

# Between Germanization and Localism. The German Cultural Influence in South Tyrol (1918-1946) by *Federico Niglia*

## I

### Introduction: a cultural battlefield

The identity of Tyrol, a typical European border region, results from the interaction between different dominations and cultural influences. After the conquer of the VI century a.C. the region was incorporated in the Roman Empire. After the invasion of the Goths the region entered a troubled era, falling under the domination of different kingdoms and experiencing several territorial adaptations. The emergence of Habsburg as the ruling dynasty in Central Europe and the extension of its sovereignty over the region in the fourteenth century marked a turning point: even though the various lines of the Habsburg dynasty did not abstain from involving Tyrol in local wars and conflicts, the county experienced a process of stabilization and growth.

The absorption in the Habsburg empire did not immediately affect the autonomy of the region, that maintained an authority on both fiscal and military matters for about three centuries. Maria Theresia was the first who effectively subordinated Tyrol's regional administration to the central administration in Vienna, reducing the range of autonomy of the county<sup>1</sup>. Since then the degree of local autonomy rapidly decreased: the institutional settlement of 1867 altered once and for all the status of Tyrol, which was annexed to the crown land of Cisleithania and tightly integrated in the imperial institutional system<sup>2</sup>.

As regards its cultural identity, Tyrol maintained a fierce sense of independence which lasted until the collapse of the dual monarchy, despite the contraction of its political and administrative autonomy<sup>3</sup>. The situation changed over the nineteenth century, when Tyrol became the battlefield between conflicting cultures and national identities. The rising national irredentism of the Italians clashed with the local German speaking element. The opposition between the two groups increased between the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth and contributed to the final clash between the "Latin"

culture and the “German” one. The decision to join the Triple Entente against the Central Powers taken by the Italian government in April 1915 definitely fomented the hate between the two nationalities and closed the door to any future cohabitation.

The Austrian defeat and the division of the region in two parts (the northern under the sovereignty of the Austrian republic and the southern, renamed Upper Adige, included in the Kingdom of Italy), opened a new phase. In contradiction with the moderate approach of a few enlightened personalities, the Italian authorities maintained a nationalist attitude towards the Tyrolean question in attempt to subjugate and isolate the German minority. The following Fascist regime implemented and enforced the project of Italianizing South Tyrol, in order to increase the national homogeneity of the region and above all to prevent the rise of a German fifth column inside the national borders.

The history of South Tyrol from the Great War and the settlement of the question in 1946 has been deeply analyzed both by Austrian and Italian historians. For decades, the academic dialogue was badly affected by the survival of nationalist concerns on both sides. On a few core issues a disagreement between Italian and German speaking (it means German and Austrian) historians does still exist: the judgment on the Tyrolean policy adopted by pre-Fascist Italian governments; the options of 1939; the De Gasperi-Gruber agreements of September 1946, which establish a set of rules for the safeguard of the German speaking minority. The German speaking historiography, together with what we can call a “Tyrolean” historiography, is largely contributing to the analysis of the different aspect of the Tyrolean question, even though a number of limitations affects their methodological approach<sup>4</sup>. On the contrary, Italian scholars find it hard to deal with the issue, as confirmed by a limited number of publications and studies<sup>5</sup>.

This chapter stems from an apparently easy observation: there is no doubt that for the Italians living and dealing with the South Tyrolean question the national reference point was moderately clear and understandable. For the German speaking Tyrolean population the interaction between cultural and linguistic models was slightly more complicated: for them the deeply rooted local and rural identity was mixed with the reference to the “German world”. The latter concept has a high degree of ambiguity, since it refers in some cases to Austria, in some others to Germany or to a broader German cultural area. If before 1914 the German main reference point for the Tyroleans was the Habsburg Empire, the influences from the German world multiplied after 1918. For the Tyrolean population end of the World War I marked a cultural turning point: the image of Austria and that of Germany often overlapped. As

a result, the fight for the restoration of the Tyrolean unity merged with the broader *Anschluss* question.

In this chapter, I focus on the identity of South Tyrol between the two world wars. I will briefly discuss the issue of cultural and national identity in Austria and Tyrol in the Habsburg empire. After that, I will analyze the impact that the Great War had on Austria and on the South Tyrolean population with the emergence of Germany as a new reference point for both. I will then concentrate on the South Tyrolean question in the interwar period, focusing both on the Italian approach to the minority problem and on the reaction of the German speaking minority. An insight will be given on the controversial relations between the German speaking minority in South Tyrol between the option agreement of 1939 and the German occupation in the province in 1943-45. I will finally provide a few remarks on the survival of German influences in South Tyrol after World War II.

## 2

### The German influence in Tyrol under the Habsburg domination

«The heart of the Habsburg Empire lies at its periphery». Joseph Roth's famous quotations summarizes the complexity of the Austrian empire, whose power and wealth depended in a large part on the external regions, while Vienna and the centre acted as a stabilizing factor<sup>6</sup>. Before transforming in a source of instability in the pass transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the different nationalities and cultures fueled the vitality of the empire. German was the language of the monarchy but it had no hierarchically supremacy on the other languages. According to historian Roberta Pergher «representatives of the ruling elite and administrative body did not conceive of themselves in nationalist terms but viewed their "Germanness" as an expression of their education and culture»<sup>7</sup>.

The *Ausgleich* of 1867 deeply impacted on the equilibrium between national groups and changed the role that the German language and culture played in the self-perception of the elites in the empire. In the multinational regions, language and culture became dividing factors: at the turn of the century the German speaking elite elaborated a new self-representation based on the superiority of the German civilization<sup>8</sup>. In some cases the perceived superiority of single individuals merged with the political action carried out by pro-German and pan-German movements, whose attempt was to transform the supposed German cultural superiority into a project of political domination.

Until the first half of the nineteenth century the county of Tyrol maintained a special position in the national hierarchy of the empire: on

the one hand, it was a German speaking province strictly connected with the House of Habsburg. On the other hand, it was a peripheral county, with a strong sense of autonomy. The region was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, an ethnically complex entity: in 1900 on a whole population of 805.000 inhabitants, 55% were German speakers, 43% Italian speakers and 3% Ladin speakers. The division between the two main groups resulted also from a clear territorial partition, the German speakers living in north and the Italian speakers in the South. In the years preceding the break out of the war this vision went in competition with the traditional self-perception of German-ness as an open ethnicity, which was popular in Tyrol but also in other imperial territories.

The rising opposition between the two groups led to the emergence of maximalist territorial aspirations. Italian claims, traditionally limited to the province of Trent, expanded to the South Tyrolean region up to the Brenner border. The idea of “securizing” the Brenner Pass and to create an homogeneous Italian region gathered momentum among Italian nationalists. The main supporter of this project was the Roveretan irredentist Ettore Tolomei, founder and editor of the “Archivio per l’Alto Adige”<sup>9</sup>. His project was finally embraced by the Italian government and by the minister of foreign affairs Sydney Sonnino, who successfully included the request for South Tyrol in the London Pact.

Confronted with the activism of the Italian group the German speaking population increased its defensive attitude. German speaking Tyroleans, faced with the growing instability of the time, reacted enhancing their traditional institutions (for example the traditional Tyrolean military corps of the Schützen), which should defend not only the Tyrolean territory, but above all the regional identity. The enrolment in the Schützen corps grew year by year and reached quota 65.000 before the war outbreak<sup>10</sup>. The emergence of the local tradition as a shelter for the Tyrolean identity is also confirmed by the restored myth of Andreas Hofer – his centennial was celebrated in 1909 – who affirmed as the leading icon of the national and irredentist Tyroleans<sup>11</sup>.

Broadly speaking, the analysis carried out on the Tyrolean identity before the breakout of the war confirms that what has been called the “Tyroleaness”<sup>12</sup> was a typical example of local and rural pride with a high degree of loyalty to the Emperor. Pan-German groups and movements did not obtain great success in Tyrol. Pan-German myths and propaganda rarely influenced the Tyroleans, who viewed with suspicion the project of a borderless German world attempting to conquer the continent. Before the war imperialistic instincts were unfamiliar for a population that considered national and ethnic borders as tool to safeguard values and traditions.

### **Clash of irredentism and the new Tyrolean geography**

The Great War transformed the region of Tyrol in a real battlefield where not only soldiers but also different visions confronted<sup>13</sup>. The war-fever fomented extremist visions and irredentists on both sides started claiming for the “redemption” of the whole Tyrolean region: in one of the few books published in English by Italian nationalists it was clearly stated that «Trentino and the Upper Adige form an inseparable whole, share a common destiny»<sup>14</sup>. On the other side the German propaganda opposed the motto: “Tirol den Tiroler! Von Kufstein bis zur Berner Klause”<sup>15</sup>. Pan-German slogans claiming for a “Wiedeindeutschung” of the Trentino up to the Garda Lake gathered momentum also among a population which had always maintained distance from the big history. Tyroleans, as well as the other populations involved in the conflict, were poisoned by the war propaganda and participated in the atrocities that took place from 1915 up to the late 1918. They fought for the glory of the empire but also the unity of their region: the Congress of the Tyrolean People, which took place in May 1918 in Sterzing, strongly reaffirmed the unity of the region and asked the Viennese diplomacy to enter negotiations with the British and the French to avoid any form of Tridentine autonomy.

The crush of the Austrian southern defensive line in 1918 alongside with the collapse of the whole Habsburg empire was a shock for the German speaking part of the Tyrolean population. On November 3, 1918 the Italian troops headed by general Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi entered Trent and the Italians rapidly extended their control up to the Brenner pass. During the first Italian military occupation of Tyrol no important riots or incidents took place. In the twilight of the liberal age, moderate figures dominated the Italian approach to the South Tyrolean question and contained the extremist nationalist attitude of those who promoted a rapid and violent Italianization of the province. The symbol of Italian enlightened elite was Luigi Credaro, established psychologist follower of Wilhelm Wundt, appointed in 1919 General Civilian Commissioner for the region Upper Adige. Given his excellent knowledge of the German language and culture and of the agricultural problems in mountain regions, he promoted a moderated approach to the cultural and institutional settlement of the Upper Adige. Even after the signature of the Treaty of Saint Germain he refused to pursue a forced Italianization of the German minority<sup>16</sup>. At the national level, another supporter of a balanced solution of the Tyrolean question was Luigi Luzzatti, former prime minister and influential academician with a strong interest for the German world (he popularized in Italy the German economic doctrine of Schulze-Delitzsch): he openly proposed

in the Parliament the concession of a privileged status to the German speaking minority in order to safeguard its cultural identity.

The achievement of a new balance between Italians and German speaking Tyroleans became impossible when extremism spread on both sides of the barricade. Italian nationalists easily got the better of the moderates, accusing them of pliability. Old nationalists and irredentists would have found a new ally in the Fascist movement: together they transformed a narrow provincial problem into a broad anti-German campaign.

Austrians and Tyroleans reacted, since the end of the war, with an attempt to establish a new state based on an homogeneous cultural entity. When both the German and the Austrian empire collapsed the unification of the "German" population appeared to many as the only feasible solution. In November 1918 the Austrian national assembly drew up a provisional constitution stating that "German Austria is a component of the German republic". The great powers promptly blocked the *Anschluss* and at the Paris peace conference the Austrian diplomacy unsuccessfully attempted to obtain endorsement of the US president in favor of the Austrian interest<sup>17</sup>. The *Landesregierung für Tirol* developed a vain collateral diplomatic action to avoid the division of the region. Wilson, in accordance with the British and French delegates, believed that a pro-Italian solution of the Tyrolean question would have increased a cooperative attitude of the Italian delegation in the negotiations for the eastern border with Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes<sup>18</sup>. In the end, the peace conference gave no safeguard to the German speaking minority and formally prohibited any attempt to unify Germany and Austria. Despite the allied opposition many Austrians and Tyroleans held onto the idea that the inclusion in a broad Germany would have been the only way to safeguard their cultural integrity: consequently, in March 1920 the Landtag of Tyrol formally asked for the second time the great powers to suppress the prohibition of a union with Germany.

The situation worsened after October 10, 1920, when the Kingdom of Italy formally annexed South Tyrol. Agitations in the province rose in the early 1921, with a large number of activists calling for a plebiscite. The Tyrolean movement enhanced its independence from the Austrian central authorities, which considered the issue of the annexation as a foreign policy and not as a local issue. However, Tyroleans did not give up and on April 24, 1921 a plebiscite took place in Northern Tyrol for the annexation of the region to Germany: the result was impressive, with 98,6% of votes in favor of this solution. The regrettable economic situation in the country gave new chance to those who believed that the establishment of a common economic area with Bavaria would have restored the welfare of the region.

Confronted with the growing activism of the German speaking minority, Italian nationalists reacted with an escalation of violence. On the same day of the plebiscite violence spread on the southern part of the region, when a Fascist squad headed by Achille Starace, the secretary of the Fascist Party to be, attacked the *Bozner Frühjahrsmesse*, where five people remained killed. One of the victims was the teacher Franz Innerhofer, who was shot while protecting a young child<sup>19</sup>.

Violence also burned up in the Italian parliament and it has to be remembered that the first speech of Benito Mussolini before the Chamber of Deputies was devoted to the situation in the Upper Adige. In his speech he directly attacked the approach followed by Credaro and asked for a more assertive policy. In Mussolini's words:

Il movimento politico antitaliano nell'Alto Adige è monopolizzato dal Deutscher Verband, il quale è espressione dell'Andreas Hofer Bund, che ha sede a Monaco, e che rivendica quale confine tedesco non già la stretta di Salorno, ma la Bern Clause o Chiusa di Verona. Ora il signor Credaro è responsabile della propaganda pangermanista nell'Alto Adige<sup>20</sup>.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1922 Fascist militias occupied the Bolzano town hall and overthrew Julius Perathoner, the democratically elected major. A few days later Fascist activists besieged the Office of the Italian Commissioner in Bolzano and forced Credaro to resign. South Tyrol can be formally considered the first victim of the Fascist rise to power, since the Fascist assault to its local institution was carried out before the March on Rome, which took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October later that year. After Mussolini's rise to power a peaceful cohabitation in South Tyrol became impossible. The last attempt in this direction was carried out in February 1923, when the local Fascist authorities negotiated an agreement with the Deutscher Verband to reach a *modus vivendi*. After the compromise failed as a result of nationalist pressures, the Fascist government turned into the defender of the "Italianità" of the region. Tolomei, who had been marginalized at the end of the war, became again the inspirer of the Italian campaign in the region. He succeeded in presenting the South Tyrolean leaders as agents of the pan-Germanist movements and called for a fight against them. Mussolini himself favored a "muscular" solution of the Tyrolean question since he still feared a fifth column of German revisionism inside the Italian borders. Consequently, he supported Tolomei's initiatives alongside those promoted by the minister of national education, the philosopher Giovanni Gentile.



### South Tyrol under Fascism and the “German” influence

The dismantlement of the Tyrolean identity accelerated in 1923. The so called “relazione Preziosi-Tolomei”, ratified in July by the Council of Ministers, completely dismantled the cultural autonomy of the German-speaking minority. New and invasive actions were enforced: Italianization of street signs, inscriptions and family names; enhancement of the Italian military and civilian presence on the territory; abolishment of German Tyrolean political and cultural institutions<sup>21</sup>. The demolition of the Tyrolean cultural identity made another step forward with the passing of the Lex Gentile, which reformed the Italian educational system in order to accomplish the nationalist and Fascist objectives of the government. The establishment of Italian as official language resulted in the forbidden of teaching German: starting from the school year 1923-24 all children in the first class would have no class in German<sup>22</sup>. The Fascist government made a step forward in 1926 with the establishment of the province of Bolzano in the attempt to increase the control over the whole region. Looking at the whole Fascist policy on the South Tyrolean question from the early 1920s up to 1938 strong evidence exist of the anxiety of the Italian authorities to “secure” the region and to de-Germanize the local population.

Under the Fascist domination the German language and culture became the key factor for the safeguard of the Tyrolean local identity. Not surprisingly, the first reaction against the “foreign” Italian domination was in the educational field: immediately after the pass of the Gentile reform, a group of South Tyrolean activists created an informal school system which served the entire province and gave the pupils a concrete opportunity not to miss their native language.

The experience of the so called *Katakombenschulen* (catacomb schools) played a fundamental role for the self-awareness of the minority for three specific reasons. It firstly contributed to the safeguard of the native language among young people. Secondly, the German schools became the training ground of the future leaders of Tyrolean irredentism, those who fought for Tyrolean cause against the Italians, the Germans and after 1945 again the Italians: this was the case of Eduard Reut-Nicolussi, who held an important position in the campaign for Tyrolean freedom during and after World War II<sup>23</sup>. Thirdly and lastly, the *Katakombenschulen* sacrificed the first martyrs of the South Tyrolean cause after Innerhofer. A still celebrated icon is that of Angela Nikoletti, a very young “catacomb teacher” arrested by the Italian police, who died in 1930<sup>24</sup>. Another and maybe more important case is that Josef Noldin, a key figure of the move-



ment who was interned in the Sicilian island of Lipari in 1927 and wrote an interesting memoir of his captivity<sup>25</sup>.

The movement went under the moral leadership of Michael Gamper, a priest and journalist who animated the irredentist campaign. He openly opposed the Fascist regime and his newspaper "Dolomiten" became the flag of Tyrolean irredentism<sup>26</sup>. He also used his religious status to get the support of the Vatican<sup>27</sup> and rapidly became one of the public enemies of the Fascist regime, undergoing a series of restrictions.

The irredentist campaign was carried out by Gamper and the Tyrolean leadership with no formal and continuous support of foreign governments. In fact, a strong support to the cause came from the German world. Most surprisingly, it was not Austria that mainly supported the "cousins" below the Brenner line. Since the 1920s the Austrian capacity to support the South Tyrolean initiative was very limited: the country was too much dependent from the Italian political and economic support to open such a critical question. In the following decade the Austrian government adopted an openly pro-Italian attitude, especially after 1932 when Engelbert Dollfuss ascended to Federal Chancellor. Dollfuss established an authoritarian regime in the attempt to overcome the structural weakness which affected the Austrian republic since its establishment. As a proud opponent of the *Anschluss* with Germany, the Austrian chancellor established a strong alliance with Mussolini, who supported the Austrian struggle for independence until Dollfuss' assassination<sup>28</sup>. Many Austrian nationalists, who had supported the Tyrolean cause in the postwar period, changed their attitude: this is the case of many members of the *Heimwehren*, the strongest Austrian nationalist militia headed by Ernst Rüdiger Starhemberg, who formerly fought for the maintenance of the Tyrolean unity and then refused to support the cause.

South Tyrol was not an official foreign policy priority of the Weimar Republic: it was a German speaking "Austrian" population of 250.000 people, which were very few if compared, for instance, with the 1.700.000 German citizens who were subdued to the Polish sovereignty. Nevertheless it was, as written by Gustav Stresemann in his memoirs, a sentimental question and this was the reason why the German government supported the Tyrolean irredentists as well as the other German minorities in Poland or in Czechoslovakia.

During the 1920s the German government allocated funds and supported groups and associations fighting against Mussolini's projects to Italianize the province. Tyrolean individuals and groups obtained hospitality on the German territory: this is the case of the Andreas Hofer Bund, the leading irredentist association, whose headquarter was established in Munich and organized the boycotting of Italian goods in 1925-26. The Weimar Republic

also gave intellectual support to the Tyrolean anti-Italian campaign: from the German universities and academic institutions book and essays on the “German character” of South Tyrol were released every year promoting an “intellectual” *Anschluss*<sup>29</sup>. Not surprisingly, the German support to the Tyrolean cause strongly contributed to the controversial relations between Mussolini and the Weimar Republic until the fall of the latter<sup>30</sup>.

Hitler rise to power deprived South Tyrol of the German support. Hitler’s position on question is well known and one can find the *Mein Kampf* a plurality of passages in which he stated that South Tyrol should be “sacrificed” for the achievement of a closer friendship between Italy and Germany:

Wer aber heute glaubt, durch Proteste, Erklärungen, vereinsmeierliche Umzüge usw. die Südtiroler Frage lösen zu können, der ist entweder ein ganz besonderer Lump oder aber ein deutscher Spießbürger. Darüber muß man sich doch wohl klar sein, daß die Wiedergewinnung der verlorenen Gebiete nicht durch feierliche Anrufungen des lieben Herrgotts erfolgt oder durch fromme Hoffnungen auf einen Völkerbund, sondern nur durch Waffengewalt<sup>31</sup>.

From a diplomatic point of view, in the 1930s both the two German countries betrayed the Tyrolean cause. Hitler finally went along Mussolini’s desire for a stronger inclusion of the Upper Adige in the Italian nation and after the accomplishment of the *Anschluss* in March 1938 the *Führer* agreed to definitely close the South Tyrolean question. The two governments signed on October 31, 1939 a treaty giving the German and Ladin speaking minorities of the Upper Adige the chance to “opt” until 31 December between the emigration in the neighboring Germany and the stay in Italy. Those refusing the transfer on the German territory would have experienced a “forced” Italianization. About 163.000 inhabitants opted for the transfer on the German territory, while a minority of about 63.000 people decided for the stay on the native soil. It should be clarified, however, that only a small part of those who opted immediately left the region for Germany: for the majority of them the option was an *escamotage* to be saved from Italian hands and they had not effective intention to leave the native soil.

The option agreement was a worse moment for the South Tyrolean population. The German historian Rolf Steininger explicitly defined, in the introduction to a book on the question, the agreement as the starting point of an “ethnic cleansing”<sup>32</sup>. The prominent irredentist leaders reacted to the attempt to delete South Tyrol refusing to transfer in Germany. Gamper, Friedl Vollger and a few maintained the unity of the so called *Dableibern* and faced prior the radicalization of the Fascist regime and, since 1943, a very unfriendly German occupation.

The history of the South Tyrolean population between 1939 and 1945 was considered a minefield until the late 1980s. Historians hesitated in critically analyzing that period in the fear to destroy the myth of the South Tyrol as the victim of two dictatorships. The rise of a new generation of people not involved in those events, along with the emergence of new sources and studies, have contributed to a better understanding of that years<sup>33</sup>.

The South Tyrolean community got divided when confronted with the choice between the stay in an hostile country and an uncertain transfer in the Third Reich. Only a few opted voluntarily for Germany for ideological reason, while the majority was pushed by the nightmare of a violent Italianization<sup>34</sup>. The statistics on the enrolment of South Tyrolean males in the German military and police corps give poor evidence of an ideological involvement. Nazi Germany was unsuitable as a new *Heimat*, first and foremost because those who opted for Germany considered Hitler responsible for their bad condition. Such a feeling was also shared by the majority of the *Dableiber*, who considered Germany responsible for the division of the region and for the disbandment of its population. In addition, the strong Catholic orientation of those who remained on the Italian soil increased the suspicion towards the pagan Nazi Germany. Gamper and the other local leaders explicitly refused to support the Nazi ideology and often condemned the irreligious practices perpetrated beyond the border: Gamper, for example, openly stigmatized in a well-known article (*Ein schrecklicher Verdacht*, 1940) the Nazi practice to exterminate ill and handicapped people<sup>35</sup>.

The fall of Mussolini in July 1943 and the German occupation of Italy, which took place in early September 1943 after the proclamation of the armistice, worsened the still critical situation in South Tyrol. In the 600 days lasting from September 1943 to April 1945 South Tyrol and the provinces of Trent and Belluno were included in the Operationszone Alpenvorland (OZAV), whose headquarter was established in Bolzano.

The new military and civilian authorities subordinated the interests of the local community to those of Germany. The whole Tyrolean region became a new recruitment area for the Wehrmacht and other military corps. The German authorities did not restore the local autonomy of the region and, in fact, established a strong police control over the region. A new police corps, the Südtiroler Ordnungsdienst (SOD), was established and its members were mainly recruited among those who opted for Germany in 1939. Among the misdeeds committed by the Tyrolean collaborationists the pursuit of Jews can be mentioned, along with the oppression of those who refused the settlement in Germany. The Germans scientifically attempted to destroy the unity of the community hitting the leaders of the *Dableiber*. Gamper, considered one of the main Tyrolean enemies of

National-socialism<sup>36</sup>, had to flee from the region. The other local leaders (Friedl Volgger, Rudolf Posch, Josef Ferrari and others) had to escape the Nazi persecution<sup>37</sup>. The key figure of the German occupation was OZAV's Supreme Commissar Franz Hofer, *Gauleiter* of Tyrol and Voralberg. A motivated executioner of the Berlin orders, Hofer considered as the last bastion of Nazi power in Europe and he devoted all his forces to the implementation of the military forces and to the cleansing. The project to transform Tyrol in the headquarters of the Nazi guerrilla against the overwhelming Allied troops taking the control over continental Europe was never pursued given the rapid collapse of the Nazi institutions and networks which followed Hitler's death. On 2nd September 1945 the US 88th Infantry Division occupied South Tyrol and took the control of the province facing no significant opposition.

## 5

### German political and cultural influence in postwar Tyrol

The destiny of South Tyrol at the end of the war was decided in accordance with the treatment that the Great Powers assigned to Austria. The governments of Great Britain, Soviet Union and United States took position on the future of Austria with a declaration released on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943. According to the Moscow Declaration «Austria, the first free country to fall a victim to Hitler's aggression, shall be liberated from German domination». In the same document the Allies charged the country with Hitler's crimes, stating that «she has responsibility which she cannot evade for participation in the war on the side of Hitlerite Germany, and that in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her own contribution to her liberation». In conclusion, the three great powers agreed not to allow any territorial or political compensation in favour of the newly established Austrian republic. As a matter of fact, South Tyrol remained within the Italian borders, since a return under the Austrian sovereignty would have caused an excessive frustration of the Italian interests. On 14 September 1945 the Council of Foreign Ministers, the body established to draft the peace treaties, confirmed that a new settlement of the Italian northern border was not an issue and that further negotiations should be limited to limited rectifications. The following negotiations led to the De Gasperi-Gruber agreement of September 1946, which gave to the German speaking minority of the province a high degree of autonomy and safeguard<sup>38</sup>.

As regarded the German speaking world, after the war the ties between Austria and Germany were definitely cut. The *Staatsvertrag*, the Austrian peace treaty signed in 1955, confirmed the *Anschluss* forbidden:

Die Alliierten und Assoziierten Mächte erklären, daß eine politische oder wirtschaftliche Vereinigung zwischen Österreich und Deutschland verboten ist. Österreich anerkennt voll und ganz seine Verantwortlichkeiten auf diesem Gebiete und wird keine wie immer geartete politische oder wirtschaftliche Vereinigung mit Deutschland eingehen<sup>39</sup>.

Apart from the legal statements, in the postwar years the relations between Bonn and Vienna worsened: FRG chancellor Konrad Adenauer demonstrated few interest in a German-Austrian *rapprochement*<sup>40</sup> and strongly criticized the neutral orientation of Vienna, which he considered as a danger for German reunification<sup>41</sup>.

The fragmentation of the German world was at the highest level in 1956, when the South Tyrolean question re-emerged prior as a bilateral Italian-Austrian controversy and then as a bigger international problem. Nevertheless, the decision of the Austrian government to put South Tyrol at the top of the foreign policy agenda, taken with the support of the national public opinion, along with the indirect support of a significant part of the public opinion in West Germany, confirm the survival of a tie between the German speaking minority in the Italian province and the rest of the German world.

The reasons that led Austria to invest so many resources in the campaign for the Tyrolean independence are well known. The most surprising and revealing feature data concern the support of West German people. Recent archival sources allow to identify three main groups who supported the anti-Italian campaign carried out in Innsbruck: the public opinion and the political authorities of the German Länder on the Austrian border (Bayern, Baden-Württemberg); the associations of the refugees coming from the eastern regions annexed to Poland and Czechoslovakia, who accepted to support the campaign of their Austrian "cousins"; the nationalist groups and parties who suffered in a defeated and divided Germany and considered the South Tyrolean campaign as a broader fight for the restoration of the German greatness. South Tyrolean irredentists benefited both from the interest and the concrete support of the German people and groups. Despite the neutrality of the German Federal government from Adenauer to Schmidt, Germans also often taken position against the discrimination the German speaking minority was supposed to suffer. Moreover, a significant amount of financial support flew from Munich and other German economic centers to sustain cultural and political actions for the protection of the German language and culture in the region<sup>42</sup>. The reopening of the South Tyrolean question, which remained open until the signature of the Moro-Waldheim agreement in 1969, keep the past of a Great Germany alive. For South Tyrolean nationalists and irredentists went on looking at Germany as a reference point for the following decades.

## 6

**Closing remarks**

In the last two centuries Tyrol has had a controversial relationship with the German world. Until the collapse of the Austrian empire the German language and culture played an important role for the identity of the community: German was the language of the leading elite and ethnicity of the region. Before 1914, the Tyrolean community rejected pan-German projects and maintained a suspicious attitude towards any attempt to alter the cultural and political status quo.

The war and the fall of the empire marked a turning point for this rural and traditional community: the territorial unity of the region was broken and the main cultural reference point – the Habsburg empire – collapsed. German speaking Tyroleans became a minority inside the Italian borders and had to fight for the survival of their identity. With the raise to power of Fascism in Italy the safeguard of native culture and language became harder than during the twilight of Italian liberal age.

The German language and the lying behind culture became key factors for the protection of the Tyrolean identity: the *Katakombenschulen* and other initiatives allowed the transmission of the local identity to the new generations. The cause of the South Tyrolean people received a strong support by the German world: not only Austria and the Tyrolean brothers in Innsbruck, but also the German people and government gave economic, political and cultural help to the irredentists in Bolzano. During the 1920s the influence of “Germaness” on South Tyrol reached the peak. During the 1930s, however, the South Tyrolean cause was betrayed by both Austria and Germany: the governments of the two countries sacrificed their commitment in South Tyrol to maintain good relations with Mussolini’s Italy.

South Tyroleans also perceived the friendship of the Germany as an instrument for the safeguard of their identity. But in fact, the Tyroleans did not want to completely merge their identity in a broader German community.

So, it is not possible to simplify the relations between the German minority and South Tyrol and the German world in the interwar period. The German influence on South Tyrol was indirect and discontinuous: the German world was undoubtedly a reference point, but its influence was always secondary if confronted with the local and rural values of the community. When, between 1943 and 1945, Nazi Germany attempted to subjugate the South Tyrolean community, the reaction was not unanimous: a significant part of the community welcomed the Germans as liberators, underestimating the fact that Tyrol was not a priority for



Germany and that Nazism had no respect for Tyrolean traditions too. Only a small but pugnacious minority openly reacted against what they perceived as a German occupation.

In the last years of war the limit of the German influence on the South Tyrolean people clearly emerged. Given that, after the war an indirect cultural and political influence survived and inspired the last wave of Tyrolean irredentism. Such influence lasted from the mid-1950s (after the signature of the *Staatsvertrag*) and the mid-1970s (when the between German individuals and groups on the one hand and irredentist and terrorist groups in the region on the other was cut off).

### Notes

1. H. Reinalter, *Aufklärung, Absolutismus, Reaktion. Die Geschichte Tirols in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Schendl, Wien 1974.
2. See M. J. Levy, *Governance and Grievance: Habsburg Policy and Italian Tyrol in the Eighteenth Century*, Purdue Research Foundation, West Lafayette 1988.
3. L. Cole, *"Für Gott, Kaiser und Vaterland". Nationale Identität der deutschsprachigen Bevölkerung Tirols 1860-1914*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt 2000.
4. On the limits of the "Tyrolean" historiography see L. Cole, "Fern von Europa"? *The peculiarities of Tirolian historiography*, in "Zeitgeschichte", vol. 23, n. 5-6, 1996, pp. 181-204.
5. On the Italian historiography see F. Scarano, *Di chi è l'Alto Adige. Una disputa fra storici italiani, austriaci e tedeschi*, in "Limes", vol. 10, n. 5, October 2002.
6. A classic account of the Habsburg policy on nationalities is that of G. Stourzh, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs 1848-1918*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie für Wissenschaft, Wien 1985.
7. R. Pergher, *A Tale of Two Borders: Settlement and National Transformation in Libya and South Tyrol under Fascism*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 2007, p. 54.
8. P. Judson, *Frontiers, Islands, Forests, Stones: Mapping the Geography of a German Identity in the Habsburg Monarchy 1848-1900*, in P. Yaeger (ed.), *The Geography of Identity*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1996, pp. 382-406.
9. Tolomei is one of the most controversial figures of Italian irredentism. Gisela Framke, who wrote one of the few existing books on Ettore Tolomei, dates back the Italian campaign for the Upper Adige to the very first years of the new century; G. Framke, *Im Kampf um Südtirol. Ettore Tolomei (1865-1952) und das "Archivio per l'Alto Adige"*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1987, p. 58. Italian historiography, often in disagreement with the Austrian one, has pointed out that the Italian attitude towards the Tyrolean question was slightly more complex. A turning point in the Italian campaign for South Tyrol was in 1908, when Austria annexed the Bosnian region. The Austrian government refused to apply the compensation clause introduced in 1887 and fueled a new wave of the Italian irredentism which led, at the end, to a campaign for the annexation of Bolzano.
10. Cole, "Für Gott, Kaiser und Vaterland", cit., pp. 432, 435.
11. L. Cole, *Andreas Hofer: The Social and Cultural Construction of a National Myth in Tirol, 1809-1909*, European University Institute, San Domenico di Fiesole 1994. See also O. W. Johnston, *The Myth of Andreas Hofer: Origins and Essence*, in Consortium on Revolutionary Europe 1750-1850 Proceedings 1989, eds. D. D. Howard and J. C. Horgan, Institute on Napoleon and the French Revolution-Florida State University, Tallahassee 1990, pp. 720-8.
12. Pergher, *A Tale of Two Borders*, cit., p. 59.



13. K. Eisterer, R. Steininger, *Tirol und der erste Weltkrieg*, Österreichischer Studienverlag, Innsbruck-Wien 1995. See also J. Fontana, *Il Tirolo storico nella prima guerra mondiale, 1914-1918*, Athesia, Bolzano 2000.
14. M. Alberti, C. Corsi, A. Hodnig, T. Sillani, A. Tamaro, *Ettore Tolomei, Italy's Great War and her National Aspirations*, Alfieri e Lacroix, Milan 1917, p. 78.
15. *Bern* was the ancient Germanic name of Verona. On the evolution of the image of the enemy in the Austrian war propaganda see N. Dacrema, *Il volto del nemico. Scrittori e propaganda bellica (1915-1918) nell'Austria di Francesco Giuseppe*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1998.
16. A. Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta. L'amministrazione pubblica dell'Alto Adige tra Italia liberale e fascismo*, Edizioni dall'Orso, Alessandria 2003.
17. A. Low, *The Anschluss movement 1918-1919 and the Paris Peace Conference*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia 1974.
18. M. Toscano, *Storia diplomatica della questione dell'Alto Adige*, Laterza, Bari 1967, p. 26.
19. In the collective memory of South Tyrol Innerhofer is the first martyr who fell during the Italianization of province.
20. «Il movimento politico antitaliano nell'Alto Adige è monopolizzato dal Deutscher Verband, il quale è la emanazione dell'Andreas Hofer Bund, che ha sede a Monaco, e che rivendica quale confine tedesco non già la stretta di Salorno, ma la Bern Clause o chiusa di Verona. Ora il signor Credaro è responsabile della propaganda pangermanista nell'Alto Adige, perché ha avallato, prefazionandolo, un libro dove si dice che il confine naturale della Germania è ai piedi delle Alpi, verso la valle del Po»; B. Mussolini, Speech before the Chamber of Deputies, 21 June 1921.
21. R. Steininger, *South Tyrol: a minority conflict of the Twentieth Century*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey 2003, pp. 18-20.
22. Classes in German were finally abolished in 1925 with the Royal Decree n. 2191. According to Steininger, 30.000 pupils were affected by the reform. Steininger, *South Tyrol*, cit., p. 26.
23. On Nicolussi a wide research was published: see M. Gehler (ed.), *Eduard Reut-Nicolussi und die Südtirolfrage 1918-1958*, Part 1, *Biographie und Darstellung*, Wagner, Innsbruck 2007.
24. "Angela Nicoletti", in *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815-1950*, Band 7, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1978.
25. C. Hartung von Hartungen, A. Sparber (eds.), *Josef Noldin: sein Einsatz – sein Opfermut – sein Nachwirken*, Athesia, Bolzano 2009.
26. He changed the old name of the newspaper, *Der Tiroler*, in order to bypass the Fascist censorship.
27. The signature of the Lateran treaty in 1929 mitigated the situation of the German minority in South Tyrol and the use of German was allowed in the teaching of religion.
28. K. Stuhlpfarrer, *Austrofaschistische Außenpolitik. Ihre Rahmenwirkungen und ihre Auswirkungen*, in E. Tálos, W. Neugebauer (eds.), *Austrofaschismus: Beiträge über Politik, Ökonomie und Kultur 1934-1938*, Lit. Verlag, Wien 2005.
29. I. Haar, M. Fahlbusch, *German scholars and ethnic cleansing, 1919-1945*, Berghahn Books, Providence 2005, pp. 123-5.
30. F. Scarano, *Mussolini e la Repubblica di Weimar: le relazioni diplomatiche tra Italia e Germania dal 1927 al 1933*, Giannini, Napoli 1997, pp. 30-5.
31. H. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Zentralverlag der NSDAP, München 1943, p. 743.
32. Steininger, *South Tyrol*, p. 1.
33. C. von Hartungen, F. Miori, T. Rosani (eds.), *Le lettere aperte 1939-43: l'Alto Adige delle Opzioni*, La fabbrica del tempo, Bolzano 2006.
34. J. W. Cole, E. R. Wolf, *The hidden frontier: ecology and ethnicity in an alpine valley*, California University Press, Berkeley 1999, p. 60.

35. On Gamper's life and political and journalistic activity see W. Marzari, *Kanonikus Michael Gamper: ein Kämpfer für Glauben und Heimat gegen Faschistenbeil und Hakenkreuz in Südtirol*, Hollinek, Wien 1974.
36. On Gamper see M. Windegger, K. M. Gamper, *Ein Leben für Südtirol (1885-1956)*, Dolomiten, Bolzano 2007.
37. G. Steinacher, *Südtirol im Dritten Reich: NS-Herrschaft im Norden Italiens 1943-1945*, Studienverlag, Innsbruck 2003; L. Steurer, M. Verdorfer, W. Pichler, *Verfolgt, verfehmt, vergessen. Lebensgeschichtliche Erinnerungen an den Widerstand gegen Nationalsozialismus und Krieg. Südtirol 1943-1945*, Edition Sturzflüge, Bozen 1993; M. Lun, *NS-Herrschaft in Südtirol: die Operationszone Alpenvorland 1943-1945*, StudienVerlag, Innsbruck 2004; M. Wedekind, *Nationalsozialistische Besatzungs- und Annexionspolitik in Norditalien 1943 bis 1945: die Operationszonen "Alpenvorland" und "Adriatisches Küstenland"*, Wissenschaftsverlag, Oldenbourg 2003.
38. Among Austrian historians the myth of the missed return of South Tyrol to Austria as a consequence of Cold War is still strong. Even Rolf Steininger, one of most authoritative experts of the Austrian and Tyrolean history wrote that «Südtirol wurde das erste Opfer dieses [Kaltes] Krieges»; Id., *Der Staatsvertrag. Österreich im Schatten von deutscher Frage und kaltem Krieg 1938-55*, Studien Verlag, Innsbruck 2005, p. 63. The case of the De Gasperi-Gruber agreement, which gave the German speaking minority in the Upper Adige a privileged status, is a unique in postwar Europe. Other German minorities (i.e. the Sudeten) did not benefit from similar initiatives.
39. Art. 4, 1) of the Austrian State Treaty.
40. In a well known conversation with Karl Gruber, Adenauer said: «If Austria demands reparations from us, we shall send an urn containing Adolf Hitler's mortal remains to Vienna»; H.-P. Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer: German Politician and Statesman in Period of War, Revolution and Reconstruction*, vol. 2, *The Statesman, 1952-1967*, Berghen Books, Providence 1997, 246.
41. Austria and FRG reacted very differently to the challenge of the Cold War: while Western German increased its ties with the Atlantic World, the Austrian diplomacy engaged, after the signature of the Staatsvertrag, in a policy that have been called of "active neutrality". M. Pape, *Ungleiche Brüder: Österreich und Deutschland 1945-1965*, Böhlau Verlag, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2000, pp. 283-400.
42. F. Niglia, *Aldo Moro, la diplomazia italiana e la questione dell'Alto Adige 1963-1969*, in D. Caviglia, D. De Luca, F. Perfetti, A. Ungari, *Aldo Moro nell'Italia contemporanea*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2011.