first involved the suppression of the local Tyrolean culture and the German language during Mussolini's Italianisation programme from 1923. The second was the *Option* of 1939, which required all German and Ladin speakers in South Tyrol to decide between emigrating to the German Reich and taking on German citizenship, or remaining in their homeland and being subject to further Italianisation. Both the process of enforced Italianisation and the *Option* show how cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol should always be understood in the context of

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<sup>6</sup> Gregorio Gobbi and Katrin Schenk, eds, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', *Landesinstitut für Statistik*, [https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz\\_2019\(3\).pdf](https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz_2019(3).pdf) [accessed 12 June 2021], p. 19.

geographical factors and political events, both of which have helped to shape the debate at every stage. The extent of the Italianisation programme was justified by the belief of Italian nationalists such as Ettore Tolomei – a key figure in the province’s Italianisation – that the Brenner Pass constituted Italy’s natural border. This application of the so-called ‘natural border theory’ and the advantage of such a border in defence terms were key reasons for Italian interest in South Tyrol.<sup>7</sup> Building on the Italianisation policy from 1923 onwards, the politically-motivated *Option* reduced the complexities of cultural identity and multilingualism to a single binary choice.

The annexation remains an open wound over a century after it was confirmed by the signing of the Treaty of Saint Germain in September 1919. This is testament in part to the wide-ranging function of multilingualism in shaping identity formation in South Tyrol, not only as a linguistic factor, but also as a concept that affects the cultural, historical and political dynamics of the province. The different geographical distributions of the three language groups in South Tyrol and the question of how far the province’s annexation is reversible from a political viewpoint go beyond the primary remit of this thesis. The extent to which the three language groups inhabit the same parts of the province and the development of public discourse concerning the annexation will nevertheless be discussed in terms of how these two distinct factors have affected cultural identity formation over the last century.

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<sup>7</sup> Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck: Haymon, 2014), p. 29.

The primary research questions are:

- a) Is it possible to speak of a South Tyrolean cultural identity and, if so, how can it be defined?
- b) What is the precise nature of South Tyrol's multilingualism and its impact on South Tyrolean cultural identity?

For the purposes of this thesis and specifically in relation to South Tyrol's German, Italian and Ladin-speaking groups, the term 'cultural identity' encompasses the numerous factors which shape identity formation, both across the province and within individual language groups. These include geographical factors, historical and political factors, cultural and social factors, and not least the linguistic and literary expression of the different groups that participate in the province. It is the diverse, often highly personal attitudes of different groups and individuals towards cultural identity which make it a particularly fruitful topic in relation to South Tyrol.

Cultural identity is especially closely associated with linguistic identity in South Tyrol, though its importance is by no means uniform across the province. The contrasting approaches of German speaker Jürgen Wirth Anderlan of the Südtiroler Schützenbund and Ladin-speaking linguistics professor Paul Videsott are especially helpful in this regard. Wirth Anderlan's preference for the term 'Volksgruppen' ('ethnic groups') over 'Sprachgruppen'<sup>8</sup> ('language groups') implies that, despite the clear importance of language, the groups are distinguished by a common heritage which extends beyond a shared mother tongue. On the other hand, Videsott's comment that 'für die

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<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Wirth Anderlan, interview with author, 14 March 2018.

allermeisten Ladiner ist ladinische Kultur identisch mit ladinischer Sprache'<sup>9</sup> shows that language is of great importance to some sections of South Tyrolean society.

Each language group has a particular relationship not only with the languages of South Tyrol, but also with the political history of the province. Using the notion of 'cultural identity' therefore has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it allows for an acknowledgement of the distinct and particular importance of language in identity formation across the province's three language groups. On the other hand, it indicates that the importance of language for identity should also be viewed alongside other aforementioned factors<sup>10</sup> in order to articulate how the particularity of South Tyrol's situation affects the development of identity, both within and between language groups.

The use of the term 'language groups' to refer to South Tyrol's German, Italian and Ladin-speaking communities is not intended to suggest that language is the sole distinguishing feature between the province's three main groups. Rather, it reflects the particular role of language in South Tyrol as a marker of cultural identity. Moreover, 'language groups' also aligns with the official terms frequently used in governmental documents (*Sprachgruppen* in German, *gruppi linguistici* in Italian and *grups linguistics* in Ladin).

According to the census of 2011,<sup>11</sup> 62.3% of South Tyrol's population speak German, 23.4% speak Italian and 4.1% speak Ladin, a Rhaeto-Romance language which is

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<sup>9</sup> ('For the vast majority of Ladins, Ladin culture is identical to the Ladin language'). Paul Videsott, interview with author, 11 March 2019.

<sup>10</sup> See Introduction, pp. 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> Gregorio Gobbi and Brigitte Thurner, eds, '2012: Statistisches Jahrbuch für Südtirol', *Landesinstitut für Statistik*, [https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/jahrbuch\\_2012.pdf](https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/jahrbuch_2012.pdf) [accessed 18 March 2021], p. 118.

linguistically related to Friulian and Romansh. Most Ladin speakers also speak German and Italian in addition to their native Ladin dialect. In addition to these three groups, approximately 8.8% of the population are immigrants, who mostly speak a mother tongue other than German, Italian or Ladin.<sup>12</sup>

The thesis uses an external perspective – independent of the individual language groups in South Tyrol – to explore the tensions between competing views of the province as a haven of multilingualism, a province irreconcilably divided along cultural and linguistic lines, or a transit land between Italy and the German-speaking world. It examines how far the distinctiveness of the three main language groups precludes their influence on each other. It analyses the differences *within* language groups, looking at how different identities can co-exist as part of the same broad language community. The significance of the fact that the German, Italian and Ladin-speaking communities all share cultural and linguistic allegiances with communities outside South Tyrol is also considered, specifically when exploring the possibility of shared identities beyond national or provincial borders. The thesis brings together fictional and non-fictional written works, oral interventions, and artefacts of memory culture to model an approach to debates on cultural identity and multilingualism which integrates the perspectives of groups and individuals that have previously not been addressed in detail.

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<sup>12</sup> Gobbi and Thurner, '2012: Statistisches Jahrbuch für Südtirol', pp. 109 and 118. There is no exact percentage given for those who did not identify as belonging to any of the three main language groups, as the 'other' category also includes people who did not complete or incorrectly completed the Act of Linguistic Belonging, which requires every resident of South Tyrol to declare belonging to one of the province's three main language groups (or indeed none). The figure of 8.8% was calculated by working out the number of people from outside Italy who were registered as living in South Tyrol in 2011 (44,355) as a percentage of the province's total population, as recorded in the census of 2011 (505,067).

A central concern of the thesis involves articulating cross-cultural and cross-language connections between historical narratives, literary works and political developments, areas that have mostly been addressed separately and from the perspective of one particular language group. It analyses the significance of political developments for relations between language groups and considers the importance of written works by authors and cultural commentators, both as a response to these political developments and as a space for facilitating the intercultural negotiation and exchange not always encouraged by government policies. The thesis specifically addresses the evolving influence of South Tyrol's multilingualism on questions of cultural identity in the province, stressing how the use of language as both an exclusive identity marker and a tool of oppression has complicated its influence on identity formation. The role of memory culture in both mediating between complex cross-cultural, cross-language narratives on the twentieth century and allowing these often contradictory perceptions to co-exist constitutes the focus of Chapter Six. The importance of geographical factors is considered throughout, particularly their role in shaping and limiting interactions between language communities.

The core of this thesis was inspired by two influential cultural figures: poet Norbert Kaser and politician and activist Alexander Langer. Both were prominent in a group of pioneering South Tyroleans from the post-war generation who fundamentally changed the discourse on cultural identity and multilingualism in their home province. Kaser and Langer were born a year apart shortly after the Second World War, were acquainted with each other and both died young: Kaser died aged thirty-one from cirrhosis in 1978 and Langer committed suicide in 1995 at the age of forty-nine. Of particular interest for the concerns of this thesis are Kaser's 'Brixner Rede' (1969) and Langer's

*Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept, a cross-cultural model of identity which first emerged during the campaign Langer led against the Act of Linguistic Belonging (ALB, 1981).<sup>13</sup> The interventions of Kaser and Langer began to shape an identity specific to South Tyrol which embraced rather than ignored its evolving cultural diversity. They altered the emphasis of the debate, rejecting a backward-looking nostalgic, German-speaking Tyrolean identity in favour of a forward-looking cross-cultural identity which both acknowledged tensions between language groups and emphasised areas of common ground.

Kaser's speech, given at a student literary colloquium in Brixen in 1969,<sup>14</sup> resonated far beyond literary circles. It drew widespread attention to how South Tyrol might deal with its complex history and proposed literature as a way of exploring unaddressed questions concerning its complex history and its changing cultural demographics.

Kaser's intervention was notable for the way in which it used these taboo topics, which he termed 'heilige Kühe'<sup>15</sup> ('sacred cows'), as an area of commonality between the German and Italian-speaking communities rather than a cause of division. Significantly for this thesis, his speech recognised the need for South Tyrol's cultural debate to extend beyond German speakers, highlighting the importance of Italian voices. Both Kaser's call for a more diverse cultural debate in South Tyrol, and his suggestion that

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<sup>13</sup> Alexander Langer, 'Gesamtsüdtiroler gesucht!', in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo 1978-1995/Aufsätze zu Südtirol 1978-1995*, ed. by Siegfried Baur and Riccardo Dello Sbarba (Meran: AlphaBeta, 1996), pp. 167-173. The Act of Linguistic Belonging required all South Tyroleans to identify as being part of either the German, Italian or Ladin-speaking community.

<sup>14</sup> Decisions throughout this thesis concerning whether to use the German, Italian or Ladin name for a South Tyrolean settlement have been determined by the settlement's majority language group.

<sup>15</sup> Norbert Kaser, 'Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft und der letzten zwanzig Jahre', in Norbert C. Kaser, *Prosa*, ed. by Benedikt Sauer and Erika Wimmer-Webhofer (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2) (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1992), pp. 109-118 (p. 117).

cultural interventions can act as pioneering influences in this discussion, will serve as a starting point for examining the development of cultural identity and multilingualism in the province since his intervention, particularly in the exploration of twenty-first century depictions of identity and belonging in Chapter Five of this study.

Like Kaser's speech over a decade previously, Alexander Langer's *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept, first proposed during the early to mid-1980s, offered a new perspective on debates on cultural identity and multilingualism. It rejected the notion that identity construction had to be a monocultural process, at a time when governmental initiatives such as the Act of Linguistic Belonging (1981) required all South Tyroleans to declare belonging to a specific language group. Langer suggested shortly before his death that there must be *Grauzonen* ('grey areas') which permit intercultural exchange, and an acceptance of those who construct their identity across cultural boundaries.<sup>16</sup> The present thesis builds on Langer's argument that cultural diversity constitutes a distinct part of identity formation. It explores whether the grey areas he articulates could be recast as growing mainstream spaces of negotiation which accommodate areas of commonality and actively encourage cultural diversity, rather than representing ambiguous zones which are inhabited by outsiders.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander Langer, 'Zehn Punkte für das Zusammenleben', in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo*, pp. 234-243 (p. 238).

<sup>17</sup> Langer's notion of *Grauzonen* is entirely separate from the concept of the *zona grigia* coined by Primo Levi, which is discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

## **Situating cultural identity in the context of research on South Tyrol**

The multi-perspectival approach of the thesis is influenced by both Kaser's and Langer's interventions, in that both argue for the importance of attending to a diverse range of cultural factors in the formation of South Tyrolean identity. Of particular relevance are Kaser's observations concerning the capacity of cultural interventions to address South Tyrol's complex history and broaden the scope of mainstream debate in South Tyrol, and Langer's argument that cultural diversity can exert a distinct influence over identity construction. The thesis focuses primarily on interventions after 1969 – the date of the 'Brixner Rede' – in order to explore to what extent Kaser's and Langer's radical ideas have been taken up by subsequent generations of South Tyrolean cultural figures and how far these notions have since become the topic of mainstream discussion.

The thesis contributes both to wider moves towards transnationalising Modern Languages research and to scholarship on South Tyrol. The *Transnational Modern Languages* series has highlighted how aligning multiple aspects of cultural life with a particular nation state and language is a powerful yet problematic construct which can suppress diversity. This issue gains particular importance in the volume *Transnational German Studies* (2020), where Rebecca Braun and Benedict Schofield observe that 'the transnational is certainly a term which invites reflection on a stable concept of nation-based identity'.<sup>18</sup> Using South Tyrol as a case study for looking at discussions surrounding cultural identity and multilingualism emphasises how a complex province

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<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Braun and Benedict Schofield, 'Introduction: Transnationalizing German Studies', in *Transnational German Studies*, ed. by Rebecca Braun and Benedict Schofield (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 1-13 (p. 4).

which is influenced by different cultures, languages and identities and which does not correspond to conventional geographical, cultural and linguistic borders can be subject to a sense of ongoing instability. This instability is in fact intrinsic to South Tyrol's value as a case study for the wider field of German Studies: the particular situation of the province demonstrates how approaching topics from a cross-border, cross-cultural and cross-language perspective can lead to new, more nuanced insights which might be missed by a monocultural, monolingual approach that gains its definition from national borders.

In addition to positioning South Tyrol as a valuable case study for wider debates in Modern Languages, the thesis also makes connections between different areas of research within the province itself. Scholarship on South Tyrol has so far tended to focus on particular aspects of the province in isolation, such as its complex twentieth-century history, political developments, fictional writing by South Tyrolean authors and, more recently, its developing memory culture in the twenty-first century. Many contributions approach South Tyrol from a perspective informed primarily by linguistics. The thesis does consider the specific role of language in identity formation, mainly in Chapter One. However, this question is primarily pursued by examining how the distinctive role of language within identity formation is discussed in contemporary written works by German, Italian and Ladin-speaking South Tyrolean authors. Furthermore, much research on South Tyrol has focused on the situation of one of its language groups or is written from the perspective of a particular community. The thesis, by contrast, is primarily concerned with the interactions between different language groups.

This study is broadly situated in cultural history and specifically offers a contribution to research on identity formation in multilingual communities. Reading Peter Burke's work *What is Cultural History?* in the context of the specific concerns of this thesis helps to explain why, although multilingualism studies, border studies, literary studies and memory studies are all highly relevant to its research questions, the present study is best understood as a contribution to cultural history.

Burke's argument that cultural history can encompass close reading<sup>19</sup> and a consideration of cultural encounters<sup>20</sup> is pertinent to this thesis, which uses close reading of a wide range of texts from different genres to examine how the evolving interactions between South Tyrol's language communities shaped the process of identity formation. He goes on to observe that 'although cultural historians cannot be expected to solve contemporary problems, the study of cultural history might allow some people to think about some of these problems with clearer heads'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the present thesis is not intended to offer a solution to the ongoing complexities regarding identity formation in South Tyrol. Rather, it explores the complex constellation of factors which affect identity formation in the province and uses the centenary of the annexation as a fresh vantage point from which competing perspectives can be viewed alongside each other. It examines the distinctive contributions of different language groups and high-profile individuals, and reveals the active promotion of an ongoing dialogue focused on the contested issue of South Tyrolean identity.

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, p. 112.

<sup>21</sup> Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, p. 112.

A key purpose of the thesis is to demonstrate the importance of attending to a wide range of cultural fields, interventions and artefacts when investigating contested cultural identity, and the corresponding need for a variety of research perspectives. In addressing the research questions, I will therefore draw selectively on research in multilingualism studies, border studies, literary studies and memory studies which contributes to an understanding of the key issues at stake.

Within multilingual studies, both Hoffmann's and Stavans's and Blackledge's and Pavlenko's explorations of identities in multilingual contexts illuminate the research questions discussed in the present thesis. In *Multilingual Identities*, Hoffmann and Stavans assert that interactions with others in an unfamiliar environment where they feel threatened can result in unstable and vulnerable identities.<sup>22</sup> In *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, Blackledge and Pavlenko also comment on the changing, often volatile, nature of identities in multilingual areas. They write that 'identity becomes interesting, relevant, and visible when it is contested or in crisis [...] [it] is particularly salient in contexts where multiple interpretations or meanings collide, resulting in a power struggle as to whose interpretation prevails'.<sup>23</sup> Notions of instability and vulnerability, and the concept of multiple interpretations colliding, are highly relevant to the present thesis. Historical, political and cultural instability is an intrinsic part of identity formation in South Tyrol, and the debate on cultural identity and

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<sup>22</sup> Charlotte Hoffmann and Anat Stavans, *Multilingualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 203.

<sup>23</sup> Adrian Blackledge and Aneta Pavlenko, 'Introduction: New Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts', in *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, ed. by Adrian Blackledge and Aneta Pavlenko (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004), pp. 1-33 (p. 19).

multilingualism between 1919 and 2019 was characterised by multiple interpretations and power struggles both within and between language groups.

South Tyrol's status as a border province is key to the discussion of cultural identity in this thesis. Both the province's complex history since the annexation and the ongoing contemporary political tensions caused by its geographical and cultural circumstances have helped to shape the debate on cultural identity at every stage. The discipline of border studies is therefore highly relevant to the research questions considered in the present work. Wastl-Walter's observation on borders in the *Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies* is especially pertinent in relation to South Tyrol: she states that borders 'can only be understood in their context, they are shaped by history, politics and power as well as by cultural and social issues'.<sup>24</sup> Her multifaceted understanding of borders draws parallels with the decision in this thesis to explore the significant interventions of prominent cultural and literary figures such as Claus Gatterer, Sebastiano Vassalli and Roberta Dapunt within the broader context of major political developments in South Tyrol.

The written contributions of figures such as Gatterer, Vassalli and Dapunt play a significant role in identity construction in South Tyrol, which in turn highlights literary studies as a highly pertinent discipline for this thesis. In *The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Paul Jay explores the increasingly prominent role of 'transnational spaces or regions' within literary studies and also reflects on how the discipline can be used to articulate relationships between the local and the global.<sup>25</sup> Literature is a

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<sup>24</sup> Doris Wastl-Walter, 'Introduction' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, ed. by Doris Wastl-Walter (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 24-31 (p. 24).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 74.

particularly relevant medium through which to explore cultural identity in South Tyrol, as it offers a means of celebrating a distinctive language in a contested multilingual space. The written word being a form of identity construction in itself is explored in both the memoirs of the 1930s and 1940s analysed in Chapter Two and in the creative literary texts discussed in Chapter Five. Roberta Dapunt's poetry, discussed in both of these chapters, is a case in point. She explores the link between the local and the global in the specific context of the Ladin-speaking valley of Val Badia, using poetry as a means of articulating the area's distinctive local identity. By focusing on universal themes, she uses poetry to communicate this long-established local identity to a wider audience beyond the borders of both the Ladin valleys and South Tyrol.

In view of South Tyrol's especially contested history, the field of memory studies holds special significance for the exploration of South Tyrolean cultural identity in this thesis. The fact that each language group was differently affected by a turbulent history including the annexation, consecutive dictatorships and the *Option* makes the formation of a unifying memory culture, and by extension a unifying cultural identity, particularly difficult. When applied to the specific research questions of this thesis, Jan Assmann's definition of memory culture and Pierre Nora's definition of sites of memory – both discussed in Chapter Six – help to explain why discussing memory studies in a South Tyrolean context is especially fruitful yet also challenging. Nora describes sites of memory as 'any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial

heritage of any community'.<sup>26</sup> This definition raises particularly searching questions when considered in relation to South Tyrol, a province that was subject to many competing 'human wills' between 1919 and 2019. Similarly, Assmann's contention that memory culture is determined by the collective answer to the question of 'What must we not forget?'<sup>27</sup> is especially revealing when considered in the context of South Tyrol, where the inability to reach a consensus on how to remember its complex past acted as a barrier to contemporary identity formation.

The complexity of South Tyrol's historical and contemporary circumstances, the wide-ranging constellation of factors affecting cultural identity in the province, and the diverse range of perspectives on which the thesis draws were all important considerations when deciding upon a theoretical approach in the present study. In view of these factors, a choice was made not to construct a pre-defined theoretical framework. Instead, the focus is on close reading of a wide range of primary sources from multiple perspectives, guided by the research questions and with consistent reference to the processes of cultural and linguistic identity formation. This enables the thesis to shed new light on the intensely contested processes by which cultural identities have been shaped in South Tyrol since its annexation in 1919.

Guided by the specific concerns of these primary sources, a retrospective theoretical framework specific to South Tyrol was established. The thesis offers a periodisation of the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism in four phases which is supported by

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<sup>26</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Preface to the English Language Edition', in Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. xv-xvii (p. xvii).

<sup>27</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Memory Culture', in *Cultural Memory and Early Civilisation: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 15-69 (pp. 16-17).

the different perspectives and genres considered throughout. A four-phase framework which identified key moments in the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism enabled an understanding of how the discourse evolved and how the different factors affecting identity were closely interlinked. It demonstrated how the same questions were posed, concerning the injustice of the annexation, South Tyrolean victimhood and how best to negotiate South Tyrol's evolving cultural and linguistic demographics, yet showed that these questions prompted different answers from different groups at different points in time. Using the centenary as a new means of viewing the historical debate on multilingualism and cultural identity emphasised connections between parts of the discussion which may otherwise have appeared disparate. Together, the four-phase framework and the particular perspective of the centenary revealed a cross-language, cross-cultural and cross-generational dialogue of ideas between the figures analysed in this study.

Due to its focus on the particular cultural diversity of South Tyrol, this present study has been partly inspired by the work of previous researchers discussing the specificities of South Tyrolean literature, what distinguishes it from work by writers in Austria, Germany and the rest of Italy, and if there is even a South Tyrolean literature at all. Throughout the thesis, similar questions are explored in relation to the particularities of cultural identity formation in the province.

Siegrun Wildner's article 'Von Grenzen und Grenzgängern in der deutschsprachigen Südtiroler Literatur' (2019)<sup>28</sup> contributes to the questions considered in this thesis by

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<sup>28</sup> Siegrun Wildner, 'Von Grenzen und Grenzgängern in der deutschsprachigen Südtiroler Literatur', *Oxford German Studies*, 48 (2019), 54-60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00787191.2019.1583432>.

highlighting the dual function of borders as both exclusive and unifying aspects of identity construction, specifically examining the role of fiction in exploring these seemingly contradictory roles. In particular, Chapter Five shares Wildner's belief in the importance of borders as part of identity construction in contemporary South Tyrolean texts. However, it adopts a broader scope by also considering how the challenges of living in a multilingual border region are articulated in works by Italian and Ladin-speaking writers.

Luca Renzi's article 'A proposito di alcuni scrittori dell'Alto Adige e non: Joseph Zoderer, Sabine Gruber, Francesca Melandri' (2018)<sup>29</sup> provides an example of how to consider the role of fictional texts in cultural identity formation from a cross-cultural, cross-language perspective, an approach also taken in this thesis. Renzi's article is especially helpful in highlighting how questions of identity must be viewed in the context of political events, additionally emphasising the relationship between fictional texts and political developments. This present study expands upon the interplay Renzi identifies between politics, fictional texts and identity. The interventions analysed both respond to political developments – as is the case with Alexander Langer's criticism of the ALB – and anticipate them, as in the laying of the *Stolpersteine* in Bolzano to commemorate individuals persecuted by the Nazis.

Significantly, Renzi suggests that written works can precipitate a discourse on identity which transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries. The article therefore touches upon two important concerns of this study, namely the specific ability of fiction to shape the

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<sup>29</sup> Luca Renzi, 'A proposito di alcuni scrittori dell'Alto Adige e non: Joseph Zoderer, Sabine Gruber, Francesca Melandri', *Rivista di lingue e culture moderne*, 2 (2018), 39-57, <https://doi.org/10.7358/ling-2018-002-renz>.

debate on identity formation and the role of South Tyrol's particular form of cultural diversity within this discussion. The thesis builds on Renzi's cross-cultural, cross-language examination of identity formation by focusing on a wider range of authors and genres. It accepts the argument put forward by Renzi that fictional texts can in themselves be considered as forms of memory culture, but expands upon this notion by analysing how museums and memorials can provide a physical space for accommodating the same kind of competing interpretations of history that texts articulate in written form.

The article 'Erinnerungskulturen im Widerstreit: Das Beispiel der Stadt Bozen/Bolzano 2000-2010' (2012)<sup>30</sup> by historians Hans Heiss and Hannes Obermair informs the exploration of memory culture in this thesis by articulating its potential dual role in both uniting South Tyrol's language communities and driving them further apart. Most importantly, the article supports the use of the centenary commemorations as a defining rationale for the thesis. Heiss's and Obermair's contribution, written seven years before the centenary, asserts that the passing of time has enabled a new generation of historians from different language communities to begin constructing a South Tyrolean memory culture which brings together complex and competing national and regional narratives. This study uses Arno Kompatscher's speech in Meran marking the centenary in September 2019<sup>31</sup> in order to emphasise how the gradual changes

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<sup>30</sup> Hans Heiss and Hannes Obermair, 'Erinnerungskulturen im Widerstreit: Das Beispiel der Stadt Bozen/Bolzano 2000-2010', in *Der Grenzraum als Erinnerungsort: Über den Wandel zu einer postnationalen Erinnerungskultur in Europa*, ed. by Patrick Ostermann and others (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), pp. 63-80.

<sup>31</sup> Kompatscher, the German-speaking governor of South Tyrol, gave a speech to commemorate the centenary of the annexation. He dismantled the notion that South Tyroleans were victims of both the Fascist and Nazi regime (the so-called *Opferthese*), while also explicitly commenting on the injustice of the annexation.

which Heiss and Obermair identify in attitudes towards South Tyrol's history have since manifested themselves in a new political discourse which integrates views previously viewed as mutually exclusive.

Johanna Mitterhofer's article 'Competing Narratives on the Future of Contested Heritage' (2013)<sup>32</sup> shares Heiss's and Obermair's identification of competing narratives within memory culture. Her notion of a 'multilogue'<sup>33</sup> is especially important in influencing how this thesis articulates the distinct role of memory culture and its connection to cultural identity. The idea that multiple, competing interpretations of history can exist alongside each other and be understood as stimulating critical reflection offers further evidence of the growing space for negotiation in identity formation highlighted in this thesis. Mitterhofer uses the debate over the future of Bolzano's Victory Monument to position memory culture as a discipline which allows competing views of history to co-exist rather than foregrounding one historical interpretation at the expense of another. Chapter Six of this thesis – specifically section 6.1 – can be seen as an assessment of how far the exhibition underneath the Victory Monument has succeeded both in accommodating the competing narratives prompted by the monument itself and in creating a unifying site of memory from a divisive monument.

The thesis uses the distinctive position of the province's Ladin speakers beyond the often contradictory narratives held by South Tyrol's German and Italian-speaking communities to widen the discussion of identity construction and multilingualism.

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<sup>32</sup> Johanna Mitterhofer, 'Competing Narratives on the Future of Contested Heritage: Fascist Monuments in Contemporary South Tyrol', *Heritage & Society*, 6.1 (2013), 46-61, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1179/2159032X13Z.0000000006>.

<sup>33</sup> Mitterhofer, 'Competing Narratives', p. 58.

Considering the specific situation of the province's oldest language group serves to show how an acceptance of multilingualism, which has often been viewed as being incompatible with identity formation in South Tyrol's German and Italian-speaking communities, has long been incorporated into the construction of distinct Ladin identities. Rut Bernardi's and Paul Videsott's three-volume work *Geschichte der ladinischen Literatur* (2014)<sup>34</sup> brings the work of Ladin authors to an audience beyond the Ladin-speaking valleys and dispels the notion – even amongst Ladin speakers – that Ladin literature does not exist.

Bernardi's and Videsott's inclusion of works written by Ladin authors in other languages – such as the Italian diary of Fortunato Favai<sup>35</sup> and the Italian poems of Roberta Dapunt<sup>36</sup> – informs the argument of this thesis that multilingualism is an accepted part of Ladin cultural identity. Indeed, as Bernardi and Videsott imply, the lack of commercial Ladin language publishers means that writing in another language, or attracting interest in a translation, is the primary way for Ladin authors to build a substantial readership. This present study analyses works by Ladin authors in both Ladin and Italian, and in South Tyrol and beyond, to draw out how their written interventions have the potential to shape debates on cultural identity and multilingualism across the whole province.

The contributions of Favai and Dapunt were specifically chosen for this thesis because together they offer both an insight into South Tyrol's past and a potential model for managing province-wide tensions between cultural identity and multilingualism in the

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<sup>34</sup> Rut Bernardi and Paul Videsott, eds, *Geschichte der ladinischen Literatur. Ein bio-bibliografisches Autorenkompendium von den Anfängen des ladinischen Schrifttums bis zum Literaturschaffen des frühen 21. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols (Bolzano: Bolzano University Press, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter Two, section 2.9 and Chapter Five, section 5.3.

future. Moreover, both Favai and Dapunt have overtly provided their respective Ladin communities in Fodóm and Val Badia with a voice that carries beyond their local area while still conveying their distinct cultures and traditions. Section 2.9 (Chapter Two) focuses specifically on the interplay between language, location and identity in Dapunt's Ladin poetry volume *Nauz* (2012). By contrast, Section 5.3 (Chapter Five) considers the particular function of poetry as a creative medium. It explores the interactions between spirituality, creativity and a sense of belonging in her volume *La terra più del paradiso* (2008), mostly written in Italian but shaped by her Ladin background.

### **Methodology, structure and focus**

The thesis will initially explore the cultural and linguistic dynamics of South Tyrol before going on to consider the complex constellation of factors which have influenced the formation of cultural identity. From the second chapter onwards, a broadly chronological approach will elucidate the development of identity in South Tyrol, analysing a variety of written genres before focusing on twenty-first century developments in South Tyrolean memory culture in the final chapter.

While multilingualism and cultural identity are closely connected, the overlap between them is not absolute. This study shows that in order to develop an understanding of cultural identity in South Tyrol, it is necessary to take account of the particular constellation of factors which affect the cultural identity formation of the individual groups, their interactions and their development over time.

The fictional and non-fictional works, oral interventions and artefacts of memory culture examined in this thesis each advance the debate surrounding cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol. The thesis focuses on interventions from different time periods which changed the dynamics of the debate, also placing them in a wider cultural, linguistic, historical and political context. The cross-cultural, cross-language approach adopted in this study articulates key moments which shaped the development of South Tyrolean cultural identity, from the province's annexation in September 1919 through to Arno Kompatscher's pivotal speech marking the centenary of the annexation in September 2019.

The first chapter, **'Cultural identity and multilingualism in the light of political developments, 1919 to 2019'**, provides the historical and political context for the arguments of the thesis. It also refers to research on the province, insofar as it is relevant to the focus of this particular study. The chapter explores key events in South Tyrol's cultural history since 1919 that prompted debate surrounding cultural identity and multilingualism. A framework of four phases illuminates the dynamics of the debate between 1919 and 2019. These four phases show that what might appear to be an unstructured debate is in fact shaped by particular turning points which often correspond to political events but are not fully explained by them. This framework shows that as well as being linked to political events, the changing character of the debate is influenced by individual voices and cultural developments which may not be crucial to a historical study of South Tyrol, but which are highly pertinent when examining cultural identity and multilingualism.

The second chapter is entitled **'The languages of South Tyrol: contemporary literary perspectives and their impact on identity'**. Using fictional and non-fictional texts by authors from each of South Tyrol's three main language groups, it proposes that an understanding of South Tyrol's specific cultural and linguistic dynamics – and particularly the evolving nature of multilingualism in the province – is essential to understanding the overall development of cultural identity in South Tyrol. The first part of the chapter outlines the complex and distinctive role of language in identity formation within each of the province's three main language communities from a perspective informed by linguistics. The second part focuses on how the fictional and non-fictional protagonists in four selected texts perceive the role of language in their own cultural identity. The texts analysed are Toni Colleselli's semi-fictional short story collection *Reden: Siebzehn Sprechgeschichten aus Südtirol* (2011); Maxi Obexer's semi-autobiographical essay *Europas längster Sommer* (2017); Alessandro Banda's autobiographical travelogue *Due mondi e io vengo dall'altro* (2012) and Roberta Dapunt's Ladin poetry volume *Nauz* (2012).

The third chapter – entitled **'The depiction of cultural identity between 1919 and 1945 through memoirs and diaries from South Tyrol and the surrounding area'** – considers the roots of cultural and linguistic conflict in South Tyrol by examining constructions of identity in memoirs and diaries which reflect on the momentous events between 1919 and 1945. The chosen texts are Claus Gatterer's memoir *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (1969), Franz Thaler's memoir *Unvergessen* (1988) and Fortunato Favai's diary *Opzioni, guerra e resistenza nelle valli ladine* (2000). Their individual perspectives collectively give a sense of the cumulative effect of four key political measures on cultural identity

formation in the province and surrounding area: the annexation and subsequent Italianisation, the *Option*, and the Nazi occupation.

The fourth chapter is entitled '**The debate on cultural identity from 1972 to 2019**'. It articulates how the contrasting interventions of two key cultural figures helped to reshape the wider debate on cultural identity in South Tyrol. It compares the essays of German-speaking South Tyrolean politician and activist Alexander Langer from the 1980s and 1990s with the travelogue *Sangue e suolo* (1985) by Italian journalist and author Sebastiano Vassalli. Langer's and Vassalli's contributions are used to explore how perceptions of intercultural and interlinguistic relations have developed since the time between 1919 to 1945, the period covered by the autobiographical sources discussed in Chapter Three. Langer's and Vassalli's differing, though equally critical, responses to the societal changes facilitated by the Second Autonomy Statute (1972)<sup>37</sup> demonstrate how the shifting emphases of cultural identity formation following the Statute represented a significant break with the time prior to its implementation, yet still retained the undercurrents of tension and mutual distrust between language groups which marked the post-war period.

The fifth chapter – '**Identity and belonging in twenty-first century works by South Tyrolean authors**' – advances the exploration of cultural identity both chronologically and thematically. It considers how the topic of intercultural, interlingual (dis)harmony in South Tyrol, highlighted in contrasting ways by Langer and Vassalli, is explored in three creative literary works from the twenty-first century: Sabine Gruber's novel *Stillbach*

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<sup>37</sup> The Second Autonomy Statute (1972) aimed to address the shortcomings of the First Autonomy Statute (1948), which was criticised by South Tyrol's German and Ladin-speaking communities as being excessively favourable towards the province's Italian speakers.

oder *Die Sehnsucht* (2011); Stefano Zangrando's Italian novel *Amateurs* (2016), and Ladin poet Roberta Dapunt's poetry collection *La terra più del paradiso* (2008). The chapter explores how the undercurrents of disharmony between South Tyrol's language groups, highlighted by Langer's and Vassalli's work in the 1980s and 1990s, have since commanded much wider interest and promoted more broadly based debate.

The sixth and final chapter is entitled '**Memory culture in South Tyrol: Marking the centenary of the province's annexation in 1919**'. The chapter uses the centenary of South Tyrol's annexation as a reference point for considering what the province's evolving memory culture reveals about the evolution of cultural identity formation between 1919 and 2019. It initially focuses on two twenty-first century South Tyrolean artefacts of memory culture in Bolzano. The exhibition underneath the Fascist Victory Monument in Bolzano (2014)<sup>38</sup> and the *Stolpersteine* ('Stumbling Stones') memorials to victims of Nazism (2015) are notable for marking a new approach to the province's twentieth-century history, one which explicitly engages with its inherent complexity. The chapter subsequently explores how far the notion of challenging established interpretations of history was later integrated into mainstream political discourse during commemorations to mark the centenary of the annexation in September 2019.

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<sup>38</sup> The exhibition in Bolzano is situated underneath the Victory Monument, which Mussolini ordered to be built in 1926. It explores both the controversial and divisive history of the Victory Monument, and South Tyrol's complex history between 1918 and 1945.

## **‘Wir waren [...] aber nicht nur Opfer. Auch bei uns gab es Anhänger dieser Ideologien’<sup>39</sup>**

The centenary commemorations act as a contemporary point of reference for the whole thesis. In particular, Kompatscher’s aforementioned speech in Meran in September 2019 represents the point at which the complex historical narratives alluded to by Kaser’s ‘Brixner Rede’ – and later explored in the early years of the twenty-first century in the context of memory culture – became part of mainstream political discourse.

The centenary commemorations are key in shaping both the questions asked throughout this thesis and in determining how they are approached. They highlight that there is a set of questions concerning cultural identity and multilingualism that need to be addressed in an integrated way, an approach largely sidelined in the past as prominent individuals were caught up in particular groups, concerns and historical events. Following the marking of the centenary, it has become possible to see the whole century of complex and often acrimonious debates as part of an ongoing process in which key questions around cultural identity and multilingualism and complex historical narratives continually return and generate different responses.

Kompatscher’s willingness in Meran to allow seemingly contradictory perceptions of history to co-exist by addressing the dual taboo of the annexation and the *Opferthese* (the notion that South Tyroleans were victims of both the Fascist and the Nazi regimes) raises fundamental questions about memory culture in South Tyrol which are explored

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<sup>39</sup> (‘We were not only victims [...] there were also supporters of these ideologies amongst us’). Tiroler Landtag, *Gedenksitzung: “Zwischen Zerreiung und Hoffnung”*, online video recording, Land Tirol, 10 September 2019, <https://www.tirol.gv.at/landtag/live/archiv/2019/10092019-gedenksitzungzwischen-zerreissung-und-hoffnung/> [accessed 25 February 2020].

in the course of the thesis. Particularly pressing issues include who is doing the remembering and from which perspective, who has the right to remember, and what exactly is being remembered. The first five chapters of the study provide the necessary context for these questions to be considered. They are then addressed directly in Chapter Six, where South Tyrol is identified as a case study for other areas grappling with questions of collaboration and complicity.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Cultural identity and multilingualism in the light of political developments, 1919 to 2019**

The aim of this chapter is to elucidate key moments in South Tyrol's cultural history that stimulated debate and shaped narratives concerning cultural identity and multilingualism. Its purpose is not to provide a full account of the historical events affecting different language communities in South Tyrol.<sup>40</sup> Instead, it uses a four-phase framework to identify turning points in the debate, which took a variety of historical, political and cultural forms. Throughout this chapter, reference will be made where appropriate to historical research on South Tyrol which is significant in demonstrating how discussions around cultural identity and multilingualism have developed.

The four phases were chosen as a way of reflecting how the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol was clearly punctuated by four clear political turning points which shaped the broad direction of public discourse in the province. Without the annexation (the start of Phase One), the subsequent hostilities between language groups in the province would never have developed to such a great extent.<sup>41</sup> While the enforced process of Italianisation and the subsequent *Option* were undoubtedly highly significant events which had differing long-term consequences for each language

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<sup>40</sup> A detailed account of South Tyrolean history since 1919 is given in Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck: Haymon, 2014). For a study which includes a history of the area before 1919, see Brigitte Mazohl and Rolf Steininger, *Geschichte Südtirols* (Munich: Beck, 2020). For an alternative overview of South Tyrol's cultural history, see Georg Grote and Hannes Obermair, eds, *A Land on the Threshold: South Tyrolean Transformations 1915-2015* (Oxford: Lang, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 48-51, for a more detailed explanation of the annexation.

community, these two measures were only possible due to the initial annexation in September 1919.

The signing of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement<sup>42</sup> in September 1946 (the start of Phase Two) was significant for two reasons. On the one hand, it sent a clear message that South Tyrol belonging to Italy represented the status quo for the foreseeable future, after the upheaval of Italianisation between 1923 and 1943 and the subsequent Nazi occupation of South Tyrol between September 1943 and May 1945. On the other hand, the Agreement provided a solid legal basis for the province's German speakers to subsequently argue throughout the 1950s and 1960s that the Italian government was failing to honour the safeguards outlined in both the Agreement of 1946 and the First Autonomy Statute of 1948.

The signing of the Second Autonomy Statute in 1972<sup>43</sup> (the start of Phase Three) was important as it hugely increased the safeguards offered to South Tyrol's German speakers and provided recognition to the Ladin-speaking community, who had not been mentioned at all in the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement. Moreover, the signing of the Statute had both short and long-term consequences. In the short term, it shifted areas of tension in South Tyrol rather than removing them altogether, giving prominence to the contrasting ideas of Sebastiano Vassalli and Alexander Langer respectively. It also reinforced the separation of the province's language groups on both a legal and educational level. In the long term, however, the Statute has provided a lasting

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 55-57, for a more detailed explanation of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 59-61, for a more detailed explanation of the Second Autonomy Statute.

foundation for South Tyrol's political system which continues to underpin much of the mainstream debate on identity and multilingualism in the twenty-first century.

The agreement to found the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion in 1998<sup>44</sup> (the start of Phase Four) was significant as it represented a formal political structure which established cross-border collaboration between three former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Occurring after the so-called 'South Tyrol question' had formally been resolved in 1992,<sup>45</sup> the agreement to establish the Euroregion therefore came without the underlying suggestion that this was a first step towards a return to the borders that existed prior to South Tyrol's annexation.

Though the political events which mark the beginning of the four phases were important in determining the general direction of the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol, they were by no means the sole instigators of change. Other cultural interventions explored in the thesis helped to determine the precise emphasis of public discourse, such as Alexander Langer's *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept and Sebastiano Vassalli's travelogue *Sangue e suolo*.<sup>46</sup> Identifying four phases reflects the fact that the debate was not changed overnight by political legislation, rather it gradually evolved over time due to a combination of diverse factors which both responded to and anticipated political change.

The notion of South Tyrol as a political and cultural entity is a relatively recent concept: it was only established following the annexation of 1919. By contrast, the term 'Tyrol' has been in existence since the twelfth century. It has been proposed that the German

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 63-66, for a more detailed explanation of the Euroregion.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 61-62.

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter Four, section 4.1.

name *Tirol* came from the Ladin word *teriol/troi*, meaning ‘road’ or ‘steep path’.

Estimates suggest that in 1200, two thirds of modern-day South Tyrol was populated by Ladin speakers,<sup>47</sup> while this figure was just 4.1% in 2011, according to the census.<sup>48</sup>

From 1363, modern-day South Tyrol, as well as modern-day North Tyrol, Trentino and parts of Belluno, were united as the County of Tyrol under the control of the Habsburgs.

The County of Tyrol remained under Habsburg rule almost uninterrupted until 1919.

The German term *Südtirol* was hardly used until the nineteenth century, when it came to distinguish the southern Italian-speaking part of the County of Tyrol (largely corresponding to modern-day Trentino) from the northern, mainly German-speaking area. Having first been advocated by Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini in 1866, Italian claims to what was to become South Tyrol began to intensify in March 1890, mainly thanks to the short-lived weekly nationalistic publication *La Nazione Italiana*. It was founded and edited by Trentino-born teacher and journalist Ettore Tolomei, who was from a family of Italian nationalists and later became a leading figure in the Fascist Italianisation of South Tyrol from 1923. Tolomei was an enthusiastic supporter of the ‘natural border theory’,<sup>49</sup> which contended that national borders should correspond to natural geographic features. This was a nationalist concept derived from the Italian irredentism which first surfaced following the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. Applying the ‘natural border theory’ to South Tyrol, Tolomei and other Italian nationalists argued that the Brenner Pass constituted Italy’s ‘natural border’. Moreover, Tolomei saw South Tyrol’s Ladin valleys as providing a Latin element in the area and

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<sup>47</sup> Hans Karl Peterlini, *Wir Kinder der Südtiroler-Autonomie*, (Bolzano: Folio, 2003), p. 103.

<sup>48</sup> Gregorio Gobbi and Katrin Schenk, eds, ‘2019: Südtirol in Zahlen’, *Landesinstitut für Statistik*, [https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz\\_2019\(3\).pdf](https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz_2019(3).pdf) [accessed 12 June 2021], p. 19.

<sup>49</sup> Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck: Haymon, 2014), p. 29.

therefore as the ideal starting point for the projected re-Italianisation of South Tyrol, which he termed *Alto Trentino* in the 1890s. The notion of 're-Italianisation' was based on the fact that the area south of the Brenner Pass was once part of the Roman Empire. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the area was being referred to by Tolomei and other Italian nationalists as *Alto Adige* (Upper Adige), a term derived from the River Adige and initially coined by Napoleon in the early-nineteenth century to refer to an area which included parts of the modern-day northern Italian provinces of South Tyrol, Trentino, Vicenza and Brescia.

Prior to its annexation, research on what then became South Tyrol reflected the fact that it was still a contested territory. Scholarship therefore focused on the cultural question of how far South Tyrol should be considered Italian, a topic regularly addressed by Italian nationalists such as Tolomei. Along with linguistics researcher Carlo Battisti, Tolomei founded the nationalist journal *L'Archivio per l'Alto Adige* in 1906. In its first edition, Tolomei himself discussed the Italianisation of South Tyrolean place names,<sup>50</sup> a task he was later asked to officially implement by the newly formed Fascist government in 1923.

Although discussion of the Italianisation of South Tyrol was largely confined to Italian nationalists in the early twentieth century, the influence of Italian irredentism began to grow around this time. The concept of *terre irredente* – the notion that areas such as Trento and Trieste were rightfully Italian and should be 'returned' to Italy – was a key argument used by nationalists in favour of Italian intervention against Austria-Hungary in the First World War. In the case of South Tyrol, the aforementioned concept of the

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<sup>50</sup> Ettore Tolomei, 'La toponomastica dell'Alto Adige', *Archivio per l'Alto Adige*, 1 (1906), 137-159.

Brenner Pass constituting the ‘natural border’ of Italy was prominent in justifying the annexation. During the First World War, the *Archivio* was increasingly written by Tolomei himself. His plans for the annexation of South Tyrol became more concrete and in 1916 he published suggested Italian place names for around 10,000 South Tyrolean settlements.

The previous year, in April 1915, Italy had already secretly been promised South Tyrol by the Allies (Britain, France and Russia) at the Treaty of London – provided that Italy intervened on their side in the ongoing First World War and that the Allies were subsequently victorious. Once the Allies had won, Italy occupied the area that came to be known as South Tyrol in November 1918. The effect of the impending annexation on the local communities was immediate. All passenger and freight traffic with North Tyrol and the rest of Austria ceased, any telegraphic equipment and carrier pigeons had to be given up, and letters could not be sent to certain countries, including Germany, Austria and Hungary.<sup>51</sup> After the Treaty of Saint Germain in September 1919 had officially formalised the secret agreement concerning South Tyrol made at the Treaty of London four years previously, the area south of the Brenner Pass, previously part of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire, was annexed by Italy. From the Allied perspective, annexing South Tyrol did not simply fulfil a promise made to Italy (despite initial misgivings from American President Woodrow Wilson, who feared that South Tyrol’s enforced annexation by Italy contradicted the commitment to self-determination he had laid out in his ‘14 Points’ speech in January 1918).<sup>52</sup> The annexation had the added

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<sup>51</sup> Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg*, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Rolf Steninger, ‘1918/1919: Die Teilung Tirols’, in *A Land on the Threshold: South Tyrolean Transformations 1915-2015*, ed. by Georg Grote and Hannes Obermair (Oxford: Lang, 2017), pp. 3-25 (pp. 3-4).

effect of providing Italy with the militarily important Brenner Pass. It also sanctioned the newly-founded Austrian Republic for its former association with the collapsed Austro-Hungarian Empire,<sup>53</sup> which had aligned itself with the Central Powers who accepted responsibility for starting the First World War. Following the annexation, the newly created province came to be known as *Südtirol* in German, *Alto Adige* in Italian and *Südtirol* or *Sudtirol* in Ladin. The province was known in English as South Tyrol, a direct translation of the German term *Südtirol* that was used to distinguish South Tyrol from the newly formed province of North Tyrol, which still belonged to Austria.

### **1.1 Phase One – The annexation (1919): Identities of oppositionality during a time of upheaval and oppression**

The annexation of South Tyrol in 1919 constituted the first phase of the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism. Though there had been Italian and Ladin speakers living in the Habsburg County of Tyrol, the part that was to become South Tyrol was still majority German-speaking and heavily influenced by Tyrolean culture.<sup>54</sup> According to the last census before the annexation – conducted in 1910 – 89% of the population were German speakers, 3.8% were Ladin speakers and only 2.9% were Italian speakers.<sup>55</sup> Crucially, at that point each community maintained their own distinct language and culture. The situation changed dramatically following South Tyrol's

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<sup>53</sup> Frauke Lachenmann and Rüdiger Wolfrum, eds, *The Law of Armed Conflict and the Use of Force: The Max Planck Encyclopaedia of Public International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 1178.

<sup>54</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', p. 19. Thomas Kager, 'South Tyrol: Mitigated but not Resolved', *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, 1.3 (1998), [http://www.trinstitute.org/ojpcr/1\\_3kag.htm](http://www.trinstitute.org/ojpcr/1_3kag.htm) [accessed 28 May 2021].

<sup>55</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', p. 19.

annexation. By 1921, the proportion of Italian speakers had increased to 10.6%<sup>56</sup> and the *Lex Corbino* laws, introduced that year, had already begun to increase Italian influence on the province's education system.<sup>57</sup>

The presence of Italians in South Tyrol was not a new development in itself. Rather, it was the large number of Italian speakers who emigrated to South Tyrol from across Italy following the annexation, allied with the imposition of Italianisation on the province's German and Ladin-speaking communities, which raised tensions with the indigenous German and Ladin-speaking population. The wide-ranging and oppressive nature of the Italianisation programme established the dynamics of the first phase of the debate, which was dominated by identities of oppositionality and a hostile attitude towards multilingualism.

Much of the enforced Italianisation process was entrusted to Ettore Tolomei, who announced a thirty-two-clause programme in July 1923. Measures included the Italianisation of German place and street names and a further restructuring of the school system, whereby Italian replaced German as the language of instruction in most schools. All expressions involving the word *Tirol* were banned in August 1923, including *Tiroler*, *Südtiroler* and *Deutsch-Südtirol*. In his memoir *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (1969), historian Claus Gatterer states that the term *Südtirol* was initially seen as a 'Deklassierung'<sup>58</sup> immediately after the annexation, in comparison with the area's

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<sup>56</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Ostensibly, the *Lex Corbino* of 1921 merely obliged Italian speakers in South Tyrol to send their children to Italian-speaking schools. However, in reality it prompted the implementation of monolingual Italian commissions who declared any German-speaking families with Italian-sounding surnames to be Italian. Ladin speakers were also declared to be Italian, with Ladin-speaking children forced to attend Italian-speaking schools. Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>58</sup> ('a derogation'). Claus Gatterer, *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (Bolzano: Folio, 2015), p. 11.

Tyrolean heritage. Following the banning of the term, however, Gatterer suggests that using *Südtirol* or *Südtiroler* became a form of rebellion against the Italian state.<sup>59</sup>

By 1939, sixteen years of sustained Italianisation and simultaneous suppression of the German language and Tyrolean culture had exacerbated the cultural and linguistic contradictions inherent in the Italian annexation of a majority German-speaking territory. Some members of South Tyrol's German-speaking community, led by the local Nazi organisation *Völkischer Kampfring Südtirols* (VKS), hoped that Hitler's expanding territorial ambitions would involve annexing South Tyrol and incorporating the province into the German Reich. However, these hopes receded after Hitler's promise to Mussolini in March 1938 that he would respect the existing Brenner border.<sup>60</sup> Hitler and Mussolini agreed upon the South Tyrolean *Option* in order to achieve the mutual wish for a German-Italian alliance and the maintenance of the Brenner border. The *Option* also reflected the Italian desire for South Tyrol to become more culturally Italian and the Nazi ideology of having all German speakers as part of the German Reich. All German and Ladin-speaking residents in South Tyrol – along with those in the nearby majority Ladin-speaking villages of Cortina de Anpezo, Fodóm and Col in the province of Belluno – were required to make a choice.<sup>61</sup> By 31 December 1939, they had to decide between remaining in Italy and experiencing further Italianisation, or emigrating to the German Reich, which entailed taking on German citizenship and leaving their homeland and livelihood behind. 86% of South Tyroleans (approximately 213,000 people) chose to emigrate to the German Reich, though only approximately one in three of those who

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<sup>59</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg*, p. 77.

<sup>61</sup> For a more detailed historical account of the *Option* and an examination of its aftermath, see *Le Opzioni rilette/Die mitgelesenen Briefe*, ed. by Ulrike Kindl and others (Bolzano: La Fabbrica del Tempo, 2014).

opted for the Reich actually emigrated due to logistical difficulties and the upheaval of the Second World War. The *Option* created long-term divisions, sometimes within families, between those who chose to leave (even if they subsequently had to stay in South Tyrol) and those who decided to remain.

South Tyrol was under Italian control until September 1943, when the Italian government announced an armistice with the Allies following Mussolini's overthrow. Following this development, South Tyrol was immediately occupied by Nazi troops. The province was declared the 'Operational Zone of the Alpine Foothills' by the Nazis and German was restored as an official language. The area continued to be occupied by the Nazis until the end of the war in May 1945. The Nazi withdrawal from South Tyrol occurred almost two weeks after the rest of Italy had celebrated its liberation, reinforcing that the province was at this stage no longer considered part of Italy, even by Italians themselves.

The Italianisation programme, *Option* and the Nazi occupation were all distinct and momentous events with vastly differing outcomes for the different language groups in South Tyrol. These events undoubtedly caused dramatic shifts in the relative political recognition afforded to South Tyrol's language communities and in the province's cultural and linguistic demographics. The cumulative upheaval caused by the events between 1919 and 1945 – allied with the presence of successive oppressive, nationalistic, fascist dictatorships – prompted tensions both within and between South Tyrol's language groups. This upheaval and the long-lasting fissures within communities precipitated by the *Option* prevented the momentous political and social changes of the time from being adequately processed, both by the long-standing German and Ladin-

speaking communities and by the recently arrived Italians. Instead, existing identities became more entrenched and exclusive, especially in the German and Italian-speaking communities. In this context, any acceptance of multilingualism was viewed as a concession to the enemy.

## **1.2 Phase Two – The Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement (1946): An uneasy interim solution amid rising discontent**

The signing of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement in September 1946 represented the start of the second phase. The Agreement was brokered by Austrian Foreign Secretary Karl Gruber and Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi and it constituted a democratic, internationally recognised reaffirmation of the borders established by the Treaty of Saint Germain in 1919. The Agreement sought to balance the Allies' desire for South Tyrol to be part of Italy for political reasons and the importance of recognising South Tyrol's right to a degree of autonomy. Significantly, the Agreement did not fulfil the wishes of the newly formed Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), which campaigned for the province to be reunified with Austria. Instead, it was a political signal that South Tyrol's long-term future was as part of Italy and therefore marked a turning point in the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism. Above all, the Agreement ensured that South Tyrol's annexation could no longer be framed as a temporary state of affairs, but rather had to be acknowledged as the status quo for the foreseeable future. Notably, the Agreement made no mention of the province's Ladin community.

Unlike the Treaty of Saint Germain, the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement of 1946 offered a clear commitment to protect the rights of German speakers, albeit one which was not properly fulfilled until the Second Autonomy Statute of 1972.<sup>62</sup> The terms of the Agreement offered a legal justification for German speakers who felt that the Italian government was not honouring its obligations towards them, offering them a stronger voice in the subsequent debate on cultural identity throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

The Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement was followed in February 1948 by the First Autonomy Statute. The Statute, agreed between the Italian state and a reluctant South Tyrolean provincial government, grouped the predominantly German-speaking province of South Tyrol with the mostly Italian-speaking province of Trentino in a region described as *das Trentino-Tiroler Etschland/Il Trentino-Alto Adige*.<sup>63</sup> South Tyrol therefore held very little power alone. The treatment of South Tyrol and Trentino as a single entity provoked widespread unease, particularly amongst South Tyrol's German-speaking community, as it caused them to be outnumbered 5:2 by Italian speakers. The key difference between the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement (1946) and the First Autonomy Statute (1948) related to the interpretation of regional and provincial borders. The former foresaw a form of limited autonomy which only concerned South Tyrol and neighbouring bilingual settlements in Trentino,<sup>64</sup> an area that was majority

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<sup>62</sup> For further information on the details of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement and the First and Second Autonomy Statutes, see Antony Alcock, *The South Tyrol Autonomy, A Short Introduction* (Bolzano, 2001), [www.provincia.bz.it/downloads/South-Tyrol%20Autonomy.pdf](http://www.provincia.bz.it/downloads/South-Tyrol%20Autonomy.pdf) [accessed 4 June 2020].

<sup>63</sup> The term *Etschland* is derived from the use of the German term *Etsch* to refer to the River Adige, which flows through South Tyrol. However, *Etsch* also has Italian Fascist connotations, given the official Fascist-era use of the German term *Oberetsch* (a literal translation of the Italian term *Alto Adige*) as a replacement for the German term *Südtirol*, which had been banned during the Italianisation programme between 1923 and 1943. Under the Nazi occupation, the area including South Tyrol was officially known in German as *Die Operationszone Alpenvorland*.

<sup>64</sup> Oskar Peterlini, 'The South Tyrol Autonomy in Italy: Historical, Political and Legal Aspects', *ResearchGate*,

German-speaking. By contrast, the latter granted a similar level of autonomy to a majority Italian-speaking region, which conceived of the whole of the South Tyrol and Trentino provinces as a single entity. The Statute therefore provided this newly-configured *Trentino-Alto Adige/Tiroler Etschland* region with far greater powers than the majority German-speaking province of South Tyrol, which now constituted part of a political entity that was in effect ruled by Italian speakers.

Following the implementation of the First Autonomy Statute, identity construction was increasingly characterised by exclusivity and fear, primarily emanating from German and Ladin speakers concerned by growing Italian influence in South Tyrol. Multilingualism continued to be viewed with distrust as a tacit acceptance of the still contested annexation. Identity construction became ever more aggressive as South Tyrol's German-speaking community tried to distance itself from an Italian population which reached its proportional peak in 1961, when it accounted for 34.3% of the province's inhabitants.<sup>65</sup> The growing number of Italian speakers represented a threat, both to identity formation in South Tyrol's German-speaking community and to future safeguards for German speakers in the province. Efforts to combat this perceived threat took an extreme, violent turn during the so-called *Bombenjahre* throughout the 1950s and 1960s, led by the separatist group *Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol* (BAS). The most notorious attack was the *Feuernacht* of 11 June 1961, when thirty-seven electricity generators – nineteen of which were in Bolzano – were blown up.

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316861601\\_The\\_South\\_Tyrol\\_Autonomy\\_in\\_Italy\\_International\\_Conference\\_One\\_country\\_two\\_systems\\_three\\_legal\\_orders](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316861601_The_South_Tyrol_Autonomy_in_Italy_International_Conference_One_country_two_systems_three_legal_orders) [accessed 28 October 2020], p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', p. 19.

The extreme methods of the BAS were far from universally popular amongst South Tyrol's German community, though dissatisfaction with excessive Italian influence was a prominent theme of mainstream public discourse in the province during the 1950s. Widespread displeasure had been demonstrated by the presence of 30,000 South Tyroleans, including some Ladin speakers, at a protest at Sigmundskron Castle alongside the German-speaking SVP chairman (and later provincial governor) Silvius Magnano in 1957. Their motto, *Los von Trient* ('Away from Trentino'), reinforced the protesters' opposition to South Tyrol being associated with Trentino, their frustration at the perceived disproportionate control exerted by the Italian state, and their desire for more political autonomy. The protesters felt that the German and Ladin-speaking communities in South Tyrol would not be subject to sufficient protections for as long as the First Autonomy Statute remained in place. The actions of the BAS were therefore a violent escalation of existing tensions in the South Tyrolean identity debate, rather than a starting point for tension in themselves. Although it attracted widespread condemnation, the increasing violence of the BAS nevertheless underlined that the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement and the First Autonomy Statute had failed to resolve South Tyrol's future.

The uncertainty left by these two pieces of legislation had already been highlighted on an international level a year before the *Feuernacht*, when Austria officially brought the question of South Tyrol to the attention of the UN in June 1960. Talks between Austria and Italy regarding the full implementation of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement and the First Autonomy Statute had proved unsuccessful. The UN instructed Italy and Austria to continue negotiations to find a peaceful solution. South Tyrol's fate therefore

became more prominent in European and global affairs throughout the 1960s than it had been at any previous point after the Second World War.

The increasing prominence of South Tyrol on a global scale was also reflected within Italy. In 1961, the Italian government established a cross-language commission to examine possible solutions to South Tyrol's situation. The public narrative in South Tyrol continued to be dominated both by the injustice of the original annexation and by the Italian government's failure to implement the terms of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement. However, political narratives within South Tyrol subtly shifted following the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement: rather than focusing on secession from Italy, South Tyrol's German-speaking politicians, led by the ruling SVP, began to concentrate on ensuring that South Tyrol's German speakers were able to maintain an identity informed by their Tyrolean heritage despite their official status as Italian citizens.

### **1.3 Phase Three – The Second Autonomy Statute (1972): Long-term stability at the cost of short-term division**

The Second Autonomy Statute (1972), the product of extensive negotiations between the South Tyrolean provincial government and the Italian state, represented the beginning of the third phase. The Statute – agreed in 1969 before coming into force three years later – had diverse and far-reaching consequences for identity formation and multilingualism within the province. It provided more political, linguistic, administrative and educational safeguards for the German and Ladin-speaking

communities.<sup>66</sup> Significantly, the Statute included the German term *Südtirol* instead of *Tiroler Etschland* and granted powers previously held by the combined Trentino-South Tyrol region to the individual provinces of Trentino and South Tyrol.

The Statute reaffirmed the division between German and Italian-speaking schools, also giving a solid legal basis to the teaching of Ladin alongside German and Italian in primary and secondary schools in Val Badia and Gherdëina. It addressed the disproportionate number of Italian speakers in public sector jobs by introducing the Ethnic Proportion Law (EPL), which provided for the proportional allocation of public sector jobs amongst South Tyrol's language groups. The EPL was supported by the introduction of the Act of Linguistic Belonging (ALB). These two interconnected laws consolidated the notion of separate identities for each of South Tyrol's main language groups, legitimising the idea that the distinctive cultural and linguistic heritage of the German and Ladin-speaking communities had been neglected by the terms of the First Autonomy Statute and the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement.

Though it partially appeased the German and Ladin-speaking communities – as well as those who favoured a monolingual approach to identity construction – the Second Autonomy Statute was not popular among other sections of South Tyrolean society, notably parts of the Italian-speaking community and those who advocated a cross-cultural process of identity formation. These two groups were each offered a voice by the works of Sebastiano Vassalli and Alexander Langer respectively. Rather than lending stability and coherence to the debate concerning cultural identity and multilingualism by removing areas of tension, the Second Autonomy Statute initially simply shifted

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<sup>66</sup> Alcock, *The South Tyrol Autonomy*, pp. 13-14.

these fault lines elsewhere. This change in emphasis inadvertently granted extra prominence to the aforementioned disaffected groups.

While the rising popularity of the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) party during the 1980s pointed towards the increasing influence of monolingualism in identity formation, Alexander Langer's high-profile opposition to the ALB drew attention to an identity which straddled deep-rooted boundaries between South Tyrol's communities. Thanks to Langer's concept of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler*, the notion of a cross-cultural identity became a viable aspect of South Tyrolean identity formation, though it was still not widely supported. The recognition of Ladin as an official language of administration in Val Badia and Gherdëina in 1989 served to legitimise the notion of a distinct process of Ladin identity formation, yet did not address the concept of a South Tyrolean identity which encompassed each of the province's three main communities.

The Second Autonomy Statute established the basis for a long-term improvement in relations between South Tyrol's language communities by addressing the shortcomings of both the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement and the First Autonomy Statute. It also established South Tyrol as a distinct political entity. However, in the short term, the Statute polarised the debate on identity and multilingualism. A long-term easing of tensions came at the cost of accentuating the differences between the language communities, leaving many unanswered questions concerning the role of multilingualism in cultural identity and creating an identity vacuum for those not wishing to align themselves entirely with any one of South Tyrol's language groups.

South Tyrol's permanent status as an Italian province with a high degree of autonomy and safeguards for its German and Ladin-speaking communities was ultimately

confirmed in a joint announcement to the UN by Austria and Italy in 1992. Following approval by the relevant national and regional parliaments, both countries agreed that the Italian government had fully implemented the terms of both the Second Autonomy Statute and the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement. Although it marked a general improvement in relations between the two countries, residual tensions between South Tyrol and the Italian government remained and intensified following the involvement of the right-wing *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) in the Italian coalition government in 1994. Many of South Tyrol's German speakers feared that the governmental influence of the AN, the post-1989 rebranding of the neo-fascist MSI party, would endanger the province's autonomy.

Though electoral developments in Rome during the early 1990s did little to improve relations between the Italian state and South Tyrol's provincial government, there were greater signs of collaboration on a regional, cross-border level. Political initiatives aimed at increasing co-operation between South Tyrol, North Tyrol and Trentino gathered pace during the early 1990s, helped by the election of provincial governments keen to develop cross-border relations. The first joint parliamentary sitting between the three provinces occurred in 1991, and in 1994 the respective provincial governments participated in a joint conference in Bolzano.<sup>67</sup>

The trend during the 1990s towards establishing more connections with neighbouring areas was not limited to South Tyrolean politics. Scholarship on South Tyrol was also developing during this time to reflect a growing feeling that the literature of the

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<sup>67</sup> 'Milestones', *Euroregion Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino*, <http://www.europaregion.info/en/milestones.asp> [accessed 28 October 2020].

province should be viewed in a wider, cross-border context. Sieglinde Klettenhammer wrote in 1996 of the importance of acknowledging the diverse cultural factors which shape works by German, Italian and Ladin-speaking South Tyrolean writers, some of whom had an audience beyond the province's borders but were still influenced by their South Tyrolean background.<sup>68</sup> Klettenhammer's article was indicative of a growing awareness of the need to acknowledge South Tyrol's specific cultural diversity by drawing attention to influences from both within and beyond the province's borders.

#### **1.4 Phase Four – Founding of the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion (1998): The beginnings of mainstream cross-border political and cultural collaboration**

At a meeting in Meran between the parliaments of South Tyrol, North Tyrol and Trentino in 1998 – the fourth of its kind – the decision was taken to officially establish a cross-border Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion in order to provide an official framework within which the three territories could collaborate.<sup>69</sup> The legal document confirming the official status of this cross-border collaboration as a Euroregion was not signed until 2011 due to concerns by the Italian state that it could lead to a spike in separatist sentiments – a reservation disputed by the South Tyrolean government. However, the initial agreement to establish a Euroregion in 1998 was a key turning point

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<sup>68</sup> Sieglinde Klettenhammer, 'Wider die "verwelkte Metapher zwischen den verrosteten ethnischen Gitterstäben": Themen und Tendenzen der Lyrik aus Südtirol seit den siebziger Jahren', *Zagreb Studies of German Philology*, 3 (1996), 105-137.

<sup>69</sup> For a history of the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion, see Hans Heiss, 'Die Euregio Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino – Eine Skizze jüngerer Entwicklungspfade', in *Die schwierige Versöhnung: Italien, Österreich und Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Andrea Di Michele and others (Bolzano: University of Bolzano Press, 2020), pp. 539-562.

which marked the start of a new phase in debates on cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol.

A study in 2018 identified 214 Euroregions, of which 158 were deemed 'active'. Of these, 61 regions, including the Tyrol South Tyrol Trentino Euroregion, were deemed 'especially active'.<sup>70</sup> Euroregions, so-called due to their focus on cross-border European regions, are designed to encourage supranational co-operation between neighbouring areas with common political, cultural and identity-based concerns. The concept of a Euroregion was distinct from the aforementioned occasional intergovernmental meetings in the early 1990s: it was a formal structure – recognised across Europe and shared by other cross-border European regions – that established an ongoing forum for supranational collaboration.

The agreement to found the Euroregion changed the emphasis of the cultural identity debate from a South Tyrolean perspective, since it constituted a political organisation that confirmed the special status of South Tyrol as a multilingual border province with historical, cultural and linguistic ties to North Tyrol and Trentino, but without the underlying suggestion that this could precede secession from Italy.

The positive impact of the Euroregion on questions of identity and multilingualism arguably outweighed the increased political co-operation it was designed to encourage. It offered concrete proof of a cross-border and cross-provincial commitment to actively work together in pursuit of common goals, with South Tyrol playing a prominent role.

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<sup>70</sup> Antoni Durà Guimerà and others, 'Euroregions, Excellence and Innovation across EU borders. A catalogue of good practices', *University of Barcelona Department of Geography*, [https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/recot\\_crii\\_catalogue\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/recot_crii_catalogue_0.pdf) [accessed 28 October 2020], p. 34.

Most crucially for identity formation, the Euroregion's encouragement of cross-border co-operation legitimised the notion, advocated by Alexander Langer, that osmosis between different cultures must be possible and that conventional national borders are unable to entirely accommodate the complex cultural, linguistic, historical and political dynamics that have bearing on South Tyrolean identity formation.<sup>71</sup> The inaugural inclusion of the German term *Südtirol* in the Italian constitution in 2001 was an important recognition at national level of South Tyrol's status as a multilingual border province with a Tyrolean heritage.

The Euroregion, and to a lesser extent the aforementioned symbolic change to the Italian constitution, were official acknowledgements that multilingualism represented a legitimate component of mainstream South Tyrolean identity formation. These two developments also implicitly indicated that South Tyrol's annexation had established a national border between areas which, despite cultural and linguistic differences, retained a common Habsburg heritage. From 2014, an elected representative of the Ladin-speaking areas of the Belluno province was involved in Euroregion discussions, with the specific aim of increasing cross-provincial collaboration between Ladin areas.<sup>72</sup> The Euroregion therefore assumed additional significance: it provided a common framework in which the Ladin-speaking areas in South Tyrol, Trentino and Belluno – long united under the County of Tyrol – could simultaneously work both with one another and alongside their German and Italian-speaking counterparts.

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<sup>71</sup> Alexander Langer, 'Zehn Punkte für das Zusammenleben', in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo 1978-1995/Aufsätze zu Südtirol 1978-1995*, ed. by Riccardo Dello Sbarba and Siegfried Baur (Meran: AlphaBeta, 1996), pp. 234-243 (p. 238).

<sup>72</sup> 'Ladiner in der Euregio: Treffen zwischen Mussner und Agostini', *Südtiroler Landesverwaltung*, 5 June 2015, [http://www.provinz.bz.it/news/de/news.asp?news\\_action=4&news\\_article\\_id=501655](http://www.provinz.bz.it/news/de/news.asp?news_action=4&news_article_id=501655) [accessed 29 October 2020].

Although not without political difficulties, the Euroregion signalled an important official change in emphasis: it represented a forward-looking desire to acknowledge areas of common interest, rather than a nostalgic wish to revert to the borders of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire. Unlike the First Autonomy Statute, it acknowledged the distinctiveness of Trentino and South Tyrol, while still enabling cross-provincial and cross-border co-operation. Moreover, it involved the supranational concept and vision of Europe in an identity that had up to then been constructed on exclusively local and national lines.

As the twenty-first century has progressed, the founding of the Euroregion has also had an impact on the approach of South Tyrolean writers towards their work. In 2016, Stefano Zangrando, an Italian-speaking novelist who has spent some years in Berlin, talked of the need for 'uno spazio letterario euroregionale' ('a Euroregion literary space'), a more flexible category of literature which reflects the wider supranational borders of the Euroregion and reaches beyond the deep-rooted cultural and linguistic fault lines in South Tyrol.<sup>73</sup> Unlike Klettenhammer over twenty years previously, Zangrando was able to draw on the Euroregion as a model for a multilingual literary space which could accommodate the specific influence of cultural diversity on works by South Tyrolean authors while not allowing restrictive geographical, cultural or linguistic markers to limit their scope and potential audience.

Notwithstanding the success of the Euroregion, one development in particular underlined how tensions between different groups in South Tyrolean society continued

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<sup>73</sup> Elisabetta Bortolotti, 'Stefano Zangrando, ponte fra due culture', *Uomo, Città, Territorio*, 1 May 2016, pp. 40-41.

to persist into the twenty-first century. In 2017, the issue of whether South Tyroleans should be eligible for dual Italian-Austrian citizenship resurfaced following the entry of the right-wing *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) into the Austrian coalition government. The often heated political and public debates provoked by the possibility of dual citizenship were telling: they indicated that, despite considerable progress, aspects of South Tyrol's twentieth-century history, and specifically the interplay between this history, cultural identity and multilingualism, remained unresolved as the centenary of the province's annexation by Italy approached.

### **1.5 The centenary of the annexation (2019): An integrated approach to questions of cultural identity and multilingualism**

The centenary of South Tyrol's annexation was commemorated in September 2019 and marked a turning point in the way questions concerning cultural identity and multilingualism were addressed. It suggested a renewed governmental readiness to tackle the complex historical narratives which continued to complicate identity formation in the province. A speech made by South Tyrol's governor Arno Kompatscher in September 2019 symbolised a decisive change in how the province's history was incorporated into identity formation across South Tyrol. In the speech, made at a special parliamentary sitting in Meran to mark the centenary, Kompatscher dismantled the notion of South Tyroleans being victims of both the Fascist and the Nazi regimes (the so-called *Opferthese*). Crucially, however, he combined this with an acknowledgement of the injustice entailed by the annexation:

Seit 1919 teilt uns eine Unrechtsgrenze [...] Die Brennergrenze ist als Folge von Imperialismus und Nationalismus zu verstehen, als Frucht fehlgeleiteter Ideologien. Später wurde sie auch Symbol des Leids, das durch Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus über uns gekommen ist. Wir waren [...] aber nicht nur Opfer. Auch bei uns gab es Anhänger dieser Ideologien, die genauso aktiv mitgewirkt haben an dieser Tragödie.<sup>74</sup>

It was not the first time that Kompatscher had publicly undermined the *Opferthese*.

However, the speech in September 2019 was especially significant for the way in which he discredited the *Opferthese* as well as addressing the suffering caused by South Tyrol's annexation. By dealing with these two notions jointly, Kompatscher signalled a change in emphasis. Up until that point, the political and military rationale behind the annexation had been exploited to construct a historical narrative which consistently cast South Tyrol as a victim between 1919 and 1945. This shift concerned both how identity in South Tyrol is discussed and how the province's memory culture can contribute to this debate.

Although a symbolic acknowledgement from the Italian government of the suffering caused by the annexation has to date not been forthcoming, Kompatscher's speech signalled a gradual change in how narratives on South Tyrol's past are integrated into contemporary identity formation across the province. The contrast between the Italian government's reluctance to address the significance of the annexation and Kompatscher's use of the centenary to encourage a broader discussion of South Tyrol's prevailing historical narratives makes a consideration of the evolving role of memory

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<sup>74</sup> ('Since 1919, an unjust border has divided us. [...] The Brenner border can be understood as a consequence of imperialism and nationalism, as the result of misguided ideologies. Later it also became a symbol of the suffering that was brought upon us by fascism and National Socialism. However, we were not [...] only victims. There were also supporters of these ideologies among us, who actively collaborated in this tragedy'). Tiroler Landtag, *Gedenksitzung: "Zwischen Zerreißung und Hoffnung"*, online video recording, Land Tirol, 10 September 2019, <https://www.tirol.gv.at/landtag/live/archiv/2019/10092019-gedenksitzungzwischen-zerreissung-und-hoffnung/> [accessed 25 February 2020].

culture still more pertinent. In his speech, Kompatscher did not allow the presence of two fascist dictatorships during South Tyrol's twentieth-century history to simplify historical narratives and prevent the implications of the annexation and the Second World War from being addressed. Rather, he engaged with the annexation, the *Option* and the Second World War within a single speech, recognising their interconnected roles in South Tyrol's cultural identity formation. He built on the reassessment of twentieth-century narratives started by South Tyrol's evolving memory culture,<sup>75</sup> which provided a physical space where these competing and often contradictory narratives could be accommodated.

The centenary commemorations – and specifically Kompatscher's role within them – did not alter the questions being posed concerning cultural identity and multilingualism. Instead, they served to integrate questions previously discussed separately within individual groups into a mainstream cross-cultural, cross-language discourse which acknowledged the unjust circumstances of the province's establishment without allowing them to either overshadow important questions of complicity or hinder increased interaction between language groups.

## **Conclusion**

The four-phase framework proposed in this chapter shows that what might appear to be unstructured debates on cultural identity and multilingualism are in fact shaped by particular turning points. The generational change in the lead-up to the centenary of the

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<sup>75</sup> See Chapter Six, section 6.3.

annexation was especially significant in changing how the debate has been conducted. It allowed questions concerning the injustice of the initial annexation, the *Opferthese*, and what it means for different communities to live together, to be discussed within the context of South Tyrol's entire history since 1919 and from a range of different perspectives, rather than foregrounding particular historical periods or the experiences of particular individuals and language groups at the expense of others.

The specific role of language in contemporary identity construction will be examined in the following chapter, which uses four twenty-first century works to analyse how the intercultural, interlinguistic tensions and evolving attitudes towards multilingualism explored in the present chapter manifest themselves in writings by South Tyrolean authors. It looks at how the distinctive nature of each of South Tyrol's three main language groups creates three distinctive identities and considers to what extent these identities hinder a cross-cultural, cross-language process of identity formation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The languages of South Tyrol: contemporary literary perspectives and their impact on identity**

This chapter examines the roles of language in the articulation of identity of German, Italian and Ladin speakers in South Tyrol. It elucidates the linguistic tensions both within and between South Tyrol's three main language groups, first through a consideration of the complex linguistic background of the province and then via a close analysis of four texts by South Tyrolean authors. The chapter considers how the interactions between language groups affect the potential emergence of a multilingual approach to identity formation which transcends long-established linguistic boundaries within South Tyrol. It explores the development of categories such as 'insider' and 'outsider' and how the factors which inform these categories affect the identity formation of South Tyroleans both within and beyond the province.

The issue of language and its specific role in identity formation has contributed in important ways to each of the four phases identified in Chapter One. Indeed, many of the complexities and controversies concerning the influence of language on identity formation began in 1919 with the annexation of South Tyrol. The annexation ultimately led to the process of enforced Italianisation between 1923 and 1943, which was a politically-motivated attempt to alter the linguistic demographics of South Tyrol permanently.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 51-53.

Any discussion of the effect of language on identity formation in South Tyrol must take account of geographical factors, as the language communities are by no means evenly distributed across the province. According to the 2011 census, 62.3% of residents identified as German-speaking, 23.4% as Italian-speaking and 4.1% as Ladin speaking. In particular, there are distinct demographic differences between urban and rural areas.<sup>77</sup> According to the 2011 census, 84.1% of the Italian-speaking community live in the three biggest population centres of Bolzano, Meran and Brixen, compared to only 19.1% of the province's German-speaking population, who mostly live in the surrounding rural areas.<sup>78</sup> South Tyrol's Ladin-speaking communities are both highly concentrated, and located in rural areas. Ladin speakers are the smallest by far of the three main language groups across the whole province, accounting for 4.1% of South Tyrol's population overall in the 2011 census.<sup>79</sup> Only 5.6% of the Ladin-speaking population live in Bolzano, Meran and Brixen.<sup>80</sup> These statistics reveal that the three main language groups in South Tyrol tend to inhabit different physical spaces. Geographical distribution has in turn historically limited their contact with each other, thereby also acting as a barrier to the formation of a multilingual identity in the province.

As we have seen, until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, German, Ladin and Italian-speaking communities had co-existed largely peacefully in their

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<sup>77</sup> Gregorio Gobbi and Katrin Schenk, eds, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', *Landesinstitut für Statistik*, [https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz\\_2019\(3\).pdf](https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz_2019(3).pdf) [accessed 12 June 2021], pp. 10-12 and 16-18. The breakdown of the population data by language group in each settlement only includes German, Italian and Ladin speakers. There is no data available on the percentage of people from outside Italy living in each settlement.

<sup>78</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', pp. 10-12 and 16-18.

<sup>79</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', p. 19.

<sup>80</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', pp. 10-12 and 16-18.

different physical spaces as part of the County of Tyrol under the Habsburg dynasty. According to the census of 1910, the final one undertaken before South Tyrol's annexation, 89% of the inhabitants of what was to become South Tyrol were German-speaking, 3.8% were Ladin-speaking and just 2.9% were Italian-speaking.<sup>81</sup> However, the annexation of South Tyrol in 1919 and the subsequent Fascist Italianisation programme from 1923 fundamentally changed the relationship between the language groups. Moreover, rather than peacefully co-existing, the communities were from then on in competition with each other.

As outlined in Chapter One, language has been used since 1919 as a tool of oppression by establishing the dominance of one language group at the expense of another. For example, many Germanic family names were Italianised under Mussolini's Italianisation programme from 1923 and the German term *Südtirol* was banned. Moreover, Ladin was viewed by Italian fascists as an Italian dialect, rather than as a language in its own right.<sup>82</sup>

Even after the German term *Südtirol* was officially reinstated on a provincial level as part of the Second Autonomy Statute (1972), language continued to be a source of division in South Tyrol. Although the Statute was officially intended to ensure parity between the province's German, Italian and Ladin-speaking communities, it in fact underlined distinctions between the respective language groups. The existence of parallel monolingual educational systems was confirmed, with German-speaking South Tyroleans being taught in separate schools from Italian-speaking South Tyroleans.

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<sup>81</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', p. 19.

<sup>82</sup> 'Eine Gesellschaft im Wandel', *Istitut Micurá de Rù*, <https://www.micura.it/de/home/278-israel-istitut> [accessed 29 April 2021].

Moreover, the Act of Linguistic Belonging (ALB)<sup>83</sup> of 1981 made declaring oneself part of the German, Italian or Ladin-speaking community a legal requirement, which in turn forced every South Tyrolean to make a conscious choice concerning the language community to which they felt they most belonged – a choice which necessarily excluded diversity of identity. Green Party politician Alexander Langer was especially opposed to this act, as he felt that it excluded those who did not feel as though they identified entirely with any one group. The ALB was in part introduced to facilitate the Ethnic Proportion Law (EPL)<sup>84</sup> of 1976, which provided for the proportional allocation of some public sector jobs among the province's language groups. Although the legal requirement to declare 'belonging' (*Zugehörigkeit/appartenenza/portignënza*) to a group was dropped in 1991, it was replaced by an obligation to 'align' oneself (*Zuordnung/aggregazione/agregazion*) with the German, Italian or Ladin-speaking group, without which it was not possible to apply for certain public sector posts and receive certain kinds of benefit support.<sup>85</sup> Choosing which language group to align oneself with was therefore not only a legal requirement, it additionally assumed a professional and economic purpose which has continued into the twenty-first century. Language continues to play a distinct role in identity formation for each of the province's main language groups. The German variety, or more accurately varieties, are spoken by a majority language community in South Tyrol yet the German speakers are a linguistic minority within Italy. The situation is reversed for South Tyrol's Italian-speaking community, in that they constitute a minority within South Tyrol but a majority

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<sup>83</sup> *Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeitserklärung* in German; *dichiarazione di appartenenza al gruppo linguistico* in Italian; and *detlaraziun de portignënza al grup linguistich* in Ladin.

<sup>84</sup> *Ethnischer Proporz* in German; *proporzionale etnica* in Italian; and *proporzionala etnica* in Ladin.

<sup>85</sup> Oskar Peterlini, 'Autonomy and the Protection of Ethnic Minorities in Trentino-South Tyrol: An Overview of the History, Law and Politics', trans. by Marie Fraser (Vienna: Braumüller, 1997), p. 169.

within Italy. The Ladins are well used to their status as a minority language community, yet grapple with internal linguistic complexities which affect the formation of a cross-Ladin identity.

## **2.1 Defining linguistic terms**

By contrast with the later sections of the chapter, which are devoted to analysing selected texts as artefacts in their respective cultural contexts, sections 2.2 to 2.4 discuss the languages of South Tyrol with reference to the descriptive categories used in linguistics. Instead of deploying the term ‘dialect’ in accordance with non-specialist usage, as elsewhere in the thesis, these sections will therefore refer to ‘varieties’, thereby avoiding potential normative connotations. This is in line with Peter Trudgill’s definition of variety: ‘a neutral term used to refer to any kind of language – a dialect, accent, sociolect, style or register – that a linguist happens to want to discuss as a separate entity for some particular purpose.’<sup>86</sup> Trudgill’s definition of ‘variety’ allows subtle linguistic differences between varieties to be drawn out that may mark significant boundaries between different varieties within the same language community.

## **2.2 The languages of South Tyrol’s German-speaking community**

The German varieties of South Tyrol are a central aspect of German-speaking identity formation in the province, distinguishing South Tyrol’s German speakers not only from

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<sup>86</sup> Peter Trudgill, *A Glossary of Sociolinguistics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 139-140.

speakers of other languages in South Tyrol, but also from those in other German-speaking areas. The South Tyrolean German varieties are markedly distinct from High German, a fact which is partially attributable to the province's geographical proximity to North Tyrol and Bavaria, and the shared ethnic history dating back to the Baiuvarii people of the sixth century. The South Tyrolean German varieties are part of the South Bavarian dialect group and therefore share many linguistic features with local varieties spoken in North Tyrol and southern Bavaria. Alemannic features are prominent in dialects in the west of the province, with Carinthian ones being prominent in the east.<sup>87</sup>

There is no single South Tyrolean German variety, but rather a collection of local varieties which are mutually intelligible and share many features while being distinct from one another. A kind of regional High German, which shares phonetic features with the variety spoken in North Tyrol, is only used in a limited number of more formal contexts. These include official processes such as court cases and church services, certain professional and administrative contexts, political speeches, and interactions with outsiders who would not understand the local variety.<sup>88</sup> In the overwhelming majority of contexts, however, the relevant local German variety, rather than a more widely spoken regional variety, is used. Unlike South Tyrol's Italian speakers, many German speakers in South Tyrol have a common linguistic heritage. Large numbers of German speakers are members of families or communities that have lived in South Tyrol

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<sup>87</sup> Ludwig Eichinger, 'South Tyrol: German and Italian in a Changing World', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 23.1-2 (2002), 137-149, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630208666459>. (p. 139).

<sup>88</sup> Claudia Maria Riehl, 'Varietätengebrauch und Varietätenkontakt in Südtirol und Ostbelgien', *Linguistik Online*, 32.3 (2007), 105-117, <https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.32.540>. (p. 109).

for centuries, so the language that individuals speak at home is likely to be less distinct from the language they speak outside it.

The local German variety is commonly used on social media and in informal written communications such as text messages and emails,<sup>89</sup> though children are encouraged to use High German in oral discourse when interacting with their school teachers and must use High German when completing written work. As the majority of German speakers use their local German variety at home, some pupils find the switch to using oral and written High German at school particularly challenging.<sup>90</sup>

Attitudes towards language use in South Tyrol's German-speaking community are often characterised by familial and societal pressures. High German is widely perceived as a formal language spoken under duress,<sup>91</sup> an association established especially in the course of formal school education. The pressure to speak the relevant local German variety in as many contexts as possible comes more from the family and local community.<sup>92</sup> It has been described specifically in relation to South Tyrol as both 'ein zentrales Element der Identitätsbildung'<sup>93</sup> and '[ein] zentrales Identifikationsmoment'.<sup>94</sup>

Though the local German varieties are used by the German-speaking community to distinguish themselves from the province's Italian-speaking community, South Tyrol's

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<sup>89</sup> Barbara Baumgartner, 'Facebook spricht Dialekt', *Academia BZ*, 10 January 2016, <https://www.academia.bz.it/articles/facebook-spricht-dialekt> [accessed 6 April 2021].

<sup>90</sup> Ulrike Huber and others, 'The German Language in South Tyrol (Italy)', *Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (2017), [https://www.mercator-research.eu/fileadmin/mercator/documents/regional\\_dossiers/german\\_in\\_south\\_tyrol\\_2nd.pdf](https://www.mercator-research.eu/fileadmin/mercator/documents/regional_dossiers/german_in_south_tyrol_2nd.pdf) [accessed 6 April 2021], p. 29.

<sup>91</sup> Hans Heiss, interview with author, 12 March 2019. Heiss is a South Tyrolean historian and a former Green Party member of the provincial parliament.

<sup>92</sup> Riehl, 'Varietätengebrauch und Varietätenkontakt', p. 108.

<sup>93</sup> ('A central element of identity formation'). Heiss, interview with author, 12 March 2019.

<sup>94</sup> ('A central feature of identity'). Riehl, 'Varietätengebrauch und Varietätenkontakt', p. 111.

geographical status as part of Italy and its active contact with the Italian language since 1919 has nevertheless led to some lexical borrowing from Italian. The German used in administrative contexts is a case in point: *Patent* ('driving licence') comes from the Italian *patentino* and *Kondominium* ('apartment') comes from the Italian *condominio*.<sup>95</sup> There is also a small yet significant Italian influence on language use amongst South Tyrol's German-speaking community in informal situations. For example, the Italian words *magari* ('maybe/if only') and *casino* ('chaos') are used frequently in everyday language by German speakers in the province.

### **2.3 The languages of South Tyrol's Italian-speaking community in Bolzano**

Language use among South Tyrol's Italian-speaking population has followed a distinct trajectory, largely due to the politically orchestrated arrival of Italian speakers during the first half of the twentieth century. The number of Italian speakers living in South Tyrol increased from 7339 in 1910 (2.9% of the population) to a numerical peak of 137,759 (33.3%) in 1971, having reached a proportional peak of 34.3% in 1961. The census in 2011 showed that there were 118,120 Italian speakers in South Tyrol (23.4%), around 64% of whom live in the provincial capital of Bolzano.<sup>96</sup> Possible reasons for the fall in Italian speakers include their perception that the Second Autonomy Statute (1972) strengthened the position of the German-speaking community in South Tyrol. Furthermore, there was a feeling around that time that there were limited professional

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<sup>95</sup> Christoph Stragenegg, interview with author, 13 March 2019. Stragenegg is the headteacher of the Vinzentinum, a German-speaking school in Brixen.

<sup>96</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', pp. 10, 16 and 19.

prospects for Italian speakers beyond administrative roles in Bolzano, given the German-speaking community's dominance of tourism and agriculture.<sup>97</sup>

The large number of Italian speakers in the provincial capital Bolzano has led to the development of a distinctive Italo-Romance variety spoken around the city. The emergence of 'Bolzano Italian' can be traced back to the mid-1930s, when large numbers of Italian speakers were encouraged to move to the city following the establishment of a new industrial area. Italian speakers working in the area increased from nought in 1936 to 19,000 by 1947. Many came from neighbouring northern Italian provinces, including Trentino and Belluno.<sup>98</sup> In the intervening years, some of the linguistic features of the distinct northern Italo-Romance varieties spoken by newcomers to South Tyrol, most notably the Venetian and Trentino varieties, have developed into the shared variety of 'Bolzano Italian'.<sup>99</sup> As with the local South Tyrolean German varieties, the written form of 'Bolzano Italian' is mostly used in more informal contexts, such as on social media.<sup>100</sup>

There are a number of factors which contribute to variation within this shared 'Bolzano Italian', with regional differences being especially prominent. Chiara Meluzzi's study entitled 'Dialects and linguistic identity of Italian speakers in Bozen' (2015) provides a pertinent example of how an individual's familial connections to other areas of Italy can

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<sup>97</sup> Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck: Haymon, 2014), pp. 196-197.

<sup>98</sup> Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg*, p. 70.

<sup>99</sup> Chiara Meluzzi, 'Dialects and linguistic identity of Italian speakers in Bozen', *Globe: A Journal of Language, Culture and Communication*, 1 (2015), 1-16, <https://journals.aau.dk/index.php/globe/article/view/697/891> [accessed 8 November 2019]. Alessandro Vietti, 'Italian in Bozen/Bolzano: the formation of a "new dialect"', in *Towards a New Standard: Theoretical and Empirical Studies on the Re-standardization of Italian*, ed. by Massimo Cerruti and others, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 176-212.

<sup>100</sup> Chiara Meluzzi, 'Per un'analisi della varietà di italiano parlato a Bolzano: il corpus CitaBol', *Ladinia*, 40 (2016), 191-210 <https://www.micura.it/upload-ladinia/files/580.pdf> [accessed 7 April 2021], (p. 206).

give rise to a specific form of variation. She interviews a 27-year-old male, who states that he speaks the Calabrian variety at home, especially with his father, before switching to a Bolzano variety partially influenced by the Venetian variety when outside the home. The same interview reveals that choice of variety is not straightforwardly aligned with choice of register. The Bolzano variety and the family-influenced Calabrian variety cannot be defined in terms of register, as the man reports using the Bolzano variety in informal situations, such as during conversations with friends.<sup>101</sup> This differentiates Bolzano's Italian speakers from South Tyrol's German-speaking community. Whereas informal situations in the German-speaking community are almost exclusively characterised by the use of long-established local German varieties, Bolzano's Italo-Romance variety relies on a vocabulary taken from various northern Italo-Romance varieties in the absence of a long-established common linguistic base. This shared vocabulary bridges the gap created by individual linguistic differences, helping to form a unifying linguistic identity within the community. However, the unique familial influences that affect individual linguistic identities are still allowed to flourish as part of distinct individual home-based linguistic identities.

## **2.4 The languages of the Ladin-speaking community**

Five distinct Ladin varieties are generally recognised across the Ladin-speaking areas in the provinces of South Tyrol, Trentino and Belluno. These varieties are spoken in the

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<sup>101</sup> Meluzzi, 'Dialects and linguistic identity of Italian speakers in Bozen', pp. 9-10.

valleys of Val Badia and Gherdëina (South Tyrol); in the valley of Fascia (Trentino) and in the towns of Fodóm and Cortina de Anpezo (Belluno) respectively.

All the Ladin varieties are both spoken and written, though the official recognition afforded to them differs between Ladin-speaking areas. In South Tyrol, Ladin has been an official language since 1989 and it is used in all administrative contexts in Val Badia and Gherdëina, as well as in province-wide administration which affects the two Ladin-speaking valleys. Though 50% of lessons in schools in Val Badia and Gherdëina are taught in German from the second year of primary school onwards, with the other half taught in Italian, the local Ladin variety is taught as a separate subject for two hours a week. Ladin became an official language of administration in 1993 in Fascia (Trentino), where it has also been taught in schools since 1997. The local Ladin variety is not an official administrative language in Belluno, though it is taught as a school subject for one hour a week, albeit only on a voluntary basis and with the agreement of parents and teachers.<sup>102</sup>

Between the late 1980s and early 2000s, there were sustained yet ultimately fruitless efforts to accomplish the complex aim of developing a standardised written Ladin language which would be widely used and accepted across the five Ladin-speaking areas in South Tyrol, Trentino and Belluno. The process began in 1987, when a proposal supporting a standardised spelling system was passed.<sup>103</sup> The following year, Heinrich Schmid – who had been involved in developing a cross-regional version of Romansh in

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<sup>102</sup> Paul Videsott, interview with author, 11 March 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Dieter Kattenbusch, 'Ladinien', in *Handbuch der mitteleuropäischen Sprachminderheiten*, ed. by Robert Hinderling and others (Tübingen: Narr, 1996), pp. 311-333 (p. 329). Cited in Herta Maurer-Lausegger, 'The Diversity of Languages in the Alpine-Adriatic Region I: Linguistic Minorities and Enclaves in Northern Italy', *Tidsskrift for Sprogforskning* 2, 1 (2004), 5-23 <https://tidsskrift.dk/tfs/article/view/43/37> [accessed 11 March 2021], (p. 13).

Switzerland – was commissioned by the two major Ladin cultural organisations to develop criteria for a common written Ladin language known as *Ladin Dolomitan*.<sup>104</sup> In addition to his experience of developing a cross-regional variety of Romansh, the Swiss-born Schmid was also chosen due to his status as an impartial leader for the project.<sup>105</sup> The desire for a common written Ladin language was not linked to concerns over mutual intelligibility between the local dialects, since differences are relatively minor.<sup>106</sup> Instead, the development of *Ladin Dolomitan* was driven by the concern, which grew during the 1990s, that the individual Ladin varieties would gradually die out in an increasingly globalised world where mobility and travel beyond the Ladin-speaking valleys was greatly increasing. The Ladin cultural institutions hoped that the creation of a prestigious, widely accepted written Ladin language used across all Ladin-speaking areas would help to mitigate the threat of Ladin disappearing as a written language.<sup>107</sup> The recognition of Ladin as an official administrative language of South Tyrol in 1989 gave the development of *Ladin Dolomitan* greater impetus since it highlighted the complications caused by the absence of a common written Ladin language: both the Val Badia and Gherdëina varieties were granted official recognition in their respective valleys as the language of administration.<sup>108</sup> Following input from a number of Ladin

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<sup>104</sup> Roland Bauer, 'Wie ladinisch ist *Ladin Dolomitan*?: Zum innerlinguistischen Naheverhältnis zwischen Standardsprachen und Talschaftsdialekten', *Ladinia*, 35 (2012), 205-235, <http://ald.sbg.ac.at/rid/rb-lad-2012.pdf> [accessed 6 August 2020], (pp. 205-206).

<sup>105</sup> Bauer, 'Wie ladinisch ist *Ladin Dolomitan*?', p. 207.

<sup>106</sup> Videsott, interview with author, 11 March 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Andre Klump, 'Das Dolomitenladinisches im wissenschaftlichen Kontext', *Ladinia*, 28 (2004), 81-101, <https://www.micura.it/upload-ladinia/files/219.pdf> [accessed 6 August 2020], (p. 84).

<sup>108</sup> Klump, 'Das Dolomitenladinisches im wissenschaftlichen Kontext', pp. 85-87.

cultural organisations, a book of grammar for *Ladin Dolomitan* was published in 2001,<sup>109</sup> followed by a dictionary in 2002.<sup>110</sup>

However, by the time of these publications, the likelihood of *Ladin Dolomitan* being widely accepted among the Ladin-speaking communities had already receded significantly following the death of Schmid in 1999. Underlying concerns that the introduction of *Ladin Dolomitan* would lead to a loss of prestige for the existing Ladin varieties gained momentum in the absence of the impartial Schmid.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, some feared that *Ladin Dolomitan* would be linguistically too close to Italian.<sup>112</sup>

In 2003, the prospect of *Ladin Dolomitan* becoming an official language of administration in South Tyrol was effectively ended when the SVP-led provincial government – on the recommendation of a Ladin-speaking SVP member of Parliament – confirmed both the Val Badia and Gherdëina Ladin varieties as official administrative languages in South Tyrol.<sup>113</sup> The resistance towards and eventual rejection of *Ladin Dolomitan* on both a political and public level underscores the desire amongst Ladin speakers to protect the distinctiveness of their own varieties and in turn associated identities. Respect for internal variation, then, gained greater prominence than the project promoting homogenisation. Arguably the biggest ongoing challenge regarding language and identity concerns the desire of each Ladin-speaking area to differentiate itself from the others enough to guard against the danger of losing its Ladin identity,

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<sup>109</sup> *Gramatica dl Ladin Standard* (St Martin de Tor: Union Generale di Ladins dla Dolomites, 2001).

<sup>110</sup> *Dizionar dl Ladin Standard* (St Martin de Tor: Union Generale di Ladins dla Dolomites, 2002).

<sup>111</sup> Bauer, 'Wie ladinisch ist *Ladin Dolomitan*?', p. 207.

<sup>112</sup> Bauer, 'Wie ladinisch ist *Ladin Dolomitan*?', p. 215.

<sup>113</sup> Bauer, 'Wie ladinisch ist *Ladin Dolomitan*?', p. 211.

balanced against the wish to develop a unifying cross-valley identity which collectively distinguishes all Ladin speakers from their German and Italian-speaking counterparts.

## 2.5 Introduction of texts

Contemporary South Tyrolean literature offers an illuminating case study for examining relations both within and between South Tyrol's language groups, and exploring specifically how these relations inform questions of identity. Through their chosen language of publication, authors already implicitly identify themselves with one of South Tyrol's three main language communities and appeal to a specific audience. The four texts analysed in this chapter are *Reden: Siebzehn Sprechgeschichten aus Südtirol* (2011),<sup>114</sup> a collection of short stories in German by journalist Toni Colleselli; Maxi Obexer's semi-autobiographical essay *Europas längster Sommer* (2017),<sup>115</sup> Alessandro Banda's autobiographical travelogue *Due mondi e io vengo dall'altro* (2012),<sup>116</sup> and Roberta Dapunt's Ladin poetry volume *Nauz* (2012).<sup>117</sup>

Though they were all published in the twentieth-first century, the texts were particularly chosen for their specific shared focus on the role of language within identity formation in South Tyrol, rather than their common status as contemporary works by South Tyrolean authors. The precise function of language in identity differs between each text, all of which are written by authors with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and contrasting connections to South Tyrol. It is clear that each of the

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<sup>114</sup> ('Talking: Seventeen Spoken Stories from South Tyrol').

<sup>115</sup> ('Europe's longest Summer').

<sup>116</sup> ('Two worlds and I come from the other one').

<sup>117</sup> ('Feeding trough').

province's three main language communities has been affected in particular ways by the complex and evolving status of multilingualism in the province. Each author uses the written word – and a variety of fictional or non-fictional protagonists – to elucidate both the particular contribution of language to identity formation, and how language interacts with a diverse constellation of other factors to shape identity in South Tyrol.

The four chosen texts stand out because of how they often challenge the linguistic and cultural fault lines between the three main language communities, examining whether these communities can ever sustain a unifying identity that crosses linguistic boundaries. The works reflect the aim of this thesis to examine how far South Tyrol's language communities interact with one another, rather than viewing them as separate entities. They share a common theme of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', exploring how the distinctions between these two categories are sometimes blurred.

Each text approaches the issue of language and identity in South Tyrol from a different perspective. *Reden* tackles the topic from within South Tyrol. Colleselli (b. 1959), who grew up in the German-speaking Puster Valley with a German-speaking mother and Ladin-speaking father before moving to Bolzano in 1970, uses interviews with young German and Italian-speaking South Tyroleans as the inspiration for a series of short stories. Colleselli's work largely involves stories told from either a German-speaking or an Italian-speaking perspective. An Italian translation of the German original, entitled *Storia di lingua*, was published in 2012.<sup>118</sup> Despite Colleselli's Ladin familial connections, Ladin-speaking perspectives in *Reden* are largely restricted to second-hand accounts. *Reden* provides an internal, lived, contemporary perspective on how South Tyrol's three

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<sup>118</sup> Toni Colleselli, *Storie di lingua*, trans. by Gabriele di Luca (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2012).

language groups interact, with a particular emphasis on the oral construction of identity. Throughout the collection, Colleselli uses the experiences of his fictional protagonists to reposition the role of language in identity. Instead of depicting language as a central part of a monolingual identity, Colleselli demonstrates through his characters how language can act as a means of negotiation between different communities, facilitating a greater engagement with South Tyrol's multilingual situation.

Maxi Obexer's *Europas längster Sommer* is a semi-autobiographical work described in the blurb as a *Romanessay* ('novelistic essay'). During the text, Obexer negotiates the difficult transition from South Tyrolean to German citizen and sets the key issues of South Tyrolean identity formation in a wider, European context. As well as extending questions of language and identity beyond South Tyrol's borders, she explores the concept of a linguistic hierarchy. She intersperses recollections of her own early days in Berlin with observations concerning the immigrants with whom she shares a train to the German capital on the way to her German citizenship ceremony. She uses the contrasts and parallels between these experiences of immigration as a means of examining why some outsiders are valued and accepted more than others.

In his autobiographical travelogue *Due mondi e io vengo dall'altro*, Banda, like Obexer, explores the notion of being an outsider in order to consider the validity of long-established linguistic and cultural distinctions. Though the status of outsider is to some extent assigned to Obexer by her acquaintances in Berlin, Banda explicitly defines himself as such, despite living and working in South Tyrol: '[...] mi sono sempre sentito

un outsider [...]: due mondi e io vengo dall'altro'.<sup>119</sup> Banda's text advocates an approach to identity which is not exclusively defined by the province's complex history, instead promoting one which is also concerned with the multilingual realities of the present. He accepts the history of conflict between South Tyrol's German and Italian-speaking communities, yet does not use this as the defining feature of his own vision of South Tyrol in the twenty-first century. Instead, he highlights how the province is home to an increasing number of people who speak languages other than German, Italian or Ladin. *Due mondi* is marked by the inherent difficulty of balancing an awareness of South Tyrol's complex twentieth-century history – and the tensions between language groups that this often prompted – with a need to reflect the evolving contemporary linguistic and cultural demographics of the province.

*Nauz*, a poetry collection written entirely in Ladin by Roberta Dapunt – born in Val Badia in 1970 – similarly explores how to reconcile competing impulses in identity formation. Dapunt brings together the dual concepts of a local and global identity, questioning whether it is possible to reconcile a local Ladin identity with both an increasingly multilingual province and an ever more globalised world. She alludes to the distinctive Ladin identity cultivated by South Tyrol's oldest language community, both drawing out the differences between Ladin-speaking valleys and highlighting the linguistic and cultural barriers to preserving a distinctive identity as a linguistic minority. *Nauz* analyses the interplay between location, identity and language. This prompts a reviewer, Austrian writer Helmut Schönauer, to ask: 'Ist die ladinische Sprache

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<sup>119</sup> ('[...] I've always felt like an outsider [...] two worlds and I come from the other one'). Alessandro Banda, *Due mondi e io vengo dall'altro* (Rome: Laterza, 2012), pp. 70-71.

überhaupt eine Sprache, wenn sie vom eigenen Hof entfernt wird?’<sup>120</sup> Dapunt considers the value of a local identity and language when displaced from a local context, exploring to what extent Ladin identities are derived not only from the different Ladin dialects, but also from the distinct rural cultures to which they are connected.

## **2.6 Contrasting attitudes towards language in *Reden: Siebzehn***

### ***Sprechgeschichten aus Südtirol (2011) by Toni Colleselli***

The fictional stories and protagonists featured in *Reden* are inspired by conversations that Colleselli – an author, publisher and translator – undertook in the 2009/2010 academic year with South Tyrolean pupils in their final school year. The exchanges focused on the students’ linguistic experiences and were connected to a wider research project at the University of Bolzano, conducted by Professor Siegfried Baur and entitled *Zweitsprachenlernen – Eine Zwischenbilanz. Wie man in Südtirol zweisprachig wird oder einsprachig bleibt.*<sup>121</sup> The title of the overarching project implies that these stories were nonetheless influenced by the notion that monolingualism is the default state, even in a multilingual province such as South Tyrol, and that knowledge of an additional language requires conscious effort.

In addition to his connections to multilingualism through Baur’s research project, Colleselli’s translation work and his role as editor of an anthology of contemporary

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<sup>120</sup> (‘Is the Ladin language in fact a language at all if it is removed from one’s own farm?’). Helmut Schönauer, review of Roberta Dapunt, *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder* (Bolzano: Folio, 2012), in *Lesen in Tirol*, 16 August 2012, <https://www.lesen.tibs.at/index.php/content/erwachsene/roberta-dapunt-nauz> [accessed 5 September 2019].

<sup>121</sup> (‘Learning a second language – a progress report: How you become bilingual or remain monolingual in South Tyrol’).

Italian literature in South Tyrol<sup>122</sup> show how his work is concerned with the interactions between the province's languages and cultures. Indeed, Colleselli is relatively rare in having connections to each of South Tyrol's main language groups through a combination of professional and personal circumstances. Much of *Reden* focuses on the challenging relationship between South Tyrol's German and Italian-speaking communities.

*Reden* was praised by fellow South Tyrolean author Laura Mautone as 'Un libro che qualche politico dovrebbe leggere per tornare ad avere visioni. Un libro che Alexander Langer avrebbe apprezzato'.<sup>123</sup> *Reden* shares Langer's aim of suggesting an alternative approach to language and identity in South Tyrol. Rather than ignoring potential areas of conflict, *Reden* acknowledges their presence but highlights ways of resolving them. Colleselli's exploration of these linguistic tensions could be seen as a more pragmatic version of Langer's cross-cultural *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept.<sup>124</sup>

However, the reception of *Reden* elsewhere, specifically in the weekly local German-speaking magazine *FF*, indicates that such linguistic divisions persist. The review's headline read: 'Wie kommt es, dass Italiener, die in Südtirol aufwachsen, nicht deutsch lernen? Ein Buch erlaubt verblüffende Einblicke in ein Land, das auf dem Papier zweisprachig ist'.<sup>125</sup> The headline assumes German to be the mainstream language of

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<sup>122</sup> Toni Colleselli, ed., *Narrare l'Alto Adige: 25 anni di racconti intorno alla provincia meno italiana d'Italia*, (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> ('A book that some politicians should read in order to have vision once more. A book that Alexander Langer would have appreciated'). Laura Mautone, review of Toni Colleselli, *Reden: Siebzehn Sprechgeschichten aus Südtirol* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2011), in *Franz Magazine*, 26 November 2011, <https://franzmagazine.com/2011/11/26/reden-di-toni-colleselli-parlare-di-sudtirolo/> [accessed 5 September 2019].

<sup>124</sup> See Chapter Four, section 4.2.

<sup>125</sup> ('How has it come to pass that Italians who grow up in South Tyrol don't learn German? A book offers striking insights into a province that is bilingual on paper'). Review of Toni Colleselli, *Siebzehn Sprechgeschichten aus Südtirol* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2011), in *FF*, 27 October 2011, pp. 52-55 (p. 52).

South Tyrol. Moreover, by referring to South Tyrol as ‘zweisprachig’ rather than ‘dreisprachig’, it implicitly overlooks the long-standing presence of Ladin speakers. It also hints at the difference between perception and reality concerning the nature of South Tyrol’s multilingualism. The *FF* uses selective extracts from *Reden* to present Colleselli’s short stories largely as a way of cementing South Tyrol’s separate identities rather than acknowledging it as a project designed to encourage a renewed dialogue on a unifying identity between language communities.

Alongside his exploration of the linguistic tensions *between* different language communities, Colleselli also focuses on tensions *within* them. He specifically considers the relative role of the German dialects and High German in identity formation. For his young German-speaking protagonists, High German is a school subject like any other while their local dialect is an innate part of their identity. Many of the German-speaking characters in Colleselli’s stories, such as the female protagonist in *Die achte Geschichte*, emphasise how their local dialect is the only language that they need not consciously learn:

Der Dialekt ist meine Sprache, hochdeutsch [sic] eben nicht. Ich kann mich nicht mit dem identifizieren, was ich in Hochdeutsch schreibe. Das ist mir einfach fremd. Im Dialekt schreibe ich hingegen so wie ich denke. Das bin dann ich.<sup>126</sup>

Colleselli’s German-speaking character frames High German as being a ‘foreign’ language to German-speaking South Tyroleans. There is an authenticity and immediacy when writing in the local dialect that the character presents as being absent in High German, suggesting that these reflections are filtered before reaching the paper.

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<sup>126</sup> (‘Dialect is my language, High German quite simply isn’t. I cannot identify with what I write in High German. It’s just foreign to me. By contrast, when I write in dialect, I write how I think. That’s me.’). Toni Colleselli, *Reden: Siebzehn Sprechgeschichten aus Südtirol* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2011), p. 67.

Through this character, Colleselli depicts dialect as a more authentic and immediate expression of personal identity. By contrast, High German is viewed as a means to an end, as a 'foreign' language confined to school. The same German-speaking protagonist goes on to state: 'Die Lehrer in der Schule reden aber auch bei weitem nicht immer hochdeutsch [sic].'<sup>127</sup> This assertion both demonstrates the character's emphasis on the artificial nature of High German and reflects the fact that dialect can also be used in a formal educational context.

An Italian-speaking perspective on the role of German dialects for identity in *Die sechste Geschichte* expands upon Colleselli's vision concerning their function. Unlike the female German-speaking protagonist of *Die achte Geschichte*, the local German dialect is not the male protagonist's first language. For him, the authenticity of dialect is both an advantage and a drawback:

Der Dialekt, den ich dauernd hörte und den ich auch in meiner Sprache ein bisschen nachahmte, war nämlich nicht nur alltägliches Kommunikationsmittel, sondern auch Quelle vieler Fehler [...] In jedem Tal, in jedem Dorf wird ein bisschen anders gesprochen. Es ist also eine sehr freie Sprache, die man selber interpretieren muss.<sup>128</sup>

On the one hand, the Italian speaker admires the liberating creativity offered by the local German dialect, to the extent that he tries to imitate it when speaking German himself. Its lack of fixed rules is presented as enabling the crafting of a highly personal identity in a way that the grammatical standardisation of High German does not allow. Each individual shapes how they use the local dialect – even the protagonist for whom it

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<sup>127</sup> ('The teachers at school don't always speak in High German, not by a long way'). Colleselli, *Reden*, p. 69.

<sup>128</sup> ('The dialect that I constantly heard, and also imitated a bit in my language, was in fact not only an everyday method of communication, but also the source of many errors.[...] In every valley and every village, people speak a bit differently. So it's therefore a very free language that you've got to interpret yourself'). Colleselli, *Reden*, p. 53.

is not his first language. They use it as a tool for expressing their own individual identity rather than seeing language as a clearly defined set of words and structures around which an identity must be formed.

The creative potential offered by the local German dialect is also presented as a drawback. It is described by the Italian-speaking protagonist as '[die] Quelle vieler Fehler', especially when he attempts to revert to the High German taught in German lessons at his Italian-speaking school. These 'mistakes', as perceived by the character, reinforce the differing status of the local German varieties amongst South Tyrol's language groups. For the Italian speaking protagonist, the local German dialect is something that he can occasionally imitate and for which he holds a certain admiration, yet it is also a barrier in his attempts to master High German and achieve a good grade in German at school. For the German-speaking protagonist of *Die achte Geschichte*, her local German dialect is an inherent part of her identity, which gives her a strong sense of belonging to her local community.

*Die fünfzehnte Geschichte* suggests that the German local dialect can be as much a cause of exclusion as a sign of belonging, depending on one's linguistic background. The Italian-speaking protagonist describes his tense, infrequent encounters with his German-speaking counterparts as follows:

[...] von der Mentalität her, ist der Konflikt einfach vorprogrammiert [...] Vielleicht hat es aber auch nichts mit der Sprache zu tun [...] Das Problem tritt wirklich nur hier [in Südtirol] auf. Also ist es ein Mentalitätsproblem. Die Deutschen reden dann absichtlich Dialekt, damit wir nichts verstehen.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> ('[...] conflict is a pre-programmed part of the mentality [...]. But perhaps it's also got nothing to do with language [...] The problem only really arises here [in South Tyrol]. It's therefore a mentality problem. The Germans deliberately speak in dialect so that we don't understand anything'). Colleselli, *Reden*, p. 131.

Here the Italian-speaking protagonist does not present the German language as a barrier to communication or as a cause of division in itself. Rather, the specific South Tyrolean German dialects are used as a verbal manifestation of what the protagonist perceives as a deep-seated, divisive mentality amongst many members of South Tyrol's German-speaking community. By highlighting the use of the local dialect amongst South Tyrolean German speakers, *Die fünfzehnte Geschichte* suggests that they are cementing an exclusive identity of which the Italian speakers can never truly be a part. In using the local German dialect as a distinguishing feature of their identity, the nameless German-speaking characters of *Die fünfzehnte Geschichte* are shown by the Italian-speaking protagonist to avoid engaging with their problematic status as Italian citizens. Indeed, the protagonist interprets the use of the local dialect by the German speakers as a sign that they view their Italian citizenship as irrelevant to their German-speaking identity.

By seemingly ignoring both their Italian citizenship and their Italian-speaking counterparts, the German-speaking South Tyrolean characters in this story are framed as dismissing the idea of a cross-cultural South Tyrolean identity, such as that suggested by the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept advocated by Alexander Langer.<sup>130</sup> Linguistic identity is not used by the unnamed German-speaking characters of *Die fünfzehnte Geschichte* as an opening towards a cross-cultural, cross-language process of identity formation involving South Tyrol's other communities, but rather as a form of protection against these 'other' groups. Speaking Italian, or even High German, would constitute a

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<sup>130</sup> The concept of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* was used by Langer throughout the 1980s and 1990s to encourage South Tyroleans to identify with the whole province rather than with one particular language group (see Chapter Four, section 4.2).

recognition of Italian influences on South Tyrol, an acknowledgement that Colleselli implies is yet to occur in this story.

The use of the local German dialect to form an exclusive identity in *Die fünfzehnte Geschichte* raises key questions concerning the function of South Tyrol's multilingualism in identity formation across the province, namely, whether this multilingualism is embraced, endured or rejected. The opening of the same story provocatively suggests that a less positive approach towards multilingualism is most prevalent:

Ich habe mein Deutsch beim Discounter gekauft. Es ist keine Luxusausgabe [...] Für meine Bedürfnisse hat es immer gereicht [...] Wieso soll ich mehr Aufwand betreiben als nötig ist?<sup>131</sup>

German is not presented by the Italian-speaking protagonist as a key part of his identity as an Italian speaker living in South Tyrol, but rather as a commodity to be acquired using the least effort possible. It is not a second language but a foreign language, one that must be learnt like any other, rather than a valued part of a multilingual identity.

A lack of identification with the 'other' language is similarly apparent amongst German-speaking characters in Colleselli's short stories, as demonstrated by the following extract from *Die zweite Geschichte*:

Sobald dann das *Antologia-Buch* der italienischen Literatur eingeführt worden ist, ging gar nichts mehr. Bei uns in der Klasse ist niemand im Stande auch nur einen dieser Texte zu verstehen. Nicht einmal zu begreifen, worum es da eigentlich geht. Meistens lernt man dann eben auswendig, was die Lehrerin in der Klasse dazu gesagt hat.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> ('I bought my German at the discount store. It's not a luxury version. [...] It's always been enough to meet my requirements. [...] Why should I put in more effort than necessary?'). Colleselli, *Reden*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>132</sup> ('As soon as the Italian literary anthology had been introduced, nothing worked any more. None of us in our class are in a position to understand even one of these texts, not even in terms of understanding what it's about. Mostly you just learn off by heart what the teacher has said about the book in class'). Colleselli, *Reden*, p. 21.

The 'other' language, in this case Italian, is once more depicted as an unwelcome, inflexible commodity to be acquired but not truly understood, let alone embraced. Learning the Italian pronouncements of the teacher off by heart is presented as standing in stark contrast to the creative nature of the local German dialect which – according to the aforementioned protagonist of *Die sechste Geschichte* – requires interpretation by each individual. The reference to an Italian literature anthology in *Die zweite Geschichte* reaffirms the view, replicated in many of the collection's stories, that Italian is a language that has already been shaped by others, rather than an evolving medium which can be adapted to fit one's own identity. The German-speaking protagonist is shown to equate the move from primary school to middle school as the point at which Italian stopped being the creative language of comic strips such as *Pimpa* and assumed a more inflexible form as the established language of literature anthologies.<sup>133</sup>

In the collection, Colleselli uses his young characters to frame language as either primarily a communicative tool (as shown in *Die fünfte Geschichte*: 'Sprache ist Kommunikation')<sup>134</sup> or as a symbol of identity (as seen in *Die achte Geschichte* and *Die fünfzehnte Geschichte*). In *Die elfte Geschichte*, he focuses on the experiences of a young German-speaking character considering her next steps to demonstrate how this dual role of language can be apparent within the same individual's identity framework. Colleselli raises the additional question of whether South Tyrol's multilingualism is in fact more of a hindrance than a benefit when it comes to forming a coherent identity:

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<sup>133</sup> Colleselli, *Reden*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>134</sup> ('Language is communication'). Colleselli, *Reden*, p. 43.

Wenn ich hingegen mit richtigen Italienern spreche, so habe ich nicht immer den Mut, einfach drauflos zu reden. [...] Ich glaube, dass es gut gewesen wäre, wenn ich vom Anfang an die italienische Schule besucht hätte [...] Ich wäre dann vielleicht auch nicht so zweigeteilt wie jetzt. Ich weiß nämlich nie, ob ich nach der Matura weggehen oder hier bleiben soll. Natürlich würde mich eine italienische Uni reizen. Aber ich weiß nicht. Ich bin einfach so unsicher. Ich kann zwar nicht unbedingt schlecht italienisch, aber es ist eben ein Gasthausitalienisch.<sup>135</sup>

The use of the metaphor 'zweigeteilt' ('split in two') suggests that, in this character's case, South Tyrol's multilingualism has not produced a coherent, multilingual identity which incorporates her cross-language connections. Rather, the character feels forced to choose between two ill-fitting monolingual identities, which results in a sense of indecision and split loyalties. Torn between her German-speaking education and her desire to attend an Italian-speaking university, the girl feels that growing up in a multilingual province has left the path ahead unclear. The attraction of an Italian-speaking university is tempered by a worry that her 'Gasthausitalienisch' ('guesthouse Italian') will be deemed insufficient. Rather than providing an inclusive identity that leaves many options open, the girl believes that her lack of contact with 'real' Italians has left her potentially unable to survive outside the unique linguistic context of South Tyrol. Through the perspective of the female German-speaking protagonist, Colleselli suggests that South Tyrol's status as a multilingual border region precipitates a sense of linguistic fragmentation rather than linguistic fluency.

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<sup>135</sup> ('However, when I speak with real Italians, I don't always have the courage to just talk. [...] I think it would have been good if I had gone to an Italian-speaking school right from the start. [...] Maybe then I wouldn't feel as split in two as I do now. Specifically, I don't know whether I should leave South Tyrol after my A levels or stay here. Of course I would be tempted by an Italian university. But I don't know. I'm just so uncertain. My Italian isn't really that bad, but it's more like a guesthouse level of Italian'). Colleselli, *Reden*, pp. 94-95.

The Italian-speaking protagonist of *Die zwölfte Geschichte* furthers the impression that South Tyrol's geographical border location, combined with the dominance of the local German dialects, has hindered language learning rather than enabling it:

Südtirol liegt an der Grenze. Es sollten also die Sprachen gelehrt und gesprochen werden, die an beiden Seiten der Grenze gebraucht werden [...] In Südtirol sprechen die Italiener nämlich italienisch, die Deutschen sprechen aber nicht deutsch. Auch die Zweisprachigkeit aller Südtiroler wird dadurch behindert. Man ist nämlich zweisprachig, wenn man zwei Sprachen spricht, nicht eine Sprache und einen Dialekt.<sup>136</sup>

The protagonist suggests that South Tyrol's German speakers are especially disadvantaged in an increasingly globalised world, left with a sketchy command of both High German and Italian and fluent only in their local German dialect. Colleselli therefore implies a contradiction between the fact that South Tyrol is a multilingual province with three official languages without its being home to a multilingual population. In the aforementioned quote from *Die zwölfte Geschichte*, he uses the concept of a geographical border in a metaphorical manner to suggest that it acts as a barrier rather than as an opening to other cultures and identities. Through the assertions of the protagonist of *Die zwölfte Geschichte*, he considers whether the proximity of other languages and cultures can in fact encourage a highly local, narrow, monolingual identity which prevents young South Tyroleans from succeeding beyond the province.

Colleselli puts forward a possible alternative model to this highly local monolingual identity. Throughout the collection, he subtly demonstrates how the role of language

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<sup>136</sup> ('South Tyrol is situated on the border. Therefore, the languages needed on both sides of the border should be taught and spoken here. [...] In South Tyrol, the Italian speakers speak Italian but the German speakers do not speak German. This therefore also hinders the bilingualism of all South Tyroleans. You are only bilingual if you speak two languages, not one language and one dialect'). Colleselli, *Reden*, p. 109.

can move from being a central and restrictive tenet of a monolingual identity into being a helpful tool for negotiation on the path to a multilingual identity. In *Die neunte Geschichte*, the mutual lack of linguistic fluency is embraced:

Die Italiener bei uns da heroben haben für meine Aussetzer meistens noch Verständnis. Sie haben Schwierigkeiten mit dem Deutschen, ich mit dem Italienischen. So können sie mich noch irgendwie verstehen und wir reden dann ein bisschen deutsch und ein bisschen italienisch, so ein Mischmasch.<sup>137</sup>

Here, a linguistic 'Mischmasch' is presented not as an unsatisfactory compromise indicative of shortcomings on the part of the German-speaking South Tyrolean protagonist, but as a pragmatic sign of compromise and openness to others from different backgrounds.

However, Colleselli's stories do not collectively emphasise a widespread prevalence of multilingual identities in South Tyrol. Instead, they warn that the province could be regressing into a series of separate, exclusive, monolingual identities. The stories suggest that this is not entirely due to inherited prejudices against language groups, but partly because of insufficient linguistic competency, insufficient social contact with other language groups and a degree of awkwardness concerning other languages and cultures.

Crucially, South Tyrol's contemporary multilingualism did not develop gradually, a fact which distinguishes the province from other multilingual areas such as Switzerland. The nature of the annexation and subsequent enforced Italianisation meant that relations between language groups, particularly the German and Italian-speaking communities,

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<sup>137</sup> ('The Italians up here are mostly still understanding of my lapses. They have trouble speaking German and I have trouble with Italian. They still manage to understand me more or less, so we speak a kind of mishmash, a bit of German and a bit of Italian'). Colleselli, *Reden*, p. 81.

were characterised by competition, rather than the co-existence which marked much of the existence of the County of Tyrol under the Habsburgs. Colleselli implicitly dismisses the equivalence between accepting multilingualism and being unfaithful to modern-day South Tyrol's roots as a primarily German and Ladin-speaking part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In so doing, he repositions multilingualism as a notion which encapsulates the province's particular linguistic situation, rather than one which glosses over its complex history.

Colleselli redefines the role of multilingualism within identity, whereby the extent of one's multilingualism is defined not by fluency in a language, but by one's openness to the people and culture that it represents. However, the references throughout *Reden* to the simmering hostilities between language communities, specifically the reference to a 'Mentalitätsproblem'<sup>138</sup> ('mentality problem') in the German-speaking community by the Italian-speaking protagonist of *Die fünfzehnte Geschichte*, suggests that Colleselli is cautious about the prospect of a multilingual South Tyrolean identity developing in the future. *Reden* reinforces the impression that linguistic identity continues to be a problematic concept for many residents of South Tyrol, including the province's younger generations, represented by the fictional characters in his short stories. However, his work implies that the attitudes of younger generations are not marked by an insurmountable hostility towards the 'other' language. Rather, the largely monolingual structures of South Tyrol education and society in general discourage sustained engagement with the particular nature of multilingualism in the province.

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<sup>138</sup> Colleselli, *Reden*, p. 131.

## 2.7 The notion of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in *Europas längster Sommer* (2017) by Maxi Obexer

Maxi Obexer's European perspective on identity construction in her semi-autobiographical essay *Europas längster Sommer* (2017) contrasts with the internal, South Tyrolean viewpoint adopted by Colleselli in *Reden*. Obexer (b. 1970), a South Tyrolean author, playwright and lecturer with a particular interest in refugees and immigration, was inspired to write *Europas längster Sommer* following the events of the summer of 2015. After the image of a drowned Syrian boy on Greek shores drew worldwide attention to the refugee crisis in Europe, German Chancellor Angela Merkel responded by promising to welcome all refugees. As Obexer states towards the end of the text: 'Es war der Sommer, als wir wieder anfangen, höher und weiter zu denken, über die Grenzen hinaus, in ein Europa hinein'.<sup>139</sup> The text reflects on whether the events of 2015 have had a sustained impact on how immigration is discussed, both at government level and in public discourse.

Obexer contrasts her experiences of first arriving in Berlin from South Tyrol as a student in the early 1990s with those of the young non-European men she encounters on her train journey from her South Tyrolean homeland to her German citizenship ceremony in Berlin. As she travels further away from South Tyrol, Obexer considers her own sense of identity and how far it is shaped by her South Tyrolean roots. Her exploration of language and identity is closely informed by her inextricable South Tyrolean

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<sup>139</sup> ('It was the summer when we once more began to think more ambitiously and more broadly, beyond borders and into Europe'). Maxi Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer* (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2017), p. 100.

connections. The train journey is also a symbolic one as Obexer struggles to reconcile her South Tyrolean roots with her status as a soon-to-be German citizen.

Obexer's confusion over how to categorise herself was mirrored in the book's reception. German critic Florian Kölsch described Obexer as 'Die Deutsch-Italienerin'<sup>140</sup> ('The German-Italian woman') and Maria Jordan of the *Neues Deutschland* website stated: 'Die Frau kommt aus Italien, genauer gesagt, aus Südtirol'. Jordan went on to say of Obexer: 'Sie spürt die Nachbeben der Wende, sie passt für ihre Freunde in keine richtige Schublade.'<sup>141</sup> referring to the time after her arrival in 1993 when Obexer is awkwardly described as a 'Südin'<sup>142</sup> ('southerner') by her Berlin friends as she is from neither East nor West Germany. Obexer implies that her initial arrival in Berlin is characterised by a continued distinction between East and West Germany in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is apparent throughout the text that, though a sense of division remains in Germany in 2017, the nature of this division has changed since Obexer's arrival. Categories of East and West have been replaced by a distinction between Europeans and non-Europeans and 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Despite these significant changes, Obexer suggests that her status as a German speaker from outside Germany continues to place her in a kind of limbo.

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<sup>140</sup> Florian Kölsch, review of Maxi Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer* (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2017), in *buecher.de*, 9 August 2017, [https://www.buecher.de/shop/berlin/europas-laengster-sommer/obexer-maxi/products\\_products/detail/prod\\_id/48267306/](https://www.buecher.de/shop/berlin/europas-laengster-sommer/obexer-maxi/products_products/detail/prod_id/48267306/) [accessed 5 September 2019].

<sup>141</sup> ('The lady comes from Italy, from South Tyrol, to be precise. She senses the aftershocks of the fall of the Wall. [...] Her friends can't find the right box to put her in'). Maria Jordan, review of Maxi Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer* (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2017), in *Neues Deutschland*, 21 November 2017, <https://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/1070782.europas-laengster-sommer-was-heisst-das-deutschsein.html> [accessed 5 September 2019].

<sup>142</sup> Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 29.

*Europas längster Sommer* proved controversial amongst the jury of the *Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis*, a highly prestigious German-speaking literary award for which it was shortlisted in 2017. The themes of language, identity and foreignness divided opinion. German literary critic Hubert Winkels questioned Obexer's credibility: 'Aus der Perspektive des Komforts [wird] versucht, sich in andere hineinzudenken [...] Ganz misslungen ist es deshalb, weil sie es nicht zusammenbringt mit ihrer eigenen Geschichte'.<sup>143</sup> It could be argued that Winkels shows a misunderstanding of the historic and contemporary identity struggles in South Tyrol by referring to Obexer's position as one of security and privilege. Furthermore, by categorising Obexer's identity difficulties as being separate from those of the non-European immigrants who play a large part in the text, Winkels refuses to acknowledge that both Obexer and the immigrants she describes could be classed as 'outsiders'. Indeed, Obexer's critique of what she perceives as the nonsensical way in which immigrants are categorised as 'insiders' or 'outsiders' is a major theme of the text.

By contrast, Swiss panel member Hildegard E. Keller commented: '[Ich habe mich] als Schweizerin mit der Sprachproblematik identifizieren können. [Ich] habe besonders auf die Stimme geachtet, die Kritik der Behördensprache finde ich richtig'.<sup>144</sup> It seems especially significant that the Swiss-born Keller is more appreciative of the language and identity-related difficulties encountered by Obexer than her German colleague Winkels.

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<sup>143</sup> ('From a position of comfort, [Obexer] tries to put herself in the mindset of others. [...] However, this fails entirely as she does not manage to link this together with her own story'). 'Jury nicht einig zu Maxi Obexers Text', *ORF*, 8 July 2017, <https://bachmannpreis.orf.at/stories/2853738/> [accessed 5 September 2019].

<sup>144</sup> ('Coming from Switzerland, [I] was able to identify with the issue of language. [I] particularly attended to the voice. In my view, the criticism of the language of the authorities is correct'). 'Jury nicht einig'.

Much of *Europas längster Sommer* concerns the role of language in defining ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, as even Obexer herself flits between the two categories. Identity is depicted not as a controllable concept defined entirely by oneself, but rather as a privilege granted by others. She uses *Europas längster Sommer* as a way of re-evaluating the notion of identity, reframing it as a more flexible, self-defined concept which need not correspond to national borders.

Early in the text, it appears that Obexer’s apparent lack of control over her identity has had a detrimental impact on her use of language, as she recounts an exchange at the foreign residents’ registration office in Berlin:

“Ich sprechen Deutsch, ja [sic]“. Auch ich sprach plötzlich in einem korrekten ausländischen Deutsch. Mit der Anfrage nach einer Aufenthaltserlaubnis wurde meine eigene deutsche Sprache unversehens zur Fremdsprache.<sup>145</sup>

When treated like an outsider, Obexer subconsciously fulfils this role. The description of her grammatically incorrect German as ‘[ein] korrekte[s] ausländische[s] Deutsch’ suggests that an imperfect command of German forms part of the expected identity assigned to immigrants by the German authorities. As a South Tyrolean, Obexer may not completely correspond to this stereotype, yet she still adapts her use of language in order to conform to this expectation of ‘foreignness’.

A major theme of the text involves how, in Obexer’s view, Germans have tried to establish a distance between themselves and immigrants. She represents a potential challenge to this linguistic distancing as an immigrant who speaks a dialect that is distinct from, but still related to, High German. Obexer’s case constitutes an individual

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<sup>145</sup> (“I speaks German, yes [sic]“. I too was suddenly speaking in a correct foreign German. When I was asked about my residence permit, my own German language suddenly became a foreign language’). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 11.

example of how a South Tyrolean's unusual linguistic identity can undermine well-established processes of identity formation predicated on inflexible geographical and linguistic borders. Many of Colleselli's fictional protagonists in *Reden* challenge the dichotomy between monolingualism and multilingualism, whereas Obexer questions two different but connected distinctions: between familiar and foreign languages and between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Through articulating her failure to fit into a pre-existing category, Obexer constructs a catch-22: her position in a linguistic and cultural limbo is both the cause of her identity crisis and the defining feature of her identity.

Obexer's reflections on her time in Berlin as a university student are dominated by an inferiority complex regarding her inability to speak High German:

Wie könnte ich Wittgenstein, ausgerechnet Wittgenstein im Dialekt widersprechen? Könnte ich überhaupt sprechen? Oder werde ich, wenn ich nur den Mund aufmache, stottern?<sup>146</sup>

She presents this inferiority complex as being heightened in an academic context, a notion furthered by her juxtaposition of the academic language required for philosophical discussion with her description of the everyday context in which her local South Tyrolean dialect is used: 'der Dialekt gehört der Landschaft, den Jahreszeiten, der Witterung und dem Gedeih von Tieren und Menschen.'<sup>147</sup> Obexer's choice of Wittgenstein as a symbol of German-speaking culture initially appears odd, since he was Austrian and spent much time in an English-speaking context. However, his function in this passage is more as a symbol of elevated language and ideas than as an archetypal figure of the German-speaking world. Obexer contrasts the sophistication of

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<sup>146</sup> ('How could I contradict Wittgenstein, Wittgenstein of all people, in dialect? Could I speak at all? Or will I just stutter when I open my mouth?'). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 32.

<sup>147</sup> ('Dialect belongs to the countryside, the local seasons, the climate and the wellbeing of people and animals'). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 16.

Wittgenstein's ideas on 'die Trennung zwischen den Tieren und den Menschen'<sup>148</sup> with her own stuttering as she tries to find the words to engage critically with these philosophical concepts. Therefore, rather than being a central tenet of her identity, language, or more precisely a lack of it, is framed by Obexer as a source of shame and an obstacle to furthering her education.

Obexer's focus on an inferiority complex surrounding her use of language in formal situations is apparent in a professional context as well as an academic one. In her account of the day she signed her first contract to bring two of her plays to the stage, the same day she attended the aforementioned Wittgenstein seminar, Obexer reports that the boss of the unnamed Berlin-based publishing house commented on her South Tyrolean dialect: 'Ich hatte mir mein Deutsch knochenhart erarbeitet, und sie sprach von einem Dialekt?'<sup>149</sup> She presents herself as being trapped in a linguistic limbo, one where she presents her language as being foreign both to her and to her interlocutor. It is neither a local dialect for Obexer, nor a recognisable form of High German for the publishing chief. Obexer implies that she is unable to define her own identity as she lacks the language with which to define it adequately. This episode highlights a further fault line in the linguistic identity outlined by Obexer, namely the discrepancy between one's own personal perception of one's language and the perception by others. Obexer simultaneously exploits her impending German citizenship to cement her status as an outsider in South Tyrol and uses her residual South Tyrolean dialect as a symbol of her otherness in Berlin.

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<sup>148</sup> ('The separation of animals and people'). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 31.

<sup>149</sup> ('I had worked really hard on my German and she was referring to a dialect?'). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 31.

The relationship between High German and Germanness is helpful for illuminating Obexer's sense of inferiority concerning her use of language. The prestige attached to High German is highlighted in the following comment by Heike Wiese from the perspective of linguistics:

In Germany, the label *Hochdeutsch* [High German] is commonly used for an idealised standard variety, which, like standard languages in other countries, is regarded as the basis for "proper usage" and is associated with middle and upper class language use. [...] Standard language ideology seems to be particularly powerful in Germany, with strongly restrictive and puristic tendencies.<sup>150</sup>

The prestige associated with High German and the strong connection between standard language, class and a refined Germanness contextualises Obexer's presentation of her flawed High German as both a primary reason for her outsider status and a major factor in her inferiority complex. By focusing on her perceived linguistic shortcomings, a notion cemented by her aforementioned conversations with immigration officials and the publishing chief, she reinforces her position as a non-German.

Obexer's description of living with her Russian housemate Elena in Berlin shortly after arriving as a student both expands upon her construction of a linguistic limbo and hints at additional reasons behind it:

Elena sagte mir einmal, ein Russe kann alles verlieren, solange er seine Sprache behält. Die wichtigste Heimat war die Sprache, und die war im Innenfutter seines Mantels verwoben. Und ich? Was suchte ich so heftig im Fremden, wenn nicht eine Sprache? [...] Ich war gierig nach Sprache. Alles in mir wollte zur Sprache. Ich fraß sie auf. [...] In mir war ein hungriges Loch. Wie durch einen Trichter füllte ich es mit Sprache, mit allem, was sich durch Sprache denken, fühlen und füllen ließ. Das Loch blieb hungrig und wenn ich es nicht ständig fütterte, drohte es, mich zu verschlingen.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Heike Wiese, "This migrants' babble is not a German dialect!": The interaction of standard language ideology and "us"/"them" dichotomies in the public discourse on a multiethnolect', *Language and Society*, 44 (2015), 341-368, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404515000226> (p. 345).

<sup>151</sup> ('Elena once said to me that a Russian can lose everything, as long as they keep hold of their language. The most important *Heimat* was language and it was woven into the very fabric of their being. And me?)

The centrality of language to Obexer's identity is clearly apparent. Indeed, the absence of an adequate language with which to express her identity is implied as the primary reason for her identity crisis. Her use of 'ein hungriges Loch' as a metaphor for her craving for language is pivotal in the role she assigns to language in her identity.

Language is presented not as an optional component but as an innate requirement, a physical hole requiring constant nourishment. Obexer presents this absence of language as overwhelming any other components of her identity. Language does not remain a static concept in her identity, rather she frames it as requiring continuous, careful management, lest it become a threat to her entire sense of self. It is simultaneously the cause of her helplessness and the cure for it.

Throughout her work, Obexer constructs a symbolic helplessness alongside the sense of physical helplessness that she creates on her train journey. In so doing, she imposes upon herself a twofold limbo: between her impending German citizenship and her ties to South Tyrol and by extension between the High German she has yet to master and the local dialect she has long since left behind. By constructing this twofold limbo, she absolves herself of the need to commit entirely to a South Tyrolean or German identity. Rather than aligning herself entirely with one of these two categories, both of which she views as unsuitable, she uses the sense of transit suggested by the train journey to present herself as occupying an ambiguous middle ground. She frames this middle

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What was I looking for so avidly in this foreign land, if not a language? [...] I was greedy for language. Every fibre of me wanted to get to language. I lapped it up. [...] There was a hungry hole within me. I filled it up with language, with everything that could be thought, felt or filled with language, as you would with a funnel. The hole remained hungry and threatened to engulf me if I didn't feed it constantly'. Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 16.

ground as providing a more accurate reflection of her complex relationship with identity.

Obexer's application for German citizenship, a process to be officially completed following her train journey to Berlin, represents an alternative method of defining her often contradictory engagement with identity. Her stated explanation of the decision is revealing: 'Es ist auch ein Experiment. Ich möchte herausfinden, ob sich mit dem Pass etwas ändert.'<sup>152</sup> Rather than remaining in her self-constructed identity limbo, she frames her citizenship application as an attempt to officially escape it. She shows herself to be relying on external factors to define her identity, rather than on her own personal relationship with language. Such outsourcing absolves Obexer of the need to construct her own identity, yet she suggests that the reliance on the German authorities places her in a still more vulnerable position. She emphasises this sense of vulnerability when recounting an uncomfortable moment in her train journey to Berlin. She recalls the incongruity of the six non-European men opposite being removed from the train in the Bavarian city of Rosenheim, as she is allowed to continue to her citizenship ceremony in Berlin:

[...] es bleibt keine Zeit, sich die Augen zu reiben. Kaum auf den Beinen, werden sie durchs Abteil nach draußen befördert. [...] Wir waren Insassen desselben Großraumwagens und wurden mit einem Schlag segregiert. Drinnen sitzen wir, draußen stehen sie.<sup>153</sup>

In continually highlighting the apparently arbitrary distinctions made by the German authorities between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' while simultaneously submitting to an

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<sup>152</sup> ('It's also an experiment. I'd like to find out whether having a different passport changes anything'). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 59.

<sup>153</sup> ('There was no time to even rub one's eyes. They were barely on their feet before being escorted out of the carriage. [...] We were occupants of the same carriage and had been segregated in one fell swoop. We're sitting inside while they stand outside'). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, pp. 101-102.

official process of citizenship herself, Obexer positions herself once more as being in a state of limbo. On this occasion, she depicts her limbo as being somewhere between the perceived privilege of her fellow passengers born in Germany and what she conveys as the disrespect shown to the non-European men being removed from the train.

Obexer suggests that her continued presence on the train does not equate to her being an 'insider'. This distinction is reinforced by her exploration of German citizenship: 'das Signal an jene, die einwandern und sich einbürgern lassen, bleibt dasselbe: Es geht bis zur deutschen Staatsbürgerschaft, aber nicht darüber hinaus'.<sup>154</sup>

For Obexer, German citizenship does not mark the shift from 'outsider' to 'insider'. Instead, it represents a move from one kind of outsider to another. Yet rather than bemoaning this status, Obexer embraces it. She exploits her soon-to-be officially recognised status as an outsider to construct an identity based on criticism of the German authorities and what she presents as their restrictive approach to immigration. By drawing attention throughout the text to episodes where her lack of High German has been noted, Obexer exploits the aforementioned connection between High German and Germanness to distance herself from what she sees as the flaws of the German immigration system.

In *Europas längster Sommer*, Obexer uses South Tyrol's unique linguistic situation as a case study for what she perceives as the universal obsession with borders. It is a literary plea for a more flexible identity model, involving multiple linguistic identities that co-exist with one another. Obexer uses the more familiar, European context of South Tyrol

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<sup>154</sup> ('The signal to those who enter the country and apply for citizenship remains the same: You can have German citizenship but that's as far as it goes'). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 74.

to draw attention to the wider global problems of inequality concerning how 'insiders' and 'outsiders' are treated. She emphasises the arbitrary way in which she perceives these identity markers are assigned, especially in relation to non-European immigrants. Although Obexer suffers from a sense of isolation due to her South Tyrolean roots, she is still far more accepted than the non-European immigrants she encounters.

Obexer specifically draws attention to the subjective nature of language and its role in determining 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. This is especially clearly illustrated when she frames the aforementioned linguistically challenging conversation with the boss of a publishing house as being symptomatic of her general struggle for acceptance: what for Obexer is High German is an unfamiliar South Tyrolean dialect for her interlocutor. Yet this unfamiliarity is not entirely based on linguistic differences. Obexer's long-term success in Berlin as a writer shows how potential barriers to communication can be overcome. Rather, the isolation experienced by Obexer is also a manifestation of the cultural differences, and by extension identity differences, which divide two people who speak different forms of the same language.

Obexer frames South Tyrol's unique linguistic, cultural, historical, political and social circumstances as creating an identity rift which an official citizenship ceremony cannot overcome. In the same way as Alessandro Banda redefines South Tyrolean identity formation by moving beyond 'l'antica, eterna contrapposizione di italiano-tedesco',<sup>155</sup> Obexer's text draws attention to the external forces which govern identity formation, both in South Tyrol and beyond. Above all, she resolves her self-confessed difficulties with the restrictiveness of the notion of 'identity' by reframing it as an inclusive,

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<sup>155</sup> ('The ancient, eternal juxtaposition of German and Italian'). Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 81.

culturally diverse space of negotiation where contrasting loyalties can co-exist and increasingly interact without replacing or weakening each other.

## **2.8 The tension between past and present in *Due mondi e io vengo***

### ***dall'altro* (2012) by Alessandro Banda**

In his autobiographical travelogue *Due mondi e io vengo dall'altro*, Alessandro Banda, born in Bolzano in 1963, considers how the presence of multiple languages and cultures can be embraced within South Tyrol. The text, published by Italian publishing house Laterza, is divided into eight chapters in which Banda combines cultural, linguistic, historical and literary reflections on South Tyrol with a consideration of his own experiences of living and working in the province.

Aside from being one of the few texts written by an Italian-speaking South Tyrolean to engage with identity formation in the province, *Due mondi* is also notable for the way in which Banda explicitly states his intention at the beginning of the text to offer a fresh perspective on the province, particularly directed at those from outside South Tyrol.<sup>156</sup> He acknowledges existing tensions, beginning by asserting that the relationship between the province's German and Italian-speaking communities is one of 'coesistenza' ('co-existence') rather than 'convivenza' ('living together').<sup>157</sup> However, he seeks to show that a sustained focus on a deep-rooted conflict, which he believes has come to define many discussions surrounding identity formation in South Tyrol, is in fact blinding South Tyroleans to the contemporary possibilities offered by cross-cultural

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<sup>156</sup> Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 5.

<sup>157</sup> Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 5.

identities. Inspired by his own identity struggles, Banda seeks to show through *Due mondi* that having different elements to one's identity need not be viewed negatively, a sentiment that he suggests is not widely shared in South Tyrol.<sup>158</sup> Whereas Obexer uses *Europas längster Sommer* as a plea for a greater understanding of South Tyrol's particular situation from those beyond the province's borders, Banda places the onus on South Tyroleans themselves to look beyond the German-Italian dichotomy which he believes has unduly dominated the province since its annexation.

Banda's desire for a more flexible approach to identity formation among South Tyroleans is influenced by his own experiences of being defined by his Italian mother tongue, both as a child in Meran and during adulthood. He recalls how the separation of German and Italian-speaking children began at nursery and continued throughout his school life:

Fin da bambino sapevo che c'erano, loro, i tedeschi. All'asilo c'era la sezione tedesca. Poi sapevo dove stavano le elementari tedesche. Le medie tedesche. Al liceo noi, gli italiani, avevamo il secondo e il terzo piano. Sotto c'erano i tedeschi [...] i primi cinque minuti della nostra pausa coincidevano con gli ultimi minuti della pausa dei tedeschi. Per questo un bidello si piazzava davanti alla porta che conduceva al piano di sotto.<sup>159</sup>

He emphasises how German and Italian-speaking children were made to inhabit different spaces within the school, in addition to their existing separation along linguistic lines. His image of the caretaker acting as an adult barrier to interaction

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<sup>158</sup> Gigi Bortoli, 'Identità multiple: l'Alto Adige di Alessandro Banda', *Alto Adige*, 18 July 2012, <https://www.altoadige.it/cronaca/bolzano/identita%C3%A0-multiple-l-alto-adige-di-alessandro-banda-1.504386> [accessed 12 June 2021].

<sup>159</sup> ('From being a child, I knew that they existed, the German speakers. At nursery, there was a German section. Then we knew where the German primary schools were. And then the middle schools. At our high school, we, the Italians, had the second and third floor. Below us were the Germans. [...] The first five minutes of our break time coincided with the final minutes of the Germans' break time. For this reason, a caretaker positioned themselves in front of the door which led to the floor below'). Banda, *Due mondi*, pp. 71-72.

between the children is telling. It emphasises his view that the separation of language groups was an artificial process instigated by adults rather than a natural process or a considered decision taken by the children.

Banda shows that the linguistic and cultural separation which marked his childhood continued to affect his life as an adult, as his career choices were guided, and in many cases limited, by his status as an Italian speaker. He writes first of how he translated German texts into Italian for a publishing house in Venice, a job that allowed him to mediate between the linguistic and cultural worlds of Italian and German speakers, albeit one which relied on the words of others rather than his own.<sup>160</sup> Upon returning to South Tyrol and resettling in Meran, Banda found that his options as an aspiring teacher were severely restricted by his Italian-speaking background: ‘potevo insegnare sia nella scuola italiana (svariate materie, quelle previste dal mio piano di studi), sia in quella tedesca (qui solo italiano seconda lingua)’.<sup>161</sup> Even in Meran, the only major South Tyrolean town to have an almost equal number of German and Italian speakers, Banda was stranded in the same educational system with parallel monolingual strands that he had experienced in the town as a child. He uses this episode to suggest that the educational policy of linguistic separation – confirmed by the Second Autonomy Statute (1972) – has positioned language as a defining feature of a monolingual identity rather than as one component of a more diverse, multilingual identity.

Banda uses his recent experiences of teaching Italian at a German-speaking school in Meran to argue that the notion of ‘multilingualism’ in South Tyrol needs to change in

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<sup>160</sup> Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 77.

<sup>161</sup> (‘I could either teach in an Italian school, teaching the various subjects that I had studied at university, or teach in a German school, where I could only teach Italian as a second language’). Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 78.

order to reflect the growing numbers of people arriving in the province who speak a language other than German, Italian or Ladin. He focuses on the comments of a Pakistani pupil to him: 'quando parlo inglese penso in hurdu; quando parlo in tedesco penso in inglese; quando parlo italiano non penso niente'.<sup>162</sup> This quotation could suggest that the pupil is most comfortable when speaking Italian: it appears to be the only language in which their thoughts are not filtered through another language. However, Banda also uses these comments to suggest that languages cannot be entirely separated from one another: expressions in one language are often the product of interactions between other languages. This example supports Banda's warning throughout the text against a false equivalence between language and identity: he argues that connecting a particular language with a specific, separate identity is misguided.

Banda suggests earlier in the text that a determination to associate specific words with a specific language group is a common trait among South Tyroleans, using local place names as a case in point: 'In questa provincia ci si è sempre così accaniti sull'origine dei toponimi, sull'etimo, sulla provenienza, sull'appartenenza al mondo germanico o a quello latino o a quello prelatino.'<sup>163</sup> This apparent focus on the origins of the province's place names can be traced back to the Fascist Italianisation programme from 1923, where over 10,000 place names in South Tyrol were Italianised. Language was therefore far more than a tool of communication: it was also established as a sign of ownership and control over the people of the province. Banda's text implies that the linguistic

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<sup>162</sup> ('When I speak English I think in Urdu; when I speak German I think in English; when I speak Italian I don't think anything'). Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 81.

<sup>163</sup> ('In this province, people always get worked up about the origin of toponyms, about their etymology and provenance, about whether they belong to the Germanic or Latin or pre-Latin world'). Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 20.

separation reinforced by the Second Autonomy Statute and intended to protect each language group has in fact become symbolic of an interlinguistic and intercultural conflict which, in his view, 'non ha più ragione d'essere'.<sup>164</sup>

Significantly, Banda comments that he has found the cultural and historical deficit caused by his monolingual educational experience in a bilingual community to be more problematic than any subsequent linguistic difficulties. This statement advances his argument concerning the persistence of tensions between language groups in South Tyrol. He observes that an absence of everyday encounters with German speakers as a child left him with an inadequate understanding of the significance of South Tyrol's history, for which an excellent Italian-speaking school history teacher could not entirely compensate. He suggests therefore that maintaining the distinctions between language groups has come at the cost of mutual cultural and historical understanding.

Banda's acknowledgement of the importance of South Tyrol's twentieth-century history reveals the contradictions at the heart of *Due mondi*. He comments in an interview that the historic tension between language groups is 'come un effetto che sopravvive alla propria causa',<sup>165</sup> while implying in the text itself that linguistic segregation in schools has engendered an inadequate understanding of the province's turbulent history. At the beginning of *Due mondi*, he asserts his intention to take on the perspective of a tourist in South Tyrol – 'Faccio finta di essere un turista'<sup>166</sup> – yet his own first-hand-experiences are a recurring theme of the work. He states that he has always felt like an outsider but

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<sup>164</sup> ('[A conflict] which no longer has a reason to exist'). Bortoli, *Identità multiple*.

<sup>165</sup> ('like an effect which has outlived its cause'). Bortoli, *Identità multiple*.

<sup>166</sup> ('I am pretending to be a tourist'). Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 17.

also writes of South Tyrol: 'non mi sento a disagio qua, in Alto Adige. Sono nato qua. Ho trovato lavoro qua, e casa e famiglia'.<sup>167</sup>

Most significantly, Banda argues that multilingualism is a trait South Tyrol shares with many other parts of Italy and Europe. In the aforementioned interview about the text, he downplayed the differences between German, Italian and Ladin speakers.<sup>168</sup> The fact that Banda nevertheless returns to these three categories throughout *Due mondi* reinforces how both appreciating the distinctiveness of South Tyrol's three language groups and understanding their complex interactions with one another is pivotal to an understanding of the province's unique circumstances.

Banda's own identity-related difficulties and a sense of not belonging, a theme he returns to throughout the text, could explain why he seeks to minimise the differences between South Tyrol's three main language groups. The title – *Due mondi e io vengo dall'altro* – positions Banda as an outsider who belongs to an unnamed third category, one beyond the German and Italian-speaking communities. His occupation as a teacher of Italian in a German-speaking school also shows him acting as a didactic mediator between the two languages and cultures. He repeats the 'due mondi' phrase later in the text as he emphasises how his connection to South Tyrol was accidental: his father, a teacher, was given a job in Meran in the early-1950s due to an administrative error that was never corrected.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> ('I don't feel disadvantaged here in South Tyrol. I was born here and have found work, a house, and a family here'). Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 10.

<sup>168</sup> Bortoli, *Identità multiple*.

<sup>169</sup> Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 70.

Significantly, Banda dismisses the notion of an Italian-speaking 'community' in South Tyrol: 'Quella italiana locale non è una comunità. Almeno io, io che scrivo, non l'ho mai, nemmeno per un attimo, nemmeno per sbaglio, sentita come tale'.<sup>170</sup> In blurring the distinctions between language groups, he solves his own identity dilemma. Rejecting the restrictive categories which have informed many of his life choices is a continuation of the process started by his stated intention to take on a tourist's persona at the outset of *Due mondi*.

Banda's identity difficulties are clearly as much of a professional concern as a personal one. He laments the fact that he has been labelled – somewhat pejoratively – as a 'provincial writer':

[...] io sono un provinciale, uno scrittore di provincia, della provincia estrema, confinaria, prossima al nulla, al vuoto, alle distese glaciali. [...] Lo scrittore di provincia non è parente di nessuno, in un mondo in cui tutti sono parenti di tutti'.<sup>171</sup>

He suggests that South Tyrol's geographical position as a border region in the far north of Italy has limited his success as a writer in the rest of the country. As with Obexer in *Europas längster Sommer*, his South Tyrolean roots have precipitated both a feeling of inferiority and a sense of resentment in relation to his professional life. Obexer acknowledges the complex effect of South Tyrol's history as part of Italy on the province while Banda looks to move beyond it. His attempts to shift the focus of identity formation away from South Tyrol's three main language groups serves to emphasise the

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<sup>170</sup> (The local Italians are not a community. At least I, the writer, have never felt that was the case. Never, not even for a moment, not even in error'). Banda, *Due mondi*, p. 6.

<sup>171</sup> ('I am a person of the provinces, a writer of the provinces, an extreme border province in the middle of nowhere, on the edge of nothingness, next to expanses of ice. [...] The provincial writer is not related to anyone, in a world in which everyone is related to everyone'). Banda, *Due mondi*, pp. 102-103.

importance of understanding these distinctive communities, even as the linguistic and cultural demographics of South Tyrol continue to evolve.

## **2.9 The interplay between language, location and identity in *Nauz* (2012)**

### **by Roberta Dapunt**

Whereas Banda laments the impact of South Tyrol's geographical isolation on his professional life in *Due mondi*, Roberta Dapunt uses the rural setting of her Ladin-speaking village as a key inspiration for her Ladin poetry volume *Nauz* (2012). She examines contradictory impulses in the relationship between language and identity in the local setting of Val Badia, where she was born and lives.

The reception of *Nauz*, a volume which includes black-and-white photographs of the rural life it explores, focuses closely on the implications of this local setting. In a review, Daniela Strigl characterises the collection as follows: 'Auf eng begrenztem Raum, sich vertiefend, ein eng begrenztes Thema: Nachdenken über den Tod und das Töten – und das Essen'.<sup>172</sup> Strigl's comments emphasise one of the distinguishing qualities of Dapunt's poetry, namely its exploration of universal themes in a local setting.

Dapunt's description of Ciaminades, the hamlet where she lives in Val Badia, demonstrates how the local setting by no means precludes a wide-ranging, universal discussion of the various connections between language and identity, indeed it actively

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<sup>172</sup> ('A narrowly focused theme is profoundly explored in a confined setting: reflections on death and slaughter – and food'). Daniela Strigl, review of Roberta Dapunt, *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder* (Bolzano: Folio, 2012), in *Lyrik Kabinett*, 2012, <https://www.lyrik-kabinett.de/aktuelles/lyrik-empfehlungen/lyrik-empfehlungen-2012/> [accessed 5 September 2019].

facilitates this: 'Ciaminades è un microcosmo, per me rappresenta il mondo intero. Qui avviene tutto, nascita e morte, malattia e lavoro nei campi, scrittura e silenzio'.<sup>173</sup>

Dapunt's assertion, made during an interview for a multilingual website which focuses on South Tyrolean culture, contextualises her decision to write in Ladin. By writing in her mother tongue, a dialect of Ladin spoken by around 10,000 people,<sup>174</sup> Dapunt adds a further local dimension to her discussion of identity. However, she counterbalances this by writing of universal themes such as work, birth and death. The translation of Dapunt's poems into first German and then Italian is testament to the appeal of her poems beyond the Ladin valley they explore.<sup>175</sup>

*Nauz* was preceded by *La terra più del paradiso* (2008),<sup>176</sup> a poetry volume written largely in Italian. It was followed by the Italian collections *Le beatitudini della malattia* (2013) and *Sincope* (2018), the latter of which was awarded the Premio Viareggio, a prestigious Italian literary prize. *Nauz* is the most unequivocally Ladin volume in Dapunt's oeuvre, not only because of its use of the Ladin language. It is also the collection in which she deals most explicitly with the intricacies of rural Ladin life, an exploration influenced by her life on the farm owned by her husband's family.

Unlike *La terra più del paradiso*, which was published by prominent national Italian publisher Einaudi, the original Ladin poems in *Nauz* were initially published alongside a

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<sup>173</sup> ('Ciaminades is a microcosm. For me it represents the whole world. Everything happens here, birth and death, illness and work in the fields, writing and silence'). Reinhard Christanell, 'Questa è la mia vita e da essa ti sto scrivendo: incontro con Roberta Dapunt', *Franz Magazine*, 31 May 2012, <http://franzmagazine.com/2012/05/31/questa-e-la-mia-vita-e-da-essa-ti-sto-scrivendo-incontro-con-roberta-dapunt/> [accessed 5 September 2019].

<sup>174</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', pp. 10-12 and 16-18.

<sup>175</sup> When discerning the meaning of the Ladin poems in *Nauz*, I have always worked from the original work in the Val Badia Ladin dialect, using an online bilingual Val Badia-German dictionary provided by the Ladin cultural institute Micurá de Rù where necessary to resolve any ambiguities. 'Suche Gadertalisch – Deutsch', *Micurá de Rù*, <https://www.micura.it/de/woerterbuecher/vb/ldplus> [accessed 17 June 2021].

<sup>176</sup> See Chapter Five, section 5.3.

German translation by Folio, a publishing house that states on its website that it aims to encourage cross-border cultural exchange.<sup>177</sup> The poems – which formed a volume entitled *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder* (2012) – were translated into German by South Tyrolean translator Alma Vallazza. Two of the seventeen Ladin poems, ‘Te chësc lüch’ and ‘tëmp de maza’, were originally published in *La terra più del paradiso*. An Italian translation of *Nauz* undertaken by Dapunt herself was published in 2017 under the title *Nauz: versi ladini* by Il Ponte del Sole, a publishing house based in Rovigo, north east Italy. As the German translation of *La terra più del paradiso* was not published until 2016, *Nauz* was the first of Dapunt’s works to appear in German.

By the time that *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder* was published in 2012, Dapunt was an established poet within Italy. In this collection, she returns linguistically to her Ladin roots by exploring the specific interactions between language, location and identity. Even Dapunt’s Italian translation of 2017, with its subtitle *versi ladini* (‘Ladin verses’), offers a strong reminder that the text is rooted in the Ladin-speaking world. In addition to acting as a linguistic mediator, Dapunt uses her photographs of rural Ladin life to provide an additional means of visual mediation between her readers and the rural Ladin life she describes in *Nauz*.

Throughout the collection, which comprises seventeen poems and one piece of prose (‘I ó te cuntè’), Dapunt identifies a tension between two competing models of Ladin identity. On the one hand, she depicts a distinctive local Val Badia identity, strongly informed by rural life and underpinned by the rituals described in ‘I ó te cuntè’ and ‘ciantia dadoman’, the first two texts in the collection. On the other hand, she articulates

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<sup>177</sup> ‘Über uns’, *Folio Verlag*, <https://www.folioverlag.com/Der-Verlag/UEber-uns/> [accessed 5 April 2021].

the challenges of incorporating this local identity both into a cross-valley Ladin identity and into a more globalised identity, as seen in ‘l’üsc de stala’ and ‘Vers ladin’. Dapunt’s inclusion of black-and-white photographs depicting the slaughtering process could be seen as a way of reconciling these two identity models by bringing to a wider audience one of the rituals that underpins local identity formation in Val Badia.

By focusing on key texts of the collection, namely ‘Vers ladin’;<sup>178</sup> ‘I ó te cuntè’;<sup>179</sup> ‘ćiantia dadoman’;<sup>180</sup> ‘Tan ri tëmp’<sup>181</sup> and ‘l’üsc de stala’;<sup>182</sup> this section will primarily consider two interconnected questions. Firstly, how far Dapunt’s collection suggests that these two local and global forms of identity can co-exist, and secondly, whether there is a cross-valley identity that can unite all five Ladin-speaking areas in South Tyrol, Trentino and Belluno.

In ‘Vers ladin’, Dapunt directly addresses the difficulties of writing in Ladin:

Vers ladin, tan rî che al é da te scrì.  
Ćiara da finestra fora y vëiga dantadüt tëmp y sajun,  
degun pinsier a jënt ladina, degun paîsc nadè.  
[...] Miorè, ingrassè parores y punt d’odüda  
y tla finada ćiarè zoruch da n cucher ite.<sup>183</sup>

Rut Bernardi and Paul Videsott interpret the poem as an expression of doubt regarding the function of Ladin as a language of poetry.<sup>184</sup> However, ‘Vers ladin’ can also be seen

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<sup>178</sup> (‘Ladin poem’).

<sup>179</sup> (‘I want to tell you’).

<sup>180</sup> (‘Morning song’).

<sup>181</sup> (‘Such bad weather’).

<sup>182</sup> (‘the stall door’).

<sup>183</sup> (‘Ladin poem, how difficult it is to write you./Look out of the window and see above all the weather and the season,/no thoughts of the Ladin people, no home village./ [...] /Words and perspectives are nourished, made fatter/and nonetheless, the view is like looking back through a spyhole’). Roberta Dapunt, ‘Vers ladin’, in *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder, Ladinisch und Deutsch*, trans. by Alma Vallazza (Bolzano: Folio, 2012), p. 15, ll. 1-3 and 9-10.

<sup>184</sup> Rut Bernardi and Paul Videsott, eds, *Geschichte der ladinischen Literatur. Ein bio-bibliografisches Autorenkompendium von den Anfängen des ladinischen Schrifttums bis zum Literaturschaffen des frühen 21. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols (Bolzano: Bolzano University Press, 2013), p. 976.

as a broader expression of uncertainty regarding the role of Ladin in identity formation, as the act of writing a poem prompts the speaker to acknowledge their struggle to identify with their local rural surroundings. The title of 'Vers ladin' is problematic for the speaker: they are struck by the connection between their struggle to use the Ladin language creatively, their lack of identification with their surroundings, and the subsequent difficulties they encounter in forming a Ladin identity.

The difficulties of the speaker therefore reinforce the centrality of the Ladin dialects to Ladin identities. The Ladin dialects are a major way for the Ladin-speaking population to distinguish themselves from German and Italian-speaking communities, as well as from each other. The concept of language as a distinctive expression of identity corresponds to Colleselli's presentation of the role of dialect in identity formation amongst the German-speaking community in *Reden*. The key difference here relates to the function of the different dialects. The German speakers in Colleselli's *Die fünfzehnte Geschichte* are shown to use their dialects as a way of excluding Italian speakers. Conversely, the Ladin dialects allow Ladin speakers to both differentiate themselves from one another and exclude other Ladin speakers, as later alluded to in 'l'üsc de stala'. Dapunt's poetic focus on the desire to retain distinct Ladin identities in the different Ladin-speaking areas draws parallels with the resistance to the aforementioned efforts to create a standardised Ladin language. The successful introduction of *Ladin Dolomitan* could have caused a loss in prestige for the existing local dialects and precipitated a re-evaluation of local Ladin identities.

The intrinsic connection, and in some cases equivalence, between language and identity explains the extent of the speaker's apparent identity struggles in 'Vers ladin'. As they

are seemingly unable to write fluently in Ladin, the poem is instead dominated by descriptions of the immediate landscape outside, which appears limiting and claustrophobic. There is a connection between the restrictive landscape and the speaker's linguistic restrictions. The Ladin language used to describe the speaker's home valley relates to generic concepts, such as the weather and the seasons, rather than personal markers of identity. The speaker is subject to conflicting impulses, namely a desire to experience a sense of rootedness and home while simultaneously wanting to fulfil their wish to explore beyond their Ladin-speaking homeland.

While the speaker in 'Vers ladin' has an uneasy relationship with the rural landscape of their Ladin valley, Dapunt focuses on the tangible rural processes intrinsic to local identity formation in Val Badia in 'I ó te cuntè' and 'cíantia dadoman'. The main theme here is the ritual of slaughter. The overriding importance of rural language in *Nauz* is immediately apparent from the title of the collection: 'Nauz' translates as 'feeding trough' in English. 'I ó te cuntè', the volume's first work, gives a painstaking account of a pig's slaughter.

Dapunt's adoption of a prose style in 'I ó te cuntè' enables a more detailed account of the pig's final moments and makes the process seem gradual. In this case, she uses language to describe the situation as accurately as possible as she writes of the smell of steaming intestines, before contrasting the warmth of the barn with the chill of the winter air outside:

I ó te cuntè de sciöche la pëigrizia te chësc mêsc tofa da stentins che füma [...] Mësa pasciüda la nosta, te nosta bočia romiarunse l'tier che ne gnarà nia sopoli.<sup>185</sup>

Dapunt's vivid description of the slaughtering process in the opening work invites an interesting parallel with the volume's title. *Nauz* implies a focus on caring for animals and ensuring they are fed, whereas in 'I ó te cuntè', Dapunt suggests that the main purpose of animals in the farming community is to provide food for the local people. Her jarring juxtaposition of a feeding trough with the image of steaming intestines discomfits the reader and establishes one of the main themes of the collection, how best to define the relationship between humans and animals. Dapunt presents the slaughtering process as having a sacred, reverential quality. The space of the barn and the language used to describe it are reassuring in their familiarity. Though the wintry weather is out of the local population's hands, the slaughter of the pig and the setting of the table are underpinned by ritual and under their control.

Whereas the prose style of 'I ó te cuntè' presents the killing of the pig as a sacred, protracted ritual, the rushed, hurried tone of the volume's first poem – 'ćiantia dadoman' – implies a less drawn-out approach to slaughter:

Y incö dadoman te chërda na usc  
[...] fej l'sanch na burta vera, cöc' fostü tla nëi arfera.  
[...] Pür' porcel túa pel desnüda<sup>186</sup>

The speaker addresses the pig directly and in a familiar manner, which seems at odds with the absence of sentimentality suggested by the detailed description of the pig's blood spilling out into the snow. The contrasting connotations of Dapunt's language and

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<sup>185</sup> ('I want to tell you how slowness smells like steaming intestines on this farm [...] Our table is plentifully stocked. We will chew over the unburied animal'). Dapunt, 'I ó te cuntè', *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder*, p. 7, ll. 1-2 and 13-14.

<sup>186</sup> ('This morning a voice calls after you, [...] the blood gurgles, the red tracks are absorbed by the snow. [...] Poor naked pig'). Dapunt, 'ćiantia dadoman', *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder*, p. 11, ll. 3, 7 and 11.

imagery in ‘ćiantia dadoman’ hint at the mixture of respect and pragmatism concerning animals in Ladin society, suggesting that the relationship between humans and animals cannot be characterised by a conventional hierarchy with humans at the top. Animals are acknowledged throughout *Nauz* as being a valuable part of the community, and indeed of Ladin identity formation, by providing a regular source of food. There is sympathy for the pig in ‘ćiantia dadoman’, yet also an overwhelming acceptance that its slaughter is necessary.

The Ladin dialect of Val Badia is used as the tool through which this nuanced relationship between the local farmers and the cattle they own is portrayed. The local dialect captures both the intimacy and the mystery of rural life, its detailed rituals only fully understandable to Val Badia residents. In this way, even those from nearby Ladin valleys are not entirely included in this local identity. Instead of referring to an all-encompassing Ladin identity, Dapunt alludes to the existence of a two-tier Ladin identity hierarchy, where the local identity of one’s home valley, in this case Val Badia, is at the top. A cross-valley Ladin identity appears to be of secondary importance.

However, in ‘l’üsc de stala’ (‘the stall door’), the final poem of the collection, the final poem of the collection, Dapunt presents a challenge to the identity hierarchy depicted in the previous poems:

Degun lingaz forest bacan, degun lingaz che tö ne conësces nia, é l’monn./  
L’medemo fazorel da incër l’će y la bona ćiamalta florësc inće iadô les munts./  
Por tan che erba ladina crësc dlunch incëria, dan stala y pro zopa<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> (‘It is not a foreign language farmer, the world is not a foreign language to you/ They wear the same cloth around their head, the same tender wild spinach also grows on the other side of the mountains/Ladin grass thrives across this area too, in the stable and amongst the manure’). Dapunt, ‘l’üsc de stala’, *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder*, p. 73, ll. 17-19.

In the closing lines of the poem, the speaker appears to advocate a cross-Ladin identity based on a common language, suggesting that the other Ladin dialects are not so dissimilar from the one spoken in their home valley, presumably Val Badia. The speaker goes on to emphasise similarities in both language and landscape between the Ladin-speaking valleys, asserting that the same Ladin grass also grows on the other side of the mountains. By emphasising similarities in landscape, 'l'üsc de stala' hints at an enduring, deep-rooted, cross-valley Ladin identity which can overcome minor differences in dialect. In contrast to 'Vers ladin', 'l'üsc de stala' emphasises the possible unifying role of language in identity formation, a unity underpinned by a common landscape.

Alongside its allusion to a cross-Ladin identity, 'l'üsc de stala' implies the possibility of forging a new identity model which succeeds in maintaining a local identity while showing awareness of an increasingly globalised world. Accepting the linguistic and cultural similarities with those in the neighbouring Ladin-speaking valleys is implied by Dapunt to be a first step towards achieving this balance between the local and the global. Indeed, 'l'üsc de stala' mentions the importance of attending to the small but important tasks required in rural life without isolating oneself from the world beyond the valley: 'Chilò sön limo de stala, este tö rissa viënta/danter dediziun al pice y vijiun dl monn.'<sup>188</sup> It is therefore suggested that a local identity, a cross-Ladin identity and an identity beyond the Ladin valleys are indeed compatible with each other.

Videsott implies that the balance between a local and global identity has already evolved to an extent, suggesting that though language is a major part of Ladin culture,

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<sup>188</sup> ('Here on the stable's threshold, you are the living divide/between devoting oneself to the small things and looking out into the wider world.') Dapunt, 'l'üsc de stala', ll. 6-7.

this does not make identity formation in the Ladin valleys a monolingual process: ‘die ladinische Identität ist gebildet durch die Mehrsprachigkeit.’<sup>189</sup> This acceptance of multilingualism as a part of Ladin identity formation contrasts starkly with the views of the Südtiroler Schützenbund’s Jürgen Wirth Anderlan concerning the potential problems posed by a ‘Mischkultur’ (‘mixed culture’) for the German-speaking population. Wirth Anderlan’s comments about the protection of the German language – ‘die deutsche Sprache muss [...] als Minderheit gefestigt werden’<sup>190</sup> – hint at the uneasy relationship sections of South Tyrol’s German-speaking community have with their recently acquired minority status. Conversely, many Ladins embrace the multilingualism required by their relatively small numbers, a fact attested to by Videsott: ‘Das gehört zum größten Stolz der Ladinier, dass sie die zweite und dritte Sprache besser können als die anderen.’<sup>191</sup>

Though language is undoubtedly vital to Ladin identity formation, it is not required as part of rural work, an equally central part of the local identity depicted in *Nauz*. The only communication of sorts is with animals who are subsequently slaughtered. This helps to explain Dapunt’s use of black-and-white photographs. The photos play a distinct role in the defining of Ladin identity, or indeed identities, in *Nauz* by visually representing the brief connections between farmers and their animals described in the volume’s poems. They express the nobility and solitude that characterise the rural tasks which inform much of the Ladin identity formation explored throughout the collection. ‘Tan ri tëmp’

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<sup>189</sup> (‘The Ladin identity is formed through multilingualism’). Videsott, interview with author.

<sup>190</sup> (‘The German language must [...] be strengthened as a minority [language]’). Jürgen Wirth Anderlan, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>191</sup> (‘It is a source of great pride to Ladin speakers that their competency in their second and third languages is better than that of the others [their German and Italian-speaking counterparts]’). Videsott, interview with author.

hints at the purpose of the pictures. In this poem, the speaker is keenly aware of the nobility and necessity of the rural work that they are undertaking, but the price of this is an all-consuming, often bleak, loneliness: 'Vëgneste tö, val'un, incö a me ciafè?/Te chësc mêsc che ghira sciöche unica compagna la fedelté./[...] Mi pëgn por chësc podest, la surité.<sup>192</sup> This double bind raises the question of how work can be valued if there is no one there to witness it.

The photographs are tangible proof of the value of the farmers' work. They capture a noble yet often overlooked role that cannot be fully appreciated purely through the Val Badia Ladin dialect. These photographs give *Nauz*, and by extension the Ladin dialects and identities, a more universal quality. By acting as a record of the rural work done by farmers, the photographs grant the speaker the appreciation and, more importantly, the validation they crave. This in turn helps to validate the Ladin identities by bringing the farmers' local work to a wider audience. Ultimately, this balance between the local and the universal helps to answer the aforementioned central question Schönauer raises about the connections between language and identity in *Nauz*: 'Ist die ladinische Sprache überhaupt eine Sprache, wenn sie vom eigenen Hof entfernt wird?'<sup>193</sup> Dapunt does indeed demonstrate that the Ladin dialects remain valid and meaningful as a part of identity when taken out of their home environment. Rather than being limited by the local experiences of its people, the Val Badia dialect instead offers a local perspective on globally applicable issues that affect rural life. Dapunt's trend of putting local issues into

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<sup>192</sup> ('Will you, someone, come to visit me today?/On this farm where a sense of loyalty is my only companion/[...] The price for this voluntary chancellorship: loneliness'). Dapunt, 'Tan ri tëmpe', *Nauz: Gedichte und Bilder*, p. 31, ll. 6-7 and 10.

<sup>193</sup> ('Is the Ladin language in fact a language at all if it is removed from one's own farm?'). Schönauer, 'Roberta Dapunt, *Nauz*'.

a universal context is replicated in her understanding of the concept of *Heimat*:

‘Glücklicherweise aber ist Heimat mehr als die Zugehörigkeit zu einem Ort und zu einer Sprache’.<sup>194</sup>

If *Heimat* is not defined purely by a sense of belonging to a particular place or language, then it could be defined as a concept that encompasses an entire way of life. The way of life described by Dapunt is one heavily dominated by farming tasks, a rural background which affects much of the language used in the collection. Despite the clear importance of language to Ladin identity formation, Dapunt’s poems collectively suggest that Ladin identity, or rather identities, do not entirely spring from the language itself, but rather from the distinctive rural surroundings to which they are connected.

## Conclusion

Though it is by no means the only factor which affects identity formation, language is of particular importance in South Tyrol on both a personal level, thanks to the province’s complex twentieth-century history, and on an official basis, due to the introduction of the Ethnic Proportion Law in 1976 and the Act of Linguistic Belonging in 1981.

The impact of South Tyrol’s specific linguistic situation extends beyond South Tyroleans who remain in the province, also affecting those who move away. The situation of the German-speaking community is particularly instructive. The various German-speaking

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<sup>194</sup> (‘Fortunately, however, *Heimat* is more than belonging to a place and to a language’). Alma Vallazza, ‘Heimat ist mehr als Ort und Sprache’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 November 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/roberta-dapunt-heimat-ist-mehr-als-ort-und-sprache-1.4209525> [accessed 5 September 2019]

protagonists in the texts discussed in this chapter feel both linguistically ill-suited to living in Italy, as outlined by the protagonist of Colleselli's *elfte Geschichte*, and out of place in a German-speaking country, as shown by Obexer's account of her linguistic challenges in Berlin. The role of language in the identity formation of South Tyroleans is highly complex. Both the Act of Linguistic Belonging and the parallel monolingual education systems in South Tyrol's German and Italian-speaking communities encourage a specific, if often artificial, sense of identification with a particular language group. However, it is the highly specific relevance of these categories to South Tyrol's particular situation which causes many South Tyroleans to feel out of place when travelling to areas beyond the province, even when they ostensibly share a common language.

Language has different functions for identity in each text. For some protagonists in Colleselli's short stories, language protects and distances them from other cultures. For others, a lack of linguistic competency constitutes a source of great frustration which prevents them from truly engaging with the linguistic and cultural diversity facilitated by South Tyrol's status as a multilingual province. For Obexer, her distinctive local German dialect is in turn a welcome sign of her difference, an unsettling confirmation of her isolation and an uncomfortable sign of her privilege compared to the non-European immigrants with whom she shares a train to Berlin. In Dapunt's case, language enables her to express the simple yet sacred nature of the unique Ladin identities she elucidates in *Nauz*. For Banda, his Italian-speaking background is a restrictive influence on his career choice within the province, while he perceives his connections to South Tyrol as limiting his success as an author in the rest of Italy.

It is clear that, despite their differences, each of South Tyrol's main language groups have been impacted both linguistically and culturally by the province's multilingualism. As Obexer intimates in *Europas längster Sommer*, the control exerted on the province by the Italian government over the course of ten decades continues to affect fundamentally everyday life in the province: 'Seit fast hundert Jahren werden die Geschicke dieser Provinz im italienischen Parlament in Rom beschlossen. Das soll keinen Einfluss haben auf die soziale und gesellschaftliche Realität?'<sup>195</sup>

Indeed, the other three authors also each recognise the need for contemporary debates on identity and multilingualism to reflect changing cultural dynamics in South Tyrol and beyond, acknowledging long-established tensions while advocating the need for a forward-looking identity. Colleselli's depiction of interlinguistic tensions in *Reden* highlights the importance of acknowledging the individual histories of the three language groups. Banda alludes to deep-rooted tensions, particularly between the German and Italian-speaking communities, but argues that they should be overcome as part of a process of identity formation which reflects the increasing presence in South Tyrol of other communities from beyond the province's borders. Dapunt's depiction of local Ladin identity formation in *Nauz* reinforces the presence of discrepancies *within* language communities as well as *between* them. This struggle for a peaceful co-existence between an identity linked to a single group and one connected to the whole province is a recurring theme throughout each of the texts discussed.

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<sup>195</sup> ('The fate of this province has been decided in the Italian Parliament in Rome for almost a century. How can that not influence its social reality?'). Obexer, *Europas längster Sommer*, p. 67.

The linguistic, cultural and political barriers to a multilingual identity can be traced back to the momentous event of South Tyrol's annexation in 1919, a politically motivated decision which has shaped many debates surrounding identity construction in the intervening century and underpinned each of the four phases of debate identified in Chapter One of this thesis. The next chapter will consider precisely how the annexation, and especially the events which followed it, affected post-war identity construction across the province. It will focus on texts by Claus Gatterer, Franz Thaler and Fortunato Favai. Each of these works offers a distinct first-hand perspective on how the Italianisation programme from 1923, the *Option* (1939) and – in Thaler's case – the Nazi occupation of South Tyrol (1943-1945) particularly shaped identity formation across the province and the surrounding area.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The depiction of cultural identity between 1919 and 1945 through memoirs and diaries from South Tyrol and the surrounding area**

This chapter uses selected memoirs and diaries to consider how the 1939 *Option*, and the events which preceded and followed it, shaped identity in South Tyrol and the surrounding area. The *Option* marked a key turning point for identity formation: all German and Ladin speakers in South Tyrol and the surrounding area<sup>196</sup> had to choose whether to remain in their homeland, which was now part of Italy, or begin a new life in the German Reich, which was in effect a foreign land. The *Option* caused huge divisions in South Tyrol, often within families. It represented the apex of a series of divisive measures, which began with the annexation of 1919, continued with the enforced programme of Italianisation implemented by Mussolini's Fascist regime from 1923 to 1943, and concluded with the Nazi occupation of South Tyrol between September 1943 and May 1945. The effects of each of these measures on identity formation in South Tyrol were momentous, both at the time and for generations afterwards.

The chapter analyses the exploration of identity in three first-hand individual accounts: the memoir *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (1969)<sup>197</sup> by the historian and journalist Claus Gatterer, the memoir *Unvergessen* (1988)<sup>198</sup> by peacock feather embroiderer

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<sup>196</sup> Ladin and German speakers in the nearby province of Belluno were also required to take part in the *Option*.

<sup>197</sup> ('Beautiful world, bad people').

<sup>198</sup> ('Unforgotten').

(*Federkielsticker*) Franz Thaler and the diary *Opzioni, guerra e resistenza nelle valli ladine* (2000)<sup>199</sup> by farmer and teacher Fortunato Favai. Gatterer's memoir constitutes his adult reflections on his childhood in the majority German-speaking village of Sexten in South Tyrol between 1929 and 1943. Thaler primarily recounts his imprisonment in Dachau between December 1944 and April 1945 for refusing to join the German *Wehrmacht*. Ladin speaker Favai's diary, written in Italian, offers his contemporaneous perspective on daily life between 1940 and 1945 in the Ladin-speaking village of Fodóm, which, like South Tyrol, was a former Austro-Hungarian territory affected by the *Option* of 1939.

Autobiographical perspectives are the primary focus of the present chapter. Examining memoirs and diaries offers a very particular, personal perspective on cultural identity, one which differs from the less personal and more overtly politically-focused works studied in Chapter Four of this thesis, the contemporary creative literary works in Chapter Five and the artefacts of memory culture in Chapter Six. To varying extents and using various approaches, Gatterer, Thaler and Favai each combine personal observations on daily life with references to wider events in South Tyrol and beyond between the annexation of the province in 1919 and the end of the Second World War in 1945.

Though they are both autobiographical, the perspectives offered in diaries and memoirs differ in crucial ways. Historian Peter Heehs offers a helpful distinction: he defines a memoir as 'a retrospective narrative about a portion of the writer's life', whereas a diary is 'a document in which the writer records his or her experiences, thoughts and

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<sup>199</sup> ('Options, war and resistance in the Ladin valleys')

feelings shortly after they happen, in discrete entries, often dated'.<sup>200</sup> Heehs states that 'diaries differ from memoirs in not being retrospective and in not having an explicit plot. They are written from day to day, with the present as a moving vantage point and without any knowledge of the future'.<sup>201</sup> Although Heehs stresses that these distinctions are 'not absolute',<sup>202</sup> they nevertheless help to explain why the chosen memoirs and diaries complement each other in this chapter's exploration of identity formation. Whereas Gatterer's and Thaler's memoirs allow their authors to construct an identity retrospectively with full knowledge of subsequent events, Favai's identity construction via his diary takes place in real time. Notwithstanding the posthumous editing of his diary by local Ladin historian Luciana Palla, Favai's identity construction occurs at a time when the ultimate victor of the ongoing Second World War was uncertain, an uncertainty he refers to directly in his diary.<sup>203</sup> These differing perspectives must therefore be taken into account when comparing the authors' respective approaches to identity construction.

G. Thomas Couser, who specialises in life writing, suggests that memoirs are distinct from diaries in that they are not generally intended for publication.<sup>204</sup> Favai's diary is however unusual in this respect as it was written with the explicit aim of providing an account of the Second World War, with a particular focus on the specific situation of

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<sup>200</sup> Peter Heehs, *Writing the Self: Diaries, Memoirs and the History of the Self* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 6.

<sup>201</sup> Heehs, *Writing the Self*, p. 6.

<sup>202</sup> Heehs, *Writing the Self*, p. 6.

<sup>203</sup> In an entry from 12 March 1944, Favai states: 'La soluzione di questo e di altri problemi inerenti le nostre valli, è ancora prematura. La fine della guerra e la conseguente sistemazione dei nuovi confini potrà metterla all'ordine del giorno'. ('The solution to this [the future of the Ladins] and other problems concerning our valleys has not yet been achieved. The end of the war and the consequent settling of new borders can put it on the agenda'). Fortunato Favai, 'Il diario di Fortunato Favai', in *Opzioni, guerra e resistenza nelle valli ladine*, ed. by Luciana Palla (Trento: Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, 2000), pp. 85-360 (p. 263).

<sup>204</sup> G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 30.

Fodóm's Ladin-speaking population at the time of the *Option* and beyond.<sup>205</sup> This primarily informative intention may explain the focus of the diary on the events of the war and the experiences of others, with comparatively little focus on Favai himself. In Favai's case, the diary genre offers a 'real time' insight into the uncertainty of the period between 1940 and 1945 as his focuses, opinions and hopes for the future shift throughout the text. Unlike Gatterer and Thaler, he cannot look back on the events of the period from a distance, and this sense of instability is apparent in his cautious exploration of Ladin identity.

Couser's distinction between autobiographies and memoirs is especially useful when considering Gatterer's and Thaler's memoirs. He states that 'autobiographies are generally more comprehensive – in chronology and otherwise; memoirs are generally more focused and selective'.<sup>206</sup> Gatterer and Thaler use the selectivity offered by memoirs in different ways: Gatterer exploits the selective focus on his childhood to distinguish clearly between his so-called 'zweite[s] Leben'<sup>207</sup> ('second life') after the Second World War and his first life before it. By contrast, Thaler uses the specific eighteen-month time span of his memoir to emphasise how this relatively short period of time has been pivotal to his sense of identity for the rest of his life, a fact reinforced by the choice of title.

Despite genre differences, Gatterer's, Thaler's and Favai's texts are nevertheless united by the fact that they are each used as a means of constructing identity. Their accuracy

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<sup>205</sup> Luciana Palla, 'Introduzione', in *Opzioni, guerra e resistenza nelle valli ladine*, ed. by Luciana Palla (Trento: Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, 2000), pp. 7-12 (p. 8).

<sup>206</sup> Couser, *Memoir*, p. 24.

<sup>207</sup> Claus Gatterer, *Diary*, 15 March 1984, unpublished manuscript. Cited in Thomas Haniflè, "Im Zweifel auf Seiten der Schwachen": *Claus Gatterer, Eine Biographie* (Innsbruck: Studien, 2005), p. 39.

as historical sources should therefore be treated with caution, in accordance with a general principle touched on by Heehs:

Only a naïve historian would take every statement in a diary or memoir at face value. It is hard for us to be honest with ourselves, harder to be frank with others, still harder to write the truth as we have seen it and preserve what we have written.<sup>208</sup>

Above all, memoirs and diaries are clearly distinct from historical accounts in that they offer an overtly personal perspective rather than an analysis based on multiple sources. Such personal perspectives are particularly valuable when it comes to exploring the highly complex impact of events such as those covered by Gatterer, Thaler and Favai. This chapter is not concerned with defining what constitutes ‘the truth’ of these events. It focuses rather on the three authors’ perception of how the events themselves shaped both their own identities and those of the people around them.

The focus on texts from German and Ladin-speaking perspectives in this chapter reflects the fact that these were the communities where identity construction was most under threat during the period from 1919 to 1945. Italian speakers were not required to participate in the *Option*, as they were already deemed to be living in their ‘home’ country. Throughout this period, the significant increase in South Tyrol’s Italian-speaking population, driven by Mussolini’s Italianisation programme from 1923, had a huge impact on the established German and Ladin-speaking communities. This chapter therefore also considers the influence of a growing Italian-speaking population on identity formation within German and Ladin-speaking communities in South Tyrol and the surrounding area, an especially prominent theme in Gatterer’s and Favai’s texts.

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<sup>208</sup> Heehs, *Writing the Self*, pp. 6-7.

Favai began his diary in 1940, at a time when life in his home village of Fodóm<sup>209</sup> in the Belluno province was in a state of flux.<sup>210</sup> In 1940, residents were still adjusting to being separated both from the defunct Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire and from the other Ladin-speaking areas of Val Badia, Gherdëina and Fascia, which now belonged to the neighbouring provinces of South Tyrol and Trentino respectively. Previously, all the Ladin-speaking areas had been united under the County of Tyrol. The complex questions of identity and belonging precipitated by this separation were further complicated by the implementation of the *Option* in 1939. Favai dwells on this event at length, elucidating its effect on residents in the overwhelmingly Ladin-speaking village of Fodóm, who had to choose between further Italianisation in their home village and emigrating to the German Reich while taking on German citizenship.

Gatterer's memoir *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* covers a time of great upheaval for the German-speaking population in the recently established province of South Tyrol. Though he makes occasional reference to his father's memories of life as part of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire, he mainly reflects on the period from when he started primary school in 1929 up to the completion of his secondary education in the summer of 1943, with a particular emphasis on the period until June 1940. Gatterer focuses particularly on the difficulties he faced in negotiating between the Italian-speaking identity that was forced upon him by Italianisation and the German-speaking Tyrolean identity informed by his family background and their experiences of growing up under the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire.

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<sup>209</sup> As he is writing his diary in Italian, Favai refers to Fodóm by its Italian name Livinallongo.

<sup>210</sup> The published version of Favai's diary ends on 1 January 1946, though he continued his diary until 1949, before resuming it between 1953 and 1958.

While Gatterer concludes his memoir with the symbolic end of his childhood, Thaler's memoir *Unvergessen* commences with the beginning of his adult life. Thaler focuses on the time from when he received his summons to fight for Nazi Germany as a nineteen-year-old in March 1944 to his return home to South Tyrol in August 1945, following his imprisonment in Dachau for failing to answer his army summons. Much of his memoir concerns his attempts to negotiate his complex attitude towards South Tyrol as part of his post-war identity. In particular, he seeks to reconcile his deep sense of identification with South Tyrol with the role that he perceives the province and some of its residents to have played in his unimaginable suffering in Dachau.

Recognition of South Tyrol as a cultural and political entity changed significantly between the publication of *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* in 1969 and *Unvergessen* in 1988. Gatterer's memoir was released in a year that marked a cultural and political turning point in the province. In August 1969, Norbert Kaser's 'Brixner Rede' ('Brixen Speech') drew widespread attention to the notion of a specific South Tyrolean literature which engaged fully with what Kaser termed the province's so-called 'sacred cows'. By this, he meant, amongst other things, engaging with the extent of South Tyrolean support for the Nazis during the Second World War, which he referenced by hinting at the wartime popularity of South Tyrolean Nazi-supporting author Joseph Georg Oberkofler.<sup>211</sup>

Kaser was especially critical of Hubert Mumelter's German novel *Maderneid: Lied eines Lebens* (1948),<sup>212</sup> presenting it as being symptomatic of all that was wrong with the

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<sup>211</sup> Norbert Kaser, 'Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft und der letzten zwanzig Jahre', in Norbert C. Kaser, *Prosa*, ed. by Benedikt Sauer and Erika Wimmer-Webhofer (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2) (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1992), pp. 109-118 (p. 117).

<sup>212</sup> ('Maderneid: Song of a Lifetime'). Hubert Mumelter, *Maderneid: Lied eines Lebens* (Klagenfurt: Jörgl, 1948)

literature produced by the previous generation of South Tyrolean authors before 1969.<sup>213</sup> He lamented that *Maderneid* was set in the 1800s, in the ‘much glorified’ time of Tyrolean hero Andreas Hofer, implying that Mumelter retreated into the time before South Tyrol’s annexation in order to avoid engaging with the increased presence of Italian speakers in the province following the annexation.<sup>214</sup>

The need for the province’s literature to reflect the presence of the Italian-speaking community in South Tyrol was a prominent theme of Kaser’s speech, another ‘sacred cow’ which he felt had yet to be adequately addressed. He drew attention to the importance of amplifying the works of South Tyrol’s Italian speakers,<sup>215</sup> also emphasising the fact that Italy had unspecified historical and cultural ‘sacred cows’ of their own.<sup>216</sup> He acknowledged that Italian-speaking South Tyrolean writers had slowly begun to engage with Italy’s position as part of South Tyrol, specifically mentioning Gianni Bianco’s novel *Una casa sull’argine* (1965).<sup>217</sup> However, he asserted that Bianco’s fictional work, which focuses on a relationship between a young Italian man and a German-speaking South Tyrolean woman in the late-1950s, was very much the exception rather than the rule and had attracted little attention. Kaser suggested that a more widespread willingness by South Tyrol’s Italian authors to address their own ‘sacred cows’ through their work, combined with a greater openness from the German

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<sup>213</sup> Mumelter (1896-1981) was a German-speaking author and journalist born in Bolzano. *Maderneid* is set in the 1800s and follows the fluctuating fortunes of three young fictional protagonists: German speakers Verena and Hans, who are due to be married, and Ladin speaker Peter, with whom Verena falls in love. *Maderneid* is the name of the farm owned by Verena’s family.

<sup>214</sup> Kaser, ‘Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft’, p. 113.

<sup>215</sup> Kaser, ‘Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft’, p. 115.

<sup>216</sup> Kaser, ‘Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft’, p. 115.

<sup>217</sup> (‘A house on the river bank’). Bianco (1933-2015) was born in Campania, southern Italy, but grew up in Bolzano. As well as focusing on the complex interlingual relationship between the two protagonists, Bianco also refers to the growing tensions between German and Italian-speaking communities in South Tyrol during the late-1950s. Gianni Bianco, *Una casa sull’argine* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2020).

and Ladin-speaking communities towards these contributions, would be the catalyst for a greater acceptance of cultural diversity in South Tyrolean literature, which could then lead to change in wider South Tyrolean society.

Less than three months after Kaser's speech, the terms of the Second Autonomy Statute were agreed between the ruling Südtiroler Volkspartei and the Italian state, a pivotal political event in South Tyrol's twentieth-century history which went a long way to addressing the perception amongst South Tyrol's German and Ladin-speaking communities that Italian speakers had too much power in the province. Though the Statute itself was not implemented until 1972, the terms of the agreement recognised South Tyrol as a political entity that was distinct from the neighbouring Trentino province. Gatterer's memoir, one of the first personal accounts of Italianisation, the *Option* and the Second World War, therefore marked an early stage in a wider cultural and political shift as South Tyrol gradually became a distinct cultural and political entity, and the complex, momentous events between 1919 and 1945 began to be examined in greater detail.

By the time that *Unvergessen* was published in 1988, the Second Autonomy Statute had been extensively implemented and South Tyrol was therefore more securely established as a distinct political entity. Moreover, memoirs by South Tyroleans reflecting specifically on the Second World War were becoming more common: most notable among them was *Das falsche Opfer?* (1984)<sup>218</sup> by special forces soldier Sepp de Giampietro. However, Thaler's memoir was especially significant for being a civilian

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<sup>218</sup> Sepp de Giampietro, *Das falsche Opfer? Ein Südtiroler (in der Division Brandenburg) zwischen seinem Gewissen und der Achse Berlin-Rom* (Graz: Stocker, 1984).

account of the war which also implicated ordinary South Tyroleans in Nazi atrocities. It represented a challenge to the *Opferthese*, the idea that South Tyroleans were victims of both the Fascist and Nazi regimes. The publication of *Unvergessen* in 1988 coincided with an increasing public interest in South Tyrol's twentieth-century history. In particular, the history of the *Option* was gaining prominence in academic and public discourse alike: it was the subject of an exhibition in 1989 in Bolzano financed by the South Tyrolean government and visited by around 30,000 people.<sup>219</sup> *Unvergessen* was particularly significant as its main focus is not on the *Option*, an event well suited to supporting the *Opferthese* due to its focus on South Tyrolean suffering, but on the latter stages of the Second World War. Thaler emphasises that there were Nazi sympathisers where he lived in the Sarntal Valley and explores how both North and South Tyroleans were complicit in his imprisonment in Dachau.

Both Gatterer and Thaler recount their own wartime experiences in a way which allows for the coherent construction of their respective personal identities, but also reflects the complex and evolving role of wartime narratives in collective post-war identity formation across the province. Both memoirs have come to be seen as classics of South Tyrolean literature, and are read by many secondary school pupils across the province as part of their study of South Tyrol's twentieth-century history.<sup>220</sup>

Both men balance distinct and competing impulses when writing their memoirs: the momentous impact of the events they were describing on identity construction before,

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<sup>219</sup> Eva Pfanzelter, 'The (Un)digested Memory of the South Tyrolean Resettlement in 1939', in *A Land on the Threshold: South Tyrolean Transformations, 1915-2015*, ed. by Georg Grote and Hannes Obermair (Oxford: Lang, 2017), pp. 119-143 (p. 132).

<sup>220</sup> 'Technologische Fachoberschule Bruneck, 'Staatliche Abschlussprüfung 2019/20'', <https://docplayer.org/187136017-Technologische-fachoberschule-bruneck.html> [accessed 11 March 2021], p. 24.

during and immediately after the Second World War; their own personal involvement with these events; and ways in which the sensitive topic of South Tyrolean complicity connected to post-war identity construction and the subsequent post-war development of South Tyrol as a distinct cultural and political entity following the internal wartime divisions engendered by the *Option*.

The *Option*, a key theme in this chapter's texts, gave rise to two key terms that were instrumental in the evolution of South Tyrolean identity at the time. The term *Optanten* was coined to describe the 86% of German and Ladin-speaking South Tyroleans who chose to emigrate to the German Reich,<sup>221</sup> with *Dableiber* by contrast referring to those who decided to remain in South Tyrol. According to Gatterer, the term *Südtiroler* gradually developed from being a sign of 'Deklassierung'<sup>222</sup> immediately after the annexation into a unifying symbol of German-speaking rebellion against the Italian state,<sup>223</sup> after it banned both terms in 1923. By contrast, the terms *Optanten* and *Dableiber* created deep divisions within the German-speaking community.

The varying uses of *Optanten* and *Dableiber* in public discourse reveal much about their respective connotations. Both groups gravitated towards specific organisations in South Tyrol which each encouraged a sense of community among those who had made the same decision and offered practical support. The group for *Optanten* embraced their title, calling themselves Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Optanten in Deutschland (ADO).

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<sup>221</sup> Although 86% of German and Ladin-speaking South Tyroleans opted to emigrate to the German Reich, only around a third of the *Optanten* – approximately 75,000 – actually left South Tyrol, due to a variety of logistical difficulties and the ongoing Second World War. Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck: Haymon, 2014), pp. 100 and 106. Martha Verdorfer, 'Option und Umsiedlung: Erfahrungsdimensionen von Frauen', in *Le Opzioni rilette/Die mitgelesenen Briefe*, ed. by Ulrike Kindl and others (Bolzano: La Fabbrica del Tempo, 2014), pp. 65-69 (p. 67).

<sup>222</sup> ('A derogation'). Claus Gatterer, *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (Bolzano: Folio, 2015), p. 11.

<sup>223</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 10.

Conversely, a select group of German speakers who remained in South Tyrol eschewed the passive term *Dableiber*, instead naming themselves the Andreas Hofer Bund (AHB) after revered Tyrolean freedom fighter Andreas Hofer (1767-1810). The AHB later became a resistance organisation when some members worked with Allied forces and Austrian partisans in North Tyrol to oppose the Nazis following their occupation of South Tyrol in September 1943.<sup>224</sup>

The existence of organisations such as the ADO and the AHB is testament to the significant divides created by the *Option* among German-speaking South Tyroleans who were previously united by their shared experiences under Italianisation. Any collective concept of *Südtiroler* was quickly replaced by the binary categories of *Optanten* and *Dableiber*, a dichotomy strengthened by the founding of the ADO and AHB. The first-hand accounts of the time before and after the *Option* considered in this chapter indicate that a process intended to resolve conclusively the so-called ‘South Tyrol question’ did not achieve its purpose. Instead, the *Option* only served to increase instability by splitting families, creating division in previously tight-knit communities and endangering existing local identities.

### **3.1 The exploration of identity in *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (1969) by Claus Gatterer**

Gatterer’s memoir focuses primarily on the effect of South Tyrol’s ever-changing political situation on everyday life in Sexten from the late-1920s until 1943. His family

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<sup>224</sup> Michael Wedekind, *Nationalsozialistische Besatzung- und Annexionspolitik in Norditalien, 1943 bis 1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), p. 416.

were among the approximately 14% of the province's population who signalled their intention to stay in South Tyrol rather than emigrating to the German Reich following the *Option*.

The text is a chronologically structured first-person account of Gatterer's childhood and his encounters with family and friends. The adult Gatterer reflects on the time from when he started primary school until he left secondary school in the summer of 1943 at the age of nineteen. However, he concerns himself overwhelmingly with the time until June 1940: the period between June 1940 and the end of July 1943 is covered in a matter of pages at the end of the memoir as part of an 'Epilog in Episoden'<sup>225</sup> ('epilogue in episodes'). Though the adult Gatterer makes reference to numerous political events beyond South Tyrol – including Hitler's seizing of power in 1933,<sup>226</sup> the lead-up to the Second Italo-Abyssinian War in 1935<sup>227</sup> and Mussolini's dismissal in July 1943<sup>228</sup> – the primary focus throughout is on the impact of these events on local people, rather than on the events themselves.

Gatterer's retrospective, often ironic, analysis of his childhood experiences is a dominant theme of *Schöne Welt, böse Leut*. He was in fact opposed to the memoir's subtitle – *Kindheit in Südtirol* – as he felt that it did not adequately indicate how he was reflecting as an adult on his childhood experiences, rather than writing the memoir from his childhood perspective.<sup>229</sup> The opening line of the memoir clarifies that the *schöne*

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<sup>225</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, pp. 406-422.

<sup>226</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 168.

<sup>227</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 221.

<sup>228</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 414.

<sup>229</sup> The publishers Molden added the subtitle 'Kindheit in Südtirol', despite Gatterer's protests. Arno Dusini, 'Nachbemerkung', in *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* by Claus Gatterer (Bolzano: Folio, 2015), pp. 423-433 (p. 428).

*Welt* he refers to – often ironically – is Sexten,<sup>230</sup> yet in an afterword he asserts that the names of certain characters were changed and other precise details of events altered so that he could stay as close to the truth as possible: for example, his ‘godfather’ was not in fact his godfather.<sup>231</sup>

Thematically, Gatterer’s memoir is in keeping with his work as a historian both before and after the publication of *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* in 1969. Though he had been an Austrian citizen since 1956 after marrying an Austrian woman, his interest in South Tyrol was still a major feature of his work. In his 1400-page non-fictional historical work *Im Kampf gegen Rom* (1968),<sup>232</sup> Gatterer had already argued that the time period between 1923 and 1945 – which encompassed the dictatorships of Mussolini and Hitler – remained a taboo topic in South Tyrol, a situation he connected with a fear of undermining the deep-rooted notion that South Tyroleans were victims of both the Fascist and Nazi regimes.<sup>233</sup> Writing a year before the agreement of the Second Autonomy Statute in 1969, he also sought to highlight in *Kampf gegen Rom* how South Tyrol could proactively work with other Italian regions that were home to linguistic minorities in order to increase the autonomy they were granted by the central Italian government in Rome.<sup>234</sup> Gatterer’s non-fictional historical text, the provocatively titled *Erbfeindschaft Italien-Österreich* (1972),<sup>235</sup> continued his propensity for working across historical, national, cultural and linguistic borders. He there considers the respective

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<sup>230</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 5.

<sup>231</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 423.

<sup>232</sup> (Claus Gatterer, *Im Kampf gegen Rom: Bürger, Minderheiten und Autonomien in Italien* (Vienna: Europa, 1968).

<sup>233</sup> Gatterer, *Im Kampf gegen Rom*, p. 1247. Cited in: Haniflè, *Im Zweifel*, p. 143.

<sup>234</sup> Gatterer, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, Radio Ö1, 13 April 1976. Cited in Haniflè, *Im Zweifel*, p. 142.

<sup>235</sup> Claus Gatterer, *Erbfeindschaft Italien-Österreich* (Vienna: Europa, 1972).

histories of Austria and Italy, elucidating areas of tension but also articulating potential areas of cultural common ground.<sup>236</sup>

The adult Gatterer uses the exploration of his childhood identity struggles in *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* as an autobiographical case study which demonstrates from a first-person perspective the complications caused by cultures and languages competing rather than interacting with one another. *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* therefore assumes a dual purpose for Gatterer: it functions both as a retrospective attempt to make sense of his complex childhood wartime identity and as a wider appeal to South Tyroleans to move away from restrictive historical, cultural and linguistic dichotomies by reassessing their own perceptions of the province's history between 1923 and 1943.

Throughout his memoir, Gatterer undermines the simplistic dichotomy ironically suggested by the title: the notion of outsiders – *böse Leut* – intruding uninvited on the *schöne Welt* of Sexten and South Tyrol. The use of *Leut* – a common South Tyrolean version of the High German term *Leute* – suggests that the title could be a criticism of what Gatterer views as the reductive way in which the time between 1923 and 1943 had been perceived by South Tyrol's German speakers in the time up until his memoir's publication. A posthumously discovered draft of *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* offers a further insight into Gatterer's desire to challenge commonly accepted narratives concerning the period between 1923 and 1943. He there contrasts big 'history' (*Geschichte*) with the multitude of small 'stories' (*Geschichten*) that make up true history: 'Die wahre

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<sup>236</sup> Hanifile, *Im Zweifel*, p. 156.

Geschichte [...] das sind die kleinen Geschichten... Die große Geschichte, die von Mussolini, Dollfuß und Hitler erzählt, [...] ist verzerrt, falsch, erlogen'.<sup>237</sup>

Mussolini and Hitler are clearly presented as *böse Leut* throughout the text, yet they are not the main focus of Gatterer's memoir. Instead, he emphasises his encounters with people local to Sexten, those responsible for, to use his words, 'die kleinen Geschichten' – the little stories. The character development of Gatterer's 'godfather' encapsulates his nuanced approach throughout the memoir towards the people he encountered as a child. Gatterer presents his godfather as being a Nazi supporter for much of the time span of his memoir, even before Hitler seized power.<sup>238</sup> However, he also shows his godfather reconsidering his allegiances at the end of July 1943 after the Nazis forcibly euthanised two local children with learning difficulties, who were the sons of an *Optanten* who had signalled his intention to leave South Tyrol.<sup>239</sup> Gatterer's presentation of his godfather's Nazi sympathies allows him to undermine the concept of Sexten and South Tyrol as an entirely *schöne Welt*, whereas the focus on his godfather's changing beliefs at the end of the memoir also implies that no-one – other than Hitler and Mussolini – can be conclusively and unproblematically labelled as *böse Leut*.

Gatterer's memoir – particularly his undermining of the idealistic image of South Tyrol as a *schöne Welt* – provoked contrasting responses within the province at the time of publication. Gatterer's friend, the SVP politician Hans Benedikter, recalls the negative response to Gatterer's text from residents of his home village of Sexten: 'am liebsten

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<sup>237</sup> ('The true history [...] lies in all the small stories... The big history that gives an account of people such as Mussolini, Dollfuß and Hitler [...] is distorted and false'). Dusini, 'Nachbemerkung', p. 426.

<sup>238</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 98.

<sup>239</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, pp. 417-418.

hätten sie ihn “erschlagen“.<sup>240</sup> Fritz Molden, whose eponymous publishing house originally published *Schöne Welt, böse Leut*, remembers letters being sent to Gatterer by German-speaking South Tyroleans who were angry at how he had tarnished their *schöne Welt*: ‘Wir haben geglaubt du bist ein Freund Südtirols, jetzt bringst du diese Beschimpfung.’<sup>241</sup> By contrast, Norbert Kaser’s influential ‘Brixner Rede’, held in August 1969 around the time that *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* was published, included Gatterer as part of a new generation of South Tyrolean writers that he believed were well placed to tackle the province’s ‘sacred cows’.<sup>242</sup>

*Schöne Welt, böse Leut* also attracted attention beyond South Tyrol, where the reception was less polarised than it was within the province. Herbert Nedomansky described Gatterer in the Austrian newspaper *Die Presse* as follows: ‘wort- und humorbegabt, pfiffig und ironisch, auch unter dem Mantel des Dorfchronisten [blieb er] ein Mann von weitem Horizont und intellektuellem Habitus’.<sup>243</sup> Reviewing Gatterer’s memoir in the German *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, South Tyrolean Herbert Rosendorfer praised his rejection of German and Italian fascism and picked up on Gatterer’s focus on borders, finding within the text ‘das Kaleidoskop einer soziologischen Grenzsituation, wobei hier dem Wort “Grenze“ doppelte Bedeutung zukommt’.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> (‘Ideally they would have liked to “kill” him’). Hans Benedikter, interview with Thomas Hanifle, 29 December 2003. Cited in Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 153.

<sup>241</sup> (‘We had thought you were a friend of South Tyrol, now you’re insulting us’). Fritz Molden, interview with Thomas Hanifle, 13 January 2004. Cited in Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 153.

<sup>242</sup> Kaser, ‘Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft’, p. 117.

<sup>243</sup> (‘Talented in his use of words and humour, shrewd and ironic. Even in the guise of a village chronicler, he remained a man of broad horizons and intellectual bearing’). Herbert Nedomansky, review of Claus Gatterer, *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (Vienna: Molden, 1969), unpublished manuscript. Cited in Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 153.

<sup>244</sup> (‘The kaleidoscope of a sociological border situation, with the word “border” here assuming a double meaning’). Rosendorfer, Herbert, review of Claus Gatterer, *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* (Vienna: Molden, 1969), in *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 5 September 1970. Cited in: Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 153.

The wide-ranging importance of various borders is especially prominent in the adult Gatterer's construction of his childhood identity. He shows how forming an identity as a young child in South Tyrol during Italianisation involved negotiating complex cultural and linguistic borders. Towards the beginning of the memoir, the adult Gatterer describes his childhood struggle to reconcile the official Italian-speaking identity promoted in his primary school with the German-speaking identity he was encouraged to embrace at home:

Wir waren Zerrissene. Unsere kindlichen Fantasien waren gespalten wie das, was sich in uns allmählich zur Persönlichkeit formte. Unsere Hülle war Lüge: Wir logen daheim über die Schule, in der Schule über daheim und uns selbst. In der Schule sagten wir "wir", wenn wir die Italiener meinten; aber wenn die Stine, die Schuldienerin, die Mittags- oder Abendruhe angeläutet hatte, sagten wir "wir", wenn wir uns, die Nichtitaliener, meinten.<sup>245</sup>

By describing himself as 'not Italian' rather than articulating his cultural identity in positive terms, the adult Gatterer retrospectively rejects the German-Italian dichotomy precipitated by Italianisation. 'Gespalten' implies that he was forced by Italianisation to hold two entirely separate identities, with the use of the 'Hülle' ('cover') metaphor adding to the connotations of restrictiveness surrounding identity formation. Even the personal pronoun 'wir', generally used as a marker of belonging, is repeated to the point of confusion, highlighting the adult Gatterer's belief that coherent identity formation had been impossible due to Italianisation.

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<sup>245</sup> ('We were torn. Our childlike imaginations were as divided as the entity which gradually shaped itself into our personality. Our cover consisted of lying. We lied at home about school and we lied at school about home and about ourselves. At school, we used "we" to refer to the Italians but when the caretaker Stine had rung the bell for our lunchtime rest or for bedtime, we used "we" to mean us, the non-Italians'). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 116.

By contrast, Gatterer's exploration of the collective pre-annexation Tyrolean identity that existed before he was born bears a greater sense of permanence when compared to his fractured presentation of his own childhood identity:

Die Ladiner, die man ein wenig überheblich als "Krautwalsche" bezeichnete, waren "wir", sie gehörten zu uns. Da überlebte also der alte, offene Tyrolismus, der eine Gemeinschaft in drei Sprachen gewesen war.<sup>246</sup>

The two forms of 'wir' in Gatterer's aforementioned 'kindliche Fantasien' appear polar opposites. Here, however, there is only a single, familiar, collective 'wir' – of which the Ladins are considered to be a part – and later a single, separate 'sie' or 'die dort'.

Conversely, Gatterer recalls how the overwhelmingly German-speaking population of Sexten viewed Italians – 'they' or 'that lot' – as being unquestionably separate from this familiar Tyrolean 'wir': 'Gegenüber den Italienern war der Gegensatz unüberbrückbar: ein tiefer Graben trennte das südtirolische "Wir" unerbittlich vom "Sie", von "denen dort"'.<sup>247</sup> The comparative clarity with which the adult Gatterer presents this pre-annexation identity could be connected to the fact that it is a historic identity which belonged to the County of Tyrol under the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire, an empire that had collapsed in 1918, six years before Gatterer's birth. He categorises this identity as an 'alte[r], offene[r] Tyrolismus', a complete, well established identity that exists beyond the cultural and linguistic division which marked his childhood.

When writing about his childhood, Gatterer frequently emphasises how his sense of identity, or more precisely the lack of it, was defined by various institutions beyond his

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<sup>246</sup> ('The Ladins, who were labelled a little haughtily as *Krautwalsche*, were part of this "we", they belonged with us. There the old, open version of Tyroleanism survived, which had been a community made up of three languages'). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 12.

<sup>247</sup> ('The contrast with the Italians was impossible to overcome: a huge chasm inexorably separated the South Tyrolean "we" from "them", from "that lot over there"'). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 12.

control. This is evident, for example, in the narration of an episode from the early-1930s, where he explains how the *Carabinieri* arrived at the family home when he was a boy of around eight or nine to confiscate ‘undesirable’ books:

Die Mutter ließ mich durch eine Schwester rufen, ich sollte dolmetschen. [...] [Der Maresciallo] machte selbst einen Rundgang durchs Haus, steckte da seine Neugiersnase in eine Kommodenlade oder Truhe, dort seine Knochenhand in die Berge schön gewaschener und gebügelter Bettwäsche und stürzte schließlich, als er im oberen Stock nichts gefunden hatte, auf die Tür zur Selchküche zu. Die Mutter schrie “Vorsicht!“, auf Deutsch, da die meisten Leute, die sich nicht auskannten, über die Schwelle stolperten, doch war der Maresciallo schon in der rauchigen Finsternis untergetaucht. [...] Das Festmeterbuch nahmen sie [...] Oben auf dem Bücherstoß in der Stube lag *Andreas Hofer und der letzte Kampf der Tyroler im Jahre 1809*.<sup>248</sup>

Gatterer uses visual, linguistic and cultural contrasts to create an immediate distance between the identity nurtured in the home and the one imposed by the state: the neatly laundered washing is juxtaposed with grotesque references to the body parts of the government official. Gatterer’s mother’s warning in German is ignored by the Italian-speaking official, who Gatterer only refers to by his Italian title *Maresciallo*. The image of the officials looking for ‘dangerous’ books, taking away the *Festmeterbuch* which was used to calculate the price of wood while leaving behind one about Tyrolean folk hero Andreas Hofer, allows Gatterer to demonstrate how, in his view, the Italians had little appreciation or understanding of Tyrolean history. He suggests that they mostly ignored any German words in books and searched for pictures instead.<sup>249</sup> He

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<sup>248</sup> (‘My mother called on me via one of my sisters, saying that I should interpret. [...] [The *Maresciallo*] himself did a tour of the house, sticking his nose into a drawer or a chest. He also stuck his bony hand in the pile of beautifully washed and ironed bed linen. Only after finding nothing on the top floor did he rush back to the door leading to the smoking kitchen/pantry. Mum shouted “Be careful!” in German, because most people who didn’t know their way around the house stumbled on the threshold. But the *Maresciallo* had already disappeared into the smoky darkness [...] They took the timber pricing book [...] up there on the pile of books lay *Andreas Hofer and the Last Battle of the Tyroleans in 1809*’). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, pp. 169 and 177.

<sup>249</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 175.

implies that the state invaded the physical space of his home and confiscated books without any understanding of their cultural significance.

Gatterer mentions that he was called to interpret between his mother and the government officials, once more presenting his younger self as straddling the German and Italian-speaking worlds and conveying the words of others rather than being allowed to express his own ideas. His description of the official's visit indicates his concern to underline how long-established conventions ceased to apply following South Tyrol's annexation. Whereas previously the home was a safe, private space, under Italianisation no space was closed to the state, a fact also evoked by the image of the *Maresciallo* rooting around in the smoky darkness.

The school reforms under the *Lex Corbino* in 1921 and the *Lex Gentile*<sup>250</sup> in 1923 are presented by Gatterer as a key element in the dismantling of pre-annexation society and the Tyrolean identity with which it was associated. However, his memoir suggests that his educational experiences were not entirely typical of many pupils in South Tyrol. Gatterer attended the Vinzentinum in Brixen, a Catholic boarding school which was exempt from some of the policies implemented in the majority of South Tyrolean schools. Italian was established as the standard language of instruction in most schools across the province. However, on 11 February 1929, the continued use of German in lessons at the Vinzentinum and three other Church schools was formalised as part of the Lateran Treaty, signed by the Italian state and the Vatican City.

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<sup>250</sup> The *Lex Gentile* was a law, introduced in 1923, which escalated the process of Italianising the South Tyrolean school system and introduced Italian as the language of instruction in the vast majority of South Tyrolean schools. This followed the *Lex Corbino* law of 1921, which obliged all Ladin-speaking children and those German-speaking children with family names deemed to be 'Italian' to attend Italian-speaking schools. Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg*, pp. 22-23.

Gatterer's arrival at the Vinzentinum in 1935 coincided with the beginnings of a linguistic compromise at the school which had profound implications for his retrospective construction of identity. Although the Vinzentinum was granted the right to use German, the German-language *Matura* for which the school had traditionally prepared its pupils up to then was not recognised by the Italian state. In order to prepare their students for the state-recognised exams, which were assessed in Italian and obligatory from Autumn 1937, lessons at the Vinzentinum were increasingly taught in Italian.

The adult Gatterer uses the concept of being stranded between two forces beyond his control as a pupil at the Vinzentinum to indicate the extent to which schoolchildren were subject to competing cultural and linguistic influences, as shown by his comments on the role of language at the school:

War's denn logisch, dass wir in der Kiste dreimal wöchentlich italienisch reden mussten, wir Studenten untereinander und sogar mit den Vorgesetzten? Italienisch reden bei der Einbrennsuppe und beim Fußballspiel, beim Tarockieren und beim Studium, nur beim Beten nicht? Man sagte, dies sei nötig, damit wir uns im Italienischen perfektionieren könnten. Was wir an diesen Tagen zusammenredeten, war ein Kauderwelsch, Volapük für jedes ungeschulte Ohr: "schuhputzare", "anstrengare", "ma è klar", so sprachen wir.<sup>251</sup>

Much as in his earlier description of the Italian authorities entering his home, the adult Gatterer rejects the idea of a private childhood identity, implying that it had become increasingly difficult to separate his private German-speaking identity from the Italian language he must use to pass state-recognised exams. His use of a rhetorical question –

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<sup>251</sup> ('Was it logical then, that we had to speak Italian at school three times a week, when we were talking among ourselves and even with superiors? When eating our local soup and when playing football, when playing cards during our studies, with the only exception being during prayer? It was said that this was necessary for us to refine our Italian skills. The language we cobbled together among ourselves on these days was a mishmash, which sounded like nonsense to the untrained ear. We said things like "schuhputzare" "anstrengare" and "ma è klar"). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 297.

‘war’s denn logisch?’ – hints at the dual purpose of his memoir as a way of both retrospectively making sense of his childhood identity and inviting the reader to consider the problems created by the state in imposing draconian cultural and linguistic restrictions on schoolchildren. Gatterer’s mention of ‘schuhputzare’ and ‘anstrengare’<sup>252</sup> implies that these strict borders served only to create an awkward, mixed language which was not part of his identity.

To understand Gatterer’s relationship with Italian culture and language, it is useful to contrast his criticism of ‘jen[e] die uns zwingen, unsere Sprache zu vergessen und dafür Italienisch zu lernen’<sup>253</sup> with his admiration for the nun who taught him Italian at primary school:

Schwester Blanka nahm uns gewissermaßen an der Hand und führte uns behutsam vom “Haus” zur “casa”, von der “Kirche” zur “chiesa”, vom “Apfel” zur “mela”, vom “Esel” zum “asino”, vom “Hund” zum “cane” – die neuen Begriffe blieben zwar fremd und widerborstig, aber sie waren nicht feindselig, weil die gute Schwester nie das Gefühl aufkommen ließ, dass die eine Sprache besser sei als die andere oder dass man etwa eines nicht sagen dürfe und ein anderes sagen müsse. Sie achtete den gesetzlich vorgeschriebenen absoluten Primat des Italienischen, und sie lehrte uns zugleich, die Muttersprache zu achten.<sup>254</sup>

Italian is presented here not as an enemy of German, nor as a replacement for it, but as an equal part of a bilingual identity. This sentiment is reinforced by Gatterer’s mentions of the German and Italian words side-by-side and the fact that the German preposition

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<sup>252</sup> ‘schuhputzare’ is formed from the German verb ‘schuhputzen’ (‘to clean shoes’) and ‘anstrengare’ is formed from the German verb ‘sich anstrengen’ (‘to make an effort’). Both verbs are presented by Gatterer in the infinitive form, with Italian verb endings.

<sup>253</sup> (‘those people who forced us to forget our language and learn Italian instead’). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 299.

<sup>254</sup> (‘Sister Blanka took us by the hand, so to speak, leading us gently from “Haus” to “casa”, from “Kirche” to “chiesa”, from “Apfel” to “mela”, from “Esel” to “asino”, from “Hund” to “cane”. These new concepts remained strange and recalcitrant, but they were not hostile because the good Sister never gave the impression that one language was better than the other or that you had to use one instead of another. She respected the legally enshrined supremacy of Italian and taught us simultaneously to respect our mother tongue’). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 47.

'zu' changes to reflect the gender of the Italian word that follows. Schwester Blanka offers an identity model reminiscent of the cross-cultural *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept that Alexander Langer advocated half a century later.<sup>255</sup> However, whereas Langer proposes an entirely new model of identity, Schwester Blanka is shown by Gatterer to work within the societal constraints imposed on her, accepting the superiority of Italian in the eyes of the state but simultaneously ensuring that her pupils need not abandon their German-speaking identities. Gatterer's praising of Schwester Blanka's approach to primary school teaching suggests that he does not resent Italian as being part of his identity *per se*, rather he reserves his distaste for the draconian way in which it was imposed in South Tyrol with little regard for the province's German-speaking Tyrolean heritage.

While Gatterer's detailed account of his primary and secondary school years until the age of sixteen spans over four hundred pages in the 2015 edition, his memoir covers the period between June 1940 and July 1943 in less than twenty pages before stopping entirely. The reasons for Gatterer's comparatively brief consideration of this time period are not entirely clear, though one possible explanation could be that the end of June 1940 was the final extended deadline for all South Tyroleans to register their decision concerning the *Option*. This extension applied to, amongst others, members of the clergy and their associates, as well as to people who were ill at the time of the original deadline.<sup>256</sup> 30 June 1940 could therefore be seen as symbolising the end of the South Tyrol that Gatterer had known up to that point, when any common notion of *Südtiroler*

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<sup>255</sup> Langer's *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept was a cross-cultural identity model which was aligned with all residents of South Tyrol, rather than with one particular community.

<sup>256</sup> Alex Lamprecht, 'Kirche und Option in Südtirol (1939/40). Eine Zerreißprobe' (Unpublished master's thesis, University of Vienna, 2018), <http://othes.univie.ac.at/53403/1/56344.pdf> [accessed 14 December 2020], p. 19.

was conclusively replaced by the divisive terms *Dableiber* and *Optanten*. Reflecting on the effect of the *Option* on the sense of community in Sexten towards the end of his memoir, Gatterer states:

Es gab das Volk nicht mehr; auch "uns" gab es nicht mehr, uns, das Dorf, die Dorfgemeinschaft. Es gab nur noch Fronten: hie "Kamaraden" – hie "Verräter"; hie "Auswanderer" – hie "Dableiber"; hie "Deutsche" – hie "Walsche"; hie "Getreue" – hie "Judasse".<sup>257</sup>

Gatterer presents the *Option* as the culmination of the turmoil that had built up since South Tyrol's annexation in 1919. He suggests that the sense of unity derived from secretly using the banned German term *Südtiroler* had given way to an irreconcilable 'us and them' dichotomy based solely on a binary decision made at the *Option*: it is significant that the term *Südtiroler* is not mentioned at all in Gatterer's juxtapositions. The time span of his narrative could also be partially explained by his aforementioned preference for 'die kleinen Geschichten' over 'die große Geschichte': the outbreak of war in September 1939 is not covered until the final forty pages of the memoir.<sup>258</sup> The end of the *Option* could be seen to represent the last 'choice' made by ordinary South Tyroleans before wider European political events took over. Stopping his detailed narrative before the escalation of the Second World War allows Gatterer to maintain his focus on 'die kleinen Geschichten' of South Tyroleans while these stories were still informed rather than obscured by 'die große Geschichte' of world events.

Even the short biography included after the memoir in the edition published in 2015 does not go into detail about Gatterer's activities between September 1943 and 1945,

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<sup>257</sup> ('There was no such thing as "the people" anymore. There was also no "us" anymore, the village, the village community. Only battle lines remained: here "comrades" – here "traitors"; here "emigrants" – here "Dableiber"; here "Germans" – here "Walsche"; here the "faithful ones" – here the "Judases"). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 399.

<sup>258</sup> Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 383.

only mentioning his attending university in Padua. Thomas Hanifle's biography of Gatterer, entitled *Im Zweifel auf Seiten der Schwachen* (2005), partially fills in the gaps concerning his movements at this time. Nevertheless, even Hanifle notes that 'aus diesem kurzen Lebensabschnitt [...] ist wenig bekannt'.<sup>259</sup> What is certain, however, is that Gatterer's desire to pursue further study was not the only motivation behind his decision to enrol at the University of Padua in October 1943. He was also keen to avoid service in the *Wehrmacht* following the Nazi occupation of South Tyrol the previous month, not least because of his contacts within the anti-Nazi Andreas Hofer Bund.<sup>260</sup>

Here we can see a relevant parallel with Franz Thaler's *Unvergessen*. Both men chose to leave their home town in order to avoid service with the *Wehrmacht*. However, Gatterer's education initially afforded him the opportunity to study in relative safety, whereas Thaler's flight into the hills near Villanders was short-lived and he was later imprisoned in Dachau. Gatterer's subsequent activity in the war – he eventually found work in Parma for '[die] Verwaltung des deutschen Amtes für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion'<sup>261</sup> after a brief return to Sexten at the beginning of 1944 – suggests that despite his opposition to the Nazis, he was unable to avoid indirectly assisting the German war effort entirely.

Gatterer was incarcerated in Parma's San Francesco prison by Italian partisans in April 1945 along with his friend Toni Sapelza. Sapelza recalls that Gatterer's apparent Germanness was one of the reasons for his capture:

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<sup>259</sup> ('Little is known [...] about this short period of his life'). Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 37.

<sup>260</sup> Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 36.

<sup>261</sup> ('in the offices of the German Department for Armaments and War Production'). Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 38.

Klaus hat man ja von weiten [sic] angesehen, dass er kein Italiener ist: “Tedescho, tedescho!!”, haben sie geschrieen. Ich hab[e] zwar gesagt, dass er kein Deutscher ist, aber das hat alles nichts mehr genützt.<sup>262</sup>

Sapelza’s account implies that the identity-based complexities of Gatterer’s childhood persisted into early adulthood. Gatterer’s German-speaking connections changed from being an oppressed part of his identity under Italianisation to a potential reason for military service under the Nazis and finally the superficial rationale for his imprisonment by Italian partisans, despite his being an Italian citizen.

Hanifle’s assertion that Gatterer identified ‘mit einem multinationalen Südtirol’<sup>263</sup> which existed beyond German-Italian conflicts hints at another potential motivation behind both his reluctance to identify unambiguously with one community over another and his silence concerning the time between 1943 and 1945. This decision could be linked to his post-war desire to present himself as belonging to a new generation of South Tyroleans who, like Kaser and Langer, were concerned above all with developing a community in South Tyrol that embraced harmony between the province’s language groups.

Gatterer seems to view his post-war identity as being completely separate from his wartime experiences. In a private diary entry written on 15 March 1984, three months before his death, he wrote: ‘Das zweite Leben: normalerweise beginnt das mit 50. Für mich begann es 1945. Seither lebe ich dieses zweite (und eigentliche) Leben’.<sup>264</sup> *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* could therefore not only be seen as a way for Gatterer to encourage

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<sup>262</sup> (‘You could see from a distance that Klaus was not Italian. “Tedescho, tedescho!!”, they cried. I did say that he wasn’t German, but it was no longer any use’). Toni Sapelza, interview with Thomas Hanifle, 23 December 2003. Cited in Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 39.

<sup>263</sup> (‘with a multinational South Tyrol’). Hanifle, *Im Zweifel*, p. 164.

<sup>264</sup> (‘One’s second life normally begins at 50. Mine began in 1945. Since then, I have been living this second (and actual) life’). Gatterer, *Diary*, 15 March 1984, unpublished manuscript.

South Tyroleans to engage with the ‘taboo’ period between 1923 and 1943, but also as a written means for Gatterer himself to draw a line under his ‘first life’ and childhood.

### **3.2 The exploration of identity in *Unvergessen* (1988) by Franz Thaler**

In *Unvergessen*, Thaler writes primarily of his incarceration in Dachau between December 1944 and April 1945, before describing the subsequent difficulties he faced in forming a coherent identity upon returning to South Tyrol. On the one hand, the title suggests that the memoir is partially derived from a determination to keep the events of the Second World War, and the memories of those who died at the hands of the Nazis, in the collective public consciousness. On the other hand, the choice of the title *Unvergessen* implies a personal motive, namely Thaler’s determination – by contrast with Gatterer – to ensure that his experiences in the war continued to help define his identity.

Thaler’s statement in his afterword is particularly significant in underlining the ongoing significance of his wartime experiences in his post-war identity construction: ‘Wenn es dann um Vergessen geht, wird es schwieriger. Ich habe verziehen, aber nicht vergessen.’<sup>265</sup> He further states: ‘Es ist leicht, jemandem zu verzeihen, wenn er seine Fehler zugibt. Schwieriger wird es, wenn jemand alle Schuld abstreitet, auch wenn sie bewiesen werden kann.’<sup>266</sup> His belief that South Tyrolean complicity in the war has not

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<sup>265</sup> (‘However, forgetting is much more difficult. I have forgiven but not forgotten’). Franz Thaler, *Unvergessen* (Bolzano: Raetia, 2014), p. 169.

<sup>266</sup> (‘It is easy to forgive someone when they admit to their mistakes. It becomes more difficult when someone denies all culpability, even if this can be proven’). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 168.

been adequately addressed as part of post-war identity construction in the province underpins much of the new identity model he advocates in *Unvergessen*.

In an article on the background to the memoir, journalist and publisher Gottfried Solderer asserts that the decision of Thaler's original publishers Sturzflüge to reject the provisional title *Mein Kampf. Unter den Rädern Hitlers*<sup>267</sup> reflected an overriding desire for the memoir to take a conciliatory approach: 'Man wandte sich schließlich von dem martialischen Titel ab und ging einen versöhnlicheren Weg'.<sup>268</sup> Solderer presents the memoir as a space of negotiation between Thaler's personal identity – which is forever marked by his experiences in Dachau – and the collective South Tyrolean approach to identity formation, which has in Thaler's view glossed over South Tyrolean complicity with the Nazis during the Second World War.

The primary challenge which recurs throughout the memoir concerns the discrepancy between the importance of Thaler's imprisonment for his own identity and the comparative lack of post-war public discussion concerning South Tyrolean complicity in the Second World War. Thaler presents his memoir as a step towards addressing this perceived disconnect between his own attitude towards identity construction and that of most of his fellow South Tyroleans: 'Im Museum von Dachau liest man die Worte: "Wer sich des Vergangenen nicht erinnert, ist dazu vorurteilt, es noch einmal zu erleben." Dieses Büchlein soll ein bisschen mithelfen, das zu verhindern.'<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> 'My Battle. Under the Wheels of Hitler'.

<sup>268</sup> ('Ultimately, it was decided to avoid the martial title and a more conciliatory approach was adopted'). Gottfried Solderer, 'Ein Buch und seine Geschichte', in *Unvergessen* by Franz Thaler (Bolzano: Raetia, 2014), pp. 235-240 (p. 236).

<sup>269</sup> ('In the Dachau museum you read the words: "Those who do not remember what is past are doomed to experience it again". This little book is intended to make a small contribution to avoiding this'). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 169.

The public response to *Unvergessen* suggests that Thaler succeeded in his efforts to bring the events of the Second World War into South Tyrol's political, literary and social consciousness. He was awarded the prestigious 'South Tyrolean Political Personality of the Year' prize in 2012 at the age of 87 in recognition of his role in drawing attention to what the South Tyrolean journalist and historian Günther Pallaver described as 'die vielen dunklen Flecken der Südtiroler Vergangenheit'.<sup>270</sup> In a speech fifteen years previously, the chairman of the South Tyrolean Press Association, Gianfranco Fata, had already identified a similar quality in *Unvergessen*, describing it as embodying the message that 'Man muss zuerst vor der eigenen Tür kehren und das Übel im eigenen Haus bekämpfen.'<sup>271</sup> Thaler's memoir also reinforced the contemporary implications of the Second World War to members of the general public in South Tyrol. Reader Verena Niederegger commented: 'Es ist notwendig, auch den Südtirolern vor Augen zu führen, dass die Diktatur Hitlers von vielen einzelnen kleinen Befehlsausführern gestützt wurde – auch in unserem Land.'<sup>272</sup>

Thaler's familiarity as someone who clearly belonged to 'unser Land' could help to explain why his unfamiliar focus on perpetrators in South Tyrol was in fact largely well received in the province: within two years of its publication, five thousand copies of *Unvergessen* had been sold.<sup>273</sup> Nevertheless, Thaler presents himself as an outsider in

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<sup>270</sup> ('the many dark corners of South Tyrol's past'). Günther Pallaver, 'Laudatio für Franz Thaler', *Südtiroler Gesellschaft für Politikwissenschaft*, 2013, [http://www.politika.bz.it/PPJ\\_12\\_Laudatio.html](http://www.politika.bz.it/PPJ_12_Laudatio.html) [accessed 23 March 2021].

<sup>271</sup> ('You must first look at what's on your own doorstep and fight the evil in your own house'). Gianfranco Fata, 'Ansprache des Vorsitzenden der Südtiroler Pressevereinigung', in 'Auszüge aus Briefen an Franz Thaler', ed. by Franz Pfattner, in *Unvergessen* by Franz Thaler (Bolzano: Raetia, 2014), pp. 213-232 (p. 232).

<sup>272</sup> ('It is also necessary for South Tyroleans to be alerted to the fact that Hitler's dictatorship was underpinned by many individual ordinary people who carried out his orders – and that includes our own home territory'). Verena Niederegger, 'Auszüge aus Briefen an Franz Thaler', p. 230.

<sup>273</sup> Solderer, 'Ein Buch', p. 237.

his afterword to *Unvergessen*: 'Ich weiß, dass einer, der über die Hitlerzeit so schreibt wie ich, zum Außenseiter gestempelt und gerne als Nörgler hingestellt wird.'<sup>274</sup> Defining himself as an outsider who was hostile to Hitler's regime enables Thaler to separate the memories of South Tyrol that encouraged him to persevere during moments of despair from the memory of fellow South Tyrolean collaborators whom he holds partially responsible for his incarceration.

Aided by embracing his 'outsider' status, Thaler proposes a new model of South Tyrolean identity. His letter to the *Katholisches Sonntagsblatt* in 1982, which attracted the attention of historian Leopold Steurer and ultimately led to the publication of *Unvergessen* six years later, offers an insight into the kind of identity he advocates in his memoir. He reclaims seemingly nationalistic, exclusive identity markers, additionally raising the notion of South Tyrolean complicity in the Second World War. His efforts to contextualise the importance of language in the concept of *Heimat* constitutes a retrospective attempt to reclaim in adulthood the sense of local identity of which he had been deprived as a child. Much like Alexander Langer in his approach to his wide-ranging *Gesamtsüdtiroler* identity model during the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>275</sup> Thaler reframes *Heimat* as an inclusive notion:

Für mich ist nicht nur die Sprache Heimat, dazu gehören auch die vertrauten Berge und Täler, die Dörfer mit all ihren Bräuchen und Trachten und die friedlichen Nachbarn. Nicht zuletzt aber die Dorfkirche mit ihren Sonn- und Feiertagen. Das alles ist für mich Heimat. In mancher Tiroler Stube musste sogar der Herrgott weichen. Diejenigen wurden nicht nur der Heimat, sondern auch

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<sup>274</sup> ('I know that someone who writes about Hitler's time as I do is branded an outsider and tends to be held up as a grumbler'). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 167.

<sup>275</sup> See Chapter Four, section 4.2.

dem Herrgott untreu. Wer heute hergeht und das alles verwischen oder bestreiten will, der entlarvt sich selbst als Nazi oder er weiß nichts darüber.<sup>276</sup>

Like Langer, Thaler advocates a broader definition of the term *Heimat*. He moves it away from being a concept characterised merely by a common language – ‘für mich ist nicht nur die Sprache Heimat’ – focusing instead on the importance of South Tyrol as a place and on the prominence of religion in its collective identity. By emphasising the decisive role of enduring natural features such as ‘die vertrauten Berge und Täler’ and referencing the omnipresence of God, he recasts *Heimat* as an independent, almost sacred concept that cannot be hijacked by any one ideology such as Nazism.

Thaler’s dislike of exclusive identity markers is apparent throughout the memoir and can be traced back to his exclusion from a German class at school because of his family’s decision to remain in South Tyrol following the *Option*, rather than emigrating to the German Reich:

Der Lehrer schaute mich eine Weile an und sagte, ich solle heimgehen, er wolle nur Deutsche unterrichten. Ich saß verdattert da, stand dann auf und ging ganz schwindlig zur Tür hinaus. Ich war sehr, sehr traurig.<sup>277</sup>

Thaler presents the prevailing identity around the time of the *Option* as one defined not by a shared history or culture, but rather one shaped by a binary decision that was, in Thaler’s case, made on his behalf by his family. His reporting of this episode suggests that the *Option* has entirely destroyed the unity Gatterer suggests was engendered by

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<sup>276</sup> (‘For me, *Heimat* is not just language. The familiar mountains and valleys, the villages with all their customs and traditional dress and our peaceful neighbours are all part of *Heimat* too, and, last but not least, the village church with its Sundays and Church holidays. All of that is *Heimat* for me. In some Tyrolean homes, even God himself had to retreat. These people were not only unfaithful to their *Heimat*, but also to God himself. Anyone who wants to come along today to hide or dispute all this is either exposing themselves as a Nazi or is ignorant of these matters’). Thaler, ‘Eine leidvolle Zeit: Leserbrief Franz Thaler’, in *Unvergessen* by Franz Thaler, pp. 233-234 (p. 234).

<sup>277</sup> (‘The teacher looked at me for a while and said that I should go home as he only wanted to teach Germans. I sat there shocked, then stood up and walked out of the door with my head spinning. I was very, very sad’). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 19.

the term *Südtiroler* in the early 1930s. Instead, there are only *Deutsche* – those who indicated their desire to emigrate to the German Reich – and *Walsche*, a derogatory term used by the province’s German speakers to refer to those chose to stay in South Tyrol, which was also used to describe Italians. Thaler reports being told by a fellow local resident: ‘Dein Vater hat “walsch“ gewählt, du bist jetzt ein “Walscher”’.<sup>278</sup>

Thaler’s explanation of his refusal to join the *Wehrmacht* at the age of nineteen suggests that he began to exploit his exclusion from the Germanic identity of the *Optanten* as he moved into adulthood. He uses his Italian citizenship as a partial justification for not wanting to answer the summons: ‘Mit neunzehn Jahren stand ich vor dem Kriegsgericht, nur weil ich mich als italienischer Staatsbürger nicht zum deutschen Kriegsdienst zwingen lassen wollte.’<sup>279</sup> Much like Gatterer’s reference to his Italian-speaking identity in *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* as ‘eine Schuluniform’,<sup>280</sup> it is here apparent that, during the Second World War, Thaler uses identity as a pragmatic tool for survival rather than as a means of expressing his cultural and linguistic affinities. Although Thaler does not identify with Italy on a cultural or linguistic level, he calculates as a young adult that his position as an Italian citizen offers him his best opportunity of avoiding Nazi military service. His later redefining of *Heimat* therefore becomes more understandable. Under his definition of the concept, his status as an Italian citizen is compatible with his status as a church-going South Tyrolean who observes local customs.

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<sup>278</sup> (‘Your father voted “walsch”, you are now a “Walscher”’). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 17.

<sup>279</sup> (‘I stood before the court martial at nineteen years of age, simply because, as an Italian citizen, I did not want to allow myself to be forced into German military service’). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 37.

<sup>280</sup> (‘a school uniform’). Gatterer, *Schöne Welt*, p. 13.

Thaler's exploitation of his Italian citizenship invites an instructive parallel with the role of Italian culture and language in Gatterer's identity construction. Both men use South Tyrol's status as an Italian province to distance themselves from fascist Nazi ideologies, without identifying with Italian language, Italian culture, or Italian Fascist ideology.

Although Thaler indicates that the rumours he had heard about Nazi activities influenced his objection to German military service, he refers first to his Italian citizenship,<sup>281</sup> a technical justification that was already questionable given Nazi Germany's occupation of South Tyrol at the time when Thaler was called up. His presentation of this episode is an example of how South Tyrol's complex cultural and linguistic situation could be manipulated as part of identity construction and used for competing purposes. These complexities are both a means for the younger Thaler to attempt to avoid military service during the war and the basis of the post-war *Opferthese* that the older Thaler undermines throughout *Unvergessen*.

Thaler's and Gatterer's memoirs suggest that during the time period covered by their accounts, Italian citizenship was a pragmatic administrative tool to be exploited when necessary, rather than a key part of a multilingual South Tyrolean identity. This sense of pragmatism is further reflected in Thaler's willingly identifying himself as an Italian citizen in order to accelerate his return home following liberation and avoid subsequent administrative difficulties.<sup>282</sup> Moreover, in his case, Italian citizenship allowed him to avoid association with the Nazi ideology that he felt had subsumed key tenets of

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<sup>281</sup> Thaler, *Unvergessen*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>282</sup> Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 139.

traditional Tyrolean identity, while still maintaining the connection he felt towards the long-established Tyrolean culture of his homeland.

Thaler's selective post-war approach to identity construction is linked to his inability to determine his own wartime identity, both during his incarceration and immediately prior to it. His time hiding out in the mountains around Villanders accelerates his loss of identity: 'Oft war ich mir wie ein wildes Tier vorgekommen, das bei jedem Geräusch erschrickt und flieht.'<sup>283</sup> His exclusion from the new version of German-speaking identity that developed following the *Option* has broadened to include a spatial and social isolation which assumes an additional dehumanising dimension.

In fact, the identity, or rather absence of it, that Thaler encounters in Dachau is the antithesis of the model of identity that he creates through his memoir. His preferred model reconciles his personal experiences in Dachau with the contrasting experiences of fellow South Tyroleans who were not incarcerated themselves. *Unvergessen* is a way of bridging this gap. Rather than trying to make sense of what is intrinsically meaningless, Thaler opts instead simply to present the dehumanising conditions of Dachau as they were. He forces his readers to engage with his first-hand recollections of imprisonment, challenging them to find a way of incorporating this history – history in which he believes South Tyrol to be complicit – into their own identities.

Thaler attempts to find a place for his vision of South Tyrol in his own identity, even when recounting his experiences in Dachau, and presents his relationship with his home province during his imprisonment as one characterised by contradictions and internal conflict. He suggests that his affinity with South Tyrol remained strong as he recalls the

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<sup>283</sup> ('I had often felt like a wild animal that took fright at every noise and fled'). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 30.

comfort provided by the presence of fellow South Tyroleans in Dachau: 'Ich wurde sofort von Südtirolern umringt. Es waren hauptsächlich Passeierer da, Toni Königsrainer, Franz Hauser, Georg Oberprantacher, Franz und Heinrich Haller sowie der Eisacktaler Simon Dorfmann aus Garn bei Latzfons.'<sup>284</sup> His happiness at meeting fellow South Tyroleans contextualises his relationship with his homeland. He does not feel resentment towards South Tyrol as a province, as shown by his aforementioned desire to include 'die vertrauten Berge und Täler' in his expanded perception of *Heimat*. Instead, he struggles to forget about those South Tyroleans who he feels enabled his incarceration, clearly distinguishing them from the fellow South Tyrolean prisoners he is so pleased to encounter. Both South Tyrol and North Tyrol are linked for Thaler to his loss of freedom: his incarceration began in Schlanders in South Tyrol, continuing in the North Tyrolean town of Hall before he reached his final destination of Dachau. Thaler demonstrates how this complex dual connection to both South and North Tyrol endured following his arrival in Dachau and subsequent transferral to the nearby satellite camp of Hersbruck. This link is crystallised by his description of his encounter with the commandant of the Hersbruck camp, who reveals he is from North Tyrol when reducing Thaler's prison sentence from ten to two and a half years:

Er fragte mich, woher ich komme, und wollte genau wissen, aus welcher Gegend in Südtirol. Er kenne das Sarntal zwar nicht, aber in Meran sei er schon öfter gewesen. Da er aus Hall in Tirol stamme, habe er Südtirol schon oft besucht [...] [Er] ermutigte mich durchzuhalten, damit ich einmal nach Südtirol zurückkehren könne.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> ('I was immediately surrounded by South Tyroleans. The people there were mainly from the Passeier Valley, including Toni Königsrainer, Franz Hauser, Georg Oberprantacher and Franz and Heinrich Haller. Simon Dorfmann was from the Eisack Valley, hailing from Garn near Latzfons'). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>285</sup> ('He asked me where I came from and wanted to know the precise area of South Tyrol. He didn't know the Sarntal Valley but had been to Meran quite frequently. As he hailed from Hall in North Tyrol, he had

North Tyrol and South Tyrol are no longer places linked entirely to Thaler's lack of freedom, they also constitute symbols of potential salvation. The entire model of identity constructed by Thaler is broadened by this conversation. The possibility of a shared Tyrolean identity provides a rare connection between prisoner and commandant, briefly transcending the established camp hierarchy. He uses this cross-Tyrolean connection to distinguish between the reassuring familiarity of his homeland and the dictatorships in South Tyrol since its annexation.

The role of a cross-Tyrolean connection in breaking down the barriers between Thaler and those involved in his imprisonment is apparent once again in his exchange of letters with another resident of Hall in 1973, Josef Recla, the man responsible for escorting Thaler from Schlanders to Dachau. Recla states: 'Ich an meiner Person hätte Dich gerne laufen lassen [...] ich war schon öfters in Südtirol und auch in Sarntal'.<sup>286</sup> Once again, a shared connection to South Tyrol acts as a means of easing reconciliation between Thaler and those directly or indirectly responsible for his suffering.

Thaler suggests that reconciling his personal identity with wider post-war identity formation in South Tyrol proved far more difficult in the immediate aftermath of the war. He recalls with resentment when he was told by a local official to return to a holding camp in Bolzano in order to obtain a ration card:

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often visited South Tyrol. [...] He encouraged me to keep going so that I could one day return to South Tyrol'). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 79.

<sup>286</sup> ('If it had been up to me, I would have let you go. [...] I've often visited South Tyrol, and the Sarntal Valley too'). 'Fotos und Dokumente', in *Unvergessen* by Franz Thaler (Bolzano: Raetia, 2014), pp. 182-212 (p. 203).

Er schaute und las eine Weile, wandte sich dann an mich und sagte, ich müsse noch ins Entlassungslager nach Bozen gehen, um von dort entlassen zu werden, da er mich sonst nicht einschreiben und mir keine Lebensmittelkarte geben könne.<sup>287</sup>

The above encounter reinforces Thaler's self-characterisation as an outsider. He emphasises how established regulations in South Tyrol were not adapted to take account of prisoners' experiences during the war. Rather than adjusting protocol to acknowledge Thaler's particular circumstances and engaging with him on a personal level, the official relies on procedure, attempting to exclude him once again by directing him to the Bolzano camp. Thaler provides a further example of this apparent official reluctance to integrate his experiences into a mainstream post-war South Tyrolean identity, describing how even the 'new' clothing package given to him by the local authorities shortly after his return home had already been tampered with:

Das Paket war aufgerissen, und die Kleider lagen auf dem Boden ausgebreitet da [...] Als ich zu Hause mein Kleiderpaket auspackte, sah ich, dass der Gemeindesekretär meine neue Jacke mit seiner alten, zerflickten ausgetauscht hatte [...] Ich verlor mein ganzes Vertrauen in die Obrigkeit.<sup>288</sup>

The image of the ripped 'new' clothing package – ostensibly a symbol of compensation for his suffering in Dachau and Hersbruck – acts as a visual manifestation of how Thaler, unlike Gatterer, does not want to begin a 'zweite[s] Leben' that is distinct from his wartime experiences. Rather than persisting with an identity hierarchy from which he feels excluded, Thaler seeks to remodel it to include those like him. He states: 'Als Heimgekehrter fühlte ich mich den Kriegsopfern gegenüber verpflichtet, etwas für sie zu

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<sup>287</sup> ('He looked and read for a while, then turned his attention to me and said that I still had to go to the holding camp in Bolzano in order to be released from there. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to register me or give me a ration card'). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 157.

<sup>288</sup> ('The parcel was torn apart and the clothes lay spread out on the floor. [...] When I unpacked my clothes parcel at home I saw that the council secretary had swapped my new jacket for his old, patched up one. [...] I lost all trust in authority'). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 160.

tun, für sie ein Denkmal zu errichten',<sup>289</sup> referring to his involvement in establishing a memorial in his home valley for victims of the Second World War. However, he observes that the focus gradually shifted from victims to heroes, a change which only included those who were injured or killed in action, excluding those – like him – who refused to fight for the Nazis.<sup>290</sup>

*Unvergessen* is not only a means for Thaler to define his own identity, it is also a written memorial for those who were no longer able to define their identity themselves. This dual purpose of *Unvergessen* is fulfilled not by ignoring the existing South Tyrolean identity debate in which Thaler feels the events of the latter part of the Second World War and the Nazi occupation of the province are overlooked, but rather by seeking to incorporate this long-established identity into a new, more representative one. By simultaneously acknowledging and challenging the dominant narratives concerning South Tyrolean identity formation and the *Opferthese*, Thaler completes his journey from outsider to insider, a journey which was completed not with *Unvergessen's* publication in 1988, but with his aforementioned winning of the 'South Tyrolean Political Personality of the Year' for 2012. At the formal awarding of the prize the following year, Günther Pallaver said the following:

Während gleich nach Kriegsende die vielen dunklen Flecken der Südtiroler Vergangenheit der Logik der Einheit geopfert und die Rollen zwischen Tätern und Opfern schon bald wieder getauscht wurden, hat Franz Thaler Zeugnis abgelegt über das Unrecht, sind er und einige wenige andere gegen den Strom der Zeit geschwommen. Der gesellschaftliche Druck nahm schon bald wieder zu, damit das Sprechen mit dem Schweigen ausgetauscht würde. Mit seinem Buch [*Unvergessen*] [...] hat er die Kultur der Erinnerung nachhaltig beeinflusst. Franz Thaler behauptet von sich: "Ich bin nur ein kleiner Mensch". Wenn alle "kleinen"

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<sup>289</sup> ('As someone who had returned home, I felt a duty to do something for the victims of the war, to build a monument to them'). Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 161.

<sup>290</sup> Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 162.

Menschen die Größe eines Franz Thaler hätten, wäre unsere Gesellschaft ein bisschen gerechter und menschenwürdiger.<sup>291</sup>

Pallaver's speech hints at how Thaler's memoir helped to redefine the view of South Tyrol's role in the Second World War. The fact that Thaler won a prestigious prize previously awarded to leading figures from medicine and academia demonstrates how a self-defined 'small man' from a rural, farming background could bring a new approach to identity into the cultural consciousness of the province by drawing attention to the so-called 'dark corners' of South Tyrol's past.

In spite of their different backgrounds, experiences and approaches to identity construction, Thaler and Gatterer were both equally important in shaping the post-war debate on South Tyrolean identity. Nevertheless, their contradictory relationships with South Tyrol – allied with their selective use of the province in identity construction – demonstrate that the role of South Tyroleans before and during the Second World War, and the subsequent effect of these complex historical narratives on identity formation, remained problematic long after the war had ended.

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<sup>291</sup> ('While shortly after the end of the war, the many dark corners of South Tyrol's past were sacrificed for the logic of unity and the roles of victim and perpetrator were soon swapped once again, Franz Thaler bore witness to the injustice, he and a few others swam against the tide of the time. The social pressure soon increased once more, so that speaking out was replaced with silence. With his book [Unvergessen], [...] he has had a continuing influence on the culture of remembering. [...] Franz Thaler states of himself: "I am only a small person". If all "small" people had the stature of a Franz Thaler, our society would be a bit fairer and more decent'). Pallaver, 'Laudatio für Franz Thaler'.

### **3.3 The exploration of identity in *Opzioni, guerra e resistenza nelle valli***

***ladine: Il diario di Fortunato Favai: Livinallongo 1939-1945 (2000), edited***

**by Luciana Palla**

Fortunato Favai's diary *Opzioni, guerra e resistenza nelle valli ladine* provides a counterpoint to the memoirs of Gatterer and Thaler, offering an exploration of identity during the Second World War through a different genre and from a different cultural, linguistic and generational standpoint. In contrast to Gatterer (1924-1984) and Thaler (1925-2015), Favai (1899-1961) had first-hand experience of living in a united County of Tyrol – in the Ladin-speaking village of Fodóm – before the collapse of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire following the end of the First World War.

The connection between Fodóm, South Tyrol and its Ladin valleys – informed by a shared cultural and linguistic heritage established over many centuries – endured beyond South Tyrol's annexation. The redrawing of borders following the First World War was a political and military decision which did not take account of the area's common history and a shared identification with the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire. As Fodóm's largely Ladin-speaking inhabitants were faced with a binary choice between being subject to further Italianisation and emigrating to the German Reich, Favai implies that both the historic local Ladin identity of Fodóm and the cross-Ladin identities established before South Tyrol's annexation assumed an even greater importance for older residents who, like him, had first-hand experience of life under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>292</sup> Favai's diary, recorded in twenty-eight notebooks,<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Favai, *Diario*, pp. 222-227.

<sup>293</sup> Palla, 'Introduzione', p. 8.

serves as a reminder of the fact that the identity-related difficulties precipitated by the *Option* extended beyond German speakers, and indeed beyond those within South Tyrol's recently redrawn borders.

The effect of both the *Option* and the Second World War on daily life in Fodóm is a major feature of Favai's diary: both are mentioned in the title – chosen by editor Luciana Palla – while Favai's first entry on 30 March 1940 focuses on the difficult choice presented to Fodóm's residents by the *Option*. Unlike Gatterer's and Thaler's memoirs, Favai's diary constructs identity from the perspective of someone who intended to emigrate to the German Reich. Favai, a farmer and former primary school supply teacher who also worked as a hotel landlord during the Second World War, only made his decision six months after the initial deadline of 31 December 1939 and largely because many family members, including his three sisters, expressed their intention to leave.<sup>294</sup>

As Favai indicates in his first entry, some residents of Fodóm, like their South Tyrolean counterparts, were for various reasons<sup>295</sup> granted an additional six months – until 30 June 1940 – to register their choice in relation to the *Option*.<sup>296</sup> Favai never actually emigrated to the Reich due to a combination of logistical difficulties and an increasing reluctance to follow through on his decision as the war progressed. By the beginning of October 1940, just three months after opting to leave, he already writes of how those leaving their Ladin homeland are doing so with a sense of regret.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Favai, *Diario*, p. 90.

<sup>295</sup> See Chapter Three, p. 156.

<sup>296</sup> Favai, *Diario*, p. 88.

<sup>297</sup> Favai, *Diario*, p. 101.

Favai's uncertain, vacillating attitude towards the *Option* is symptomatic of his non-committal attitude towards his own identity construction. In the original diary, he appears to have intended to write a second entry a day after his first, yet the date of 31 March is crossed out<sup>298</sup> and it is not until 10 June, when he has almost made a decision regarding the *Option*, that he writes again. Favai is described in Luciana Palla's introduction to the diary as modest, shy and introverted. According to his wife – who died the year before the diary was published – he did not attend his teacher training exam as he was convinced he would fail it.<sup>299</sup>

The reasons behind Favai's decision to write in Italian rather than his local Ladin dialect are unclear, though there are two plausible explanations. It could have been either a sign of his desire for his diary to reach a wider audience – he wrote the diary with the intention of it being published – or a reflection of the fact that Italian had been the language of instruction in schools in Fodóm since the nineteenth century. The fact that Favai composed poems in his local Fodóm Ladin dialect both before and after the Second World War, thereby demonstrating a written facility with Ladin, suggests that the former explanation may be most likely.<sup>300</sup>

Before proceeding to a close analysis of Favai's exploration of identity in the village of Fodóm, it is important to consider the implications of the fact that the text has been edited by Palla, a prominent local historian from Fodóm with a particular interest in the Ladin-speaking communities. The publication of Favai's edited diary was part of a wider

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<sup>298</sup> Favai, Fortunato, Diary, 30 March.1940 – 10 July.1941, *Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino*, unpublished manuscript.

<sup>299</sup> Palla, 'Introduzione', p. 7.

<sup>300</sup> Rut Bernardi and Paul Videsott, eds, *Geschichte der ladinischen Literatur. Ein bio-bibliografisches Autorenkompendium von den Anfängen des ladinischen Schrifttums bis zum Literaturschaffen des frühen 21. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols (Bolzano: Bolzano University Press, 2013), pp. 1202-1203.

project – focusing on the time between 1939 and 1945 – which explored the experiences of those who lived in the predominantly Ladin-speaking communities of Fodóm, Col and Cortina de Anpezo in Belluno, all of which had formerly been part of the County of Tyrol. The project’s particular temporal focus explains why the published diary only includes Favai’s entries between 30 March 1940 and 1 January 1946, though he continued his diary, with interruptions, until 1958.

In her introduction to the diary, Palla explains how she weighed the goals of the wider project against the need to convey an accurate and faithful representation of Favai’s wartime experiences. Her decision to note the omitted themes at the end of each notebook – including Favai’s comments on the weather and his perception of the progress of the war elsewhere<sup>301</sup> – strongly suggests that editorial decisions were guided by a desire to maintain a focus on life in Fodóm during the Second World rather than being connected to any other agenda. Palla goes on to detail the efforts made to ensure accurate transcription: ‘Il testo è stato trascritto in modo del tutto conforme all’originale. Alcuni isolati interventi di normalizzazione ortografica sono stati segnalati in nota’.<sup>302</sup> A study of the first pages of his original diary<sup>303</sup> confirms that Palla’s edits and omissions do not significantly alter the content of the original diary. It can therefore be concluded that, though it is necessary to acknowledge editing as part of any close analysis, the published versions of Favai’s diary can be taken as an accurate representation of his original diary in relation to the themes connected to this thesis.

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<sup>301</sup> Favai, *Diario*, p. 108.

<sup>302</sup> (‘This text has been transcribed in a way that corresponds entirely to the original. Some occasional orthographic amendments have been signalled in annotations’). Palla, ‘Introduzione’, p. 10.

<sup>303</sup> Though Favai’s original diary had not been digitised before, the Fondazione Museo del Trento was able to do this upon request for the first part of the diary, covering the period from March 1940 to July 1941. The remainder of his diary until 1958 has not yet been digitised.

The overriding theme of Favai's observations concerns the specific difficulties faced by Fodóm's overwhelmingly Ladin-speaking population during the Second World War, namely the challenge of maintaining a local Ladin identity when faced with a binary choice between increased Italianisation in Fodóm or emigrating to the German Reich. Favai uses the notion of Ladin speakers being dictated to by Germany and Italy as the foundation for his construction of identity. In his entry of 25 November 1942, he expresses his belief that many local residents had only chosen to emigrate to the German Reich after hearing rumours that those who chose to stay in Fodóm would in fact be forcibly moved to southern Italy, rather than being allowed to stay in their homeland:

Allora, si diceva, e in realtà alte personalità lo avevano detto che, quegli che non avessero votato per la Germania, sarebbero stati costretti ugualmente a lasciare le loro terre per essere trasferiti oltre il Po. Per vari mesi questa propaganda si è propagata fra la gente e molti avevano anche optato per questo. Dicevano, meglio trasferirsi in Germania dove esiste per noi una maggior affinità di cultura e di carattere, che venire forse trasferiti chissà dove forse nell'Italia Meridionale.<sup>304</sup>

Rather than defining a new local Ladin identity in response to the *Option*, Favai instead offers a justification for its absence. The possibility of remaining in Fodóm following the *Option* is never mentioned. By suggesting that those who chose to remain in Fodóm had been threatened with being moved to southern Italy, Favai insinuates that the *Option* deprives the villagers of a tangible Ladin *patria* ('homeland') altogether. Rather than blaming his fellow Ladin speakers for the absence of an identity, he transfers this responsibility to the instigators of the *Option*, whom Gatterer would refer to as 'böse

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<sup>304</sup> ('So, it was said [at the time of the *Option*], and by prominent figures too, that those who didn't vote for Germany would still have to leave their homelands and would be moved beyond the River Po. For a number of months, this propaganda worked its way through the population and many opted for Germany because of it. They [those who opted for Germany] said that it was better to move to Germany, where we [the Ladins] had a greater affinity in terms of culture and character, than having to move to who knows where in southern Italy'). Favai, *Diario*, p. 206.

Leut' and Favai terms 'alte personalità'. Favai's approach also reveals an underlying point of tension over whether the governmental authorities or the Ladin population themselves were responsible for identity construction. He makes reference to the misleading propaganda and intimidation from both the German and Italian dictatorships to suggest that Ladins in Fodóm were forced to make do with a set of pre-determined and ill-fitting identities which took no account of their own distinct history, culture or language.

Favai suggests that the oppression of Ladin identity affected all generations. He underlines what he views as the detrimental impact of the *Option* on the local education system in order to draw attention to what he saw as the incompatibility between the German-speaking identity expected of the children of *Optanten* and the local Ladin dialect with which they had grown up. Favai questions educational provision in his diary entry of 6 October 1941, the day before supposedly German-speaking schools were opened specifically for the children of *Optanten* who had yet to emigrate to the German Reich:

L'insegnamento nelle scuole degli allogeni che si trovano ancora qui, è molto limitato. Esso si limita a leggere e scrivere, all'insegnamento della lingua tedesca. Tute [sic] le altre materie come: aritmetica, geografia, storia, ecc. ne sono escluse. Dato che i ragazzi non conoscono la lingua, l'insegnamento viene loro impartito in dialetto Fodom, non in italiano. Tutte le spiegazioni vengono dunque date in dialetto.<sup>305</sup>

Favai highlights the difficulties that he feels are inherent in rapidly imposing an artificial and unfamiliar monolingual German identity on a group of children who spoke the local

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<sup>305</sup> ('The teaching in the schools for *Optanten* children who are still here is very limited. It is restricted to reading, writing and teaching them the German language. All other subjects, such as Maths, Geography and History, are excluded. Given that the children don't understand the [German] language, teaching is done in the Fodóm dialect rather than in Italian. All the explanations are therefore given in dialect'). Favai, *Diario*, p. 168.

Ladin dialect as their mother tongue and had until then been schooled in Italian. His observation that the Fodóm dialect was in reality the language of instruction in these ‘German’ schools is telling. The use of the Fodom dialect – rather than Italian – as a pragmatic alternative to the little understood German suggests that the local Ladin dialect and culture were not seen as a threat to German-speaking identity in the same way as Italian was. Favai indicates that, in his view, the decision to leave Fodóm was interpreted by both the German and Italian authorities as a decision to embrace a monolingual German identity. He draws attention to what he sees as the unsuitable monolingual German school system for the children of *Optanten* to reinforce his suggestion that the monolingualism encouraged by the *Option* entirely contradicts the multilingual upbringing of Fodóm’s Ladin-speaking children.

Favai consistently presents identity in Fodóm as a concept governed by political events and distant officials rather than by individual choices and local Ladin leaders. In an entry on 12 October 1941, he outlines how, in his opinion, the disconnect between *Optanten* and *Dableiber* in Fodóm is not limited to children attending separate schools. In fact, he suggests that the sense of division in the village also extends to the general population, leading to a marked difference in mentality:

Livinallongo [...] è diviso in due campi diversi, in due gruppi separati di azione e di idee. La mentalità degli optanti per la Germania è pressoché [sic] compatta e cioè, essi hanno la sicurezza assoluta che la Germania vincerà la guerra. A questa sicurezza si unisce l’orgoglio di essere tedeschi, anche se, nascostamente rimpiangono di dover lasciare il loro paese natale. [...] Guardano a Hitler il capo del Nazionalsocialismo, come a un mito, come ad un essere che a qualcosa di divino. [...] Quelli [...] che restano [...] sarebbero lieti che la guerra si decidesse a favore della Gran Bretagna [sic]. [...] essi sperano nella ricostruzione dell’impero Austroungarico.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> (‘Fodóm [...] is divided into two groups, which are separate in terms of their actions and ideas. The [collective] mentality of those who opted for Germany is almost unanimous: they are absolutely certain

Favai presents the *Option* as being at the root of these divergences in mentality, rather than contrasting individual political and ideological opinions. In so doing, he continues to link the apparent absence of a unifying Ladin identity with the decisions of the German and Italian authorities rather than with the actions of Fodóm's residents, for whom stability is a common motivation. He does not present the identities of the *Optanten* and *Dableiber* as being radically different, but rather as two contrasting approaches to achieving the common aim of filling the vacuum created by the loss of a local Ladin identity in the village.

As the war progresses, Favai begins to reconstruct a specifically Ladin identity, initially looking to the time before Fodóm's annexation as a possible model for a future identity. Though his observations suggest an enduring nostalgia for a local Ladin *patria*, in an entry on 29 April 1943, he questions whether a return to the situation prior to Fodóm's annexation and the *Option* is possible:

Vivevano d'una vita semplice senza artifici, naturale, d'una vita che tanto s'adattava, armonizzava al luogo, alle montagne nelle quali vivevano. [...] L'amore con il quale i nostri antenati erano gelosamente avvinti alla loro terra d'origine è stato gravemente intaccato. [...] Ne consegue che la gioventù non ha più quell'amore al lavoro della terra, quasi si vergogna, piuttosto preferisce dedicarsi altrove, in lavori assai più umilianti, che non sia il nobile lavoro dei loro genitori e antenati.<sup>307</sup>

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that Germany will win the war. This certainty is linked to a pride in being German, even if there is a hidden regret at having to leave their birthplace. [...] They look towards Hitler, the figurehead of National Socialism, as though he has a somewhat mythical, divine quality. [...] Those [...] who remain [...] would be delighted if Great Britain won the war. They hope for the resurrection of the Austro-Hungarian Empire'. Favai, *Diario*, p. 170.

<sup>307</sup> ('They lived a simple, non-materialistic life, a life which largely adapted to and harmonised with the surroundings and the mountainous areas where they lived. [...] The inextricable love felt by our predecessors towards their homeland has been gravely damaged. [...] It follows that the youth of today no longer have this love for working on the land, in fact they are almost ashamed of it. They prefer to direct their efforts elsewhere, into rather more degrading jobs, which are unlike the noble work of their parents and forefathers'). Favai, *Diario*, pp. 225-226.

Favai insinuates that the gradual erasure of a distinctive Ladin identity has created a disjuncture between the younger generation and the Ladin traditions treasured by their parents. His apparent rejection of the past as a basis for the future identities of the Ladin communities invites parallels with Gatterer's comments about his own future identity, where he mentions his desire to start a 'zweite[s] Leben' after 1945. Crucially, whereas Gatterer appears to leave the past behind conclusively, Favai retains a nostalgia for the Ladin culture in Fodóm before its annexation. These contrasting relationships with the past can be partially explained by the generational difference between Favai and Gatterer: Favai was a young man at the time of the annexation whereas Gatterer was not born until ten years later, his only experience of a united County of Tyrol being from his father's stories. This suggests that perhaps Gatterer's wish to start a 'zweite[s] Leben' was as much a necessity as it was a conscious choice. The time from his birth in 1924 until 1945 had been marked by huge political and social upheaval which was entirely uncondusive to coherent identity formation. Gatterer's solution was to disregard these years altogether. By contrast, Favai initially begins to fall back on his first-hand experience of, and fondness towards, the Ladin culture of the early twentieth century, an affection he fears the younger generation do not share. He shows how the prominent rural influence on Ladin identity formation is a comfort for older generations such as himself but a source of restriction for the younger generation. Favai's extensive treatment of collective Ladin identity formation in Fodóm contrasts with his comparatively brief exploration of his own personal identity. His wish that the diary should be published allows us to see the questions he poses about Ladin identity towards the end of the war in 1944 in a particular light: 'Chi siamo noi? Quale la nostra

origine?'.<sup>308</sup> These questions suggest that instead of being simply a personal reflection on his own identity, his diary can be seen as a document which was intended to allow subsequent generations with greater distance from the events of 1939 to 1945 to consider how these events shaped Ladin identity in the intervening years. He implicitly invites the reader to reconcile the events of the Second World War with the events before and after it. Favai turns the specific cultural heritage of the Ladins – a notion he suggests was ignored and exploited by the German and Italian authorities – from a source of vulnerability during the war into an advantage in the years after it. By exploring the pre-annexation Ladin identity and showing the Ladins to be influenced but not entirely shaped by their neighbours, he positions the *Option* and the Second World War as turbulent parts of an extensive and particular Ladin history and identity in Fodóm, showing them to be events which can inform the community's post-war identity formation without defining or destroying it.

## Conclusion

Each of the texts has both a personal and collective function in relation to identity formation. The process of writing down their reflections – whether retrospectively or contemporaneously – allows Gatterer, Thaler and Favai to begin coming to terms with the far-reaching consequences of the momentous, turbulent events between the collapse of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire following the end of the First World War and the end of the Second World War in 1945. Each text is also an individual case

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<sup>308</sup> ('Who are we? What is our origin?'). Favai, *Diario*, p. 262.

study which demonstrates to post-war generations the specific local and personal complexities of this period of history.

The authors each use an autobiographical genre to argue for a nuanced approach to identity formation: they position their written account of their first-hand experiences as a way of demonstrating what they see as the damage inflicted by unsuitable dichotomies which obscure the particularity of the situation in South Tyrol and the surrounding area. Gatterer and Thaler both invoke personal life events as a means of commenting on the unsuitability of the *deutsch-walsch* and the *Optanten-Dableiber* dichotomies. The contemporaneity of his diary reinforces Favai's suggestion that the notion of a unifying Ladin identity was continually undermined throughout the Second World War, both by misleading propaganda and by the *Option* being presented as a solution to the 'South Tyrol question', which in turn necessitated a binary choice between the German Reich and Italy.

The three works are united by a number of salient factors: how the three authors present their personal identity in their work; the role they see themselves as fulfilling; their personal background; and finally the broader public perception of the *Option* and the Second World War at the time of publication and – in Favai's case – at the time of writing. In Favai's diary, there is no opportunity to reflect on the impact of the events in the war as they have only just occurred. He therefore chooses instead to record events from his perspective and positions his diary as a prism through which future generations of readers can consider the long-term impact of these events on collective identity formation in Fodóm.

Gatterer's text is more reflective than Favai's: he uses his adult perspective to differentiate between the oppressive, conflicting, artificial process of identity formation to which he was subjected as a child and the authentic adult identity which he believes began to develop during his 'second (and actual) life'<sup>309</sup> after the Second World War. His mention of a 'zweite[s] Leben' suggests that his memoir serves as a starting point for his future personal and professional identity. On a personal level, it allows him to separate distinctly his 'first life' and childhood before the end of the Second World War from his 'second life' as an adult after it, with his status as an Austrian citizen since 1956 offering him even more distance from these events. Professionally, he exploits the retrospective quality of the memoir genre to highlight the turmoil caused by political, cultural and linguistic divisions. This in turn bolsters his post-war arguments in favour of greater cross-cultural and cross-lingual interaction in South Tyrol. Rather than ignoring his childhood wartime experiences, Gatterer directly engages with them to strengthen his position as one of the older members of a new generation of writers, including Norbert Kaser and Joseph Zoderer, who used the written word to both tackle South Tyrol's historical taboos, and to consider what it means to live alongside and with other language groups.

Kaser's mention of Gatterer in his 'Brixner Rede' in 1969 shows that he was considered to be part of a wider group of prominent writers who were beginning to change how South Tyrolean literature responded to the province's complex twentieth-century history. By contrast, Thaler, as he himself emphasises, was 'ein kleiner Mensch', a peacock-quill maker who grew up on a farm with no literary background. He uses the

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<sup>309</sup> Gatterer, Diary, 15 March 1984, unpublished manuscript.

memoir genre as a platform to communicate the personal experiences of a so-called 'einfacher Mann aus dem Volke'<sup>310</sup> to an audience across the province and beyond. Furthermore, in the afterword to *Unvergessen*, he comments on how he will be seen by others in South Tyrol as a 'Nörgler' ('grumbler') and an 'Außenseiter' ('outsider').<sup>311</sup> He exploits this apparent perception of him as an outsider in order to change the way in which South Tyrolean involvement in the Second World War is discussed and unambiguously position some of his fellow Sarntal Valley residents as perpetrators. He explicitly uses his wartime experiences as part of both his personal and professional identity: at the end of *Unvergessen* he mentions that he has accompanied South Tyrolean school groups on educational visits to Dachau.<sup>312</sup>

Gatterer's and Thaler's contrasting approaches to their wartime experiences can also be explained by the shift in both the public perception and the literary presentation of Italianisation, the *Option* and the Second World War between 1969 and 1988. Literary critic Alessandro Costazza describes Gatterer's memoir as representing '[der] erst[e] literarisch[e] Versuch einer Aufarbeitung jener Zeit' for South Tyrol.<sup>313</sup> The fact that Gatterer's highly personal work was the first to engage critically with South Tyrolean support for and complicity with the Nazis necessitated a cautious approach towards any potential discussion of these sensitive subjects, particularly given that the traumatic events had occurred little more than a generation previously. Moreover, negotiations

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<sup>310</sup> ('straightforward man of the people'). Fata, 'Ansprache des Vorsitzenden der Südtiroler Pressevereinigung', p. 231.

<sup>311</sup> Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 167.

<sup>312</sup> Thaler, *Unvergessen*, p. 166.

<sup>313</sup> ('[the] first literary attempt to engage with that time [of the Fascist and Nazi regimes]'). Alessandro Costazza, 'Der Bildungsroman eines Historikers: Geschichte und Geschichten in Claus Gatterers "Schöne Welt, böse Leut"' *Studia theodisca*, 10 (2003), 165-220, <https://sites.unimi.it/dililefi/costazza/Pubblicazioni/Gatterer.pdf> [accessed 16 December 2020] (p. 184).

between the South Tyrolean and the Italian governments over a new Autonomy Statute were at a delicate stage at the time of publication.

By contrast, significant literary and historical developments had occurred by the time *Unvergessen* was published in 1988. In addition to the aforementioned memoir by de Giampietro,<sup>314</sup> the arrest of South Tyrolean SS labour camp commander Josef Schwammberger in 1987 further undermined the *Opferthese* which had helped to shape post-war identity formation. Though the notion of South Tyrolean victimhood was still highly influential, conditions for the publication of a memoir such as Thaler's, which directly implicated South Tyroleans in Nazi atrocities, were nevertheless more favourable than they had been when *Schöne Welt, böse Leut* first appeared almost twenty years previously.

Through their respective first-hand accounts, Gatterer, Thaler and Favai each offer a nuanced, personal view of the period between 1919 and 1945 which challenges long-established historical, cultural and linguistic fault lines. However, the precise extent to which they were able to explore such nuances was determined in each case by both their personal situation at the time of writing and by the broader political and social circumstances in South Tyrol and the surrounding area.

The next chapter examines how topics that were not yet fully developed in these wartime-focused personal memoirs and diaries, such as the marginalisation of South Tyrol's Italian speakers and the notion of a cross-cultural identity, gradually became pressing themes in the more overtly politically focused contributions of Sebastiano Vassalli and Alexander Langer during the 1980s and 1990s. It uses Vassalli's and Langer's

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<sup>314</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 141-142.

writings to demonstrate how the shifting emphases of cultural identity formation following the Statute represented a significant break with the time prior to its implementation, yet still retained the undercurrents of tension and mutual distrust between language groups which marked the post-war period.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The debate on cultural identity from 1972 to 2019

Much of South Tyrol's twentieth-century history was characterised by turbulent events which had far-reaching consequences for all its inhabitants, events which included the Fascist Italianisation programme under Mussolini from 1923 to 1943; the *Option* of 1939; the Nazi occupation of the province from 1943 to 1945; and the violence carried out by the separatist group *Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol* (BAS), which peaked during the 1960s.<sup>315</sup> Each of these events was informed by an 'us and them' dichotomy, creating divisions between and sometimes within language groups and leading to a debate on cultural identity that was typically characterised more by division than cohesion. There was little evidence of a cross-cultural process of identity formation that might have been suited to bringing together the identities of the German, Italian and Ladin-speaking communities. Historical narratives concerning the complex, momentous events were largely developed within individual language groups and separate cultural organisations.

The controversial renaming of one of the main squares in the provincial capital of Bolzano in 2001 is especially helpful in demonstrating how the influence of monocultural twentieth-century historical narratives persisted into the twenty-first century. In 2001, Bolzano's City Council voted to change the name of the city's *Piazza della Vittoria* (Victory Square) – a symbol of Italian Fascism – to *Piazza della Pace* (Peace Square). The Council wanted the renaming to be a symbol of reconciliation between

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<sup>315</sup> See Chapter One of this thesis for a more detailed account of these events and their position within the debates on cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol.

South Tyrol's language groups that aimed to commemorate the complex history of the province, rather than being seen to celebrate the Fascist Italianisation with which the former nomenclature and the nearby Victory Monument<sup>316</sup> were associated. However, after a sustained campaign led by the Italian right-wing Alleanza Nazionale party, 62% of Bolzano residents voted to change the square's name back again in a referendum the following year. The referendum itself served only to reopen the divisions between South Tyrol's communities that the initial renaming had sought to close. This single incident is symptomatic of the wider historical, political, cultural and linguistic tensions that continue to affect South Tyrol and complicate the debate on identity during the twenty-first century.

The Second Autonomy Statute (1972)<sup>317</sup> forms the logical starting point for the chapter as it constituted a significant turning point in how cultural identity in South Tyrol was discussed. It was important both politically – in recognising South Tyrol as a political entity in its own right – and in reshaping public discourse. The Statute is also a common link between the different 'outsider' voices discussed in this chapter. Notwithstanding their differing backgrounds and perspectives on cultural identity, these voices are united by their challenging of the status quo, represented by the Second Autonomy Statute and the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP).

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<sup>316</sup> The Victory Monument was commissioned by Mussolini in 1926. It celebrated Italy's victory in the First World War, commemorated fallen Italian soldiers, and replaced a monument to the Austro-Hungarian *Kaiserjäger* soldiers. It has caused controversy throughout its history and is seen by some as a glorification of fascism and a provocative symbol of Italian supremacy.

<sup>317</sup> The Second Autonomy Statute (1972) aimed to address the shortcomings of the First Autonomy Statute (1948), which was criticised by South Tyrol's German and Ladin-speaking community as being excessively favourable towards the province's Italian speakers.

Dissatisfaction with the Statute and the laws it precipitated underpinned the pioneering work of both journalist and author Sebastiano Vassalli (1941-2015) and Green Party politician and activist Alexander Langer (1946-1995).<sup>318</sup> In his controversial travelogue *Sangue e suolo: Viaggio fra gli italiani trasparenti* (1985),<sup>319</sup> Vassalli combines his own impressions of South Tyrol as an outsider<sup>320</sup> visiting the province for the first time with his report of conversations with South Tyroleans from a variety of backgrounds and professions. In this polemical work, he highlights his belief that the ruling SVP,<sup>321</sup> responsible for negotiating the Statute with the Italian government in 1969, has too much power. He also foregrounds the topic of Italian marginalisation in South Tyrol, which at the time was little discussed in the province. Vassalli suggests that the Statute, and in particular the Ethnic Proportion Law (EPL, 1976)<sup>322</sup> that followed it, led to Italians feeling disadvantaged. Throughout *Sangue e suolo*, he presents South Tyrol as a province irrevocably divided along cultural and linguistic lines.

By contrast, Langer was a different kind of outsider. He was a German speaker born in South Tyrol, though as a child he unusually spoke High German rather than the local dialect at his family home in the majority German-speaking town of Sterzing.<sup>323</sup> Later, as

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<sup>318</sup> Langer played a leading role in a succession of intercultural South Tyrolean parties which held the same principles and involved the same people but participated in elections under various different names. These included Neue Linke/Nuova Sinistra (1978-1983), Alternative Liste für das andere Südtirol/Lista alternativa per l'altro Sudtirolo (1983-1988), Grün-alternative Liste/Lista Verdi Alternativa (1988-1993), and finally Verdi-Grüne-Vërc (1993-).

<sup>319</sup> ('Blood and Soil: Journey amongst the Transparent Italians').

<sup>320</sup> Vassalli grew up in Novara, in the northern Italian region of Piedmont.

<sup>321</sup> Though the SVP position themselves as representing the interests of both German and Ladin speakers in South Tyrol, Vassalli argued throughout *Sangue e suolo* that they were only a party for South Tyrol's German-speaking community.

<sup>322</sup> The EPL (1976) provided for the proportional allocation of public sector jobs amongst South Tyrol's German, Italian and Ladin-speaking groups.

<sup>323</sup> Alexander Langer, 'Minima Personalia', in *Die Mehrheit der Minderheiten: Warum wird unsere Welt vom ethnischen Sauberkeitwahn und vom grundlosen Vertrauen in Mehrheiten beherrscht?*, ed. by Peter Kammerer (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1996), pp. 29-49 (p. 29).

the leader of the left-wing Green Party, he was frequently at odds with the ruling SVP. He used this 'outsider' status to challenge the notion that South Tyrol was destined to remain culturally and linguistically split, at a time when senior politicians within the SVP were advocating increased separation between language groups. Langer's work led to him being disparagingly referred to as a 'Zusammenlebensapostel'<sup>324</sup> ('disciple for living together') by Anton Zelger, the SVP politician and Secretary for German-speaking Schools and Culture from 1969 to 1989.

In a number of essays throughout the 1980s and 1990s, he independently advocated an inclusive model of identity encompassing all South Tyroleans, which he termed the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* (those who identify with all parts of South Tyrol). Langer advocated the concept of cross-cultural identity formation to compensate for what he saw as the division caused by the Statute, in particular the Act of Linguistic Belonging (ALB, 1981).<sup>325</sup>

Though united in their criticism of the SVP and the Statute, Vassalli and Langer were also highly critical of each other. The two men were acquainted – according to Vassalli they met in February 1983<sup>326</sup> – and crucially they responded to one another, invariably in a critical manner. In *Sangue e suolo*, Vassalli pointedly quotes SVP General Secretary Bruno Hosp, who disparagingly describes Langer as 'la camicia sbiadita di Lenin'.<sup>327</sup> Even when stating that Langer is a charismatic leader of his Neue Linke party, Vassalli

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<sup>324</sup> Florian Kronbichler, *Was gut war: Ein Alexander-Langer-ABC* (Bolzano: Raetia, 2005), p. 41.

<sup>325</sup> The ALB (1981) legally obliged every South Tyrolean resident to declare belonging to either the German, Italian or Ladin-speaking community.

<sup>326</sup> Sebastiano Vassalli, *Il confine. I cento anni del Sudtirolo in Italia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2015), p. 131.

<sup>327</sup> ('a poor imitation of Lenin'). Sebastiano Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo: Viaggio fra gli italiani trasparenti* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), p. 149.

suggests that this has little political influence by describing them as ‘un partitino locale’.<sup>328</sup>

Likewise, *Sangue e suolo* provoked a strong response from Langer, especially concerning Vassalli’s depiction of a divided South Tyrolean society which marginalised the province’s Italian speakers. In a newspaper article written in Italian shortly after its publication, Langer expressed his concern that Vassalli’s travelogue would only serve to increase tension between the German and Italian-speaking communities in South Tyrol by becoming ‘una specie di piccola bibbia dell’italiano incazzato per l’Alto Adige’.<sup>329</sup> He also questioned the accuracy of Vassalli’s work, asserting that it contained ‘alcune grandi bugie’<sup>330</sup> (‘some big lies’) and dismissing the likelihood of his claim that Italian speakers would be non-existent in South Tyrol by the year 2000. He suggests that Vassalli had a preconception of South Tyrol as a culturally divided province before he even visited and only took notice of anything which reinforced that view.<sup>331</sup>

The very fact that Vassalli and Langer engaged with each other’s contributions shows a shared willingness to engage in open debate on South Tyrol, its turbulent history, and the challenges involved in balancing the interests of all South Tyroleans. In particular, their respective focuses on a multicultural South Tyrolean identity (Langer) and the marginalisation of Italian speakers (Vassalli) created for the first time a prominent platform for these sensitive issues to be discussed. Moreover, the time which had passed since the Second Autonomy Statute began to be implemented in 1972 – allied

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<sup>328</sup> (‘A small local party’). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 50.

<sup>329</sup> (‘a kind of little bible for Italians ticked off about South Tyrol’). Alexander Langer, ‘Zoderer e Vassalli, due libri sul Sudtirolo’, in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo 1978-1995/Aufsätze zu Südtirol 1978-1995*, ed. by Siegfried Baur and Riccardo Dello Sbarba (Meran: AlphaBeta, 1996), pp. 74-80 (p. 80).

<sup>330</sup> Langer, ‘Zoderer and Vassalli’, p. 79.

<sup>331</sup> Langer, ‘Zoderer e Vassalli’, pp. 78-79.

with the status of Vassalli and Langer as figures separate from the ruling SVP – allowed for a debate which could not be perceived as being led by people with a vested interest in protecting the Statute.

Though measures implemented due to the Statute, such as the ALB, the EPL and the confirmation of parallel monolingual education systems,<sup>332</sup> were intended to ensure official parity between the province's language groups, they in fact limited everyday interactions between them. Such measures also restricted the growing influence of other voices in the cultural identity debate which exist beyond the German-Italian dichotomy that has dominated many of the narratives concerning South Tyrol's twentieth-century history.

The influence of Ladin speakers, mixed-language South Tyroleans and immigrants are especially unsuited to this narrow, dichotomous focus. The desire of the provincial government to protect each of South Tyrol's three main language groups has resulted in certain narratives from particular groups being foregrounded at the expense of others, which in turn has historically caused the mainstream debate on cultural identity to be limited in its scope. In addition, neither of these three sets of 'other voices' are addressed in detail by Vassalli or Langer, though each has gradually been amplified in the broader debate since their writings in the 1980s and 1990s. Their distinct and growing influence challenges the status quo in South Tyrol, but in a different way from Vassalli and Langer. The Ladin-speaking community in South Tyrol undermine the notion that South Tyrol is dominated by a German-Italian dichotomy. The presence of mixed-

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<sup>332</sup> The Statute confirmed the existence of parallel monolingual education systems for South Tyrol's German and Italian speakers. Only the Ladins had their own multilingual school system (see Chapter Three, pp. 233-234 for more information about schools in South Tyrol's two Ladin-speaking valleys).

language South Tyroleans debunks the idea that all of the province's residents can unambiguously belong to just one of the three groups outlined by the ALB, while the increasing number of immigrants in the twenty-first century highlights that other voices beyond South Tyrol's three main language groups can contribute to the ongoing cultural identity debate.

Engaging with the marginalised voices of Ladins, the divided loyalties of mixed-language South Tyroleans, and the emerging voices of immigrants towards the end of the present chapter<sup>333</sup> is therefore important for two reasons. Firstly, it takes the discussion of cultural identity beyond the parameters of the debate conducted by Vassalli and Langer, while retaining the overarching focus on the voices of 'outsiders'. Secondly, it advances the temporal span of the chapter by assessing the evolving and broadening scope of the cultural identity debate in the twenty-first century.

#### **4.1 Shaping the debate I: Sebastiano Vassalli**

Vassalli's travelogue *Sangue e suolo: Viaggio fra gli italiani trasparenti* (1985) was a polemical work, a fact emphasised from the outset by the provocative choice of title. By the 1980s, Vassalli was a well-respected journalist alongside his main career as a fiction writer. He had no connection to South Tyrol before 1983, when he was commissioned to write a piece on the province by Claudio Sabelli Fioretti, the editor of *Panorama mese*, an Italian news magazine with national circulation. Fioretti gave Vassalli the

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<sup>333</sup> See Chapter Four, sections 4.3 and 4.4.

provisional title of 'Il bilinguismo in Alto Adige'<sup>334</sup> ('Bilingualism in South Tyrol') and he was subsequently sent to the province on a research visit in February 1983.

The suggestion to make his account of his South Tyrolean trip into a book first came from the respected Italian editor Piero Gelli in October 1983, who was working at the time for the publisher Garzanti.<sup>335</sup> Vassalli then returned to South Tyrol in November 1983, with the stated intention of capturing the atmosphere in the province in the lead-up to the provincial parliamentary elections on 20 November.<sup>336</sup> The timing of Vassalli's visit emphasises the change in his purpose and scope that had occurred since the initial commission from *Panorama mese*: what had started as a single article concerning the linguistic demographics of South Tyrol had turned into an entire text focused on the complexities of the province's politics.

Not only was Vassalli's *Sangue e suolo* one of the first non-fictional texts written from an Italian perspective about the specific political and cultural situation in South Tyrol, it was among the first to be read by Italians outside the province. Its publication therefore played a key role in establishing and presenting the concept of Italian-speaking South Tyroleans as a marginalised group to readers both within and outside the province.

Author and translator Toni Colleselli's description of South Tyrol in 2015 as 'la provincia meno italiana d'Italia'<sup>337</sup> demonstrates that the idea of it being a province distinct from the rest of Italy in terms of its identity is not unique either to Vassalli or to the time when he wrote *Sangue e suolo*. However, Vassalli's specific focus on the marginalisation

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<sup>334</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 8.

<sup>335</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 103.

<sup>336</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 103.

<sup>337</sup> ('the least Italian province in Italy'). Toni Colleselli, ed., *Narrare l'Alto Adige: 25 anni di racconti intorno alla provincia meno italiana d'Italia* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2015), p. 12.

of South Tyrol's Italian-speaking community by the province's German speakers during a period of increased tension between language groups in the mid-1980s made *Sangue e suolo* especially pivotal to the debate on cultural identity.

Vassalli's particular emphasis on what he saw as the marginalisation of South Tyrol's Italian speakers and the dominance of the German speakers almost prevented the text from being published at all. Garzanti did not ultimately publish it, despite paying Vassalli. The author himself suggested that this was due to its controversial subject matter. He stated that the publisher Bollati also pulled out at the last minute. The text was eventually published, despite some reservations, by the prestigious Einaudi publishing house in July 1985. Vassalli implied that Einaudi hoped its low-profile summer release would ensure that it escaped the attention of critics.<sup>338</sup> However, the critical response it provoked from both Langer<sup>339</sup> and the SVP, albeit for differing reasons, indicates that these hopes were not realised. Incensed by Vassalli's depiction of them as a quasi-dictatorial party, the SVP convened a meeting following its publication in order to investigate who had commissioned his travelogue, suspecting (falsely) that it was the Italian Communist Party (PCI).<sup>340</sup>

The political response to *Sangue e suolo* was not limited to the SVP. In 2003, Vassalli admitted that a trade union closely associated with the neo-fascist party Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) had offered to organise a book presentation shortly after

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<sup>338</sup> Maurilio Barozzi, 'Vassalli all'Adige nel 2004: quel libro sul Sudtirolo che irritò la SVP', *L'Adige*, 27 July 2015, <https://www.ladige.it/eventi/cultura/2015/07/27/vassalli-alladige-2004-quel-libro-sudtirolo-che-irrit-svp> [accessed 22 September 2020].

<sup>339</sup> See Chapter Four, p. 192.

<sup>340</sup> Barozzi, 'Vassalli all'Adige nel 2004'.

publication,<sup>341</sup> demonstrating that *Sangue e suolo* had resonated both beyond South Tyrol's borders and across the political spectrum. This example of Vassalli, a well-established left-wing writer, exploring the theme of Italians being disadvantaged in their own country was instrumentalised by far-right neo-fascists as a justification of their views.

The vigorous, contrasting political reactions to *Sangue e suolo* in the summer of 1985 can be partially attributed to the momentous results at the council elections in May of that year. The neo-fascist MSI was the most popular party in Bolzano's council election, gaining 22.6% of the vote. In Meran they received almost 12% of votes and became the second largest Italian-speaking party.<sup>342</sup> The fact that the MSI vote elsewhere in Italy only reached 5.3%<sup>343</sup> shows the disproportionate level of support for the party in urban areas of South Tyrol with large numbers of Italian speakers. The rise of the MSI in this period suggests that the need for the interests of Italian speakers to be protected was becoming an increasingly common topic in public discourse in South Tyrol around the time of *Sangue e suolo*'s publication.

Vassalli's provocative presentation of South Tyrol's German speakers is underpinned by sweeping stereotypes and incendiary generalisations about narrow-mindedness and far-right sympathies, while his prediction concerning the possible disappearance of Italian speakers in South Tyrol by the year 2000 is undoubtedly far-fetched. However, the rise of the MSI around the time that *Sangue e suolo* was published lent a certain

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<sup>341</sup> Giancarlo Riccio, "'Sangue e suolo' così come viene raccontato nel 2003, vent'anni dopo', in *Vassalli, Il Sudtirolo difficile*, ed. by Giancarlo Riccio (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2016), pp. 36-44 (p. 40).

<sup>342</sup> Peter Janke, 'Terrorism in South Tyrol', in *Terrorism and Democracy*, ed. by Peter Janke (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1-34 (p. 24).

<sup>343</sup> 'Quando il voto è firmato', *La Stampa*, 16 May 1985, p. 2.

prominence and credibility to the polarised form of identity construction which he presents throughout the text. Rather than allowing his status as an outsider to preclude him from drawing conclusions on the political and cultural situation in South Tyrol in the mid-1980s, Vassalli instead exploits this position to address ‘taboo’ subjects, including the perceived undue dominance of South Tyrol’s German-speaking community.

Although some assertions seem unlikely, such as his mention of a bookshop in the province that contained no Italian books,<sup>344</sup> these matters of detail in no way detract from the overall value of what is a controversial yet ground-breaking text. Even twenty-five years after its publication, it was referred to in the local Italian language newspaper *Corriere dell’Alto Adige* as ‘il libro-terremoto’<sup>345</sup> (‘the earthquake book’).

Vassalli’s propensity for addressing taboo topics begins with the title – *Sangue e suolo: Viaggio tra gli italiani trasparenti*. *Sangue e suolo* is a clear reference to *Blut und Boden*, a nineteenth-century concept which equated specific races with specific settlement areas and was adopted by the Nazis to justify their desire for greater *Lebensraum* (‘living space’) for the German Reich. It is not clear whether Vassalli himself chose this incendiary title, or if it was driven by his publisher Einaudi. Regardless of who was responsible, the title appears to imply provocatively that the South Tyrol of the 1980s retains some of the far-right fascist inclinations which saw Nazi-sympathising South Tyroleans, euphemistically known as *Fluchthelfer* (‘refugee helpers’),<sup>346</sup> assist leading

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<sup>344</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 99.

<sup>345</sup> Diana Benedetti, ‘“Sangue e suolo”: Il libro-terremoto compie 25 anni’, *Corriere dell’Alto Adige*, 21 August 2010, p. 4.

<sup>346</sup> Gerald Steinacher, *Adolf Eichmann – Ein Optant aus Tramin*, University of Nebraska Department of History (2010), 307-337, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1138&context=historyfacpub> [accessed 21 January 2021] (p. 317).

Nazis such as Josef Mengele and Adolf Eichmann as they went into hiding in the years after the German defeat.<sup>347</sup>

Taken together, the title and subtitle encapsulate the two interconnected focuses of Vassalli's views on South Tyrol. On the one hand, he presents the German speakers of South Tyrol as being excessively dominant. He suggests that the province's German speakers, led by the quasi-dictatorial SVP, are indistinguishable from their counterparts in Germany and retain residual Nazi sympathies. On the other hand, Vassalli presents the Italians as a 'transparent' group, marginalised and oppressed by their German-speaking counterparts.

Vassalli's references to the Nazi period in the preface are typical of a text which implies that the events of the Second World War in South Tyrol are yet to be fully acknowledged by South Tyroleans: he writes of the release on parole of Austrian Nazi Walter Reder in January 1985.<sup>348</sup> This mention of Reder offers a further indication that Vassalli closely associates South Tyrol and its complex Nazi past with that of other German-speaking areas, rather than seeing South Tyroleans as being uniquely trapped between Mussolini's and Hitler's forms of fascism.

Vassalli may have been aware of the controversy his travelogue would create, since he appears to defend himself pre-emptively against potential criticism of his perceived reasons for writing *Sangue e suolo*. Throughout the book, he makes an ever-clearer distinction between the article he was initially asked to write for *Panorama mese* –

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<sup>347</sup> Gerald Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run: How Hitler's Henchmen Fled Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 23-25.

<sup>348</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. vii.

which he admits was a short-term job that was primarily financially motivated<sup>349</sup> – and the travelogue that he subsequently produced. In the preface of *Sangue e suolo*, he comments on the project as follows: ‘Non è scritto dalla parte dei tedeschi e nemmeno da quella degli italiani: è scritto dalla parte di chi non ha altra patria che il proprio lavoro’.<sup>350</sup> By referring to ‘lavoro’, he casts his work as an objective, professional presentation of South Tyrolean society by an impartial observer. He seeks to bolster further the credibility of the text by stating how, unlike the editor who commissioned the original article, his new editor Piero Gelli ‘non chiede spettacolo e non ha bisogno di colore’.<sup>351</sup> Vassalli implies that the purpose of *Sangue e suolo* is not to suggest or create difficulties between language groups where there were previously none, but rather to draw out pre-existing tensions which had not previously been written about in detail from an Italian-speaking perspective.

The book is split into four distinct sections which correspond to Vassalli’s various research trips: the first short section provides background on Vassalli’s decision to write about South Tyrol; the second details his first visit to the province in February 1983; the third describes his second visit in November 1983; and the fourth brief section focuses on his time in the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg in August 1984.

Vassalli implies that this final section is an extension of his focus in the rest of the text on ‘[i] rapporti tra italiani e tedeschi’,<sup>352</sup> which further emphasises how he does not distinguish between the German speakers in Germany and those in South Tyrol. Indeed,

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<sup>349</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 8.

<sup>350</sup> ([‘This book] is written neither on behalf of Germans, nor on behalf of Italians. It is written by someone whose only sense of loyalty is to their own work’). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. vii.

<sup>351</sup> (‘He doesn’t ask for drama and he doesn’t need fireworks’). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 102

<sup>352</sup> (‘the relationships between Italians and Germans’). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 181.

he does not use the terms 'i sudtirolesi' to indicate South Tyrol's German speakers or 'gli altoatesini' to refer to the Italian-speaking community throughout the whole text, which would have acknowledged South Tyrol's special political status within Italy while still differentiating between the two groups. It is therefore clear that for Vassalli, language is a key marker of cultural difference.

*Sangue e suolo* is a political and cultural analysis of the communities Vassalli visits, divided into short chapters of no longer than four pages. In each chapter focusing on South Tyrol, he offers his account of a conversation with figure(s) from the province who are mostly members of either the German or Italian-speaking community. Only two of the text's short chapters directly address the Ladin-speaking community, and only one of these involves an interview with a Ladin speaker.

Vassalli's reporting of his conversations varies slightly from chapter to chapter. On some occasions, he immediately begins with the words of his interlocutor, whereas on others he sets the scene and introduces the topics and people to be discussed before recounting the meeting itself. He frequently ends chapters with a direct quote from his interlocutor, firmly placing the focus on his interviewees.

The interviews Vassalli recounts focus on a range of diverse topics related to South Tyrol, from the faults of the EPL<sup>353</sup> to the role of local sports teams in promoting cultural division.<sup>354</sup> His interlocutors come from many different professional backgrounds, including politics [SVP General Secretary Bruno Hosp],<sup>355</sup> religion [prominent clergyman

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<sup>353</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 45.

<sup>354</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 78.

<sup>355</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 33.

Father Giorgio Cristofolini]<sup>356</sup> and journalism [editor of the German language *Dolomiten* newspaper Josef Rampold].<sup>357</sup>

Vassalli also recounts his conversations with South Tyroleans who are not public figures, including a German-speaking student referred to only as A.D.<sup>358</sup> He often makes use of pseudonyms and anonymous contributions. In his article following the publication of *Sangue e suolo*, Langer implies that Vassalli's use of this strategy to report unsupported anecdotes was a deliberate decision in order to reinforce his controversial emphasis on Italian marginalisation and cultural division.<sup>359</sup> When addressing this topic in *Sangue e suolo*, however, Vassalli suggests that his use of pseudonyms was in fact a condition imposed by his interviewees.<sup>360</sup> Regardless of whether it was instigated by the author or his interviewees, Vassalli's use of anonymous sources and pseudonyms is suggestive of a climate of fear which corresponds to his positioning of the SVP as a quasi-dictatorial party.

Despite the differing backgrounds of his conversation partners and the varying emphasis of the conversations, the interviews reported and topics covered serve the same broad purpose for Vassalli. Taken together, they highlight the tensions between South Tyrol's German and Italian-speaking communities, emphasise his belief that the province's Italian speakers have been politically and socially marginalised, and draw attention to the excessive political and cultural dominance Vassalli perceives South Tyrol's German-speaking community to hold.

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<sup>356</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 38.

<sup>357</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 47.

<sup>358</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 112.

<sup>359</sup> Langer, 'Zoderer e Vassalli', p. 79.

<sup>360</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 14.

Vassalli's largely negative presentation of German speakers in South Tyrol in *Sangue e suolo* is by no means limited to his choice of title. In the text itself, he writes of a German-speaking community which has a very low opinion of their Italian-speaking counterparts. From the start of the book, South Tyrol's Italian speakers are cast by Vassalli as the unjust victims of prejudice. To demonstrate this point, he quotes the view of an anonymous German-speaking South Tyrolean he met on his first trip to the province in February 1983: 'tutti gli italiani per noi sono Wallischer'.<sup>361</sup> He uses the derogatory term 'Wallischer'<sup>362</sup> to reinforce his contention that the Italian-speaking community in South Tyrol are seen by German speakers not as fellow South Tyroleans, but rather as outsiders. He suggests that this dismissive attitude towards South Tyrol's Italian-speaking community has affected the Italian speakers themselves by quoting an unnamed local Italian-speaking historian who laments that Italian speakers feel 'emarginati e oppressi sul nostro stesso territorio'.<sup>363</sup>

He places much of the blame for these tensions on the narrow outlook adopted by most of the German-speaking community. When describing his first visit to South Tyrol, he asserts that there are 'tedeschi progressisti' ('progressive Germans') in South Tyrol, but states that they are the exception to the rule.<sup>364</sup> Crucially, he establishes an equivalence between 'tedeschi progressisti' and those who have travelled beyond the province. In this way, he suggests that the sense of hostility towards 'outsiders' is not simply a mental obstacle in the minds of German-speaking South Tyroleans, it is a physical

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<sup>361</sup> ('all the Italians are *Walsche* to us'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 59.

<sup>362</sup> 'Wallischer' is Vassalli's Italian rendering of 'Walsche', a derogatory term used by German-speaking South Tyroleans to refer to Italians.

<sup>363</sup> ('marginalised and oppressed in our own territory'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 24.

<sup>364</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 30.

barrier in the geographical fabric of the province itself, which by definition affects only the German speakers who have lived there for centuries, rather than the Italian speakers who have their roots outside the province. He implies that the mountains of South Tyrol contribute towards its residents' closed mind: 'sono le montagne che anche fisicamente chiudono gli orizzonti'.<sup>365</sup> In suggesting that the province's mountainous Alpine landscape precludes open-mindedness, Vassalli is able to frame the marginalisation of Italians as a specifically 'German' South Tyrolean problem rather than an 'Italian' one.

There are few occasions in *Sangue e suolo* where Vassalli deviates from his dichotomous focus on 'Germans' and 'Italians'. His report of his conversation with Hugo Valentin<sup>366</sup> in February 1983 forms part of only two brief chapters in which he directly considers the cultural and political status of South Tyrol's Ladin speakers. Even these fleeting references are used as a means of adding to his overall emphasis on the marginalisation of Italians in South Tyrol, rather than as part of a detailed examination of the Ladins' specific situation. When contextualising his conversation with Valentin at the provincial parliament building in Bolzano, Vassalli underlines the German-speaking dominance within the SVP by observing that Valentin is the party's only Ladin member of parliament.<sup>367</sup> He also quotes Valentin as highlighting that the Ladins are in fact the oldest inhabitants of South Tyrol,<sup>368</sup> perhaps in order to imply that historical reasons alone cannot be used to justify what Vassalli perceives as the disproportionate political and cultural control exerted over the province by its German-speaking population.

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<sup>365</sup> ('The mountains also physically close one's horizons'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 30.

<sup>366</sup> Valentin was the SVP's only Ladin-speaking member of parliament between 1978 and 1994.

<sup>367</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 22.

<sup>368</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 22.

Vassalli uses his second analysis of the Ladins, inspired by a trip to the Ladin-speaking village of Urtijëi in Gherdëina in November 1983, to emphasise how the German-speaking dominance of South Tyrol extends to the labour market. He states that the Ladins are disadvantaged by the Ethnic Proportion Law (EPL)<sup>369</sup> and therefore struggle to obtain public sector jobs: 'è più facile per un ladino diventare campione del mondo di sci che far carriera politica in provincia di Bolzano'.<sup>370</sup> Like his later forecast in relation to the disappearance of Italians in South Tyrol by the year 2000,<sup>371</sup> Vassalli uses predictions to warn that German dominance will continue if left unchecked: he asserts that due to the EPL, public sector jobs will remain beyond the reach of the Ladins and that the residents of Urtijëi will instead be forced to continue being hoteliers, skiers, carpenters and farmers until at least the year 2000.<sup>372</sup> Vassalli tellingly prefaces these comments by arguing that, much like South Tyrol's Italian speakers, the province's Ladin speakers do not have any representatives in the Italian national parliament in Rome.<sup>373</sup>

In both his analysis of the Ladins and throughout *Sangue e suolo*, Vassalli implies that South Tyrol's political system is partially responsible for Italian marginalisation by presenting voters with a limited choice. He quotes an anonymous Italian teacher, who he reports as stating the following ahead of South Tyrol's provincial elections in November 1983:

[...] i giornali parlano di quattordici partiti [...] ma i partiti veri sono tre, uno tedesco [the SVP] e due italiani [...] I due partiti italiano sono: il partito di chi vuole integrarsi a tutti i costi nel gruppo tedesco [presumably centre-left parties

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<sup>369</sup> See Chapter One, p. 60.

<sup>370</sup> ('It is easier for a Ladin speaker to become a skiing world champion than it is for them to forge a political career in South Tyrol'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 127.

<sup>371</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 155.

<sup>372</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 127.

<sup>373</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 127.

including the Democrazia Cristiana, the Partito Socialista Italiano and Partito Comunista Italiano] e il partito di chi vorrebbe restare italiano [the MSI]'.<sup>374</sup>

Through this anonymous quotation, Vassalli implicitly dismisses the possibility that there might be any factions which adequately represent the interests of both German and Italian speakers. In so doing, he ignores Alexander Langer's cross-cultural party of the time<sup>375</sup> and reasserts his belief that the SVP represent only German speakers.

Vassalli's approach to the SVP throughout *Sangue e suolo* is complex. On the one hand, he uses the influence associated with individuals within the SVP, such as Ladin representative Hugo Valentin and General Secretary Bruno Hosp, to support his own views. Vassalli's report of his conversation with Valentin strengthens his argument that the German-speaking community is unduly politically dominant. Furthermore, he uses Hosp's scathing criticism of Langer as an implicit criticism of his campaigning for greater interactions between South Tyrol's language groups, which directly contradicts Vassalli's view of South Tyrol as a province that is culturally and linguistically divided by an enduring German-Italian dichotomy.

However, on the other hand, Vassalli consistently criticises the SVP, and in particular provincial governor Silvius Magnano, for holding too much political power with insufficient checks and balances. He reports the anonymous Italian teacher as stating: 'Il partito unico tedesco si chiama Magnano'.<sup>376</sup> This implication of a German-speaking

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<sup>374</sup> ('The newspapers talk about fourteen parties [...] but there are three true factions, one German faction and two Italian factions [...] The two Italian factions are the faction for those who want to integrate into the German group at all costs, and the faction for those who would like to remain Italian'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>375</sup> See Chapter Four, footnote 318, p. 190, for more information on the succession of intercultural parties that Langer was involved in, which eventually formed the basis of the South Tyrolean Green Party.

<sup>376</sup> ('The only German party is called Magnano'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 104.

dictatorship supports Vassalli's focus on Italian marginalisation and reinforces the fascist, nationalistic associations of the book's title.

Throughout the text, Vassalli does not present the Second Autonomy Statute as a solution to the province's difficulties, but rather as a factor which increased the dominance of German speakers at the expense of their Italian-speaking counterparts. Vassalli suggests that the SVP's election poster for the 1983 provincial elections is a visual embodiment of their power at a time when they held twenty-one of the thirty-four seats in the provincial parliament: '[...] l'attenzione del passante non va alla scritta, va agli occhi: che dal centro del manifesto lo scrutano in modo inquietante, lo seguono mentre cammina, restano fissi su di lui'.<sup>377</sup> By suggesting that Magnano's eyes follow people as they walk past the poster, Vassalli presents him as a sinister, omniscient, God-like figure. Far from portraying Magnano as the benevolent 'father of South Tyrolean autonomy',<sup>378</sup> he depicts him as a restrictive, controlling dictator.

The connection between Magnano and South Tyrol intensifies over the course of the text. Vassalli gives the impression that Magnano not only *controls* South Tyrol, but is also the physical embodiment of it. He reports an anecdote he has been told concerning Magnano's reluctance to use a prosthetic in place of the leg he lost in the Second World War as a political strategy: 'non ha voluto sostituire la gamba amputata con una protesi. Per rappresentare anche fisicamente la patria mutilata e offesa'.<sup>379</sup> Vassalli's suggestion

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<sup>377</sup> ('[...] the passer-by's attention is not drawn to the writing, it's drawn to the eyes that disconcertingly scrutinise them from the centre of the manifesto. They follow them while they walk, remaining fixed on them'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 106.

<sup>378</sup> Rainer Mayerhofer, 'Südtirol trauert um den "Vater der Autonomie"', *Wiener Zeitung*, 25 May 2010, [http://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/europa/europaarchiv/44258\\_Suedtirol-trauert-um-den-Vater-der-Autonomie.html?em\\_cnt=44258](http://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/europa/europaarchiv/44258_Suedtirol-trauert-um-den-Vater-der-Autonomie.html?em_cnt=44258) [accessed 17 April 2021].

<sup>379</sup> ('He didn't want to replace his amputated leg with a prosthetic, so that he could also physically reflect his mutilated and insulted homeland'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 164.

that Magnano consciously styled himself as a human reminder of South Tyrol's turbulent history has important implications for his vision of South Tyrolean cultural identity in *Sangue e suolo*. By contending that Magnano has fashioned himself as a physical embodiment of South Tyrol and its mutilation, Vassalli implicitly discounts the idea that South Tyrolean identity, as represented by Magnano, can also encompass the province's Italian speakers. In referring to Magnano's attachment to a historical 'patria' – the County of Tyrol – of which Italy was not a part, Vassalli pinpoints one of the recurring difficulties which has shaped the debate on cultural identity in South Tyrol: the challenge of acknowledging the province's lengthy history as part of the County of Tyrol under the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire without alienating the Italian speakers who feel no attachment to this period of the province's history. By targeting Magnano, the much venerated 'father of autonomy', Vassalli not only takes on the ruling SVP, he also fundamentally questions the political principles on which South Tyrolean society has been built since the Second Autonomy Statute of 1972.

Though the journalist and former Green Party politician Arnold Tribus claimed in 2016 that the text has been entirely forgotten thirty years after its publication,<sup>380</sup> it is crucial to distinguish between the lasting popularity of a work and its importance in shaping an ongoing debate. The importance of *Sangue e suolo* lies not in its enduring mass popularity, nor in its status as a text which engages with South Tyrol from a position of profound prior knowledge, neither of which apply to Vassalli's work. Instead, it is significant because of how it constituted an established Italian journalist drawing attention to the subject of Italian marginalisation and the perceived political and

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<sup>380</sup> Arnold Tribus, 'Ma l'Autonomia non è piovuta dal cielo', in *Vassalli, il Sudtirolo difficile*, pp. 127-130 (p. 128).

cultural domination of South Tyrol's German-speaking community in a discussion which had long cast Italian speakers in the role of oppressors.

In *Il confine. I cento anni del Sudtirolo in Italia* (2015),<sup>381</sup> Vassalli's second text on South Tyrol, it appears that his fundamental view of the province as one beset by divisions between the German and Italian-speaking communities has remained unchanged. The book's subtitle – *I cento anni del Sudtirolo in Italia* – suggests it is a historically-focused text, though it is not structured entirely chronologically. Instead, each chapter examines a particular theme or event which Vassalli deems important for an effective understanding of South Tyrol's history since 1919. Focuses include the years of Italian Fascism from 1923 to 1943, the particular role of different types of borders in the province, and the frequent use of the 'bridge' metaphor to describe South Tyrol's particular situation. After acknowledging its association with Langer, Vassalli uses the bridge metaphor to encapsulate his belief that the fault lines between South Tyrol's German and Italian-speaking communities are still present thirty-two years after he first visited in 1983: he describes the province as 'una regione di frontiera con due lingue [...] un ponte tra due mondi'.<sup>382</sup>

However, there are also indications in *Il confine* that Vassalli's perspective on South Tyrol has shifted to a certain extent since writing *Sangue e suolo*. The presentation of *Il confine* and its focus on almost one hundred years of history in the province stands in stark contrast to the snapshots of South Tyrolean life in 1983 which formed the basis of Vassalli's travelogue. The emphasis of the text itself is different too: perhaps *Il confine*

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<sup>381</sup> ('The Border: One hundred years of South Tyrol in Italy').

<sup>382</sup> ('a border region with two languages [...] a bridge between two worlds'). Vassalli, *Il confine*, p. 144.

constitutes an attempt by Vassalli to alter the legacy of *Sangue e suolo* and distance himself from the neo-fascists who exploited it. He is undoubtedly more explicit in his treatment of Italian fascism: the arrival of Mussolini's Black Shirts in Bolzano in 1922 is described as the start of 'i vent'anni (è più) di follia in Sudtirolo/Alto Adige'.<sup>383</sup> The use of the more Germanic 'Sudtirolo', both in this quote and in the book's subtitle 'I cento anni del Sudtirolo in Italia', contrasts starkly with the use of the Italian term 'Alto Adige' in the provisional title of his article for *Panorama mese* in the 1980s. This may indicate a growing recognition of the long history of the province as a majority German-speaking area as part of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire before it was annexed by Italy. Vassalli's shift in perspective extends beyond South Tyrol's history. His stance towards his old adversary Langer has softened in the intervening years: writing twenty years after Langer's suicide, Vassalli describes him as 'un'ottima persona'<sup>384</sup> ('a wonderful person'). Moreover, Vassalli's opinions on South Tyrolean politics are significantly more favourable. In contrast to his heavy criticism of Magnano in *Sangue e suolo*, he praises his successor Luis Durnwalder, in post between 1989 and 2014, describing him as 'un uomo aperto al dialogo'.<sup>385</sup>

*Sangue e suolo* was 'il libro-terremoto', a political and cultural snapshot of South Tyrol written by an outsider and designed to shock South Tyrol's German-speaking politicians and citizens into changing course. By contrast, *Il confine* is a text which assesses all of South Tyrol's time as part of Italy, acknowledging progress while highlighting areas of difficulty which Vassalli feels still need to be addressed.

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<sup>383</sup> ('[more than] twenty years of madness in South Tyrol/Alto Adige'). Vassalli, *Il confine*, p. 27.

<sup>384</sup> Vassalli, *Il confine*, p. 134.

<sup>385</sup> ('a man open to dialogue'). Vassalli, *Il confine*, p. 140.

## 4.2 Shaping the debate II: Alexander Langer

While the publication of Vassalli's provocatively titled *Sangue e suolo* (1985) focused attention for the first time on the concept of Italian-speaking South Tyroleans as a marginalised group and coincided with the rise of the neo-fascist party Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), Langer's widely reported suicide in 1995 highlighted the negative impact of cultural divisiveness in South Tyrol while also giving prominence to his ideas on cultural integration.

From the mid-1960s until his death, Langer tirelessly advocated his vision of a province which was not characterised by cultural divisions. He was born in the majority German-speaking town of Sterzing to German-speaking parents in 1946.<sup>386</sup> In his essay 'Minima Personalia' (1986), he implies that his familial background contributed to his never wanting to align himself entirely with one of South Tyrol's language groups.<sup>387</sup> As well as speaking High German rather than the local dialect at home, his German-speaking family sent him to an Italian-speaking Kindergarten and, unlike many neighbouring families, never flew the Tyrolean flag outside their house.<sup>388</sup>

Langer was hugely influenced by growing up during the notorious *Bombenjahre*,<sup>389</sup> when the separatist group BAS used increasingly violent methods to campaign for an end to Italian control over South Tyrol. By the mid-1960s, he was already convinced that greater integration, rather than separation, between communities was required to bring

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<sup>386</sup> Langer's mother was born in Sterzing and his father was born in Vienna.

<sup>387</sup> The title 'Minima Personalia' is presumably a play on the title of Theodor Adorno's philosophical book *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen dem beschädigten Leben* (1951), where Adorno is critical of society and laments its lack of morality.

<sup>388</sup> Langer, 'Minima Personalia', pp. 30-31.

<sup>389</sup> Langer, 'Minima Personalia', p. 30.

about harmony: 'Zusammen mit einigen Freunden beginne ich [...] zu verstehen, daß eine "gemischte Gruppe" vielleicht der Schlüssel sein könne, um die Probleme Südtirols zu verstehen und anzugehen'.<sup>390</sup> Langer continued to emphasise the benefits of looser divisions between South Tyrol's language groups throughout his life.

He moved in political circles and also established contact with South Tyrolean literary figures such as poet Norbert Kaser and novelist Joseph Zoderer, who both played prominent roles in widening the parameters of the debate on South Tyrolean identity from the late-1960s onwards. Both Kaser and Zoderer published some of their early work in the literary section of *die brücke*, a left-wing newspaper co-founded by Langer in 1967, which initially published only in German but then also began to publish articles in Italian the following year.

Two works included in Siegfried Baur's and Riccardo Dello Sbarba's posthumously compiled volume of Langer's collected writings provide an especially effective summary of his ideas. They comprise one presentation subsequently published as an essay – 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander' (1986)<sup>391</sup> – and Langer's essay 'Zehn Punkte für das Zusammenleben' (1995),<sup>392</sup> written shortly before his suicide. Whereas Vassalli primarily viewed South Tyrolean society as being clearly split into German and Italian speakers with very little contact between the two communities, Langer was described by educational researcher Baur and journalist and politician Dello Sbarba as a 'Grenzgänge[r] zwischen Sprachgruppen und Kulturen'.<sup>393</sup> Langer's vision of 'un altro

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<sup>390</sup> ('Together with a few friends, I am beginning [...] to understand that a "mixed group" could perhaps be the key to understanding and addressing South Tyrol's problems'). Langer, 'Minima Personalia', p. 33.

<sup>391</sup> ('With Each Other, Next to Each Other').

<sup>392</sup> ('Ten Points for Living Together').

<sup>393</sup> ('a border crosser between languages and cultures'). Siegfried Baur and Riccardo Dello Sbarba, 'Vorwort', in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo*, pp. 7-8 (p. 7).

Sudtirolo<sup>394</sup> ('an alternative South Tyrol') was built around bringing together all the different cultures of South Tyrol to create a united sense of identity. He promoted an inclusive identity which stood in opposition to the provincial government's decision to oblige South Tyroleans to declare allegiance to a particular group through the Act of Linguistic Belonging (ALB).

Langer's aim of appealing to all South Tyroleans was embodied by his preparedness to write and speak in both German and Italian. Moreover, he suddenly falsely declared himself as a Ladin speaker prior to the provincial parliamentary elections in 1983, having previously refused to abide by the ALB upon its inception in 1981. This step ensured his eligibility as a candidate while still highlighting what he perceived as the folly of the ALB. His subsequent refusal to align himself with any specific community in 1991 saw him excluded from standing as a mayoral candidate in Bolzano shortly before his death in 1995.<sup>395</sup> Ultimately this incident demonstrates how Langer's desire for a unified South Tyrolean identity both proved detrimental to the progression of his political career and solidified his position as a prominent voice opposing the prevailing policies of the time. Though it ultimately excluded him from standing for the mayorship in the 1990s, Langer's promotion of integration between language groups many years before it became a more common topic of debate has contributed to his continued prominence in twenty-first century discussions surrounding identity in South Tyrol.

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<sup>394</sup> Carlo Romeo and Leopold Steurer, 'L'impegno per un altro Sudtirolo: Alexander Langer e la contestazione al censimento del 1981', *Carlo Romeo*, 3 July 2015, [http://www.carloromeo.it/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=201&catid=10&Itemid=108](http://www.carloromeo.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=201&catid=10&Itemid=108) [accessed 21 September 2020].

<sup>395</sup> Hans Karl Peterlini, *Wir Kinder der Südtirol-Autonomie: Ein Land zwischen ethnischer Verwirrung und verordnetem Aufbruch* (Bolzano: Folio, 2003), p. 90.

The unifying sentiments that underpin Langer's work are best expressed through his concept of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler*. The notion emerged during the campaign by Langer's *Neue Linke/Nuova Sinistra* party against the ALB, a movement in which Langer himself played a leading role. The concept of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* embodies a sense of belonging to a culturally diverse South Tyrol. It is an identity which crosses boundaries, not only acknowledging South Tyrol's cultural diversity, but actively embracing it.

In 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander' (1986), originally a presentation given in Meran, Langer argued that 'eine Kultur des Zusammenlebens'<sup>396</sup> was required to bring about greater harmony between South Tyrol's communities. He believed that focusing on the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept – which accentuates the benefits of South Tyrol's cultural diversity – could help to transform nostalgia for the 'old' Tyrol into a sense of optimism regarding its modern incarnation. He defined *Gesamtsüdtiroler* as follows:

[...] Menschen, die sich nicht allein als Angehörige ihrer Volksgruppe fühlen, sondern Gesamtsüdtiroler sind oder werden wollen. Die also ein Zusammengehörigkeitsempfinden vertreten, das die gesamte Bevölkerung unseres Landes umfaßt, eine übergreifende Identitätsstiftung fördert, eine Gesamtverantwortung für dieses Land und alle seine Bewohner bejaht.<sup>397</sup>

The concept of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* thus embodies a citizen of the province who embraces its diverse population in an ethos of inclusivity. This concept is especially well suited to a presentation given in Meran, the only city in South Tyrol where the number of German and Italian speakers is roughly equal. In his essay 'Minima Personalia' (1986),

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<sup>396</sup> ('A culture of living together'). Alexander Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo*, pp. 178-182 (p. 178).

<sup>397</sup> ('[...] people who don't simply feel as if they belong to their ethnic group but who are or want to become *Gesamtsüdtiroler*. People who advocate a sense of togetherness that encompasses the whole population of our province and promotes the formation of an all-inclusive identity. People who affirm an overarching responsibility for this province and all its inhabitants'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', pp. 181-182.

Langer refers to the ALB as 'Option 1981',<sup>398</sup> suggesting that the law, though not constituting the stark choice of 1939, still forces South Tyroleans to choose between a restrictive set of pre-defined options which assume identifying with one culture and language as the norm. Langer demonstrates that welcoming and acknowledging the diversity of South Tyrol's communities is not merely a possibility offered by the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept, it is a condition of it. Identifying as a *Gesamtsüdtiroler* requires people to consider themselves responsible for all residents in the province, rather than simply those with whom they share a culture, language or heritage.

Like Vassalli, Langer is critical of how the relations between communities are managed in South Tyrol and places much of the blame for this situation on decisions taken by the SVP. However, whereas Vassalli implies that the solution involves redressing the balance between language groups by paying greater attention to the needs of Italian speakers, Langer suggests that the notion of different groups competing with one another should be abandoned altogether. In 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', he states that South Tyrol's political system has promoted '[...] eine Kultur des ethnischen Tauziehens, der beständigen Abgrenzung, des Zwangs zur ethnischen Geschlossenheit und Blockbildung'.<sup>399</sup> He implies that, rather than being able to embrace the province's cultural diversity as *Gesamtsüdtiroler*, South Tyroleans are instead pulled in opposing directions and forced by the EPL and ALB to make a conscious choice between one group and another, a choice that entails influencing the competitive power dynamics between groups: 'jeder [muß sich doch] zu seiner Volksgruppe bekennen und durch den

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<sup>398</sup> Langer, 'Minima Personalia', p. 45.

<sup>399</sup> ('[...] a culture which involves an ethnic tug-of-war, continual drawing of boundaries, forced ethnic unity and the construction of ethnic factions'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 179.

Proporzmechanismus unweigerlich die einen schwächen, um die anderen zu stärken, und umgekehrt'.<sup>400</sup> Langer's model instead positions South Tyrol as a place of negotiation in which different communities in South Tyrolean society can co-exist and interact, rather than competing and being separated by rigid cultural and linguistic markers.

Instead of rejecting politically loaded concepts associated with cultural allegiances, Langer opts to redefine them. This approach is especially clear in his treatment of the notion of patriotism. In 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', he subverts the view that patriotism is linked to pride in a single culture: 'Es ist also eine patriotische Pflicht, heute für die Möglichkeit eines solchen "Gesamtsüdtirolertums" zu arbeiten'.<sup>401</sup> By framing a multicultural concept as the 'patriotic' option, Langer demonstrates that a society which embraces both patriotism and multiculturalism is possible. In doing so, he also seeks to ensure that his *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept reaches a wide audience, targeting more socially conservative South Tyroleans as well as those who more openly celebrate the province's diversity.

Just as Langer avoids restricting his potential audience for the notion of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler*, he also avoids limiting its influence to a particular sphere. He argues that the concept is as important to politics as it is to everyday life in South Tyrol. He links it to mainstream political discourse by presenting it as being pivotal to the long-term survival of the autonomy granted to the province by the Second Autonomy

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<sup>400</sup> ('[Everyone has to] state their allegiance to their ethnic group. Due to the ethnic proportionality mechanism, they must unavoidably weaken one group in order to strengthen the other, and vice versa'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 182.

<sup>401</sup> '(Today it is therefore a patriotic duty to work towards the possibility of such a *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 182.

Statute, widely recognised across South Tyrol as being a symbol of its *Sonderstatus* ('special status').<sup>402</sup> Langer's belief that the continued success of the Statute depends on fully embracing the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept aligns his pioneering model of identity with the fate of the province. He states that it is essential for South Tyroleans to actively support the notion of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler*, otherwise 'die Autonomie [wird auch] keinen langen und festen Bestand haben'.<sup>403</sup> The Second Autonomy Statute legally enshrines the rights of each individual language group, including the right to be taught in one's own language. However, Langer argues that a greater level of interaction between South Tyrol's communities is crucial in safeguarding the province's special status, rather than constituting the primary danger to it. A continuation of the prevailing situation is not presented as an option. He uses the non-existent notion of a 'wohltemperiert[er] Konflikt'<sup>404</sup> ('well-tempered conflict') to highlight the precariousness of South Tyrol's situation. The implication that conflict represents the default state of affairs, while reflective of the province's twentieth-century history, is conveyed by Langer as an inadequate foundation for long-term prosperity.

Langer implies that *Gesamtsüdtiroler* can help to ease historic tensions between language groups: 'Unser Land braucht heute mehr denn je solche Gesamtsüdtiroler, die den Entzweiungsprozeß aufhalten und aktiv für einen Einigungsprozeß arbeiten'.<sup>405</sup> He implicitly challenges any perception that embracing people who do not entirely identify

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<sup>402</sup> Peterlini, *Wir Kinder der Südtirol-Autonomie*, p. 150.

<sup>403</sup> ('[South Tyrol's] autonomy [will also] not endure for long'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 182.

<sup>404</sup> Langer's reference to a 'wohltemperiert[er] Konflikt' is also a play on a collection of Bach's preludes and fugues entitled *Das wohltemperierte Klavier* (The Well-Tempered Clavier). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 182.

<sup>405</sup> ('Today more than ever, our province needs such *Gesamtsüdtiroler* who can stop this process of divisiveness and work actively towards a process of unification'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 182.

with any one group would increase division in South Tyrolean society. Instead, he suggests that their presence and conscious openness towards all South Tyrol's communities could help to calm any hostilities, describing *Gesamtsüdtiroler* as '[...] Menschen, die ihre wohlverstandene ethnische und sprachliche Identität in den größeren Rahmen unserer "Landeseinheit" einzubringen vermögen'.<sup>406</sup> His use of 'wohlverstanden' counters any notion that *Gesamtsüdtiroler* may be people who are unsure of their identity, presenting their decision as a conscious, considered one. He positions *Gesamtsüdtiroler* as people with a coherent identity who embody his vision of an alternative South Tyrol, actively contributing to unity in the province rather than undermining it.

Altering pre-conceptions of terms that are key to identity formation in accordance with his culturally and ethnically inclusive vision for South Tyrol is a feature of Langer's work. In addition to redefining the concept of patriotism and challenging the notion of cultural diversity and multilingualism as a threat to South Tyrol's autonomy, Langer also tackles the perception of *Heimat* as a monocultural concept. As Baur and Dello Sbarba have highlighted, Langer understood *Heimat* as being 'mehrsprachig und multikulturell'<sup>407</sup> ('multilingual and multicultural') In an unfinished, posthumously published glossary of South Tyrol, entitled 'Südtirol ABC' (1988), he underlines his belief in the importance of a more inclusive notion of *Heimat* for increasing harmony between different communities:

Gemeinsames und gegenseitig anerkanntes Heimatrecht, gemeinsames Heimatbewußtsein und Zurückstehen vaterländischer Anwandlungen sind aber gefordert, wenn eine gemeinsame Zukunft aller im Lande lebenden Menschen

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<sup>406</sup> ('[...] people who are capable of introducing their own well understood ethnic and linguistic identity into the wider context of our "provincial unity"'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 182.

<sup>407</sup> ('multilingual and multilcultural'). Baur and Dello Sbarba, 'Vorwort', p. 7.

irgendwann die ständige ethnische Frontenbildung ablösen soll – das wird auf beiden Seiten einige Anstrengung kosten.<sup>408</sup>

Similarly to his definition of *Gesamtsüdtiroler*, Langer uses unifying words such as ‘gemeinsam’, ‘gegenseitig’, and ‘all[e] im Lande lebenden Menschen’ to reflect his culturally and ethnically inclusive approach to identity construction. Crucially, unlike Vassalli, he explicitly states that improving cohesion between groups in South Tyrol is the responsibility of all South Tyroleans, rather than just that of the German-speaking community. He later expands upon this idea of an inclusive *Heimat* in his essay ‘Zehn Punkte für das Zusammenleben’ (1995), which was originally published in the Frankfurt-based magazine *Kommune*. Here, he suggests that a broader interpretation of the concept would help to decrease tensions between South Tyrol’s communities:

Je deutlicher das Heimatrecht und damit der freie Ausdruck von Identität auf dem ganzen gemeinsamen Siedlungsgebiet gesichert sind [...] desto weniger Raum wird die Forderung nach eigenen und exklusiven Territorien, Institutionen usw. finden, und desto weniger wird man sich streiten müssen, wem dieser oder jener Ort “gehört“.<sup>409</sup>

Langer concentrates on two interconnected concepts: who has the right to *Heimat* and who it belongs to. The discrepancy between South Tyrol’s history as part of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire and its modern status as part of Italy is a complicating factor when discussing notions of rights and belonging. Nevertheless, Langer chooses to emphasise words such as ‘frei’ and ‘gemeinsam’, rejecting more

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<sup>408</sup> (‘A shared and mutual acknowledgement of the right to *Heimat*, a common consciousness of *Heimat*, and a distancing from “fatherland” impulses are all required if a common future for all the people who live in South Tyrol is to supersede the constant culture of ethnic polarisation at some point. That will require some effort on both sides’). Alexander Langer, ‘Südtirol ABC: Ein unveröffentlichtes Fragment’, in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo*, pp. 305-355 (p. 341).

<sup>409</sup> (‘The more clearly the right to *Heimat*, and therefore the right to the free expression of identity, is secured across the whole, jointly inhabited province [...], the less room there will be for demands for separate and exclusive territories, institutions etc. There will also be fewer disputes regarding who this or that place “belongs” to’). Alexander Langer, ‘Zehn Punkte für das Zusammenleben’, in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo*, pp. 234-243 (p. 239).

restrictive terms such as 'eigen' and 'exklusiv'. These semantic choices allow him to transform *Heimat* from a concept which could constitute a point of tension between South Tyrol's communities into one which signifies unity.

The desire to break down entrenched borders between South Tyrol's constituent groups is a consistent theme in Langer's contributions. He argues for a change in the perception of South Tyrol's cultural diversity in 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', observing that it should be viewed as a source of enrichment and enjoyment, rather than as an embarrassment, inconvenience or unwelcome duty:

Platz zu machen für Gesamtsüdtiroler in unserem Lande ist aber nicht nur eine patriotische Pflicht(übung), sondern auch der schönste Weg, aus der Besonderheit unseres Landes eine gewissermaßen einmalige Chance zu machen und zu nutzen – eine Chance, die uns viele neiden.<sup>410</sup>

Instead of presenting the unusual cultural mix that was initially forced on South Tyrol as an unwelcome barrier to establishing unity, Langer seeks to reframe it as an opportunity to embrace the province's unique situation and forge a new identity rooted in cultural and ethnic diversity.

Langer's propensity for subverting mainstream narratives concerning cultural identity in South Tyrol is demonstrated once more in his re-interpretation of SVP politician Anton Zelger's widely publicised comments on cultural separation in 1979: 'Je klarer wir trennen, desto besser verstehen wir uns'.<sup>411</sup> In 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', he rejects Zelger's pronouncement in favour of his own preferred maxim: 'Je mehr wir

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<sup>410</sup> ('Making room for *Gesamtsüdtiroler* in our province is not only a patriotic duty, but also the best way to create and make use of what is a somewhat unique opportunity that arises from the particularity of our province – an opportunity of which many are jealous'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 182.

<sup>411</sup> ('The more clearly we separate ourselves, the better we get on with each other'). Siegfried Baur, *Die Tücken der Nähe: Kommunikation und Kooperation in Mehrheits-/Minderheitssituationen* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2000), p. 149.

miteinander umgehen, desto besser verstehen wir uns.<sup>412</sup> In contrast to Zelger, Langer argues that the key to overcoming prejudices and creating the richly diverse cultural identity he advocates involves South Tyrol's different groups learning more about each other and spending more time together: 'Sprache, Geschichte, Kultur, Bräuche, Gewohnheiten, Ängste, Vorurteile, Stereotype der verschiedenen zusammenlebenden Volksgruppen kennen und verstehen zu lernen, trägt entscheidend zu guten Beziehungen bei'.<sup>413</sup> He suggests that South Tyroleans should engage with the concerns and prejudices of different communities rather than avoiding them.

Langer's call to engage with mutual prejudices and stereotypes constitutes a socio-cultural application of the vision his friend Norbert Kaser had articulated from his vantage point as a poet when he called for a new generation of authors to tackle South Tyrol's 'heilige Kühe' ('sacred cows') in his 'Brixner Rede' of 1969.<sup>414</sup> By contrast with Vassalli, who specifically highlights the lack of 'progressive Germans' in *Sangue e suolo* and predicts the disappearance of South Tyrol's Italian-speaking community by the year 2000, Langer's exploration of prejudice does not single out any particular group. He implies that interaction between South Tyrol's communities can be achieved without affecting the status of the respective groups. When he makes predictions, he focuses on the precarious future of South Tyrol's autonomy, which, like his *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept, applies to all residents in the province. His contention that cultivating the

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<sup>412</sup> (The more we engage with each other, the better we get on with each other'). Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 181.

<sup>413</sup> ('Recognising and learning to understand the languages, histories, cultures, traditions, habits, fears, prejudices and stereotypes of the different ethnic groups who live together contributes decisively to good relationships'). Langer, 'Zehn Punkte', p. 236.

<sup>414</sup> In his 'Brixner Rede', Kaser was highly critical of existing South Tyrolean literary traditions. He called for South Tyrol to tackle its 'sacred cows' and build a new literary tradition, also highlighting the importance of Italian voices in this process. See Chapter Three, pp. 139-141, for more information.

peaceful co-existence of South Tyrol's communities is an 'art'<sup>415</sup> implies that harmony in the province cannot be achieved by political statutes alone. It conveys a conviction that flexible, nuanced approaches are required, particularly in relation to identity.

Langer uses the notion of *Grauzonen* ('grey areas') to complement his identity model of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* and provide a flexible counterpoint to the fixed identity categories he believes are encouraged by political legislation such as the ALB. He presents *Grauzonen* as a way of both facilitating greater interaction between communities and accommodating those who do not entirely identify with a single group. The concept expands his vision of identity in South Tyrol, which emphasises the ability of communities not only to co-exist, but also to influence one another:

Deshalb ist es so wichtig, eine pragmatischere und flexiblere – vor allem: weniger exklusive – Auslegung der Zugehörigkeit zu einer Volksgruppe, Konfession u. dgl. zu bevorzugen: es muß eine gewisse Osmose mit fließenden Übergängen zwischen verschiedenen Gemeinschaften möglich sein, es muß für Grenzgänger erlaubt sein, sich da und dort zuzugesellen und teilzuhaben, es braucht – neben dem klar definierten Territorium – auch "Grauzonen", Freiräume für Begegnung ("Freihandelszonen", würde man sie kommerziell nennen), Existenzmöglichkeiten mit einem möglichst geringen Definitionszwang, ohne Herumreiten auf ethnischer oder konfessioneller Disziplin, dafür mit Chancen auf freieren Austausch, Kommunikation, Interaktion.<sup>416</sup>

Here, Langer continues his pattern of adapting existing concepts to support his notion of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler*. However, rather than making previously exclusive concepts more inclusive – as was the case with his refashioning of patriotism and *Heimat* – he reshapes

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<sup>415</sup> Langer, 'Miteinander, Nebeneinander', p. 181.

<sup>416</sup> ('This is why it is so important to give precedence to a more pragmatic, more flexible – and above all less exclusive – interpretation of belonging to an ethnic group, denomination etc. A certain osmosis must be possible with fluid transitions between different communities. Border crossers must be allowed to join in and participate here and there. Alongside clearly defined territory, it is also necessary to have "grey areas" and free spaces for encounters (commercially they would be known as "free trade areas"). One must be able to exist with minimal pressure to define oneself. This should be done without harping on about ethnic or denominational discipline. Rather, it should provide opportunities for freer exchange, communication and interaction'). Langer, 'Zehn Punkte' p. 238.

the ambiguity conveyed by the concept of *Grauzonen*, or 'grey areas', to support his vision of identity. The idea of a 'grey area' (*zona grigia*) had been used by Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi to describe the very specific situations of those in Auschwitz who occupied an ambiguous position between victim and perpetrator.<sup>417</sup> A *Grauzone* is also understood more generally in a German-speaking context as '[ein] zwielichtiger oder zweifelhafter Bereich, besonders zwischen Legalität und Illegalität.'<sup>418</sup> Langer's concept of *Grauzonen* is distinct both from the atrocities of the Holocaust and from the notion of legal uncertainty in a German-speaking context. Instead, *Grauzonen* are presented in more positive terms as clearly defined areas which alleviate the political and social pressure to identify oneself as belonging to either the German, Italian or Ladin-speaking community.

Rather than positioning *Grauzonen* as unsettling symbols of ambiguity and uncertainty, Langer uses the concept to create spaces capable of accommodating South Tyrol's diversity. He does not see them as a way of replacing clarity with ambiguity, but rather as a distinct alternative concept for South Tyroleans who feel that their own individual sense of identity requires a context that is not limited by monocultural or monolingual boundaries. 'Übergang' and 'Osmose', both concepts used by Langer in his exploration of *Grauzonen*, also have connotations of movement, suggesting that Langer is presenting identity as a fluid, open concept that is subject to both change and outside influences. This flexible notion of identity is furthered by his use of words with connotations of liberty such as 'Freiräume', 'flexibel' and 'Grenzgänger', all of which

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<sup>417</sup> There is no indication that Langer is referring to Levi's use of the term. Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), p. 25.

<sup>418</sup> ('a shady or uncertain area, particularly between legality and illegality'). 'Grauzone', *Duden*, <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Grauzone> [accessed 24 September 2020].

contrast sharply with the restrictiveness implied by his description of the ALB as ‘der ethnische Käfig’ (‘the ethnic cage’) in his essay ‘Minima Personalialia’ (1986).<sup>419</sup>

Langer reinforces the importance of flexibility in identity later in ‘Zehn Punkte für das Zusammenleben’, when he advocates being able to hold multiple identities without being perceived as showing disloyalty to any single one: ‘Es muß auch die Möglichkeit geben, mehreren Gemeinschaften gegenüber offen und loyal zu sein – ohne Exklusivanspruch!’.<sup>420</sup> Moreover, he implies that it should not simply be a matter for the individual to construct their own identity: ‘Pluri-ethnisches Zusammenleben muß auch sichtbar anerkannt werden’.<sup>421</sup> He argues that society must be seen not only to accept tacitly the possibility of a multicultural identity, but to model it openly.

A personal diary entry written in Ireland in 1993 suggests that Langer was beginning to sense that his vision of a multicultural society in South Tyrol was unachievable: ‘Ich habe wirklich zu viele Versprechen gesät und Hoffnungen geweckt. Ich derpack’s nicht’.<sup>422</sup>

The juxtaposition of ‘Hoffnungen’ and ‘Versprechen’ underlines the discrepancy between his success in drawing attention to his multicultural ideals and the difficulty of making them a reality. It is telling that these thoughts are written both away from South Tyrol and in a personal diary, as if this combination of distance and privacy allows Langer to reflect more on his life and aims. The use of the dialect verb ‘derpacken’ (High German: schaffen) demonstrates a significant difference in style between Langer’s

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<sup>419</sup> Langer, ‘Minima Personalialia’, p. 45.

<sup>420</sup> (‘It must also be possible to be open and loyal towards multiple communities – without the requirement of exclusivity to one community!’). Langer, ‘Zehn Punkte’, p. 239.

<sup>421</sup> (‘The notion of living together multi-ethnically must also be visibly acknowledged’). Langer, ‘Zehn Punkte’, p. 239.

<sup>422</sup> (‘I have really made too many promises and built up too many hopes. I can’t hack it’). Kronbichler, *Was gut war*, p. 119.

published essays and presentations and his private diary entries, also showing how he had picked up his local German dialect despite not speaking it at home as a child.

In spite of his growing doubts, Langer remained committed to his ideal of a cross-cultural South Tyrolean identity right until the end of his life. Langer's exhortation in his suicide note is particularly poignant: 'Seid nicht traurig, macht weiter, was gut war'.<sup>423</sup> His suicide note could be interpreted as a plea to his allies to persist with the campaign for a more inclusive society and process of identity formation in South Tyrol. It is therefore fruitful to examine in this chapter how far the promises made and the hopes awakened by Langer died with him and to what extent his ideas have since been adopted and advanced by others.

As a fellow member of the Green Party and co-editor of Langer's collected essays, Riccardo Dello Sbarba's contributions are especially useful for judging both how far Langer's own ideas have been developed by his political successors and how successful these efforts have been. In the form of an open letter to Langer in his non-fiction book *Südtirol Italia: Il calicanto di Magnano e altre storie* (2006), Dello Sbarba refers to the province as 'il "tuo" Sudtirolo'<sup>424</sup> ("your" South Tyrol'). Dello Sbarba juxtaposes what he views as the gradually increasing interaction between South Tyrol's language groups in everyday life with the province's political system, which he feels is still irrevocably divided along cultural and linguistic lines.

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<sup>423</sup> ('Don't be sad, carry on doing what was good'). Ariano Mantuano, 'Rimini: una via da dedicare ad Alex Langer', *Fondazione Alexander Langer*, 15 May 2006, <http://www.alexanderlanger.org/it/52/1663> [accessed 23 February 2018].

<sup>424</sup> Riccardo Dello Sbarba, *Südtirol Italia: Il calicanto di Magnano e altre storie* (Trento: Il Margine, 2006), p. 218.

Dello Sbarba contrasts the efforts of the South Tyrolean Green Party to promote South Tyrol's cultural diversity by selecting candidates from all of the province's groups with the monocultural approach favoured by other political parties.<sup>425</sup> Most significantly, he shares his perception of how other parties view the Greens' approach: 'Non siete né "veri" italiani né "veri" tedeschi [...] quindi fuori'.<sup>426</sup> 'Veri italiani' and 'veri tedeschi' imply a sense of belonging to a single group, in stark contrast to Langer's call for *Grauzonen*. Moreover, 'fuori' suggests that the cross-cultural approach to identity formation encouraged by Langer's *Gesamtsüdtiroler* is still viewed politically as the exception rather than the rule. Though Dello Sbarba suggests that the Greens have continued Langer's commitment to cultural diversity, he is more sceptical about the extent to which Langer's unifying, inclusive ideas have been heeded elsewhere in South Tyrolean politics.

Dello Sbarba believes that for harmony to be achieved in South Tyrol, interactions between language groups – in politics and beyond – should be characterised not by the metaphor of a pendulum, where the balance of power swings between communities, but by that of a bridge, which symbolises the joining point of multiple cultures.

Contrasting the two metaphors, he states:

Il pendolo etnico del Sudtirolo continua a muoversi, spinto di qua dagli uni e di là dagli altri: se c'è un vincitore ci sarà un vinto, se qualcuno guadagna qualcun altro perderà. Il ponte e il pendolo: il primo unisce, l'altro divide; il primo somma, l'altro sottrae; il primo affratella, l'altro inimica; il primo dischiude mondi, l'altro li serra; sul primo ci si muove in entrambe le direzioni, l'altro si sposta a senso unico.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Dello Sbarba, *Südtirol Italia*, p. 216.

<sup>426</sup> ('You are neither "true" Italians, nor "true" Germans, so therefore you are outsiders'). Dello Sbarba, *Südtirol Italia*, p. 216.

<sup>427</sup> ('South Tyrol's ethnic pendulum continues to swing, driven this way by one group and then that way by the other: if there's a winner, then there will be a loser. If someone gains, someone else will lose. The bridge and the pendulum: the former unites, the latter divides; the former brings things together, the

His use of the bridge metaphor is especially significant here, as it replicates Langer's use of words with inclusive, unifying connotations. While Langer's contributions are characterised by words and phrases such as 'gemeinsam', 'gegenseitig' and 'all[e] im Lande lebenden Menschen', Dello Sbarba uses verbs which suggest a similar search for common ground, such as 'unire', 'sommare' and 'affratellare'.

Significantly, Langer identified with the bridge metaphor himself: the magazine he co-founded in 1967 was entitled *die brücke*. In fact, he was already making use of inclusive, unifying words as a schoolboy in Bolzano at the height of the notorious *Bombenjahre* in the 1960s. Writing in the first issue of his school newspaper in November 1961, entitled *Offenes Wort*, he stated: 'Wir möchten für *alle* da sein [...] wir suchen Kontakt mit *allen*. Unsere Hilfe steht *allen* offen' (my italics).<sup>428</sup> Though friends and colleagues of Langer's such as Dello Sbarba continue to advocate his ideas, Dello Sbarba's open letter to Langer in 2006 suggests that his aspiration of a cross-cultural South Tyrolean identity, aided by greater interactions between language groups, has yet to be fully realised. Dello Sbarba suggests that although such everyday interactions between communities in South Tyrol are gradually increasing, this shift has yet to be reflected by South Tyrol's overwhelmingly monolingual political system.

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latter draws them apart; the former harmonises, the latter antagonises, the former opens up worlds, the latter closes them off; with the former you can move in both directions, yet with the latter you are committed to one direction only'). Dello Sbarba, *Südtirol Italia*, p. 217.

<sup>428</sup> ('We want to be there for everyone [...] we seek to make contact with everyone. Our help is open to everyone'). Kronbichler, *Was gut war*, p. 7.

### 4.3 Marginalised voices: Ladin speakers

Alexander Langer was undoubtedly a leading voice for a more inclusive approach to cultural identity in South Tyrol which encouraged interaction and less strict divisions between South Tyrol's German, Italian and Ladin speakers. In contrast to the ALB and EPL, his concept of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* did not limit the opportunities afforded to Ladin speakers based on their position as the province's smallest language group. Nevertheless, on occasion he appeared to group the fortunes of South Tyrol's Ladin speakers together with those of the German-speaking community. When addressing identity formation in South Tyrol following the Second World War in a presentation entitled 'Identitätsstiftung' (1984)<sup>429</sup> – originally given at a symposium in the North Tyrolean city of Innsbruck – he stated: 'Für die deutsch- (und ladinisch-)sprachigen Südtiroler begann eine positive Identitätsstiftung einzusetzen'.<sup>430</sup> Such an approach to Ladin post-war identity construction accounts for neither the contrasting wartime experiences of South Tyrol's German and Ladin speakers, nor the marked internal differences between the two Ladin-speaking valleys in South Tyrol, particularly in relation to the *Option* of 1939. For example, 80% of Ladin speakers from Gherdëina chose to emigrate to the German Reich, while the figure in Val Badia was only 36%.<sup>431</sup>

The tendency to sideline South Tyrol's Ladin speakers has persisted into the twenty-first century. Journalists Stefano Fait's and Mauro Fattor's brief acknowledgment of the

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<sup>429</sup> ('Identity Formation').

<sup>430</sup> ('A positive process of identity formation began to take shape for the German-speaking [and Ladin-speaking] South Tyroleans'). Alexander Langer, 'Identitätsstiftung', in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo*, pp. 118-126 (p. 122).

<sup>431</sup> Luciana Palla, 'L'accordo italo-tedesco delle opzioni per il Reich', in *Opzioni, guerra e resistenza nelle valli ladine*, ed. by Luciana Palla (Trento: Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, 2000), pp. 15-52 (p. 19).

Ladins in *Contro i miti etnici: Alla ricerca di un Alto Adige diverso* (2010)<sup>432</sup> is symptomatic of a wider tendency amongst those working on the whole of South Tyrol to overlook the province's oldest language community: 'Ribadisco che in questa sede non intendo occuparmi degli unici veri indigeni, la minoranza ladina'.<sup>433</sup> The fact that this observation is included in small print as a footnote could be interpreted as a visual manifestation of the way in which Ladin-speaking voices have been neglected as part of the intellectual debate on South Tyrol's cultural identity.

The German-speaking South Tyrolean journalist and researcher Hans Karl Peterlini is by contrast notable for highlighting the issue of Ladin marginalisation in the context of a wider discussion concerning South Tyrol and the complexity of relations between language groups. He asserts that instead of reaffirming their support for Ladin speakers, the German speakers' status as a linguistic minority within Italy has in fact made them less sensitive to the plight of smaller minorities within South Tyrol: 'Der Kampf um die eigenen Rechte hat die Sensibilität der deutschen Südtiroler für schwächere Minderheiten nicht verfeinert, sondern in vielen Fällen eher vergrößert'.<sup>434</sup>

In order to support his focus on Ladin marginalisation, Peterlini highlights the case of the fountain that stands outside the provincial parliament in Bolzano. It depicts one of the key scenes in ancient Dolomite sagas: a dwarf is defeated by a giant. According to some interpretations, it is an allegory of the defeat of King Laurin, the king of the

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<sup>432</sup> ('Against ethnic myths: On the search for a different South Tyrol').

<sup>433</sup> ('I would like to re-emphasise that at this point I do not intend to focus on the only truly indigenous people, namely the Ladin-speaking minority'). Stefano Fait and Mauro Fattor, *Contro i miti etnici: Alla ricerca di un Alto Adige diverso* (Bolzano: Raetia, 2010), p. 25.

<sup>434</sup> ('Having to battle for their own rights has not increased the sensitivity of the German-speaking population towards weaker minorities. Instead, in many cases it has made them less sensitive'). Peterlini, *Wir Kinder der Südtirol-Autonomie*, pp. 101-102.

original Ladin-speaking settlers in modern-day South Tyrol, by Dietrich of Bern, who symbolised the Germanic conquerers of the area.<sup>435</sup> As was the case with the statue of Walther von der Vogelweide in Bolzano (referred to directly by Vassalli in *Sangue e suolo*),<sup>436</sup> the King Laurin fountain was removed by the Italian Fascists in the interwar years. In 1993, the SVP returned it to its original place outside the Bolzano parliament building. Peterlini states that during this decision-making process ‘der verhaltene Protest der Ladinler wurde übergangen’.<sup>437</sup> The parallel with both the Bolzano Walther statue and the referendum in 2002 concerning the city’s *Piazza della Vittoria* reveals much about the relative prominence of the Ladin voice in province-wide discussions. The return of Walther’s monument to Bolzano after the Second World War could be seen to demonstrate the enduring strength of German-speaking culture in South Tyrol, while the referendum of 2002 was testament to the influence of Bolzano’s Italian-speaking population. Conversely, the return of the King Laurin fountain, supported by the predominantly German-speaking SVP against Ladin opposition, is a tangible reminder of the vulnerability of the Ladin-speaking culture or, to use Peterlini’s words, ‘[die] Verdrängung des Ladinischen im Lauf der Jahrhunderte’.<sup>438</sup>

Notwithstanding Peterlini’s concerns about the peripheral position of Ladins in public life, election results since *Sangue e suolo*’s publication in 1985 suggest that their influence on South Tyrol’s political landscape has gradually increased, although their population size has remained static. In 1993, Ladins Dolomites (a party representing

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<sup>435</sup> Peterlini, *Wir Kinder der Südtirol-Autonomie*, p. 101.

<sup>436</sup> Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 13.

<sup>437</sup> (The muted protests of the Ladin-speaking population were overlooked’). Peterlini, *Wir Kinder der Südtirol-Autonomie*, p. 101.

<sup>438</sup> (‘[The] displacement of Ladin culture over the centuries’). Peterlini, *Wir Kinder der Südtirol-Autonomie*, p. 101.

only Ladin speakers) was elected to the provincial parliament for the first time, subsequently retaining their seat in 1998. Although Ladins Dolomites later formed an electoral pact with the BürgerUnion für Südtirol [sic] and Wir Südtiroler, both of which represented German and Ladin speakers, these results point towards a subtle change in emphasis in South Tyrolean politics during the 1990s. They imply an increasing desire among Ladin speakers to change the status quo by ensuring that the SVP would no longer be the only political party to represent them. The fact that some Ladin speakers chose to use their political influence to support an opposition party rather than enhancing the SVP's mandate suggests that traditional political fault lines were beginning to shift.

The single seat gained by the Ladins Dolomites/BürgerUnion für Südtirol/Wir Südtiroler coalition narrowly denied the SVP an overall majority in the 2013 parliamentary elections, implying that the influence of Ladin speakers on South Tyrolean politics extends beyond local elections in Val Badia and Gherdëina. Though the aforementioned coalition lost their single seat at the 2018 provincial elections, the emergence of Team K, a cross-cultural, cross-language party which gained six seats and further helped to decrease the SVP vote in 2018, offers further evidence that the SVP are no longer an automatic choice for Ladin speakers (or indeed German speakers). The founding of Team K also suggests that the Green Party, who retained their three parliamentary seats in 2018, can no longer claim, as Dello Sbarba did in 2006, to be the only major party to target all three of South Tyrol's main language groups.

Legal changes since 1989 suggest that the influence of the Ladin-speaking population on South Tyrol's cultural identity debate has not been limited to the political arena. The

recognition of Ladin as an official language of administration in Val Badia and Gherdëina in 1989 marked an important turning point as it granted the Ladin language parity with German and Italian. The fact that Ladin did not become an official administrative language in Fascia (Trentino) until 1993 and still does not enjoy official status in Ladin-speaking parts of Belluno demonstrates how South Tyrol compares favourably to nearby Italian provinces concerning the official recognition of Ladin.

A potential future area of debate concerns the role of the Ladin-speaking communities in modelling the more cross-cultural approach to cultural identity which is gradually emerging across the whole of South Tyrol. The German-speaking community had to grapple with reconciling their desire to maintain their Tyrolean culture with the sudden influx of Italian-speaking immigrants from across Italy throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Meanwhile the Italian speakers have encountered the dual challenge of developing their own cultural identity both within a community of Italian speakers from different parts of Italy and within a province with a significant German-speaking majority. Both the German and Italian-speaking communities, then, have had to struggle with sudden, relatively recent changes of status concerning their respective cultures and languages. By contrast, the Ladins have negotiated these challenges for many centuries, as shown by Peterlini's aforementioned allusion to the Dolomite sagas and the background to King Laurin's fountain outside the parliament building. They have become well used to balancing the often contradictory impulses involved in simultaneously creating a distinct identity within each Ladin valley, developing a coherent cross-Ladin identity, and ensuring that Ladin-speaking voices are prominent in province-wide discussions.

The Ladin school system in the South Tyrolean valleys of Val Badia and Gherdëina constitutes a prime example of how Ladin speakers have adapted to the proximity of two major European languages while also maintaining their own sense of cultural identity. It is the only multilingual school system in the province. For the first year of primary education, lessons are taught in German, Italian and Ladin. From the second year onwards, German and Italian language teaching are given equal weight, with 50% of lessons taught in each language. The local dialect of Ladin is included as a separate subject, which is typically taught for two hours each week and also used to explain any unfamiliar German or Italian expressions. Ladin middle schools, attended between the ages of 11 and 13, follow the same pattern, with Ladin again taught for two hours a week as a separate subject. At age 13, Ladin-speaking children are required to make a choice. They can attend one of the four high schools in Val Badia and Gherdëina, where the languages of instruction are weighted in the same way as at primary and middle school level.<sup>439</sup> Alternatively, they can go to either a German or Italian-speaking school outside the Ladin valleys, having intensively learnt both languages at primary school. While the vast majority of Ladin-speaking children attend Ladin-speaking schools until the age of 13, the situation is reversed from then onwards, largely due to the small number of Ladin-speaking high schools and the increased emphasis on focusing on particular academic or vocational subjects.

Ladin is not taught at all in South Tyrolean schools beyond Val Badia and Gherdëina, though there have been developments that have granted the Ladin dialects of the two valleys greater prominence within the province, as well as supporting the contribution

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<sup>439</sup> Roland Verra, 'The Ladin language in education in Italy', *Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism*, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573600.pdf> [accessed 31 August 2020], pp. 18-27.

of Ladin speakers to South Tyrolean cultural and political life. Since the interventions of Vassalli and Langer in the 1980s and 1990s, Ladin-speaking communities are increasingly being given the means to ensure the effective implementation of their specific multilingual educational model. In 1997, a separate Ladin-speaking pedagogical institute was established in Bolzano, followed by the founding of a department dedicated to the training of Ladin-speaking teachers in Brixen the following year.

The effective implementation of a multilingual school system in the Ladin valleys contrasts strongly with the controversy surrounding multilingual schools in the rest of the province, a topic which continually re-emerges in political and public discourse. The Ladin system, which gives equal weight to German and Italian and still reflects the area's particular Ladin culture, could be viewed as a model that enables South Tyrol to establish a harmonious, diverse cultural identity which successfully acknowledges the province's changing demographics and enables increased interaction between language groups. However, the terms of the debate on multilingual schools outside the Ladin valleys indicate how multilingualism is viewed very differently beyond Val Badia and Gherdëina. Even supporters of a multilingual school system across the whole of South Tyrol, such as the Green Party and Team K, have advocated it as an alternative to the mainstream monolingual options rather than as a replacement. Whereas multilingual schools are the norm in Ladin-speaking valleys, multilingualism is framed in German and Italian-speaking communities as being the exception to the rule.

## 4.4 New voices and divided loyalties: Immigrants and German-Italian

### South Tyroleans

A major reason for South Tyrol's changing demographics is the increasing immigrant population, which, according to the census in 2011, accounts for around 8.8% of the province's inhabitants.<sup>440</sup> Although they are more numerous than their Ladin-speaking counterparts, a development foreseen by Langer,<sup>441</sup> no single nationality comes close to outnumbering the Ladin population: according to the 2011 census, the largest immigrant group were Albanians and they accounted for only 1.1% of South Tyrol's total population.<sup>442</sup>

Moreover, immigrants do not enjoy the same official recognition as Ladin speakers in South Tyrol. Changes implemented in the ALB in 1991 excused respondents from declaring *belonging* to one group if they did not feel this was appropriate. However, all South Tyrolean residents are still required to *align* themselves with one of the three main language groups for the purposes of the EPL. Those who do not align themselves with any language group cannot apply for public sector jobs and are excluded from receiving certain benefits.<sup>443</sup> By contrast, the Ladins are able to identify officially as specifically belonging to the Ladin-speaking community. The aforementioned difficulties Vassalli perceives Ladins as encountering when obtaining public sector jobs – chiefly due

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<sup>440</sup> See Introduction, footnote 12, p. 22, for an explanation of how the figure of 8.8% was reached. Gregorio Gobbi and Brigitte Thurner, eds, '2012: Statistisches Jahrbuch für Südtirol', *Landesinstitut für Statistik*, [https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/jahrbuch\\_2012.pdf](https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/jahrbuch_2012.pdf) [accessed 18 March 2021], p. 109 and p. 118.

<sup>441</sup> Guido Denicolò, 'Vertiefungstreffen: Guido Denicolò über die Volkszählung und die Situation des Zusammenlebens in der Provinz Bozen', *Alexander Langer Stiftung*, 9 October 2011, <https://www.alexanderlanger.org/de/722/3200> [accessed 18 September 2020].

<sup>442</sup> Gobbi and Thurner, '2012: Statistisches Jahrbuch', p. 110 and p. 118.

<sup>443</sup> Oskar Peterlini, 'Autonomy and the Protection of Ethnic Minorities in Trentino-South Tyrol: An Overview of the History, Law and Politics', trans. by Marie Fraser (Vienna: Braumüller, 1997), p. 169.

to the EPL – can be seen as a reminder that official recognition does not always translate to greater job opportunities. Nevertheless, the Ladins' status as 'i discendenti dei più antichi abitanti delle valli'<sup>444</sup> has ensured both an acceptance of their presence by South Tyrol's 'other' main language groups and a long-standing ability to negotiate the province's complexities successfully.

Whereas Ladin speakers have long been resident in the province, significant immigration from beyond South Tyrol and Italy is a far newer phenomenon. Of the 44,355 foreigners registered as living in South Tyrol on 31 December 2011, 5558 were Albanians. The next most numerous groups were Germans (4677), Moroccans (3570), Pakistanis (3032), and Macedonians (2356).<sup>445</sup> The diversity these figures demonstrate within South Tyrol's immigrant population renders it very difficult to talk in general terms of the influence of immigrants on the province's cultural identity. However, a particularly illuminating aspect of the debate on immigrants' contribution to South Tyrol's cultural identity concerns the relative status of the province's language communities in the eyes of immigrants, as well as the relative status of immigrants from the perspective of South Tyroleans. The educational decisions taken by immigrant families in South Tyrol offer a telling insight into the former question. In the absence of a clear familial, cultural or linguistic affiliation to any of South Tyrol's three main language groups, immigrants must make a decision based on other factors. For most, this means choosing between the majority language of the province (German) and the

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<sup>444</sup> ('the descendants of the most ancient inhabitants of the valleys'). Vassalli, *Sangue e suolo*, p. 22.

<sup>445</sup> Gobbi and Thurner, '2012: Statistisches Jahrbuch', p. 109.

majority language of the country (Italian). The cultural demographics of where they live in South Tyrol also play an important role in their decision.

The challenges encountered by German-speaking immigrants arriving in South Tyrol highlight that language can be as much of a cultural marker in identity as a linguistic one. A fluent command of High German would appear to offer German speakers an advantage in the labour market of a province where 62.3% of residents are German speakers.<sup>446</sup> However, this advantage is limited. Entry to many professions and public sector jobs is dependent upon the successful negotiation of the State Bilingualism Exam, introduced in 1976. It is a tiered test which requires candidates to demonstrate a certain level of competency in both German and Italian (and Ladin for those living in Ladin-speaking areas). In any case, any professional advantage gained by a fluent knowledge of High German does not often transfer to everyday interactions. Siegfried Baur gives credence to this view by underlining the status of dialect as ‘[das] zentral[e] Identitätsmerkmal’<sup>447</sup> amongst the German-speaking South Tyrolean community. Baur also draws attention to the use of the South Tyrolean German dialects as a kind of ‘Eintrittskarte’ or ‘Mitgliedsausweis für das “Tirolersein”’.<sup>448</sup> By making the local dialects a central tenet of local identity, the German-speaking community are not only excluding immigrants – and indeed South Tyroleans who do not speak the relevant local German dialect – they are also sidelining Germans who speak High German or a different German dialect.

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<sup>446</sup> Gobbi and Schenk, ‘2019: Südtirol in Zahlen’, p. 19.

<sup>447</sup> (‘[the] central hallmark of identity’). Siegfried Baur, *Die Tücken der Nähe*, p. 150.

<sup>448</sup> (‘entry ticket or membership ticket for being considered “Tyrolean”’). Baur, *Die Tücken der Nähe*, p. 151.

In addition to being the language of everyday life, an ability to speak the local German dialect also increases the likelihood of acceptance into German-speaking South Tyrolean society. The marked cultural and linguistic differences between the local German dialect and High German present an additional dilemma to adults arriving in South Tyrol who do not have the same exposure to High German as school-aged immigrants. In deciding what to learn first, they must choose between the social acceptance provided by a knowledge of the specific local German dialect and the necessity of knowing High German in order to pass the State Bilingualism Exam and gain entry into many professions. This choice can also be a financial one: in some jobs, successfully passing the State Bilingualism Exam can trigger a monetary bonus.<sup>449</sup>

The question of which school their children should attend is not only a dilemma for immigrant families, it is also problematic for children born in South Tyrol with mixed-language parentage. As minority rights researcher Verena Wisthaler suggests, children from these families can 'feel affiliated to both systems'.<sup>450</sup> South Tyrol's linguistically divided school system can therefore be as unforgiving towards those who identify with two language groups as it is towards those who identify with none. The challenges faced by South Tyroleans from mixed-language backgrounds significantly complicate their cultural identity. Although many people have grown up in linguistically mixed families precisely *because* of South Tyrol's complex history, their multilingual voices can be lost if the South Tyrolean debate on cultural identity focuses on the province's three main language communities as entirely separate entities.

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<sup>449</sup> Oskar Peterlini, 'Autonomy and the Protection of Ethnic Minorities', pp. 181-182.

<sup>450</sup> Verena Wisthaler, 'Identity Politics in the Educational System in South Tyrol: balancing between minority protection and the need to manage diversity', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 13.3 (2013), 358-372, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12051> (p. 364).

Although there are clear cultural and linguistic obstacles to the integration of immigrant voices as a prominent part of the debate on cultural identity in South Tyrol, there are increasing signs that their contributions are gradually being considered on a political level. Provincial governor Arno Kompatscher specifically referred to the importance of engaging with the increasing number of immigrants arriving in South Tyrol during a speech to mark the centenary of the province's annexation in September 2019:

Es ändert sich die Gesellschaft. Es sind nicht mehr nur die drei Sprachgruppen, die im Land leben, es sind viele [...] Menschen anderer Sprachen und Kulturen, die inzwischen bei uns eine provisorische oder definitive Heimat gefunden haben. Wie gehen wir mit dem Zusammenhalt in der Gesellschaft um?<sup>451</sup>

Kompatscher's comments do not however detract from the aforementioned practical difficulties caused by the official separation of language groups, which are as problematic for immigrants as they are for South Tyroleans from mixed-language backgrounds. The complex position of both groups demonstrates how Langer's concept of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler*, someone who identifies with all of South Tyrol as an intrinsically diverse community rather than with only one part of it, remains pertinent over a quarter of a century after his death.

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<sup>451</sup> ('Society is changing. There are no longer only the three language groups living in the province, there are many [...] people of other languages and cultures here, who have in the meantime found a provisional or a definitive homeland with us. How can we deal with cohesion in society?'). Land Südtirol, *100, 80, 50: Zukunft - Erinnerung*, online video recording, Facebook, 5 September 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/LandSuedtirol/videos/535959213621569/> [accessed 18 September 2020].

## Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how the debate on cultural identity in South Tyrol is marked by narratives which are both complementary and contradictory. Vassalli highlights the differences between language groups while Langer seeks to emphasise, and create, areas of common ground. The role of immigrants introduces a range of new voices into the debate from outside South Tyrol, while Ladin speakers have the oldest voice of all. Despite their differences, each of these aspects of the cultural identity debate suggest that the situation in South Tyrol needs to evolve in order to address and reflect the province's complex position and changing demographics fully. However, the distinct perspectives of each individual or group leads to differing views concerning the exact form that these changes should take. Above all, each of the highlighted areas presents a challenge to the status quo, represented to varying extents by the SVP, the ALB, the EPL and the monolingual school system. Vassalli challenges German-speaking domination; Langer challenges long-established separation along cultural and ethnic lines; the Ladins challenge the German-speaking/Italian-speaking dichotomy; mixed-language South Tyroleans challenge the concept of three distinct language communities; and immigrants challenge the notion that South Tyrol is home to only three language groups.

There are more recent, younger voices than Vassalli and Langer who either continue to engage with the perceived marginalisation of Italian speakers in South Tyrol<sup>452</sup> or argue

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<sup>452</sup> See Lucio Giudiceandrea and Aldo Mazza, eds, *Stare insieme è un arte: Vivere in Alto Adige/Südtirol* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2012).

for a more multicultural approach to identity formation.<sup>453</sup> However, the fact that these issues remain part of contemporary identity construction in the twenty-first century is largely attributable to Vassalli's and Langer's ability to communicate opinions which were initially on the periphery of the debate to a wider audience in the 1980s and 1990s.

Vassalli and Langer not only succeeded in igniting renewed discussion about South Tyrol's cultural identity. Their achievement lies above all in creating a framework for a coherent debate on these issues by changing its terms and broadening its parameters, albeit from very different perspectives. They drew attention to issues that had previously been little discussed, and they argued against the official position that the Second Autonomy Statute represented a permanent solution to tensions between South Tyrol's communities. Whereas Vassalli advocated a realignment of how influence and power should be spread between South Tyrol's communities, Langer's *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept fundamentally questioned the idea that they should be in competition with each other at all. He rejected the existing terms of the debate by using his *Gesamtsüdtiroler* concept to break open the 'ethnisch[e] Käfig[e]'<sup>454</sup> ('ethnic cages') advocated by the ALB. His lasting achievement is to have created a concept which is designed to allow South Tyroleans the freedom to create their own sense of identity, rather than forcing them to choose from a set of externally imposed, predetermined options.

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<sup>453</sup> See Riccardo Dello Sbarba, *Südtirol Italia: Il calicanto di Magnano e altre storie* (Trento: Il Margine, 2006) and Hans Karl Peterlini, *Wir Kinder der Südtirol-Autonomie: Ein Land zwischen ethnischer Verwirrung und verordnetem Aufbruch* (Bolzano: Folio, 2003).

<sup>454</sup> Langer, 'Minima Personalía', p. 45.

Vassalli's and Langer's contrasting responses to the political and societal changes facilitated by the Second Autonomy Statute (1972) demonstrate that the shifting debate on cultural identity formation following the establishment of the Statute represented a significant break with the period prior to its implementation, though the undercurrents of tension and mutual distrust between language groups that were apparent in the preceding post-war period remained.

It is clear that the parameters of the debate on cultural identity have widened still further since Vassalli's and Langer's major contributions in the 1980s and 1990s. The German and Italian-speaking communities are not the only groups contributing to discussion, and as the demographics of the province have changed, so too have the terms of the debate. The broader points of tension are similar to what was explored by Vassalli and Langer: cultural and linguistic conflicts persist and South Tyrol's relationship with the rest of Italy is still the subject of regular discussion. However, it is the nature and scope of these tensions which have changed over time. Moreover, the topics of Italian marginalisation and an inclusive, cross-cultural identity – rarely discussed topics when broached by Vassalli and Langer respectively – have since become more mainstream subjects of debate.

The concept of cultural identity is not only discussed in the non-fictional texts of the kind analysed in this chapter. It is also highly prominent in fictional texts by South Tyrolean writers. The next chapter of this thesis will therefore expand the purview of the debate covered in this chapter by examining the exploration of identity and belonging in a selection of creative literary works by South Tyrolean authors.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Identity and belonging in twenty-first century works by South Tyrolean authors**

This chapter considers the themes of identity and belonging in three contemporary works by South Tyrolean authors: Sabine Gruber's German novel *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* (2011),<sup>455</sup> Stefano Zangrando's Italian novel *Amateurs* (2016) and Ladin poet Roberta Dapunt's Italian and Ladin collection *La terra più del paradiso* (2008).<sup>456</sup>

Considering creative literary works offers a very particular perspective on identity and belonging in South Tyrol. They allow for a nuanced and fluid consideration of cross-cultural and cross-language interactions that may transcend entrenched distinctions between South Tyrol's communities. In particular, the nature of the works offers the authors both a creative licence and a sense of distance which enables them to explore complex, sensitive topics which have bearing on identity and belonging from a range of narrative perspectives.

Comparing and contrasting the ways in which the themes of identity and belonging are treated in the three creative literary works – each featuring South Tyrolean protagonists – raises the question of whether there is such a thing as South Tyrolean literature. It is therefore also pertinent to consider how far the works themselves can be said to belong to a particular type of literature with a common focus on the cultural, linguistic and historical complexities of South Tyrol.

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<sup>455</sup> ('Stillbach or The Yearning').

<sup>456</sup> ('The earth more than paradise').

Poet Norbert Kaser was the first person to draw widespread attention to the notion of a specifically South Tyrolean literature in his 'Brixner Rede' of 1969, a speech given at a conference organised by the Association of South Tyrolean Students. The twenty-two-year-old dismissed the value of the vast majority of work by South Tyrolean authors up to that point:

99% unserer Südtiroler Literaten wären am besten nie geboren [...] In der Einladung zum heurigen "literarischen kolloquium" heißt es: "Südtirols Literatur ist tot". Wie aber kann etwas tot sein, das es nie gegeben hat?<sup>457</sup>

In his speech, Kaser was especially critical of works, such as Hubert Mumelter's novel *Maderneid* (1948),<sup>458</sup> which focused heavily on local issues, lamenting an overreliance on 'ewig[e] Landschaftsbeschreibungen'<sup>459</sup> and an excessive tendency to hark back to the time of folk hero Andreas Hofer, who led the Tyrolean Rebellion against the Napoleonic armies in 1809.<sup>460</sup> He was scathing about what he perceived as the failure of South Tyroleans to address what he called the province's 'heilige Kühe'<sup>461</sup> ('sacred cows'). These 'sacred cows' can be seen both as a reference to South Tyrol's complex history during the Second World War, and as a criticism of the way in which Kaser felt the long-established German and Ladin-speaking communities had ignored the emerging voices of Italian-speaking writers. Kaser implied that these Italian-speaking South Tyrolean writers should tackle unspecified 'sacred cows' of their own.<sup>462</sup> He

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<sup>457</sup> ('It would have been better if 99% of our South Tyrolean literary figures had never been born. [...] In the invitation to this year's "literary colloquium" it states: "South Tyrol's literature is dead". How, though, can something be dead if it's never existed?') Norbert Kaser, 'Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft und der letzten zwanzig Jahre', in Norbert C. Kaser, *Prosa*, ed. by Benedikt Sauer and Erika Wimmer-Webhofer (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2) (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1992), pp. 109-118 (p. 111).

<sup>458</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 139-141.

<sup>459</sup> ('interminable descriptions of the countryside'). Kaser, 'Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft', p. 112.

<sup>460</sup> Kaser, 'Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft', p. 113.

<sup>461</sup> Kaser, 'Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft', p. 117.

<sup>462</sup> Kaser, "Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft", p. 118.

suggested that a willingness from Italian writers to tackle their own ‘sacred cows’ through literature, combined with a greater openness towards Italian authors from South Tyrol’s German and Ladin-speaking communities, would go a long way towards improving the state of South Tyrolean literature, and in turn the state of South Tyrolean society.<sup>463</sup>

Rather than seeing the numerous ‘sacred cows’ of all South Tyrol’s communities as a barrier to developing a distinctive literary tradition in the province, Kaser positioned these taboo topics as the starting point for a South Tyrolean literature which both engaged fully with the province’s history and reflected the cultural and linguistic diversity of its inhabitants. He juxtaposed the older generation of South Tyrolean authors – who he believed offered a restrictive, idealistic view of the province and rarely ventured beyond its borders – with a new group of writers, including German-speaking novelist Joseph Zoderer (b. 1935).<sup>464</sup> He suggested that Zoderer belonged to a generation of authors who had travelled beyond South Tyrol and were willing to engage more fully with the province’s cultural, linguistic and historical complexities.

Following Kaser’s speech, there was little evidence of a gradual willingness from South Tyrolean writers to confront the province’s ‘sacred cows’. Zoderer’s controversial novel *Die Walsche* (1982) was very much the exception to this rule. The mixed-language relationship at the centre of the novel, allied with its undermining of the notion of a cross-Tyrolean identity, provoked polarised reactions in the province: though it was praised in some quarters as a turning point in South Tyrolean literature, one letter to

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<sup>463</sup> For a further discussion of what Kaser meant by ‘sacred cows’, see Chapter Three, pp. 139-141.

<sup>464</sup> Kaser, ‘Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft’, p. 117.

the newspaper *Dolomiten* lamented that it presented South Tyrol's German speakers as 'unterentwickelt[e] Primaten'.<sup>465</sup> However, the novel proved hugely popular both in the wider German-speaking world and in Italy, where the translation has been reprinted six times.<sup>466</sup>

The complex reception of *Die Walsche* encapsulates the difficulties faced by publishers when considering how to present works by South Tyrolean authors which deal with themes that are particularly relevant to South Tyrol. The publication of Gruber's *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* by Munich-based publishing house C.H. Beck is an example of how works by South Tyrolean authors can be categorised under the broader heading of German literature. Gruber's novel reflects Beck's general emphasis on history, yet the categories of their website, including 'German-speaking literature' (under which Gruber's works are listed) and 'international literature', suggest that there is little concern to acknowledge the cultural specifics of authors such as Gruber who write in German but whose work is strongly influenced by their particular experience of multiculturalism and multilingualism.<sup>467</sup>

The situation of Dapunt's publisher Einaudi may at first sight appear largely similar to that of Gruber's publisher Beck. Einaudi is a publishing house known across Italy, while Beck is a prominent name in German literary circles. Moreover, as with Beck, there are separate sections on Einaudi's website for 'poetry', 'Italian fiction' and 'foreign fiction'

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<sup>465</sup> ('underdeveloped primates'). Ruth Esterhammer, 'Joseph Zoderer im Spiegel der Literaturkritik' (Vienna: LIT, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>466</sup> Nóra De Buiteléir, 'Literary Production and Identity Politics in the South Tyrol: The Case of Joseph Zoderer's *Die Walsche*', *Austausch*, 2.1 (2012), 5-20, [https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Joseph%20Zoderer's%20Die%20Walsche%20-%20N%20c3%b3ra%20de%20Buitel%20c3%a9ir\\_0.pdf](https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Joseph%20Zoderer's%20Die%20Walsche%20-%20N%20c3%b3ra%20de%20Buitel%20c3%a9ir_0.pdf) [accessed 26 November 2020] (p. 5).

<sup>467</sup> 'Literatur bei C.H. Beck', *C.H. Beck*, <https://www.chbeck.de/buecher/literatur/literatur-bei-chbeck/> [accessed 27 November 2020].

(of which there are various national subcategories divided by language), but no category to reflect the complex backgrounds of authors like Dapunt who write in Italian yet have grown up in close proximity to other languages and cultures.<sup>468</sup> However, the specific question of which language to write in is far more complex in Dapunt's particular case. Whereas Gruber was able both to write in her first language and to reach a wide audience, Dapunt had to make a choice between either writing in the Val Badia Ladin dialect – her first language – or reaching a wider Italian-speaking audience. Ultimately, she found a compromise of sorts in *La terra più del paradiso* by writing the majority of the forty-four poems in Italian and including two in Ladin. She translated the two Ladin poems into Italian herself and included these translations below the original Ladin versions in the Einaudi edition. Here it is possible to see Dapunt personally taking on the role of mediating between languages and cultures in a way that Einaudi, as an Italian publishing house with national reach and a largely monolingual audience, does not. In contrast to Beck and Einaudi, AlphaBeta, the publisher of Zangrando's novel *Amateurs*, has made exploring the connections between the different languages and cultures in South Tyrol a key part of their mission as an organisation:

Die Verlagstätigkeit ist ein Teil der Gesamtphilosophie des Projektes Alpha & Beta, welches sich als globales Bildungs- und Kulturprojekt in einer mehrsprachigen, multi- und interkulturellen Region versteht [...] *Edizioni AlphaBeta Verlag* ist daher auch ein Grenzverlag.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> 'Novità in libreria', *Einaudi*, <https://www.einaudi.it/ultime-uscite/> [accessed 27 November 2020].

<sup>469</sup> ('Book publishing is one part of the entire philosophy of the Alpha & Beta project, which sees itself as a global educational and cultural project in a multilingual, multicultural and intercultural region [...] *Edizioni AlphaBeta Verlag* is therefore also a border publisher'). 'Alpha & Beta Verlag', *AlphaBeta*, <http://www.alphabeta-verlag.it/de/edizioni-alphabeta-verlag> [accessed 14 December 2018].

AlphaBeta are a prominent example of a publishing house committed to promoting a translingual, transcultural approach to literature. They even have a bilingual German-Italian name: *Edizioni AlphaBeta Verlag*. Their self-definition as a 'border publisher' demonstrates that their location in South Tyrol is central to their work, an aim reflected in their decision to publish *Amateurs*, a novel in which different types of borders feature as a central theme. It is significant that the publishing house forms part of a wider project by AlphaBeta to encourage multilingual and multicultural interactions: they also run a series of language courses for South Tyroleans of all backgrounds and ages, including courses specifically geared towards immigrants from outside the EU and courses which cover the local German dialect. The diversity of their published texts therefore reflects their broader commitment to working across cultural and linguistic borders. The vast majority of books they publish are by German and Italian-speaking South Tyrolean authors. Texts are not divided by language on their website: instead they are arranged by themes, many of which relate to specific cultural and linguistic concerns inherent in border regions. AlphaBeta have therefore created a kind of South Tyrolean literature which is not categorised by language, genre or cultural perspectives, but rather by a common interest in the interactions within and between South Tyrol's diverse communities.

Individually, all three works examined in this chapter take on the 'sacred cows' attacked by Kaser in his 'Brixner Rede'. They do so in different ways and reflect his call for a literature in South Tyrol which moves beyond the narrow geographical and thematic focus of previous works by South Tyrolean writers. Gruber's *Stillbach*, set in Rome, uses the fictional characters of Emma, Ines and Clara to elucidate both the historical and more recent challenges faced by South Tyroleans when they move beyond the

province's borders. Through the three female protagonists, the complex role of South Tyroleans in the Second World War as victims and perpetrators is considered, along with the possible existence of an area of ambiguity between these two binary categories.

The fictional South Tyrolean village of Stillbach, and its often contradictory role in the identity formation of the novel's three protagonists, acts as a focus for discussing how the South Tyrolean backgrounds of the characters shape their lives and their ongoing search for a sense of identity and belonging. They each retain a certain yearning for the familiarity of their home village, but it is also suggested that their idealised view of Stillbach bears little resemblance to reality. The novel explores the experiences of Emma, Ines and Clara when they leave behind the South Tyrolean mountains which Kaser referred to as 'die Zäune des Weltbildes',<sup>470</sup> yet it is also clear that the influence of Stillbach, be it positive or negative, does not cease once the characters leave the province. If anything, the physical distance between Stillbach and Rome makes their home village's influence ever more pronounced in the course of the novel.

Like the storyline of Gruber's *Stillbach*, the plot of Zangrando's Italian novel *Amateurs* plays out away from South Tyrol. Set in Berlin, the work similarly considers how the fictional protagonists' shared South Tyrolean background can influence their sense of identity even when they are physically removed from the province. However, unlike *Stillbach*, it is set entirely in the twenty-first century and features an Italian-speaking protagonist. The use of the Italian-speaking Valentino as the novel's first-person narrator reflects Kaser's call for Italian voices to assume more importance in South

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<sup>470</sup> ('fences which limit our view of the world'). Kaser, 'Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft', p. 117.

Tyrolean literature. South Tyrol's status as a border region, and the challenges this brings, is embraced rather than denied through an often humorous exploration of Valentino's and his friend Gerwin's existence on the borders of society. The prominence of borders as a theme is in stark contrast to the literature criticised by Kaser, which he believed was historically, culturally and thematically narrow in its scope. He felt that the literature of writers such as Hubert Mumelter depicted an artificial picture of South Tyrol that ignored the effect of the annexation and instead persisted with a misleading view of South Tyrol as a solely German and Ladin-speaking province.<sup>471</sup> Zangrando's stated support for a 'spazio letterario euroregionale' ('a Euroregion literary space') based on the Tyrol South Tyrol Trentino Euroregion<sup>472</sup> is reflected in the novel, which uses the travails of the two protagonists to argue for a more cross-border, multilingual approach to identity formation. In doing so, Zangrando moves beyond the highly local focus dismissed by Kaser. The distinctiveness of South Tyrol is acknowledged, without allowing its specificities to limit the novel's scope.

Unlike Zangrando's and Gruber's novels, Dapunt's poetry volume *La terra più del paradiso* (2008) offers a very clear sense of being situated in a familiar local setting, which closely informs how the themes of identity and belonging are explored. Though only two of the poems are written in the Ladin dialect of Dapunt's Val Badia, many of the forty-four poems are strongly influenced by its rural South Tyrolean surroundings, a stark contrast to the largely urban settings of *Stillbach* (Rome) and *Amateurs* (Berlin). Through the poems, Dapunt offers the Ladin community a voice which is distinct from

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<sup>471</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 139-141.

<sup>472</sup> Elisabetta Bortolotti, 'Stefano Zangrando, ponte fra due culture', *Uomo, Città, Territorio*, 1 May 2016, pp. 40-41 (p. 41).

the German and Italian-speaking perspectives in *Stillbach* and *Amateurs* respectively. Her exploration of the complex interactions between nature, spirituality, creativity and a sense of belonging is far removed from the superficial, idealistic, literary descriptions of the countryside that Kaser denounced in his 'Brixner Rede'. However, instead of trying to move beyond the South Tyrolean landscape altogether, an approach advocated by Kaser, Dapunt's poems engage directly with the implications of the immediate landscape of Val Badia as both a reassuring and restrictive influence on identity formation. *La terra più del paradiso* is a series of concise poems which both embody and explore the complex role of the surrounding Val Badia landscape in the process of identity formation. Dapunt examines how the creative process of writing can in itself contribute to a sense of identity and belonging.

Together, the three works establish a flexible framework for South Tyrolean literature which goes beyond provincial restrictiveness while also being distinctly South Tyrolean. The form of South Tyrolean literature modelled by Gruber's, Zangrando's and Dapunt's works articulates a common desire to explore the specificities of South Tyrol, and the inherent challenges they pose for identity formation, in a cross-cultural, cross-language and cross-border context far removed from the highly local focus so criticised by Kaser.

### **5.1 Identity and belonging in *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* (2011) by**

#### **Sabine Gruber**

Gruber's novel features three South Tyrolean female protagonists – Emma, Ines and Clara – from two generations who are united by their shared connection to the

mountainous German-speaking village of Stillbach. Emma, born around 1916, is part of the generation with direct experience of the Second World War, which she spent working at a hotel in Rome that she later came to own herself following her Italian husband Remo's death. Ines and Clara, childhood friends born in Stillbach around 1960, get to know Emma at different times: Ines when working at Emma's hotel in 1978 and Clara when visiting her at an old people's home in 2009.

The novel begins with South Tyrolean protagonist Clara boarding a train from South Tyrol to Rome in 2009 after hearing of the death of her childhood friend Ines, with whom she grew up in Stillbach in the 1960s and 1970s. She has already stopped off in Stillbach on the way from her own home in Vienna to collect the keys to Ines's apartment in Rome, where she is travelling at the request of Ines's mother to sort through her friend's belongings.

The novel's narrative perspective shifts a number of times. *Stillbach* consists of three distinct phases that are each interspersed with an examination of the events of the Second World War in Italy, with a particular emphasis on South Tyrol's complex role. The opening section accounts for around 20% of the whole work. It is set in 2009 and written from a third-person limited perspective, switching focus between Clara and Austrian historian Paul. It is suggested that Paul had a fleeting liaison with Ines in Rome in 1978 before they briefly reconnected prior to Ines's death. Paul and Clara get to know each other while tidying Ines's apartment in Rome, discovering an unfinished semi-autobiographical manuscript of Ines's in the process.

The middle section of *Stillbach*, about half of the whole novel, appears to be taken from Ines's manuscript, with the implication that she was working on it at the time of her

death in 2009. This novel within a novel combines a retrospective first-person reflection on Ines's time working at Emma's hotel in 1978 with a third-person narrative focusing on Ines's perception of Emma's experiences since arriving in Rome in 1938. Later in the novel, it is suggested that this narrative is partly informed by Ines's conversations with Emma when visiting her in the care home in 2009.<sup>473</sup> The novel within a novel ends abruptly when Ines is falsely accused of theft at the hotel by colleague Antonella<sup>474</sup> and is forced to return home to South Tyrol. At the end of *Stillbach*, Emma's Italian-speaking son Francesco, born at the end of the Second World War after Emma unexpectedly became pregnant by Remo, attempts to prevent Ines's novel being published as he objects to its portrayal of his mother, who it is implied is suffering from dementia.<sup>475</sup>

The final phase of *Stillbach* is once more written from a third-person limited perspective, switching focus between Clara and Paul in 2009 as they discuss Ines's novel and cautiously embark on a relationship together. Despite their clear differences, the narrative perspectives of Clara and Paul on the one hand and Ines on the other share two themes which are especially significant for understanding how the themes of identity and belonging are discussed in the novel. Both perspectives are characterised by the complex role of the village of Stillbach in the lives of Emma, Ines and Clara and the cross-generational effect of South Tyrol's role in the Second World War on the sense of identity felt by the three female protagonists.

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<sup>473</sup> Sabine Gruber, *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht*, (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2015), p. 47.

<sup>474</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 275.

<sup>475</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, pp. 348-349.

Gruber defined herself in an interview as ‘eine in Wien lebende Europäerin deutscher Muttersprache mit einem italienischen Pass’,<sup>476</sup> and her novel focuses on the difficulty of reconciling diverse cultural, linguistic and historical factors as Emma, Ines and Clara each struggle to find a sense of belonging that simultaneously acknowledges and goes beyond their links to Stillbach. The definite, if complex, identity that Gruber assigns to herself in the aforementioned interview is absent in her three female protagonists.

Gruber describes the reception that *Stillbach* received in South Tyrol as ‘durchwegs positiv, was mich doch ein bisschen verwundert hat’,<sup>477</sup> especially given the novel’s engagement with many challenging aspects of the province’s role in the Second World War:

Ich habe schon damit gerechnet, dass es ideologische Einwände geben könnte, schließlich versucht man in Südtirol immer noch die deutsche Kultur hochzuhalten und möglichst nicht zu beschmutzen.<sup>478</sup>

Fellow South Tyrolean author Erika Wimmer describes *Stillbach* as ‘ein Buch, das man mit Vergnügen liest und das einem dennoch, zumal als Tiroler oder Südtirolerin, zahlreiche Facetten der eigenen Geschichte oder Landesidentität eröffnet, ja begreifbar macht’.<sup>479</sup> Gruber’s manner of approaching a difficult period of South Tyrol’s history was

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<sup>476</sup> (‘A German-speaking European who lives in Vienna and has an Italian passport’). Verena Platzgummer and Alexander Walzl, ‘Interview: “Ich bin eine in Wien lebende Europäerin deutscher Muttersprache mit einem italienischen Pass”’, *Südstern*, 10 October 2014, <https://www.suedstern.org/stories/show/236-ich-bin-eine-in-wien-lebende-europaerin-deutscher-muttersprache-mit-einem-italienischen-pass> [accessed 25 March 2020].

<sup>477</sup> (‘consistently positive, which actually surprised me somewhat’). Christine Dobretsberger, ‘Drauflos schreiben gibt es bei mir nicht’, *Wiener Zeitung*, 3 August 2013, [https://www.wienerzeitung.at/themen\\_channel/wz\\_reflexionen/zeitgenossen/565749\\_Sabine-Gruber.html](https://www.wienerzeitung.at/themen_channel/wz_reflexionen/zeitgenossen/565749_Sabine-Gruber.html) [accessed 7 November 2018].

<sup>478</sup> (‘I had already considered that there could be ideological objections. Ultimately, South Tyrol is a place that still seeks to venerate German culture, attempting as far as possible not to besmirch it’). Dobretsberger, ‘Drauflos schreiben’.

<sup>479</sup> (‘A book that is a pleasure to read, and especially if you are a Tyrolean or South Tyrolean, it opens up many aspects of your own history or regional identity for you and indeed renders them comprehensible’). Erika Wimmer, review of Sabine Gruber, *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* (Munich: Beck, 2011), in

also lauded beyond the province's borders, with German literary critic Alexander Košenina praising Gruber for writing 'ein Geschichtswerk über die schwierigen Geschicke der Tiroler, die [...] zwischen den politischen Fronten aufgerieben wurden'.<sup>480</sup> Throughout the novel, Gruber combines a consideration of the events of the Second World War – and the role of fictional and real-life South Tyroleans in them – with a focus on the complex role of the fictional village of Stillbach in the identities of Emma, Ines and Clara.

Though the novel is set in Rome, its title underlines how Emma's, Ines's and Clara's feelings towards their home village of Stillbach have a constant influence on their sense of identity and belonging. Throughout the novel, Gruber presents the protagonists' attitude towards Stillbach as somewhat contradictory: a longing for the familiarity of their home village is tempered by a realisation that the place they long for no longer exists. Emma's ties to Stillbach are emphasised by the character of Ines's Aunt Hilda in an extract, reported by Ines, which emphasises how the impact of the village on identity formation can be viewed very differently by different characters, depending on whether or not they have subsequently remained in Stillbach:

[...] Tante Hilda war ihrerseits nicht müde geworden zu betonen, daß sie Stillbach kenne, daß die Manente [Emma] aus Stillbach stamme, als bürge der Ortsname für den Charakter seiner Bewohner, als sei er ein Qualitätszeichen auch für jene, die schon lange von Stillbach fortgezogen waren.<sup>481</sup>

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Forschungs-Institut Brenner-Archiv, 2011, [https://www.uibk.ac.at/brenner-archiv/literatur/tirol/rez\\_2011/gruber\\_stillbach-oder-die-sehnsucht.html](https://www.uibk.ac.at/brenner-archiv/literatur/tirol/rez_2011/gruber_stillbach-oder-die-sehnsucht.html) [accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>480</sup> ('A historical work on the difficult fate of the Tyroleans, who were [...] squeezed between the political fronts'). Alexander Košenina, review of Sabine Gruber, *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* (Munich: Beck, 2011), in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 September 2011, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/sabine-gruber-stillbach-oder-die-sehnsucht-wer-ging-mit-wem-wohin-11290199.html> [accessed 7 November 2018].

<sup>481</sup> ('[...] for her part, Aunt Hilda was never tired of emphasising that she [Emma] knew Stillbach and that she came from there, as though the place name acted as a guarantor for the character of its inhabitants.

Hilda's emphasis on Emma's links to Stillbach, her childhood home, suggests that the village is not a place that is widely understood, above all by outsiders. This adds to the impression given throughout the novel that Stillbach provides a sense of identity which is clearly defined, yet outdated and restrictive. Though this specific, sustained and highly local affinity with one's home village may be viewed positively by characters such as Hilda – who have chosen to remain in Stillbach – it becomes a hindrance for figures such as Emma, Ines and Clara when they decide to travel beyond the village.

Gruber uses the local Stillbach dialect to encapsulate many of these difficulties, which are outlined in a letter from Ines to Clara shortly before her death:

Das Stillbacherische sei nicht so leicht einzuordnen, hatte Ines in dem Brief geschrieben, in Stillbach wüchsen die Karotten neben dem Erdäpfelacker [...] und zu den Chips sagten ohnehin alle *patatine*. Das Stillbacherische sei zwischen den Stühlen zu Hause, da sitze man ohnehin besser und bequemer. Die österreichische Monarchie, der Faschismus mit seinem deutschen Sprachverbot und schließlich die Schulbücher und Touristen aus der Bundesrepublik hätten ihre Spuren hinterlassen.<sup>482</sup>

The disparate influences on the Stillbach dialect have made it both unique and exclusive. Through Ines's letter, Gruber partially presents the area 'zwischen den Stühlen' as a comfortable space which successfully reflects how the dialect, and by extension the identity of Stillbach residents such as Ines, has been influenced by a range of cultures. However, the description of Emma's son Francesco's linguistic difficulties as he talks to Clara presents this mix of competing cultures in a far more incongruous light:

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It was as though it were a hallmark of quality even for those who had long since moved away from Stillbach'). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 96.

<sup>482</sup> ('The Stillbach dialect was not so easy to categorise, Ines had written in the letter. In Stillbach, *Karotten* [High German for carrots] grew next to the *Erdäpfelacker* [Austrian dialect for potato field] [...] and instead of *Chips* (High German for crisps), everyone said *patatine* [the Italian term] in any case. The Stillbach dialect was at home 'between the stools', it was better and more comfortable there in any case. The Austrian monarchy, [Italian] fascism with its prohibition of German and finally the school textbooks and German tourists had all left their mark'). *Stillbach*, p. 311.

‘Francescos Deutsch klang ihr [Clara] noch in den Ohren; es war eine eigenartige Mischung aus bundesdeutscher Intonation und vertrauten Wortmelodien des Stillbacher Dialektes gewesen’.<sup>483</sup> Gruber depicts listening to Francesco’s German as a discomfiting experience for Clara. The description of the conversation suggests that Francesco, who grew up in Rome with a German-speaking mother, is struggling to reconcile the contrasting linguistic aspects of his identity. His German lacks both the reassurance implied by ‘[die] vertrauten Wortmelodien des Stillbacher Dialektes’ and the clarity provided by ‘[die] bundesdeutsch[e] Intonation’.

As well as being an uncomfortable experience for Clara, these linguistic difficulties are also inhibiting for Francesco himself: ‘[...] manchmal hatte er so lange nach einem passenden Wort gesucht, daß Clara nervös geworden war’.<sup>484</sup> Gruber uses the character of Francesco to exemplify the linguistic difficulties that can be caused by a multilingual background: Francesco himself is depicted as being ‘zwischen den Stühlen’. Unlike Ines’s description of Stillbach’s German dialect, however, Francesco’s position appears anything but ‘bequem’. In fact, it is awkward and uncomfortable:

Erst als Clara Francesco auf italienisch gefragt hatte, wie es seiner Mutter gehe und wie sie sich damals, Ende der dreißiger Jahre, als Deutschsprachige in Rom zurechtgefunden habe, hatte er die Sprache gewechselt und ohne Punkt und Komma von seiner *mamma* erzählt.<sup>485</sup>

Instead of painstakingly trying to bring the appropriate German word to mind,

Francesco speaks naturally and without hesitation in Italian. It is only once he abandons

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<sup>483</sup> (‘Francesco’s German still reverberated in her ears, it had been a unique mix of federal German intonation and the familiar linguistic melodies of the Stillbach dialect’). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 54.

<sup>484</sup> (‘[...] sometimes he had searched so long for an appropriate word that Clara had become nervous’). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 54.

<sup>485</sup> (‘Clara had asked Francesco in Italian how his Mum was doing and how she had found her way in Rome as a German speaker back then at the end of the 1930s. It was only then that Francesco had switched languages and told stories of his *mamma* while barely pausing for breath’). Gruber, *Stillbach*, pp. 54-55.

the uncertainty of his multilingual background in favour of a comforting monolingualism that he is able to find fluency and confidence.

Like Francesco, whom she first briefly met when working at Emma's hotel in 1978,<sup>486</sup>

Ines must also navigate a complex constellation of cultural and linguistic influences.

Unlike Francesco, however, she uses the position 'zwischen den Stühlen' to her advantage, particularly in her professional life. She primarily adheres to the Austrian spelling system in her unfinished novel and takes on Italian-German translation work when living in Rome.<sup>487</sup>

Despite her translation work, it is suggested that Ines's personal identity did not become more influenced by Italian culture during her time in Rome, a point emphasised as Clara looks through Ines's diary following her death: '[Der Terminkalender verfügte] über deutsche, österreichische und schweizerische Service- und Notrufnummern und [nahm] keinerlei Bezug auf das italienische Umfeld'.<sup>488</sup> If anything, Ines's time away from Stillbach seems to have increased her sense of longing for her home village and its familiarity: the desktop background of her computer in Rome is said by Clara to feature a picture of a lake in Stillbach.<sup>489</sup>

As with the character of Ines and her desktop background, Stillbach's importance in Emma's identity is closely connected to the familiarity offered by the enduring Alpine landscape. Above all, she retains fond memories of the Tyrolean scenery as she is seduced by the German-speaking Hermann Steg, a guest at her hotel in Rome in 1978.

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<sup>486</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 298.

<sup>487</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 15.

<sup>488</sup> ('[Her appointment diary featured] German, Austrian and Swiss service and emergency numbers and [made] no mention of the Italian-speaking environment'). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 23.

<sup>489</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 310.

She is so besotted by him that she furtively tries on his aftershave, called ‘Alt-

Innsbruck’:

Noch nie war sie Steg so nahe gewesen; sie roch jetzt ein bißchen wie er, und das kühlende mentholhaltige Parfum gab ihr etwas von der Frische der Bergluft zurück, die sie hier vermißte.<sup>490</sup>

Here, mountainous surroundings are not presented as restrictive, as was the case with Kaser’s description of South Tyrol’s mountains as ‘die Zäune des Weltbildes’<sup>491</sup> in his ‘Brixner Rede’. Instead, this reminder of Tyrolean landscapes and ‘Bergluft’ is depicted as invigorating, allowing Emma to reconnect with her Tyrolean roots. It is a vision of her homeland which maintains the refreshing quality of the mountain air without the claustrophobia of village life in Stillbach.

Ines’s description of one of Emma’s repeated attempts at jigsaw puzzles in 1978 is especially significant in positioning the role of Stillbach in the older woman’s sense of identity:

Als ich die Terrasse betrat, sah ich die Manente [Emma] über einen Tisch gebeugt [...] Oberhalb ihrer Hände lagen in Reihen und nach Farben geordnet Puzzleteile [...] [es handelte sich immer] um Bilder aus der näheren Umgebung von Stillbach.<sup>492</sup>

The image Gruber creates of Emma repeatedly piecing together a picture of Stillbach and the surrounding area could be viewed as a metaphor for her ongoing efforts to create a coherent identity from the diverse aspects of her life: her South Tyrolean roots in the German-speaking village of Stillbach; her late German-speaking fiancé Johann;

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<sup>490</sup> (‘She had never been so close to Steg. Now she smelled a bit like him and the cooling, menthol perfume gave her back some of the freshness of the mountain air that she missed here’). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 158.

<sup>491</sup> (‘fences which limit our view of the world’). Kaser, ‘Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft’, p. 117.

<sup>492</sup> (‘As I came out onto the terrace, I saw Mrs Manente hunched over a table [...] Above her hands lay jigsaw pieces set out in rows and arranged according to colour. [...] [the jigsaws were always] pictures of the area around Stillbach’). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 147.

her late Roman husband Remo; and her life as a hotel owner in the Italian capital. The implication that this exercise was a regular occurrence and that the jigsaws always involved pictures of Stillbach or nearby areas underlines the village's inescapable centrality to Emma's identity, a notion confirmed by Gruber's choice of title. Even as she lives and works in Rome, Emma is very conscious of her roots in Stillbach and still retains a certain longing for the familiarity of the village. However, the description of Emma poring over a collection of jigsaw pieces rather than an entire picture of Stillbach emphasises how both her own and South Tyrol's history do not easily lend themselves to a coherent process of identity formation. Although she tries to order the pieces in terms of colour and in rows, they nevertheless retain the impression of being individual entities rather than a cohesive whole.

Gruber positions Clara's identity as being incomplete, much like Emma's. While Emma's sense of belonging has been undermined by the loss of her fiancé Johann in 1944 and then her husband Remo in 1970, Clara's is deeply affected by the death of her childhood friend Ines: 'Etwas ist mit Ines' Tod aus mir herausgeschält worden, ein Teil des Gehäuses'.<sup>493</sup> Although Clara muses that 'unser Stillbach hat schon angefangen auszutrocknen, lange vor Ines' Tod',<sup>494</sup> it is clear that Ines provided Clara with a tangible link to the Stillbach that she knew as a child, a connection that has been weakened following her friend's death. The discovery of Ines's unfinished semi-autobiographical novel goes some way to restoring Clara's sense of kinship with her late friend.

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<sup>493</sup> ('Something was cut out of me with the news of Ines's death. A part of my core'). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 21.

<sup>494</sup> ('Our Stillbach had already begun to dry out long before Ines's death'). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 21.

Beyond its function of bringing the two women closer together and prompting Clara to reflect on her attitude towards Stillbach, Ines's novel also foregrounds the historical focus of Gruber's work. The novel's discovery is the first of a number of narrative devices which all allow for a highly nuanced approach towards South Tyrol's complex wartime history over the course of *Stillbach*: it allows Ines to retell Emma's wartime experiences, which in turn prompts a discussion of South Tyrol's past between Clara and Paul, encouraging Paul to share with her his historical expertise on the Second World War. Above all, Clara's discovery of Ines's draft prompts an ongoing discussion between her and Paul which gradually articulates a nuanced approach to South Tyrolean complicity that moves beyond a restrictive victim-perpetrator dichotomy. Moreover, their conversations position an understanding of South Tyrol's history during the Second World War as being pivotal to Clara's success in finding a secure sense of self in the twenty-first century.

When reading through Ines's manuscript towards the end of the novel, Clara is said to ask herself: 'Ist nicht die in Wien lebende Schriftstellerin Sabine Gruber in Lana [in Südtirol] aufgewachsen? [...] Wenn sie nicht irrte, war Ines mit Gruber sogar flüchtig befreundet gewesen.'<sup>495</sup> By showing Clara to mention both the author's own South Tyrolean background and her current residence in Vienna – notably also where Clara herself lives – Gruber establishes both familiarity with and distance from South Tyrol to allow her to engage with the exact nature of the province's role in the Second World War. Gruber's self-reference in the novel supports an interpretation of *Stillbach* as a way of completing what the character of Ines started. Clara's observation that Ines

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<sup>495</sup> ('Didn't the author Sabine Gruber, who lives in Vienna, grow up in Lana [in South Tyrol]? [...] If she wasn't mistaken, Ines had even briefly been friends with Gruber'). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 322.

intended to write about the issue of perpetrators in the Second World War before her unexpected death – ‘alles weist darauf hin, daß sie sich im nächsten Manuskript mit den Tätern befassen wollte’<sup>496</sup> – further supports this view of a connection between Ines’s unfinished novel within a novel and Gruber’s completed work.

Unambiguous real-life South Tyrolean perpetrators are in fact discussed in *Stillbach*. For example, Paul discovers a reference to Josef Schwammberger – who commanded various Nazi labour camps in Krakow – in Ines’s novel.<sup>497</sup> Gruber also uses a range of techniques to discuss less clear-cut cases, positioning Emma’s late fiancé Johann as a fictional case study of the ‘typical’ South Tyrolean who was pressed into military service with the Nazis. She then exploits different cross-generational narrative perspectives to examine the extent of his complicity. The character of Johann therefore provides a fictional means of exploring the very real complexities of engaging with the role of South Tyroleans during the Second World War, underlining how these events can have consequences for South Tyroleans’ sense of identity and belonging which extend far beyond the wartime generation.

The recurring, cross-generational role of German Nazi SS commander Erich Priebke (1913-2013) throughout the different strands of the novel embodies the complex relationship between South Tyroleans and the Nazis both during and after the Second World War. At the beginning of the novel, in 2009, he is spotted by Paul in a café in Rome.<sup>498</sup> Priebke’s most notorious role in the war itself involved co-ordinating the Ardeatine Caves Massacre near Rome in March 1944. 335 Italian civilians were

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<sup>496</sup> (‘Everything points to the fact that she wanted to deal with the perpetrators in the next manuscript’). Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 357.

<sup>497</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 74.

<sup>498</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 18.

murdered in revenge for the killing of 32 Nazi soldiers, mostly South Tyrolean members of the Bolzano SS regiment, in an attack by Italian partisans in Rome's Via Rasella the previous day. In *Stillbach*, Johann is said – via Ines's perspective on Emma's thoughts – to be one of the victims of the attack.<sup>499</sup> The long-term repercussions of the Via Rasella attack change the course of Emma's life – and by extension Ines's and Clara's too – by causing her to marry the Italian Remo instead and remain in Rome rather than returning to Stillbach with Johann.<sup>500</sup>

The implications of the events in the Via Rasella have wider significance for contemporary questions of identity and belonging which extend beyond the novel's plot and characters. The attack holds a particular resonance for South Tyrolean readers in the twenty-first century, both as an example of how people from the province became implicated in the complex wider events of the Second World War, and as a potential challenge to the *Opferthese*, the deep-rooted post-war notion that South Tyroleans were victims of both Hitler and Mussolini. On the one hand, the attack encapsulates how South Tyroleans can be seen as victims of Nazi ideology: even their deaths are exploited to commit a further atrocity at the Ardeatine Caves. On the other hand, the South Tyrolean soldiers can also be seen as perpetrators by virtue of their role in the SS regiment. Moreover, Priebke's prominence in the novel can be viewed as an implicit reference to how some South Tyroleans helped leading Nazis, including Priebke himself, to escape capture by the Allies following the war.<sup>501</sup> By combining fiction and reality,

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<sup>499</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 141.

<sup>500</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, p. 139.

<sup>501</sup> Mary Williams Walsh, 'At Long Last, Nazi Faces Trial', *Los Angeles Times*, May 8 1996, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-05-08-mn-1798-story.html> [accessed 30 April 2021].

creating multi-generational protagonists and setting a novel with South Tyrolean protagonists away from South Tyrol, Gruber finds both the necessary distance to engage in detail with sensitive questions surrounding complicity and collaboration and the required familiarity to remind the reader that the events of the Second World War remain pivotal to South Tyrolean identity formation in the twenty-first century.

The aforementioned warm response to Gruber's work suggests that the release of *Stillbach* in 2011 was timely. Clara's meeting with Emma at an old people's home at the end of the novel symbolises how *Stillbach* was published at a crucial time of generational change. Members of Emma's generation, who were young adults during the Second World War, were dying out. The increased distance that now separated subsequent generations from the war – symbolised by the characters of Clara, Ines and Paul – enabled them to engage with the complex narratives of the time in a way that was not possible for generations before them.

Gruber uses Priebke's final appearance at the end of the novel as a visual indication that the post-war generation are better equipped to consider the complexities of the Second World War than those who lived through it themselves. The final image of Clara sitting with Paul on the bench in Rome, aware of Priebke's presence nearby but unperturbed by it, strikes a cautious note of hope in relation to her search for a future sense of identity and belonging which is informed but not restricted by her connection to *Stillbach*. Helped by the ongoing generational change embodied by Priebke's frail state, Clara begins to find a balance that her fellow South Tyrolean Emma, now with advanced dementia,<sup>502</sup> will never achieve.

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<sup>502</sup> Gruber, *Stillbach*, pp. 346-347.

Gruber positions the shared connection of her protagonists to the border province of South Tyrol as a central yet complicating factor in their search for identity and belonging. However, it is precisely these cultural, linguistic and historical complexities that she exploits to enhance her cross-generational exploration of the effect of South Tyrol's twentieth-century history on identity formation. She moves between fact and fiction, unfamiliarity and familiarity and past and present to create a novel in which any restrictions of genre, geography and time are rejected. Gruber combines the fictional scope offered by a novel with the credibility of historical protagonists. She uses Emma's, Ines's and Clara's fictional journeys – both literal and metaphorical – to encourage readers to draw on the cultural, linguistic and historical complexities of South Tyrol as the basis for their own process of identity formation, rather than allowing them to stand in the way of such a process.

## **5.2 Identity and belonging in *Amateurs* (2016) by Stefano Zangrando**

The quiet optimism regarding identity and belonging at the end of Gruber's *Stillbach* is not present in Stefano Zangrando's novel *Amateurs*. Whereas *Stillbach*'s final image focuses on the beginnings of Clara's and Paul's relationship, Zangrando's novel, written in Italian, ends with friends Valentino and Gerwin realising that they have both been romantically deceived. *Amateurs* follows the pair's unsuccessful efforts to find a coherent sense of belonging as they live their lives on social, linguistic, cultural and generational borders.

Zangrando was born in Bolzano in 1973 to an Italian-speaking family. He is a writer, lecturer and translator of German literature who splits his time between Berlin, South

Tyrol and Trentino. There appear to be autobiographical elements to the broad situation of the protagonists in the novel – Zangrando too has connections to both South Tyrol and Berlin – though he distances himself from the characters themselves.<sup>503</sup>

The borders Zangrando creates in *Amateurs* are fictionalised: he uses them as a way of challenging what he sees as the narrow way in which borders are perceived as purely geographical entities. In a newspaper interview following the publication of *Amateurs*, he positions the novel as a light-hearted yet significant contribution to discourse surrounding identity and belonging in South Tyrol, a debate which he suggests is generally too serious in tone:

A me il confine interessa come categoria esistenziale, in senso lato, non geografico. E nel racconto ho cercato di tematizzarlo in modo ironico e dissacrante. Le stesse origini bolzanine dei due personaggi, uno di madrelingua italiana e l'altro tedesca, rivestono sì un'importanza ai fini dello scioglimento finale, ma è un'importanza ben fragile che fa beffa della seriosità con cui simili questioni sono trattate ancora oggi in Alto Adige. Il centro dell'universo non è qui'.<sup>504</sup>

Zangrando does not make South Tyrol the centre of his fictional universe: the plot is set far away from the province, in Berlin. Nevertheless, the complexities of the province inform the novel's recurring themes of borders and isolation. Valentino's and Gerwin's common connection to South Tyrol – a border province – underpins both their friendship and their lonely shared predicament. By setting a fictional work with two South Tyrolean protagonists away from the province, Zangrando uses both the

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<sup>503</sup> Daniela Mimmi, 'Tra dilettanti dell'amore e principianti incompiuti', *Alto Adige*, 6 March 2016, p. 12.

<sup>504</sup> ('I'm interested in borders as an existential category, in a broad sense rather than a geographical one. In the story I've tried to focus on this in an ironic, discrediting manner. The shared Bolzano origins of the characters, one Italian-speaking and one German-speaking, do indeed take on an importance for the purposes of the denouement, but it is a rather fragile importance that mocks the seriousness with which similar questions are treated today in South Tyrol. The centre of the universe is not here [in South Tyrol]'). Mimmi, 'Tra dilettanti'.

creativity and distance offered by a fictional genre and the physical distance he creates from South Tyrol in the novel to offer a perspective on identity in the province which is shaped by South Tyrolean concerns but not limited by its geographical borders or the specificity of its situation.

In an interview in 2016 with a Trentino-based cultural magazine, Zangrando advocated a cross-border, multilingual approach to literature – inspired by the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion – which offered a critical perspective on the whole region and was independent from political discourse. He uses the struggles of Italian-speaking South Tyrolean Valentino and German-speaking South Tyrolean Gerwin as a fictional embodiment of why a more cross-border, multilingual approach to identity formation in South Tyrol is necessary.

Much of the novel's action occurs over two days in late April and early May 2002.

Valentino and Gerwin share various experiences: going to a restaurant; embarking on a night out in Berlin; observing the *Walpurgisnacht* celebrations<sup>505</sup> and witnessing a Labour Day demonstration before watching a performance of Gerhard Hauptmann's play *Die Weber*. The novel is underpinned by the unsuccessful love lives of the two protagonists: Gerwin's infatuation with 'Lisa', seemingly a woman he has never met but appears to contact constantly, and Valentino's apparent obsession with an actress he has seen in a video. Towards the end of the novel, it is suggested to the reader that Valentino and Gerwin appear to have fallen in love with the same woman. In the novel's final pages, however, it is suggested that 'Lisa' is in fact an alter ego created by Gerwin's

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<sup>505</sup> *Walpurgisnacht* is a night when witches are said to hold a wild celebration and await the arrival of spring. It features prominently in German literature, most notably in Goethe's *Faust*, which is quoted at the beginning of *Amateurs*. In modern times, *Walpurgisnacht* has come to mark the start of left-wing riots in Berlin. The beginnings of these riots are described in *Amateurs*.

housemate Alain, who is seemingly in love with Gerwin. The suggestion of deception at the end of the novel is typical of two naïve characters who lack any clear sense of identity or affinity with anything or anyone.

Zangrando explained that the book's title reflects the characters' collective inexperience in love, life and socialising, describing Valentino and Gerwin as 'dilettanti della vita [...] [e] dilettanti dell'amore'.<sup>506</sup> He said that *Dilettanti* was in fact the provisional title of the novel but that by having a non-Italian title he preserved 'un'ambiguità alla quale non volevo rinunciare'.<sup>507</sup> Zangrando asserted that he adapted the title from the German word 'Amateure'. Nevertheless, the decision to use what appears to be an English title rather than a German or Italian one may also reflect an attempt on his part to move beyond the German-Italian dichotomy with which Valentino and Gerwin struggle throughout the novel.

Though Zangrando stresses the need to move away from conceiving of borders in purely geographical terms, his protagonists Valentino and Gerwin have nevertheless been shaped by living on geographical borders, owing to their common connection to South Tyrol. Gerwin grew up in the province until he was thirteen before moving to Munich due to his father's job. Meanwhile Valentino still lives in South Tyrol. The two men first met on an overseas study placement in Barcelona, despite having grown up in Bolzano at the same time. Zangrando here hints at the divided society of the 1980s that forms the focus of the previous chapter of this thesis. The character of Valentino recalls how

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<sup>506</sup> ('amateurs in life [and] [...] amateurs in love'). Mimmi, 'Tra dilettanti'.

<sup>507</sup> ('an ambiguity that I didn't want to give up'). Gabriele Di Luca, review of Stefano Zangrando, *Amateurs* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2016), in *salto.bz*, [http://www.edizionalphabeta.it/142/Public/rassegna-stampa2/16-03-06\\_amateurs\\_salto.pdf](http://www.edizionalphabeta.it/142/Public/rassegna-stampa2/16-03-06_amateurs_salto.pdf) [accessed 24 April 2021].

Gerwin moved in primarily German-speaking circles from which he, as an Italian speaker, felt entirely excluded.<sup>508</sup>

Freed from the divisions of the province's monolingual school system, the two protagonists become friends as young adults away from South Tyrol, finding that their shared uncertainty over their respective places in the world offers a common ground that transcends their differing mother tongues. Even when away from South Tyrol, however, their identities are still shaped by their links to the province. The novel is narrated by Valentino and begins with the reunion of the two protagonists at a Berlin airport as Valentino travels from South Tyrol to spend a few days with Gerwin in the German capital. They then go out for a meal, during which they reflect on their lives on the borders of society before going in search of a night out.

The atmosphere surrounding Valentino and Gerwin in *Amateurs* is one of transition: from youth to adulthood; from one millennium to another and from the old world of the weavers in *Die Weber* to the new world of technology, a development emphasised by Gerwin's obsession with his mobile phone. Yet Zangrando shows both men to be unable to manage this generational transition. As Valentino himself points out early in the novel at the restaurant in Berlin, they are '*Grenzmenschen* [...] due giovani uomini sul confine di tutto, né ragazzi né adulti'.<sup>509</sup> The fact that the Italian-speaking Valentino uses the German term *Grenzmenschen* not only suggests that their position on various borders has become a defining feature of their identities, it also shows how the protagonists are required to negotiate between the German- and Italian-speaking

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<sup>508</sup> Stefano Zangrando, *Amateurs* (Meran: AlphaBeta, 2016), p. 9.

<sup>509</sup> ('border dwellers [...] two young men on the border of everything, neither kids nor adults'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 30.

worlds – a specifically South Tyrolean problem – as part of their efforts to establish a more secure sense of belonging.

The borders on which Valentino and Gerwin live can be broadly divided into two types: spatial and temporal. Temporal borders are apparent throughout *Amateurs*: the two protagonists unsuccessfully try to straddle two generations as they struggle to cope with the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century and cannot adapt to a world which is evolving around them.

Spatial borders manifest themselves visually and in various different places during the novel: on the bus; in a nightclub; in the toilets and on the street. Even when surrounded by people, Valentino and Gerwin seem to be somehow apart. Zangrando uses their uneasy bus journey to Berlin's city centre to represent visually their spatial isolation.

The pair struggle to find a place to sit as they seek out a party in the city:

Nell'autobus non c'erano posti a sedere – gli altri passeggeri non avevano l'aria di *viveur* in procinto di passare una serata fuori, piuttosto di pensionati assennati o lavoratori al rientro dal turno –, così restammo in piedi nello spazio centrale riservato alle carrozzine.<sup>510</sup>

Zangrando places Valentino and Gerwin in the wrong place at the wrong time, juxtaposing their desperate desire for a party with the weariness of the workers, exhausted after a long day. Although tired, these workers have a purpose: they are sitting down at the end of their shifts. Conversely, Valentino and Gerwin find themselves standing up and purposeless, with no-one sharing their desire for a night out. Whereas their fellow passengers are returning to their homes, a concrete symbol of

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<sup>510</sup> ('On the bus there weren't any places to sit. The other passengers didn't have the air of vibrancy that comes before a night out. Rather, they had the air of sleepy pensioners or workers on the way home at the end of their shifts. We therefore remained on our feet, standing in the central place reserved for prams/ wheelchairs'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 37.

belonging, they have a less definite destination, simply 'fuori' ('outside'). Valentino is an Italian speaker in the German capital many miles from his South Tyrolean homeland, whereas German-speaking South Tyrolean Gerwin appears equally directionless, despite living in Berlin himself.

The impression that the pair are living on various symbolic borders is strengthened by their decision to occupy a place reserved for prams or wheelchairs. Although they are said to occupy 'the central space', in every other sense they exist on the margins.

Mindful that their lack of purpose precludes them from identifying with workers returning home, while their relative youth distinguishes them from sleepy pensioners, Valentino and Gerwin decide to occupy a space reserved for groups to which they clearly also do not belong. Instead of a sense of youthful exuberance, there is a restlessness precipitated by their uncertain identity on the borders of society: they stand awkwardly in the wrong place, isolated from those around them. The situation created by Zangrando is so incongruous that it becomes comedic, reflecting his previously stated desire to explore the challenges posed by borders in a light-hearted manner which stands in stark contrast to the excessively serious way in which he believes they are often treated in South Tyrol.

Later in the novel, Zangrando develops the theme of spatial isolation in a different setting, a nightclub, as Valentino and Gerwin attempt to enjoy the party they were so desperate to find. Zangrando once more uses the theme of Valentino's and Gerwin's shared social isolation for comedic effect. Upon arrival at the club, Valentino exclaims 'oddio la techno',<sup>511</sup> yet enters anyway, providing further evidence that he is alienated

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<sup>511</sup> ('Oh my God, techno music'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 67.

from youth culture. Shortly afterwards, Valentino's isolation is complete as he leaves Gerwin's side to retreat still further to the margins of the room: 'In ogni caso presi con me il gin tonic, mi allontanai dal bar [...] e mi misi a ballonzolare ai margini della pista'.<sup>512</sup> Similarly to Valentino's awkwardness on the bus, the image of him dancing alone to music he appears to dislike is so incongruous as to be comedic. It also hints at his difficulties in finding a sense of belonging, a common theme amongst many of the fictional protagonists discussed in this chapter. Rather than leaving the club or finding a music genre more suited to his tastes, Valentino doggedly persists in trying to fit in with the techno music, a symbol of a youth culture of which he is no longer a part.

Throughout the novel, Zangrando continues to put Valentino and Gerwin in farcical situations to make telling points on identity and belonging. Amidst the chaos of a night out in Berlin, Valentino consoles himself by commenting to Gerwin: 'se non altro qui si è al centro delle cose [...] in Alto Adige un casino del genere te lo scordi'.<sup>513</sup> Valentino is freed from the apparent geographical and cultural isolation of South Tyrol, yet still seems lost in the centre of Berlin once these restrictions are removed and he finds himself outside the nightclub without Gerwin, a familiar and tangible link to South Tyrol.

A turning point in the novel is reached just over halfway through, when Zangrando shows Valentino abandoning restrictions of geographical and cultural borders in favour of a more existential approach. One way in which Valentino attempts this is by framing life, and in turn identity, as an act of destiny when talking to Gerwin:

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<sup>512</sup> ('In any case, I took my gin and tonic with me, distanced myself from the bar [...] and positioned myself on the edge of the dancefloor, where I bobbed around'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 68.

<sup>513</sup> ('Well, if not nothing else, we're in the centre of the action here. [...] You can forget any craziness like this happening in South Tyrol'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 96.

Prova per un momento a immaginarlo: se nulla fosse stato un caso, se tutti quei segni e quelle corrispondenze avessero avuto un senso, all'improvviso avremmo capito che esiste un destino. Tutto ci sarebbe apparso inserito in una trama più grande di noi, universale!<sup>514</sup>

However, although Valentino clearly adopts a more existential view here which moves beyond geographical and cultural borders, he retains an overwhelmingly passive approach. By insinuating that a force beyond his control is responsible for 'everything', he absolves himself of the need to shape his own sense of identity and belonging.

This invoking of a higher power represents the last stage of his fruitless search for a sense of belonging defined by others rather than by himself. Initially, at the beginning of the novel, he alluded to his obsession with the woman he had seen in a music video. He then looks to Gerwin for a sense of belonging, as shown by his panic when alone outside the nightclub. Once it becomes apparent that Gerwin is no more purposeful than him, Valentino is shown to ponder the notion of destiny as a means of moving beyond the restrictive borders on which he lives. He resolves his earlier concern that his presence in the world didn't make sense by imagining that this meaning has already been ordained for him. However, the use of the pluperfect subjunctive tense here – 'se nulla fosse stato un caso' – implies that he is engaging in self-deception and that this scenario merely provides a temporary escape from the reality of having to determine his own identity by navigating the complexities of his South Tyrolean heritage.

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<sup>514</sup> ('Try to imagine it for a moment: if nothing had been a coincidence, if all these signs and these correspondences had had a meaning, suddenly we would have realised that there was such a thing as destiny. Everything would have appeared to be part of a drama greater than ourselves, a universal one!'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 103.

Shortly after this episode, Zangrando shows Valentino offering a deeper insight into the exact nature of the complexities of his South Tyrolean background and their effect on his and Gerwin's identity:

Nei nostri primi anni di vita eravamo stati un *cruccho* e un *Welsch*, due razze non propriamente in sintonia, e se adesso eravamo diventati qualcos'altro, qualcosa di più complesso, sradicato e compatibile, ciò era anche dovuto all'obliterazione delle nostre provenienze, alla rinuncia più o meno consapevole a una storia e una mitologia tramandate, alla loro sepoltura sotto strati di nuove appartenenze, nel caso di Gerwin, di fughe e tentativi alla cieca, nel mio. Un po' come un bianco e un nero in un film di fantascienza americano, ma un po' più bilingui.<sup>515</sup>

This extract is typical of Zangrando's light-hearted yet telling treatment of South Tyrol and its particularities throughout *Amateurs*. He addresses the specific difficulties posed by Valentino's and Gerwin's South Tyrolean backgrounds before concluding Valentino's internal monologue with a seemingly superficial comparison to an American science fiction film. However, the flippant tone of the last line belies the profundity of the preceding sentences. Valentino suggests that the only way in which both he and Gerwin have been able to handle their complex South Tyrolean connections is by ignoring them altogether, yet it is clear that their attempts to find their own place in society have conclusively failed.

Viewed in the context of these reflections on his identity, Valentino's subsequent contentment at being able to walk anonymously through the Kreuzberg district of Berlin

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<sup>515</sup> ('During the first years of our lives, we were seen as a *cruccho* (Gerwin) or a *Welsch* (Valentino), two races not really in harmony. And if now we had become something else, something more complex, displaced and compatible, this was also due to the obliteration of our origins, to the conscious or otherwise renouncement of a history and mythology that had been handed down. It was due to the burial [of this history and mythology] under layers of new affinities, in Gerwin's case, and running away and clueless attempts, in mine. A bit like a white person and a black person in an American science fiction film, but a bit more bilingual'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 121. *Cruccho* is a term used by Italians, often disparagingly, to refer to German speakers. *Welsch* is a variation of *Walsche*, a derogatory term used by German-speaking South Tyroleans to describe Italian speakers.

towards the end of the novel appears to be connected to his relief at not being seen to belong to one particular group or another:

Potersi mescolare agli altri esseri umani restando loro ignoto, vagare senza meta fra i loro ozi e consorzi, ma senza un ruolo preciso, una funzione: senza un'identità riconoscibile.<sup>516</sup>

Rather than being dismissively labelled *welsch*, as he was in his childhood, Valentino luxuriates in the ability to walk around Berlin without a precise role or a recognisable identity. However, the cost of this anonymity is a complete lack of purpose, as he wanders aimlessly, 'senza meta'.

As Valentino's previous reflections on his identity demonstrate, the complex interactions (or indeed lack of them) between South Tyrol's German and Italian-speaking communities are a key factor in his identity crisis. On the way to watch *Die Weber* with Gerwin, he states: 'Sto solo dicendo che trovarmi qui in mezzo, sul margine tra due situazioni, mi piace, no so perché, mi fa sentire al mio posto'.<sup>517</sup> When considered alongside his previous assertion that as children he and Gerwin were known as *crucco* (Gerwin) and *welsch* (Valentino), this quote could indicate that South Tyrol's cultural and linguistic divisions have made the adult Valentino reluctant to be part of one group or another, so as not to be ostracised or pigeon-holed. However, Zangrando's comedic accounts of Valentino's isolation on the bus and in the nightclub suggest that, when assessing the reasons for his identity crisis, the social and generational borders he

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<sup>516</sup> ('I could blend in with the other humans, remaining unknown to them, meandering aimlessly between them, but without a precise role, a function, without a recognisable identity'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 130.

<sup>517</sup> ('I was just saying that I like it, finding myself here in the middle, on the border between two situations. I don't know why, it makes me feel at home'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 145

has acquired as a hapless man in his late twenties should be considered alongside the cultural and linguistic borders he has inherited from his South Tyrolean background.

It is apparent that Gerwin too has encountered challenges due to his South Tyrolean upbringing, though, as with Valentino, these are exacerbated by his awkwardness in social situations throughout the novel. Nevertheless, his comments to Valentino prior to watching *Die Weber* – when he describes his difficulties in learning German at school in Bolzano – show the particular linguistic challenges he has encountered due to his South Tyrolean background: ‘Di questo dramma vidi una rappresentazione, una vita fa, sul canale teatrale del ZDF [...] Non ci capii niente! [...] vivevo ancora a Bolzano, avrò avuto tredici anni, andavo alla scuola media’.<sup>518</sup> Even as a German speaker living in Berlin, Gerwin’s linguistic integration is still hindered by his South Tyrolean connections.

Valentino’s difficulties in understanding *Die Weber* and Gerwin’s struggles when learning High German at school allow Zangrando to demonstrate how linguistic difficulties can also cause a sense of cultural alienation. It is therefore significant that one of the qualities which attracts Gerwin to ‘Lisa’ is her status as a ‘berlinese purosangue’<sup>519</sup> Gerwin views a relationship with ‘Lisa’, who has seemingly solid German roots, as the perfect opportunity for him to leave behind a life on the margins. Like Valentino, he looks to others to determine his identity on his behalf but remains stranded on both spatial and temporal borders throughout the novel. Gerwin’s South Tyrolean background may have precipitated his initial identity crisis. However, it is the way in which these pre-existing cultural and linguistic borders interact with the

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<sup>518</sup> (‘A lifetime ago I saw a performance of this play on the [West German] ZDF theatre channel [...] I didn’t understand any of it. [...] I was still living in Bolzano and would have been about thirteen, at middle school’). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 155.

<sup>519</sup> (‘a Berliner through and through’). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 12.

temporal and spatial borders that Gerwin later acquires himself which ultimately causes his identity crisis to escalate. As he comments to Valentino before watching *Die Weber*, they not only find themselves on a geographical border between ‘un paese e l’altro’ (‘one country and another’) but also on a temporal border between ‘un’età e l’altra’ (‘one era and another’).<sup>520</sup>

Zangrando demonstrates the specific interaction between temporal and spatial borders in his description of the Labour Day celebrations that Valentino and Gerwin encounter when walking to watch *Die Weber*:

[...] l’orchestrina della polizia suonava canzoni dei Beatles [...] Adesso alla nostra destra si dipartiva un lungo pannello alto circa un metro e mezzo che una sfilza di adolescenti, uno dopo l’altro, era dedita a imbrattare con bombolette spray. L’odore di vernice era forte.<sup>521</sup>

The aforementioned quotation juxtaposes the authority and experience implied by ‘l’orchestrina della polizia’ playing prepared Beatles songs on the one hand and the adolescents expressing themselves through freestyle graffiti on the other. Yet the scene also emphasises Gerwin’s and Valentino’s constant occupation of spatial and temporal borders. They are too old to take part in the rebellious adolescent graffiti spraying, yet also lack the authority associated with the police force. Spatially, they are both symbolically removed from the action and physically standing apart from it, not belonging to one group or another. Indeed, what brings them together is their common feeling of isolation and their shared pursuit of an unobtainable ‘woman’. Meanwhile Zangrando uses Gerwin’s constant checking of his phone to situate his examination of

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<sup>520</sup> Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 154.

<sup>521</sup> ([...] the police orchestra played Beatles songs. [...] Now, to our right, a big panel about a metre and a half long was coming away and a string of teenagers were lining up to graffiti it with spray cans, one after the other. The smell of varnish was strong’). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, p. 131.

identity construction clearly in the twenty-first century. An object meant to increase connectivity only succeeds in exacerbating his isolation, not only from the rest of the world but also from his close friend Valentino. In pursuing a secretive romantic relationship, Gerwin risks alienating one of his few genuine friends.

Although the atmosphere surrounding Valentino and Gerwin is one of transition, they occupy their own border away from this change. By the end of the novel, their efforts to overcome their overwhelming feelings of inadequacy risk isolating them from each other. Valentino's and Gerwin's borders are not all acquired, rather some are in place from the very start due to their shared South Tyrolean background. They are, inescapably, 'due *Grenzmenschen* [...] sul confine di tutto',<sup>522</sup> who therefore suffer from a sense of isolation which is exacerbated by their apparent social ineptitude. They are hapless, persuasive fictional advocates for the literature of the Euroregion advocated by Zangrando in which cross-border and cross-language interactions are embraced rather than avoided. Zangrando's exploration of such interactions in *Amateurs* overcomes the limits of politically imposed geographical borders. He intersperses his jocular examination of the universal difficulties of adulthood with fictional reflections on the specificities of South Tyrol's situation. He does so in a manner that acknowledges the particularities of the province while also gently mocking those who view cultural and linguistic interactions in South Tyrol from what he regards as a narrow, excessively serious perspective. In so doing, he creatively and light-heartedly advances the debate within the province on identity and belonging.

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<sup>522</sup> ('two border dwellers, on the border of everything'). Zangrando, *Amateurs*, pp. 29-30.

### 5.3 Identity and belonging in *La terra più del paradiso* (2008) by Roberta

#### Dapunt

Dapunt's poetry volume *La terra più del paradiso* (2008) represents a turning point in her career. Following the private publication of two Italian poetry collections in 1993 and 1999 respectively, the publication of *La terra più del paradiso* in 2008 by prominent Italian publisher Einaudi introduced her work to a wider audience beyond both the Ladin-speaking valleys and the province of South Tyrol. After its original publication in Italian (with Italian translations for the Ladin poems below the original Ladin text), a German translation was published by Folio under the title *Dies mehr als Paradies* in 2016. Folio is a German-speaking publisher with offices in Bolzano and Vienna, who state that they aim to encourage cross-border cultural exchange.<sup>523</sup> The German translation of *La terra più del paradiso* could be seen as forming part of this overriding mission. The original poems are given in Italian or Ladin, with the German translation on facing pages. The two Ladin poems in the collection were additionally translated into a South Tyrolean dialect of German, a choice made by the translators which situates the poems more specifically in both a rural Ladin and South Tyrolean context.

*La terra più del paradiso* was followed by three further volumes of poetry: *Nauz* (2012, Folio) and the two Italian collections *Le beatitudini della malattia* (2013, Einaudi) and *Sincope* (2018, Einaudi). The publication of *Nauz* – discussed in detail in Chapter Two – was particularly significant as it was Dapunt's first Ladin poetry volume.<sup>524</sup> The

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<sup>523</sup> 'Über uns', Folio Verlag, <https://www.folioverlag.com/Der-Verlag/UEber-uns/> [accessed 5 April 2021].

<sup>524</sup> Dapunt had some individual Ladin poems published by local Ladin organisations between 1999 and 2002, but *Nauz* represented her first full volume of Ladin poetry, and the first time any of her Ladin poetry had been published by a mainstream, non-Ladin publisher.

collection was published by Folio in 2012: the original Ladin poems and the German translations were arranged on facing pages, while the volume also included a collection of black-and-white photos depicting rural Ladin life. The consistent use of the Ladin dialect of Val Badia in *Nauz* enables Dapunt to analyse the precise interplay between location, identity and language in a more sustained way than in *La terra più del paradiso*, which instead focuses on conveying the specificity of rural Ladin identity formation to an audience beyond the Ladin valleys.

Neither the title of *La terra più del paradiso*, nor the blurb introducing it on Einaudi's website, make any reference to Dapunt's Ladin background. Instead, the blurb highlights only that, unlike many writers, she is not from a city, before describing her work as among the most interesting in contemporary Italian poetry.<sup>525</sup> Dapunt, who was little known beyond her home province at the time of publication, therefore takes on the role of cultural and linguistic mediator herself: after outlining the particular nature of identity and belonging in the Ladin valleys in the early part of the volume, she then additionally addresses broader social and political issues which affect the whole of Italy, notably the topic of immigration.

Dapunt has not only mediated between cultures and languages in her own poetry throughout her career, she has also done so with the work of others, as shown by her translation into Italian of a poetry collection by the German-speaking South Tyrolean author Georg Paulmichl.

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<sup>525</sup> 'Roberta Dapunt: "La terra più del paradiso", Einaudi, <https://www.einaudi.it/catalogo-libri/poesia-e-teatro/poesia/la-terra-piu-del-paradiso-roberta-dapunt-9788806185831/> [accessed 20 November 2020].

In *La terra più del paradiso*, Dapunt uses poetry in a highly distinctive manner to explore the themes of identity and belonging. For her, it is a means of making sense of confusion: her poems mediate between conflicting desires and feelings. Dapunt remarked in an interview upon the contrast which struck her in her youth between the impression of certainty given to the reader by a finished, professionally published poem and the blank page and sense of solitude which confronts the writer before they begin their work.<sup>526</sup> *La terra più del paradiso* begins to bridge this gap, exploring how the creative process of poetry writing interacts with the ritualistic tasks of rural life to create a sense of quiet contentment. Dapunt places great emphasis on simplicity, concision and the importance of daily tasks in her poetry, articulating her dislike of lengthy works and unnecessarily elevated poetic language and concepts.<sup>527</sup> These preferences are reflected in *La terra più del paradiso*, where each poem is contained on a single page and none are longer than twenty-six lines. Rather than using 'alti concetti'<sup>528</sup> ('elevated concepts') to imbue her poems with meaning, Dapunt articulates the sense of belonging and purpose that arises from the deceptive simplicity of everyday rural tasks.

While the poems cannot be read as being entirely autobiographical, the role of rural tasks in Dapunt's own life nevertheless offers an insight into the specific treatment of identity and belonging in *La terra più del paradiso*. Dapunt lives on the farm in Val Badia which her husband inherited from his family. As part of the legal terms of the inheritance, her husband was obliged to assume management of the farm himself,

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<sup>526</sup> Maria Quinz, 'Sincope: conversazione con "la poeta" Roberta Dapunt', *Franz Magazine*, 5 February 2019, <https://franzmagazine.com/2019/02/05/sincope-conversazione-con-la-poeta-roberta-dapunt/> [accessed 20 November 2020].

<sup>527</sup> Quinz, 'Sincope'.

<sup>528</sup> Quinz, 'Sincope'.

meaning that both he and Dapunt took on the rural tasks associated with farm management. Though Dapunt had grown up nearby, she did not have a background in farm work.<sup>529</sup> One might see the inheritance of the farm as offering a *raison d'être* which was thrust upon Dapunt, rather than being consciously chosen. *La terra più del paradiso* could therefore be read as a written means of negotiating between the creative impulses of poetry writing and the practicalities of everyday rural work on the farm. She has stated that the volume's title came from a sense that nature is already a form of earthly paradise in itself.<sup>530</sup> Through the act of writing poetry, she gives the natural world a sense of agency which is integral to the exploration of identity and belonging in the collection.

There is a marked development in how these themes are addressed in the course of *La terra più del paradiso*. In the early part of the volume, the Italian poems such as 'mie mani'<sup>531</sup> and 'penitenziale'<sup>532</sup> focus on how the speaker struggles to come to terms with the restrictive and often bleak isolation of their immediate surroundings. There is a strong sense of place in each poem, yet also discomfort at feeling physically and creatively trapped. The two Ladin poems near the middle of the collection suggest an equally strong sense of place, but without the restrictiveness and frustration expressed in the preceding Italian poems. Key themes evoked here are closeness with nature and harmony with the world.

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<sup>529</sup> Birgit Veit, 'Gedichte vom Heu, vom Sterben und von den Tieren', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 13 December 2017, <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/gedichte-vom-heu-vom-sterben-und-von-den-tieren-id.1335893?reduced=true> [accessed 20 November 2020].

<sup>530</sup> 'La Casa della Poesia', *Europa in Versi 2013 – Roberta Dapunt*, online video recording, YouTube, 28 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9WVNWwYDus> [accessed 25 November 2020].

<sup>531</sup> ('my hands').

<sup>532</sup> ('penitential').

The inclusion of the poem ‘credo’<sup>533</sup> towards the end of the collection retains the emphasis of ‘Te chësc lüch’<sup>534</sup> on harmony. However, while ‘Te chësc lüch’ assumes an almost whimsical tone and is focused on the specific local relationship between humans and nature in the Ladin valleys, ‘credo’ uses more shocking imagery, focusing on relationships between humans and broadening its scope geographically, linguistically and culturally. In so doing, ‘credo’ demonstrates a wider sense of identification with a world beyond the borders of Val Badia, South Tyrol and Italy by referring to topical social and political issues, most notably the increasing number of immigrants in Italy. Here, the focus of the speaker is less on how their own identity can be defined, as in ‘Te chësc lüch’, and rather on how the identity of others should be perceived.

At first sight, the two Ladin poems appear to juxtapose the brutality of rural life with its beauty: this is already indicated in the two titles, ‘tëmp de maza’ (‘Slaughtering time’) and ‘Te chësc lüch’ (‘on this farm’).<sup>535</sup> However, it is soon apparent that the slaughtered animals in ‘tëmp de maza’ are afforded the same respect by the speaker as is given to the natural world in ‘Te chësc lüch’. The two poems do not contradict each other. Rather, when read together, they demonstrate the full scope of rural life, articulating how the particular geographical isolation of Val Badia and the other Ladin valleys has given animals and nature a very particular role in the formation of identity in Ladin communities.

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<sup>533</sup> (‘I believe’).

<sup>534</sup> (‘On this farm’).

<sup>535</sup> When discerning the meaning of the two Ladin poems in *La terra più del paradiso*, I have always worked from the original work in the Val Badia Ladin dialect, using an online bilingual Val Badia-German dictionary provided by the Ladin cultural institute Micurá de Rù where necessary to resolve any ambiguities. ‘Suche Gadertalisch – Deutsch’, *Micurá de Rù*, <https://www.micura.it/de/woerterbuecher/vb/ldplus> [accessed 17 June 2021].

In ‘Te chësc lüch’, nature is shown as offering the Ladins a sense of purpose. It is the only poem in the whole collection to mention the Ladin people by name (‘Jënt ladina’).<sup>536</sup> Though there is no explicit reference to the Ladin people in ‘tëmp de maza’, there is a clear sense of ritual and a feeling that the slaughter of an animal, though unavoidably bloody, is nevertheless as much a part of the local Ladin human identity as the surrounding natural landscape.

In the German translation of *La terra più del paradiso*, the poems originally written in Italian are only translated into High German, whereas the two Ladin poems are additionally translated into a South Tyrolean German dialect – the local dialect of the rural German-speaking village of Stilfs in the Vinschgau valley.<sup>537</sup> Though the translation of *La terra più del paradiso* was a separate project with which Dapunt herself was not involved, the translators’ decision to use a rural German South Tyrolean dialect gives the reader a palpable sense of the importance of local dialects as a key part of expressing rural, local identities across the province. Furthermore, though Stilfs is located on the other side of South Tyrol from Dapunt’s home hamlet of Ciaminades, both places share a strong emphasis on local identity, rural rituals and the Catholic Church, all of which are key themes in *La terra più del paradiso*.<sup>538</sup>

In response to a question at a poetry reading about what single image she most associates with her Ladin-speaking homeland, Dapunt responded that what came to

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<sup>536</sup> Roberta Dapunt, ‘Te chësc lüch’, in *La terra più del paradiso* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), p. 20, l. 5.

<sup>537</sup> Roberta Dapunt, ‘fock o’stechn’ and ‘Af deïn houf’, in *Dies mehr als Paradies*, trans. by Khatuna Arshaulidze and others (Bolzano: Folio, 2016), pp. 45 and 51.

<sup>538</sup> Marta Villa, ‘Identità e riconoscimento attraverso i culti della fertilità e il paesaggio agricolo nel Tirolo del Sud. Il case study della popolazione giovane maschile di Stilfs in Vinschgau’, in *A Land on the Threshold: South Tyrolean Transformations 1915-2015*, ed. by Georg Grote and Hannes Obermair (Oxford: Lang, 2017), pp. 287-303.

mind was in fact more of a sound. She talked of the local Ladin farmers she had met and how their use of language represented a contradiction: on the one hand nothing was left unsaid when they spoke, yet there were also long periods of silence, partly brought about by the solitary nature of their rural work.<sup>539</sup> Throughout the collection, what seems to be silence in fact enables a deeper connection with the quiet movements of the natural world: in the first line of the collection's first poem, entitled 'Mai come ora', the speaker reflects on the necessity of silence: 'Mai come ora mi fu necessario il silenzio'.<sup>540</sup> Silence is not presented in *La terra più del paradiso* as a barrier to finding an identity, but as an integral part of the process. Dapunt combines written and visual depictions of silence with the specific performative, oral quality of poetry to emphasise how a sense of belonging is not derived solely from the natural landscape of Val Badia itself, but rather from the specific way in which the local residents of the valley engage with both their own language and the world around them to develop a harmonious relationship with nature.

As well as offering a distinct sense of belonging, nature influences the creative act of writing poetry itself. Whereas the Ladin poem 'Vers ladin'<sup>541</sup> in the volume *Nauz* (2012) can be interpreted as a reflection on the linguistic challenges of writing poetry in Ladin, the Italian poems 'mie mani' and 'nelle silenziose ore'<sup>542</sup> in *La terra più del paradiso* explore the effect of the Ladin landscape on writing poetry. Read together, they illuminate both the interactions between nature and creativity and the effect of these

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<sup>539</sup> PalazzoRoberti, *Roberta Dapunt: 'Ampio dire sono queste parole' – Resistere, 17 giugno 2018*, online video recording, YouTube, 26 July 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_YuKLOP8II](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_YuKLOP8II) [accessed 25 November 2020].

<sup>540</sup> ('Now more than ever, I am in need of silence'). Dapunt, 'Mai come ora', in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 3, l. 1.

<sup>541</sup> ('Ladin poem').

<sup>542</sup> ('in the silent hours')

interactions on the speakers' sense of belonging. In 'mie mani', their hands are empty, symbolising a lack of inspiration. The coldness of the snow and fog outside contrasts with the warmth of the room in which the speaker is writing, yet the lack of visibility in the surrounding landscape seems to have also clouded their ability to think. The notion of their hands being open as well as empty when writing poetry – 'mani aperte, mie mani vuote'<sup>543</sup> – suggests that the act of writing is not simply a way of filling the time between their rural tasks on the farm, it fills a gap in their identity.

'nelle silenziose ore' evokes the contradictory interactions between nature and poetry. It appears that the natural surroundings are limiting the speaker's ability to write fluently: the silent isolation of the landscape results in a dearth of creativity. However, towards the middle of the poem, they seem to accept that describing the beauty of the landscape in exalted tones does not come naturally anyway. This suggests that rather than being in competition with each other, there is a kind of synthesis between the natural world and the speaker. By learning to accept the patterns of nature and conveying both periods of silence and intense activity, they gradually articulate a sense of belonging.

The Ladin poems in *La terra più del paradiso* convey a spirit of harmony between poetry writing, language, nature, and a sense of belonging. In 'Te chësc lüch', the boundaries between people and nature become blurred: the Ladin people are said to 'flower' when interacting with the natural surroundings.<sup>544</sup> Nature is therefore an essential component of their identity. The act of caring for nature offers the speaker a purpose

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<sup>543</sup> ('open hands, my empty hands'). Dapunt, 'mie mani', in *La terra più paradiso*, p. 5, l. 6.

<sup>544</sup> Dapunt, 'Te chësc lüch', in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 20, l. 3.

and a strong sense of belonging. The treatment of time in 'Te chësc lüch' is especially pertinent. Tending to nature is presented as part of their future ('dagnì'),<sup>545</sup> rather than as a rural relic of the past.

By contrast, in the Italian poem 'penitenziale', the speaker takes a backward-looking perspective dominated by regrets: 'Mi dolgo' ('I regret') is placed prominently at the beginning of each sentence and the enjambement of the intervening lines implies that the act of writing poetry has prompted an outpouring of emotion that has previously been bottled up. The poem reads like a prayer and appears almost confessional, an effect that is strengthened by the reference to 'peccati' ('sins') in the first line.<sup>546</sup> The speaker seems to regret the distance they feel between themselves and nature, stating 'mi dolgo [...] / di non essere pianta di questo luogo',<sup>547</sup> before lamenting their inability to express their regret adequately through poetry. In 'Te chësc lüch', by contrast, the distance between the speaker and nature has evaporated, as though the act of writing in the Ladin dialect of Val Badia has brought them closer together. Moreover, there is no explicit reference to writing poetry, as if writing in Ladin has provided a creative energy which has transformed it from a conscious effort into a natural process.

Nature takes on a kind of spiritual role in 'Te chësc lüch', as though mediating between the speaker and God. The mental barriers that are encountered in 'penitenziale' – '[i miei] confini / [...] [gli] spazi angusti nella mente'<sup>548</sup> – seem to be overcome in 'Te chësc lüch' by the act of looking into the natural world in the distance.<sup>549</sup> Nature offers a

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<sup>545</sup> Dapunt, 'Te chësc lüch', in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 20, l. 1.

<sup>546</sup> Dapunt, 'penitenziale', in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 9, l. 1.

<sup>547</sup> ('I regret not being planted in this place'). Dapunt, 'penitenziale', in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 9, l. 7.

<sup>548</sup> ('[my] borders / [...] [the] restricted spaces of my mind'). Dapunt, 'penitenziale', in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 9, ll. 3-4.

<sup>549</sup> Dapunt, 'Te chësc lüch', in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 20, l. 6.

tangible visual outlet for the creative impulses of the speaker. The spiritual uncertainty of Italian poems such as ‘di ritorno dalla stalla’ earlier in the collection – ‘Sei tu Dio?’<sup>550</sup> (‘Are you God?’) – develops into the spiritual harmony present in ‘Te chësc lüch’, which offers a secure sense of belonging.

There are similarly explicit references to spirituality and a sense of faith in ‘credo’, an Italian poem placed towards the end of the collection which particularly criticises what is presented as the indifferent attitude of people all over Italy towards the plight of immigrants. The spiritual focus is most obviously shown by the regular repetition of ‘credo’ (‘I believe’) at the beginning of each line. However, rather than being used to forge a deeper connection between the speaker and their local Ladin surroundings, as in ‘di ritorno dalla stalla’ and ‘Te chësc lüch’, the theme of spirituality in ‘credo’ is used to place the poem in a broader socio-political context far beyond the Ladin valleys. For example, its description of immigrants as ‘angeli senza ali’<sup>551</sup> (‘angels without wings’) suggests that looking after fellow humans is as much a part of living a Christian life as the Church services that are referred to in ‘di ritorno dalla stalla’. Much like ‘penitenziale’, it is prayer-like in its repetition, but uses this repetition to address a political, topical issue far removed from the local focus of ‘Te chësc lüch’. Like ‘penitenziale’, ‘credo’ outlines a sense of identity but takes a more positive approach by expressing what the speaker believes in rather than what they regret. It shows how both words and nature can cause suffering: some immigrants drown in their attempts to reach Italy by boat, while those who do arrive are branded ‘illegal’ the next day.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Dapunt, ‘di ritorno dalla stalla’, in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 8, l. 2.

<sup>551</sup> Dapunt, ‘credo’, in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 34, l. 17.

<sup>552</sup> Dapunt, ‘credo’, in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 34, l. 14.

However, 'credo' also demonstrates how both a sense of spirituality and a creative use of language with connotations of inclusivity can combine to create a more global form of identity which is politically and socially aware.

When reading 'credo' together with the collection's penultimate poem 'esilio in Corpus Domini',<sup>553</sup> it is possible to see an emerging model of how language, nature, spirituality, and the act of writing poetry can all interact to create an identity which is sufficiently well-defined to offer a sense of belonging, without being so specific in terms of time or place as to become either restrictive for the speaker (as in 'penitenziale') or unwelcoming to outsiders (as is alluded to in 'credo'). In 'credo', this rejection of a narrow sense of identity is strengthened by numerous references to embracing diversity and an emphasis on accepting people regardless of their skin colour. The poem can be viewed as a creative means of decreasing the distance between the plight of immigrants and the comparatively privileged lives of Italians. It addresses the theme of isolation, common to the whole collection, in a distinctive way. Rather than an introspective focus on the isolation of the speaker themselves, as in the Italian poems 'mie mani' and 'penitenziale', there is a clear outward focus on ensuring that others do not feel a sense of isolation when arriving as immigrants in Italy for the first time.

'esilio in Corpus Domini' adds an additional layer of complexity to the theme of isolation, suggesting that the speaker does not identify entirely as an 'insider', even when in familiar surroundings. In the poem, they describe how they are both in nature and apart from it, in exile in their homeland: 'In mezzo agli alberi, dentro all'erba, sotto i

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<sup>553</sup> ('in exile in the body of Christ').

fiori,/io sono la zolla staccata dei campi coltivati.’<sup>554</sup> Significantly, Dapunt references this phrase when defining her own identity in an interview in 2019:

In uno dei miei versi ho scritto che sono la zolla staccata dei campi coltivati. Continuo ad esserlo. Ciononostante per ogni espressione, così per la poesia, ci vogliono una persona, un tempo e un luogo.<sup>555</sup>

The act of writing poetry provides a clear sense of ‘persona’ (person), ‘tempo’ (time), and ‘luogo’ (place) in *La terra più del paradiso*, which combine to create a sense of belonging from what appears to be a position of isolation. In ‘esilio in Corpus Domini’, the image of an isolated clump of earth detached from carefully cultivated fields suggests that the speaker has made isolation a virtue of their identity. The poem combines the local focus of ‘Te chësc lüch’ with the global perspective of ‘credo’. There is still the same sense of isolation as at the start of the volume, but here the speaker has come to terms both with their situation and with the contradictions that inform their sense of identity and belonging. ‘esilio in Corpus Domini’ brings together the competing impulses which recur throughout *La terra più del paradiso*: the balance between familiarity and unfamiliarity; freedom and restrictiveness; silence and noise; a mental writing block and a desire for creativity.

By referring to ‘la zolla staccata dei campi coltivati’ (‘the clump of earth detached from the cultivated fields’), the speaker defines for the first time a sense of belonging which is linked to, yet not restricted by, their connections to Val Badia. The image, placed within a poem entitled ‘esilio in Corpus Domini’, also has clear religious connotations:

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<sup>554</sup> (‘amidst the trees, within the grass, below the flowers,/I am the clump of earth detached from the cultivated fields.’) Dapunt, ‘esilio in Corpus Domini’, in *La terra più del paradiso*, p. 48, l. 12.

<sup>555</sup> (‘In one of my verses, I’ve written that I am the clump of earth detached from the cultivated fields and this is what I continue to be. Nevertheless, for every form of expression, including poetry, one needs a person, a time and a place’). Quinz, ‘Sincope’.

the cultivated fields could be seen as a metaphor for the elaborate spiritual celebrations undertaken by the Catholic Church. Viewed in this light, we could see the notion of 'la zolla staccata dei campi coltivati' as a sign of how the speaker has found a simple, personal sense of spirituality in nature that is separate from the formal and ornate Catholic services held in Val Badia. The idea of being in exile 'in Corpus Domini' hints at how, unlike Valentino's whimsical talk of destiny in *Amateurs*, spirituality has ultimately provided the speaker with a personal sense of belonging which exists independently of a specific time, place and language. They may be devoid of human company, but they have deliberately chosen to be surrounded by nature.

It is significant that the poem 'esilio in Corpus Domini', along with its image of an isolated clump of earth detached from carefully cultivated fields, is alluded to by Dapunt not only in an interview eleven years after the publication of *La terra più del paradiso*, but also in an open letter she wrote to Kaser in 2009 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of his 'Brixner Rede'. One of the primary themes of Dapunt's letter concerns how South Tyrolean literature should be defined. Early on, she writes to Kaser: 'ti rispondo con scrittura italiana, da pensiero ladino, da lettura di te risolta in tedesco'.<sup>556</sup> Through this description, Dapunt positions herself as someone who mediates between all three of South Tyrol's communities, further emphasising how the work she writes in Italian is underpinned by her Ladin background. This position of cultural and linguistic mediator is strengthened by her decision to translate the Ladin poems of *La terra più del paradiso* and *Nauz* into Italian herself. The act of translation from Ladin to Italian

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<sup>556</sup> ('I respond to you writing in Italian, influenced by Ladin thoughts about your work written in German'). Roberta Dapunt, 'Una lettera a Norbert Conrad Kaser', *Nazione Indiana*, <https://www.nazioneindiana.com/2018/02/15/lettera-norbert-kaser/> [accessed 26 November 2020].

therefore does not involve one person reflecting the creativity of another in a different cultural and linguistic context, but rather the same person (Dapunt) articulating her own sense of identity and belonging in a language which, though not her mother tongue, has nevertheless partially shaped her life in South Tyrol.

Dapunt's aforementioned image of the isolated clump of earth detached from cultivated fields is therefore imbued with a deeper meaning when read in the whole context of her letter to Kaser, where she engages on a personal level with her own cultural, linguistic and spiritual background. The clump of earth can be seen not so much as a symbol of unwanted isolation, but rather as a consciously chosen vantage point linked to but nevertheless separate from a single community, which enables Dapunt to reflect fully the diverse influences that have shaped her sense of identity and belonging. In many ways, a similar metaphor could be used to articulate what constitutes South Tyrolean literature, a question Dapunt considers in her letter to Kaser. The notion of a perspective linked to, but distinctly separate from, a particular community in South Tyrol can describe all three creative literary works discussed in this chapter.

Dapunt's poetry and her references to the act of writing poetry in both interviews and in the poems themselves are notable for how they present identity formation as a creative process in which both reading poetry out loud and prolonged periods of silence are of equal importance. Throughout *La terra più del paradiso*, Dapunt articulates a sense of identity and belonging which encompasses nature, spirituality, a sense of familiarity, and rural tasks. These are distilled into a series of complex yet concise images which can only be fully understood by both reading the finished poems out loud

and by acknowledging the written and unwritten silences in the collection. The reader finishes the process referred to by Dapunt – ‘La poesia deve ascoltare prima ancora di essere ascoltata’<sup>557</sup> – as they hear both the sounds and the silence which inspired the poetry.

The act of writing and being heard are in themselves part of identity formation: it is only once the poems of *La terra più del paradiso* are assembled and heard together that they can be fully understood. Dapunt uses the concise creativity of poetry and its oral, performative quality to bridge the gap she found so perplexing as a child between the single blank page that the writer starts with and the finished volume seen by the reader.

## Conclusion

All the works analysed in this chapter are united by a shared recognition that South Tyrol’s status as a multilingual border region with a multitude of competing cultural and linguistic influences complicates the formation of coherent narratives concerning identity and belonging. *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* and *Amateurs* both feature protagonists who feel isolated, an isolation which is to varying extents connected to their complex cultural, linguistic and familial ties to South Tyrol. A sense that the protagonists’ conflicted identity exacerbates their social isolation is a common feature across the two novels. In *Stillbach*, Emma, Ines and Clara feel as though they are foreigners in Rome despite their official status as Italian citizens. In *Amateurs*,

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<sup>557</sup> (‘Poetry must listen even before being listened to’). Quinz, ‘Sincope’.

Valentino's and Gerwin's connections to South Tyrol emphasise their sense of social, linguistic, cultural and generational isolation.

The protagonists of *Stillbach* and *Amateurs* are united by a shared sense of dissatisfaction concerning their inability to find a secure sense of identity and belonging. The situation is reversed in Dapunt's *La terra più del paradiso*, where the poems grapple with the concrete, highly local sense of identity offered by the Ladin valleys. The protagonists of the novels yearn for cultural and linguistic familiarity as they travel away from South Tyrol, yet this familiarity is precisely what can become suffocating in some of Dapunt's poems.

Each of the works discussed in this chapter engages with the protagonists' respective difficulties in maintaining an identity which is sufficiently specific to ensure a clear sense of belonging while being adaptable enough to avoid isolation from those around them. In exploring the various social, linguistic, cultural and generational difficulties encountered by their protagonists, Gruber, Zangrando and Dapunt join Langer and Vassalli<sup>558</sup> in enriching the debate on identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol.

Comparing the response to Gruber's, Zangrando's and Dapunt's works in the twenty-first century with the reception of Joseph Zoderer's novel *Die Walsche* in 1982 reveals a significant shift in discourse concerning creative fictional works in South Tyrol. Whereas *Die Walsche* provoked a polarised response, *Stillbach* in particular was praised for its exploration of complex aspects of South Tyrol's history.

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<sup>558</sup> See Chapter Four.

The difference in the reception of these two novels can be attributed to the respective timing of the works and the extent to which their approach contrasted with what had gone before. When *Die Walsche* was published, it was among the first widely-read German fictional works which depicted a South Tyrolean interlingual relationship and engaged directly with the challenges of living in a multilingual province. The political situation at the time was tense: there was significant controversy regarding the Second Autonomy Statute and the controversial Act of Linguistic Belonging had only just been introduced. By the twenty-first century, the Second Autonomy Statute had been fully implemented and extended, the basis for a Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion had been established, greater distance from the Second World War was beginning to prompt a reassessment of South Tyrol's role in the conflict, and the distinctive voices of the Ladin-speaking community were becoming increasingly influential both within the Ladin valleys and across the province. These political developments created an environment in which the works discussed in this chapter could be positively received. In their own way, they each explored topics which were specific to South Tyrol – the balance between local and global identities, the complexities of the province's multilingualism, and its challenging twentieth-century history – but placed them in a broader cultural and historical context beyond the province.

Unlike Zoderer with his novel *Die Walsche*, Gruber, Zangrando and Dapunt were not alone in drawing attention to the cultural, linguistic and historical complexities of South Tyrol through creative literary works. They were instead part of a cross-language group of writers, including novelists Sepp Mall (b. 1955) and Paolo Bill Valente (b. 1966), who took advantage of a moment of generational change to address South Tyrol's 'sacred

cows', as Kaser had encouraged in his 'Brixner Rede' of 1969.<sup>559</sup> For example, Zangrando's light-hearted exploration of the complexities of identity formation would have been impossible when *Die Walsche* was published in 1982 amid political unrest and escalating tensions between South Tyrol's communities. Dapunt's poems and their vivid imagery give a voice to the Ladins' distinctive rural identity in a way that Zoderer's novel, focused on the tensions between the German and Italian-speaking communities, could not. Her frequent questioning of faith and exploration of spirituality were also far less controversial than they would have been a generation earlier, when the Catholic Church played a more pivotal role in identity formation. Similarly, *Stillbach* uses the fictional characters of Emma, Ines and Clara to explore questions of South Tyrolean complicity in the Second World War and the challenges of multilingual identity formation in a way which would have been intensely controversial at the time when *Die Walsche* was published, given that the Second World War was still very much part of living memory.

The next and final chapter of this thesis analyses further how far South Tyrol's history can be integrated into contemporary identity construction. It will consider South Tyrol's engagement with the past beyond a literary context by examining its rapidly evolving memory culture. The chapter will explore to what extent the centenary of the province's annexation in September 1919 – and particularly how it was marked – constituted a turning point in attitudes towards South Tyrol's complex twentieth-century history and in discussions surrounding identity formation in the province.

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<sup>559</sup> Mall's German language novel *Wundränder* (2004) is set in South Tyrol during the notorious *Bombenjahre* of the 1960s. Valente's Italian language novel *Diario del maestro di Cordés* (2013) follows the experiences of Mario, sent to a small fictional village in South Tyrol to teach Italian in the 1930s during the enforced Fascist Italianisation programme.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Memory culture in South Tyrol: Marking the centenary of the province's annexation in 1919**

The words of South Tyrolean governor Arno Kompatscher in a television interview to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2020 demonstrate the ongoing complexity of constructing a shared memory culture in South Tyrol:

Wir haben in unserer Geschichtsschreibung immer darauf hingewiesen, dass es [Südtirol] ein Land der Opfer und zweier Diktaturen war, und das stimmt. Aber es stimmt auch, dass es bei uns genauso Mitläufer und auch Täter gab. [...] Es muss dieses Bewusstsein sein, [...] dass wir eben nicht aus dieser reinen Opferrolle diese Dinge betrachten dürfen, sondern wir wissen auch, die Unserigen waren Täter.<sup>560</sup>

There are many competing narratives concerning South Tyrol's twentieth-century history. Kompatscher's mention of South Tyrol's two dictatorships both articulates the unique challenges faced by South Tyrolean memory culture and explains why the *Opferthese*, the notion that South Tyroleans were victims of both the Fascist and Nazi regime, has persisted so long and assumed such prominence in identity construction. Kompatscher's comments on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2020 represent further confirmation of the ongoing shift in South Tyrolean memory culture which was first signalled by his speech in September 2019 to mark the centenary of South Tyrol's annexation by Italy. There, he had notably addressed both the injustice of the

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<sup>560</sup> ('When we have written about history, we've always referred to the fact that [South Tyrol] was a province of victims and two dictatorships, and that's correct. But it's also true that there were equally collaborators and also perpetrators among us. [...] There must be this awareness [...] that we must not view these things from this position purely of victimhood. Instead, we must also acknowledge that some of our fellow citizens were perpetrators'.) Du Fe, *Internationaler Tag des Holocaust-Gedenkens in Bozen-Südtirol 2020*, online video recording, YouTube, 31 January 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9jmqTkamDs> [accessed 26 February 2020].

annexation and the falsehood of the *Opferthese*: ‘Seit 1919 teilt uns eine Unrechtsgrenze [...] Wir waren [...] nicht nur Opfer. Auch bei uns gab es Anhänger dieser Ideologien’.<sup>561</sup>

In signalling a change in how South Tyrol’s history was being discussed in political discourse, Kompatscher’s initial intervention in September 2019 also marked a shift in the role of memory culture in the province. This chapter traces developments in South Tyrolean memory culture since 2014 in order to assess to what extent a shift had already begun to occur prior to Kompatscher’s speech, analysing the subsequent effect of any change on identity formation in the province. It also considers the challenges which persist in relation to South Tyrol’s memory culture beyond the centenary of its annexation.

Exploring the general definition of memory culture given by leading cultural historian Jan Assmann helps to articulate why the establishment of a common memory culture in South Tyrol continues to be so problematic:

[...] memory culture is concerned with a social obligation and is firmly linked to the group. The question here is: “What must we not forget?” [...] Memory culture depends mainly, though not exclusively, on various links with the past.<sup>562</sup>

When applied to South Tyrol’s specific situation, Assmann’s definition crystallises how the differing interpretations of the past nurtured by the province’s main language groups could hinder the development of a coherent South Tyrolean memory culture. If

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<sup>561</sup> (‘Since 1919, an unjust border has divided us [...] We were [...] not only victims. There were also supporters of these ideologies amongst us’). Tiroler Landtag, *Gedenksitzung: “Zwischen Zerreiung und Hoffnung”*, online video recording, Land Tirol, 10 September 2019, <https://www.tirol.gv.at/landtag/live/archiv/2019/10092019-gedenksitzungzwischen-zerreissung-und-hoffnung/> [accessed 25 February 2020].

<sup>562</sup> Jan Assmann, ‘Memory Culture’, in *Cultural Memory and Early Civilisation: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 15-69 (pp. 16-17).

establishing a memory culture is a collective process informed by a general consensus concerning what must not be forgotten about the past, then it assumes that there is a commonly accepted view of South Tyrol's history. However, the narratives surrounding the province's twentieth-century history continue to be contested, both within and between language groups.

Historian Hannes Obermair – who was particularly prominent in two of the initiatives to be discussed in this chapter – describes the province's history as 'eine Geschichte des Rechts und des Unrechts zugleich'.<sup>563</sup> Obermair's focus on competing perspectives on history, which vary between and within South Tyrol's German, Italian and Ladin-speaking communities, is at odds with the concept of a memory culture based on a commonly agreed perception of how the past should be remembered. Creating a unifying memory culture from a complex history which is characterised by contested narratives, competing cultures and cycles of oppression is therefore the primary challenge concerning memory culture in South Tyrol. Furthermore, this unity must be achieved without diluting or glossing over the distinctive experiences of South Tyrol's three main language groups.

The tension between competing and contested histories in South Tyrol makes the role of sites of memory within the province's memory culture all the more significant, as they are spaces where opposing views and experiences can co-exist and be explored by different groups. 'Sites of memory' is an expression translated from the French term *lieux de memoire*, coined by French historian Pierre Nora and defined by Nora as 'any

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<sup>563</sup> ('a history that encompasses both right and wrong simultaneously'). Hannes Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community'.<sup>564</sup> To return to Assmann's definition of memory culture, if there is no consensus across South Tyrol's language groups about what should not be forgotten about the past, then it is extremely difficult to create a site of memory which holds the same symbolic value for all South Tyroleans.

With respect to a specifically South Tyrolean context, Nora's and Assmann's definitions suggest that when creating unifying sites of memory which form part of a collective South Tyrolean memory culture, it is also necessary as part of this process to establish a view of the past with which all South Tyroleans can identify, regardless of their cultural background. Sites of memory can therefore play a specific dual role in creating a South Tyrolean memory culture: they can both reshape deep-rooted historical narratives in the province and provide physical spaces which people can visit in order to reflect on – and perhaps revise – their views on South Tyrolean history.

History is particularly significant in modern-day South Tyrol, where interpretations of the past are viewed as a means of controlling the multifaceted debate surrounding identity formation in the present. When examining the interactions between perceptions of history and identity construction, particular consideration must be given to which views are granted priority over others, who controls these views, and why they are given prominence.

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<sup>564</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Preface to the English Language Edition', in Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. xv-xvii (p. xvii).

The aforementioned questions about historical narratives were given greater urgency by the fact that the centenary of South Tyrol's annexation coincided with a time of generational change. Eyewitnesses of the Second World War were dying out and the time from 1939 to 1945 was becoming a period reported not by eyewitnesses but by historical documents, a situation already true of the First World War for a number of years. Sites of memory were perceived as having the potential to bridge the gap between first-hand eyewitness accounts and historical documents.

South Tyrolean historians Hans Heiss and Hannes Obermair – both with connections to the South Tyrolean Green Party – highlight how South Tyrol's status as a multilingual border region produces unique views on the past and therefore gives rise to a memory culture which differs from that of its neighbours. Specifically, they assert that the provincial capital Bolzano is rare in being a city that had been subject to two oppressive fascist regimes,<sup>565</sup> a statement which could also be applied to the whole of South Tyrol. This experience of dual dictatorship, allied with both the differing relationships of South Tyrol's language groups to memory culture and the well-established *Opferthese*, distinguishes memory culture in South Tyrol from that of its Austrian, German and Italian neighbours. The positioning of South Tyrol's uniquely politically charged history within the province's memory culture is directly relevant to the unique contemporary cultural, linguistic and social dynamics at play. The artefacts considered in this chapter

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<sup>565</sup> Hans Heiss and Hannes Obermair, 'Erinnerungskulturen im Widerstreit: Das Beispiel der Stadt Bozen/Bolzano 2000-2010', in *Der Grenzraum als Erinnerungsort: Über den Wandel zu einer postnationalen Erinnerungskultur in Europa*, ed. by Patrick Ostermann and others (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), pp. 63-80 (p. 77).

were chosen because they were designed to reshape existing perspectives on the past in different ways, challenging how it was remembered by contemporary generations.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the Bolzano exhibition *BZ '18-'45: Ein Denkmal, eine Stadt, zwei Diktaturen*,<sup>566</sup> which opened in July 2014. An analysis of this permanent exhibition is especially relevant in this chapter because the exhibition was created in order to transform the controversial Victory Monument into an inclusive site of memory. The location of the exhibition in Bolzano, and specifically underneath the Victory Monument, is especially important on a symbolic level: Bolzano was the local centre of power for successive fascist dictatorships, and the Victory Monument itself has historically been a major cause of division between groups in South Tyrol.<sup>567</sup> The exhibition is also significant because it was established as an official site of memory, authorised by the provincial, local and national governments of the time. Though politicians did not directly influence the precise nature of the exhibition, the working committee responsible for organising the exhibition was nevertheless made up of non-political representatives of the three groups who jointly commissioned the project: the Italian state, the province of South Tyrol and the city of Bolzano. This attention to representation also demonstrates that the exhibition was given the role of acting as a collaborative form of memory culture. The idea of concentrating on two dictatorships and shared suffering, rather than on a cycle of oppression, marked a shift in memory culture in South Tyrol. The exhibition represented a space which was the product of

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<sup>566</sup> ('One monument, one city, two dictatorships').

<sup>567</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 188-189.

perceptions of the past being discussed *between* language groups rather than simply *within* them.

The chapter goes on to consider the contribution of the Bolzano *Stolpersteine* ('Stumbling Stones') to the province's memory culture in the context of a global initiative that was launched in 1992. *Stolpersteine* are installations made from 10x10cm concrete cubes, each bearing the name of one victim of the Nazis inscribed on a brass plate. Over 75,000 have been laid worldwide: they are placed in front of a person's last freely chosen place of residence prior to their deportation or escape. They can be laid to commemorate all victims of Nazi persecution, including non-Jews and survivors, though all of those commemorated in Bolzano were Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust.

The laying of fifteen *Stolpersteine* in front of residences around the city in January 2015, a project commissioned by Bolzano City Council, constituted a significant turning point in South Tyrol's approach to memory culture. They presented a challenge to the aforementioned *Opferthese*. Moreover, the urban location of the installations in Bolzano reflected the belief of South Tyrolean historian Andrea Di Michele – himself a member of the Victory Monument exhibition committee – that sites of memory should not need to be specifically visited.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> Talking about the prominent luminous ring advertising the exhibition on the Monument itself, Di Michele states: '[Der Leuchtring soll] jedem der vorbeigeht deutlich macht, dass sich das Denkmal nun verändert hat [...] dies muss für alle deutlich sichtbar sein, auch für jene, die keine Zeit oder kein Bedürfnis haben, die Ausstellung im Untergeschoss zu besuchen.' ('[The luminous ring should] make clear to every passer-by that the Monument has now changed [...] This must be clearly visible to everyone, including those who don't have the time or inclination to visit the exhibition in the basement'). Europaregion Tirol, *BZ '18-'45. Ein Denkmal, eine Stadt, zwei Diktaturen*, online video recording, YouTube, 25 March 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-bphYj9QE8> [accessed 16 December 2019].

Thirty-three *Stolpersteine* had already been installed in Meran, the traditional centre of South Tyrol's Jewish community, in 2012. However, the location of the *Stolpersteine* in Bolzano was especially significant on both a symbolic and political level. Firstly, it represented a symbolic recognition of the particular role of Bolzano in the Holocaust: a large transit camp on the outskirts of the city was used to aid the deportation of thousands of prisoners to concentration camps between the summer of 1944 and May 1945. Secondly, the fact that the *Stolpersteine* were commissioned by Bolzano City Council showed a political willingness to acknowledge the complicity of the city's government and its residents in enabling the Holocaust.

The final section of this chapter uses the events organised to mark the centenary of South Tyrol's annexation as a means of assessing how the province's complex history affected both attempts at developing a memory culture and the process of identity formation in the province. It elucidates the political and historical fault lines between the official commemorative events held by the government and the unofficial contributions of local cultural organisations such as the Südtiroler Schützenbund. The government wished to comment on the injustice of the annexation without reigniting debates about South Tyrol's potential future secession from Italy, while the Schützenbund used the centenary to reinforce their argument that South Tyrol should not be part of Italy at all. By considering how these competing views on the annexation and contrasting wishes concerning the future of the province were managed, the chapter reaches a conclusion about the prospects of harmony between different sections of South Tyrol's population and the potential development of a unifying process of identity formation in the province which incorporates each of its three main language groups.

As well as being highly instructive in isolation, the artefacts discussed in this chapter complement and illuminate one another, bringing together the elements which have contributed to South Tyrol's evolving memory culture. In varying forms and to varying extents, each artefact re-emphasises the province's unique historical circumstances and the role of these circumstances in shaping a highly complex yet distinctive memory culture.

### **6.1 The role of memory culture in the Bolzano exhibition *BZ '18-'45: Ein Denkmal, eine Stadt, zwei Diktaturen* (July 2014)**

*BZ '18-'45: Ein Denkmal, eine Stadt, zwei Diktaturen* – first opened on 21 July 2014 – was designed to be a permanent exhibition located in the underground space of the Fascist Victory Monument in the centre of Bolzano. The exhibition was jointly commissioned by the Italian state, Bolzano City Council and the South Tyrolean provincial government. An organising committee including representatives of all three stakeholders was established in March 2011.<sup>569</sup> Their aim was to consider how to create some form of permanent exhibition beneath the Victory Monument, a site that had been closed to the public from the late 1970s due to the division it provoked within South Tyrol and the fact that it had been twice attacked by separatist groups. In January 2012, the local, provincial and national representatives agreed both to reopen the Victory Monument to visitors and to create an exhibition under the Monument itself. In

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<sup>569</sup> *Bolzano City Council representatives*: Hannes Obermair (historian and archivist) and Silvia Spada (director of museums at Bolzano City Council). *South Tyrolean provincial government representatives*: Andrea di Michele (member of the Centre for Regional History in Bolzano) and Christine Roilo (Chair of the South Tyrolean Archive). *Italian state representative (and Chair of the committee)*: Ugo Soragni (General Director of Museums at the Italian Ministry of Culture).

addition to the committee, American cultural historian Jeffrey Schnapp was appointed as an external consultant.<sup>570</sup>

The notion of balance became an especially important aspect of the exhibition design, as its creation was inextricably linked with the contested narratives bound up with the Victory Monument's history. Completed in 1928 on Mussolini's orders, the Victory Monument was dedicated to the fallen Italian soldiers of the First World War. It replaced the *Kaiserjäger* memorial in the centre of Bolzano and symbolised both the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the triumph of Italian Fascism. The Monument proved endlessly divisive from the time of its construction onwards. Whereas many Italians viewed it as a worthy celebration of Italy's victory in the First World War, 10,000 people organised a counter protest in Innsbruck (North Tyrol) on the day of its inauguration in 1928.<sup>571</sup> The Monument is still reviled by cultural organisations such as the Südtiroler Schützenbund, which view it as glorifying the oppression suffered by South Tyrolean German speakers under Italianisation and refer to it as '*das faschistische Bauwerk*'<sup>572</sup> (*'the Fascist structure'*).

It is therefore clear that the task of those involved in creating the exhibition was highly complex. They had to negotiate a path between those who celebrated the Victory Monument as a reminder of Italian military strength and those who wanted to see it destroyed because of its close association with Mussolini's Fascist regime. The

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<sup>570</sup> Hannes Obermair and others, *BZ '18-'45: Ein Denkmal, eine Stadt, zwei Diktaturen. Begleitband zur Dokumentations-Ausstellung in Bozener Siegesdenkmal* (Bolzano: Folio, 2016), pp. 10-12.

<sup>571</sup> Harald Dunajtschik and Aram Mattioli, 'Eroberung durch Architektur: Die faschistischen Um- und Neugestaltungsprojekte in Bozen', in *Italien, Blicke: Neue Perspektiven der italienischen Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Petra Terhoeven (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2010), pp. 87-106 (p. 95).

<sup>572</sup> 'Das Siegesdenkmal in Bozen', *Südtiroler Schützenbund*, 1 May 2016, <https://schuetzen.com/2016/05/01/das-siegesdenkmal-in-bozen/> [accessed 16 December 2019].

organising committee sought to strike this delicate balance by creating an inclusive space underneath the Victory Monument without overlooking its divisive past.

Moreover, they wanted to acknowledge the controversial circumstances under which the Victory Monument had been built, while also contextualising this within both the broader subsequent history of the Monument itself and the wider history of South Tyrol, with a particular focus on the time between 1918 and 1945.<sup>573</sup>

The three main strands of the thirteen-room exhibition each focus on distinct areas but their physical proximity to each other reflects the aforementioned overriding rationale of the project. There is an outer pathway, an inner pathway and four corner rooms. The text, pictures and videos on the outer pathway, located on the outside walls of the nine 'non-corner' rooms, chronicle the history of Bolzano and South Tyrol between 1918 and 1945, focusing on key events such as the annexation (1919), the *Option* (1939) and the Nazi occupation of South Tyrol (September 1943-May 1945). The inner pathway, located on the inside walls of each of the thirteen rooms and also comprising texts, pictures and videos, deals specifically with the history of the Victory Monument from when it was built between 1926 and 1928 up to its significance in the twenty-first century. In addition to the four corner rooms, there is also a separate space in the monument's crypt.

The four corner rooms are especially important in maintaining the balanced approach towards South Tyrolean history encouraged by the exhibition, both in terms of their physical location in each of the four corners of the exhibition and their particular focus. They combine a specific examination of the Monument itself with an awareness of more

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<sup>573</sup> Obermair and others, *Begleitband*, pp. 10-11.

widely applicable questions concerning monuments in general. Two of the rooms (5 and 9) acknowledge the particular history of the Victory Monument: one examines its specific architectural features while another explains the life and work of the Monument's architect Marcello Piacentini (1881-1960). The other two corner rooms (1 and 13, the first and last of the exhibition) use the Victory Monument as a stimulus for encouraging visitors to consider actively the function of monuments and their changing role in modern society. The broader focus of rooms 1 and 13, allied with their prominent positioning at the beginning and end of the exhibition, also reflects the stated aim of the committee to explore the controversial history of the Monument 'im europäischen Geist'<sup>574</sup> ('in a European spirit'). This desire to place the Monument and South Tyrol's history in a context beyond the province's borders was further reflected in Schnapp's aforementioned appointment as an external consultant.

Each of the four corner rooms encapsulates the overriding aim of the exhibition, which invites people to use information from a number of different sources to form their own view concerning both the period between 1918 and 1945 and the specific significance of the Victory Monument within South Tyrol's history. The exhibition not only informs visitors about the debate surrounding the Victory Monument, it invites them to take part in it. The thirteenth and final room of the exhibition is deliberately left largely empty in order to act as an open area for 'critical reflection on the past'.<sup>575</sup> The room is designed to encourage all visitors – from school classes to the general public – to

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<sup>574</sup> Obermair and others, *Begleitband*, p. 10.

<sup>575</sup> 'The Four Corner Rooms', *BZ '18-'45*,

<https://www.monumenttovictory.com/en/inhalt/eckraeume.html> [accessed 9 March 2021].

consider how they can contribute to future public debate concerning the function of monuments such as the Victory Monument.

The overall configuration of the exhibition further encourages visitors to draw their own conclusions about both the Monument and South Tyrol's history. Though they must start in Room 1 (asking 'What is a Monument?') and end in Room 13 (concerning the future of monuments), the positioning of the inner path and the outer path in the same room allows the visitor to choose which part of the exhibition to engage with first. They may look at the history of South Tyrol and the history of the Victory Monument in two separate circuits, or they can consider them both together. The curators of the exhibition have provided visitors with the necessary basic information, but it is up to the visitors themselves to decide in what order they process this information. The individual exhibits within each room add to the idea of visitors being inspired to engage carefully with South Tyrol's history. For example, some of the photos on the outer path of the exhibition were deliberately printed out of focus to encourage visitors to take a closer look and to read the accompanying captions.<sup>576</sup>

Overall, the exhibition signalled a change in how South Tyrol's complex twentieth-century history was integrated into the province's twenty-first century memory culture. To return to Nora's definition of sites of memory, it quickly became a 'symbolic element of the memorial heritage' of South Tyrol, heralding an approach to the province's past which was designed to allow competing narratives to exist in the same space and embrace the complexity of South Tyrol's turbulent twentieth-century history, rather than relying primarily on interpretations of history which support the *Opferthese*.

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<sup>576</sup> Obermair and others, *Begleitband*, p. 13.

The desire to embrace the complexity of South Tyrol's history was reflected in the commission's decision to leave the Victory Monument itself unchanged, apart from the addition of a luminous, ring-shaped digital sign bearing the name of the exhibition at the front of the Monument. The design of the sign itself reflected its overriding purpose: to draw attention to the exhibition's aim of changing public perceptions of the Monument without being seen to deface the Monument itself. A similarly nuanced approach was adopted in relation to the Latin quotations which were originally inscribed in the monument's crypt and glorified the concept of sacrifice for the fatherland. The original quotations remain but are left in darkness, superimposed with luminous counter-quotations warning about the dangers of dictatorship and the value of democracy by figures such as German playwright Bertolt Brecht and German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt. As well as placing the specific history of South Tyrol and the Monument in a broader European context – a stated aim of the exhibition<sup>577</sup> – this approach acknowledged the complex, divisive history of the Monument while using the superimposed quotations to encourage a sense of unity and freedom in the province.

In their joint article written in 2012, Hans Heiss and Hannes Obermair – the latter a member of the commission – allude to a complexity specific to South Tyrol when creating collaborative sites of memory, namely the differing relationships of South Tyrol's German, Ladin and Italian-speaking communities with the province's memory culture. Heiss and Obermair state that South Tyrol's German and Ladin-speaking communities have a more firmly established connection to South Tyrol's history than

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<sup>577</sup> Obermair and others, *Begleitband*, p. 10.

their Italian-speaking counterparts, partly due to their older links to South Tyrol and the lower likelihood of their moving away from the province. Heiss and Obermair also state that the less well-established local connections amongst Italian speakers can result in a reluctance on their part to comprehend the effect of Italianisation in South Tyrol and accept the Italian state's residual responsibility for it.<sup>578</sup>

The reference to 'zwei Diktaturen' and 'eine Stadt' in the exhibition's title suggests that its aim was not to apportion culpability to a particular language group. Rather, it was designed to encourage the formation of a contemporary identity founded on shared suffering and a mutual understanding of – and responsibility for – the events of the past. The organising committee was chaired by Ugo Soragni, then General Director of Museums at the Italian Institute of Culture. His dual role as chair and Italian state representative provides evidence that the Italian government was eager to be seen to take a leading role in engaging with South Tyrol's complex history.

The committee included historians, which pre-empted accusations of the exhibition being a purely political project. Indeed, members of the committee were especially keen that the project should not be interpreted by the public as being politically-led: Soragni obtained a 'non-interference' clause to ensure that the work of the committee was free from political influence.<sup>579</sup> However, although politicians may not have influenced the precise nature of the exhibition, shifts in local and provincial politics still played a large part in the initial decision to create an exhibition under the Victory Monument.

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<sup>578</sup> Heiss and Obermair, 'Erinnerungskulturen im Widerstreit', p. 75.

<sup>579</sup> Andrea Carlà and Johanna Mitterhofer, 'Coming to Terms with Controversial Memories: The Monument to Victory of Bolzano/Bozen', *Europe Now*, 2 April 2019, <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2019/04/04/coming-to-terms-with-controversial-memories-in-south-tyrol-the-monument-to-victory-of-bolzano-boze/> [accessed 4 February 2020].

Obermair believes that the presence of centre-left Bolzano mayor Luigi Spagnolli was a key factor in a greater political willingness to engage with the events that occurred between 1918 and 1945 in South Tyrol: 'Die Bereitschaft war da, das zuzulassen.'<sup>580</sup>

The change in political circumstances coincided with a shift in the attitude of historians towards the events between 1918 and 1945 in South Tyrol, particularly in relation to the Victory Monument. Obermair states: 'Was das *Siegesdenkmal* war, wusste man schon viel früher [...] man hat nur nicht die entsprechenden Schlüsse daraus gezogen.'<sup>581</sup> If the earlier lack of engagement with the Victory Monument was not due to insufficient knowledge, then it could be attributed to a reluctance to address what Obermair terms 'der klassische Graubereich der Geschichte'.<sup>582</sup> In other words, the contested narratives surrounding the Victory Monument rendered it difficult to draw definitive conclusions on its place in memory culture. The increased distance from the Second World War, a new-found political will, the multimedia format of the exhibition and the diverse representation on the commission enabled *Ein Denkmal, eine Stadt, zwei Diktaturen* to accommodate these complex, contested narratives in a way that the history books of the twentieth century had not been able to do.

Moreover, the specific contested debate surrounding the Victory Monument drew attention once more to the influence of the *Opferthese* in South Tyrolean identity formation. The prominence of the *Opferthese* partially explains why it has taken so long for sites of memory to be created in South Tyrol. Abandoning the reassuring certainty of

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<sup>580</sup> ('People were prepared to allow it'). Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>581</sup> ('It has been known for some time what the *Victory Monument* was. [...] It was simply that the necessary conclusions had not been drawn from this information.') Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>582</sup> ('The classic grey area of history'). Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

the *Opferthese* in favour of the unsettling uncertainty of ‘der klassische Graubereich der Geschichte’ would require a dismantling of long-established identity models. The aforementioned inclusion of a luminous sign advertising the exhibition on the Victory Monument itself was a visual indication of the exhibition’s clear role in challenging long-established views of South Tyrol’s twentieth-century history, helping to communicate this shift to a wider audience of passers-by. Thanks to the sign, the area then became a site of memory which, like the *Stolpersteine*, did not need to be consciously visited for its significance to be appreciated.

Encouraging visitors to view South Tyrol’s entire twentieth-century history – and the role of individuals in that history – in less black and white terms was conceived as one of the main functions of the exhibition. Rather than providing a pre-existing framework for identity construction such as that offered by the *Opferthese*, the exhibition was instead intended to place the onus on its visitors, drawing attention to the controversial history of the Monument and inviting people to consider critically its significance to their own identities.

The initial public reaction to the exhibition gave mixed signals concerning the achievement of these objectives. The fact that it attracted four thousand visitors across the first two days of opening in 2014 suggested both a significant interest in reconfigured Fascist-era sites of memory and a willingness to reconsider deep-rooted views on the province’s past. Positive responses from the cultural world beyond South Tyrol implied that the exhibition’s appeal extended past initial local curiosity. It was highly commended at the 2016 European Museum of the Year awards, with the judging

panel commenting that the exhibition succeeded in neutralising the powerful symbolism of the Monument without destroying it.<sup>583</sup>

However, it also attracted criticism from some sections of South Tyrolean society, suggesting that the intercultural and interlinguistic tensions surrounding the Victory Monument had not been entirely left behind. The party Die Freiheitlichen, representing right-wing German speakers, protested against 'das in den Keller verbannte Museum'<sup>584</sup> and called for the Victory Monument to be pulled down altogether. Meanwhile those on the right of the Italian political spectrum expressed their displeasure at the luminous sign attached to the Victory Monument, asserting that it disfigured the Monument itself.<sup>585</sup>

A political desire to preserve the Victory Monument and its surroundings in their original state resurfaced in 2016 when Alessandro Urzi, Bolzano mayoral candidate for the right-wing party Alto Adige nel cuore, responded to suggestions that the *Piazza della Vittoria*, the area where the Victory Monument is located, should be renamed once again.<sup>586</sup> He stated: 'La storia non si cambia, tanto meno con una delibera.'<sup>587</sup> Urzi's comments underline the symbolic and historical value of the Victory Monument for many Italian speakers. His viewpoint also gives credence to Obermair's belief that the creation of the exhibition and the shift in official memory culture from 2011 to 2015

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<sup>583</sup> Obermair and others, *Begleitband*, p. 149.

<sup>584</sup> ('The museum that has been banished to the basement'). Gerhard Mumelter, 'Faschistisches Siegesdenkmal in Bozen entpolitisiert', *Der Standard*, 25 July 2014, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000003507187/faschistisches-siegesdenkmal-in-bozen-entpolitisiert> [accessed 3 June 2021].

<sup>585</sup> Mumelter, 'Faschistisches Siegesdenkmal in Bozen entpolitisiert'.

<sup>586</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 188-189, for a more detailed discussion of developments surrounding the renaming of the square where the Monument is located.

<sup>587</sup> ('History does not change, regardless of how many rulings are passed.') 'Piazza Vittoria e Monumento non si toccano', *Alto Adige nel Cuore*, 28 July 2016, [www.altoadigenelcuore.it/piazza-vittoria-non-si-tocca](http://www.altoadigenelcuore.it/piazza-vittoria-non-si-tocca) [accessed 19 December 2019].

had much to do with the prevailing political climate of the time, specifically the influence of Bolzano mayor Luigi Spagnolli, who resigned in 2015.

The initial negative response to the creation of a unifying memory culture around the Victory Monument from right-wing political representatives of both the German and Italian language communities offered conflicting signals regarding the exhibition's success. On the one hand, it implied that a common South Tyrolean memory culture had yet to be established. Conversely, the source of this criticism suggested that the exhibition had succeeded in its aim of providing a collaborative, cross-cultural, cross-language site of memory which challenged interpretations of history – favoured by its critics – that were tightly constructed along monocultural and monolingual lines. The external recognition achieved by the exhibition also suggested that South Tyrol's approach to memory culture could be used as a model for other countries grappling with collaboration and contested narratives in the Second World War and beyond. Indeed, Hannes Obermair's invitation to speak about South Tyrolean memory culture at a conference in Japan at the University of Kobe in 2019 – entitled 'Disputes and Revised Narratives of Historical Heritage and Memorials: South Tyrol, Taiwan and Croatia' – was further testament to South Tyrol's value as a global case study in this area.

Obermair himself is pragmatic when assessing the impact of the exhibition, framing it as part of a broader process within South Tyrolean memory culture. On the one hand, he comments on the 'besonder[en] Stellenwert'<sup>588</sup> ('particular value') of the exhibition and states that it was a 'game changer' in South Tyrolean memory culture, opening the way for other installations such as the Bolzano *Stolpersteine* and sending a clear message of

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<sup>588</sup> Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

collective responsibility: 'es geht alle an'<sup>589</sup> ('it concerns everyone'). Here Obermair hints at the exhibition being a trigger for a wider change in memory culture, positioning it as a sign of the democratisation of sites of memory. Rather than being the sole preserve of history enthusiasts and politicians, they are instead reconstituted as locations that should inform contemporary identity construction for all South Tyroleans, regardless of their generation and cultural background.

On the other hand, Obermair highlights the necessarily limited impact of the exhibition in isolation: 'Zugleich darf man nicht zu viel davon erwarten [...] Das Thema würde sehr viel mehr erfordern, man darf diese Orte nicht [...] überstrapazieren.'<sup>590</sup> He frames the exhibition neither as a lone attempt to transform memory culture, nor as an end in itself, but rather as a project which holds symbolic value by marking the beginning of a shift in the public perception of sites of memory in South Tyrol.

Instead of adhering to traditional markers of 'success', it can be argued that the exhibition *BZ '18-'45: Ein Denkmal, eine Stadt, zwei Diktaturen* reshaped the criteria by which memory culture should be judged. The exhibition's value lay not in its capacity to appeal to a specific audience or its ability to present a single version of the past, nor should it be judged solely on the volume of visitors it attracted or the number of external awards it received. Rather, its true contribution to South Tyrolean memory culture was embodied in the way in which it began to replace long-established monocultural, monolingual perceptions of the past by creating an inclusive site of memory which broke down long-established geographical, cultural and linguistic

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<sup>589</sup> Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>590</sup> ('At the same time, you can't expect too much of it [...] This topic requires a lot more attention. You can't [...] overburden these places'). Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

borders. The exhibition embraced South Tyrol's historical complexities rather than avoiding them, allowing parallel views to exist without prioritising one over another. It modelled a new approach for imagining sites of memory and South Tyrolean approaches to memory culture, embracing nuance, asking challenging questions of its visitors and opening the way for subsequent projects to explore these areas further.

## **6.2 The role of memory culture in the Bolzano *Stolpersteine* (January 2015)**

The laying of fifteen *Stolpersteine* ('Stumbling Stones') in Bolzano in January 2015 represented a further development in South Tyrol's approach to its complex history. They marked the continuation of a process started by the Victory Monument exhibition and a further 'symbolic element'<sup>591</sup> of the province's memory culture. The installations were commissioned by Bolzano City Council. Timed to coincide with the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in January 2015, the *Stolpersteine* were intended to be an official acknowledgement of Bolzano's collective complicity in the Holocaust.

*Stolpersteine* are a worldwide project started by German artist Gunther Demnig in 1992 to commemorate victims of the Nazis. To use Demnig's words, the *Stolpersteine* concept is underpinned by his belief, taken from the sacred Jewish Talmud text, that 'a person is

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<sup>591</sup> Nora, *Realms of Memory*, p. xvii.

not forgotten until his or her name is forgotten'.<sup>592</sup> Stones have been installed in countries including Italy, Germany, Austria, Argentina, Hungary and the Netherlands.

After the City Council had expressed a desire to acknowledge symbolically victims of the Holocaust – and specifically Bolzano's complicity in enabling deportations – they took up the suggestion of the Bolzano branch of the National Association of Italian Partisans to install a series of *Stolpersteine*. These were to be laid outside residences in the city which served as the last freely chosen addresses for Jewish residents of Bolzano before they were deported to concentration camps.

Historians Hannes Obermair and Sabine Mayr, who took a leading role in identifying victims of the Holocaust who might be commemorated by the Bolzano *Stolpersteine*, described the rationale behind the installations in Bolzano as follows:

Damit möchte die Stadt Bozen ein öffentlich wirksames Zeichen setzen, um sich ihrer besonderen historischen Mitverantwortung zu stellen. Denn es waren eine mörderische Bürokratie und das Schweigen, wenn nicht Mitwirken vieler, die die Barbarei der Entrechtung von Menschen und des gezielten Genozids erst möglich gemacht haben.<sup>593</sup>

Obermair and Mayr worked closely with the Jewish Museum in Meran throughout the process of identifying names for *Stolpersteine* in Bolzano. Through their joint research, they established that 938 Jews were registered as living in South Tyrol in October 1938, among them sixty-nine residents of Bolzano. Of these sixty-nine residents, only three

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<sup>592</sup> Suzanne Cords, 'Creator of the largest Holocaust memorial turns 70, but his life work continues', *Deutsche Welle*, 27 October 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/creator-of-the-largest-holocaust-memorial-turns-70-but-his-life-work-continues/a-41107926> [accessed 30 January 2020].

<sup>593</sup> ('In so doing, the city of Bolzano would like to make a public, meaningful gesture in order to accept their particular historical complicity. For it was a murderous bureaucracy and the silence or indeed in many cases the collaboration of many people that made the barbarism of the deprivation of rights and targeted genocide possible.') Sabine Mayr and Hannes Obermair, 'Jüdische Opfer des Holocaust in Bozen', *Stadt Bozen/Città di Bolzano*, January 2014, [https://www.gemeinde.bozen.it/UploadDocs/14262\\_Holocaust\\_BZ\\_2015\\_Stolpersteine\\_DEUTSCH\\_korr6.pdf](https://www.gemeinde.bozen.it/UploadDocs/14262_Holocaust_BZ_2015_Stolpersteine_DEUTSCH_korr6.pdf) [accessed 16 December 2019], p. 3.

were Italian citizens. Forty-two were from Germany or Austria, twelve from Czechoslovakia, four from Poland and two each from Portugal and Latvia. There were also Jewish citizens of Great Britain, America, Hungary and Egypt living in the city in 1938. It was announced by the Fascist Italian government in November 1938 that all foreign Jews were to leave South Tyrol and those who had obtained Italian citizenship after 1919 had it revoked. This meant that the vast majority of South Tyrol's Jewish inhabitants had been forced to leave by 1939.<sup>594</sup>

The research identified twenty-five individuals belonging to seventeen different families who could be commemorated by *Stolpersteine* in the city. Fifteen of these people from ten families were eventually given individual *Stolpersteine* in Bolzano: only one of those commemorated by a *Stolperstein* was born in the city (Olimpia Carpi in 1940).<sup>595</sup>

Demnig laid the first stone in Bolzano himself, as with the first installation in each town or city. The unveiling ceremony in January 2015 was attended by Bolzano City Council's Culture Minister Patrizia Trincanato, a clear sign of both the Council's leading role in commissioning the project and their desire to accept responsibility for the city's historical role in the Holocaust.

The laying of the *Stolpersteine* was especially significant in South Tyrol due to the way in which it challenged the *Opferthese*, a concept which had been especially prominent in post-war identity construction in the province over a sustained period of time. Much as Franz Thaler's memoir *Unvergessen* (1988)<sup>596</sup> implicates South Tyrol and South Tyroleans in the deportation of prisoners to concentration camps, the *Stolpersteine*

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<sup>594</sup> Mayr and Obermair, 'Jüdische Opfer des Holocaust in Bozen', p. 2.

<sup>595</sup> The number was eventually reduced from twenty-five to fifteen due to the difficulties of obtaining precise information concerning the fate of some individuals.

<sup>596</sup> See Chapter Three, section 3.2.

clearly position South Tyrol as being the starting point for an unimaginable journey of suffering rather than a blameless province repressed by successive fascist dictatorships. The presence of the *Stolpersteine* in the modern-day streets of Bolzano symbolises how the events of the past can be incorporated into the identity construction of the present. The specific focus of the *Stolpersteine* adds a complex, challenging dimension to South Tyrol's relationship with memory culture. Although the Victory Monument exhibition touches on the notion of South Tyroleans as perpetrators, it also focuses on the shared suffering of the German and Italian-speaking populations under two dictatorships. By contrast, the *Stolpersteine* establish a clearly defined space of suffering and victimhood, which only those named on the stones can occupy.

To borrow the terminology of Martin Walser from his essay 'Unser Auschwitz' (1965), Bolzano's *Stolpersteine* deprive South Tyroleans of the opportunity '[sich] auf die Seite des Opfers zu stellen'.<sup>597</sup> Walser's words provide a useful framework for understanding the specific role of the *Stolpersteine* in South Tyrolean memory culture. They constitute a contemporary method of undermining a pattern in South Tyrolean Holocaust narratives which bears similarities to the trend which Walser had identified in Germany fifty years previously. The *Stolpersteine* clearly define what constitutes a victim, preventing modern-day South Tyroleans from aligning themselves with these victims. This parallel between South Tyrol and Germany also lends weight to the idea that the process of challenging deep-rooted perceptions about the past has been severely delayed in South Tyrol when compared to Germany, a delay which can be partially

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<sup>597</sup> ('put themselves on the side of the victims'). Martin Walser, 'Unser Auschwitz', in *Heimatkunde: Aufsätze und Reden*, ed. by Martin Walser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), pp. 7-23 (p. 14).

attributed to the longevity of the *Opferthese*. The *Stolpersteine* undermine this prominent *Opferthese* topos and point towards South Tyrolean complicity in Nazi atrocities by showing how the province was for some Jews the site of their deportation.

The laying of the Bolzano *Stolpersteine* constituted an important step in reshaping how perceptions of history were integrated into contemporary identity formation in South Tyrol. Significantly, they do not name the perpetrators, only the victims, creating an ambiguity which reduces the ability of visitors to distance themselves from the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Furthermore, they are located within South Tyrol, although the people they commemorate were murdered elsewhere, therefore representing a concrete symbol of South Tyrolean complicity in the Holocaust. By amplifying the suppressed experiences of minority groups such as the Jews, the *Stolpersteine* draw attention to hidden religious and racial prejudice in a debate dominated by discussion of cultural and linguistic discrimination.

The *Stolpersteine* can function both as a visual manifestation of South Tyrolean complicity in the war and as a reminder that individual elements of the same memory culture project can be situated in different geographical locations, telling individual stories yet conveying the same overriding message of South Tyrolean complicity. In contrast to the Victory Monument exhibition, the *Stolpersteine* are, in Obermair's words, 'ein diffuses Museum'<sup>598</sup> ('a scattered museum'). They are a thoroughly urban form of memory culture, placed in the central streets of Bolzano. As Obermair states:

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<sup>598</sup> Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

‘Das Projekt ist [...] eine der wenigen möglichen Formen, zerstörtes Leben zu erinnern im Stadtraum.’<sup>599</sup>

The *Stolpersteine* decrease the gulf between past and present by creating a site of memory that exists *alongside* contemporary life rather than apart from it. These central sites contrast with the suburban location of the remembrance trail at the former concentration camp site in Bolzano’s *Reschenstrasse*. The trail, opened in 2012, was a project initiated to commemorate the role of the Bolzano camp in aiding the deportation of prisoners to concentration camps between the summer of 1944 and May 1945. It is a site of memory that demands a more conscious act of remembrance than the *Stolpersteine* due to its location on the outskirts of the city.

By focusing on individual tragedies in the midst of collective suffering, the *Stolpersteine* reconfigure and personalise the act of remembrance. These individual cases also decrease the distance between the person being remembered and the person encountering the *Stolpersteine*, creating an intimacy which crosses into incongruity and awkwardness as the ‘visitor’ physically steps over the stones commemorating those persecuted. This awkwardness is reinforced by the compression of the process of remembering and the act of remembrance. The *Stolpersteine* fulfil both these roles, prompting a remembering process which quickly results in an act of remembrance when the visitor pauses to consider the inscriptions. In creating an uncomfortable power dynamic between the visitor and the site of memory, the *Stolpersteine* reinforce how

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<sup>599</sup> (‘The *Stolpersteine* project is [...] one of the few possible ways in which destroyed lives can be remembered within an urban space’). BolzanoBozenVideo, *Stolpersteine in Bozen*, online video recording, YouTube, 16 January 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xArKY8x-kh0> [accessed 16 December 2019].

the past is often repressed rather than truly understood. They prompt a reconsideration of what constitutes remembrance. Their residential locations recast memory culture as a recurring aspect of everyday life, but one which disrupts one's daily routine.

The *Stolpersteine* constitute an initial contribution to an area of South Tyrol's history – namely the persecution of Jews – that was previously characterised by silence. The broad scope of potential perpetrators implied by the *Stolpersteine* extends far beyond those directly responsible for the Holocaust, such as Hitler and Mussolini. It expands the network of complicity and collaboration to implicate ordinary South Tyroleans, and here, inhabitants of Bolzano. As Obermair and Mayr observed in their aforementioned explanation of the rationale behind the *Stolpersteine* memorial, many residents of the town remained silent and in so doing became complicit in the Holocaust.<sup>600</sup>

Obermair's and Mayr's allusion to silence being as much a part of complicity as conscious actions further widens the definition of perpetrators. As Hans Heiss points out: 'Die Täterschaft der Südtiroler wird immer noch vermieden [...] in den Familien hat es nie Auseinandersetzungen und Gespräche gegeben.'<sup>601</sup> The *Stolpersteine* draw attention to areas of silence in interpretations of South Tyrol's history. Instead of simply providing an alternative narrative where South Tyrolean perpetrators are unambiguously identified, this narrative is left partially incomplete, providing a space for previously unaddressed questions of familial collaboration and complicity to be asked both publicly in South Tyrolean society and privately within families.

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<sup>600</sup> Mayr and Obermair, 'Jüdische Opfer des Holocaust in Bozen', p. 3.

<sup>601</sup> ('The idea of South Tyroleans being perpetrators is still being avoided. [...] It has never been engaged with or talked about within families'). Hans Heiss, interview with author, 12 March 2019.

Challenging the idea that South Tyrol emerged untainted from the Second World War also serves to undermine one of the key tenets of South Tyrolean identity, namely the notion of *Heimat*. The very existence of *Heimat* is also a contested idea beyond South Tyrol, particularly in a wider German-speaking context. Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman highlight how *Heimat* can provide ‘a sense of security and belonging’ but observe that these feelings can be deceptive. They assert that *Heimat* ‘expresses the longing, perhaps illusory, for such an absolute foundation or unchanging essence’.<sup>602</sup> The complex twentieth-century history of South Tyrol – including the annexation, successive fascist dictatorships and shifting balances of power – may help to explain the use of the concept of *Heimat* in the province: it provides an ‘absolute foundation’ which is grounded in geographical location and endures through the province’s turbulent recent past.

The concept continues to divide opinion within South Tyrol. On the one hand, the notion of *Heimat* is crucial to Jürgen Wirth Anderlan, leader of the Südtiroler Schützenbund from May 2019 to January 2021. Speaking in March 2019, Wirth Anderlan stated: ‘Heimat ist wo ich mich wohl fühle.’<sup>603</sup> By contrast, Hannes Obermair is highly sceptical of the concept, terming it ‘völliger Schwachsinn’ (‘complete rubbish’) and asserting that ‘Heimat ist wo niemand war und wo niemand sein wird’.<sup>604</sup> The involvement of Obermair in the *Stolpersteine* project indicates that part of their

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<sup>602</sup> Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman, *Heimat: A German dream: regional loyalties and national identity in German culture, 1890-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 23. This study offers a detailed exploration of the complex and often contradictory role of *Heimat* in the broader context of regional and national identity.

<sup>603</sup> (‘*Heimat* is where I feel a sense of wellbeing’). Jürgen Wirth Anderlan, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>604</sup> (‘*Heimat* is where no-one was and where no one will ever be.’) Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

intended function in South Tyrol is to dismantle the well-established concept of *Heimat* through promoting alternative views on the past. As concrete markers of historical events, the *Stolpersteine* symbolise a pragmatic view of South Tyrol which recognises its multi-faceted role in the Second World War.

There is however a danger that the shift in public perception attempted by projects such as the *Stolpersteine* is so great that it leads to a feeling of indifference amongst the South Tyrolean public towards the province's history. This indifference is hinted at by both Obermair and Wirth Anderlan, an area of agreement which transcends their differences of opinion regarding the role of *Heimat* in identity formation. Obermair believes that engaging with the past is still viewed by many South Tyroleans as 'ein intellektuelles Spiel und sonst gar nichts [...] es wird geduldet, mehr nicht'.<sup>605</sup>

Obermair's comments in particular suggest that South Tyrol's history is widely seen as an academic pursuit, rather than a prominent aspect of contemporary society and identity formation.

Wirth Anderlan detects a similar indifference towards local history, commenting that the motto 'Für Gott, Kaiser und Vaterland' – established in the territory up until 1918 – has become 'für fette Bratwurst, iPhone und Mercedes'.<sup>606</sup> He goes on to state that '[das größte Problem ist] der Wohlstand [...] die Heimat sollte immer noch im Herzen verankert sein und nicht in der Brieftasche'.<sup>607</sup> His assertion suggests that a strong sense of *Heimat*, and in turn a strong identity, are harder to nurture in times of prosperity.

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<sup>605</sup> ('an intellectual game and nothing more [...] it is tolerated, but no more than that'). Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>606</sup> ('For God, the Kaiser, and the fatherland [has become] for a fat Bratwurst, an iPhone and a Mercedes'). Wirth Anderlan, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>607</sup> ('[The biggest problem] is prosperity. [...] *Heimat* should still be anchored in your heart and not in your wallet'). Wirth Anderlan, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

The negative correlation between prosperity and identity formation is strengthened by Obermair's emphasis on South Tyrol's collective reliance on the *Opferthese*, a concept linked to times of struggle and oppression. However, the struggle projected by the *Opferthese* is one-sided, suggesting that the criteria concerning which precise hardships are judged as conducive to identity formation are very narrow. Hardship can only be used as part of identity construction when it is presented unambiguously, as it is through the *Opferthese*. Any uncertainty concerning the identity of perpetrators – as suggested by the *Stolpersteine* – is therefore incompatible with identity models aligned with the *Opferthese*.

A particular challenge posed for contemporary identity formation lies in the re-examination of existing narratives and a reconsideration of what constitutes a perpetrator, a process begun by the Victory Monument exhibition and continued in the *Stolpersteine*. The exhibition and *Stolpersteine* must be analysed together to understand their collective impact. Both constitute sites of memory which challenge rather than reassure. They both seek to develop a narrative whereby past hardships can sit alongside present prosperity in contemporary identity formation. They aim to ensure that sites of memory, and the issues they raise concerning identity, move from being the preserve of academic discussions to forming a major topic in public discourse, thus creating a more accessible memory culture. However, in order to achieve a shift in memory culture, the nature of the public discourse itself, and specifically the role of South Tyrol's history in it, must change.

Despite their differing backgrounds and views on South Tyrolean memory culture, both Wirth Anderlan and Obermair believe that South Tyrol's history remains an important

part of modern-day identity construction in the province. Wirth Anderlan states: 'Wir müssen immer wissen woher wir kommen, damit wir auch wissen wohin wir gehen.'<sup>608</sup> Obermair goes further and describes those who view history as a purely intellectual pursuit as 'verräterisch' ('treacherous').<sup>609</sup> Rather than being used as a tool for one-sided identity formation, the *Stolpersteine* and Victory Monument exhibition jointly demonstrate how the nuances of history can be embraced to encourage a multifaceted identity. The laying of the *Stolpersteine* represents a step on the way to achieving this aim, a journey which started with the opening of the Victory Monument exhibition in July 2014.

### **6.3 Marking the centenary of South Tyrol's annexation by Italy**

#### **(September 2019)**

2019 was a highly significant year in South Tyrol's modern history. As well as marking the centenary of South Tyrol's annexation from Italy on 10 September 2019, it was also the eightieth anniversary of the *Option* and the fiftieth anniversary of the agreement of the terms of the Second Autonomy Statute between the Italian state and South Tyrol, represented by the ruling SVP.<sup>610</sup> The centenary was particularly important as the annexation was highly controversial, yet was also the event which ultimately led to the distinct mix of cultures and languages that have informed much of the debate surrounding identity construction in South Tyrol. Above all, the centenary acted as both

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<sup>608</sup> ('We must always know where we come from in order to know where we're going'). Wirth Anderlan, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>609</sup> ('treacherous'). Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>610</sup> See Chapter One for a more detailed account of these events.

a reference point for reflecting on a century of South Tyrolean history and an opportunity for different organisations to express their views on South Tyrol's future.

The centenary – and specifically how it was marked – therefore represented both a significant challenge and a crucial turning point in South Tyrolean memory culture. The differing political, historical and cultural motivations of the organisations which chose to mark the occasion of the centenary is of particular interest. The Südtiroler Schützenbund used it as a means of highlighting their case for the secession of South Tyrol from Italy, while the Historegio regional history project and the University of Bolzano both approached it as an opportunity to supplement existing knowledge of South Tyrol's twentieth-century history and share some of these findings with the public. The South Tyrolean government, led by the SVP, framed the centenary as an important historical and symbolic juncture which could act as the starting point for a new, forward-looking identity, informed but not restricted by the turbulent events of the preceding century. There was also an increased governmental emphasis on the role of the EU-backed Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion, established in 1998 and officially ratified in 2011, as a political organisation which could expand cross-border collaboration while not diminishing the initial injustice of the annexation in 1919.

In the Swiss daily newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* – widely read across German-speaking countries – prominent South Tyrolean author Sabine Gruber summed up the fundamental dilemmas surrounding how the centenary should be marked, if indeed it should be marked at all:

Südtirol ist seit hundert Jahren Teil Italiens. Ist das Anlass zu feiern? Für deutschnationale Kreise wären derlei Gedenkfeierlichkeiten ein Affront, schliesslich sehen sie sich noch immer als Opfer der italienischen Annexion [...] Gezündelt wird immer wieder, manchmal auch von aussen: 2018 versprochen die

österreichischen Regierungsparteien FPÖ und ÖVP den Südtirolern die österreichische Staatsbürgerschaft.<sup>611</sup>

Gruber here articulates the points of tension concerning the commemoration and the diverse factors that different organisations had to take into account when considering how, and indeed whether, it should be marked. At the same time, her comments on the sensitivity surrounding the centenary commemorations indirectly help to explain why creating a unifying memory culture around South Tyrol's annexation is so challenging. As the annexation represented a space of contested narratives, organising acts of remembrance that would reflect these often contradictory views without inflaming existing tensions between language groups – such as those already caused by the discussion surrounding dual Austrian-Italian citizenship in 2018<sup>612</sup> – required a highly delicate balancing act.

This balancing act was especially relevant for the SVP when planning their official governmental commemorations. Although they present themselves as primarily representing South Tyrol's German and Ladin-speaking communities, the SVP also have a broader role in representing the interests of all South Tyroleans when negotiating with the Italian government. The circumstances of the annexation in 1919 represented a particular challenge: whereas the Victory Monument exhibition was able to draw on the

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<sup>611</sup> ('South Tyrol has been part of Italy for a hundred years. Is that a reason to celebrate? For those who move in German-speaking nationalist circles, such commemorative celebrations would be considered an insult, not least because they still see themselves as victims of the Italian annexation. [...] Tensions are continually being stoked, sometimes also by those outside [South Tyrol]: in 2018, the Austrian governing parties FPÖ and ÖVP promised South Tyroleans Austrian citizenship'). Sabine Gruber, 'Südtirol ist eine multiethnische Erfolgsgeschichte – trotz einer Vergangenheit voller Dissonanzen und Provokationen', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9 March 2019, <https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/100-jahre-suedtirol-eine-multiethnische-erfolgsgeschichte-ld.1458858> [accessed 16 December 2019].

<sup>612</sup> The involvement of the right-wing FPÖ party in an Austrian coalition government with the centre-right ÖVP in December 2017 provoked a debate on dual citizenship in South Tyrol, as the FPÖ supported offering South Tyroleans dual Austrian-Italian citizenship. Although the proposal caused much controversy, the offer of dual citizenship ultimately did not materialise for a number of reasons, including opposition from the Italian government and the collapse of the coalition in May 2019.

shared suffering of Italian and German-speaking communities during successive dictatorships, the power dynamics surrounding the annexation necessitated a different approach.

The annexation could not be solely categorised as a historical event: it remained a politically charged issue with no agreed cross-cultural, cross-language narrative which continued to inform contemporary identity formation. Whereas the Südtiroler Schützenbund considered the annexation a historic injustice marking the beginning of ongoing Italian oppression, many right-wing Italian groups believed South Tyrol's rightful place to be as part of Italy. Luca de Carlo of the right-wing Fratelli d'Italia party stated in October 2019: 'Invito chi ama l'Austria ad andarci a vivere',<sup>613</sup> referring to the Schützenbund's raising of the Austrian flag at Castel Neuhaus near Bolzano to commemorate Austria's National Day on 26 October.

Between these two diametrically opposed perspectives closely constructed along cultural and linguistic lines, there were voices such as that of Hannes Obermair which occupied a middle ground. Speaking in March 2019, Obermair placed the annexation in the wider context of South Tyrol's twentieth-century history, which he characterises as 'eine Geschichte des Rechts und des Unrechts zugleich'.<sup>614</sup>

The question of how to incorporate competing views concerning South Tyrol's history was especially pertinent for commemorations led by the provincial government, for whom the annexation presented a particular challenge. On the one hand, South Tyrol's

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<sup>613</sup> ('I invite those who love Austria to go and live there'). 'Alto Adige, de Carlo: Chi ama Austria vada a vivere in Austria', *Fratelli d'Italia*, <https://www.fratelli-italia.it/2019/10/26/alto-adige-de-carlo-chi-ama-austria-vada-a-vivere-in-austria/> [accessed 18 December 2019].

<sup>614</sup> ('a history that encompasses both right and wrong simultaneously'). Obermair, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

geographical location between two major powers had been instrumentalised in interpretations of the Second World War to justify the *Opferthese*. Conversely, the province's shifting borders, and how these border changes following the First World War were interpreted, constituted the precise point of tension when commemorating the annexation.

The *Opferthese* was reliant on the idea that South Tyrol was a border province helplessly subject to the control of greater powers. However, a decision by the SVP-led provincial government to pursue a similar narrative of passivity in relation to the annexation would have avoided answering the central question of whether the redrawn borders following the First World War were justified. Ultimately, this approach would have pleased none of the groups that contributed opposing views in this debate. Instead of shaping a unifying narrative around which to build a unifying memory culture, the government would have been seen as entirely abdicating responsibility for an official memory culture. This course of action would have allowed notions of disunity to replace the newly crafted cross-cultural, cross-language narratives encouraged by the Victory Monument exhibition and *Stolpersteine*.

The pressing political dilemmas that the centenary presented to the SVP bear out the assertion of Johanna Mitterhofer – a South Tyrolean cultural heritage researcher – that ‘the past matters not only on a rhetorical level, but [also] has concrete and tangible dimensions’.<sup>615</sup> On the one hand, an excessive focus on South Tyrol's ongoing status as part of Italy could have weakened the SVP's position at a time when they were lobbying

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<sup>615</sup> Johanna Mitterhofer, ‘Competing Narratives on the Future of Contested Heritage: Fascist Monuments in Contemporary South Tyrol’, *Heritage & Society*, 6.1 (2013), 46-61, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1179/2159032X13Z.0000000006> (p. 50).

for increased autonomy from Italy. On the other hand, an undue focus on the injustice of the annexation could have both emboldened those who believed South Tyrol should not be part of Italy at all and alienated South Tyrol's Italian-speaking community, many of whom had inherited an identity founded on the fact that relatives had moved to South Tyrol precisely because of the annexation. The challenge for the SVP then, was to acknowledge the historical injustice of the annexation while also ensuring that the centenary did not provoke further division between South Tyrol's language groups.

Unlike the government, the Südtiroler Schützenbund were able to pursue a single narrative as part of their commemorations, presenting the annexation as an injustice which should, in their view, be corrected by cessation from Italy. They produced a video entitled *Gegen Zwangsehe* ('against forced marriage'), which metaphorically used the premise of a disintegrating marriage between an Italian-speaking man and a German-speaking South Tyrolean woman to advance their argument that South Tyrol should no longer be part of Italy. The explanatory text accompanying the video on YouTube reinforces that the unhappy marriage is used metaphorically to represent South Tyrol's fractious relationship with Italy:

Das Jubiläum ist Blech, denn es war eine Zwangsehe, die vor genau hundert Jahren im Pariser Vorort Saint-Germain angeordnet und vollzogen wurde. Damals wurde Südtirol gegen seinen Willen mit Italien vermählt.<sup>616</sup>

The content of the video itself furthers the impression given in the accompanying text that the man is a metaphor for the Italian state while the woman represents South

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<sup>616</sup> ('The anniversary is nonsense because it was a forced marriage that was arranged and consummated exactly one hundred years ago in the Parisian suburb of Saint Germain. Back then, South Tyrol was wedded to Italy against its will.') Südtiroler Schützenbund, #GZ - *Gegen Zwangsehe*, online video recording, YouTube, 10 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPH6h1bvmpA> [accessed 16 December 2019].

Tyrol. The Italian man is presented as being obsessed by money: the opening image shows him entering figures into a calculator. By contrast, the German-speaking woman focuses on emotions and identity, stating: ‘Voglio essere me stessa’<sup>617</sup> (‘I want to be myself’). This juxtaposition between the grasping man and the free-spirited woman implies a discrepancy in how the German-speaking South Tyroleans and the Italian state view South Tyrol’s status as an Italian province. It is insinuated that the state merely sees South Tyrol, one of the country’s most prosperous provinces, as a lucrative cash-cow. For German-speaking South Tyroleans, however, it is suggested that separation from Italy would bring a sense of personal liberation. When explaining her feelings to her husband, the woman states ‘sto soffocando’<sup>618</sup> (‘I’m suffocating’). The contrasting characterisation of the two protagonists by the Schützenbund can therefore be seen as a modern refashioning of the *Opferthese*, depicting South Tyrol as being a present-day victim of the oppressive Italian state.

The accompanying text suggests that South Tyroleans have not only suffered at the hands of Italy, but were also victims of France, the USA and Great Britain. Italy is described as the ‘ungeliebt[er] Bräutigam’ (‘unloved bridegroom’). Meanwhile France, the USA and Great Britain – signatories of the secret Treaty of London (1915) which precipitated South Tyrol’s annexation – are termed die ‘Trauzeugen’<sup>619</sup> (‘marriage witnesses’). As well as reinforcing the focus on South Tyroleans as victims, the reference to the initial involvement of the Allies in the annexation frames South Tyrol’s past and future as a worldwide issue, rather than simply an internal Italian affair.

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<sup>617</sup> Südtiroler Schützenbund, *Gegen Zwangsehe*.

<sup>618</sup> Südtiroler Schützenbund, *Gegen Zwangsehe*.

<sup>619</sup> Südtiroler Schützenbund, *Gegen Zwangsehe*.

*Gegen Zwangsehe* suggests that what the Schützenbund view as the misguided decision reached at the Treaty of London continues to have profound consequences for the personal lives of South Tyroleans ten decades later. It is implied that South Tyrol's location within Italy restricts everyday choices, including the language one speaks. The Italian utterances made by the German-speaking woman are underpinned by resentment: 'mi ami e mi rispetti solo quando sono così come piace a te.'<sup>620</sup> By contrast, her assertions in the local South Tyrolean variety suggest a desire for personal liberation: 'Ich kriege Lust zum Tanzen, zum Singen, zum Lachen.'<sup>621</sup> By establishing an equivalence between personal and political independence, the video adds an ethical dimension to the centenary commemorations.

Ethical concerns are complemented by the theme of justice throughout the video. The annexation is depicted as a recent development which contradicts six hundred years of Tyrolean history: 'Ti ricordi che questa casa l'ho presa dai miei genitori? Da più di seicento anni è in proprietà di mia famiglia.'<sup>622</sup> In contrast to the provincial government's use of the centenary as the starting point for a process of identity formation informed by a range of cross-cultural, cross-language narratives, the Schützenbund use the annexation to reaffirm a narrative that assumes the need for distinct identities along age-old cultural and linguistic lines.

The Schützenbund's video is a reminder that the issues surrounding the annexation remain highly charged and unresolved a century later. The difficulty of developing a

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<sup>620</sup> ('You only love me and respect me if I'm as you want me to be.') Südtiroler Schützenbund, *Gegen Zwangsehe*.

<sup>621</sup> ('I want to sing, to dance, to laugh.') Südtiroler Schützenbund, *Gegen Zwangsehe*.

<sup>622</sup> ('Do you remember that I inherited this house from my parents? It's been owned by my family for more than six hundred years.') Südtiroler Schützenbund, *Gegen Zwangsehe*.

memory culture around the annexation when there is no consensus on how it should be remembered is exacerbated by the fact that the very staging of acts of ‘remembrance’ or ‘commemoration’ suggests a sense of closure, finality and a broadly accepted historical interpretation. There is no sense of closure in the *Gegen Zwangsehe* video, but rather a strong implication that the issue of South Tyrol’s future remains unresolved: the Italian-speaking man and the German-speaking woman are unable to reach an agreement, with the man merely stating ‘Tu sei pazza’<sup>623</sup> (‘you’re crazy’) in response to his wife’s request for a divorce.

By contrast, the provincial government’s marking of the annexation focused on facilitating reconciliation and defusing a politically charged event. This discrepancy between official and unofficial commemorations highlights an additional tension in South Tyrolean memory culture. Instead of adopting a middle ground in the midst of different, diverging narratives focused on single issues, the government decided to pursue a separate approach which used the annexation as an opportunity to reassess the cumulative role of South Tyrol’s twentieth-century history in contemporary identity formation. This reflective approach was encapsulated in the main official event to mark the centenary, a special joint sitting of the North and South Tyrolean parliaments in Meran on 10 September 2019. The involvement of Austria, absent from the Victory Monument exhibition and the *Stolpersteine* project, represented a further step towards pursuing a collaborative, cross-border memory culture shaped by all the countries involved in South Tyrolean history. As well as marking the centenary of the annexation, mention was also made of the eightieth anniversary of the *Option* and the passing of

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<sup>623</sup> Südtiroler Schützenbund, *Gegen Zwangsehe*.

fifty years since the basis of the Second Autonomy Statute was agreed. The event, at which South Tyrol's governor Arno Kompatscher, his North Tyrolean counterpart Günther Platter and Trentino Agriculture Minister Giulia Zanotelli made speeches, signalled both the growing influence of the EU-backed Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion and a common desire to approach the history of the whole Euroregion in a collaborative manner.

Kompatscher's speech at this *Gedenksitzung* ('commemorative sitting') marked a significant turning point in how South Tyrol integrated the events of the past into contemporary identity formation. He commented on the injustice of the annexation without using this injustice as an argument for South Tyrol's cessation from Italy.

Crucially, he undermined the *Opferthese* by asserting that there had been Nazi supporters in South Tyrol during the Second World War:

Seit 1919, teilt uns eine Unrechtsgrenze [...] Die Brennergrenze ist als Folge von Imperialismus und Nationalismus zu verstehen, als Frucht fehlgeleiteter Ideologien. Später wurde sie auch Symbol des Leids, das durch Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus über uns gekommen ist. Wir waren [...] aber nicht nur Opfer. Auch bei uns gab es Anhänger dieser Ideologien, die genauso aktiv mitgewirkt haben an dieser Tragödie. [...] Heute [...] verbindet uns die Einsicht, dass unsere Zukunft nur eine gemeinsame sein kann. [...] Südtirol ist inzwischen längst ein Modell dafür, dass ein friedliches Zusammenleben mehrerer Sprachgruppen und Kulturen gelingen kann, vorausgesetzt, dass alle Beteiligten den Mut zum Kompromiss haben.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> (Since 1919, an unjust border has divided us. [...] The Brenner border should be seen as a consequence of imperialism and nationalism, as the result of misguided ideologies. Later it also became a symbol of the suffering that was brought upon us by fascism and National Socialism. However, we were [...] not only victims. There were also supporters of these ideologies amongst us, who collaborated in this tragedy just as actively. [...] Today [...] we are united by the view that our future can only be a common one. [...] In the meantime, South Tyrol has long since acted as a model which shows that several cultures and language groups can live peacefully together, on the condition that all involved have the courage to compromise.) Tiroler Landtag, *Gedenksitzung: "Zwischen Zerreißung und Hoffnung"*, online video recording, Land Tirol, 10 September 2019, <https://www.tirol.gv.at/landtag/live/archiv/2019/10092019-gedenksitzungzwischen-zerreissung-und-hoffnung/> [accessed 25 February 2020].

Kompatscher's speech was significant above all because of its carefully balanced approach: he presented the centenary as an opportunity to acknowledge the hurt caused by the past, without allowing past hostilities to engender future divisions. He legitimised the sense of injustice the annexation provoked amongst South Tyrol's population but did not allow this to overshadow his call for an inclusive approach to identity formation. He used the suffering and tensions the annexation had provoked as the antithesis of a new identity, founded on embracing commonalities and accepting difference. This emphasis on a forward-looking identity informed by the events of the past was strengthened by the presence alongside Kompatscher of the aforementioned representatives from North Tyrol and Trentino, both former territories of Austria-Hungary and current members of the Euroregion.

Kompatscher's discrediting of the *Opferthese* constituted the most significant part of his speech. It was not the first time he had publicly undermined the *Opferthese*. In May 2017, he stated in a speech to South Tyrol's Jewish community: 'Wir haben uns immer gern als Land der Opfer dargestellt. Es gab in unserem Land Opfer und Täter. Und wir sollten damit einer reifen Demokratie entsprechend umgehen.'<sup>625</sup> However, the speech in September 2019 was crucial in reshaping South Tyrolean identity and memory culture for three reasons. Firstly, Kompatscher tackled the injustice of the annexation and the inaccuracy of the *Opferthese* in the same speech, dispelling any notion that they were mutually exclusive concepts. Secondly, his renewed discrediting of the *Opferthese* at a parliamentary sitting to mark the annexation – the very event that began the entire

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<sup>625</sup> ('We always liked to present ourselves as a province of victims. There were victims and perpetrators in our province. We should deal with this fact in a manner befitting a mature democracy.') Sabine Mayr and Doron Rabinovici, 'Erinnerung bedarf keiner Rechtfertigung', in *Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione*, 26/2 (2017), 178-187 (p. 187).

narrative of South Tyrolean victimhood – marked an important step forward in the ultimate dismantling of the topos. Finally, the presence of representatives from North Tyrol and Trentino at the sitting ensured that Kompatscher’s rejection of the *Opferthese* was heard far beyond the borders of the province, transcending political boundaries. Platter’s and Zanotelli’s attendance suggested a willingness to work collaboratively as part of the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion to explore the complex and often interconnected histories of the respective areas.

Although the parliamentary sitting was the main official event of the annexation commemorations, it was by no means the only one marking the centenary. A gathering entitled *100, 80, 50: Zukunft-Erinnerung*<sup>626</sup> took place on 5 September 2019, at which Kompatscher, along with the governors of North Tyrol and Trentino, made speeches reinforcing their commitment to a collaborative approach to engaging with South Tyrol’s twentieth-century history. The participation of Ladin-speaking poet Roberta Dapunt, German-speaking historians Hans Heiss and Martha Stocker and Italian-speaking historian and literary critic Carlo Romeo was highly significant on a symbolic level. It showed that each of South Tyrol’s main language communities had distinct experiences of South Tyrol’s history and contributed to it in very distinct ways. Their involvement also had a more concrete significance for contemporary approaches to identity formation in South Tyrol and the role of the province’s turbulent past within these approaches. Their collective presence at a major governmental commemorative event demonstrated how multilingual, multi-perspective approaches to these complex, interconnected topics were becoming increasingly mainstream in South Tyrol. It was an

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<sup>626</sup> ('100, 80, 50: Future-Remembrance').

example of how political, historical and literary influences play interconnected yet distinctive roles in understanding and reshaping views on South Tyrol's twentieth-century history and its effect on twenty-first century identity construction.<sup>627</sup>

Around the time of the centenary commemorations, initiatives with a focus on increasing understanding of South Tyrol's twentieth-century history complemented the aforementioned political and symbolic events. The Historegio project, supported by the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion, aimed to encourage the wider public to engage with the events leading up to the annexation. It explored the negotiating position of the Italian government prior to the Treaty of Saint Germain in 1919 by looking at unexamined sources, also considering the way in which South Tyrol's future was discussed in Italian public discourse. The collaboration, which involved the Universities of Innsbruck and Trento, sought to shed greater light on how people in South Tyrol, North Tyrol and Trentino were affected by the First World War.

Moreover, the Centre for Regional History at the University of Bolzano organised a programme of events to mark the annexation. A series of keynote addresses were given by renowned historians across Europe between October 2019 and January 2020 as part of a lecture series entitled 'Der Pariser Frieden 1919/20: Territoriale Neuordnung und Minderheitenprobleme'.<sup>628</sup> The comments made by Director of the Centre Oswald Überegger indicate the programme's dual purpose of both intensifying academic examination of the circumstances of the annexation and encouraging greater engagement with these events as part of mainstream public discourse: 'Wir möchten

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<sup>627</sup> Land Südtirol, *100, 80, 50: Zukunft - Erinnerung*, online video recording, Facebook, 5 September 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/LandSuedtirol/videos/535959213621569/> [accessed 25 February 2020].

<sup>628</sup> ('The Paris Peace Conference 1919/20: Territorial Realignment and Minority Problems').

diese zentralen Ereignisse der Tiroler Geschichte nicht nur wissenschaftlich aufarbeiten, sondern auch ein attraktives Bildungsprogramm für die gesamte Südtiroler Bevölkerung bieten.<sup>629</sup> Meanwhile a conference in Bolzano in November 2019 – entitled ‘Erinnerungsbilder und Gedächtniskonstruktionen: Das Erbe des Ersten Weltkriegs in Zentraleuropa (1918–1939)’<sup>630</sup> – suggested a desire to contextualise South Tyrol’s situation as part of a wider European consideration of the First World War’s aftermath. Rather than seeing the centenary as an isolated anniversary, the organisers from Bolzano’s Centre for Regional History – along with counterparts from universities in Vienna and Graz – used it as an impetus to draw public and academic attention to South Tyrol’s subsequent twentieth-century history.

Kompatscher’s speech at the *Gedenksitzung* and the aforementioned cultural events jointly offered a new perspective on South Tyrolean memory culture. The initiatives by Historegio and the University of Bolzano sought to gather more knowledge to supplement South Tyrol’s existing historical narratives, place South Tyrol’s history in a European context and share these findings with the wider public. Kompatscher’s comments in September 2019 began to reconfigure how these historical narratives might be used in identity formation. As well as reasserting his rejection of the *Opferthese*, he put forward an approach to identity formation and memory culture which acknowledged the suffering of South Tyroleans in the twentieth century while

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<sup>629</sup> (‘We would like to engage with these central events in Tyrolean history not only on an academic level. We would also like to offer an attractive educational programme for the entire South Tyrolean population.’) ‘Die Teilung Tirols im Blickfeld’, *Die Neue Südtiroler Tageszeitung*, 25 January 2019, <https://www.tageszeitung.it/2019/01/25/die-teilung-tirols-im-blickfeld/> [accessed 31 March 2020].

<sup>630</sup> (‘Images of Remembrance and Memory Constructions: The Legacy of the First World War in Central Europe (1918-1939’)).

also accepting their complicity, and in some cases participation, in atrocities committed by the Nazis.

## Conclusion

Kompatscher's call in September 2019 to nurture 'ein friedliches Zusammenleben'<sup>631</sup> ('peaceful living together') by developing an identity focused on common ground between language communities rather than on sources of division was not a new idea in public discourse on South Tyrol. Indeed, activist and Green Party politician Alexander Langer had promoted this ideal until his death in 1995. However, Kompatscher's intervention was significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, he presented a contemporary desire to focus on common ground between South Tyrol's language groups as being compatible with a recognition of the historical injustice of the annexation. Secondly, during the 1980s, the SVP had criticised Langer's call for more interaction between language groups, with Secretary for German-speaking Schools and Culture Anton Zelger disparagingly branding him a 'Zusammenlebensapostel'<sup>632</sup> ('disciple for living together'). The fact that Kompatscher, as provincial governor and leader of the ruling centre-right SVP, endorsed the notion of 'friedliches Zusammenleben', championed by Green Party member Langer almost four decades previously, emphasised the extent of the shift in governmental attitudes towards identity formation in the intervening years. Kompatscher's speech moved the idea of a 'friedliches Zusammenleben' from being a distant, idealistic notion to an achievable,

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<sup>631</sup> Tiroler Landtag, *Gedenksitzung*.

<sup>632</sup> Florian Kronbichler, *Was gut war: Ein Alexander-Langer-ABC* (Bolzano: Raetia, 2005), p. 41.

mainstream concept. Crucially, it represented an official endorsement of a widespread consideration of what exactly is meant by living together peacefully.

Part of this process also involved creating a space in which the critical views of public figures such as Wirth Anderlan, for whom the different groups that make up South Tyrolean society engage in 'ein friedliches Aneinandervorbeileben',<sup>633</sup> could be accommodated without inflaming open wounds<sup>634</sup> and undermining overall official attempts to develop a unifying memory culture. By framing 'friedliches Zusammenleben' as a concept that must be nurtured by all, Kompatscher suggested that the construction of identity, and the function of memory culture within it, is a collective responsibility. This inclusive approach provided space for competing, contested interpretations of the past while also emphasising how engagement with 'friedliches Zusammenleben' and its differing definitions could form a common basis for both identity formation and memory culture.

Despite their differing historical focus and emphasis, the Victory Monument exhibition, the *Stolpersteine* and the official centenary events were all united by their status as a form of cultural history related to a temporally specific event. They each endorsed a new approach to memory culture and rejected deep-rooted, reductive perceptions of the past. Each artefact emphasised the need to create a common contemporary memory culture from a past characterised by division. The exhibition and *Stolpersteine* in particular positioned South Tyrol as a case study for other areas grappling with questions of collaboration and complicity.

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<sup>633</sup> ('peaceful but separate co-existence'). Wirth Anderlan, interview with author, 14 March 2019.

<sup>634</sup> Heiss, interview with author, 12 March 2019.

## Thesis conclusion

In September 2019, the South Tyrolean government marked the annexation of the province in significant ways. The centenary was a defining moment for the debates at the centre of the thesis, and it also provided a defining rationale for the approach that has been adopted for examining the relationship between cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol. The government's centenary commemorations, and in particular the change in mainstream political discourse they signalled, suggest that the way forward for South Tyrol does not involve any particular group winning, losing or being marginalised. Instead, the debate is gradually being informed by a more multicultural, multilingual approach to identity.

The multi-perspective approach of this thesis is supported by the proposal of a four-phase framework which elucidates the key turning points in the debate, and also identifies the different fault lines between South Tyrol's language groups. These fault lines are informed by each community's distinct experience of, and response to, the turning points identified by the four phases themselves.

The four phases, which were characterised by conflict and competing historical narratives, help to articulate the importance of the centenary as a moment in the debate where conflicting views of identity and history could be considered together. The four-phase framework and the particular vantage point of the centenary jointly reveal a cultural history of South Tyrol and a debate on identity and multilingualism where the particular constellation of factors which affect identity formation – geographical, historical and political, cultural and social, and linguistic and literary factors – are not discrete and disconnected but rather intricately linked and interactive.

The four-phase framework shows how, at every stage of the debate, cultural interventions by figures such as Claus Gatterer, Sebastiano Vassalli, Stefano Zangrando and the committee behind the *Stolpersteine* memorial both responded to and prompted political developments. The framework demonstrates how the overall importance of these interventions from different genres, perspectives and generations can only be understood when they are considered together using a multi-perspective approach. The centenary commemorations represented a moment when the different narratives from different groups apparent in the four phases began to co-exist more peaceably rather than competing for prominence.

The dialogue of ideas which emerged between the figures considered in this thesis is apparent only when the different perspectives and factors which contributed to the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism are considered alongside one another as part of a coherent, multi-perspective process, rather than being conceived of as separate entities.

Many of the key events in South Tyrolean history prior to the centenary had been characterised by oppression and opposition. The annexation (1919), Italianisation (1923-1943), the *Option* (1939) and the two Autonomy Statutes (1948 and 1972) all conceived of South Tyrol's language groups as entirely separate entities which were largely in competition with one another, as though strengthening one identity must automatically involve weakening another. The centenary commemorations followed a similar model to that adopted in the laying of the *Stolpersteine* in January 2015, which remembered those persecuted by the Nazis: they exploited a historically divisive event

– in this case South Tyrol’s annexation – to model a new collective approach to the province’s entire twentieth-century history.

Crucially, the governmental commemorations marking the centenary emphasised how accepting the initial injustice of the annexation was compatible with a recognition of the co-operation and collaboration between language groups which had since been achieved. They showed how the annexation was gradually coming to be seen as part of cultural identity in South Tyrol, rather than being assumed to stand in the way of identity formation. The occasion of the centenary allowed the three key factors governing the debates in South Tyrol to be addressed in an integrated way: the injustice of the annexation, the extent of South Tyrolean complicity in World War Two, and the nature of contemporary interactions between the province’s language groups. This integrated approach redrew the parameters of the debate. It encouraged a discourse on cultural identity and multilingualism which brought together the contradictory narratives produced by South Tyrol’s first ten decades since the annexation, using them as the basis for a forward-looking debate which embraced cultural and linguistic difference while allowing increasing space for cross-cultural and cross-language interactions to develop.

The thesis shows how South Tyrol has been entangled in a number of different debates over the last ten decades, largely involving narratives which coalesce along cultural and linguistic lines and are seen as mutually exclusive. By contrast, the centenary has brought a liberation of perspectives, where previously contradictory narratives can exist alongside each other as part of a more inclusive discussion. This change is supported by increasingly multi-faceted interpretations of the political events which have been

discussed in the thesis as turning points in the debate concerning cultural identity and the linguistic factors involved in its formation. All of these political events show how each phase was driven by the same question: how to deal with South Tyrol's complex cultural and linguistic demographics. However, this question produced different responses over time.

The annexation of South Tyrol in 1919 (Phase One) entirely overlooked the area's cultural and linguistic complexities: it was a decision made solely for political and military reasons. Without the annexation, the enforced Italianisation programme from 1923 to 1943 and the *Option* of 1939 – and the deep divisions both measures caused within and between communities – would never have happened.

The Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement of 1946 (Phase Two) acknowledged the particular cultural and linguistic demographics of South Tyrol but did not address them sufficiently and failed to provide adequate safeguards for German and Ladin speakers. However, it provided a strong legal basis for the protests of these communities throughout the 1950s and 1960s, who felt that the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement and the subsequent First Autonomy Statute (1948) had granted the Italian-speaking community excessive power. This combination of public and political pressure helped to bring about the Second Autonomy Statute (Phase Three).

The Second Autonomy Statute constituted a more thorough recognition of the difficulties of each language group and provided a long-term political and societal foundation for South Tyrol. The Statute did not directly contribute to a more cross-cultural process of identity formation: the province's language groups were still considered as separate entities and the measures introduced in the years after the

Statute initially reaffirmed divisions and sidelined the notion of multilingual identity formation. However, measures such as the Act of Linguistic Belonging,<sup>635</sup> which reaffirmed divisions between language groups, inadvertently gave prominence to Alexander Langer's cross-cultural identity model of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler*. Furthermore, the Statute contributed to a long-term easing in relations between South Tyrol's language groups by addressing the perceived inequalities of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement and the First Autonomy Statute.

The agreement concerning the founding of the Tyrol-North Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion in 1998 (Phase Four) demonstrated how the concept of South Tyrol as a multilingual border province was gaining more mainstream recognition, directly encouraging cross-provincial and supranational political co-operation and indirectly legitimising multilingual identity formation. Notwithstanding the initial concerns of the Italian government, it marked the beginning of a phase where the recognition of shared political and cultural interests and a common history between former Austro-Hungarian territories was not automatically presented as a precursor to South Tyrol's future secession from Italy.

Finally, the speech by governor Arno Kompatscher at the *Gedenksitzung* in Meran on 10 September 2019 as part of the centenary commemorations built on the notion of cross-border co-operation. Speaking in front of an audience which included representatives of both North Tyrol and Trentino, he addressed both the advantages of South Tyrol's current status as a multilingual border province and the complexities of the province's

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<sup>635</sup> The Act of Linguistic Belonging (1981) legally obliged all South Tyroleans to identify as being part of either the German, Italian or Ladin-speaking community.

history. In the context of this single speech, he gave public expression to what had been achieved in forging a joint trajectory for South Tyrol. Kompatscher responded to the same cultural and linguistic questions that had been debated at different points by different groups and individuals in the previous ten decades, crucially choosing not to foreground one narrative at the expense of another.

In considering the artefacts that are at the centre of this thesis, it is possible to articulate a gradual yet consistent development in how discussions about cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol were conducted. Much like the aforementioned turning points in the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol, the artefacts discussed in this thesis were connected to each other in a multitude of ways. Some of these connections were personal: Norbert Kaser himself mentioned Claus Gatterer as part of a new generation of South Tyrolean writers in his 'Brixner Rede' in 1969, also praising *Die Brücke*, a newspaper co-edited by Alexander Langer.<sup>636</sup> Kaser's premature death in 1978 at the age of thirty-two was cited by Langer as a key factor in his decision to return to South Tyrol,<sup>637</sup> from where he developed the identity model of the *Gesamtsüdtiroler* during the 1980s.

Kaser's influence continued posthumously, also crossing cultural, linguistic and temporal boundaries. Roberta Dapunt wrote an open letter to Norbert Kaser over thirty years after his death, reflecting on their shared connections to South Tyrol, their feelings of

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<sup>636</sup> Norbert Kaser, 'Südtirols Literatur der Zukunft und der letzten zwanzig Jahre', in Norbert C. Kaser, *Prosa*, ed. by Benedikt Sauer and Erika Wimmer-Webhofer (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2) (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1992), pp. 109-118 (pp. 116-117).

<sup>637</sup> Alexander Langer, 'Ritorno/Rückkehr', in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo 1978-1995/Aufsätze zu Südtirol 1978-1995*, ed. by Siegfried Baur and Riccardo Dello Sbarba (Meran: AlphaBeta, 1996), pp. 29-31 (p. 31).

isolation and the notion of a South Tyrolean literature.<sup>638</sup> Dialogue between contributors to the debate was not limited to those with similar opinions on the province. Sebastiano Vassalli and Alexander Langer were acquainted with one another and, though they were critical of each other's views, they were united by a mutual willingness to engage in topics surrounding cultural identity which had previously been afforded little attention.

Taking a broadly chronological approach reveals that while the key concerns of the debate on cultural identity and multilingualism in South Tyrol remained consistent, the extent to which certain topics were foregrounded or ignored shifted significantly, largely in response to the political, cultural and social circumstances of the time. For example, Kompatscher's reference to a 'friedliches Zusammenleben'<sup>639</sup> ('peaceful living together') in his speech on 10 September 2019 had strong echoes of Langer's sustained advocacy of greater interaction between language groups over three decades previously. Growing distance from the annexation and South Tyrol's increased autonomy in the intervening years had combined to turn what had initially been a peripheral concept advocated by Langer into a mainstream notion supported by the most powerful politician in South Tyrol.

Similarly, fifty years after the 'Brixner Rede', Sabine Gruber, one of South Tyrol's most prominent authors, heeded Kaser's call for South Tyrol's writers to tackle the province's historical and cultural 'sacred cows'. In her novel *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* (2011),

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<sup>638</sup> Roberta Dapunt, 'Una lettera a Norbert Conrad Kaser', *Nazione Indiana*, <https://www.nazioneindiana.com/2018/02/15/lettera-norbert-kaser/> [accessed 26 November 2020].

<sup>639</sup> Tiroler Landtag, *Gedenksitzung: "Zwischen Zerreiung und Hoffnung"*, online video recording, Land Tirol, 10 September 2019, <https://www.tirol.gv.at/landtag/live/archiv/2019/10092019-gedenksitzungzwischen-zerreissung-und-hoffnung/> [accessed 25 February 2020].

Gruber addressed the sensitive issue of interlingual relationships and South Tyrolean complicity in the Second World War, topics that had initially been raised by Joseph Zoderer and Franz Thaler in Zoderer's novel *Die Walsche* (1982) and Thaler's memoir *Unvergessen* (1988) respectively. The differing receptions of Gruber's and Zoderer's novels in particular demonstrate that a shift in how South Tyrolean writers dealt with sensitive aspects of the province's history coincided with, or perhaps prompted, an increased public willingness to engage with these themes.

The generally warm public reaction to the opening of the politically-backed Victory Monument exhibition in 2014 was especially indicative of gradually changing attitudes towards South Tyrol's history. Thirty-five years earlier, Langer's parliamentary proposal for a critical engagement with the controversial history of the Victory Monument had been rejected by both German and Italian-speaking representatives.<sup>640</sup> The largely positive response to the exhibition in 2014 confirmed the impression that the debate on multilingualism and cultural identity was not necessarily characterised by new ideas, but rather by a more enthusiastic response to existing ideas which had gained in prominence over the intervening years. Shifts in political circumstances and public opinion combined to create an environment in which contributions that touched on sensitive aspects of South Tyrolean history and identity formation were broadly welcomed, or at least tolerated, rather than criticised, and these topics therefore became more integrated into mainstream debate.

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<sup>640</sup> Alessandro Leogrande, 'Monumento alla Vittoria in Bolzano', *Alexander Langer Stiftung*, 1 February 2018, <https://www.alexanderlanger.org/it/987/4152> [accessed 11 February 2021].

A similar pattern can be observed in relation to changing approaches to the increasing presence in South Tyrol of immigrants from all over the world. When Langer predicted that immigrants to South Tyrol would soon outnumber Ladin speakers in the province,<sup>641</sup> a scenario that had come to pass by 2001,<sup>642</sup> the potential long-term effect of increased immigration on the province had been largely ignored on a political level. By contrast, Kompatscher's speech to mark the centenary on 5 September 2019 – five days before his speech at the *Gedenksitzung* – made the influence of immigrants on South Tyrolean society into a mainstream topic of political discussion. His reference to the need to acknowledge South Tyrol's growing immigrant population when planning the province's future was especially significant. Crucially, he stressed the importance of addressing increased immigration to South Tyrol from all over the world without presenting this development as a threat to its three main language groups. Kompatscher's intervention offered further evidence that people from beyond South Tyrol's three main language groups were gradually becoming an acknowledged part of the province's cultural identity and that their contributions to society were being engaged with as part of this process of identity formation. Moreover, Kompatscher's comments showed that increased engagement with the effects of immigration was not confined to literary works by South Tyrolean authors, such as Maxi Obexer's *Europas längster Sommer* (2017), but was also emerging in mainstream political discussion in the province.

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<sup>641</sup> Guido Denicolò, 'Vertiefungstreffen: Guido Denicolò über die Volkszählung und die Situation des Zusammenlebens in der Provinz Bozen', *Alexander Langer Stiftung*, 9 October 2011, <https://www.alexanderlanger.org/de/722/3200> [accessed 18 September 2020].

<sup>642</sup> Gregorio Gobbi and Katrin Schenk, eds, '2019: Südtirol in Zahlen', *Landesinstitut für Statistik*, [https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz\\_2019\(3\).pdf](https://astat.provinz.bz.it/downloads/Siz_2019(3).pdf) [accessed 11 February 2021], p. 19.

To date, the increasing influence of immigrants in South Tyrolean society has not been addressed in detail in research on South Tyrol, though Verena Wisthaler has considered aspects of this question from an educational and a political perspective.<sup>643</sup> The growing influence of immigrants on the debates concerning cultural identity and multilingualism would benefit from further research. Future research will also be able to ascertain how far the centenary commemorations have led to a sustained change in the debates discussed in the context of this thesis, evaluating to what extent the ongoing generational change and increasing distance from the events of the first half of the twentieth century prompts a widespread engagement with the implications of South Tyrol's history for contemporary identity formation.

Aspects of South Tyrol's cultural history emphasised in this study indicate instances where a similarly multi-perspective approach could be of benefit to the study of cultural identity in other conflicted settings. The Victory Monument exhibition discussed in Chapter Six can be seen as a case study in the wider debate on the role of monuments in contemporary society for productive discourse regarding cultural identity. The exhibition's emphasis on informing the general public about the complex history of the Victory Monument illuminates the divisive debate prompted in the UK by the tearing down of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston by protestors in Bristol in 2020, a discussion described by historian David Olusoga as largely a 'fact-free zone'.<sup>644</sup> The

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<sup>643</sup> Verena Wisthaler, 'Identity Politics in the Educational System in South Tyrol: Balancing between Minority Protection and the Need to Manage Diversity', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 13.3 (2013), 358-372, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12051>. Verena Wisthaler, 'South Tyrol: The importance of boundaries for immigrant integration', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42.8 (2016), 1271-1289, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1082290>.

<sup>644</sup> David Olusoga, 'A year on, the battered and graffitied Colston is finally a potent memorial to our past', *Guardian*, 6 June 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/06/year-on-battered-graffitied-colston-finally-potent-memorial-to-our-past> [accessed 28 September 2021].

eventual decision to house the Colston statue in a museum, including the graffiti sprayed on it by protestors,<sup>645</sup> has echoes of the choice of the curators of the Victory Monument exhibition to leave the original quotes in the monument crypt intact, whilst also superimposing new ones.

Considering the first-hand written memoirs of Gatterer and Thaler and the retrospective physical memorials of the museum and *Stolpersteine* as part of the same thesis offered a nuanced view on South Tyrol's complex history which would have been missed by a more narrow perspectival approach. The Victory Monument exhibition can additionally be positioned as a case study within broader discussions concerning 'culture wars' and how complex aspects of history should be memorialised, a debate which has prompted renewed discussion on the future of monuments both elsewhere in the UK and across the world.

A similarly multi-perspective approach could prove especially pertinent when considering cultural identity in other contested geopolitical contexts. The German-Polish border is a case in point. In their introduction to *The Language of Belonging*, which uses as one of its case studies the German-Polish border towns of Guben and Gubin,<sup>646</sup> Dariusz Galasiński and Ulrike Meinhof comment that 'in a world marked by socio-political upheavals and transnational mobilities, there are no easy answers to be had: our self-understanding of identity and belonging has come under stress'.<sup>647</sup> Taking a multifaceted approach to the question of cultural identity in South Tyrol during this

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<sup>645</sup> Olusoga, 'A year on'.

<sup>646</sup> Guben was part of Germany until after the Second World War, when the eastern area of the town (given the old Polish name Gubin) became part of Poland and the western area (Guben) became part of East Germany and later the unified Germany.

<sup>647</sup> Dariusz Galasiński and Ulrike Hanne Meinhof, *The Language of Belonging* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 1.

thesis in terms of both perspectives and genres has helped to establish a coherent means of understanding cultural identity in a province where identity formation was long characterised by numerous upheavals. A similarly diverse approach may be fruitful when applied to other border regions with complex historical power dynamics such as the towns of Guben and Gubin where, as in South Tyrol, those with first-hand experience of such historical upheavals are dying out and attention will gradually turn instead to how these events can be best commemorated by future generations (as has already been the case with South Tyrol's annexation for some time).

The shift in discourse in South Tyrol prompted by the centenary of the annexation was already emerging in the context of artefacts of memory culture prior to the centenary. Such artefacts take on a special significance in the thesis, given that they constitute a different way of interrogating the kind of questions that are addressed, or indeed ignored, in written contributions. They amplify areas of silence in historical narratives, providing differing perspectives and contrasting viewpoints on existing narratives which are more inclusive of a wider range of opinions and audiences. For example, the exhibition under the Victory Monument turned what had long been a nationalistic symbol of division and oppression into a space for dialogue and discussion between language groups, where competing narratives were viewed as equal contributions to a multi-faceted discussion rather than as mutually exclusive viewpoints.

The centenary itself was crucial in signalling a new approach. It did not resolve cross-language tensions, but rather it acknowledged the interaction of competing narratives as a necessary part of a productive dialogue between language groups. As we have seen in Chapter Six, the combination of symbolic events such as political speeches, and

informative initiatives like the lecture series on the annexation organised by the University of Bolzano suggest that a peaceful co-existence between language groups does not involve establishing a common historical narrative associated with one particular organisation, language group or individual. Instead, it requires the creation of a space where different narratives from contrasting perspectives can co-exist.

The responses of organisations such as the Südtiroler Schützenbund to the centenary, in particular their video comparing the relationship between South Tyrol and Italy to a forced marriage, suggested that the injustice of the annexation remained a major topic of discontent amongst the province's German-speaking population, even after the centenary. Moreover, the reignited controversy in October 2019 over whether the Italian term *Alto Adige*, reminiscent of Mussolini's Fascist era, should be dropped in favour of the more neutral *Provincia di Bolzano* indicated that residual tensions between language groups persisted after the centenary.<sup>648</sup>

Such political and cultural controversies do not however detract from the overriding importance of the centenary for identity formation in South Tyrol. The centenary demonstrated that, though the identities of the individual language groups remained distinctive, there was an ever-increasing space for cultural and linguistic interaction between the language groups as part of each of these identities. Competing narratives which were once seen as mutually exclusive were now being discussed and integrated as part of a broader narrative. The commemorations showed that cross-cultural interaction in South Tyrol had developed since Langer alluded to 'Grauzonen'<sup>649</sup> ('grey

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<sup>648</sup> 'LH Kompatscher: Keine Rede von Streichung der Bezeichnung "Alto Adige"', *Südtiroler Landesverwaltung*, 14 October 2019, [www.provinz.bz.it/news/de/news.asp?news\\_action=4&news\\_article\\_id=631344](http://www.provinz.bz.it/news/de/news.asp?news_action=4&news_article_id=631344) [accessed 23 June 2020].

<sup>649</sup> Alexander Langer, 'Zehn Punkte für das Zusammenleben', in *Scritti sul Sudtirolo*, pp. 234-243 (p. 238).

zones') shortly before his suicide in 1995. The province's cultural diversity was a central part of identity construction for *all* language groups, an element which had grown in importance as interaction between language groups continued to increase.

As this thesis has shown, it is not that the cultural identities of the individual groups had become less distinct from one another a hundred years after the annexation. Rather, the space for South Tyrol's cultural diversity and competing narratives to be accommodated as part of these identities had gradually increased. The extent to which the centenary will signal a lasting change in South Tyrol will largely depend on how the tensions between cultural identity and multilingualism are managed. This is especially true in the light of periodic increases in tension between language groups and the growing participation of immigrants beyond the three communities that shaped the cultural identity of South Tyrol in the twentieth century.

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