

The South Tyrol Question, 1866–2010

From National Rage to Regional State

Georg Grote



PETER LANG

South Tyrol is a small, mountainous area located in the central Alps. Despite its modest geographical size, it has come to represent a success story in the protection of ethnic minorities in Europe. When Austrian South Tyrol was given to Italy in 1919, about 200,000 German and Ladin speakers became Italian citizens overnight. Despite Italy's attempts to Italianize the South Tyroleans, especially during the Fascist era from 1922 to 1943, they sought to maintain their traditions and language, culminating in violence in the 1960s. In 1972 South Tyrol finally gained geographical and cultural autonomy from Italy, leading to the 'regional state' of 2010.

This book, drawing on the latest research in Italian and German, provides a fresh analysis of this dynamic and turbulent period of South Tyrolean and European history. The author provides new insights into the political and cultural evolution of the understanding of the region and the definition of its role within the European framework. In a broader sense, the study also analyses the shift in paradigms from historical nationalism to modern regionalism against the backdrop of European, global, national and local historical developments as well as the shaping of the distinct identities of its multilingual and multi-ethnic population.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
CHAPTER 1	
Approaches to South Tyrol	1
CHAPTER 2	
Tyrolean Nationalisms before 1918	7
CHAPTER 3	
The Annexation of South Tyrol, 1919–1922	19
CHAPTER 4	
Italianization under Mussolini, 1923–1932	35
CHAPTER 5	
Under the Shadow of the Third Reich, 1933–1938	53
CHAPTER 6	
The Option and German Rule in South Tyrol, 1939–1945	65
CHAPTER 7	
The World and the South Tyrol Issue, 1945–1946	73
CHAPTER 8	
Disquiet and Unrest, 1947–1960	85

CHAPTER 9	
Explosions and Settlements, 1961–1972	99
CHAPTER 10	
Under Autonomy Rule: South Tyrol since 1972	113
CHAPTER 11	
The Regionalist Drive since 1989	121
CHAPTER 12	
Writing the Past and Establishing a South Tyrolean Collective Memory	143
CHAPTER 13	
Commemoration and Collective Memory	161
Bibliography	173
Index	183

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Approaches to South Tyrol

Anyone interested in the history of twentieth-century Europe can learn a good deal about the wider complexities of that century by focusing on a relatively small geographical area situated in the centre of Europe: South Tyrol. This small region situated between the main alpine ridge at the Brenner Pass and Lake Garda, provides the historian with a microcosm of the political, economic and social issues that dominated the history of twentieth-century Europe. The history of South Tyrol contains all the central issues that characterized twentieth-century European history: war, expulsion, suppression, colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, fascism, resistance, division, terrorism, dictatorship, the effects of the bipolar relationship between the USSR and the USA, technical progress, the Cold War, Europeanization and globalization, environmental protection and neo-liberalism. Crucially, South Tyrol also offers a vivid case study of the cultural implications of the interaction of these complex issues throughout the twentieth century.

In 1920, as part of the First World War settlement, the small area of South Tyrol was annexed (with the consent of the Western allies) by the Italian state. In the decades that followed, this small German-speaking area was subjected to an official programme of Italianization, which involved the attempted cultural deconstruction of the Austro-German identity of the region. Despite this prolonged process of denationalization the Germanic culture of the area was never successfully undermined and the people of the region never lost their appetite for self-determination, which brought the area to the brink of civil war in the early 1960s. The South Tyrol question posed serious challenges to the stability of Western Europe against the backdrop of the Iron Curtain and the division of Europe. The fact that the explosive potential inherent in the South Tyrolean situation was defused

and ultimately channelled into a process of regionalization has led many commentators to hail it as the success story in minority protection of the European Union. Since its birth in the late 1940s, the European project has been instrumental in preventing warfare and providing diplomatic solutions within Western Europe. South Tyrol posed the ultimate and, in many respects, symbolic challenge to that spirit of diplomatic endeavour.

The advent of a regionalist approach in European politics in the 1950s and the institutionalization of regional legislative developments through the Madrid Convention in 1980 defused a number of explosive regional situations in Europe. The small region of South Tyrol is today one of the major European regional players and has managed to co-found the 'Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol/Alto Adige-Trentino', thus creating a potentially powerful economic and political institution straddling the sovereignty of two well-established states, Austria and Italy, and establishing itself in the midst of them. This development was gradual, and it emerged from the South Tyrolean nationalist drive for self-determination. This book analyses in detail how the shift in paradigms from historical nationalism to modern regionalism occurred against the backdrop of European, global and local historical developments.

South Tyrol is a small geographical area, barely 120km from north to south and little more from east to west. Most holiday makers who travel through it on their way from Northern Europe to the sunny South will notice that it takes at least an hour and a half in the car after passing the border between Austria and Italy on the Brenner Pass, before the road signs become fully Italian and the German language disappears completely. Near Salurn/Salorno¹ the architecture of the villages glimpsed from the motorway changes and becomes 'very Italian'. At that stage one has left South Tyrol and entered the Provincia di Trento. Anyone with a knowledge of German and Italian will also have noticed that in South Tyrol the bilingual road signs along the A22, the Brenner/Brennero Motorway, bear names

1 All place names in South Tyrol appear in their German and Italian forms, including Trient/Trento, while place names in the Italian heartland appear in their English form.

that often appear unrelated. There may be little difference between Bozen and Bolzano, the name of South Tyrol's capital, but Gossensass and Colle Isarco or Neumarkt and Egna hardly seem like two versions of the same town. Even the Italian name for the entire region, Alto Adige, is not a literal translation of South Tyrol, which would in fact be *Tirolo del Sud*.

In many respects the word pair Alto Adige/South Tyrol hints at the entire complexity of this part of the world. Where there is a South Tyrol, there should be a North Tyrol, otherwise there would be no need to add the prefix South to distinguish one part of the landscape from another. North Tyrol is part of another independent state, Austria, which is located beyond the Brenner border. South Tyrol therefore highlights a connection to an area outside the Italian state. Those who use South Tyrol to describe the area in question, and this is the vast majority of the 320,000 German-speaking South Tyroleans, keep alive the memory of the division of Tyrol in 1918 and a loyalty to a past political unity with Austria.

Alternatively, the fact that the 160,000 Italians in South Tyrol refer to the region as Alto Adige, the high Etsch/Adige region, implies that there must be a lower Etsch/Adige region. As the Etsch/Adige river flows from the Swiss-Austro-Italian border down through the Vinschgau/Val Venosta, unites with the river Eisack/Isarco and then flows to central Italy, this lower Etsch/Adige region is in Italy where the river flows into the Adriatic Sea. The Italian name for the region, therefore, emphasizes the region's geographical connection to the entire Italian landscape: it is literally drawing the region into the Italian homeland. Thus the two names for the region are not merely German and Italian versions of each other, they are, in fact, linguistic attempts to appropriate the area based on competing political and cultural understandings of the region. An exploration of the historical underpinnings of this linguistically expressed tension will form the basis of this study.

The border between Austria and Italy was established in the aftermath of World War I and thus follows the 'natural boundary theory' as propagated by Italian nationalists. This theory was based on the idea that the 'true border' of a nation state should be decided by nature rather than ethnicity. However, this natural boundary theory also conveniently answered some pressing military, strategic, political and economic needs of the Italian state.

From a military strategic point of view, the drawing of the border along the Brenner Pass/Passo di Brennero and the Reschen Pass/Passo di Resia, which are two of the lower passes along the main alpine ridge, answered late nineteenth-century Italian needs to secure the Southern Alps and the Po Valley from northern attacks. A defense line 120km further south, at a much more distinct geographical point such as the gorge of Salurn/Salorno would have been much cheaper, more efficient and easier to instal, but the desire to own 'our half' of the main alpine ridge was dominant in the kingdom of Italy towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The Brenner Pass has for centuries marked the point of busiest trade in the Alps between Northern and Southern Europe. Other passes in the central Alps, such as the Reschen Pass/Passo di Resia, the Staller Sattel/Passo di Stalle and the Timmelsjoch/Passo Rombo, never had comparable importance in international trade. To control the Brenner Pass/Passo di Brennero politically has thus always meant more than simply to participate in the flow of goods: it meant a certain degree of control over imports and exports and an enormous amount of political power. Massive fortresses dotting the landscape from Innsbruck down as far as Sterzing/Vipiteno testify to the attempt to control the flow of goods, travelling armies and intellectual exchange. The Italians, when espousing the natural border theory, were also driven by a pressing need to control this essential gateway of European trade.

South Tyrol boasts another feature which became significant in the late nineteenth century: water. In a period that was above all else influenced by the growing impact of the industrial revolution, water represented a powerful natural resource. The country's biggest rivers, Etsch/Adige and Eisack/Isarco, lend themselves to various uses, for example, the production of electricity. As the main alpine ridge divides south from north-flowing rivers, its possession was another asset for Italy. Christoph Gufler has argued that the prospect of developing hydroelectricity was one of the main reasons for the forced amalgamation with Italy in 1920.² At the end of the

2 Christoph Gufler, 'Stauseen und Kraftwerke im Ultental', *Südtirol in Wort und Bild*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2006), 24–26.

nineteenth century, Italy was in the process of modernization and industrialization, South Tyrol's abundance of water along with its mountainous relief structure offered huge potential for further development. In fact, as soon as Italy owned South Tyrol it began to build hydroelectric power plants alongside an intensification of its efforts in the fascist campaign to industrialize Bozen/Bolzano and upper Italy.

Hydroelectric power was only one factor among others and can only be understood in the context of nationalist philosophies and the defense of natural resources. In the contemporary nationalist context it was important to own the sources of the rivers if one wanted to use their lower parts to produce electricity in order to gain and defend a certain level of economic autarky. It was felt that no northerly neighbour could pressurize Italy if it owned the entire river, from source to mouth. The era of nationalism was a period highly charged with such emotional claims. Within the course of annexing South Tyrol it became an issue of the utmost significance to use the electricity not only in South Tyrol itself, but to transport it further South to the industrial centres in Turin and Milan. It is highly unlikely that Northern Italy would have become as significant an industrial area in the twentieth century without the inexhaustible resources of electricity produced in South Tyrol. Furthermore, the fascist policy of industrializing South Tyrol in the 1920s and 1930s was motivated purely by the desire to bind the largely agrarian South Tyrol more closely to Italy. This policy of industrialization dovetailed with another major plank of the fascist policy in South Tyrol: the desire to relocate large numbers of Italian workers to the newly created industrial zone near Bozen/Bolzano, hence outnumbering the native German-speaking population.

The early period of Italian rule over German-speaking South Tyrol sets the tone for much of the twentieth century: there were various attempts to Italianize the population through force and/or industrial plantations and the ensuing move of Italian workers. The German-speaking South Tyroleans were victims of Italian policies and remained victims for a long time, which explains why much of the literature on the South Tyrol issue during the

twentieth century pays tribute to the ‘victim discourse’ of South Tyrol,³ and which, despite the fundamentally changed role of South Tyrol in the early twenty-first century, still tends to characterize the analyses in recent publications.⁴ Hence, there is a need to include more recent developments in minority protection and autonomy issues into a history of South Tyrol in the twentieth century: this monograph presents a new approach to the local history of South Tyrol and its interactions with European and world history. It also focuses strongly on the more recent past in South Tyrol (since the 1980s), a time when South Tyrol has left its victim status behind and has emerged as an economic and political force of regional significance in the Alps region and in the European concert of regions.

3 See for example: Dennison I. Rusinow, *Italy's Austrian Heritage, 1919–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), and Antony E. Alcock, *The History of the South Tyrol Question* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970).

4 See Rolf Steininger, *South Tyrol: A Minority Conflict of the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

Tyrolean Nationalisms before 1918

The roots of many conflicts in Europe in the twentieth century can be traced back to the period preceding World War I. The origins of the South Tyrol Question, which dominated politics and society in the southern Alpine region for much of the twentieth century, are no exception dating back to the rampant nationalism of the pre-1914 period. This chapter establishes the links between European nationalist ideas and their effects on the pre-World War I political landscape in today's South Tyrol and Trentino.

The era of expansive nationalism in Italy

Italy united in 1861, however, nation building was not quite finished at that stage. Venice and Rome only became Italian in 1866 and 1870 as a result of negotiations with Prussia. Bismarck needed alliances with Italy to focus on his war with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and with France and promised Venice and Rome to Italy as a reward for such an alliance. This was a precedent for the acquisition of South Tyrol after World War I. In secret talks with the Western Allies in 1915 Italy was offered this area in return for the abandonment of the existing Three Emperor's Agreement between Italy, Austria and Germany, a move that would significantly weaken the strategic position of the axis powers Germany and Austria.

Italy's claim on South Tyrol as articulated in the secret negotiations in London in 1915 was in stark contrast to the principles of Risorgimento nationalism which had determined the Italian unification process in the 1860s. The underlying idea was that every nation should possess its own

house, that is, the state it was living in. According to this central European understanding nations were distinguished from each other by the use of different languages. Thus nationalists in Italy in the 1860s accepted that Italy's northern border lay in Salurn/Salorno, the linguistic divide between the German and Italian-speaking worlds.¹ This view changed, however, in the immediate pre-World War I period when a more imperialistic philosophy gained ground in Italian political circles, which suggested that even non-Italian-speaking areas could and should become part of the Italian state. As late as 1914, the Italian foreign minister Sidney Sonnino restricted Italian interests in the north to the Trentino. In fact, in 1915 prime minister Antonio Salandra still declared South Tyrol to be a relatively undesirable object as the integration of some 200,000 Germans in order to liberate a few hundred Italians would lead to enormous problems if it ever came to defending the state's northern border.²

It is likely that Sonnino's view was influenced by the fear of pan-Slavism against which Austria might still constitute some kind of protection, while in 1914 the then prime minister Giovanni Giolitti expressed the view that the existence of the ailing dual monarchy protected Italy against the German Reich's possible expansionist ideas further south.³ At the same time the once powerful Austria still tried to hold on to the idea of a multinational Empire, but this ideal became more and more unrealistic with the growth of rampant nationalism especially in the Balkans and along Austria's fringes. The principle of nationhood had become the driving force behind the organization of collective identities in the new twentieth century, but Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph was too slow to recognize this new reality.

Finally, on 1 April 1915 Austria reflected the changing realities of the war situation and offered Italy the option of withdrawing from Trentino. Trentino was to be given to Italy after the end of the war if Italy continued to support the axis powers. At this stage the Italian prime minister Salandra

1 Hanns Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', in Anton Pelinka and Andreas Maislinger, ed., *Handbuch zur neueren Geschichte Tirols* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1993), 95–130, 97.

2 Claus Gatterer, *Im Kampf gegen Rom: Bürger, Minderheiten und Autonomien in Italien* (Vienna, Frankfurt a. M. and Zürich: Europa-Verlag, 1968), 236.

3 Gatterer, *Kampf gegen Rom*, 239.

and foreign minister Sonnino were well aware that the Entente offered much more than the crumbling dual monarchy.⁴ The Italian ambassador had been involved in secret talks with the Western Allies and began to realize that it might be both feasible and desirable to expand the Italian nation state beyond the purely Italian-speaking areas, might well be the desirable ones. When in November 1917 the new Soviet government released details of all the secret agreements the previous Tsarist government had signed up to – among them the secret London Treaty of 1915 – the world learned that South Tyrol was one of the top war goals of the Italian government and that the new Italian imperialism demanded the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero as its Northern border.⁵

Moderate voices such as the historian Gaetano Salvemini's, who warned against a German minority problem, were swept aside by a public campaign citing democracy, the sovereignty of the Italian people and the solidarity of Italy with its brothers and sisters in the Trentino and beyond. This imperialist claim employed the rhetoric and logic of Risorgimento nationalism as it claimed that all the way up to the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero the inhabitants of the land were Italian. Giuseppe Mazzini, the father of emancipatory nationalism, had paved the way for this kind of imperialist view in 1866 by claiming that only some 20 per cent of the Tyrolean people who lived south of the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero were of German origin and that they were thus easy to italianize.⁶

Moreover, in his *Unita Italiana* on 25 August 1866, he had declared that the Trentino, which belonged to Italy, stretched as far as Bruneck/Brunico and the main alpine ridge including all the rivers that flowed into the Etsch/Adige, Adda, Po and the Gulf of Venice.⁷ Thus Mazzini had, in effect, developed the blueprint for the imperialist policies of the later

4 Umberto Corsini and Rudolf Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946* (Bozen: Autonome Provinz Bozen, 1988), 40.

5 Gatterer, *Kampf gegen Rom*, 236.

6 Rudolf Lill, *Südtirol in der Zeit des Nationalismus* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 2002), 26.

7 Oswald Gschliesser, 'Der italienische Nationalismus', in Franz Huter, ed., *Südtirol: Eine Frage des europäischen Gewissens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1965), 167.

prime minister Francesco Crispi (1887–1891, 1893–1896) by providing the ideological rationale for extending the geographical boundaries of the Italian nation state.⁸ Crispi had not supported the *Irredenta* in Northern Italy as his imperialist ambitions in Africa required German and Austrian approval, but he nevertheless contributed hugely to a change in climate in Italian politics in relation to its northern border, a change that benefited the right wing political parties in Rome in particular.

In an era which claimed that the nation was the highest political ideal and nationalism became an accepted motivating force in European societies, political strategy and moderation gradually disappeared. In the nationalistically zealous period of the immediate pre-World War I era nationalism, imperialism and irredentism in northern Italy and southern Austria blended into a kind of *mélange* which was to have huge repercussions for Europe and South Tyrol, because the drawing of borders in 1919 mirrored both Mazzini's claims of 1866 and Crispi's dreams of Italy as a great power.

Nationalisms in Trentino before 1918

Neither the Trentino nor South Tyrol was apolitical in this nationalist era. The political landscape in the Trentino was very complicated as German and Italian loyalties were inextricably linked. It took the events of the war to polarize the population. At the beginning of the war there was a pro-Austrian mood, even in the city of Trient/Trento. This loyalty was combined with anti-Serbian and anti-Russian sentiments. Even Vittorio Garibaldi, one of the nationalist representatives of Trentino, reportedly said that Italy was a whore if it did not fight on the side of Austria and Germany. The paper *Il Trentino* refuted reports from pro-Italian papers claiming that the Welschtiroler, the Trentino people, were in favour of neutrality.⁹

8 Corsini / Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 31.

9 Martha Stocker, 'Austriacanti und Irredentisten', Author's Lecture Notes, 5.

Nevertheless, this impression needs to be qualified: the intelligentsia in urban Trentino had for a long time leaned towards Italy and accentuated its differences to the German neighbours in the North.¹⁰ In 1896, for example, a monument to the poet Dante Alighieri was erected in Trient/Trento, which was intended to act as a symbol of cultural defiance in response to the monument to the poet Walther von der Vogelweide, which had been erected in Bozen/Bolzano in 1889. This monument was erected not so much in order to honour the poet, who probably never visited Trient/Trento, but it was the creation of an Italian symbol in a city with mixed national loyalties. The inscription on the monument highlighted the hopes and aspirations of irredentist Trient as the poet stretches his hand out towards the North in a defiant gesture: 'A Dante, al padre, il Trentino col plauso e l'aiuto della nazione' [dedicated to Dante, the father, the Trentino with the help and to the applause of the nation]. Following World War I, the monument became the symbol of the Italian-ness of the Trentino.¹¹

The more rural parts of Trentino leaned towards Austria, the country people admired the father-figure of the Emperor,¹² but also the economic ties with other parts of the dual monarchy may explain the loyalty towards Vienna. People did not expect any economic advantages from a fusion with Italy as many farmers in Trentino associated Italians above all with the poor migrant workers they employed from time to time, 'who prepared their *polenta* among rocks in the fields and who slept in tents. My poor father and my uncle said to us: children, look at the Italians over there. They were a pitiful sight.'¹³

This positive sense of affiliation with Austria in rural Trentino disappeared during the course of the war. It was particularly the Austrian introduction of war legislation in 1915 that alienated the local people because the new military administrations dissolved local councils and

10 Stocker, 'Austriacanti und Irredentisten', 4.

11 Gschliesser, 'Der italienische Nationalismus', 176.

12 Stocker, 'Austriacanti und Irredentisten', 3.

13 Cited in Stocker, 'Austriacanti und Irredentisten', 3. Note: All translations are the author's translations, unless otherwise indicated.

social organizations and began to arrest politically unreliable people, which meant that many innocent and well-recognized individuals found themselves behind bars. The Austrian military began to distrust the entire population of the Trentino and stipulated that all people were politically unreliable whose political loyalties were not proven and who refused to publicly display patriotism.¹⁴ This suspicious approach to the local population was felt even more intensely in the Austrian army where there were numerous Trientinians. They were accused of disloyalty to Austria-Hungary and suspected of plotting treason. In 1916 the Austrian army headquarters released an order stating that Welschtiroler should be withdrawn from the first line of defence as they were politically unreliable. It is hardly surprising that an increasing number of Trientinians deserted the Austrian army, which in turn, hardened the Austrian view of them. As a result of these tensions the Austrian army had in effect turned more and more into an army of occupation. Austrian newspapers did their best to support the anti-Trientinian theories,¹⁵ which resulted in the transformation of a politically ambiguous situation at the beginning of the war into an intensely polarized atmosphere of deep-seated mistrust and perceived suppression.

Another contributory factor to this polarization was the emergence of a missionary German nationalism in Trentino. The main agent of this nationalism was the Tiroler Volksbund, which agitated aggressively in favour of the Germanization of the Trentino. They sought, for example, to build on existing German language pockets with a view to increasing the number of German speakers and, crucially, the cultural significance of German in the area. In its agitation the Volksbund made use of the fact that most of the Trentino used German as the 'Brotssprache', the *lingua franca*. A testament to the popularity of German is the fact that German language courses in purely Italian-speaking areas were common, and occasionally Italians ticked the box 'German-speaking' in the census.¹⁶ By 1917

14 Cited in Stocker, 'Austriacanti und Irredentisten', 7.

15 Stocker, 'Austriacanti und Irredentisten', 10.

16 Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', 100.

any chance of peaceful cultural co-existence of the German- and Italian-speaking inhabitants of the Trentino region had been destroyed by a combination of German missionary nationalism and a hardening irredentist opposition in Northern Italy.

Nationalisms in German South Tyrol before 1918

The German missionary tendencies apparent in German-speaking South Tyrol exacerbated existing tensions in Trentino. This cultural chauvinism, which had its origins in the patriotic concerns of the 1870s and 1880s for the survival of the German language and culture, was fundamentally radicalized by the pre-World War I nationalism.¹⁷ Unlike the Trentino, South Tyrol was much more homogeneous in its ethnic/linguistic divide: in 1910 South Tyrol comprised 221,142 Germans, 9,350 Ladins and some 7,000 Italians.¹⁸ Of the working population, sixty-two per cent were involved in farming and forestry, while thirteen per cent were engaged in industry and mining and eighteen per cent were in the tertiary sector. The ethno-linguistic homogeneity in South Tyrol manifested in a clear Austro-Tyrolean form of settlement, which reflected Germano-alpine architecture. It was also manifest in the complete dominance of the German language, loyalty to the Emperor, pro-Habsburg sentiments and a cultural focus that looked north in a socio-political sense. Hence the often abused contention, abused that is in the political arena, that South Tyrol before World War I was clearly a German land, is convincing.¹⁹

17 Hass, 'Südtirol 1919', 99.

18 Lill, *Südtirol*, 23; Corsini / Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 24.

19 See Hans Kinzl, 'Die Forderung Italiens nach der Brennergrenze', in Franz Huter, ed., *Südtirol: Eine Frage des europäischen Gewissens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1965), 236–253.

When the war broke out in 1914 fanatical nationalism was also prevalent in Tyrol. In South Tyrol this fanaticism was clearly pro-German. The German war goals extended and then included the southern slopes of the Alps as far as the Po Valley, including the Germanization of these areas and the resettlement of all Italian Trientinians. For example in 1915, the Tiroler Volksbund republished a 1905 propaganda postcard which labelled all bilingual and monolingual Italian areas as far as Verona and Lake Garda with German names, while the Italian *irredenta* was quite literally kicked out of the picture by a Tyrolean leather boot. No doubt the aggressive display of the Tiroler Volksbund reinforced the resistance of the *irredenta* in Trentino and facilitated the implosion of Tyrol during the war.²⁰ There is equally no doubt that nationalism on both sides destroyed the ancient Tyrol during this period.²¹ It was obvious that such aggressively displayed German nationalism would lead to a hardening of the Italian position in the country's negotiations both with Austria over areas along the border to Northern Italy and with the Allies in the London secret negotiations leading up to the 1915 Treaty.

When, after the London Treaty, Italy did withdraw its support for German and Austrian sides and joined the Allied camp, rumours about an Italian annexation of South Tyrol circulated and led to hysterical reactions among the people in 'Deutschtirol'. The Tiroler Volksbund held a so-called 'Volkstag' in Sterzing/Vipiteno on 9 May 1918, during which representatives reiterated their demands that the Trentino should be Germanized and that any attempt to create Trientine autonomy should be resisted. However, the noisy 'Volkstag' of Sterzing/Vipiteno did not represent the majority of Tyroleans and its influence on the negotiations over the post-war future of South Tyrol remained negligible.²²

20 Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', 100.

21 Gatterer, *Kampf gegen Rom*, 124.

22 Lill, *Südtirol*, 33.

Ettore Tolomei and the *italianità* of South Tyrol

Another political strand emerging in the pre-World War I era, the *irredenta*, claimed that the boundaries of Italy should stretch as far as the Brenner Pass. Even though this claim would violate the ideas of the classical Risorgimento nationalism it gained popularity with a steadily radicalizing interpretation of nationalism in Italy. These radical notions were based on the 'natural boundary theory' whereby the borders of states were to be marked by natural boundaries, such as the main alpine ridge rather than ethnic.

Like many other European nations the Italians leaned more and more towards a comprehensive and more aggressive version of nationalism, which focused on the superiority of the home culture over others, and linked this to a desire to spread Italian values across the world. Italian writers such as Gabriele d'Annunzio praised Italy as the 'chosen nation' which had to spread its ideals through struggle and warfare. For example, war in Giovanni Papini's writings became the 'catharsis of the decadent human species.'²³ In this way, the scientific theories of Charles Darwin regarding the 'survival of the fittest' and ideologies of nationalism amalgamated into a revolutionary romanticism which defined war as both competition and catharsis. Nationalism, imperialism and irredentism were gradually seen as one thing in Italy. Political leaders cited the Risorgimento to claim areas which were not inhabited by Italians and began to focus on the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero as the northern border of Italy, using geography as it was convenient.²⁴

One of the individuals that influenced the development of Italian chauvinism significantly was the zealous nationalist Ettore Tolomei (1865–1952). He was one of its major figureheads and has become a symbol of the Italianization of South Tyrol. Tolomei grew up in an era when nationalism in both Italy and Austria was at its most virulent and he symbolized the abandonment of political liberalism and the old unifying Catholic

23 Giovanni Papini, 'The War as a Source of National Renewal', in Roger Griffin, ed., *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 24.

24 Lill, *Südtirol*, 29.

conservative ideal represented by the ailing Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy.²⁵ Anti-Semitism and expansive nationalism were fashionable ideologies for Ettore Tolomei's generation. Born the son of a timber merchant in Rovereto, he did his military service in Vienna. Thus, he was an expert on the border area of the German-speaking world and the Italian cultural cosmos and became an ethnocentric warrior who believed he could salvage the honour of his own nation by raping its neighbour.²⁶

It was part of his nationalist repertoire to deny the native population its right to remain in its homeland. Instead, he considered South Tyrol/Alto Adige to be a genuinely Latin territory which had only been Germanized very late on, superficially and through force. The *irredenta* attempted to give it back to its rightful owner. A layer of invented topographical terms was supposed to cement this claim retrospectively.²⁷ So, from the 1890s Tolomei had worked on his expansionist nationalist programme which called the main alpine ridge with the Brenner/Brennero and the Reschen Pass/Passo Resia a natural, allegedly historically legitimate and strategically essential, northern border of Italy.²⁸ This orographic border also happened to define the alpine watershed, as all rivers south of the ridge flowed to the South. The geographer Giovanni Marinelli had come up with this theory in Tolomei's magazine *Nazione Italiana* in 1890,²⁹ and Tolomei adopted the idea and blended it with his nationalist theory in order to provide a pseudo-scientific legitimacy for the expansion of Italy. He propagated the notion zealously and continuously until people began to think that he had developed the 'watershed theory' himself.³⁰ This geographical legitimacy for the Italian claim on the Brenner/Brennero was disputed by contemporary scholars and considered unscientific. Tolomei's argument was so successful with

25 Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', 97.

26 Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', 98.

27 Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', 98.

28 Lill, *Südtirol*, 30.

29 Karl Heinz Ritschel, *Diplomatie um Südtirol* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1966), 57.

30 Viktoria Stadlmayer, 'Die italienischen Argumente für die Brennergrenze', in Franz Huter, ed., *Südtirol: Eine Frage des europäischen Gewissens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1965), 254–267, 258.

contemporary Italian nationalists, however, precisely because this blend of geographical and political logic for the annexation of South Tyrol provided nationalists with the ideological framework to claim it for Italy.

The establishment of the border of Italy at the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero was one of the two main goals in Tolomei's life, the other one was the Italianization of all the people that lived in the area between this natural boundary and the then kingdom of Italy. This idea related mainly to the German-speaking population of South Tyrol and, to a lesser degree, to the Trentino. Tolomei went to great lengths to establish, contrary to scientific evidence,³¹ that South Tyrol was essentially Italian. For example, in 1905 he founded a new pseudo-scientific magazine *Archivio per l'Alto Adige* primarily as a vehicle to promote this idea. Hence *Archivio per l'Alto Adige* deliberately entertained no attempts to understand the mentality of the majority of inhabitants of South Tyrol and deliberately ignored the historic connections between and the very close economic ties between North and South Tyrol.³²

Tolomei was largely successful in his endeavour to provide legitimacy for the notion of Italy's border stretching to the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero because even the educated circles in Italy had only a rudimentary knowledge of the geographical and ethnographic situation in South Tyrol.³³ Benito Mussolini, journalist and contributor to the socialist paper *Avanti*, reported from Trient/Trento in 1909 that a great number of Italians in the kingdom – even those who signed up to the *irredenta* – had no more than a very vague idea of the location of these areas that they wished to liberate. He explained that many, even educated Italians, displayed a significant degree of political, linguistic and geographical ignorance when they talked about the Trentino. The difference between the Trentino and Triest was largely unknown. It was believed that German was spoken in Trient, and it happened that Trient was located by the coast like Triest. This was not surprising since everything learned about geography at school was soon

31 Lill, *Südtirol*, 30.

32 Gschliesser, 'Der italienische Nationalismus', 184.

33 Gschliesser, 'Der italienische Nationalismus', 184.

forgotten, and adults travelled very little in Italy, Mussolini concluded.³⁴ This was the audience that Tolomei had in mind when, in Volume 11 of the *Archivio* in 1916, he presented to the Italian public his home-made catalogue of Italian names, the *Prontuario dei nomi locale dell'Alto Adige* containing new Italian names for every mountain, forest, village, river and meadow in South Tyrol, which was to prove the Italian-ness of the land. These names were often inaccurate translations of the German names many of which matched the original meaning only approximately, and some not at all. However, accuracy was not important to Tolomei as he was not attempting to contribute to science, but sought to annex the land linguistically as he considered South Tyrol to be a part of Italy. His motivation is best revealed by his renaming of a particular mountain, the Glockenkarkopf near the alpine ridge, as *Vetta d'Italia*: 'the Top of Italy'.

The fact that Tolomei had excellent connections with some Italian politicians, for example the liberal right politicians Sonnino and Orlando, helped him to propagate the Italianization of South Tyrol even to those politicians who belonged to the Italian peace delegation of 1918/19. These politicians attended the negotiations for a post World War I European peace settlement, which resulted, amongst other agreements, in the Versailles Treaty and the Treaty of St Germain, which was to become crucial for South Tyrol. Tolomei had thus managed to provide Italian delegates, and consequently even the US delegation, headed by Woodrow Wilson, with his cartographical material and with his views on South Tyrol. In the absence of Austrian and German delegates at the peace negotiations he thus dealt a serious blow to the notion that South Tyrol might remain with Austria.

By 1920, Tolomei had achieved one of his two aims in life, the establishment of the Brenner/Brennero border to Austria. However, his second major aim, the Italianization of South Tyrol would have to wait until the political environment was more conducive to the implementation of such an aggressive manifestation of nationalism. This more amenable climate arose in October 1922 with the takeover of power by Benito Mussolini and his blackshirts.

34 Cited in Ritschel, *Diplomatie um Südtirol*, 51f.

The Annexation of South Tyrol, 1919–1922

By the end of the First World War in November 1918 the chauvinistic nationalism that had caused the conflict and seen the proselytization of individual cultures across Europe was discredited and replaced instead by a palpable desire to create a new stable political order to anchor post-war Europe. Its guarantor, the United States under President Woodrow Wilson, had been drawn into the European war in 1917 and was determined to play a decisive role in the creation of a peace settlement and the introduction of a stable political order to post-war Europe. Whilst the allied coalition assessed the various rewards and conquests presented by their victory, those who were facing defeat, namely Germany and Austria, looked with hope to Wilson and his fourteen point programme. The foundations of these fourteen points, written in January 1918, lay in the concept of a future that would see conflict resolved only by peaceful means. ‘On the 4th of October 1918 Austria-Hungary and the German Empire offered peace to the American president. In doing so they recognized Wilson’s fourteen point programme, according to which the Italian borders were to be positioned “along clearly recognisable lines of nationality” (Point 9) and the national self determination of the population of the Danubean monarchy was assumed.’¹

While Austria and Germany’s agreement to a cessation of war is barely explicable without the existence of Wilson’s progressive ideas, Italy feared that a realization of the fourteen points would render the results of the London Treaty of 1915 meaningless. It was during the period of post-war

1 Egon Pinzer, ‘Tirol von innen am Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges,’ in Anton Pelinka and Andreas Maislinger, eds, *Handbuch zur neueren Geschichte Tirols*, Vol. 2: Zeitgeschichte, Part 1: Politische Geschichte (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1993), 40.

negotiations that Italy needed to have its claim on South Tyrol validated by the post-war peace treaties. Furthermore, Italy intended to exploit the region's weakened position to impose its rule.

It is essential to understand the expectations Woodrow Wilson's fourteen point programme raised in among many European states: Wilson's agenda for a post-war Europe comprised the founding of a peace covenant, which was to feed into the League of Nations (Point 1). Wilson's programme included: 'impartial adjustments of all Colonial claims' considering 'the interests of the population concerned' (Point 5), the 'evacuation of all Russian territory' (Point 6) by German troops, and, more significant for the Alpine region, the 'readjustment of the frontiers of Italy [...] along clearly recognizable lines of nationality' (Point 9) as well as the creation of a covenant that would guarantee 'political independence and territorial integrity to great and small nations alike' (Point 14).

In Austria, Points 9 and 14 offered hope that South Tyrol would not, as was feared, face annexation by Italy. Since the secret London Treaty of April 1915 between Italy and the western Allies, South Tyrol was no longer to be a battle ground for Italian and German nationalism. Instead it became a bargaining tool on the international plane. The Entente countries had offered Italy very comprehensive territories as a reward for Italy's entry into the alliance. By 1915 Austria-Hungary had accepted the national principle and had offered the 'main part of Trentino to Italy, with the exception of the Fassa and the San Pellegrino Valleys, and the right bank of the Isonzo river,'² coupled with the condition that the delivery of these territories would be postponed until the end of the war. The Allies, on the other hand, offered Italy the Trentino and all the lands up to the Brenner/Brennero for Italy's support. An Italian refusal of this generous offer, which included the gift of South Tyrol, was not likely, especially as imperialist nationalist coteries in Italy became increasingly influential: dreams of colonial occupation in Asia Minor and Africa were within reach, and moderate voices were completely silenced. In the North, the acquisition of the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero had become a nationalist dogma despite the area's

2 Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', 99.

decidedly non-Italian population, dominated by the German language and Austrian culture.³

Italy's imperialist claims had already been recognized in the treaty between Italy, Great Britain, France and Russia. Article 4 of the London Treaty, dated 16 April 1915, stated that as soon as a peace had been negotiated Italy would receive: the Trentino area, all of South Tyrol up to its natural boundary which was specified as the Brenner.⁴ The Italian prime minister Orlando referred to this wording of 1915 when, at the peace negotiations in Paris in 1919, he declared that Italy was a geographical unit, bounded on three sides by the sea and by mountains in the North.

This definition violated the basic idea of Risorgimento, as propagated by Italy itself, yet the real arguments for a claim to the Brenner/Brennero lay elsewhere. Economics was the driving force behind the Italian claim: if Italy got access to the main alpine ridge it gained the important rivers Etsch/Adige and Eisack/Isarco. Furthermore, there were compelling military and strategic reasons as the Brenner/Brennero was easier to defend against a possible future attack from the North.⁵

Woodrow Wilson's role in the peace negotiations

The idealistic vision behind Wilson's fourteen points did not match the political reality of post-war Europe: the right to self-determination for South Tyrol was not implemented, and Italy was no longer defined by national, but by seemingly natural and geographical borders. Apart from the creation of a league of nations none of Wilson's idealistic proposals would be realized, a surprising fact considering that he was the president

3 Corsini/Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1945*, 45.

4 Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert: Dokumente* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 1999), 16.

5 Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', 106.

of one of the most powerful states in the world and that the US had been instrumental in bringing the war to an end.⁶ At the beginning of the post-war negotiations Wilson naturally occupied a diplomatic position of power which would easily have allowed him to implement his peace concept.

Wilson's fourteen points were embedded in a framework of ideas and intentions designed to revolutionize diplomacy and world politics in a fundamental way. His fourteen points rested on four fundamental considerations:

1. Every part of the agreement has to be embedded in the legal system of the country it is designed for.
2. Peoples and provinces must not be treated like chess pieces and be pushed around on the chess board.
3. Every territorial agreement has to be in the interest and always in favour of the population affected by it, and it must not be seen as a compensation deal for the demands of rivaling states.
4. Every recognizable national movement should find recognition as far as possible without creating new or cementing old sources of dispute and animosity.⁷

In his Mount Vernon Speech on 4 July 1918 Wilson specified his ideas: he explained that any agreement of controversial issues needed to be settled with the consent of the affected population and not on the basis of specific interests and advantages of other nations.⁸ Besides insisting on the involvement of everybody, victors and losers, in the creation of a new world order Wilson categorically rejected the notion of secret agreements as those undermined the sincerity and the security of peace deals. 'This encompassing world peace programme is created in a very ingenious way: not just

6 Antony Evelyn Alcock, *Short History of Europe* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1998), 221.

7 Christiane Wagemann, *Das Scheitern des grossen Friedens: Fallstudie zum praktischen Scheitern des Weltfriedenskonzeptes Wilsons. Die Südtirol Frage* (Neuwied: Hieronymus, 1985), 119.

8 Wagemann, *Scheitern*, 120.

with regard to individual claims, but also in relation to the claim that this programme should, without exceptions, relate to rich and poor, powerful and weak nations and peoples, and to friendly and hostile states,⁹ which was a most progressive view and would have introduced a new world order had it been realized. Despite its progressive and pacifist agenda, Wilson's programme was not implemented after World War I, instead the treaties of Versailles and St Germain evolved. It is ironic that President Wilson was mainly responsible for the negotiations leading to these two treaties which facilitated the denial of South Tyrol's national self-determination.¹⁰ Through the abandonment of their neutrality and their military involvement in the war the United States had played a significant role in ensuring that the Allies remained victorious: naturally the US was to have a decisive role in drafting the ensuing peace treaties. All the more so as Wilson had argued that the US could only participate in the world war because it was on a mission to show humankind the way to freedom. According to Wilson it was only this crusade for the liberation of humankind that justified the use of violence, a stance which reveals Wilson's liberal missionary trait and his semi-religious zeal.¹¹

Wilson had ample opportunities to bring the world in line with his principles, as all participating countries, regardless of whether they were winners or losers in the war, suffered badly and were financially and economically very vulnerable. Wilson could easily have married economic assistance with his humanitarian crusade, but his idealism prevented him from mixing economic aid with power politics. He categorically renounced the 'dollar diplomacy' of his predecessors which linked diplomatic success in world issues with economic help for the parties involved. The decision not 'to use the US' economic strength to enforce its predominant political role on the domestic politics of the weak European nations,'¹² therefore resulted in the Wilson's failure to realize his ambitious peace plan. This

9 Wagemann, *Scheitern*, 120–121.

10 Wagemann, *Scheitern*, 368.

11 Wagemann, *Scheitern*, 369.

12 Wagemann, *Scheitern*, 371.

was all the more regrettable as the European people in general, but also the peace movements which mushroomed all over Europe, hailed Wilson as an angel of peace, and were expecting him to use the United States' strength to change political mentalities in Europe.

As regards South Tyrol, Wilson's initiative failed as well. Post-war political realities prevailed over Wilson's idealism because during the Paris peace negotiations Italy managed to convince the other powers of its interpretation of history, namely that it had been threatened by Austro-Hungarian imperialist aspirations in 1914, because the empire had built military forts overlooking the Italian heartland. Therefore, Italy argued successfully, the realization of the secret treaty of 1915 appeared to be the best way forward to secure peace in the alpine region. This result for South Tyrol meant that Wilson contradicted his own ideas in two respects, once because he accepted the validity of a secret agreement and secondly because the right to self-determination of the South Tyrolean people was completely ignored. The South Tyrol issue, like no other, highlights the complicated problem of Wilson's aloof idealism versus European hardnosed power politics. Despite Wilson, the world in 1918 would be divided into winners and losers.

The historian Christiane Wagemann, who undertook a detailed psychoanalysis of the President's character and his mindset, argues that Wilson's missionary christian values explain the apparent contradiction between his objectives as laid out in the fourteen point plan and his subsequent decisions in relation to areas like South Tyrol. She notes that he was not a pragmatist or a 'Realpolitiker' but a missionary, who, when things got tough, often pushed aside the political realities and approached things not as the politician he was, but as the prophet he aspired to be.¹³ Both his frail health and the conflict between liberal politician and committed Christian impaired his ability and his willingness to find viable compromises and led to his eventual failure. Umberto Corsini called Wilson 'generous, but naïve,'¹⁴ when it came to reorganizing post-war Europe. Some of the decisions, which were supposed to create stability in Europe, appear

13 Wagemann, *Scheitern*, 376.

14 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 48.

rather arbitrary, for example, ‘in order not to offend Yugoslavia and support the pan-Slavistic unification under Soviet guidance, he decided to cede the port of Fiume to Yugoslavia instead of Italy, instead he granted Italy the Brenner Pass and all of South Tyrol, thus turning 250,000 powerless Tyroleans into a football in the game of power politics, which violated Wilson’s basic convictions.’¹⁵

When assessing Wilson’s responsibility for the emergence of the South Tyrol issue, the historian Hanns Haas points to the divergence between ethnic boundaries and the natural boundary theory in the US American peace delegation: ‘According to Wilson few countries had boundaries as distinct as Italy’s. In special cases, however, strategic considerations had to be taken into account. Occasionally the principle of political self-determination could not be maintained.’¹⁶ A violation of the principle of self-determination was particularly easy to pursue against the aggressors of 1914, and thus the Germans and the Slav people had to endure most of these, as this promised the best the chance of peace in the Alps.

‘The deviations from the ethnic principle and the negation of self-determination were generally compensated by measures to protect minorities, which were issued in St Germain,’¹⁷ however, there were no guarantees attached and Italy was never forced to implement them. With hindsight this was certainly an oversight, but at the time the view prevailed that Italy was a great power and a home to many different nationalities, thus, the United States simply assumed that Italy would deal with the realities of the cultural melting pot as positively as the US had done.¹⁸ Wilson himself had to concede later in life that Italy never recognized his fourteen points.¹⁹ It was obvious in this period that the right to self-determination and the London Treaty were not compatible.

Viewed in this light, Wilson’s fourteen points became little more than a guide to political ‘best-practice’ which was theoretically convincing yet

15 Wagemann, *Scheitern*, 376.

16 Haas, ‘Südtirol 1919’, 110.

17 Haas, ‘Südtirol 1919’, 110.

18 Haas, ‘Südtirol 1919’, 114.

19 Haas, ‘Südtirol 1919’, 115.

impractical. Wilson, himself, failed to sell his programme as a leader of the peace negotiations, a role he was supposed to assume naturally and expected to take by all conference participants.²⁰ Instead, during the course of the negotiations he turned into a mere conference mediator and left the political field to European politicians who used every opportunity to promote and push their own agenda. It was easy to outmanoeuvre this president who had few tactical skills and who gravely underestimated the potential for conflict between the numerous ethnic movements in Europe. Italy's argument that the Austro-Hungarian empire had been expansionist in its irredentism was hardly refuted by Wilson's weak stance, all the less so as Britain supported the Italian view and pointed to the difficult situation of 1915. Lloyd George also repeatedly emphasized British loyalty to Italy.

Early in 1919 Wilson took the decision that the Trentino, obviously including South Tyrol, should be ceded to Italy.²¹ As Italy was not forced to guarantee a degree of autonomy to South Tyrol – even though it was willing to do so at the time – the Germans in South Tyrol were denied a say in any decision regarding their nationality, or any chance of domestic self-determination.²² At this late stage South Tyrolean politicians desperately attempted to make the President reconsider his decision. In a passionate letter to Wilson, the South Tyrolean mayors pleaded with him to reconsider his view. They emphasized the relevance of ethnic boundaries between peoples by arguing that the Tyrolean homeland had never been demarcated by states or peoples, but by language. The linguistic boundaries in Tyrol, the mayors claimed, were clearer and more pronounced than anywhere else in Europe. In their desperation they pleaded with Wilson to recognize that their 'Heimat' had belonged to the German cultural area for more than a thousand years, and they urged Wilson personally to become the saviour of their people and their homeland. The letter was signed by all

20 Wagemann, *Scheitern*, 378.

21 Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert: Vom Leben und Überleben einer Minderheit* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 1997), 36.

22 Haas, 'Südtirol 1919', 116.

the communes of German-South Tyrol and the twelve Ladin communes in Gröden, Enneberg, Buchenstein and Fassa.²³

The Government of Tyrol in Innsbruck supported this petition by sending another memorandum to President Wilson, in which they reminded him in English of his own fourteen point programme explaining that ‘the separation of even only one part of German or Ladinic territory would undoubtedly cause the ruin of the whole country and people as a political entity.’ They cited the parliamentary debate of 29 January 1919, in which the Tyrolean government had declared that ‘the question of the undivided preservation of the entire German and Ladinic territories of Tyrol fills the hearts of all the people with grave anxiety. We Tyrolese declare that we will, under no condition whatsoever, consent to a separation of South Tyrol, and we would rather make any sacrifice required of us than give up our union with our brothers in South Tyrol.’ Those sacrifices relate to the offer of the Viennese government to rescue the territorial integrity and unity of Tyrol and to ward off Italy. The government had offered to accept the neutrality of Tyrol as a whole and even to accept a fusion with neutral Switzerland.²⁴ Wilson remained unmoved, and his decision to divide Tyrol and cede its Southern part to Italy unchanged. The National Assembly in Vienna agreed to this decision in an emotionally charged debate in September 1919, during which the representatives of South Tyrol referred to this division as a tearing apart of Tyrol and voiced their pain and grief over the division angrily and noisily. The division of Tyrol after World War I proved that pre-war categories and an aggressive and expansionist nationalism had maintained the upper hand over liberal aspirations. South Tyrol became a part of the Italian state.

23 Steiningger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 264.

24 Haas, ‘Südtirol 1919’, 126.

The occupation of Tyrol

After the signing of the ceasefire between Austria-Hungary and Italy in the Villa Giusti near Padua on the 3 November 1918, Italian troops advanced to Trient/Trento on the same day. On 7 November they reached Bozen/Bolzano. By 10 November they had occupied the whole of South Tyrol as far as the Brenner Pass. In so doing Italy created a position of strength which it intended to utilize at the final negotiations. The Italian troops then marched on to North Tyrol and occupied places such as Stregen/Arlberg, Silz, Hall and Mils. They reached Innsbruck, the capital of Tyrol on 23 November. In North Tyrol there were very few problems between the local people and the occupiers, even though Italy advanced much further into Austrian lands than previously agreed. However,

the occupying Italian officials did not get involved in the internal politics of North Tyrol. In this way neither the numerous demonstrations against the likely loss of South Tyrol, during which radical tones against the Italians could be heard, nor the public demands for unity with Germany managed to disturb this relationship. The Italian military administration strove to send as many German-speaking officers as possible to Innsbruck. It was, however, seen as a painful loss that the former state archive in Innsbruck had to hand over the inventories relating to Trentino and South Tyrol. In spite of the peace treaty of St Germain being signed on 10 September 1919, the Italian occupation of Innsbruck did not end until 11 December 1920. It was probably a question of prestige which motivated the Italians to station their troops for such a long time in North Tyrol.²⁵

South Tyrol was no different to the rest of Europe in its yearning for the end of the war. As Pinzer observes,

the enormous loss of life, the ever increasing dearth of basic consumer goods, and the hopeless state of food supplies aggrieved the desperate populace. In 1918 hunger demonstrations became commonplace. Throughout the country pilfering was ram-

25 Pinzer, 'Tirol von innen', 91/2.

part so that armed guards were deployed to communities. Particularly common was the theft of livestock.²⁶

In agreement with the peace treaty of St Germain the South Tyroleans were assigned to Italy, and they reacted with concern and disbelief to these new political realities. However, the population was both too hungry and too poor to engage in civil protest or unrest, South Tyrol was, like most of Western Europe, paralysed by the Spanish Flu of 1918–19, which had easy pickings among a war-weary, weak and fatigued population. Children and mothers were its principle victims and in one week alone from 27 October to 2 November 157 people died.²⁷ The situation was exacerbated by the paucity of medical personnel the majority of whom were stationed in military hospitals tending the soldiers. When, for example, the reserve hospital in Gossensass/Colle Isarco was closed in November 1917 as the medical staff were brought to the war fronts, the Wipptal area from Steinach to Sterzing/Vipiteno was without any medical support. South Tyrol was literally shut down with the closure of schools, cinemas and transport networks for the fear of infection.²⁸

It was thus hardly surprising that Italian soldiers could occupy South Tyrol without much interference after the Austrian troops had abandoned their positions. There was no resistance from the weakened and war ravaged populace. According to the diary of the priest of the small Dolomite village of Kastelruth/Castelrotto, who represented many similar voices, the people of Tyrol were ‘tired, tired, and totally indifferent.’²⁹ They had only one thought: ‘Thank God the war is over.’³⁰ The people respected the appeal of the Italian military when it requested peace and discipline. The occupation forces themselves remained disciplined, however, the relationship between the South Tyrolean farmers and the Italian soldiers was

26 See Pinzer, ‘Tirol von innen’, 42.

27 Pinzer, ‘Tirol von innen’, 42/3.

28 Pinzer, ‘Tirol von innen’, 42/3.

29 Josef Nössing, *Völs am Schlern 888–1988: Ein Gemeindebuch* (Bozen: Athesia, 1988), 553.

30 Nössing, *Völs*, 553.

characterized by distrust, as the reaction of the predominantly agrarian population showed:

The farmers hid women and livestock from approaching soldiers, the townspeople hid their jewellery and money. There were no reports of fraternization between the population and the occupation forces. Too wide was the social gap between both groups: the South Tyroleans had only known Italians as impoverished foreign workers who came from Friule or Venice to Bozen, prepared to take on the lowest type of work.³¹

Italy addressed the poor living conditions of the South Tyroleans immediately. Representing many such reports, the chronicler of the village Völs am Schlern/Fiè allo Sciliar in the lower Eisack/Isarco Valley noted: 'Approximately eight days after the surrender the Italian troops arrived. They behaved respectably and organized public kitchens for children and poor people. In Kastelruth some people refused to be fed by the Italians, however, in Völs and Völser Aicha the *pasta asciutta* and the rice, which was largely unknown, was accepted gratefully.³² Survival was the order of the day. The new administration employed their military infrastructure in the new Italian province to create a positive impression:

It was one of the first undertakings of the military government to attend to supplies and to set fixed or free price tags on groceries, so that South Tyrol could be spared the tragedy of hunger. Italy was in a position to do this, as it commanded deliveries of supplies from the European and American allies. It was a clever political and psychological strategy towards a population that had been annexed.³³

Even though there were no clashes between the new occupiers and the native population of South Tyrol, this did not mean that life continued unchanged. 1919 was a caesura in the collective psychology of what was now a German-speaking minority located outside its native country Austria. Almost overnight a code of behaviour and a system of values was destroyed which had been characterized by the trinity of 'Gott-Kaiser-Vaterland' and

31 Pinzer, 'Tirol von innen', 90.

32 Nössing, *Völs*, 553.

33 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 56.

which had been regarded as eternal.³⁴ The end of the war for the German-speaking Tyroleans went hand in hand with the collapse of their traditional values. This was more than a temporary disorientation; it meant serious damage to the social and political prestige of their collective identity. All of a sudden they were demoted from being members of a majority native culture to the position of a minority which required help. Before World War I South Tyrol had considered itself integral to Austria as a 'bastion of German-ness and a bulwark against Italy',³⁵ now the German South Tyroleans found themselves on the wrong side of the border. They remained a border region, but now looking back into the old homeland of Austria instead of out of it. South Tyrol thus became 'auslandsdeutsch' [foreign German]. South Tyrolean historian Leopold Steurer diagnosed a kind of 'protective paralysis among the South Tyrolean community, a condition of national depression and collective frustration, focused solely on the question of nationality, which needed to be resolved.'³⁶ This 'protective paralysis' resulted in a denial of the new political realities and the embracing of anything associated with the lost homeland. The mayor of Bozen/Bolzano, Julius Perathoner's refusal to remove the picture of the Austrian emperor from his official rooms or to greet the Italian King in Italian on his visit in October 1921 was indicative of this collective shock and denial.

The new political situation in South Tyrol also represented a profound cultural shock which resulted in a feeling of impotence. It was obvious that the Italian administration had created, by their occupation of South Tyrol, a new social reality. The South Tyroleans understood very quickly that they were occupied and subordinated to a military regime, as the land was hermetically sealed off from Austria. Fiscal exchange, human communication and trade were suppressed and censorship of the postal service was introduced. The military high command under General Guglielmo Pecori-Giraldi stayed in office until the end of July 1919 and managed

34 Leopold Steurer, *Südtirol zwischen Rom und Berlin 1919–1939* (Zürich, Vienna and Munich: Europaverlag, 1980), 29.

35 Steurer, *Zwischen Rom und Berlin*, 33.

36 Steurer, *Zwischen Rom und Berlin*, 31.

within this period to replace the Austrian administration with an Italian commission. The peace treaty of St Germain affirmed under international law what Italy had virtually already achieved: an Italian-dominated South Tyrol. In October 1920 the formal annexation of South Tyrol was passed by the Italian parliament. South Tyrol's new status was official and any chance of self-determination for the German speaking population of that area eliminated.

The beginning of the Italian regime in South Tyrol from the end of the World War in 1918 to Mussolini's accession to power in October 1922 was accompanied by relatively weak, liberal governments in Rome. It became apparent that the prime ministers at the time, Orlando, Nitti, Giolitti, Bonomi and Facta, had to invest considerable time and energy in the retention of their own power, whereby 'the rule of South Tyrol and Trentino remained very tentative in the four years before Mussolini's accession to power.'³⁷ Politics in South Tyrol were shaped by the proconsuls, the governors and the governing commission: in particular, Pecori-Giraldi (November 1918 to July 1919) and Luigi Credaro (August 1919 to October 1922). Pecori-Giraldi sought to strengthen the sovereignty of Italy in Venezia Tridentina, the new name for the amalgamated provinces of Trentino and South Tyrol, whilst paying attention to the feelings and traditions of the inhabitants as far as was compatible with this project. Credaro's wish to create a sense of equilibrium between the Italian people and the minority was sincere, but he had little support from Rome and stood mostly between the two fronts.³⁸

The new administration presented itself to the native population with a mixture of liberal attitudes and political pressure, which the following excerpt from a poster-size invitation issued throughout the land to a celebration of the union on 10 October 1920, documents: 'Fellow Italians', the invitation to the German speaking South Tyroleans spelt out, 'On this noteworthy day no inhabitant who regards themselves as a grateful citizen will be absent from the festivities celebrating the expansion of the bor-

37 Lill, *Südtirol*, 52.

38 Lill, *Südtirol*, 65.

ders from Ala to Brenner to become one with the new homeland.’ While amicable and cordial on the surface, the Italian administration expected the South Tyroleans to behave like all other citizens of Italy and participate in its state commemorations. At the same time the Italian administration closed the German school in Laag near Bozen/Bolzano in October 1919 and opened a new Italian school, and this added to the feeling of Italian domination. Even though the German school was reopened in 1920 in response to public protest, the South Tyroleans were exposed to a regime which simply did not understand local traditions and customs. When, in June 1920, the South Tyroleans celebrated the religious feast of St John’s Night in their traditional way, including bonfires and the firing of salutes, thirty-nine Tyroleans were arrested, brought to Trient/Trento in chains and convicted of open acts of violence – just one striking example of how the Italian authorities mishandled the situation in South Tyrol.

In contrast to the following fascist period, the push for Italianization during the years 1919–1922 was, however, restrained. Nonetheless, a certain national-cultural expansionism during this phase can be identified in Italy’s handling of the South Tyrol issue which suppressed the right of self-determination of the inhabitants of South Tyrol. Historian Rudolf Lill concludes that it was the spirit of this nationalist epoch that both created the problem of minorities and then prevented its solution through democratic means.³⁹ An existential threat to the cultural identity of the German-speaking South Tyroleans, however, occurred simultaneously with the growing power of Mussolini in Italy.

39 Lill, *Südtirol*, 65.

Italianization under Mussolini, 1923–1932

The political stage in Europe was irrevocably altered by the accession of Benito Mussolini to power in October 1922. His regime presented Europe with the most effective model of an authoritarian national and socialist one-party state thus far.¹ Under Mussolini nationalism in Italy became an ‘integrative ideology’² which meant that South Tyrol was subject to a suppressive political system which sought the Italianization of all parts of Italy. While Mussolini adopted the principle of Risorgimento nationalism, which was well established in Italy, he redefined it in an aggressive fascist way. His appropriation of Risorgimento ideals made him more acceptable to those elites in Italian society which feared Communism. Mussolini considered Risorgimento nationalism to be a unifying force for Italy, but he was also convinced that the World War had been equally significant in this process.³ While fascist rule was established generally in Italy between 1925 and 1926, the process had begun as early as 1923 in South Tyrol, with drastic sanctions against the Tyroleans (which were similar to those taken against the people from Aosta, the Croats, the Slovenes and the Ladins, to name other ethnic minorities living in Italy). For all these minorities in Italy, Fascism was experienced as an era of suppression.⁴ Mussolini’s attitude to minorities was apparent before he came to power. The events surrounding the so-called ‘Blutsonntag’ [Bloody Sunday] in Bozen/Bolzano in April 1921 were an augury of what South Tyroleans could expect from Fascism.

1 Lill, *Südtirol*, 69.

2 Montserrat Guibernau, *Nationalisms* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1996), 47.

3 Lill, *Südtirol*, 71.

4 Lill, *Südtirol*, 72.

Ironically, Mussolini's party enjoyed strong support in South Tyrol from the growing number of Italian immigrant workers, especially among the railway workers. Under the leadership of the chairman of the party in Trento, Achille Starace, a 'Fasci di Combattimento' cell was founded in Bozen/Bolzano. From then on the fascists advocated publicly and often in an unruly fashion the Italianization of South Tyrol. In Salurn/Salorno they removed all Tyrolean double-headed eagles, and in Bozen/Bolzano they erased the German language inscriptions of several public offices. In April 1921 they descended upon a procession of German-speaking South Tyroleans who were dressed in traditional costume to commemorate the opening of the annual Bozen/Bolzano spring fair. The security forces that had been informed about the fascist gathering did nothing to hold back the 280 fascists arriving from Italy, who were joined by some 120 political hooligans from Bozen/Bolzano. The participants in the procession were set upon with wooden clubs, shot with pistols and attacked with hand grenades. Remarkably only one person was killed, Franz Innerhofer, a teacher from Marling, who became a martyr of South Tyrolean suppression by Italian fascists. A further fifty people were injured, and consequently the event has been remembered as 'Blutsonntag'.

The complicity of the Italian security forces in the events of Blutsonntag 1921 went so far that after the bloodshed they accompanied the rampaging fascists to the train station to assure them a safe passage home. The course of events on Blutsonntag indicated that the fascists were increasingly gaining power in Italy and that the middle classes had largely given in to the fascist supremacy in public life. The demonstrations in April 1921 revealed that ethnic minorities in Italy were left unprotected by a state which was quickly losing power to Mussolini.

Mussolini made ample use of this newly discovered political advantage. In April 1922, well ahead of the takeover of power in Rome, the fascists once again focused on South Tyrol. On 6 April 1922 the fascists passed a programme of action in Trento to accelerate the implementation of Italian legislation. Crucially, these measures included the abolition of the special status South Tyrol had had since 1920, and he redefined South Tyrol as part of the province of Venezia Tridentina, now comprising South Tyrol and the Trentino. An equally significant aspect of this programme was the

targeted elimination of the German language in everyday life through the introduction of Italian in all official correspondence and as a compulsory subject in schools and the only language of instruction. This language policy was coupled with the threat of military service for all South Tyroleans who would then be sent into the heartland of Italy. The fascists aimed at the dissolution of all political groups and politically motivated sports clubs, which pursued irredentist goals and came close to dissolving all South Tyrolean associations, as the use of German alone could be interpreted as irredentist.

Significantly, following Mussolini's rise to power, Ettore Tolomei was installed as Senator and from July 1923 was given the authority to implement his '32 *Provvedimenti per l'Alto Adige*' [32 Provisions for South Tyrol].⁵ These measures were effectively a programme of renationalization: the German South Tyroleans were to be de-nationalized in respect of their German identity and re-nationalized as full Italians. The programme permeated all spheres of society, from the individual to the institutional. It stipulated a new regional administration by fusing South Tyrol with Trentino, took away from Bozen/Bolzano the status of capital, introduced a ban on German press and books, and introduced an exclusively Italian school system. Locally it meant the renaming of German villages and streets, the establishment of Italian *podestà*, the prohibition of German Alpine clubs. Families were affected as they were subjected to the Italianization of their Christian and family names, while individuals were forced to eradicate any German traces in their households and to avoid using the German language completely. One example shows the extent of the disrespect with which the Italian officials acted against tradition, and the efforts they exerted to eradicate the language: in Völs am Schlern/Fiè allo Sciliar in the lower Eisack/Isarco valley the family name Pitscheider became Pezzei; Gall became Cassani; Verant Ferrandi; Wieser Viseri; Planötscher Planeccheri; Futerer Flora (named after the daughter's first name); Marmsaler Dal Monte; Schaller Scala; Kritzinger Conti; Oberhuber Bosin (the wife's name);

5 See the Appendix to this chapter.

Schroffenegger Migari and Huber Demaso.⁶ Those who did not want to have their names Italianized could not be forced to, but if any citizen wished to seek assistance from the officials it was a condition that they Italianized their names before they were eligible for help. Thus the programme of the *Provvedimenti* was enforced by the threat of total exclusion. At a time of great hardship and need this meant for many that co-operation was effectively obligatory.

Cultural resistance: The Catacomb schools

The new school curricula were designed to immerse German South Tyrol children in Italian culture and language and result in their Italianization. The intention was to embed the process of Italianization in the heart of the family. Mussolini's policy of denationalization was not accepted without resistance by the South Tyroleans. Although there was no organized resistance in the form of a revolt, the establishment of so-called 'catacomb' schools was a concrete form of active protest against the Italian administration. The editor of the *Volksbote* and guiding spirit of the South Tyroleans, Canon Gamper, urged the South Tyroleans to recover their schooling system through the creation of home schools. These resistance schools were based on the idea of the first Christians who, unsure of their safety, worshipped in hidden catacombs. The catacomb schools were organized and led by priests and teachers who had been dismissed from the official school system under the denationalization programme. Teaching materials were smuggled across the mountains from Austria and Germany. The smugglers were mostly German nationalists, but later the smuggling of material was undertaken by members of the *Völkische Kampfing Südtirol* (VKS). The political influence of these groups explains both the Catholic-conservative

6 Nössing, *Völs*, 558.

and the nationalist-völkisch orientation of the teaching curricula in the catacomb schools.

In these schools the teachers undermined the fascist denationalization policy and reinforced German language and culture. The schools operated in a fraught environment often using primitive resources. Furthermore, teachers were regularly arrested by the Italian government, which had become aware of their existence. This meant the schools struggled to create any sense of continuity and stability. Nonetheless, the symbolic importance of the catacomb schools in the 1920s cannot be underestimated. Resistance against the fascist system was thus not a violent military exercise but rather accomplished through the cultural infrastructure, in the same way as the early Risorgimento nationalist movement had operated.

The struggle for South Tyrolean monuments

The German speaking South Tyroleans were understandably less successful when it came to resisting Mussolini's campaign against Austrian symbols and monuments representing German culture in Tyrol. The denationalizing campaign sought to erase all traces of German culture by replacing them with Italian 'lieux de memoire'. In Bozen/Bolzano, for example, the Walther memorial, the Laurin fountain and the Bozen/Bolzano museum came under particular Italian scrutiny as these were most intimately linked with German culture.

Just as the memorial to Dante Alighieri in Trient/Trento (which looked to the north for nationalist reasons) symbolized the relationship between 'Welsch-Tyrol' and Italy, so the memorial to Walther von der Vogelweide (who looked south for similar reasons) which stood on the square of the same name was a symbol of German South Tyrol and its allegiance to German culture. Consequently, the fascists wished to remove it from the centre of the town and replace it with a Drusus memorial. Drusus was deeply rooted in Tolomei's vision of a new Italian Bozen/Bolzano, he was

‘the Latin hero who conquered Oberetsch to forge new paths for the Roman civilization.’⁷ However, a monument to Drusus was never erected. Instead Walther was moved to the suburbs of Bozen/Bolzano for the duration of the fascist regime. He fell victim to the reinterpretation of South Tyrolean history. The Laurin fountain also became unacceptable under the denationalization campaign as ‘the statue presented a battle scene between the German King Dietrich von Bern and the Dwarf King Laurin, the mythical leader of the Ladinish Dolomites.’⁸ It was widely regarded as a symbol of the South Tyrolean bond with the surrounding countryside. Dietrich was the German hero who had defeated the Italians. Tolomei was well aware of the significance of this statute as a symbol of South Tyrolean resistance and thus regarded it as anti-Italian. In 1933 the statue was destroyed, the culprits were never identified or caught.

Besides the erection of a memorial to Mussolini in Waidbruck/Prato Isarco, the so-called Aluminium Duce, and at the Bozen/Bolzano Financial Bureau, the simultaneous erection of ossuaries at Reschen Pass/Passo Resia and at the Brenner/Brennero near Gossensass/Colle d’Isarco are of great symbolic significance in this war of memorials. In these ossuaries the remains of Italian soldiers were entombed, who were killed during the First World War – allegedly in the battle for South Tyrol. These ‘victims’ – the invented figure of 650,000 soldiers comes up time and again – have been used, to cement the Italian claim to South Tyrol.⁹ However, in reality, the frontline in the First World War was approximately eighty kilometres south of the Brenner/Brennero border. The annexation of South Tyrol had occurred without any physical resistance, there had been no need for any soldiers to fight never mind die. The soldiers symbolically entombed in ossuaries, had in fact been exhumed and transported from the south of Italy. The graveyard was a staged and invented *lieu de mémoire*, a cynical propaganda campaign to legitimize the annexation of South Tyrol and transform it into a battle site of virtue that justified Italian national claims.

7 Thomas Pardatscher, *Das Siegesdenkmal in Bozen* (Bozen: Athesia, 2002), 34.

8 Pardatscher, *Siegesdenkmal*, 36.

9 Pardatscher, *Siegesdenkmal*, 181.

Finally, the Bozen/Bolzano museum attracted Italian attention as it was largely dedicated to preserving and displaying Tyrolean culture and indigenous traditions. However, it was the museum's imposing steeple that attracted Tolomei's critical scrutiny. Tolomei argued that the steeple was problematic because it blocked the view from Bozen/Bolzano to the Rosengarten/Catinaccio mountain range. However, the only place in Bozen/Bolzano from which this view was partially obstructed was from the Siegesplatz [Victory Square], where the fascist regime was planning to erect a memorial celebrating the annexation of South Tyrol. The real reason that Tolomei set his sights on the museum's steeple was because it appeared to dominate the town. In the blinkered gaze of Tolomei's obsessive Italianization program, the steeple represented South Tyrolean cultural resilience. As the historian Rolf Steininger astutely concluded, the steeple's destruction bore all the hallmarks of the Italian Middle Ages when 'the victorious family would truncate the steeple of the conquered party'.¹⁰ There was also a more visual and basic reason for its destruction: beside it in the town skyline the Siegesdenkmal, the fascist memorial by the Talfer Bridge, looked relatively unimpressive. As the fascist centre of remembrance was Bozen/Bolzano, no competition could be tolerated in the war of the monuments. In 1934 Tolomei had the steeple demolished.

The monument of victory

The cultural homogenization of South Tyrol via the war of the monuments would not have been so far-reaching had the fascists not destroyed the German South Tyrol memorials. Their goal was the renationalizing of South Tyrol; therefore they had to fill the vacated squares with alternative memorials. No other place in South Tyrol displayed this effort more vividly than Talfer Square (today's Victory Square). By the end of the war in 1918

10 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 107.

the foundations for the erection of a memorial to the Austrian Emperor were in place, but these were completely removed in favour of the construction of a colossal neo-classical triumphal arch in white marble, which was built between 1926 and 1928.

The Siegesdenkmal [victory monument] symbolically stands at the 'interface' between the Italian and German-speaking parts of the town. The Siegesdenkmal, with its aggressive nationalist inscription, has served as a reminder to South Tyrol of the denationalization since 1928: 'Hic patriae finis. Siste signa. Hinc ceteros excolimus lingua legibus artibus' [Here are the borders of the fatherland. Let us claim these grounds. From this point on we brought to the others the language, law, and arts]. It is not only the chauvinistic content of the inscription, but also its geographical dominance that has caused such offence to Bozen/Bolzano's German-speaking residents. By overlooking the river Talfer and the Bozen/Bolzano museum it literally towers over the traditionally German area of Bozen/Bolzano. In fact, viewed from the 'German side' of town the monument is the most imposing part of an ensemble of buildings constructed in the late 1920s and early 1930s as architectural statements of fascist power. The monument continues to declare the Italian 'fatherland's' claims on South Tyrol and the imposition of its culture, and by its continued existence unapologetically memorializes this contentious fascist past to all the inhabitants of Bozen/Bolzano.

The industrial zone near Bozen/Bolzano

The symbolic attempts to destroy the collective memory of the South Tyroleans were steadily flanked by economic actions. Among other measures the South Tyroleans, traditionally a rural society, were prevented from passing their land down intact to a chosen heir, rather they were forced to sub-divide their property thus weakening the landholdings as they passed from one generation to the next. Furthermore, these same farmers were

discriminated against when it came to seeking credit approval to support or develop their farms. In 1935 a massive industrial zone was established in the agrarian centre south of Bozen/Bolzano, local farmers were ousted with negligible financial compensation for their lost orchards, which in many cases had been their sole source of income. The establishment of an industrial zone on the meadows of Bozen/Bolzano had two main aims: first it would facilitate a sustainable change in the rural landscape through forced industrialization; secondly it meant that the industrial settlements would attract thousands of migrant workers from Italy into South Tyrol facilitating a sort of Italian plantation. The fact that the settlement of industrial labourers, like those who worked in the new aluminium plant, made absolutely no economic sense, due to a lack of raw materials in the region and the absence of a neighbouring market for the end product, was disregarded by the administration whose priority was the creation of a strong Italian workforce in Bozen/Bolzano that would further advance the policy of Italianization in the area. The relocation costs were heavily subsidized to ensure that Bozen/Bolzano was seen as an attractive economic prospect for Italians. From April 1936 financial subsidies for up to 130km were introduced for all long haul goods transportation by train to and from the Bozen/Bolzano industrial zone. This meant that it would cost no more than the transportation to business regions such as the Veneto and Lombardy.¹¹

The newly enlisted Italian workers were housed in specially designed settlements, the so-called 'semi rurali', half-rural dwellings closely connected to the industrial zone. As Lill has argued, there was little 'doubt the Italian fascists put the entire weight of modernity behind the industrialization of the Tyrolean traditions with their new urbanization.'¹² Separate Italian settlements in a new fascist style, which were strictly separated geographically from the traditional German South Tyrolean residential areas, were designed to cement the fascists' claim on the northern province.

11 Lill, *Südtirol*, 157.

12 Lill, *Südtirol*, 158.

Tolomei's policy of denationalization hinged on the successful destruction of the economic heart of German South Tyrol. Thus in 1935, he abolished the German Raiffeisen Bank and founded the Federazione delle Casse rurali dell'Alto Adige. He also integrated the local Sparkasse with the Cassa di Risparmio di Bolzano. However, there were also other social and cultural prongs to the campaign, for example, the establishment of an Italian-speaking radio station in Bozen/Bolzano, the building of a hippodrome in Meran and a campaign to encourage land acquisition by Italian peasants through the Ente di Rinascita Agraria delle Tre Venezie (ERA). Essentially, Tolomei's *Provvedimenti* represented an ideologically based campaign of systematic destruction of the German South Tyrolean's collective identity. Had the policy been effectively carried out, hardly anything would have been left of the South Tyrolean minority and their German identity would have become little more than a footnote in history.

The Weimar Republic and South Tyrol: The Stresemann–Mussolini Dispute of 1926

Outside South Tyrol Mussolini's politics were being closely observed, most particularly in Germany. The height of the Italianization policy in South Tyrol coincided with the apparent economic recovery of the Weimar Republic when it entered into a period of political stability and strength. The middle years of the Weimar Republic 1924–1929 were its golden years. As the Republic stepped out of the shadows of the Versailles Treaty, the economy (with the help of American funding) underwent an astonishing recovery. In this climate political extremists on the left and right lost their relevance and power. By the mid-1920s, and after being accepted into the League of Nations, the German Reich was again in a strong position within international politics. The government of the Weimar Republic sought to improve its popularity by fulfilling foreign minister Gustav Stresemann's *Risorgimento* aspirations. Stresemann had declared the intention of

providing ‘a voice for more than ten million Germans outside the Reich’s borders.’¹³ Bolstered by Bavarian intellectuals’ support, which had emerged as early as 1919, Stresemann challenged Mussolini in the Reichstag regarding his South Tyrolean policy of Italianization.

The so-called ‘battle of words’ between Stresemann and Mussolini in February 1926 was an indication of the political tension emerging between Italy and Germany. This exchange must be understood in the light of the changes in the political landscape in Europe, above all the Locarno Treaty of October 1925 in which Germany had guaranteed France the preservation of its Western border. After Locarno Germany became a serious player on the international diplomatic stage as it was also allowed to join the League of Nations. It demonstrated its increased international status by focusing on the cultural autonomy of German minorities abroad, an issue which had become very important for Germany following its loss of territory as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. Germany thus embarked on a direct collision course with Mussolini, who was somewhat weakened internationally after failing to secure the Brenner/Brennero border in the Locarno Treaty. Il Duce therefore reacted all the more sensitively to any criticism of his South Tyrol politics.

Throughout the winter of 1925–1926 the Bavarian and wider German media reacted negatively to the enforcement of fascist politics in South Tyrol. An irritated Mussolini responded by informing the German ambassador that Germany had a choice: it could be a friend or foe to Italy. The brewing tensions came to a head when on 6 February 1926 the prime minister of Bavaria, Heinrich Held accused Italy of ‘raping the German culture in South Tyrol.’¹⁴ Mussolini immediately launched a verbal attack that was to polarize the Italian–German relationship. He accused Germany of an anti-Italian campaign and dismissed German nationalist sentimentality. Furthermore he denied Held’s claim that there was a systematic policy of Italianization in South Tyrol. Essentially, Mussolini argued that the South Tyroleans were not a national minority but rather an ethnic relic that would

13 Lill, *Südtirol*, 75.

14 Lill, *Südtirol*, 94.

be cleared away by Italianization. He also added that Italy would never withdraw its national flag from the Brenner/Brennero Pass, but threatened that instead it would carry it even further afield.

The German foreign minister Stresemann's response to Mussolini's blustering and threats was very revealing. Stresemann was a liberal and a democrat and therefore anti-fascist, however, he introduced nationalist undertones into his speech in the Reichstag on 9 February. While he dismissed Mussolini's demagogy, he acknowledged and accepted the political situation in Europe pertaining to South Tyrol: 'South Tyrol has been assigned to Italy through the peace treaty. The question of Italian sovereignty over South Tyrol is settled.'¹⁵ However, he underscored the responsibilities that came with Italy's annexation of the area, responsibilities that were based not just on international law, but crucially on an 'international moral code.'¹⁶ Thus he reminded Italy of the recommendation 'of the allied and associated nations' and of the words of the Italian president in the Roman parliament that Italy was to pursue a very liberal line towards their new citizens.¹⁷ The Reichstag minutes reported 'Hear! Hear!' and strong support for Stresemann in the Parliament. Stresemann proceeded to delight his parliamentary audience by reciting Pecori-Giraldi's 1918 proclamation, which blatantly contradicted Italian policy in South Tyrol since 1925:

As much as Italy desires to imprint on this soil its spirit and its laws, as remote is its desire to suppress other races and languages. (Hear! Hear!) In those villages where there is a mixed population, schools in all relevant languages will be introduced. (Hear! Hear!) German-speaking communities will possess German-speaking schools ... (Hear! Hear!) German will remain the language in the classroom ... (Hear! Hear!) Gentlemen, this is the first declaration which the German population of South Tyrol were exposed to on the very day they have witnessed through military occupation that they have become citizens of another country.¹⁸

15 Walter Freiberg, *Südtirol und der italienische Nationalismus: Entstehung und Entwicklung einer europäischen Minderheitenfrage. Dokumente*, Josef Fonatana, ed. (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1990), 351.

16 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 351.

17 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 351.

18 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 352.

Stresemann, no doubt encouraged by the raucous and appreciative response, branched out and cited other Italian politicians such as Titoni, Bonomi, and even King Victor Emmanuel III, all of whom had uttered sentiments of tolerance and cultural sensitivity towards: ‘People of other nationalities who are unified with us.’¹⁹ Stresemann was also tactically astute in highlighting the Italian concerns for their own minorities based abroad:

Italy for instance has just placed value on a decree by South Slavonia to regulate the minority question by a decree dated 24 September 1923. South Slavonia grants minorities total opportunity for development within the national realm; they enjoy freedom within their religion, their press, associations, and assemblies. They have the right to establish schools and reformatories within which their own language can be used. These were claims made by Italy itself, which would lead to the assumption that they would use a similar political template for the German minorities based in the region of South Tyrol.²⁰

Stresemann, of course, concluded by highlighting the obvious: the reality for South Tyrol under the control of Ettore Tolomei and his *Provvedimenti* was quite different and amounted to little other than a deliberate policy of ‘Entdeutschung von Südtirol’ [de-Germanization of South Tyrol]. Stresemann was able to use Mussolini’s own description of the process as Italianization and pointed out that Mussolini had described it as one of his core policies. This reality stood in stark contrast to the assurances ‘which the South Tyrolean population were given throughout their annexation by Italy.’²¹

Stresemann’s criticism of the de-nationalizing policy was effective and clear: ‘The denationalization issue was pivotal for the protection of minorities.’²² He was also conscious of denying Mussolini’s claims of an anti-Italian boycotting campaign by distancing himself from the boycotting of Italian goods which had been undertaken mainly in Bavarian circles. His speech represented a scathing criticism of the Italian state’s handling

19 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 352.

20 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 352.

21 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 353.

22 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 353.

of its newly acquired territory in South Tyrol. While this in effect meant that Stresemann was commenting on, and interfering in, Italian domestic politics, he justified this on the basis that 'the German public had taken a passionate stance based on the cultural connection with German South Tyroleans.'²³ Stresemann had also implicitly articulated other grounds for Germany's right to comment: the policy of Italianization in South Tyrol was contrary to international law and morality.

Stresemann's hard line against Mussolini also applied to the Locarno problem, which lay at the heart of the debate between the two politicians: 'In the Locarno negotiations Italy has attempted to secure the Brenner border in an international agreement. Our response to that request was, I think, self-evident. Firstly, it was directed at the wrong party. Austria has to decide about the Brenner Pass as Austria borders with Italy. For our part we had no intention of interfering with Austria's right to self-determination.'²⁴ This assertion of Stresemann's is extremely interesting. He withdraws from the political debate by hiding behind a judicial formality, thus rejecting Germany's political responsibility in the issue of the stability of borders in Europe, which only eight years previously had witnessed the close military alliance between Germany and Austria. Stresemann's ambiguity about Germany's role in South Tyrol, between law and morality, was deliberate as he knew he was playing on existing Italian insecurities regarding its northern borders. It placed the South Tyrol issue within the context of German *Risorgimento* nationalism and was intended to provoke Mussolini and his strategist Tolomei who constantly stressed the Italianity of South Tyrol. They could therefore see Stresemann's comments as symptomatic of an aggressive German nationalism threatening the integrity of Italy. Stresemann continued the nationalist discourse, with the enthusiastic appreciation of his audience, by claiming that that seven years after the Versailles Treaty Weimar Germany was 'big enough and united enough to take on those who expressed desires to move against Germany.'²⁵

23 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 354.

24 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 355.

25 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 358.

Stresemann's speech and, in particular, his expression of a German nationalist sentiment was evidence of a new political confidence that was emerging in the Weimar Republic by 1926. Germany was slowly beginning to cope with the aftermath of the war and, due to massive financial aid from the United States, the economy was beginning to recover. In 1926, Stresemann had started the process of reintroducing Germany into the community of world states by entering the League of Nations. With this he marked the end of the post-war era and the beginning of a new political order in Europe within which Italy – by means of the secret treaty of 1915 as one of the beneficiaries of the war – would be limited in its political aspirations. Weimar's new national confidence was so strong that Stresemann openly criticized the Versailles Treaty through which 'millions of German citizens were forced to live under foreign rule, which was totally at odds with the idea of a people's right to self-determination.'²⁶ Stresemann's declaration that 'it is the right of the German population to feel a connection with people of the same blood living in another state, a right which no one can remove or contest'²⁷ was effectively providing the rationale for Germany to become the protector of South Tyrol, a role traditionally played by Austria.

Stresemann's pointed positioning of Germany vis-à-vis Italy on the international stage also had a clear domestic rationale. Stresemann's pronounced anti-Italianism – which from his own political perspective could be equated to a strong anti-Fascism – was designed to unite all diverging political parties in the Parliament. To this end he was successful as his speech was received with approval from all sides of the political spectrum in the German parliament. Stresemann was trying to create a basic national political consensus which would incorporate all parties, even the strongly nationalist ones from southern Germany. The Bavarian People's Party (BVP) increasingly defined itself as the voice of the suppressed German minority in Italy since Austria, the traditional voice of the South Tyroleans, was marked by political impotence.

26 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 358.

27 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 359.

Despite Innsbruck's strong support of South Tyrol, Vienna remained weak and half-hearted in its attempts to confront Mussolini's policies in South Tyrol. However, the dispute between Mussolini and Stresemann did prompt a reaction from the Austrian prime minister, Rudolf Ramek. In the wake of Stresemann's speech Ramek criticized the Italianization of South Tyrol, but he also appeased Mussolini by referring to South Tyrol as 'Oberetsch', which was a translation of the fascist term Alto Adige. As a result of this somewhat ambiguous stance he came under more criticism from the North Tyrolean camp than from Italy. An Austrian prime minister who was so mindful of Mussolini's fascist sensibilities that he could not even refer to South Tyrol by its Tyrolean name was not going to be taken seriously as a spokesman for South Tyrolean interests.

The Tyrolean delegate Kolb illustrated during the same national assembly debate how differently the Innsbruck parliament dealt with the South Tyrol issue: he referred to Wilson's fourteen points in the context of the end of the war in 1918, and to Austria's neighbourly right to have a say in South Tyrol. This became even more relevant in the face of the Italianization of German-speaking South Tyrol as this had become 'eine Weltfrage' [a global issue],²⁸ and was no longer just a bilateral problem. To conclude his long speech, Kolb quoted the famous section of Eduard Reut-Nicolussi's 1919 speech, in which he expressed his pain at the separation of South Tyrol from its fatherland Austria. This emotional reminder of the fate of South Tyrol was honoured in the parliament and was greeted with 'vigorous and lasting acclamation and applause. – The speaker was congratulated,'²⁹ and Tyrolean delegates in Innsbruck had thus reassured themselves that they were the true defenders of South Tyrol's interests in Austria.

Despite the polemic in Vienna, Innsbruck and Berlin, no one in 1926 raised the issue of the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero, not even Stresemann. Even if many politicians would have wished to see a geographical revision of the border, the timing and the political climate in Europe were not conducive to such a debate. Stresemann had other worries, and the South

28 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 437.

29 Freiberg, *Minderheitenfrage*, 447.

Tyroleans acknowledged that he was not in a position to revise the Treaty of St Germain. Germany was trying gradually to ease the effects of the Versailles Treaty and would not attempt to revise the stipulations of the Treaty for Austria. This option was first articulated by Adolf Hitler who was beginning to establish his national socialist party at the end of the decade, floating the idea of ‘*nationale Sammlung*’ [national unification].³⁰

Nevertheless, the German Reich had firmly positioned itself against Mussolini regarding the issue of South Tyrol and had thus adopted the role of the vigilant observer that Austria was unable to sustain. Consequently, the German-speaking South Tyroleans placed their political hopes in Germany, the stronger of the two German states. Bozen/Bolzano now looked to Berlin rather than to Vienna. However, it was not until the Nazi era that the South Tyroleans had their hopes seriously raised regarding the potential end to the fascist de-nationalization of South Tyrol and a move towards the German Reich.

Appendix: Ettore Tolomei’s 32 Provisions for South Tyrol

1. Unification of Alto Adige and Trentino into a single province with Trento as its capital.
2. Appointment of Italian municipal secretaries (*podestà*).
3. Revision of the (citizenship) options and closure of the Brenner border for all persons to whom the Italian citizenship was not granted.
4. Provisions to hinder Germans and Austrians from entering and staying in Italy.
5. Obstruction of German immigration.
6. Revision of the census of 1921.
7. Introduction of Italian as the official language.

30 Lill, *Südtirol*, 75.

8. Dismissal of German officials or transfer to the old (Italian) provinces.
9. Dissolution of the 'Deutscher Verband' (German association).
10. Dissolution of Alpine associations not affiliated with the Italian Alpine Club, transfer of all Alpine refuges to the Italian Alpine Club.
11. Proscribe the names 'Südtirol' and 'Deutsch-Südtirol'.
12. Shutting down of the Bozen newspaper *Der Tiroler*.
13. Italianization of German local names.
14. Italianization of public signs and inscriptions.
15. Italianization of street names.
16. Italianization of the Germanized surnames.
17. Removal of the Walther von der Vogelweide monument from the Walther Square in Bozen.
18. Increase of Carabinieri troops excluding German units.
19. Preferential treatment of land acquisition and immigration of Italians.
20. Request of non-interference by foreign powers in South Tyrolean affairs.
21. Elimination of German banks, establishment of an Italian mortgage Bank.
22. Establishment of border customs offices in Sterzing and Toblach.
23. Generous support of the Italian language and culture.
24. Introduction of Italian nursery and primary schools.
25. Introduction of Italian secondary schools.
26. Strict control of foreign university diplomas.
27. Expansion of the 'Istituto di Storia per l'Alto Adige'.
28. Realignment of the territory of the Diocese of Brixen and strict surveillance of clergy activity.
29. Exclusive use of Italian in trials and in court.
30. State control of the Chamber of Commerce and the agricultural authorities (*corporazioni*).
31. Extensive programs for new rail networks to facilitate the Italianization of Alto Adige (rail projects Milan–Mals, Veltlin–Brenner, Agordo–Brixen).
32. Increase of the number of army personnel in Alto Adige.

Under the Shadow of the Third Reich, 1933–1938

Most German South Tyroleans welcomed the arrival of Adolf Hitler in the Reich Chancellery in 1933. They had experienced post-World War I Europe as a period of oppression and hardship. The rise of Benito Mussolini from 1922 and the implementation of the 'Provvedimenti' had compounded and exacerbated their post-war grievances and left them feeling isolated and beleaguered. Thus the German South Tyroleans regarded the new chancellor in Berlin with cautious optimism hoping that in him lay a brighter German future that would include them. Nor was this sense of optimism groundless, Hitler had nurtured the idea of uniting South Tyrol with the German Empire in the early days of his national socialist movement. In his proposed trajectory for the party in 1920 he emphasized his position with direct reference to Wilson's fourteen point program: 'Unification of all Germans based on the idea of self-determination for all races.'¹ He also strongly criticized the German foreign minister Walter Simons for accepting the annexation of South Tyrol by Italy as inevitable.

Later however, and coinciding with the rise of Mussolini, the very pragmatic Hitler changed his approach to South Tyrol. He saw in Mussolini a natural ally on the international stage. Shortly after Mussolini took power in October 1922 Hitler clarified his position on South Tyrol to Italian diplomats emphasizing that the importance of Italy as an ally was of considerably more value and relevance to Germany than '200,000 well-treated Germans as opposed to millions of totally oppressed Germans.'² It was clear that Hitler would not allow the South Tyrol situation to queer the pitch for Italian-German co-operation. He made clear to Mussolini that the

1 Lill, *Südtirol*, 139.

2 Lill, *Südtirol*, 140.

South Tyrolean issue no longer existed and therefore had no implications for their relationship.

Hitler's willingness to abandon the South Tyrol issue was indicative of how important he considered a political relationship with Mussolini. This was clearly articulated in Hitler's political manifesto *Mein Kampf*, which emerged after Hitler's prison sentence in the fortress of Landsberg. In this book he repeatedly addressed the question of South Tyrol in line with his 'Heim ins Reich' [Home into the Reich] philosophy, stating that the question of South Tyrol had to be subordinate to the relationship between Italy and Germany.³ South Tyrol, according to Hitler, had always been 'the German people's Hecuba' and had been a question that 'our infernal press had inflated to a degree that would be disastrous for the German people.'⁴ Hitler explained clearly that the interests of South Tyrol had to be subordinate to the interests of the Reich:

It is important to note that the regaining of lost regions of a race or state is one of the first steps in the regaining of political power and the independence of the motherland. In such a case the interests of the lost region must be cast aside in favour of those regarding the ultimate freedom of the motherland. The liberating of oppressed or annexed regions is not generally the result of the wishes or protests of those left behind, but rather the result of the wishes of the sovereign power with which they were formerly united.⁵

In an open attack on the politicians of the Weimar Republic, who supported the South Tyrol's quest for reunification with the rest of Tyrol, Hitler associated the campaign for reunification with a Jewish conspiracy. As far as Hitler was concerned those who elevated the South Tyrolean issue above German international interests, and most particularly, a German-Italian relationship were traitors. He explained: 'It is in the interests of Jews and Habsburg sympathizers to hinder a federal German state that one day could

3 Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner and Adolf Leidlmair, *Heimatlos: die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler* (Innsbruck and Bozen: Tiroler Landesinstitut, 1993), 21.

4 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1926), 520.

5 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 688.

lead to an emancipated German fatherland. It is not out of love for South Tyrol that they are making such a fuss, but rather out of fear of a possible German Italian agreement.⁶

However, due largely to Mussolini's lack of interest, Hitler's dreams of a German-Italian agreement did not materialize immediately. Once Hitler came to power in 1933, he focused on the domestic consolidation of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party), and more gradually the expansion of German political power into Europe. Mussolini's ambivalence mutated into suspicion and rejection. In 1935 Hitler occupied the Rhineland and thus broke the terms of the Versailles Treaty, without any resistance from the Allies. Germany left the League of Nations, and Hitler allowed Hermann Göring to confirm to the international community the existence of a German air force and to announce the rearmament of Germany. Finally, in that same year the Saarland question was settled by plebiscite which resulted in an overwhelming consensus of the German people in favour of being part of the German Reich. Unsurprisingly, the Nazis turned this into a huge propaganda issue, celebrating the result of the referendum as a validation of the Nazi system. The national socialist regime's political isolation was concealed behind gestures of military power and political strength. Hitler appeared unstoppable. He had made no secret of his desire to reunite his birthplace Austria with the German Reich. The reunification of Germany and Austria would have meant German troops on the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero, a scenario Mussolini dreaded. Thus the government in Rome and the German-speaking South Tyroleans both became convinced that Hitler's troops would, sooner or later, march all the way, as far as the linguistic and ethnic divide between the Germanic and the Italian worlds at Salurn/Salorno. Mussolini moved decisively to prevent the German expansion into the South, hence he drew up the Roman Protocols in March 1934 which sought to support Austria and Hungary and bind them more closely to Italy.⁷

6 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 709.

7 Lill, *Südtirol*, 144.

The more suspicious Mussolini became of Hitler's ambitions, the more Hitler sought to forge a relationship with Mussolini. Hitler's special envoy, Hermann Göring, had announced in Rome in November 1933 that Germany would never again raise the issue of South Tyrol. In order for Hitler to achieve his aim of a strong German-Italian relationship he had to convince Mussolini that he was willing to sacrifice German South Tyrol. Ironically, neither Rome nor South Tyrol believed Hitler's declarations in this regard. In the light of his openly and oft-expressed wish to bring Austria back to the homeland, which had resulted in a pro-Nazi atmosphere in South Tyrol, Mussolini and the German-speaking South Tyroleans regarded his utterances on South Tyrol as merely tactical. For Mussolini Hitler's apparently conflicting statements on South Tyrol, Austria and the German vision of *Heimat* compounded his distrust; for the South Tyroleans it fostered hope.

However, the wider international interests of Germany and Italy brought the two dictators to an agreement when, in 1936, Germany acknowledged the Italian annexation of Ethiopia as a result of the Abyssinian war, and Italy in turn supported Germany's campaign in the Spanish Civil War. Both Italian campaigns paved the way for the Rome-Berlin axis. During the Abyssinian campaign Mussolini had affronted the main western powers, whereas Hitler had benevolently supported the annexation. The involvement in Spain cemented the de facto relationship between Hitler and Mussolini, as both dictators were now facing the united disapproval of the other main powers. In October 1936 the German and Italian foreign ministers Galeazzo Ciano and Konstantin Hermann Karl Freiherr von Neurath forged the Axis alliance. Both declared they were anti-Communist and staked out their various geographical spheres of interest. The German Reich was looking to expand in the East and thus agreed to leave the Mediterranean to Mussolini.

With this, Italy had secured a German guarantee of the Italian position and a German recognition of Austria's integrity. Hitler's desire to build a close relationship with Mussolini was fulfilled, and until 1945 he regarded this as binding. All of the sacrifices the Reich made for Italy in the succeeding years, the military aid in Greece and North Africa, the liberation of the Duce in 1943 and the creation of the Repubblica di

Salò, must be understood in the context and spirit of the 1936 agreement between Hitler and Mussolini. Crucially for the South Tyroleans, this treaty included Germany's definitive rejection of the German South Tyrol's claim to return to the Reich.

Hitler paid an official visit to Rome on 7 May 1938 in order to reassure Mussolini that the border at the Brenner Pass would remain untouched by Germany. This guarantee smoothed the way for a full Italian sanction of the Munich agreement of August 1938,⁸ which increased Hitler's influence in central Europe through the annexation of the Sudetenland. In South Tyrol Hitler's visit to Rome marked a U-turn in the propaganda of the *Völkischer Kampfring Südtirol* (VKS), but it also meant the beginning of the painful realization that Hitler rated his friendship with Mussolini above their reunification with the German Reich. South Tyrol was reduced to the 'Schmiere auf der Achse Berlin-Rom' [grease on the Berlin-Rome Axis]. Rudolf Lill points out that while Hitler's assurances that he was no longer interested in South Tyrol did not make the Option period of 1939 inevitable, it certainly made it the most likely outcome.⁹ Conrad Latour added that after the 'Handstreich von Prag' [Coup in Prague] – the unlawful occupation of the rest of Czechoslovakia – the political mood in Rome became very anti-German. Mussolini was governed by his fears that Hitler could proceed to Yugoslavia and thus threaten his sphere of interest on the Balkan peninsula. Viewed in this light, the idea of relocating German South Tyroleans to the Reich, which became known as the 'Option', could be regarded as an attempt to pacify Italy.¹⁰

8 Conrad Latour, *Südtirol und die Achse Berlin-Rom 1938–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt 1962), 30–31.

9 Lill, *Südtirol*, 145.

10 Latour, *Achse Berlin Rom*, 31.

National Socialism in South Tyrol

It is important to understand the history of National Socialism in South Tyrol from its inception, in order to fully grasp the significance of the later Option period for South Tyrolean identity. As has already been noted the resistance to Tolomei's catalogue of sanctions in South Tyrol had been restricted to civil disobedience and the establishment of the catacomb schools, which was supported by the Catholic Church. However, by the 1930s resistance had become more pronounced and more radically anti-Italian¹¹ mutating from the passive resistance of aristocrats, clerks and farmers to active resistance.¹² The Italian historian Umberto Corsini attributed the advent of this new resistance to a political shift to the right and to the emergence and influence of *völkisch* ideas in German-speaking coterie north of the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero on the political discourse of resistance in South Tyrol. On the other hand many of the young South Tyroleans protested against their established ethnic and political representation in the Deutscher Verband (DV) accusing it of insufficient political activity. This new, politicized youth no longer voiced their protest through the channels of traditional catholic institutions, but rather found a new way to express themselves through the 'Befreiungsideologie des Nationalsozialismus' [liberation ideology of National Socialism] even though this National Socialism was a variant of the governing fascism. With this came a shift in focus: the older generation were still motivated by a hope of reunification with the fatherland, Tyrol, whereas the younger generation directed their energy towards the idea of unity with the German Reich. The Reich's national liberal and national socialist parties appealed to South Tyrolean youth because they argued for the abolition of the Versailles Treaty (and with that also the provisions of the Treaty of St Germain), along with the renaissance of German national pride and the unification of all Germans in one fatherland.

11 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 203.

12 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 203.

The German general elections in September 1930 revealed massive support for Hitler's party and those involved in National Socialism interpreted this as a mandate for a national renaissance. In South Tyrol it resulted in the creation of national socialist groups. 1931 and 1932 witnessed the emergence of the local NS groups in Meran/Merano and Bozen/Bolzano respectively, initially organized by resident Austrians and Germans, who stressed the similarities between Italian Fascism and National Socialism. Whilst Tolomei welcomed these movements as a 'counterweight balancing traditional Austrian irredentism,'¹³ the more pragmatically minded Mussolini was concerned about the implications of such a development. He advised the new Bozen/Bolzano prefect Giuseppe Mastromattei only to accept National Socialism within the ranks of German nationals resident in Italy. However, he was anxious that the development of National Socialism among South Tyroleans be curbed.¹⁴ Mussolini was somewhat restricted in even this endeavour as he did not wish to offend Hitler. As early as 1933 it was obvious that containing the growth of National Socialism in South Tyrol would be impossible.

As well as the development of NSdAP branches in South Tyrol a home-grown movement of youth resistance organizations emerged from as early as 1928. These groups rejected fascist assimilation and instead focused on the preservation of South Tyrolean folklore as a defense against Italianization.¹⁵ The most significant of these small groups was the 'Nibelung,' from which emerged the student group 'Walther von der Vogelweide,' formed by Bozen secondary school pupils. This cultural movement, professed 'Heimattreu' [loyalty to the homeland] and aimed at 'Befreiung' [liberation] of South Tyrol, was closely connected to the *völkisch* idea, but did not imitate unlawful organization patterns. While they held secret meetings their focus was on educating their members by means of lectures on history, literature and politics. Significantly, their musical evenings and music camps were largely attended by Germans and Austrians from the *bündisch* or national socialist

13 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 204.

14 See Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 205.

15 Alfons Gruber, *Südtirol unter dem Faschismus* (Bozen: Athesia, 1974), 35.

organizations indicating the strong connection between these cultural resistance organizations and National Socialism.¹⁶

In general these organizations did not attract the attention of the authorities, only occasionally provoking a Carabinieri response when, for example, they organized the laying of wreaths at the memorials of Tyrolean freedom fighters or the handing out of flyers encouraging people to boycott Italian businesses.¹⁷ Recital communities were also formed during this period to safeguard collective traditions and music. The creation of these societies during the fascist period represented a deliberate protest against cultural and linguistic assimilation.

These relatively informal groups, which were familiar with contemporary political currents and which sympathized with the national socialist movement, provided the perfect recruiting ground for the prolific national socialist cells after 1933. The process was made easier by the centralization of these groups in the Gau-Jugend-Rat in 1932. In 1934, the Gau-Jugend-Rat was renamed the *Völkischer Kampfring Südtirol* (VKS), which reflected the strong influence of the German national socialist movement. During this period the VKS, under the leadership of Felix Gasser, consciously modeled itself on the ideological development of the Reich¹⁸ in order to ensure the closest possible alliance with German society.

In 1934, the Italian state banished VKS leaders Hillebrand and Gasser in the hope of crushing National Socialism in South Tyrol. However, in view of the developing relationship between Italy and Germany and the rapidly changing political climate, any Italian hopes of moving effectively against the emergence of National Socialism within its borders were compromised. Hence, in 1933 at the beginning of the Third Reich two diametrically opposed groups in South Tyrol stood looking to Germany for future guidance: the VKS and the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (VDA), which comprised the Catholic resistance group of Gamper and the conservative South Tyroleans. However, as Corsini and Lill observe,

16 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 206.

17 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 207.

18 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 207.

the VKS managed to harness the widespread belief in Hitler's 'Heim ins Reich' philosophy to bolster its own powerbase in South Tyrol, whereas, the conservatives, who also placed considerable hope in Hitler's power to bring the South Tyroleans into the Reich, nevertheless rejected the ideology of National Socialism.¹⁹ As the hopes for unification with Germany became increasingly associated with National Socialism the conservatives lost considerable ground. Furthermore, the ideological differences between the VKS and the conservatives meant that cooperation became impossible. As a result of the dominance of National Socialism in South Tyrol, central figures, for example, Canon Michael Gamper who represented the Catholic wing, began to dissociate themselves from the 'Heim ins Reich' idea.

The South Tyrolean tendency to project all its hopes onto National Socialism and Hitler was only strengthened by the continuing policy of Italianization. Its annual calendar was dotted with fascist holidays, Tolomei's *Provedimenti* were assiduously implemented, migrant Italian workers were an ever more prominent feature of life in South Tyrol, and the industrial area gave Bozen/Bolzano a very un-Tyrolean and industrialized appearance. Visitors to South Tyrol at the end of the 1920s could already attest to an ever more Italian South Tyrol, even though Tolomei's *Provedimenti* were never totally accomplished, for example, the Italianization of South Tyrol family names was a 'dead letter'.²⁰

The Catholic Church also limited linguistic and cultural assimilation through self-confident engagement in favour of the German-speaking Catholics. Their self-confidence was based on the Lateran Pact of February 1929 between the Catholic Church and Mussolini, which stated that the Church would enjoy a certain degree of freedom within the fascist state. In particular Article 22, which placed the care of all believers (German and Italian) in the hands of the church, and Article 39 which gave further power to the Pope in Rome regarding seminaries, had positive repercussions for South Tyrol. These articles guaranteed the Church autonomy over its flock and institutions, which the Italian state was bound to protect. Mussolini

19 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 271.

20 Gruber, *Südtirol unter dem Faschismus*, 52.

accepted this diminution of his otherwise absolute power in South Tyrol because he was aware that he could not afford to alienate the support of Italian Roman Catholics. If, while appeasing Italian Catholic opinion and winning their support for his European ambitions, he incidentally accorded greater freedoms to the South Tyroleans, that was a by-product he was willing to accept. However Canon Gamper, once he had secured the support of his senior Bishop, Josef Geisler, exploited this protection and power afforded to the Catholic Church in order to resist and to become the guiding spirit behind those South Tyroleans who resisted the Nazis.²¹

Meanwhile the VKS, under the leadership of Felix Gasser, Otto Waldthaler and Peter Hofer, openly embraced the ideology of the German National Socialism. Student activists such as Norbert Mumelter, Robert Helm and Karl Nicolussi were key figures in the reorganization of the VKS into sectioned paramilitary groups, which in 1936 adopted the ideology and the NSDAP 'Führer Prinzip' [the principle of leadership]. They sought to prepare South Tyrol for what they regarded as its inevitable inclusion into the German Reich. Based on this conviction they wanted to streamline South Tyrolean society in the way Germany had been restructured when the Nazis came to power:

No-one openly predicted when Hitler would 'bring South Tyrol home', would it coincide with the Anschluss with Austria, or follow an agreement or dispute with Mussolini. There was however, a widespread belief in the readiness of a land and people determined to achieve unification with Germany. The goal was to then provide the Führer with a dependable and powerful following.²²

The limitless optimism of the VKS with regard to 'Heim ins Reich' [Return to the Empire] for South Tyrol, along with numerous undercover activities (such as visits to the cemeteries of Austrian soldiers from the First World War in the Dolomites and in Trient/Trento, or the military training of young men in secret locations) fuelled the general conviction among German-speaking South Tyroleans that Hitler would bring South Tyrol

21 Steiningger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 150.

22 Corsini and Lill, *Südtirol 1918–1946*, 276.

into the Reich. Gradually, the South Tyroleans were behaving less like victims of oppression, but instead were entering a phase of optimism and preparation, consciously looking to what they believed would be a brighter future. The ideology of National Socialism along with the guarantee of self-determination for all Germans articulated by Hitler convinced many in South Tyrol that there was a realistic future for them in the Reich and the fatalism of the 1920s was replaced with pro-active optimism in the 1930s. The Saarland referendum of 1935 was regarded as a clear indication of German Risorgimento nationalism, which was expressed in South Tyrol as 'Heute die Saar, wir übers Jahr' [Today the Saarland, our turn next year]. In 1938 the Anschluss with Austria further confirmed this conviction: Austria was now part of the German Empire and National Socialism seemed unstoppable. South Tyrol was the next logical step in the German Reich's march forward. The followers of the VKS and also the DV pinned all their hopes on this eventuality. However, Hitler and Mussolini had other plans for South Tyrol: the people of South Tyrol were to be presented with an option of whether to stay or leave the *Heimat*. The option literally forced the South Tyroleans to choose between *Heimat* and identity: they could stay in their homeland and sacrifice their Austro-German identity or leave South Tyrol to retain their Austro-German traditional way of life. Consequently, the VKS, whose fortunes and hopes were so wedded to German National Socialism were left in the untenable position of having to sell an 'option' to their people that negated everything they represented.

The Option and German Rule in South Tyrol, 1939–1945

The belief among South Tyroleans that Hitler represented their best hope of salvation from fascist Italy ran very deep, despite the fact that at no stage had any of their representatives succeeded in securing any such guarantee from Hitler. In fact, before Hitler's accession to power, a small delegation of South Tyroleans met with him on 31 March 1932 in the Braunes Haus in Munich. The conversation that ensued should have dashed any hopes the South Tyroleans had that Hitler might be their saviour. The South Tyrolean delegation, led by the lawyer and politician Eduard Reut-Nicolussi and Norbert Mumelter, sought to persuade Hitler to include South Tyrol in the Reich thus saving it from fascist Italy. During this revealing encounter Hitler spelled out clearly his position on the South Tyrol and the limits to his support. South Tyrol, he explained, would not be included in the Reich for two fundamental reasons. From a strategic point of view, South Tyrol was vital to Hitler's relationship with Mussolini, which was too important to jeopardize. From an ideological point of view, South Tyrol did not have the same claims on the Reich's protection as the Germans in Poland, who he felt – in accordance with his racial theory of inferior and superior races – were clearly oppressed by 'an inferior race'. There was little doubt that Hitler was willing to sacrifice the South Tyroleans for what he considered to be the greater good of Germany. In fact, Hitler intended to use South Tyrol to strengthen the German–Italian relationship by creating organizations that would build bridges between Berlin and Rome.

The reaction of this small delegation to what must have been a devastating experience was to inform the political development of the South Tyrol during the Nazi period: they returned home and continued to maintain (and possibly believe) that Hitler would still rescue South Tyrol. In effect,

their refusal to accept Hitler's calculated rejection of their claims instigated a culture of denial and blind hope in Hitler's Reich. It was in this confused climate in 1934 that the VKS was established with the express intention of seeing South Tyrol embraced within the fold of the German Reich. Despite Hitler's unambiguous position on South Tyrol, the VKS and large swathes of the public chose to believe that Hitler merely wished to lull Mussolini into a false sense of security regarding the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero, but that he would, when the opportunity presented itself, expand his empire as far as Trient/Trento. This was, in many ways, the politics of self-delusion and desperation. To accept Hitler's position on South Tyrol would have meant not just accepting political failure, but also devastating cultural rejection and the end of any hopes that their German identity could be saved from the ravages of Italianization.

The VKS nurtured their belief in Hitler over the years that followed: the example of the Saarland referendum of 1935 offered them an example of a German population voting itself into the Reich and with the Anschluss of Austria to Germany in March 1938 the VKS could almost literally feel the Reich encroaching. However, so did Mussolini who had not been officially informed of the Anschluss and thus felt threatened. Ironically, for the South Tyroleans, this resulted in Hitler, in a bid to reassure Mussolini and maintain their political relationship, travelling to Rome in May 1938 to reassure his comrade of the integrity of the Brenner border. In effect, this meant that Hitler was publicly reaffirming the place of South Tyrol in Italy and, therefore, denying it any place in a new Reich. The implications of Hitler's rejection of South Tyrol were devastating for the VKS: the party now had to cast South Tyrol as a sacrifice for the *völkisch* ideology it had propagated since its inception. Perhaps this contradictory position was best summed up by one of the VKS leaders, Norbert Mumelter, when he declared: 'Für Grossdeutschland muss man selbst seine Heimat opfern können'¹ [In order to support the Greater German Empire one has to be prepared to sacrifice one's *Heimat!*].

1 Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2003), 42.

The VKS's position became increasingly difficult since their entire *raison d'être* was to prepare the people of South Tyrol for reunification with the Reich.² Although it was becoming ever more obvious that Hitler's goal of building a 'Volksgemeinschaft' of all Germans was subject to pragmatic considerations such as the developing friendship with Mussolini, the VKS could not afford to antagonize the leadership in Berlin by pushing its claims. Not surprisingly, the VKS found it increasingly hard to provide consistent pro-German leadership in South Tyrol. Rudolf Lill has argued that the enthusiasm for National Socialism in South Tyrol was a manifestation of national patriotism rather than of any real approval of National Socialism. Lill's contention is particularly relevant for the continued support for National Socialism in South Tyrol *after* 1938. For, despite Hitler's rejection of South Tyrol, belief in the Reich remained the South Tyroleans' way of expressing loyalty to their besieged German identity.

However, loyalty to the Reich and the spiritual notion of the homeland was to take on a meaning the South Tyroleans could never have foreseen and one that would devastate the very identity they sought to protect. Throughout 1938 and early 1939 both Mussolini and Hitler's positions regarding the German-speaking population in South Tyrol began to alter. Mussolini's tiring of South Tyrolean resistance to Italianization, and Hitler's increasing need for soldiers meant that both men began to see the removal of the German-speaking population from South Tyrol as solution to the ongoing South Tyrolean problem. Basically, they concluded, the South Tyrolean issue was not going to go away, so the people must.³

In 1939 Heinrich Himmler and the Italian foreign minister Count Ciano drafted an agreement between Hitler and Mussolini which had at its heart the relocation of the German South Tyrolean people into the German Reich. This agreement was officially called the 'Option' as it offered the South Tyroleans a choice: to leave their *Heimat* and become 'Reichsdeutsche' [citizens of the German Reich] in the Reich or to remain in the *Heimat* and become fully Italianized. Those that opted for the latter

2 Lill, *Südtirol*, 172.

3 Lill, *Südtirol*, 71.

were promised compensation for the loss of material possessions and they were promised an area of settlement where all South Tyroleans could live together in one group. The alternative was equally stark: if they decided to stay in South Tyrol they had to abandon their Germanness, their language and their customs, and would keep their Italian passport.

The VKS, who had not been consulted during the drafting of the Option agreement, found itself in an impossible position, torn between the political interests of two dictators. Furthermore, the VKS still could not afford to alienate Hitler by insisting on its desire for South Tyrol within the Reich. In other words, despite the fact that the Option amounted to a violation of everything the VKS had espoused since its establishment it was powerless to articulate its horror, in fact it had to rally behind the Option and ensure its success. The VKS, ironically, had few options itself and continued, as it always had, in the desperate hope that Hitler could yet be convinced of the South Tyrolean claim on the Reich. Thus it focused on the hope that if the South Tyroleans could be persuaded en masse to opt for life within the Reich, Hitler might be moved to protect their *Heimat*. In effect, the VKS had to replace the Nazi credo 'Blut und Boden' [blood and soil], with the notion of 'Blut oder Boden' [blood or soil]. The abandonment of the congruity of land and 'racial belonging' fundamentally undermined the VKS's credibility in South Tyrol. Inevitably, in the coming years the VKS was reduced to a mere receiver of orders rather than an active political organization.

Peter Hofer, leader of the VKS, began to urge the South Tyroleans to opt out of South Tyrol and into the Reich. He argued that the South Tyroleans were needed in the Reich to ensure the 'völkische Überleben Deutschlands' [survival of the German race]. Ironically, he was strongly supported by Ettore Tolomei who was eager to rid South Tyrol of German speakers. However, it was a rumour that had the greatest impact on people's decision whether to stay or go: the 'Sicilian legend' claimed that those South Tyroleans that chose to stay would be deported to Sicily and would thus lose their *Heimat* and the Reich. This rumour is credited with massively increasing the numbers of those that opted to leave South Tyrol for resettlement in the Reich. Ironically, once it became obvious how many South Tyroleans were willing to leave, both Italy and Germany tried to quell the

Sicilian legend. Germany feared it could not cope with such an avalanche of people pouring into the Reich; Italy envisaged state bankruptcy if it had to pay compensation to the eighty-six per cent of South Tyroleans opting to leave Italy.

This situation was further complicated by the fact that Germany could not provide any land suitable for all the South Tyroleans. Himmler suggested French Burgundy because of its hills and climate which allow the production of fruit and wine. However, Burgundy remained under the control of the Vichy regime and was therefore not an option. The Crimean peninsula was then proposed, but the Reich lost possession of it to Russia before any settlers could move there. It was, in fact, Polish Galicia where a few contingents of South Tyroleans were resettled between 1942 and 1944. However, the German defeat at Stalingrad in 1943 and the withdrawal of the *Wehrmacht* from Eastern Europe brought an end to the resettlement plans for the South Tyroleans. Furthermore, the majority of those who made the move remained in provisional settlements, mainly in Innsbruck and Munich, and a number of them returned to South Tyrol after the war.

Thus the Option was a massive failure. By 31 December 1939, eighty-six per cent of approximately 250,000 South Tyroleans had opted to leave their homeland. However, in the period from 1939 to 1943 only 75,000 (thirty-seven per cent) relocated, and of these 20–25,000 returned home at the end of the Second World War. However, the impact of the Option lay less in its success or failure and more in its meaning for the collective identity of the South Tyroleans. In response to the Option the society divided into two camps: the 'Dableiber' [those who opted to stay in South Tyrol] and the 'Optanten' [those willing to leave]. This divide was a painful and often acrimonious one and bitter rifts developed akin to those witnessed in other parts of the world affected by civil war. Families were torn apart, best friends parted for good, children turned against parents, siblings against each other. Quite apart from those entrenched in their decisions to go or stay, there were many who could not decide, who oscillated painfully between the two options. The German-speaking population and its very understanding of identity was torn apart by the reality of the Option. The

option experience spawned an entire literature written by survivors which testifies to the depth of the trauma.⁴

In 1943 fascist rule ended in Italy, Mussolini was overthrown and Italy joined the Allies in an effort to defeat Hitler and put an end to the war. Hitler installed Mussolini as president of the short-lived *Repubblica Sociale di Salò* at Lake Garda as a final act of friendship. South Tyrol remained a region of Italy although it came under German rule as it was part of the 'Operationszone Alpenvorland' [Operation zone of the Alpine foreland] along with Trient/Trento and Belluno. This rule did not fulfil the pre-war aspirations of South Tyrol for unification with Germany as it did not provide a path into the German Reich, and the German troops behaved as if they were occupying a foreign land. For the duration of the twenty months the troops spent in the area until the final surrender in May 1945, young South Tyroleans were coerced into the *Wehrmacht* and special police regiments although this was a violation of international law.

Between 1943 and 1945 South Tyrol remained under autocratic rule even though the rulers spoke German. The Nazi Gauleiter of Tyrol and Vorarlberg, Franz Hofer organized a South Tyrolean security service (SOD), which took over the police duties of the Gendarmerie. There were no major hostilities against the Italian population, but the anti-Italian mood manifested itself in the destruction of a number of fascist monuments in South Tyrol.⁵ The German language and culture in South Tyrol experienced a sort of revival: street signs turned bilingual again, Ladin reappeared beside Italian, and Tyrolean folk traditions were revived. The German schools reappeared and German mayors replaced the *podestà*. However, critical South Tyrolean voices were still silenced, for example, the *Dolomiten* newspaper and the publishing house Athesia were closed. The SOD sought out and arrested former anti-Option members of the community, many were expelled from the country or sent to concentration camps. The national

4 Georg Grote, 'Gehen oder bleiben? Die Identitätskrise der deutschsprachigen Südtiroler in Optanten- und Dableibergedichten der Optionszeit, 1939–1943', *Modern Austrian Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 1/2 (2004), 47–70.

5 Gatterer, *Kampf gegen Rom*, 770.

socialist regime implemented their racist ideology more rigorously than Mussolini had ever done, which resulted in the persecution of the Jewish community in Meran/Merano.

The proximity of the Reich became more apparent as South Tyrol and particularly Bozen/Bolzano became the target of increasingly larger air raids from the Allies, which ceased only when the German troops retreated back across the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero in May 1945. This was the hour the resistance groups in South Tyrol had waited for. Until then they had played a relatively unimportant role. There were two organizations, the Italian 'Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale' (CLN) and the German 'Andreas-Hofer-Bund' (AHB). The AHB, established in 1939, had recruited mainly from the population that chose to stay in South Tyrol. It fought for a reunited and anti-fascist Tyrol, whereas the CLN's aim was to preserve the Brenner/Brennero border. The members of the AHB aided the Allies in South Tyrol by seeking out national socialists in hiding in order to build a strong relationship with the Allies. It was this relationship of trust that eventually led to the Allied permission for the founding of the South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP) on 8 May 1945. The leaders of the party, Erich Amonn, Friedl Volgger and Josef Raffeiner had all belonged to the group of the 'Dableiber' during the war, and the group was completed by Canon Michael Gamper, the Catholic symbol of resistance against the Nazis.

The deciding moment however fell to the better informed CLN who had the situation in the palm of their hands during the surrender process in Bozen/Bolzano, taking over the government from the German troops before the AHB had time to implement their desire to reunite with North Tyrol. On 3 May 1945 the CLN took over the government of the country as far as the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero and did so in the name of Italy. To reinforce the Italian claim on South Tyrol the carabinieri hoisted the Italian flag on the border post before the American troops marched in.

The World and the South Tyrol Issue, 1945–1946

The post-World War II world witnessed a fundamentally altered political landscape in Europe. The rules of international politics were defined anew, some old players disappeared, and some new ones would dominate affairs for the next fifty years. Crucially, Europe was replaced at the centre of world politics by the bipolarity of Washington and Moscow. In this new world South Tyrol became little more than a pawn in the ensuing international political game.

The post-war world and the South Tyrol Question

One of the most significant novelties in Europe was the extended presence of the United States of America. The American involvement in World War II had, similarly to in World War I, proved decisive, marking a turning point, which resulted in the victory of the allied anti-Hitler coalition. In contrast to the post-World War I period, however, America remained present and active on the European political scene after 1945.¹ A series of conferences of foreign secretaries in Casablanca, Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam between 1942 and 1945, in which the United States played a central role demonstrated that it was now a 'global player'.

However, the US were not the only major world power with global plans: the USSR under Josef Stalin was embarking on a course of Communist

1 The rapid withdrawal of troops from Europe after 1918 was regarded as a mistake in the United States and one the American administration would not repeat.

global expansion. As a member of the anti-Hitler coalition, Stalin was determined to stake his claim in Europe and expand Communism westwards. With the dissolution of the anti-Hitler coalition following the end of the war, the three main western powers, the USA, Great Britain and France focused on containing Stalin. The western allies had several reasons for concern. First, Stalin was moving the western border of the USSR further into Poland, which was compensated (without any consultation with the Allies) with areas of eastern Germany. Secondly, Stalin was also administering the Soviet Occupied Zone (SBZ), that was to become the German Democratic Republic (GDR), without any consultation with the Allies.

As a result of these pressures Europe became focused on the opposing interests of the two new superpowers: the US and the USSR. In this new political climate minority ethnic issues such as the South Tyrol question were, if not ignored, considered only in relation to larger issues of European stability. The Allies' interests in the Alpine region were driven by domestic security concerns or the wider anxieties regarding Communism and neutralizing Germany. In fact, the only significance that the South Tyrol issue had for the Allies was in relation to Austria. While Austria had fought on the side of Germany, in November 1943 under the Moscow Declaration, the main Allies had agreed to regard it as a victim of German aggression. Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the war the Allies never failed to highlight that Austria had fought with Germany during the war and thus bore a degree of responsibility.

Great Britain, for example, feared that the Austrian Republic might drift towards communism. Austria, for its part, was anxious to secure a peace treaty with the Allies that would settle its ambiguous post-war status. Although negotiations began in 1947, they fell victim to the emerging Cold War between the US and the USSR and were not actually concluded until April 1955. The so-called Moscow Memorandum is generally seen as the beginning of Austrian post-war sovereignty and neutrality.² Hence Austria, morally weakened and struggling to assert its own post-war sov-

2 The Memorandum formed the basis of the Vienna Treaty or Staatsvertrag, on 15 May 1955, which marked the beginning of Austria's sovereignty and neutrality.

ereignty, was not in a position to speak up for or declare any interest in South Tyrol and its fate.

Needless to say, Germany effectively disappeared as a political power in Europe. Hence Germany was no longer of any real significance to the South Tyrolean issue. There was no German government prior to 1949 and government established under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer had only limited sovereignty and deliberately avoided any issue associated with the Nazi era. Chancellor Adenauer considered it more important to tackle the legacy of the Third Reich. The German population, however, maintained an interest in and affinity with South Tyrol: for example, Germans empowered by the economic miracle in the 1950s increasingly chose South Tyrol as a holiday destination.

Italy's post-war claim on South Tyrol was strengthened by various factors. Due to its change of allegiance in 1943 Italy was on the winning side by the end of the war and strove to cement its possession and occupation of South Tyrol. This was facilitated by the fact that the former protective powers of South Tyrol – Austria and Germany – were at the mercy of the Allies until 1952 and 1955 respectively. All the Allies agreed that Germany and Austria should not be given any opportunity to unite at any time in the future. Furthermore, after World War II, there was no international agreement akin to the secret London Treaty, or Wilson's fourteen points. Thus any hopes South Tyrol may have harboured of being reunited with Austria were short-lived. In the post-war climate the Allies approached the question of the reunification of South Tyrol with Austria from a practical, rather than an ethnic or philosophical perspective. Hence, when the US briefly considered the return of South Tyrol to Austria, this was not based on any notion of rectifying the injustices of World War I, but rather to strengthen Austria in an effort to make her independent of Germany.³ In May 1945, the US State Department acknowledged that South Tyrol was 'historically, culturally and traditionally Austrian and its population at the

3 Lill, *Südtirol*, 236.

end of the war is very predominantly Austrian'.⁴ However, its principal focus was on how the 'return of South Tyrol to Austria would benefit the political and economic restructuring of Austria'.⁵

Italy did not appreciate the US State Department's rather cavalier conclusion that the loss of South Tyrol for Italy 'would be negligible compared to what Austria would gain'.⁶ Italy astutely gauged the US fears and instead of dismissing them argued the reverse was true. The Italian foreign minister Alcide deGasperi pointed out that the risks of a repeat of National Socialism were higher if Italy had armed northerly neighbours in the event of another Anschluss between Austria and Germany. In a memorandum to the Allies, the Italian government raised the issue of the special role of South Tyrol for Italy and supported it with the demographic and economic facts of 1919. DeGasperi also claimed that the Italian government would grant South Tyrol a similar sort of autonomy as it had prior to Fascism. This, he argued, was a major concession in view of the fact that the South Tyroleans had supported Hitler until May 1945, whereas Italy had fought Fascism since from 1943 on.⁷

While Austria argued that the most democratic solution to the issue would be a plebiscite in South Tyrol,⁸ the Allies were more concerned with wider security issues. Faced with the continuing expansion of the USSR, the western allies sought to turn 'Italy into a useful member of the concert of European states which would look to the west rather than orientate herself towards the east. To achieve this it was necessary to support Italy both politically and economically'.⁹ On 5 July 1945, the US foreign secre-

4 Cited in Rolf Steininger, 'Die Südtirolfrage 1945/46 und das Gruber-deGasperi Abkommen' in Anton Pelinka and Andreas Maislinger, eds, *Handbuch zur neueren Geschichte Tirols*. Vol. 2: Zeitgeschichte, Part 1: Politische Geschichte (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1993), 347–398, 348.

5 Steininger, 'Südtirolfrage 1945/46', 348.

6 Steininger, 'Südtirolfrage 1945/46', 348.

7 Lill, *Südtirol*, 236.

8 Lill, *Südtirol*, 236.

9 Steininger, 'Südtirolfrage 1945/46', 349.

tary, James F. Byrnes, summed up the dilemma and the rationale behind the allied position on South Tyrol:

In the long run do we have more to gain by sparing Italy any more humiliation than by satisfying the claims of Austria. I lean more towards the former alternative. One cannot say that the acquisition of Bozen is essential for a free and independent Austria, it could rather be a source of danger should Austria fall under Russian influence.¹⁰

Allied fears of USSR aggression outweighed any considerations of legitimacy or argument. As the British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin concluded: ‘in theory the Austrians have the better argument, however handing over the power stations of South Tyrol to them could openly give the Russians a helping hand with which they could pressurise Italy.’¹¹ In view of these considerations, the Allies supported Italy’s claim to South Tyrol. Principle was yet again sacrificed to fear, political pragmatism and wider security imperatives. In real terms the price of the international fear of communism was paid by South Tyrol.

In return for the guarantee of the Brenner/Brennero border Italy was expected to facilitate the return of those South Tyroleans who had left the area under the Option arrangement between 1939 and 1943. In order to avoid burning all diplomatic bridges, especially with Austria, the British government encouraged cooperation between Italy and Austria on the issue of autonomy for German-speaking South Tyroleans.¹² Italy succumbed to this pressure and agreed to cooperate in relation to the return of South Tyroleans to their homeland and to grant the region a certain degree of autonomy. The details of this arrangement were drawn up in 1946 under the Gruber deGasperi agreement.

10 Steining, *Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart*, 64.

11 Steining, *Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart*, 64.

12 See Steining, ‘Südtirolfrage 1945/46’, 354ff.

The domestic situation in post-war South Tyrol

As a result of the Option of 1939 post-war South Tyrol was divided and fragmented. Vulnerable without its traditional protectors, it faced a strengthened Italian state. At a fundamental level South Tyrol had lost something else, something possibly more vital to any freedom campaign: the moral high ground. The South Tyroleans were seen to have supported Hitler and thus they were not only on the losing side, they were on the wrong side. They were tainted by the atrocities of the Nazis and morally contaminated.

South Tyrol's altered landscape is particularly obvious when one considers the demographics of the region: at the end of the war the 40,000 South Tyroleans who had chosen to stay in the homeland were 'legitimate Italian citizens'. The 230,000 who had opted to relocate were without rights, regardless of whether they had already left Italy or were, by the end of the war, still awaiting their emigration to Germany. The 75,000 who had left could only return if they received Italian consent. South Tyrol also played host to an ever-increasing Italian population of some 100,000.¹³ Those South Tyroleans who had opted for Hitler's resettlement programme were to pay a high price to return to the homeland. Those who availed themselves of the 'return option' lost German citizenship and had to accept Italian citizenship and the Italian presence in South Tyrol.

On 8 May 1945, the South Tyrolean People's Party (Südtiroler Volkspartei, hereafter SVP) was established to represent the German and Ladin-speaking people of South Tyrol.¹⁴ The SVP sought to distance itself from Fascism and National Socialism by stressing its links with the Catholic Church, represented by Michael Gamper, and the political legacy of the Deutscher Verband (outlawed by the fascists in 1926). The SVP attempted to offer the South Tyroleans a political voice. They were met, naturally,

13 Lill, *Südtirol*, 233.

14 Franz Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol 1945–1972* (Bozen: Raetia, 1998), 16.

with scepticism and suspicion by the Italians in South Tyrol, for example, the Italian prefect Bruno de Angelis denounced the SVP as a manifestation of German Fascism.¹⁵

The SVP wished to act as the sole representative of the South Tyroleans, thus it had to heal wounds inflicted during the Option period and thereby prevent any schism in the political lobby group it sought to create. This entailed walking somewhat of a tightrope: the SVP had to support those of the option settlement in returning to South Tyrol while simultaneously distancing itself from the scheme and its Nazi and fascist ideology.¹⁶ The fact that Canon Michael Gamper, the voice of those who had rejected the option and the Nazis, became a key figure in the SVP made the party's task considerably easier. Gamper gave the SVP a direct link with the Roman Catholic Church and a considerable degree of moral legitimacy.

While the short-term aims of the SVP were clearly more pragmatic, nonetheless, from the outset it focused on wider, more fundamental cultural and political issues. Initially, the SVP had to cleanse South Tyrol of its Nazi legacy and this involved dealing with all outstanding aspects of the option arrangement and the political rehabilitation of any South Tyroleans who had served in German special police in South Tyrol from 1942 to 1945 and the *Wehrmacht* throughout the war. In a sense this formed part of the party's healing agenda. The party also had to ensure it laid out clear core and long-term political objectives. The founding assembly focused thus on the recovery of the cultural, economic and linguistic rights of the South Tyroleans. It promised to bring peace and order to the land and, ultimately, to achieve self-determination for South Tyrol by legal means.

The final decision by the Allies to leave South Tyrol to Italy was met with horror in South Tyrol, and, in contrast to 1918, resulted in mass protests across all of Tyrol. Early 1946 was characterized by strikes, mass rallies¹⁷ and petitioning¹⁸ reiterating the call for reunification with Austria. The

15 Lill, *Südtirol*, 237 and Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 17.

16 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 210.

17 See Lill, *Südtirol*, 243.

18 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 320f.

protest banners called out for 'Justice for South Tyrol', a plea that fell on deaf ears. There was no international diplomatic support for these requests. The Allied decision in Paris left the people of South Tyrol feeling as they had in the wake of World War I: oppressed, impotent and ignored. The SVP played a crucial role in articulating this sense of exclusion and injustice and thereby created a strong political consensus that reunified South Tyrolean society. This political cohesion both reaffirmed a sense of shared collective identity among the German-speaking population and was the basis of the SVP's long-lasting political success in the post-war world.

The Gruber deGasperi agreement of 1946

The immediate post-war fate of South Tyrol was settled by an agreement drawn up between the relatively powerless Austrian foreign minister Karl Gruber and his Italian counterpart Alcide deGasperi in Paris in September 1946. Under diplomatic pressure from Europe and America and against the backdrop of the protests in South Tyrol, both parties sat down to finally decide a legal agreement that would resolve the outstanding issues relating to the return of South Tyroleans impacted by the Option arrangements and the issue of autonomy for the region.

The opening sentence of the agreement, which was in English, set the tone when it guaranteed: 'German speaking inhabitants of the Bolzano Province and of neighbouring bilingual townships of the Trento Province will be assured a complete equality of rights with the Italian-speaking inhabitants.'¹⁹ This declaration was supported by the substance of the agreement which allowed for resettlement of those South Tyroleans who wished to return to Italy and granted them Italian citizenship. For the South Tyroleans, Adolph Leidlmair has argued that this issue was 'not a

19 Gruber-deGasperi Agreement as printed in Steiningger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 328.

political issue but one of survival for the German people and a means of preventing the infiltration from the South which had restarted in 1945.²⁰ In other words, the South Tyroleans regarded this issue as vital not only to post-war healing, but also to offset the continued immigration policy by the Italian state. DeGasperi grasped that the implications of this were both historical and current, but nonetheless had to bow to international pressure in securing the return of these South Tyroleans. Under the agreement bilingualism became central to the resolution of the cultural question: road signs and official documents were to appear in both languages and crucially children could once again be educated in their mother tongue. Other aspects of the fascist Italianization programme were also reversed, for example, the Italianization of family names, and travel and trade restrictions were eased.

The Gruber deGasperi agreement had three main effects which would characterize the politics of South Tyrol in the national and international arena in the following years:

1. The Brenner border was permanently pledged to Italy. All political endeavours by the SVP as well as the protective power Austria would therefore have to focus on the issue of autonomy. Any hopes for self-determination and/or reunification with Austria were permanently relinquished.
2. Austria had managed to internationalize the issue of South Tyrol and secure a say in the fate of South Tyrol. It once again became a *Schutzmacht*, a protective power, a role which it took seriously from 1955.
3. The fusion of South Tyrol with Trient/Trento was rejected in both provinces and resulted in the internal resistance of the South Tyrolese population, especially in connection with the implementation of repressive neo-fascist politics in the early 1950s.

20 Adolf Leidlmair, *Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft in Südtirol* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1958), 81.

In essence, the Gruber deGasperi agreement justified the retention of the Brenner border by awarding a kind of autonomy to South Tyrol.²¹ This appeased the Austrian side and eased the pressure created by the open demonstrations for reunification in Tyrol. Italy had secured the permanency of its northern border and won international approval by appearing to concede on the issue of autonomy. However, because the agreement did not specify the exact geographical area to be covered by the autonomy, it allowed deGasperi to play with geography and thereby honour the letter rather than the spirit of the agreement.

Following the agreement deGasperi declared that the negotiated autonomy related to both Bozen/Bolzano and Trient/Trento. The new Italian constitution of January 1948 incorporated Article 116, which allowed for the creation of an autonomous region Trentino-Alto Adige. This meant that the regional parliament in Trient/Trento was able to outvote the German minority by 5:2. Thus the agreement was honoured and, at the same time, the balance of power in northern Italy remained the way it had been before the agreement.

As a result of this interpretation of the autonomy by the Italians the agreement of 1946 was regarded by the South Tyroleans as a fundamental failure in relation to their central aspirations for autonomy. The reaction on the ground in South Tyrol was one of dismay and impotent rage. Gruber was almost immediately placed in the position of having to defend his role in brokering the deal. He argued that he had been motivated by 'a passionate desire to achieve the best possible outcome for Austria and South Tyrol in an exceptionally difficult situation.'²² He also complained that the nature of the negotiations, for example, the use of multiple languages but

21 Austria made other attempts in 1946 in conjunction with these talks to secure a solution to the South Tyrolean issue, for example, Gruber had suggested splitting South Tyrol in Bozen/Bolzano, so that the Italians retained the 'Unterland' south of Bozen/Bolzano and the economically important industrial zone as well as the right to the hydroelectricity. When this failed, he proposed that Austria would be satisfied with the return of the Pustertal/Val Pusteria. This idea was rejected by the council of foreign ministers in June 1946.

22 Steiningger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 389.

never German added to his difficulties. In an evaluation of the agreement and the role of Gruber it must not be forgotten that the agreement was hatched in a political environment hostile to all things German – even to the language.²³ Nonetheless, the agreement of 1946 compounded a history of disappointment for South Tyrol and resulted in a sustained period of civil and political resistance.

It was precisely this characteristic, the ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’, which Karl Gruber used in defence of his signature under the agreement in 1946. He later repeatedly commented that the agreement was never intended to be an international contract, and he also conceded that he was aware of ambiguities in it that could be interpreted differently by the Italians.²⁴ DeGasperi, for his part, signed because he wished to pacify the western allies but also intended to contain the very popular demand in South Tyrol (and in Trient/Trento!): ‘Los von Rom!’ [Away from Rome], whilst Gruber was most interested in achieving any kind of internationally binding Italian obligation regarding the question of the return of the former ‘Optanten’ and the recognition of Austria as an international partner in the South Tyrol question.

23 Günther Pallaver, ‘Südtirol 1943–55: Internationale Aspekte’, in Anton Pelinka and Andreas Maislinger, eds, *Handbuch zur neueren Geschichte Tirols*, Vol. 2: Zeitgeschichte, Part 1: Politische Geschichte (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1993), 423–448, 424.

24 Steininger, ‘Südtirolfrage 1945/46’, 386.

Disquiet and Unrest, 1947–1960

In late 1947 it rapidly became clear to the German-speaking South Tyroleans that the long-awaited autonomy was a hollow construct, strategically interpreted by deGasperi to avoid actually fulfilling the promise. In fact, the period from 1947 to 1960 marked a renewed and re-energized phase of Italianization with little hope of international intervention or support for South Tyrolean culture. Much of the legislation introduced in the 1950s to Italianize South Tyrol represented little more than a resurrection and refashioning of old fascist law.

Renewed Italianization

The early 1950s witnessed a series of laws which reinforced Italian culture, language and norms and permitted the prohibition of all things foreign (i.e. German). These laws went so far as to allow the State to give preferential treatment to Italians in certain sectors of the economy and confiscate land from non-Italian South Tyroleans.¹ In March 1952 the programme of Italianization was given renewed legal status. For example, among other things, the law stopped a practice in place since 1948, whereby South Tyroleans returning from the front had been granted low ranking civil service jobs. From 1952 these secure jobs were denied to the South Tyroleans and reserved instead for Italian speakers. As Steininger has pointed out: 'From July 1952 all internal official business in South Tyrol was to be carried

1 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 475.

out in Italian, even that between German offices.² The emphasis on the Italian language helped to ensure the exclusion of the German-speaking population from the apparatus of the state and further erode any sense of cultural determination. For example, in February 1955 Italian citizens (i.e. German-speaking South Tyroleans) were prohibited from having foreign (i.e. German) names and were forced to adopt Italian names when engaging in any way with the Italian state, even at local level.

Apart from limiting the German-speaking population's role in the public service and thus denying them access to safe and secure employment, the Italian state also attacked their property rights. In autumn 1953 an old military law was introduced which prohibited private dwellings within a certain distance of military installations and the border. This was effectively used as a pretext to confiscate South Tyrolean land.³ In March 1955 Rome reintroduced the authority to confiscate property for 'state purposes', a policy which had been used to undermine the German-speaking population economic position during the fascist period.⁴

However, it was the state-assisted migration of southern Italians to South Tyrol which created the greatest discontent among the German-speaking population. In October 1953, Canon Gamper published what was to become a watershed article in the *Dolomiten* in which he likened the impact of this policy of 'infiltration' to a 'death march' for the German-speaking population:

The deliberate infiltration of our people is going full speed ahead. After 1945 and after the Paris agreement thousands migrated from southern Italy whilst the return of some tens of thousands of our relocated natives was prevented. From year to year the number of our indigenous people is decreasing and this against an uncanny increase of immigrants. We can probably set the date, using these statistics, for the day when we will be a defenseless minority in our own homeland. And this will occur in a region where not so long ago the Italians constituted only 3% of our population. It is a death march we find ourselves on since 1945 unless we are saved in our final hours.⁵

2 Steiningger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 476.

3 Steiningger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 476.

4 Steiningger, *Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart*, 77.

5 *Dolomiten* (28 October 1953).

The policy of Italian immigration was understood as a deliberate policy to outnumber the German-speaking population in their own homeland. Furthermore, many young and able South Tyroleans were forced to emigrate as a result of the discriminatory employment policies adopted during this post-war Italianization period.

In South Tyrol the policy of Italian migration combined with a post-war housing programme resulted in even further social and economic discrimination against the German-speaking population. The housing programme was a nation-wide programme to eradicate slum-like conditions in many northern Italian industrial towns, and in its aims were positive and progressive. However, in the South Tyrolean context it had quite different political and social implications. Under the scheme it was the poorest section of society living in the slums near Bozen/Bolzano's industrial zone that were eligible. These areas were entirely populated by those who had immigrated from southern Italy. However, those German-speaking South Tyrolans who were living in equally poor conditions and were also excluded from most of the jobs in the industrial zone, were not eligible as they often owned the leaking roof over their heads. Thus in South Tyrol this ostensibly progressive housing programme became just another plank of the discriminatory Italianization policy.

It is interesting that in 1991 Sepp Mitterhofer, a prominent activist of the bombing period, cited this immigration policy as one of the reasons that he abandoned politics in favour of violent resistance.⁶ Mitterhofer regarded the immigration policy and the housing programme as integral parts of the Italianization policy. He recalled:

Poor men with their possessions in a cardboard box arrived in droves and almost daily from the south at the Bozen train station. They were then housed in dilapidated barracks. After a few weeks, however, they received adequate accommodation in the form of a new-state built apartment, as they received more credits than the South

6 Sepp Mitterhofer and Günther Obwegs, *Es blieb kein anderer Weg: Zeitzeugenberichte und Dokumente aus dem Südtiroler Freiheitskampf* (Meran: Arkadia, 2000), 37.

Tyrolean for the duration of their time in the inferior barracks. After a few months they sent for their families and grandparents.⁷

The housing programme was given extra financial weight in South Tyrol as a result of a decision to equate the Province of Bozen/Bolzano with the emergency centres of Rome, Naples and Milan.⁸ This was regarded by the German-speaking population as a deliberate attempt to strengthen the impact of the housing programme as an instrument of Italianization. In comparison to the rest of Italy, and due mostly to the sharp increase in population between 1952 and 1955, the Province of Bozen/Bolzano was entitled to 2,350 million lire, 1,450 to Bozen/Bolzano and 900 assigned to the remainder of the region.⁹ These funds supported the building of apartment blocks in the industrial zone, largely to house the Italians 'who had been brought to South Tyrol to assimilate it into the country.'¹⁰

This was a form of ethnic supplantation. Indeed, in 2004 Franz Widmann, SVP party member described the apartment blocks as symbols of 'Italian oppression and politics of foreign infiltration.'¹¹ This sense of grievance was compounded by the fact that the programme by-passed the South Tyrolean administration, despite the fact that under the autonomy housing should have been controlled by the province. Instead, the Italian government sent the funds directly to the region for the construction of these apartments.¹² By by-passing the South Tyrolean local government and effectively ignoring its autonomous status the Ina Casa (Italian state housing agency) was able to sidestep regional policy and operate on the basis of national policy. In October 1957, the minister for public works, Giuseppe Togni, exacerbated the situation when he sent a telegram to the mayor of Bozen/Bolzano, Giorgio Pasquali, announcing that a further 2.5 million lire was to be provided for the extension of the town with '5,000

7 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 37.

8 Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 344.

9 Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 344.

10 Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 401.

11 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 62.

12 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 477.

apartments, churches and buildings for social and public services.¹³ This announcement resulted in Pasquali drawing rezoning plans that would provide for an increase in Bozen/Bolzano's population in the following thirty to thirty-five years from 83,000 to 150,000. This plan was described by Austrian newspaper proprietor, Fritz Molden, as 'a public commitment to the policy of planned immigration.'¹⁴ It was obviously the aim of the Italian government to further industrialize South Tyrol and thus facilitate the increase of the Italian immigrant population to fifty-five or sixty per cent of the overall population of the region.¹⁵

The SVP was under no illusions that this generous funding for building programmes was anything other than Italianization masquerading as social assistance. In 1957, the SVP leader, Silvius Magnago, criticized the controversial housing scheme, highlighting its discriminatory nature:

We cannot avoid the impression that Italy is playing politics, and that means nationalist politics. This is further proven by the fact that other areas of Italy are in greater need than Bozen, yet the government is providing more billions to Bozen for the building of apartment blocks than to other cities. It is worth noting also that not even ten per cent of this money has been spent on the South Tyroleans.¹⁶

The sense of panic among the South Tyroleans could be expressed in little more than prophecies of doom. For example, in May 1957 the *Dolomiten* warned that 'Bozen would drown in a sea of Italians.'¹⁷ It was the housing issue that underscored the emptiness of the supposed autonomy agreed in 1946. While the SVP had been considering the need to denounce the political unity with Trient/Trento, it was the housing programme that actually prompted action. Thus, in early in 1959 the SVP withdrew its representative from the regional government in Trient/Trento.

13 Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 367.

14 Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 430.

15 Fritz Molden, *Vielgeprüftes Österreich: Politische Erinnerungen* (Vienna: Amalthea, 2007), 144.

16 Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 366.

17 *Dolomiten* (10 May 1957).

In parallel with the South Tyrolean domestic issues there were diplomatic endeavours by the Austrians, who had become increasingly dissatisfied with Italy's treatment of the South Tyroleans. Between 1957 and 1959 Austria and Italy engaged in talks in an attempt to 'solve' the South Tyrolean issue. This period was marked by a singular lack of progress; the historian Rudolf Lill has characterized the period as one of 'diplomatic stagnation'. The frustration regarding the South Tyrol problem in Rome, Vienna and Bozen/Bolzano resulted in a hardening of the respective political positions. In South Tyrol this meant the radicalization of significant amounts of individuals within the German-speaking population.

The emergence of violence

A growing sense of rage and impotence regarding the systematic Italianization of the region was simply awaiting a focus, a cause célèbre, to be transformed into a form of tangible protest. This came with the 'Pfunderer Buam' [the boys from Pfunders] case. On 16 August 1957 a low-ranking member of the Italian finance administration, Raimondo Falqui, was found dead after being involved in a fight with a group of village boys at a local inn in Pfunders/Fundres. The reasons for his death remain unclear to this day, but the seven local boys were rounded up and arrested within days. All seven were found guilty and received long prison sentences ranging from ten to twenty-four years. The 'Pfunderer Buam' case helped to crystallize the growing sense of anger regarding discrimination against the German-speaking population of the region. The state authorities had insisted on a charge of 'political murder', thus situating the case at the heart of the regional tensions between the Italian state (represented in this case by the murder victim) and the disenfranchised German-speaking population (represented by the accused).

Another group around the printer Hans Stieler had carried out a series of ‘six mostly harmless’¹⁸ explosions on railway lines in the Bozen/Bolzano and Brixen/Bressanone areas between late August 1956 and January 1957. The Stieler group had also been arrested swiftly, and their court case presented another focal point for the growing sense of injustice in South Tyrol. In December 1957 they were convicted and their case was reported in the *Dolomiten* with great sympathy for the young men involved.¹⁹ There was a sense of collective lament for these young men, who had lost their freedom in a bid to draw the attention of the world to the plight of South Tyrol.²⁰

The significance of these bombings lay not in their capacity to cause damage, but in the fact that they changed the location of the political discussion by dragging it out onto the streets. Through their frustrations and resentment political activists, mostly men, took matters into their own hands and began to make use of the destructive skills they had learned during the war. With this, the issue of South Tyrol took on a new dimension. The protest against Rome now comprised all of the traditional elements of national Risorgimento, both in its political aim (separation from Italy and self-determination for South Tyrol) and in its choice of political instruments (rejection of the political parties, fermenting of frustrations and the beginning of paramilitary action).

Sigmundskron, November 1957

In November 1957, the SVP organized a protest rally at Sigmundskron/Castel Firmiano to vent the growing anger of the South Tyrolean population. The rally was an overwhelming success at which 35,000 German-

18 Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 298 and Hans Karl Peterlini, *Südtiroler Bombenjahre: Von Blut und Tränen zum Happy End?* (Bozen: Raetia, 2005), 376.

19 *Dolomiten* (2 January 1958).

20 Widmann, *Es stand nicht gut um Südtirol*, 298.

speaking South Tyroleans demanded the right to self-determination and an end to the false autonomy status of 1948. The SVP under Silvius Magnago managed to channel the disgruntled voices of protest, which could easily have erupted and triggered something more violent, into the relatively moderate protest reflective of the party line. Magnago's speech is widely regarded as pivotal in convincing many potential hardliners to adopt his motto of 'Los von Trient' [Away from Trento] rather than the more radical 'Los von Rom' [Away from Rome]. During his speech he repeated the words 'Los von Trient' like a mantra to focus the public on the idea that the solution to their predicament lay in the ending of the region with Trient/Trento rather than in separation from Italy. It is widely accepted that on that day he succeeded in harnessing the frustration of the South Tyroleans into support for a campaign to achieve a comprehensive and meaningful form of autonomy. His support base far exceeded the actual membership of the SVP, and his support was so overwhelming that he would use it to exert political pressure in all future negotiations with the Italian government.

The *Dolomiten*, which was closely associated with the SVP, marvelled at how Magnago had managed an explosive situation and transformed it into a powerful political demonstration. It warned that the call for autonomy 'should be heard where Italian decisions are made about South Tyrol's politics and where there is a move to stoke the fires here. It is possible that the simmering kettle might boil over, which would be in nobody's interest, least of all Italy's.'²¹ Thus the SVP under Magnago kept the kettle just below boiling point, which gave them considerable clout in subsequent negotiations. At Sigmundskron Magnago was transformed into the uncrowned king of South Tyrol, a reality that was also quickly recognized in Rome.

While Sigmundskron made Magnago's career, it also ended the fragile accord between the men of politics (in the SVP) and the paramilitaries of the Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol (South Tyrol Liberation committee, hereafter the BAS). Magnago's speech set a moderate tone that alienated the paramilitary wing. The leaders of the BAS, for example, Sepp Kerschbaumer, considered the day a bitter disappointment and a wasted

21 *Dolomiten* (18 November 1957).

opportunity. Kerschbaumer was angered that Magnago defused the public frustration rather than harnessing it as a mandate to adopt a much harder line when dealing with Italy.

A further indication of the heightened tensions in the area were the numerous Italian counter-demonstrations, which were more than just a response to Sigmundskron. Many of the Italian protests were encouraged by member of parliament Andrea Mitolo. The Italian demonstrations had taken place early in 1957 and increased tensions considerably between the two communities: during these protests the Giovane Italia (Young Italy movement) had called for an abolition of the Paris Treaty and an end to all initiatives designed to increase South Tyrolean autonomy. Furthermore, the Italian protestors were beginning to define themselves as a minority suppressed by the German-speaking majority in South Tyrol. The whole question of South Tyrol's autonomy was developing into an ethnic struggle between Italian and German South Tyroleans. What followed was an escalation in the political and military arenas, and the SVP began to lose its leading role. South Tyrol sat poised on the edge of an abyss of violence and extremism, as Christoph Franceschini noted: 'In 1961 a civil war appeared on the horizon in South Tyrol.'²²

Career of a 'terrorist'

The path that South Tyrol followed during this period from civil protest to violence and extremism can perhaps best be understood by examining the development of a typical terrorist who emerged from that political environment. Sepp Kerschbaumer presents the historian with the classic

22 Christoph Franceschini, 'Die Welle der Sprengstoffanschläge in Südtirol', in Anton Pelinka and Andreas Maislinger, eds, *Handbuch zur neueren Geschichte Tirols*, Vol. 2: Zeitgeschichte, Part 1: Politische Geschichte (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1993), 467–508, 467.

biography of a contemporary South Tyrolean activist. He was born in 1913, a salesman in the small town of Frangart/Frangarto near Bozen/Bolzano, a practising Catholic, helpful and popular, a faithful follower of the SVP and chairman of the party in his hometown. However, the political climate of the mid-1950s challenged his loyalty to the SVP, and during this period he turned away from the organization on the grounds that its politics had become too weak and cowardly.²³ In a symbolic act of protest he raised the flag of South Tyrol above the church steeple in Frangart/Frangarto. This was illegal and provoked an immediate reaction from the local police. Kerschbaumer was arrested and during his subsequent interrogation reiterated his conviction that the South Tyroleans had as much a right to express their identity as the migrant Italians. This logic fell on deaf ears and he served a prison sentence for his assertion of South Tyrolean identity. As a further protest he went on hunger strike, an act that elevated him to the status of regional hero. Kerschbaumer became a symbol of the civil disobedience and resistance to the Italian hold over South Tyrol. Increasingly disillusioned by the SVP's alleged acceptance of the 1948 status of autonomy, in 1956 he resigned from his party post thereby breaking his connection with the political route. Instead he founded the BAS with Josef Crepaz (50) and Karl Titscher (35). Kerschbaumer was 43 at the time and father of a number of young children. From outside the ranks of the SVP Kerschbaumer attempted to initiate a dialogue, writing countless letters to SVP members and politicians in which he called for a more decisive political strategy. Slowly, however, he became convinced that 'success could not be achieved with the weapons of the mind alone'.²⁴ Consequently the group turned into an illegal organization, which planned a new wave of violent protest.

Kerschbaumer's organization provided a home for other individuals disillusioned with SVP politics, such as Georg Klotz and Franz Muther, who joined BAS in 1957. Kerschbaumer began to slowly develop BAS units which

23 Franceschini, 'Sprengstoffanschläge', 469.

24 Franceschini, 'Sprengstoffanschläge', 470.

by 1961 had a core of 200 members and confidants.²⁵ At Sigmundskron in 1957 BAS leaflets were circulated calling for an end to Italian occupation of South Tyrol: ‘We want to remain German and refuse to be the slaves of another race which occupied our land through fraud and betrayal and for the last 40 years has exploited us with a colonial system worse than the methods once used in Africa.’²⁶ In view of Kerschbaumer’s hardline approach it is hardly surprising that he, like so many others, was disillusioned with the tone of Sigmundskron. Magnago’s ‘Los von Trient’ did not go far enough for him as he wanted ‘Los von Rom’. Only five days later the first attack of the BAS occurred, symbolically at the grave of the architect of South Tyrol’s Italianization, Ettore Tolomei. A few days later attacks were carried out in Laas/Lasa in the Vinschgau/Val Venosta, and guerrilla warfare now became a very real accompaniment to politics in South Tyrol.

Simultaneously, the military conflict became a more professional affair as the BAS secured support from sympathizers in North Tyrol and wider Austria. In Innsbruck the journalist Wolfgang Pfaundler founded a BAS unit, which organized military training and the transportation of explosives and guns for the South Tyrol fighters. The smuggling of illegal weapons and explosives over the Alps led to some extraordinary adventure stories such as those of Kurt Welser’s trips in his Volkswagen beetle which was crammed with explosives.²⁷ Or the story of young and attractive women who travelled on their own across the border at the Brenner Pass/Passo Brennero carrying kilometres of fuse wire in their luggage.²⁸ Some even ventured alone over the ice-capped mountains from the Austrian Ötztal to the Passeiertal/Val Passiria with rucksacks full of ammunition and guns. All of these tales provided raw material for myths and legends that entered the collective memory of future generations of South Tyroleans.

25 Franceschini, ‘Sprengstoffanschläge’, 471.

26 Reprint of the BAS leaflet in Elisabeth Baumgartner, Hans Mayr and Gerhard Mumelter, *Feuernacht. Südtirols Bombenjahre* (Bozen: Raetia, 1992), 121.

27 Peterlini, *Südtiroler Bombenjahre*, 82.

28 Astrid Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben: Frauen in den Südtiroler Bombenjahren* (Bozen: Raetia, 2003), 254.

The Austrian factor

Substantial sums were needed for the armament of the South Tyrolean fighters, and resources were provided by influential Austrian figures.²⁹ Some key media magnates contributed generously, for example, Wolfgang Pfaundler, Gerd Bacher (chief editor of the Viennese newspaper *Express*) and the Austrian newspaper mogul Fritz Molden. The Northern Tyrolean BAS also boasted a sizeable number of intellectuals who supported the cause, among them were Alois Oberhammer, member of the provincial government, Josef Dengler, legation councillor in the foreign ministry, Winfried Platzgummer, the former assistant to the state secretary Franz Gschnitzer, and Felix Ermacora, expert on international law and book author. For the head of the movement, Kerschbaumer, the resistance was not an ideological exercise but rather a crucial form of self defence. Conflict between Kerschbaumer and his financial backers seemed inevitable because of the different constellation of its members, and when disagreement emerged it was over the issue of the leadership of the BAS and the character of the attacks.

The involvement of the North Tyroleans in the campaign gave the South Tyrol issue an international dimension. The Viennese government also became more active in its attempts to internationalize the problem. At the same time Austrian endeavours to find a solution to the issue in bilateral talks with the Italian government were entirely fruitless, as the Italians simply reiterated the view that the Paris Treaty had been implemented and was unalterable. In 1958, in the face of the Austrian call for autonomy for South Tyrol, the Italian government intensified its already restrictive politics in South Tyrol, which led to a further deterioration of the situation.

In 1959, Vienna decided to bring Italy under diplomatic pressure by internationalizing the issue. The Austrian government debated whether

29 See Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol zwischen Diplomatie und Terror, 1947–1969*, vol. 2 (Bozen: Veröffentlichung des Südtiroler Landesarchivs, 1999), 506.

to involve the international court of justice in The Hague, but it was the SVP's suggestion to involve the United Nations that was ultimately pursued.³⁰ The new Austrian foreign minister Bruno Kreisky highlighted the South Tyrol issue in New York on 21 September 1959 and announced in his speech his intention to bring the issue before the UN plenary at the next available opportunity provided there was no progress in the talks with Italy in the meantime.³¹

As a result of this international pressure, Italy finally reacted and offered the option of secret talks. As this offer yielded no result, either, Vienna did as it had threatened and brought the issue of South Tyrol to the United Nations. On 31 October 1960, the UN plenary session unanimously decided on Resolution 1497/XV, which stated that the South Tyrol issue was to be solved by a bilateral agreement between Italy and Austria. This was a major triumph for Austrian politics. Through this resolution South Tyrol had become an international issue and Austria her official protector. With great expectations Kreisky entered talks with his Italian counterpart in January, May and June 1961 from which, however, once again no concrete results were achieved. Then, during the night of the 11 and 12 June 1961 South Tyrol witnessed the 'Feuernacht' [night of fire].

30 Steinger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 486ff.

31 Steinger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 487.

Explosions and Settlements, 1961–1972

The beginning of 1960s witnessed an arms race between East and West, between the USSR and the United States. In 1956 the Russian quashing of the Hungarian uprising had caused considerable alarm among the political leaders of Western Europe and America. In October 1957, the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik, which placed Russia at the forefront of the space race, was regarded by the American president Dwight D. Eisenhower as an ‘immense threat to the West’. The containment of Communism became Washington’s highest priority and its consequences dominated the world. In April 1961, the US under John F. Kennedy sought to invade Cuba and oust Castro in what is known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion. This failed strike strengthened Cuba’s relationship with the USSR and resulted in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962–1963. The world sat on the verge of a nuclear war.

In Europe this Cold War manifested itself in the physical division of Germany into east and west. Despite the head of the GDR Walter Ullbricht’s assertion that ‘No one intends to erect a wall here!’ that is exactly what happened in 1961. In this fragile world climate any further destabilization in central Europe was considered highly undesirable by the US and its Western European allies. The nascent violence and organized armament of South Tyrolean ‘freedom fighters’, created a very delicate political environment in the heart of the Alps, one that could potentially destabilize Italy, a member of NATO, and her neutral neighbour Austria.

1961 in South Tyrol: Bombs and tentative steps towards political progress

Throughout 1960 the BAS movement had been incapacitated by internal divisions regarding the appropriate use of violence. This dispute manifested itself in an attempted coup against Sepp Kerschbaumer, the leader of the BAS, by Wolfgang Pfaundler of the North Tyrol BAS and Georg Klotz of the South Tyrol BAS. Both these men believed that the BAS should be prepared to use violence against human as well as strategic targets while Kerschbaumer was fundamentally opposed to taking the BAS in that direction. While Kerschbaumer effectively asserted his leadership over the BAS organization in South Tyrol, these internal divisions were ultimately adding to the BAS descent into violence by 1961 and thereafter.¹ However, not only North Tyrolean sympathizers willing to join in the ‘liberation of South Tyrol’ complicated Kerschbaumer’s efforts, it was also the strong interest among Austria’s political circles in the activists’ plans that turned clear-cut protest into a multi-layered power struggle. It has emerged that even the Austrian foreign minister Bruno Kreisky was not only informed about the BAS’s plans to strike, but encouraged the activists to express their protest strongly.² When the bombing attacks started in an organized fashion in 1961, the activists could thus be sure that their actions were watched with silent approval in Vienna.

In January 1961, after another round of failed talks between Austria and Italy on the South Tyrolean issue, BAS members attacked two symbolic targets: Ettore Tolomei’s house in Glen/Gleno near Montan/Montagna and the aluminium statue of Benito Mussolini, the so-called ‘Alu Duce’ at the Montecatini plant in Waidbruck/Ponte Gardena. In March, the BAS bombed some of the unfinished apartment blocks associated with

1 See Peterlini, *Feuernacht*, 65ff.

2 Eva Klotz, *Georg Klotz: Freiheitskämpfer für die Einheit Tirols* (Vienna: Molden, 2002), 78, and Hans Karl Peterlini, *Feuernacht. Südtirols Bombenjahre: Hintergründe, Schicksale, Bewertungen 1961–2011* (Bozen: Raetia, 2011), 68.

the planned immigration and housing policy of Italianization in Bozen/Bolzano and Meran/Merano. The strategic bombing campaign continued in April when a bomb exploded beside an Italian settlement in Sarntal/Val Sarentina, and a few days later in front of the Italian Bar Ferrari in Tramin/Termenon. Miraculously, the family owners living in the building were not injured. Finally, the station of the financial police in Schlanders/Silandro and the high pressure water pipes of the Montecatini plant in Marling/Marlengo were targeted.

Finally, during the night from 11 to 12 June 1961, in what became known as 'Feuernacht' [night of fire], factions of the North and South Tyrol BAS bombed and destroyed thirty-seven electricity pylons in South Tyrol, nineteen of which were in the vicinity of Bozen/Bolzano.³ The intention of these attacks was to cripple the industrial zone in Bozen/Bolzano, the economic symbols of the Italianization policy that brought Italian workers to Bozen/Bolzano and excluded South Tyroleans. The bombs failed to bring the aluminium furnaces to a halt, however the attacks succeeded in making the South Tyrolean issue front page news all over the world.

Tragically, the Feuernacht attacks claimed the life of an innocent victim, the roadworker Giovanni Postal, who was killed in Salurn/Salorno as he attempted to defuse an explosive device.⁴ With the death of its first victim, the South Tyrol fight for freedom had lost its innocence. Ironically, Sepp Kerschbaumer was blamed for the planting of that lethal device, although from the outset he had been so ideologically opposed to targeting human beings. The SVP and the Austrian government were careful to condemn the violence,⁵ while using the opportunity to call on Italy to engage in meaningful talks to find a solution.

In response to this escalation in violence the Italian authorities deployed a further 25,000 police and soldiers in the region. They quickly located and arrested a huge number of activists and sympathizers. In the confines of the Carabinieri barracks those arrested were subjected to torture resulting

3 Peterlini, *Südtiroler Bombenjahre*, 111ff.

4 Peterlini, *Südtiroler Bombenjahre*, 129.

5 See *Dolomiten* (13 June 1961).

in confessions from all of them.⁶ Two of the prisoners, Franz Höfler and Anton Gostner, died in custody, and despite efforts by the authorities to conceal the true cause of death, it became public knowledge that they had died as a result of torture.⁷ These revelations led to a wave of protests and resulted in a perceptible shift in public opinion in favour of the activists, if not necessarily of their methods.

In the wake of the *Feuernacht* what remained of the BAS in both South and North Tyrol became more radical, adopting guerrilla warfare tactics. However, at best, these sporadic attacks maintained the pressure on the political process rather than altering it in an fundamental way. During this period the South Tyrolean activists Luis Amplatz and Georg Klotz became symbolic figures engaged in a David and Goliath struggle against the formidable Italian security service. They promoted this view of themselves in the international media, for example, the in February 1964 in the Italian weekly magazine *Europeo* and in an interview the following month given by Luis Amplatz to the German periodical *Spiegel* where he was able to put forward his case: 'The Italians stole our land from us and in the current situation there is nothing left for us but to fight for our homeland.'⁸ There were other colourful reports in the German yellow-press magazines *Bunte* and *Quick*. The problem of armed warfare was partly misrepresented and exaggerated, Klotz and Amplatz were portrayed as 'Tolle Bomber' [Brilliant Bombers], who fought for their freedom on the 'Heisse Erde Südtirol' [Hot soil of South Tyrol]. This international coverage often downplayed the fact that this fight involved bomb attacks on Carabinieri barracks and patrols, and that human beings were deliberately singled out as victims.

Amplatz and Klotz were not the only renegade fighters, there were also the 'Pusterer Buam' made up of Josef Forer, Siegfried Steger, Heinrich Oberlechner and Erich Oberleiter, whose attacks resulted in severe crack-downs by the Italian authorities. The Italians eventually used undercover agents to infiltrated the activist groups in order to paralyze or neutralize

6 Peterlini, *Feuernacht*, 196ff.

7 Peterlini, *Südtiroler Bombenjahre*, 129ff.

8 Cited in Franceschini, 'Sprengstoffanschläge', 499.

them. On 7 September 1964, Amplatz was shot dead in a mountain hut by one such agent, Christian Kerbler. Kerbler was also given the task of killing Klotz, but this plan failed and Klotz escaped, severely injured, over the main Alpine ridge into Austria, and from then on Klotz soldiered on alone without Amplatz.

The armed struggle for South Tyrol thereafter became more clandestine, as foreign secret services, extremists and above all Austrian sympathizers appeared on the battleground. The attacks, which continued until the end of the decade, took as its victims mainly members of the Italian police and financial authorities. There were also civilian victims on the South Tyrolean side, for example on 25 September 1966 ‘when at night the eighteen-year-old farmer’s son Peter Wieland was shot dead by soldiers on his way to a bar.’⁹

However, towards the end of 1969 the attacks petered out and later attacks, which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s usually coincided with stagnation in the political progress towards autonomy.¹⁰ The attacks were predictable in that symbols of Italian Fascism present in South Tyrol were targeted, such as the ossuary in Burgeis/Burgusio (31 March 1978), the Monument of Victory in Bozen/Bolzano (30 September 1978) and Tolomei’s grave (9 March 1979). These attacks resulted in tit-for-tat retaliation by Italian extremists who targeted German symbols such as Silvius Magnago’s apartment (23 July 1978), the Andreas Hofer memorial in Meran/Merano (26 October 1979) and South Tyrolean cable cars (4 December 1979) which represented South Tyrol prosperity. These waves of violence caused great unrest within South Tyrol, but had little or no effect on the political situation.

It is clear that the general public in South Tyrol was deeply ambivalent about these guerrilla fighters, for example, Georg Klotz’s wife Rosa repeatedly claimed that she was made to feel like an outlaw in South Tyrol because of her husband’s activities.¹¹ However, the reaction to the protagonists of the *Feuernacht* was more benign, and with the death of Kerschbaumer

9 Franceschini, ‘Sprengstoffanschläge’, 506.

10 Peterlini, *Bombenjahre*, 319.

11 See Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 230.

in December 1964 in Verona prison, it was transformed into respectful support for what he had tried to do in the name of South Tyrol. On 7 December 1964 Kerschbaumer died of a heart attack in prison in Verona and was buried a few days later in St Paul's church in his home village of Frangart/Frangarto. His funeral turned into an expression of huge public commitment to him and to his political aims as the head of BAS. Over 20,000 people attended, most notably Silvius Magnago.¹² This was an important political statement, almost like a second Sigmundskron, and it turned into a kind of public affirmation of the wave of violence of June 1961.¹³ The mass public and political support displayed at this funeral was a clear message to the politicians in Rome: South Tyrol stood united behind Kerschbaumer and his life-long work embracing diplomacy and arbitration, but there was also a readiness for sacrifice and violence to achieve South Tyrolean autonomy.

A legal stage: The trials in Milan

The allegations of official torture of BAS suspects in Carabinieri custody resulted in the infamous Carabinieri trials in Trient/Trento, which resulted in the acquittal of all ten Carabinieri on trial.¹⁴ There was considerable international protest in the wake of this trial, and the Italian justice system was seriously undermined. As a result, the trial of 94 activists accused of the bombings of *Feuernacht* was closely watched by the world's media.¹⁵

12 Josef Fontana, 'Ohne Anschläge keine Neunzehnerkommission, ohne Neunzehnerkommission kein Paket?' in Elisabeth Baumgartner, Hans Mayr and Gerhard Mumelter, eds, *Feuernacht: Südtirols Bombenjahre* (Bozen: Raetia, 1992), 130–146, 137.

13 Fontana, 'Neunzehnerkommission', 138.

14 Peterlini, *Südtiroler Bombenjahre*, 184.

15 Of the 94 arrested 87 were from South Tyrol, 6 from Austria, 1 from Germany. All were charged with 92 bomb attacks, 77 of these were connected to the bombing of

The fact that the trials were located in Milan was an indication that the Italian state was aware that its justice system was also on trial and must appear neutral.

The trial took place over seven months in 1963 and 1964 and all ninety-four activists were found guilty. The most severe sentences were handed out to Wolfgang Pfaundler, Luis Amplatz, Kurt Welser and Heinrich Klier, each of them receiving a twenty-year prison sentence. Eight men were sentenced to between ten and twenty years, amongst them Sepp Kerschbaumer, thirty-five (including twenty-seven detainees) received ten years and twenty-seven (including seventeen detainees) were acquitted or granted amnesty. That meant that forty-six South Tyroleans walked away free as they had served their sentence whilst in custody, but twenty-two remained in prison.¹⁶

The court case, played out in Milan, had a significant impact on the perception of the South Tyrolean issue among the Italian public. As Gatterer argued: 'For the first time in Italy the history of South Tyrol from 1918 to 1960 in its political, cultural, economic and human context was laid open like a book through the accounts of witnesses. The newspapers reported these events thus bringing them to life for the general public. In the end it felt as if it was the Italian state which had been convicted.'¹⁷ Prior to this legal dramatization of the issue, South Tyrol had been a relatively unknown northern region, in which, many Italians believed, a few rebellious Germans, most of them former Nazis, lived. However, as the journalist Umberto Gandini noted, the defendants were careful to dissociate themselves from the Nazis or the image of the 'romanitic political hero so prolific in Italian history.'¹⁸ In particular, Sepp Kerschbaumer managed to alter the picture the Italian press had painted of the 'dinamitardi'. During the court case he and his fellow-accused appeared as ordinary people who

the electricity pylons and the rest to railway tracks, industrial and military grounds, electrical structures and domestic residences.

16 Franceschini, 'Sprengstoffanschläge', 496.

17 Claus Gatterer, *Aufsätze und Reden* (Bozen: Raetia, 1991), 304.

18 Umberto Gandini, 'Wachsendes Unbehagen' in Elisabeth Baumgartner, Hans Mayr and Gerhard Mumelter, eds, *Feuernacht: Südtirols Bombenjahre* (Bozen: Raetia, 1992), 154–157, 154.

had been continually repressed by the Italians and, in desperation, had resorted to violent means to draw attention to their struggle. As Peterlini observed, they appeared as 'sincere young men, some older, many of them with children and families at home, all in suits and ties, farmers, craftsmen, simple people dressed up for the courtroom as if for Sunday mass, led in in heavy chains ...'¹⁹

The activists were not accused of high treason under sections 238 and 241 of the Italian constitution, but rather of the more minor offences of the possession of weapons and explosives. This made a more lenient sentence possible as the accused explained that the political aims of their actions had not been the separation of South Tyrol from Italy and the drive for self-determination, but the implementation of the autonomy promised to them by Italy in 1946. There was almost a riot in the courtroom as Sepp Kerschbaumer mentioned the aim of autonomy which was incorrectly translated by the interpreter as *autodecisione* that is, self-determination. It took a few moments for the tape to be replayed to confirm that it was in fact 'Landesautonomie' Kerschbaumer had said. The shift towards 'Landesautonomie' was primarily a classic legal trick, chosen with the sole purpose of mitigating the punishment of the defendants, but it also announced a shift in paradigm in the armed struggle in South Tyrol.²⁰ There was substantial evidence to contradict the suggestion that it was autonomy the bombers had been after. Josef Fontana reported that before the 'Night of Fire' he was unsure whether Kerschbaumer was fighting for self-determination or autonomy. When he interrogated Kerschbaumer on their walks together in Milan prison Kerschbaumer responded by saying that 'he was reluctant to come up with political aims which seemed out of reach', and he added that the BAS should 'only support the politics that served the Bozen-Innsbruck-Vienna relationship',²¹ which autonomy clearly did, while separation would have led to possible bilateral problems in the relationship between Italy and Austria.

19 Peterlini, *Bombenjahre*, 211.

20 See Peterlini, *Bombenjahre*, 210.

21 Fontana, 'Neunzehnerkommission', 142.

Nevertheless, there was enough evidence for the state prosecutor to accuse the defendants of treason, including flyers stating their aims and objectives. A conviction for treason would have ensured a sentence of life imprisonment. The fact that this course of action was not pursued was regarded in South Tyrol as a conciliatory gesture by the Italians. This course of action did also have significant advantages for Italy: the freedom fighters had had to claim that they were fighting for a degree of autonomy thereby denying the goal of self-determination. Italy had forced the activists to remove the notion of self-determination from the political agenda. Now all sides, Rome, Vienna and Bozen/Bolzano, could devote their energies to focusing on the provision of such autonomy.

The importance of the Milan trials for the question of South Tyrol cannot be overestimated. They marked the change from the classic nationalist concept to a more modern regionalist one. After Milan the South Tyrol question presented itself in a fundamentally different light: the aim of reunification that had dominated the discourse since 1919 was finally set aside. All further attempts to destabilize the political situation by bombs and assassination attempts could be dismissed by all sides involved – by the SVP as well as by Rome – as acts of terrorism which had no further role to play in the political context.

Impact of the ‘Night of Fire’

The *Feuernacht* caused reverberations within the SVP. A section of the party known as the ‘*Aufbau*’ [construction] were highly critical of Magnago for failing to protect the interests of the South Tyrolean economy in the wake of the *Feuernacht*. The ‘*Aufbau*’, led by Roland Riz, Toni Ebner and Erich Amonn, urged Magnago to be aware of his ‘obligations towards the Italian state’ and pursue a less confrontational line in negotiations with Rome. They expressed the hope that the Italian government would in

turn be more conciliatory towards South Tyrol.²² The 'Aufbau' were also critical of what they called 'some imprudent and extreme elements' in the SVP, who had been fully aware of the BAS plans for the Feuernacht.²³ Magnago managed to survive this internal crisis and preserved the party's strong role as the single representative of the German South Tyroleans in the ensuing talks about a settlement of the South Tyrol question with the Italian government.

There has been considerable debate about whether the 'Night of Fire' led directly to the Italians' attempts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis. However, on 1 September 1961 the minister for the interior Mario Scelba established the so-called 'Commission of 19'.²⁴ The commission comprised eleven Italians and eight South Tyroleans and was mandated to analyse the South Tyrolean situation over three months and present suggestions for a solution to the government. Josef Fontana has argued that the establishment of this commission was an indication of how vulnerable the Italian government felt in the wake of the bombing attacks.²⁵ There is little doubt that it took a combination of political demands and the pressure of violent activism on Italy to trigger the political dialogue which resulted in a long-lasting political solution.²⁶

Italy was also under considerable international diplomatic pressure: on 28 November 1961 Austria had secured a second UN resolution on the South Tyrolean issue. The establishment of the commission gave Italy the advantage of being able to deal with the problem of South Tyrol internally. Furthermore, the SVP's involvement in the commission meant that it had been forced to pin its colours to the mast and abandon critical opposition. From Italy's perspective the commission also excluded Austria, the proverbial thorn in its side for so long. Steininger argues that the commission was

22 Lill, *Südtirol*, 307.

23 These accusations were directed at Franz Widmann and Hans Dietl. See Hans Karl Peterlini, *Hans Dietl: Biografie eines Südtiroler Vordenkers und Rebellen* (Bozen: Raetia, 2007), 190.

24 Steininger, *Südtirol zwischen Diplomatie & Terror*, Vol. 2, 560.

25 Fontana, 'Neunzehnerkommission', 146.

26 Lill, *Südtirol*, 305.

yet another Italian delaying tactic, which is borne out by its slow progress.²⁷ In South Tyrol it was certainly regarded as another tactical manoeuvre by the Italian government. The commission only really gained momentum in January 1963, when the European Council envoy, Paul Struye, requested information on its progress. The commission's report did not actually appear until 1964, three years after the 'Night of Fire'.²⁸

In April 1964 the commission released its final report which became the foundation for a durable solution to the South Tyrol situation. In a climate of deep mistrust the 'Commission of 19' was able to lay the cornerstones of autonomy for the area. The commission drew up in essence 'what would become the package, officially accepted by the SVP in 1969'.²⁹ This was not a totally new autonomy, but rather a far-reaching modification of the existing regional autonomy of Trentino-Alto Adige.³⁰

The 'Südtirol Paket' and the Second Statute of Autonomy in 1972

In long negotiations with the Italian governments between 1962 and 1969, Fanfani, Leone, Moro and Rumor, Magnago achieved the 'Südtirol Paket' [South Tyrolean Package] which consisted of 137 measures, twenty-five sub-measures and thirty-one footnotes, which, in their entirety, did not constitute full autonomy, but something very close to it. The existing region Trentino-Alto Adige, which had come into being in 1948, was not abolished but weakened by the Paket, to such a degree that it became a mere institutional framework. Both provinces gained their own legislative autonomy. Crucially, this agreement came with an implementation

27 Steining, *Südtirol zwischen Diplomatie & Terror*, Vol. 2, 560.

28 Steining, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 492.

29 Steining, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 502.

30 Steining, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 502.

committee, the Commission of Nine, to negotiate the details of the new statute of autonomy. This new statute came before the Italian chamber and the Senate in 1971.³¹

Magnago had been so successful during the negotiations because he had survived various Italian governments and was thus probably better informed than most others around the negotiation table. He combined this advantage with sheer tenacity and doggedness when dealing with Rome. Magnago also came to the table with an incredibly strong mandate from his party and the German-speaking population of South Tyrol. However, it was still quite a task to persuade the SVP to accept the deal brokered in 1969.

On 22 November 1969, the SVP accepted the Südtirol Paket after a long and painful debate. The vote of 538 to 492 in favour of the deal revealed that a significant minority remained opposed. Magnago had had to fight hard to convince his party that it was the best deal possible for South Tyrol. In the end the fact that even its opponents did not have a better alternative proved decisive in swinging the vote in favour of the Paket.³²

Through the Second Autonomy Statute of 1972 South Tyrol became the 'Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano' and received the rights to far-reaching self-rule. The autonomy extended to essential areas pertaining to the running of collective organizations: libraries, higher education and museums were now under the aegis of Bozen/Bolzano, as were cultural exhibitions and traditional customs, hunting, fishing, the Alpine economy, nature protection, roads and the civil service, communication, transport, tourism, farming, social services and the conservation of culture. With all of this came the one concession already granted in 1948: equality of the German language in schools and public services. With this bilingualism in the public services was guaranteed.

31 Giorgio Delle Donne, 'Die Südtirolfrage 1955–1972', in Anton Pelinka and Andreas Maislinger, eds, *Handbuch zur neueren Geschichte Tirols*, Vol. 2: Zeitgeschichte, Part 1: Politische Geschichte (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1993) 449–466, 466.

32 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 505.

Steininger argued that ‘this treaty presents little more than the extension of Italy’s responsibilities to South Tyrol according to the settlement of 1948, which had then not been granted.’³³ However, the new statute did go further than what had been granted in 1948. The granting of water rights, for example, demonstrated that the new statute even touched upon the vital interests of Italy in South Tyrol. Having the rights to the waterways of South Tyrol had in fact been one of the key reasons Italy wished to secure the region in 1919. This was also one of the main reasons why South Tyrol was not given back to Austria in 1945. Italy was now to place this important economic and political lever back into the hands of the South Tyroleans. However, it was not until the summer of 2007 that the water rights were effectively handed over to South Tyrol, but 1972 was nonetheless important as it showed Italian good will and granted the South Tyroleans the right to claim these titles back – another novelty in comparison to 1946.

The most significant difference to 1946, however, was a guaranteed scheme of implementation of these provisions in a follow-up catalogue, the so-called ‘Durchführungsbestimmungen’. This meant that full autonomy would not be immediately effective. It came in gradually over the following years and depended heavily on the political relationship between Rome and Bozen/Bolzano, as this determined the speed of the implementation. It was envisaged that the full implementation of the Statute would take up to five years, but in fact it took until 1992 before sufficient substantial advances had been made to allow Austria as the former protective power to comfortably ratify the process. At this point Austria confirmed that the provisions of the treaty had been implemented and submitted a declaration of cessation of the dispute over South Tyrol to the UN. Shortly after that Austria joined the EU, after Italy had withdrawn its veto.³⁴

33 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 506.

34 This had been a contentious issue between the two countries. In fact, in 1967 the Italian foreign minister Fanfani had claimed that the Italian veto on Austria’s membership of the EEC would not be lifted until ‘the solved the issue of terrorism in South Tyrol’. See Peterlini, *Bombenjahre*, 311.

Under Autonomy Rule: South Tyrol since 1972

The gradual implementation of the Second Statute of Autonomy since 1972 has generally, and with justification, been hailed as a great success for the German-speaking South Tyroleans. By 2005, the South Tyroleans were the best protected linguistic minority in Europe, if not the world. This is a source of great pride for the South Tyroleans. Far from sitting back and simply enjoying the achievement, South Tyrol has become pro-active in the area of global minority issues. In order to share the acquired knowledge in achieving an autonomy, the Europäische Akademie [EURAC, European Academy] was founded in Bozen in 1992. One of the branches of this research institute focuses exclusively on advising minorities all over the world who seek to achieve similar autonomous status. The EURAC far exceeds the remit of earlier institutions such as the 'Südtiroler Wirtschafts- und Sozialinstitut', the 'Südtiroler Kulturinstitut' or the 'Gamper-Werk' which were established by South Tyroleans to work for the region's autonomy.¹

The granting of autonomy itself has resulted in the restitution of many of the cultural institutions that supported and cultivated the cultural identity of the German and Ladin-speaking South Tyroleans. South Tyrol now has its own free press, it has, since 1997, its own university, there is an abundance of radio and television programmes in German and Ladin. It should be noted that Italian is also protected under the provisions for autonomy and hence there are also many Italian-speaking institutions. Identification with South Tyrol is exceptionally high with eighty per cent of the Germans and Ladins expressing pride in being South Tyrolean.²

1 Lill, *Südtirol*, 308.

2 See Antony Evelyn Alcock, *The South Tyrol Autonomy* (Bozen: Südtiroler Landesamt, 2001), 24.

The Paket also proved economically beneficial for South Tyrol. The area is now wealthier than ever before, mainly due to the reformed tax system that allows the country to retain ninety per cent of its taxes and reinvest them in South Tyrol. The unemployment rate is extremely low in the international context and has continued to remain low at three per cent³ in the face of the financial global crisis which began in 2007. The traditional pillars of the economy, farming and tourism, enjoy success due to a combination of constant innovation, high quality control and intelligent marketing.

To conclude a story which has been laden with tragedy and oppression with a happy ending is tempting, however, the story is not over. South Tyrol is still an integral part of European developments, this time in its attempt to implement the options the EU provides for regional development, both economic and political. It is therefore important to analyse current political developments, namely South Tyrol's regionalist drive and the realities in the 'Regional State' of South Tyrol. It is also a vital part of such an analysis to look at the discourse of memory in today's South Tyrol as it is in the memory of a collective identity and in its interpretation of its own history that a people's understanding of themselves manifests itself most clearly.

Towards autonomy

It was the implementation of the Paket through the Second Statute of Autonomy in 1972 that allowed for a degree of emancipation for the German-speaking South Tyroleans. The 1972 Statute also provided the basis for the peaceful co-existence of the German, Ladin and Italian pop-

3 Landeshauptmann Luis Durnwalder quoted this figure in a speech given to the European Forum in Alpbach, Austria, on 22 August 2010.

ulations inhabiting the alpine region of northern Italy.⁴ In contrast to the 1946 First Statute of Autonomy, which resulted in the much loathed 'Region Trentino-Alto Adige' with its vague promises for the German South Tyroleans, the Second Statute comprised a catalogue of 136 measures to guide the implementation process. The fact that implementation was rather slow was not due to deliberate obstruction from either side, but resulted rather from the political insecurity in Italy caused by continuously changing governments in Rome. In 1972 the country was renamed the 'Autonome Provinz Bozen-Südtirol' [autonomous Province of South Tyrol]. Under its statute the province is entirely responsible for the education system which is bilingual: pupils are educated through their mother tongue and then also learn the other language. The province's administration is also run on a bilingual basis; to this end in 1977 the *patentino*, the certificate of bilingualism, was introduced. This has reputedly become 'one of the most hated documents, especially among the Italians,'⁵ as it is essential for entrance into public service. Public service is also governed by the proportional ethnic representation of all three linguistic groups living in the province: Germans, Italians and Ladins. The intention behind this system of proportional representation, according to Article 62 of the Statute, is to ensure that all groups are represented by the public service and that members of the German and Italian linguistic group can converse with all public institutions. The right of proportional representation governs almost all areas of public administration with very few exceptions (such as the police and the military) meaning that all posts must be filled on the basis of a detailed ethnic distribution system.

Article 62, however, stipulates that redundancies related to the proportional system are not possible and a balance can only be achieved through new personnel being employed gradually. Thus, the census that takes place in South Tyrol every ten years is very important as it is on the basis of the

4 Markus Warasin, ed., *Unsere Sache ist gerecht: Südtirol als Thema der österreichischen Aussenpolitik vor dem Hintergrund der europäischen Einigung* (Bozen: Athesia, 2005), 82.

5 Steiningger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 515.

census results that the proportional representation is modified. Since 1981 the Italian census has required that the all South Tyrolean citizens indicate which linguistic group they belonged to. Apparently, many Italian-speakers have declared themselves to be German-speaking in order to have access to the greater proportion of jobs allocated for German-speakers in the public services.⁶

The Ladin population

Of particular significance in the moral context of the autonomy is the treatment of linguistic minorities within the German minority in Italy, namely the Ladin population. Ladin, a dialect within the Rhaeto-Roman language, is still spoken by some 35,000 speakers in the Grödner Tal/Val Gardina/Val Gherdëina, the Gadertal/Val Badia, and in the Fassatal/Val di Fassa in the Province of Trento and Buchenstein/Livinalongo/Col di Lana in the Province of Belluno. When Italy annexed South Tyrol, the Ladins found themselves in a peculiar position. While they proclaimed their strong ties with the German-speaking South Tyroleans, Mussolini's fascists insisted the Ladins were genuinely Italian. In fact, Tolomei declared that Ladin was merely a bastardized Italian accent. Consequently, the Ladins felt the full force of the Italianization process with the added insult that they were considered to be little more than inferior Italians who needed re-indoctrination.

According to the First Statute of Autonomy of 1948 the Ladin population within South Tyrol was entitled to educated through Ladin only in the first class. It was only as a result of the implementation of the 1972 statute that the Ladins secured the same cultural freedom as the German-speakers when the first Ladin schools were established. Article 62 of the Second Statute of Autonomy stipulates that the Ladins are to be politically

6 Steiningger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 520.

represented both in the South Tyrolean local parliament and in the regional parliament of Trient/Trento with at least one delegate.

The fact that the Ladins are divided among the three Italian provinces South Tyrol, Belluno and Trient/Trento means that different levels of minority protection apply, which is something the Ladins themselves do not regard as appropriate. Time and again the Ladin population has objected to what they regard as a pressure to assimilate and the exploitation of Ladin issues by both the German and the Italian side.⁷

The creation of a pan-Ladin organization across the dividing province boundary lines could strengthen their political standing in the respective local parliaments and also nationally. Indeed, there are early signs of the emergence of a pan-Ladin movement: political parties are forming and a Ladin newspaper has been founded. On 25 September 2010, the Ladinians held their first pan-Ladin cultural day in Prösels Castle on the Schlern plateau, and it is more than likely that in the future Ladin representatives from all three provinces will focus more on the preservation of their collective identity and thus create a united Ladin political voice.

Problems of a multilingual society

Not all areas of public life saw a speedy implementation of the Statute of 1972. To take but one exception, it took a long time for German to become equal to Italian in court. This was basically due to the initial unwillingness of many Italian solicitors to learn German and who, due to the nature of their employment, could not be replaced overnight. However, overall progress in the autonomy issue was so impressive that, in 1992, Austria agreed to an Italian suggestion to finally end their dispute over South Tyrol and to

7 See Mateo Taibon, '*Die Ladinier: Minderbeit auf dem Rückzug*', website of the Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, <<http://www.gfbv.de/voelker/europa/ladiner>>, accessed 15 October 2010.

draft a declaration to the UN which would state this formally. Austria became a full EU member in 1995,⁸ and the relationship between the two European members has been one of good neighbourly cooperation since. This demonstrates that the granting of autonomy not only quelled South Tyrolean anxieties concerning their future, but also improved the bilateral relationship between the neighbour states Austria and Italy.

The road to gaining full official recognition for the German language and South Tyrolean customs and traditions has not always been smooth and creating a multilingual society such as the South Tyrolean one is not without its challenges. The political efforts to institutionalize German in public life have led to some curious developments over the years. In the 1990s, for example, the SVP spoke out strongly against German classes in Italian schools and argued that such a practice would dilute the cultural identity of all linguistic groups. Equally, there are no bilingual schools, in which German and Italian are taught in parallel.

This practice has occasionally been labelled cultural apartheid yet it derives from the Statute of Autonomy of 1972 which introduced two kinds of autonomy: a territorial autonomy for South Tyrol and a cultural autonomy for all three linguistic groups living within South Tyrol. The aim was to allow all three groups to develop individually without interference from the other two. Such cultural compartmentalization may seem outdated in the era of global networks and internet communication, but it reflected a genuine attempt by the architects of the autonomy to support the minority culture. The SVP has always stressed that this practice maintained the purity and thus the strength of the German language spoken in South Tyrol, which was, after all, the main distinguishing factor between the two ethnic groups and of particular significance to the minority.⁹ The SVP never advocated an ethnic division between Italian and German speakers, but the party was always opposed to the completely parallel use of both languages by all people living in the province. The SVP believed that the

8 Warasin, *Unsere Sache ist gerecht*, 110ff.

9 See Alcock, *South Tyrol Autonomy*, 20.

completely parallel use of both languages could result in a situation where neither language was learnt or spoken properly.

It is the practice in South Tyrol that children, from kindergarten age onwards until the end of secondary school, are educated in their mother tongue and gradually learn the other language. In a third step English is being introduced, so that all South Tyrolean students will eventually fulfil the European Council requirement whereby each European citizen should speak their mother tongue, the language of their neighbour and English as the *lingua franca* of Europe. South Tyrol quite consciously aims to place itself at the forefront of regional development in Europe and it wishes to be a model for other border regions similar to South Tyrol.

A high level of language competence in all languages (i.e. the mother tongue, the language of the neighbour and English), is also of strategic importance to South Tyrol. Through English it can demonstrate its own cosmopolitan and international characteristics. At the same time English is the language of international tourism and the widespread use of English will allow South Tyrol to promote its high-quality tourism products on the international stage. Finally, English opens the gates to international economic markets and can help South Tyrol to compete for market share. South Tyrol as a region which has traditionally, if not always voluntarily, been multilingual, has undoubtedly many advantages in this competition, which only a few regions in Europe can match.

The Regionalist Drive since 1989

The ratification of the Second Autonomy Statute by the central government in Rome in 1972 and the successful implementation of its guidelines in the 1970s and 1980s – despite varying opposition from ever-changing administrations in Rome – led to the emergence of a robust self-confidence amongst the German-speaking South Tyroleans. They accepted their position within the framework of the Italian state and the autonomy. However, suddenly at the end of the 1980s this steady political and economic progress in the region was faced with massive changes on the global stage.

A new era dawns in 1989

When, in 1989, the Berlin wall came down it appeared that the end of the post-war European divide between an American west and a Soviet east was in sight. The effects of this historic event were quickly felt around the world and revived a number of political processes which had for decades lain dormant. German reunification was only the most spectacular amongst them. Austria now saw an opportunity to utilize the favourable climate to its advantage. With the removal of the Iron Curtain economic cooperation with the Soviet Union was possible, and the creation of a new agreement concerning the country's membership in the EU became a real option. In view of the rapid integration of Europe, Austria considered it to its advantage to join the EU.¹ The new dynamics in world politics were

1 Warasin, *Unsere Sache ist gerecht*, 137.

also felt in the Central Alps. South Tyrol regarded these moves with trepidation, fearing that Austria's new political initiatives might threaten the relationship between North and South Tyrol, and could thus damage the process of cooperation in the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpenländer* (ARGE ALP, the cooperative community of Alpine countries), which had begun in the 1970s. The ARGE ALP, comprised Bavaria, Tyrol, South Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Graubünden and Lombardy (founding members since 1972). At a later stage Trient/Trento (1973), Canton St Gallen (1982), Tessin (1988), and Baden-Württemberg (1992) also joined. The prime ministers involved discussed common issues relating to regional trade and commerce, planning, culture, health and economics on an annual basis. The decisions reached at these meetings had the status of recommendations. However, the very existence of such a forum demonstrated the need for cross-border cooperation. Nonetheless, it was also clear that within the framework of the ARGE ALP major changes of territorial and national, administrative and political realities were not possible.²

South Tyrol's claim for the acquisition of the 'most comprehensive form of autonomy from Italy possible' needed international support, and this could not to be achieved through the instruments the ARGE ALP provided. Self-determination was still heralded by the SVP as the ultimate political goal for South Tyrol. In their 1993 manifesto the SVP outlined self-determination as the political ideal which embraced 'autonomy in all aspects of public life'. It also articulated the desire to achieve the 'restriction and abolition of the power of the central state', in order to achieve the highest degree of political emancipation for the country and its people.³ The SVP attempted to use the Paket of 1972 and South Tyrol's autonomy to seek greater proximity to North Tyrol and to loosen the political ties with Italy as far as possible. South Tyrol was bound by its obligations as a part of the Region Trento-Alto Adige. Since 1948, in the aftermath of the Gruber deGasperis agreement, Rome had used the existence of this region to suppress Bozen's political aspirations. This had been possible because the

2 Warasin, *Unsere Sache ist gerecht*, 137.

3 SVP Political Program 1993, 3.

Italian-speaking majority in Trient/Trento retained the upper hand in any decision taken in the regional parliament in Trient/Trento. Over the years, the region had undergone modifications that allowed South Tyrol more political space, but the existing region was still seen as a major obstacle to political participation both in Italy and in the European context.

Consequently, ways of superseding the existing region were investigated. In March 1990, at a meeting of the regional government (No. 33, March 1990) an SVP delegate, Siegfried Brugger, presented a landmark concept for reform. He suggested that the very existence of the region should be critically investigated. Brugger argued that as the autonomies of both Bozen/Bolzano and Trient/Trento were almost fully realized, the Region Trento-Alto Adige was virtually superfluous as a political entity. To replace it, a supraregional parliament could be established whose function would be advisory rather than executive and that would relate to Trient/Trento, South Tyrol, perhaps also Tyrol and Vorarlberg.

Brugger acknowledged that this vision was perhaps wishful thinking, however it did in fact foreshadow the future European region. Brugger cited the president of the regional parliament, Franco Tretter, who had claimed that South Tyrol, Trient/Trento, and also the surrounding Tyrol, were regarded as minority partners by the stronger regions of the Veneto, Lombardy and Bavaria. Their position could be strengthened through a common regional parliament. Brugger did not deny that the creation of such a parliament could pose challenges, as it was something completely new in international law. However, he argued that it also offered the opportunity to implement the cooperation agreement of 1993 between Italy and Austria, which was due to be ratified once the Paket was fully implemented. This revolutionary vision for regional reform, which foresaw the dissolution of the Trento/South Tyrol region and the creation of a new region, including North Tyrol (at that time not even a member of the EU), needed support from political circles within South Tyrol, Rome and Vienna if it were to stand any chance of becoming reality.

North Tyrol reacted positively. Alois Partl, Landeshauptmann (prime minister) of Tyrol, spoke favourably of a European Region of Tyrol (in

1991), which would include South Tyrol.⁴ Rome was less enthusiastic about the idea. The implementation of the 1969 Treaty was complete, and Austria was willing to declare an end to the disagreement with Italy over the South Tyrol issue. This finally happened in 1992. South Tyrol was experiencing the benefits of a wide-reaching autonomy within the Italian state, which was more extensive than any autonomy granted to other ethnic minorities in Italy. Ordinarily, Rome would have reacted forcefully to any perceived attempt by South Tyrol to gain even greater freedom from Rome. However, in the 1990s Italy was in the grip of the most serious political crises since World War II and thus failed to muster much resistance.

The political climate for regional development was favourable in Europe as cross-border cooperation between regions flourished elsewhere. The 1980 *European Framework for Cross-Border Cooperation between Regions*, the so-called Madrid Treaty, had given regional initiatives the legal framework to solve cross-border problems, using the principle of subsidiarity. Article 1 stipulated the constitutional limits of the parties involved, in order to make sure that regions would not interfere with state policies. However, the Madrid Treaty provided significant economic and political freedom, which could be used creatively by European regions.

South Tyrolean politicians watched carefully how the Madrid Treaty was implemented into regional policy in various parts of Europe. How the cooperation of pro-regional European politicians works is exemplified in the private papers of Oskar Peterlini, the then president of the Regional Council of the Autonomous Region Trentino/South Tyrol, documents he deposited in the Südtiroler Landesarchiv in Bozen/Bolzano. This corpus of unedited letters⁵ comprises a heavily annotated manuscript of a speech given by Johannes Rau, the then prime minister of the German state of Nordrhein-Westphalia. On 25 September 1991, Rau gave this presentation at an AGEK conference (Association of European Border regions) on the German-Dutch border area of Legden. In this presentation, entitled

4 Warasin, *Unsere Sache ist gerecht*, 141.

5 Photocopies of all documents are in the author's possession. They will be cited as Peterlini Private Papers.

'Perspectives on regional collaboration in Europe' the prime minister of Germany's most densely populated state argued for a strengthening of cross-border coordination between regions and for a decentralized 'Europe of the Regions'. The sections of Rau's speech that were highlighted by Peterlini provided him with a number of arguments which he employed for his political strategy: the propagation of the European Region Tyrol-South/Tyrol. Peterlini recognized in Rau's speech the implicit power in the role that border regions were beginning to play in propelling 'European unification'; as Rau observed, these regions had acquired 'bridging functions in the process of European unification'.⁶ Rau argued against the centralizing influence of Europe and in favour of regional diversity:

From the viewpoint of border regions we have to state: Europe must not be centralized in its structures. Europe must allow the regions room to develop. It must incorporate the regions' vitality and their characteristics into the process of European unification. Political union within Europe does not mean: the levelling of national characteristics to a mean average. European unification must not become synonymous with mediocrity. Political union must preserve and include the diversity of the European regions.

Peterlini was particularly interested in Rau's suggestions for a path towards a 'Europe of the Regions':

1. The establishment of the principle of subsidiarity in all treaties of the political union;
2. Creation of a Commission for the Regions which would focus on the interests of regions, states (Länder) and autonomous communities in the EU;
3. Representation of the states (Länder) and regions in the EU's Council of Ministers and a veto for those areas directly affecting their rights and interests;
4. The states' (Länder), regions' and autonomous communities' right to involve the European court of law.

6 Peterlini Private Papers.

Rau's aspirations for a Europe of Regions accorded precisely with the aims of the SVP and Peterlini: the federalization of the EU and the creation of the Europaregion Tyrol, which would be internationally accepted and thus emancipate South Tyrol even further from the Italian state.

The European Region

In November 1991, Peterlini presented the SVP's position on regional policy publicly at an international conference in Strasbourg. In his paper, entitled 'European Parliament – Regions of the Community', he criticized the fact that Europe was a confederation of states in which the national governments alone made the decisions. The elected European parliament was fighting for authority, and the regions were even further removed from political participation in Europe. As Peterlini outlined: 'A Europe which is gaining more and more power and influence, which takes over an ever-increasing part of the administration and the legislation of the national states and its regions, cannot and must not be ruled by the executive of individual states.'⁷ According to international federal principles, democratic legislation should rest on the pillars of two parliaments, the European parliament which was elected by the European people, and a second chamber which was comprised of representatives from the regions and states (Länder) of Europe. Within this chamber, which would participate in European legislation, representatives of the autonomous states (Länder) and regions could express their ideas because all those communities they represent are entitled to an effective and legally binding European minority protection framework.

At this seminal conference, Peterlini expressed South Tyrol's willingness to contribute the benefit of its experience in achieving autonomy. It

7 Peterlini Private Papers.

was in this context that he first floated his idea of a 'European Region Tyrol' (with the inclusion of North Tyrol and South Tyrol-Trentino on the basis of their close historical links) to a European audience. He explained to the conference delegates that after the entry of Austria into the European Community this 'Europaregion' could become a model of how a cross-border region could gain access to the European platform and pave the way for other such regions. This cautious attempt by Peterlini to create a cross-border region with the North was placed in the context of international environmental protection and other such cross-border arrangements in the Alpine region. Protection of the environment, air pollution control, traffic congestion control and the protection of the Mediterranean Sea were, according to Peterlini, 'not issues that a national state can be expected to deal with on its own'.⁸ However, he realized, that these were issues that could not be solved simply by the affected region, either.

Peterlini deliberately used ecological issues as examples of how regionalism could function in order to deflect any potential criticism emanating from Italian circles. Nonetheless, his vision of cooperation between North and South Tyrol was, in fact, revanchiste. It remained difficult for politicians within the SVP to advocate this Europaregion idea without being accused of Pan-Tyroleanism. At the same time it was obvious that the creation of a Europaregion would cause a shift in power within the Alps. This was a concern to politicians and a series of letters between Peterlini and Andreas Khol of the Austrian Nationalrat in June 1993 illustrates some of the issues. In response to a letter of Peterlini's dated 4 June 1993, in which he outlined his vision of a new Europaregion, Khol signalled his general support. However, he also clearly outlined his concerns and priorities regarding the distribution of power:

I am of the opinion that we must set the tone in this European region and that the unification of North and South Tyrol is the primary aim. I would regret seeing this European region of Tyrol suffer the same fate as the existing one born of the Gruber-deGasperi agreement, where the Trientians have the majority and rule over us Tyroleans from South and North Tyrol. This is my biggest concern and therefore

8 Peterlini Private Papers.

I wish that the initiative for the Europaregion Tyrol should come from North and South Tyrol, on our conditions and equipped with a legislative that retains our dominance in our own country.⁹

A week later Peterlini responded reassuringly to Khol's letter: 'I would just like to dispel your concerns that in a future Europaregion, Tyrol the Italians would have the upper hand'. He proceeded to outline a demographic profile that revealed that in any future Europaregion the German-speaking element would outnumber the Italian portion 2:1. To drive his point home, he provided Khol with the following headcount:

Italian population of Trentino (incl. Ladins)	449,852
Italian population in South Tyrol (1991 census)	116,914
Total	556,766
German speaking population of South Tyrol	287,503
Ladin speaking population of South Tyrol	18,534
Total population of Tyrol (1991 census)	631,410
Total	937,447 ¹⁰

Peterlini's demographic reassurances to Khol are a clear indication that the idea of a Europaregion was motivated by power politics (in particular to secure autonomy which had been denied them between 1948 and 1972) rather than an intrinsic belief in European integration. This exchange of letters between Peterlini and Khol occurred against the backdrop of a decision taken by the four local parliaments (Tyrol, Vorarlberg, South Tyrol and Trient/Trento) on 2 June 1993 to draft 'Modellvereinbarungen für die Schaffung einer Europäischen Region' [model agreements for the creation of a European region]. According to this decision the parliaments stated:

9 Peterlini Private Papers.

10 Peterlini Private Papers.

The new European situation requires the particular and permanent efforts of all states (Länder) to preserve the cultural, historical and social diversity of the continent. As well as the obvious advantages of a large economic market there is the threat of a soulless community with a culturally undifferentiated identity, in which smaller communities could be in danger of disappearing or being located on the margins of society.¹¹

The details of this 'Modellvereinbarung' were to be drawn up by a group of experts and officials from the three regions of Tyrol, South Tyrol and Trient/Trento. Subsequently, two expert bodies, the *tavola ronda* [round table] and an inter-regional commission discussed the possible characteristics of the new region. The status of the region would have to adhere to the stipulations of the Madrid Treaty of 1980 and the Austro-Italian agreement of January 1993 (Rahmenabkommen über grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit), which focused on cross-border communication.

The 'round table' outlined the results of this intensive collaboration in its *Relazione sul lavoro svolto da maggio 1995 a maggio 1996* [report on the work conducted between May 1995 and May 1996]. Within this report numerous practical suggestions were made for possible cooperation: exchanges of subject specialists and experts, development of economic and cultural elements, homogenization of directives concerning labour law, common quality norms and professional degrees, and a fostering of language courses and the display of the shared culture in common exhibitions. Tourism was identified as an area where major cooperation would be desirable, and it was suggested that tourism should be developed on a pan-regional basis.¹²

It was not only in Vienna, Rome and Brussels that this suggestion was accepted but most importantly it was tolerated by the South Tyrolean population which had to accept the close cooperation with its neighbouring province. The idea of a Europaregion had to be carefully explained to the public, especially in South Tyrol, as many were sceptical about the creation of another region when the much hated Region Trentino-Alto Adige

11 A photocopy of the decision of the four parliaments is in the author's possession.

12 A photocopy of the commission's report is in the author's possession.

was not yet fully a thing of the past. Thus the SVP, at its Lichtenberg party convention of 1994, published a declaration that outlined to the population of South Tyrol the advantages of such a new region. They argued that the creation of 'equal living and working conditions' in the new European region was 'also to encourage a common political identity and a communal orientation towards Europe among the multilingual populace'. The SVP envisaged that the region would 'become a wider homeland (Heimat) wherein every community could retain its specific cultural identity and simultaneously pursue common interests through appropriate institutional channels.'¹³

Meanwhile, in 1995, the two prime ministers (Landeshauptmänner) of Tyrol and South Tyrol, Wendelin Weingartner and Luis Durnwalder, opened a joint Tyrol office at the EU in Brussels. This, in effect, created the initial infrastructure for any future Europaregion. Rome objected strongly to the new Tyrol office, according to the Italian interior ministry it was a 'subversive act' and a 'seditious anti-Italian move.'¹⁴ In 1997, the Italian court of constitutional justice agreed with the ruling that the office should not have been sanctioned as its existence undermined the legitimacy of the Italian state in the area of foreign policy. While in 1998 a change in the Italian constitution resulted in an end to hostilities over the Brussels Tyrol office, Rome's concerns regarding Bozen's regionalist tendencies continued. Meanwhile, South Tyrolean self-confidence grew in the wake of a number of significant infrastructural projects completed in the latter half of the 1990s. Amongst these was the Bozen airport, the Meran–Bozen motorway (MEBO), the refurbishment of the Bozen museum and the establishment of the Free University of Bozen in 1997.

On the political stage, the creation of a European region was taking shape, thus establishing a forum for regional politics in Brussels and, at the same time, minimizing the political influence of Rome and Vienna on Tyrol. The European region thus became a forum, which could be

13 A photocopy of this document is in the author's possession.

14 Peter Pernthaler, *Die Identität Tirols in Europa* (Vienna and Bozen: Springer, 2007), 260.

instrumental in containing the economic and political rift between the two parts of Tyrol, which had emerged since the 1970s. The political desire to equip the new Europaregion with proper institutions peaked in the drafting of the so-called Toniatti Proposal. This proposal, devised by the Trientine university professor Roberto Toniatti, suggested a statute for the Europaregion Tyrol, which aimed at the introduction of legislative bodies such as a council, a convention and a first minister. This draft was very similar to a constitution, and provoked uproar in the Italian media. There were accusations of pan-Tyrolean separatism, and the Italian government took legal steps and initiated an investigation into subversive separatist activity, during the course of which documents were seized in Bozen/Bolzano and Trient/Trento. The government in Rome officially challenged the idea that Trient/Trento and Bozen/Bolzano had the right to pursue such policies or draft documents such as the Toniatti Proposal.

In the face of this political pressure, the Toniatti Bill was withdrawn by the politicians in Bozen/Bolzano and Trient/Trento. Instead of an institutional anchoring of the European region in May 1998 the three local parliaments agreed to continue with cross-border activities on the basis the 'round table' of 1996.

In spite of this settlement a new row emerged at EXPO 2000 in Hanover, when the 'Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol/Alto Adige-Trentino' pitched its own stall alongside the other exhibitors – all nation states. The state-like appearance of the Europaregion caused an argument between Rome and Innsbruck and Bozen/Bolzano. The Italian prime minister Luigi Scalfaro rejected this kind of regionalization outright, but Wendelin Weingartner, Landeshauptmann of North Tyrol, defended the Europaregion against accusations of separatism, arguing that it was an example of European federalism in accordance with the Madrid Treaty of 1980. This new closeness between North and South Tyrol signalled two important developments: first, a process had begun that would result in the establishment of a regional entity called Tyrol which, due to its geographical location (situated between Rome and Vienna) would touch on the integrity of both national governments. Secondly, the Region Trentino-Südtirol and its function appeared to be *de facto* obsolete.

In January 2001, the Italian state officially recognized these developments and an altered constitutional law, which amended the 1972 Statute of Autonomy accordingly. These amendments were so far-reaching that some analysts have claimed that they created a 'third statute of autonomy for South Tyrol.'¹⁵ The former region ceded its dominant role to the two autonomous provinces of Bozen and Trento. Since then South Tyrol has had only limited authority over foreign issues, but other than that the province governs essential aspects of everyday life in the region. This is particularly apparent in financial control, for example. Ninety per cent of taxes raised in the province are kept in the province. In return, it has taken responsibility for areas of administration that were previously within the Italian state's remit, such as the maintenance of the road network. By contrast, all administrative competencies that were previously the responsibility of the former region are now under the remit of the domain of the province. As Pernthaler has pointed out, however: 'these new competencies are not irreversible as they do not originate in the Italian constitutional system, but are granted by the state's agreed self-limitation.'¹⁶

In January 2001, with the signing of 'Alpendeclaration' [Alpine declaration] by the various first ministers of the areas of South Tyrol, Trentino and Tyrol,¹⁷ the 'Projekt Europearegion' [European Regional Project] was given a further boost. The practical effects of this declaration have been the organization of joint exhibitions, collective representations in Europe and close cooperation in the areas of economy, environment, energy, traffic, education and research, culture and tourism. While the pragmatic 'Alpendeclaration' may not be comparable to Toniatti's constitutional draft in terms of its political vision for the region, the importance of practical cooperation should not be understated as it will draw all sections of the Europearegion closer together.

It is evident that the regional project is having a magnetic effect on surrounding areas with other regions seeking inclusion. Many local

15 Pernthaler, *Identität Tirols*, 222.

16 Pernthaler, *Identität Tirols*, 200.

17 Luis Durnwalder, Lorenzo Dellai and Wendelin Weingartner.

communities on the fringes of the new region, impressed by the economic success of the autonomous provinces, have petitioned for inclusion into the successful provinces. There is, for example, the commune of Lamon near Feltre in Venetia whose 3,800 inhabitants announced in July 2005 the desire to join the Province of Bozen/Bolzano. Landeshauptmann Durnwalder received them cordially, and despite the rejection of their application by a special committee of the South Tyrolean local parliament, other communes have followed suit. A ninety-five per cent majority of the community of Sovramonte voted to change regions and a further eight communities in Belluno also voted overwhelmingly in favour of a change. These developments have caused grave concern among the governments of those regions. Veneto's first minister Giancarlo Galan defended his region from what he regarded as 'cheap and vulgar politics' promising that the Veneto would not have 'parts sold off'.¹⁸ Galan has campaigned vigorously for the abolition of South Tyrol's autonomy. A war of words has developed between Galan and Durnwalder on the issue, which underscores the significance of financial power within the regional context. Galan has accused Durnwalder of 'baiting' the people of Cortina d'Ampezzo with South Tyrol's wealth, while Durnwalder has mocked Galan for his province's lack of financial clout.¹⁹ Durnwalder's counterpart in Belluno, however, has adopted a very different strategy, hoping that through cooperation with South Tyrol he can persuade Rome to accord greater administrative autonomy to his region also. South Tyrol has undoubtedly been the driving force behind European political restructuring and regionalization and a showcase for its successful implementation. The success of the European region Tyrol has, however, the potential to lead to the destabilization of the existing order in the alpine region of northern Italy and Austria.

18 <<http://www.stol.it>>, accessed 10 October 2006.

19 <<http://www.stol.it>>, accessed 10 October 2006.

Regional statehood in South Tyrol

Ironically, the failure to institutionalize the European region through the Toniatti Proposal and the increasing popularity of the region amongst its neighbouring provinces has led to an emergence of state-like characteristics in the Province of Bozen/Bolzano. The Durnwalder era, which began in 1989, heralded the state-like development of the 'Regional State of South Tyrol'. Durnwalder worked to equip the province with all the paraphernalia of a sovereign European state. Thus South Tyrol has its own parliament, flag, and anthems (the 'Südtiroler Heimatlied', and more recently the song 'Dem Land Tirol die Treue', which is regarded as an expression of a new patriotism).²⁰ Perhaps even more significant is the fact that the region has its own diplomatic representation such as the Deutsches Generalkonsulat (German consulate) in the Dr. Streiter Gasse in Bozen/Bolzano. In March 2008 South Tyrol granted itself a 'Südtiroler Orden' [the South Tyrol medal] which the Province of Bozen/Bolzano has conferred several times on distinguished contemporaries.²¹

Bozen/Bolzano is not only the administrative centre of the Province, it has also acquired the aura of a capital. It boasts respectable museums, well-stocked libraries, a theatre, shopping facilities and restaurants well beyond what could be expected from a town of its size. The city is elegant and cosmopolitan, friendly, and intimate, and also has its own intellectual life. Bozen/Bolzano is traditional and tourist friendly in areas such as the open air fruitmarket but also extremely modern and avant garde as exemplified by the new museum of modern art, the Museion. The European Academy (EURAC) which offers excellent research facilities for scholars and the new Free University of Bozen/Bolzano not only contribute to the cosmopolitan atmosphere, but raise Bozen/Bolzano's status from that of an Alpine town.

20 *Neue Südtiroler Tageszeitung* (9/10 February 2008).

21 <<http://www.stol.it>>, accessed 3 March 2008.

In fact, the development of the University of Bozen/Bolzano is indicative of this move towards a region state. Since the division of North and South Tyrol, Innsbruck University has served as the alma mater for students from South Tyrol. However, Luis Durnwalder, after decades of opposition to the idea, changed his mind on the establishment of a university in Bozen/Bolzano.²² South Tyrol is looking no further than Bozen/Bolzano and Brixen/Bressanone for tertiary level education.

The regional desire for emancipation from Austria was all too evident in the case of Ötzi. In 1993, the ice mummy was found at the foot of a glacier, and South Tyrol fought vigorously to acquire it, even though there was considerable doubt as to whether Ötzi was actually found on South or North Tyrolean territory. Bozen/Bolzano won, and Ötzi now resides in Bozen/Bolzano's museum where he is a source of great interest and pride. The Ötzi controversy revealed that South Tyrol was slowly attempting to separate from its erstwhile homeland Tyrol by stressing its emancipation whenever the opportunity arose.

South Tyrol is well aware of its strengths and steers an equally emancipatory course in relation to Rome. The province is willing to take over further state responsibilities such as the police system and the postal services in exchange for greater independence. In fact, Bozen/Bolzano has repeatedly responded to Rome's threats to decrease the fiscal privileges of the autonomous provinces by offering to take over more of Rome's duties in South Tyrol. During the election campaign of October 2008, the then SVP party leader Elmar Pichler-Rolle even went so far as to announce his goal of a tax autonomy, which was decisive in the attempt to gain more political self-determination. In the summer of 2007 Bozen/Bolzano finally secured the rights to its hydroelectric power making it one of the strongest European regions. Given the political realities in Rome during the long Berlusconi era – with a prime minister who had little time for the autonomous provinces – South Tyrol can nevertheless be proud of what it has

22 Michael Gehler, *Tirol im 20. Jahrhundert: Vom Kronland zur Europaregion* (Innsbruck and Vienna: Tyrolia and Bozen: Athesia, 2008), 435.

achieved. The German-speaking minority in particular has fared well and has successfully established its collective identity within Italy.

Constitutional analyst Peter Pernthaler maintains that South Tyrol has developed a specifically South Tyrolean identity which differs from a pan-Tyrolean identity and often contradicts it. Pernthaler describes it as voluntaristic, an 'identity based on a desire'²³ – the desire to be South Tyrolean rather than displaying a geographical or ethnic claim to the identity. He is critical of the political chauvinism of South Tyrolean representatives, whom he accuses of seeking to prioritize South Tyrol at the expense of the other partners in the Europaregion.²⁴ He argues that the Europaregion Tyrol could be an even stronger political tool for the interests of all three participating partners if South Tyrol were willing to invest in the creation of a pan-Tyrolean identity. Pernthaler's analysis ignores the fact that South Tyrol is more than just a severed part of the historic Tyrol, it has also been part of Italy for ninety years and the self-definition of the South Tyroleans has been fundamentally affected as a result.

South Tyrolean collective identity is firmly established within the framework of the Italian state and no longer needs the ethnic definition that was so vital and prominent in the past. It can stress its function as a link between North and South in a relaxed manner. South Tyrol presents itself confidently as a success story, even within the framework of its political allies. In June 2008, at Bozen/Bolzano's Kornmarkt the SVP chairman summed up this sense of confidence, pride and achievement: 'In almost every aspect we are at the top of European league tables, whether it be in economic growth, employment rate or the production of alternative energy. We are clearly the masters of Europe's regions, even ahead of Tyrol and Trentino.'²⁵

23 Pernthaler, *Identität Tirols*, 266.

24 Pernthaler, *Identität Tirols*, 263.

25 <<http://www.stol.it>>, accessed 25 May 2008.

The SVP and politics in South Tyrol

It is understandable that the chairman of the SVP should take pride in such achievements, as it was after all the SVP who fought so hard to achieve political power for the region and played such a significant role in securing economic and political success for South Tyrol after 1945. Ironically, however, this very success is threatening to undermine the SVP's position in South Tyrol, as the region, no longer under threat, has become less predictable in its voting behaviour and more demanding of its political elite. The SVP's *raison d'être* was, for so long, the struggle for self-determination and a comprehensive autonomy for South Tyrol and protection for the identity of the German-speaking population. This has largely been achieved, and now the SVP runs the risk of becoming a victim of its own success. When considered from a practical perspective, the party has achieved all of the political goals it set out in 1945 when it was founded. One could argue that the original definition of self-determination looks little different from what South Tyrol obtained in 2011, but in a fast-changing world the concept of self-determination has also changed. A key to Silvius Magnago's success in the late 1950s was his ability to see (and convince others) that autonomy could mean self-determination *within* Italy and not merely separation *from* Italy. This foresight was crucial in guiding the SVP through the tumultuous years of the 1960s.

It is difficult to imagine any other political constellation in which South Tyrol would be more advantaged than it is now, associated loosely with Italy and with considerable influence in domestic and foreign policy. Luis Durnwalder, Magnago's successor in 1989, managed to transform the autonomy into an interregional dialogue with other regions within Europe, which has strengthened South Tyrol's role in Italy even further. If Magnago was the visionary who brought about the autonomy, then Durnwalder quickly became its manager. He succeeded in turning political spaces into economic advantages and used the international stage pragmatically to promote South Tyrol.

Despite these positive aspects, the threat of a political crisis looms over the region, as the parliamentary elections of April 2008 clearly showed. The electorate in South Tyrol denied the SVP their usual solid support and created a crisis within the party which was unsure how to combat this lack of support. The SVP had never experienced this before. What had happened? The SVP had been the all-powerful ethnic regionalist party representing the German speaking populace, and they had governed domestic policy since 1945, but in the political world they had created critical voices multiplied. Democratic deficits in the political life of South Tyrol and the SVP were bemoaned; critics claimed there was a lack of transparency in the decision-making processes and began to question the purpose of the entire party. Pernthaler places the SVP's troubles in the context of the waning 'ethnic conflict' and the subsequent loss of cultural cohesion: 'As the ethnic conflict with Italy dissolved, so the SVP and its mantra that the Germans have to stick together, lost the support of their followers.'²⁶ In fact, the purpose of an ethnic political party in general now began to be questioned in a globalizing world. The real divisions in the SVP run along different lines than the ethnic ones. In terms of its origins, the SVP is a relatively conservative party catering for the middle section of society. Even though the party also boasts a 'workers' wing', many workers in South Tyrol, including German-speaking ones, do not feel adequately represented by the SVP. At the same time, if the SVP were to shed its 'ethnic label', the party might very possibly experience support from the Italian population. There have been a few attempts at this reorientation in the past. The 'collective ethnic party' faces considerable criticism from the young and the educated South Tyroleans. This new generation is not adverse to combining the advantages of their Italian and German worlds. Life is multicultural, multilingual and young educated South Tyroleans look increasingly to global role models – where in this world is there room for an SVP that holds on tightly to old ideals which appear so out of step with the world it has helped to create?

26 Pernthaler, *Identität Tirols*, 267.

Admittedly, disenchantment and general disengagement from politics and politicians is widespread all over Europe. While this younger generation have enjoyed the benefits of a democratic system, they have not excelled in taking responsibility for maintaining that system. This reluctance on the part of the younger generation to engage in the political system in South Tyrol may partly be because the SVP dominates that system to such a degree that in many respects it *is* the system. There are few changes and alterations in the political landscape, and despite his permanent media presence and his early morning public office hours in the Palais Widmann, the Landeshauptmann Durnwalder remains generally detached from real life in South Tyrol.

In response to these frustrations new parties have sprung up within the German-speaking camp to challenge the SVP, such as the Greens, the South Tyrol Freedom Party and the Union of South Tyrol. While these parties are still quite weak they represent a fracturing of the political hegemony that has characterized the German-speaking political arena. A political party spectrum in the classical sense, that is, a system with competing parties which are able to form coalitions, is as yet absent in South Tyrol. However, the first cracks indicating a split in the SVP were visible in the summer of 2008. Moreover, after future elections circumstances may arise in which the SVP might be forced to seek a coalition with the Italian parties in South Tyrol. The SVP is facing major challenges which will change the party fundamentally.

The timing of this crisis is anything but desirable. It was the historical strength of the SVP and its deep rooting in the German-speaking electorate that, throughout South Tyrol's post-war history, led to the success of the present. Part of the reason for South Tyrol's success in carving out its autonomy was the ability to express itself forcefully with one political voice to Rome. Aspects of South Tyrol's autonomy have been threatened repeatedly during Silvio Berlusconi's second period of office between 2008 and 2011. He has never made a secret of his dislike of South Tyrol's autonomy. The weakening of the SVP and the arrival of other political voices inside South Tyrol therefore threaten South Tyrol's unified stance in the parliament in Rome, which was so important in securing and maintaining the autonomy.

Furthermore, South Tyrol's leading circles have failed to transmit the history of South Tyrol: young people in South Tyrol are often poorly informed about their past and therefore are not in a position to fully appreciate the benefits and protection the autonomy of 1972 affords the region. History has lost its resonance and with that its power to inform the current political reality. This seems surprising in a country where historical artefacts are so omnipresent and where history is so basic to an understanding of the present. It may well be that the organized teaching of history was shied away from because contemporaries were wary of old wounds and divisions resurfacing. The 'Option', the 'Rückoption' (option to return after World War II), the emigration of the 1950s and the polarizing bombing campaigns, however, have left deep impressions on the collective identity of the South Tyroleans that need to be confronted, placed in context and, most importantly, explained to a new generation of South Tyroleans. In this case ignorance is not bliss, it is merely ignorance and deprives the current generation of the ability to create an informed political future.

The teaching of history, particularly in the context of ethnic and cultural tension, is always challenging and should take place in an environment free from political manipulation. However, a knowledge of history is vital if one wishes to create an informed political process. The acceptance of South Tyrol as a success story has eased the relationship between history and historiography. Even the most controversial issues such as the bombing campaign of the early 1960s can be discussed in an informed, objective and analytical fashion as, for example, in the 2005 radio programme 'Bombenjahre' (RAI Bozen, Italian state radio and television organization, Bozen/Bolzano section) with Christoph Franceschini and Helmut Lechthaler.

Despite various attempts by the regional papers, by local historians and by the SVP themselves to keep the history alive there has been a remarkable lack of institutional and systematic historical research. It was not until 2008 that a lecturer was employed to teach South Tyrolean history at the Freie Universität Bozen. Only in spring 2011 did the government announce the creation of a Regional Historical Institute to be located at the university, which would work in cooperation with local archives in its attempts to research, document and publish local and regional history.

Even though there have been other institutions involved in historical research before now, namely the Südtiroler Landesarchiv and the Europäische Akademie, these institutes focused solely on research instead of adopting an integrated approach of research-led teaching. The new Institute for Regional History will presumably seek to take up this challenge. It will be a delicate undertaking. There are a number of histories in the Province that need to be taught: German South Tyrolean, Italian and Ladin. In view of the intimate connection between history and identity, the teaching of these histories must be sensitive and imaginative. All these histories are almost mutually exclusive as the Ladin people feel repressed by both Italy and by the German South Tyroleans, and the Italian population, which has as yet not formed a collective identity, agrees only in their shared conviction that their founding myth coincides with the fascist regime in Italy, when Mussolini brought many Southern Italians to Bozen in order to Italianize the province's population. This very era, however, is anathema to the German South Tyroleans who experienced their harshest period of suppression between 1922 and 1943. The relics of the fascist past which are apparent in Bozen/Bolzano and elsewhere, are being hailed as memorials of a founding period (*Gründerzeit*) by the Italians, while the German South Tyroleans view them as memorials of suppression and forced integration. The Ladin population, divided and dispersed over three provinces in the region, are simultaneously discovering their common bond and are thus contributing to a mixture of understandings of history which are controversial, contradictory and polarizing.

Writing the Past and Establishing a South Tyrolean Collective Memory

History is political in South Tyrol, or more accurately: historical events are more present in today's political discourses than in many other European regions. Not only are they more present, there are also more of them as all three linguistic groups in South Tyrol, the German speakers, the Italians and the Ladins, have different interpretations of that history. Historical interpretations compete with each other and often appear mutually exclusive. The discourse of memory and reinterpretation of the past is highly dynamic in South Tyrol and subject to rapid change. An analysis of this process of reinterpretation reveals a good deal about the ways in which South Tyrolean history has contributed to the area's current self-image.

The bombing campaign of 1961 and South Tyrolean autonomy

Sandro Canestrini, the solicitor acting for the South Tyrolean defendants during the 1963 Milan trials, shocked the judge and court-room audience when he opened his defence by declaring: 'I Turchi oggi hanno occupato Firenze!'¹ ['The Turks have occupied Florence today!'] Briefly relishing the stunned silence, he went on to explain that this was a joke, but that the scenario was nevertheless extremely similar to the one the German

1 Interview with Sandro Canestrini, in *Bilder aus Südtirol*, broadcast by 3sat on 6 October 2006. Report by Josef Ebner, ORF Tirol 2006.

South Tyroleans experienced after both World War I and World War II, when they had to accept that they were ruled by Italy. Canestrini's opening remarks were intended to have a resonance for the Italian public and press. His strategy was to evoke some kind of empathy amongst the Italians for the South Tyroleans, a people the majority of Italians knew precious little about. It was only as a result of the violence of 1961 that many Italians became aware that all was not well in the northern border region of their country. Even then the attacks were not in any way contextualized and regarded merely as instances of mindless terrorism. Canestrini sought to educate the Italian population about the German-speaking South Tyroleans' experience at the hands of the Italian state. In their attempt to Italianize the German-speaking majority in the province, the Italians had created a dualism in society that was hard for the native German South Tyroleans to tolerate. In the decades following the bombings of the early 1960s there was no public discussion in South Tyrol about their social or political significance. Historians dealt with the issue in passing, while the political situation for the German South Tyroleans remained unclear.² It was only in 1992, after Italy's full implementation of the Paket of 1969 and the subsequent Austro-Italian UN declaration that the dispute over South Tyrol was over, that it became possible to have a public discussion of the violence of that period and its wider historical meaning.

Elisabeth Baumgartner, Hans Mayr and Gerhard Mumelter were the first to address the issue comprehensively with the publication of *Feuernacht. Südtirols Bombenjahre. Ein zeitgeschichtliches Lesebuch* [Night of Fire: South Tyrol's Years of Bombings. A Contemporary Reader]. The editors' expressed intention was to start a 'public discussion', the introduction declared that: 'After three decades of silence it is time for the public to deal with this issue, it is time that questions are answered and that positions

2 See Felix Ermacora, *Südtirol und das Vaterland Österreich* (Vienna: Amalthea, 1984), Claus Gatterer, *Im Kampf gegen Rom* (1968), Robert Drechsler, ed., *Sepp Kerschbaumer: Ein Leben für Südtirol* (Vienna: Drechsler, 1965), Viktoria Stadlmayr, 'Italienische Argumente', in Franz Huter, *Südtirol. Eine Frage des europäischen Gewissens* (1965) and Friedl Volgger, *Mit Südtirol am Scheideweg* (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1984).

are taken.³ As the first real engagement with this controversial period at a politically sensitive time, it was careful in its editorial style providing many pictures and statements from both sides of the linguistic divide, in a conscious effort to incorporate all views in the narrative.

The Austrian writer Felix Mitterer followed up on this initiative with a four-part docudrama *Verkaufte Heimat* [Lost Homeland]. Part 3, *Bombenjahre*, dealt specifically with the bombing campaign. Mitterer's TV production reached a wide audience in Germany, Austria and South Tyrol. He depicted the protagonists of the early 1960s and their struggle in a way that was symptomatic of the treatment of the *Bombenjahre* in 1994: his heroes are riddled with self-doubt, troubled by what they felt they must do to save their *Heimat*. This docudrama reflected the *Zeitgeist* in South Tyrol in the same way that more recent publications document the change in perception. More recently, in 2005, RAI Bolzano broadcast a six-part documentary on the bomb attacks of 1961. Through *Bombenjahre* the authors Helmut Lechthaler and Christoph Franceschini managed to reopen a public discussion about the effect of these violent attacks on the political process.

The new national library

The academic debate about the effect of violence has often been characterized by wishful thinking and idealistic approaches, while the public discourse is characterized by a rehabilitation of the 'men and women' of 1961. This rehabilitation resembles historical phenomena of the early twentieth century – that is, those phases of nation-building in the evolution of small states that, after achieving national independence, resort to writing their own history in the light of what has been achieved. Yet modern-day South Tyrol is not a newly founded nation state, but a strong autonomous

3 Baumgartner, Mayr and Mumelter, *Feuernacht*, preface.

province within the 'host state' of Italy. However, an analysis of publications since the 1990s reveals that the bombers of the early 1960s are portrayed as icons. This myth-making is the foundation for the new South Tyrolean 'national library' – a corpus of printed histories of the South Tyrolean struggle. Interest in the *Bombenjahre* has been sufficient to result in a number of publications, both academic, such as Rolf Steininger's 1999 three-volume publication *Südtirol zwischen Diplomatie und Terror* [South Tyrol between Diplomacy and Terrorism],⁴ and non-academic and mainly biographical and highly subjective studies. Most of these publications are more than just memorial accounts of the past in that they place the activists and their individual destinies in the violent period of the 1960s in the wider context of South Tyrolean history in the twentieth century. Close scrutiny of this new literature reveals a strong regional self-confidence, based on the far-reaching constitutional autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano.

As the leader of the SVP (1957–1989) and Landeshauptmann of South Tyrol (1961–1989), Silvius Magnago is considered the founding father of South Tyrolean autonomy. It is generally accepted that he influenced the transition of South Tyrol from an underprivileged and impoverished backwater to the wealthiest and most politically independent region of modern Italy. Gottfried Solderer's publication *Silvius Magnago. Eine Biographie Südtirols* [Silvius Magnago: A Biography of South Tyrol, 1996] is a literary tribute to a man who has become synonymous with the success story of South Tyrol. In this impressive study Solderer draws a very human portrait of Magnago, often as a larger-than-life personality shrouded in the mist of cool professional political distance, an image widely accepted by the South Tyrolean public.

Since 2000 a wave of published biographies and oral histories have sought to, and largely succeeded in, creating a place for the more controversial activists of 1961 in the canon of South Tyrolean history. The (mainly) men portrayed in these biographies generally come from a different background to Magnago's educated and intellectual one; they were farmers,

4 '... a publication so extensive that is thus accessible only to experts', Lill, *Südtirol*, 8.

shopkeepers, students and, above all, family men. Indeed, it is the role of the families and the women behind the activists that have been stressed in recent publications. This approach has facilitated a process whereby the protagonists are humanized and their choices are given moral legitimacy. A more detailed consideration of the most significant of these publications reveals modern South Tyrol's changed perception of the events and activists of 1961.

In 2000, Josef Fontana and Hans Mayr published a biography of Sepp Kerschbaumer, *Sepp Kerschbaumer: Eine Biographie* [A Biography]. Fontana and Mayr were fellow-activists of Kerschbaumer's, who along with Luis Amplatz and Georg Klotz, is considered the main figure of the 'liberation movement'. As leading members of the BAS all three of these men were arrested and interned by the Italian police in 1961, thus they are not merely narrators but also witnesses and protagonists of the violent struggle. This makes for an intimate, well-informed, but also subjective interpretation of Kerschbaumer and the struggle he represented. His struggle was their struggle, and thus an account of his actions is also a justification of their involvement in the violent activities. This proximity to Kerschbaumer makes for a problematic publication and a curious interpretation of his character. Mayr and Fontana do not spend much time on Kerschbaumer's formative background. His journey from shopowner and family man to political activist/terrorist is not considered, instead they explore him through the prism of his role as a BAS-activist and sentenced prison inmate. This is essentially a hagiography and Kerschbaumer is not portrayed in the context of the *Zeitgeist* of his time, but rather from the perspective of 2000. This makes for a regrettably superficial and two-dimensional characterization.⁵

5 A case in point is the historical introduction, which focuses on Kerschbaumer's emergence as an activist: Kerschbaumer joined the SVP in 1946 and stepped down from his post as Ortsobmann (party chairman) of Frangart/Frangarto in 1958. This very significant phase in his life is summarized in one short paragraph which concludes: 'The SVP remained his political home', Josef Fontana and Hans Mayr, *Sepp Kerschbaumer: Eine Biographie* (Bozen: Raetia, 2000), 21. This is factually inaccurate – Kerschbaumer left his post because of the massive divergence in strategy with the SVP leadership – and stylistically most regrettable, because Fontana and

Numerous passages in the biography indicate that the authors were primarily interested in Kerschbaumer's legacy and there are constant attempts to stress his importance for contemporary South Tyrol. When describing his altruism,⁶ his philanthropy,⁷ and his extraordinary tolerance,⁸ the authors note that his qualities are exceptional even 'in the context of today'. This comparison to the present, which serves no purpose in a historical interpretation of Kerschbaumer, reveals the authors' strong personal involvement in the subject. They belong to the generation of South Tyroleans who accepted significant personal risks for their participation in the armed struggle and who paid the price and served time in Italian jails. This generation tends to evaluate the achievements in the living standards in South Tyrol since the 1980s more critically: they equate the current wealth with materialism, complacency and political lethargy. Kerschbaumer symbolizes the opposite: he is passionate in supporting fellow-citizens,⁹ he demonstrates 'exemplary civic courage',¹⁰ he declared his sole responsibility for the attacks of 1961 in the Milan bomb trials in order to protect his fellow-accused,¹¹ and he looked after his fellow inmates in Verona prison 'like a father'.¹²

Mayr rob themselves of the unique opportunity to draw an analytical picture of Kerschbaumer's character in the period 1946–1958, which forms the basis of his later actions. Similarly regrettable in its superficiality is the chapter Kerschbaumer and the Italians, where the authors write: 'He nourished a holy rage towards the official Italy. At the same he helped Italian immigrants when they needed help. He sharply distinguished between people and politics. Everybody who knew him, emphasized this fact.' Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 25. This comment is superfluous; it is a shortcut in interpreting Kerschbaumer which originates not in his time, but in the present. A few pages on, Kerschbaumer as leader of the BAS is being described as follows: 'This [i.e. Kerschbaumer's] tolerance in the home of the South Tyrolean separatist movement was unusual in contemporary South Tyrol and would still be exemplary today.' Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 27.

6 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 28.

7 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 25.

8 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 27.

9 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 84.

10 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 101.

11 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 145, 147.

12 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 207.

Fontana and Mayr repeatedly stress Kerschbaumer's strong Catholic beliefs and his exceptional concern for other human beings,¹³ however, they fail to give plausible and specific reasons for his turning to violence. Instead they present a general picture of post-World War II South Tyrol, they describe in great detail the injustices of the First Autonomy Status of 1947, and emphasize the threat posed by Italian immigration to South Tyrol and the Italian government's fifty-one per cent majorization policy. Their reading confirms the general historical understanding of the period of the 1950s as one of increasing tension in South Tyrol as epitomized by Gamper's 1953 *Dolomiten* article. It is widely accepted that Gamper's characterization of the policy of majorization as a 'the death march of the South Tyroleans' prompted Sepp Kerschbaumer to press the SVP leadership into a more decisive stance against the Italian government. Consequently, he strongly supported the new style of leadership under Silvius Magnago after the internal party revolution in the SVP in 1957. However, Magnago's speech at the Sigmundskron mass gathering disappointed Kerschbaumer, he considered it too moderate and designed to quell public outrage rather than to harness it to bring about real change. Kerschbaumer then took individual action and wrote leaflets in order to mobilize the South Tyroleans politically by encouraging them to take action against Italian oppression. These pamphlets were signed Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol BAS (Liberation Committee of South Tyrol) and widely disseminated. He also displayed great personal courage when in February 1957 he flew the Tyrolean flag from the church steeple in Frangart/Frangarto, for which he was arrested and served ten days in prison. Actions such as these mobilized the public to a degree, and in the following weeks Tyrolean flags appeared in inaccessible yet very visible places throughout the area. Moreover, civil disobedience now had a name and a symbolic figure in Sepp Kerschbaumer. His political struggle continued when he stepped down from his post as an SVP local chairperson, an act Fontana and Mayr claim was motivated by a desire to 'protect the party'.¹⁴ In response to the sentencing of the Pfunderer Buam

13 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 28.

14 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 75.

he began a fifteen-day hunger strike, to highlight what he, and many others, considered was an unjust trial.¹⁵ His letters of protest from prison to the Italian prime minister Amintore Fanfani, president Giovanni Gronchi, and minister of justice Guido Gonella were ignored. Fontana and Mayr regard this series of events as pivotal in Kerschbaumer's disenchantment with the political process and ultimate conclusion that 'we need dynamite'.¹⁶

At this juncture in their political biography, Fontana and Mayr, portray Kerschbaumer as emerging from being a very Catholic, courageous, and disappointed South Tyrolean citizen who was driven by political events to become an activist. However, they are careful to stress that he remained faithful to his Christian beliefs even though he employed violent means to improve the future of his fellow-citizens. The biographers fail to investigate the political alternative represented by Silvius Magnago. They present Kerschbaumer as someone who was forced to become a 'dinamitardo', the Italian term for the South Tyrolean activists. From then on things moved swiftly: Kerschbaumer created an active organization, linked up with North Tyrolean sympathizers who would become instrumental in procuring dynamite, and fell out with its leaders, especially Wolfgang Pfaundler, the North Tyrolean journalist. The groups differed significantly in their strategic considerations which, according to the authors, derived from their diverse individual mentalities.¹⁷ Pfaundler and Kerschbaumer's diverging views relate to the question of whether the violent struggle should be limited to attacks against objects representing Italian supremacy, or whether it should be extended to guerilla warfare and focus on human targets, i.e. carabinieri, soldiers, and Italian political representatives.

Kerschbaumer favoured the fight against the Italian infrastructure, and the authors of his biography support his view strongly. This is a crucial point for the moral legitimacy of their telling of this history, but also of their role in it. A struggle against the symbols of oppression is easier to justify to

15 See chapter 8.

16 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 101.

17 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 117.

today's readership than attacks on human targets.¹⁸ Josef Fontana and Hans Mayr created an image of Sepp Kerschbaumer that was easy to contextualize in a peaceful society at the turn of the millennium. Kerschbaumer's ethics, his courage, and his initially peaceful struggle conform to current political ethics, and he is thus transformed into a modern unifying figure representing South Tyrol's struggle for cultural independence from Italy. Few in South Tyrol disagree with his moderate anti-Italianism – directed against Italian policies but never against individual Italians. Furthermore, Fontana and Mayr use the opportunity to ascribe anti-Germanism to Italian policies and Italian demonstrations in Bozen/Bolzano, even though several historians have argued that at the root of the controversial Italian policies against South Tyrol lay the fear of fragmentation of the Italian state.¹⁹

Kerschbaumer, however, remains an icon: his letters from prison are described as the 'poetry of a virtuous heart', his altruism is praised and he is compared to an unknown Italian saint.²⁰ His funeral in 1964 is recast as a religious pilgrimage – a third Sigmundskron.²¹ Fontana and Mayr recall a protagonist who was opposed to division and disintegration, worked for peace and justice, for unity and cohesion in the pursuit of South Tyrolean freedom.²² The Sepp Kerschbaumer that they create is designed as a role model for the reader of the twenty-first century. Their biography is less true to the historical Kerschbaumer than to an idea of his legacy, which, in turn, includes them as members of Kerschbaumer's group. The chief aim

18 Nevertheless, they are careful not to come down too hard on the other group and its most prominent members, Wolfgang Pfaundler, Georg Klotz, and Luis Amplatz, as they describe the relationship between the two groups as a 'Nebeneinander, nicht Miteinander' (a parallel struggle, not a concerted one), yet at the same time it is not a 'Gegeneinander' (fight against each other) either. Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 103.

19 At the same time the Trient Carabinieri trials of 1963 would lend themselves to anti-Italian polemics, but here Fontana and Mayr remain moderate in their criticism of events which are clearly in the past and which have, thanks to the dynamics of the autonomy process of the 1970s and 80s, become history.

20 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 169.

21 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 216.

22 Fontana and Mayr, *Kerschbaumer*, 223.

of the biography is to ensure Kerschbaumer's legacy is understood as morally legitimate and therefore one that can be owned by the entire German South Tyrolean population.

In 2000, Sepp Mitterhofer and Günther Obwegs published a monograph with an unambiguous programmatic title: '*... Es blieb kein anderer Weg ...*' *Zeitzeugenberichte und Dokumente aus dem Südtiroler Freiheitskampf* [There was no other way ... Eyewitness Reports and Documents from the South Tyrolean Struggle for Freedom]. The title asserts from the outset that the violence of 1961 was not only inevitable but also morally unavoidable. The preface articulates the two main functions of the book: first, to record and explain the events of the past to the younger generation; secondly, to claim a monopoly on the truth or more emotively to end the 'litany of lies which has shrouded the 1960s struggle for freedom' and 'instead tell[s] the truth'.²³ Thus the book is aimed at the new generation of South Tyroleans, the post-bombing autonomy generation. Crucially, it also claims a monopoly on the truth, implying that there is but one truth. The narrative of South Tyrol's struggle as reflected in all these essays²⁴ is set in stone as one of 'necessary self-defence'.²⁵

In his essay Hans Stieler, leader of the so-called Stieler Group, which became famous at the end of the 1950s, sets the context for a reading of the bombing period as self-defence. He describes in detail the political situation of post-World War II South Tyrol: Italy remains fascist, the SVP betrays 'our homes',²⁶ German-speaking South Tyroleans are dispossessed of property and forced to emigrate, while Italian workers flood the area.²⁷ According to Stieler this context was vital to the formation of the Stieler Group in 1955. Its members were gravely concerned for the future of their

23 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 13.

24 The contributors are well-known activists such as Hans Stieler, Sepp Mitterhofer, Luis Steinegger and Luis Gutmann, but there are also contributions by some of the women of the resistance movement, such as Maria Mitterhofer, Rosa Klotz, and Midl von Sölder.

25 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 45.

26 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 26.

27 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 27.

Heimatland and, in order to highlight the plight of the people, created home-made bombs to warn 'our politicians to become harder in their negotiations' for independence from Italy. In his contribution Stieler argues there was a strong connection between the Italian negotiation strategy of obfuscation and delaying tactics and the subsequent violence. Stieler's rationale is that injustice creates resistance, and resistance is another form of negotiation between the oppressors and the oppressed.²⁸

All the contributors to Mitterhofer and Obwegs's collection address the issue of Italian suppression after the bomb attacks and the torture of those arrested. This focus shifts the critical attention away from bombs and the violent deeds of the activists and on to the brutality of the Italian regime. The activists' violence is only mentioned in one short subordinate clause, while the acts of torture that the carabinieri inflict on those arrested is moved centre stage. In other words, the acts of violence are seen as the context for Italian torture. Mitterhofer, for example, repeatedly stresses that it was the isolation of the South Tyroleans that forced innocent citizens into using violence as a means of protest. He portrays these citizens as compelled to action in the face of genocide.²⁹ Furthermore, they were Catholic – albeit disappointed by their church and their bishop – and consequently anti-Communist.³⁰ This presents Mitterhofer and Obwegs's freedom fighters as individuals who were embedded in the societal consensus of past and present-day South Tyrol and whose deeds in the 1960s are therefore deemed acceptable even by modern standards. They also deliberately attach these fighters to Sepp Kerschbaumer and his more benign militancy of violence against objects rather than people. Mitterhofer and Obwegs cite Rosa Klotz, wife of Georg Klotz, the most notorious guerrilla fighter of the period, who claims that Klotz and Kerschbaumer had solemnly declared that they would devote themselves to liberating South Tyrol.³¹ By associating these activists with Kerschbaumer the authors seek

28 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 34.

29 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 45.

30 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 78, 46.

31 This was in '1959 or 1960' and they had done this in the presence of 'an embroidered pillow featuring the Tyrolean eagle', Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 163.

to rehabilitate them and redeem their reputation in the light of the general social approval for Kerschbaumer and his ideals and methods. Mitterhofer and Obwegs's book seeks to reconstruct the history of South Tyrol's struggle for autonomy as a moral one in which all members of the German-speaking population were united.

Luis Amplatz is consequently portrayed as a man of great political wisdom and vision, as one of the first to recognize the significance of Italian plans to marginalize the German population.³² South Tyrolean resistance is conceptualized as a 'self-defence against an unjust regime'³³ and thus similar to contemporary colonial struggles, where rules and laws were violated in pursuit of just liberation. Luis Gutmann summarizes the situation thus: 'We violated Italian law but we obtained moral justice.'³⁴ The struggle for South Tyrolean liberation is thus portrayed as one that transcends legal justice *because* it is a moral fight.

If the reader accepts this interpretation, he/she will see the protagonists as heroes of an ethnic and national struggle. Obviously, this reading is not necessarily historically accurate, but motivated by a political agenda. Crucially, Mitterhofer and Obwegs use their book to strongly criticize contemporary efforts by the SVP to harmonize the relationship between the Italian and German people in South Tyrol.³⁵ They vehemently disagree with any attempt to find compromises: for example, they label the recognition of Italian road signs as 'rape'. In similarly trenchant vein mixed marriages between Italians and Germans in South Tyrol are regarded as having a negative impact on South Tyrolean culture, which reveals that the authors remain attached to the liberation movement's principle of cultural 'apartheid'. Fortunately, this ethnic chauvinism has little relevance in twenty-first-century South Tyrol.

Mitterhofer and Obwegs's attempts to justify morally the actions of guerilla fighters Amplatz and Klotz paved the way for Eva Klotz to publish

32 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 102.

33 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 270.

34 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 110.

35 Mitterhofer and Obwegs, *Kein anderer Weg*, 346.

the biography of her father, *Georg Klotz. Freiheitskämpfer für die Einheit Tirols* [Georg Klotz: Freedom Fighter for the Unity of Tyrol] in 2002. Klotz tells the story of the freedom fighter partly from her own perspective as a daughter, partly from a third-person narrator's point of view. Her perspective changes often and abruptly, which makes the book quite difficult to read, but she also provides the reader with insights into the family life of a freedom fighter. While the book is in the genre of memory literature, it is also overtly political in its message.

Eva Klotz paints a picture of her father as a tragic hero: he is a freedom fighter who pursues his path of violent activism even though this creates immense hardship for him and his family of six. As a hero he suffers persecution and betrayal which drives him into the mountains of South Tyrol; he is forced to emigrate to Austria where he suffers acute home sickness and repeatedly returns to South Tyrol illegally to see his farmstead and his family. Ultimately, he is a tragic hero because his ideal of armed resistance to liberate South Tyrol becomes anachronistic and outdated after the Paket of 1969. He remains an outcast, outliving his old comrades Sepp Kerschbaumer, Kurt Welser and Luis Amplatz. In the latter years of his life he experiences real loneliness as he feels the Tyrolean people no longer support him and his fight.³⁶ Though he survives an assassination attack, he finally dies from smoking-related disease, and his slow death is attributed by his daughter to his bitterness about Austria.³⁷

Eva sets out to rehabilitate her father's reputation and present him in a heroic light. While he remains throughout the book the lone wolf who adheres to nothing but his own strong principles, his daughter seeks to humanize him and thereby diminish the impression of his remoteness. She describes him as a military strategist,³⁸ calls him the symbol of Italian defeat,³⁹ a knightly and valiant warrior,⁴⁰ but at the same time compassion-

36 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 308.

37 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 314.

38 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 73.

39 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 152.

40 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 123, 104.

ate, caring and full of sympathy.⁴¹ In Eva's hands he is not an adventurer, but a liberation fighter who devotes his service entirely to his country in order to achieve South Tyrolean self-determination.

Central to Rosa's (Eva's mother's) portrayal of her husband in the same publication is the image of him as a family man, in this way she personalizes his story: his story becomes a family's story and, by implication, a society's story. Eva calls South Tyrolean society to book: her father, her family carried out South Tyrol's struggle often without their society's support. Eva describes how her mother, Rosa, attempted to meet her husband and was unable to even trust her neighbours.⁴² She portrays the SVP as negligent, claiming that even they failed to support the freedom fighters when they were exposed to systematic police torture.⁴³ In fact, she regards the SVP as traitors who condemned the attacks and welcomed the exile of Amplatz and Klotz.⁴⁴ Klotz had to endure lasting separation from his family, loneliness, and home-sickness.⁴⁵ His personal fight for South Tyrolean freedom only ended with the SVP's – with the Paket. However, even when he sought reconciliation with the Italian authorities he was rejected. He was forced to live his life away from his beloved South Tyrol making a modest living as a forest worker in Northern Tyrol living in a small mountain hut. His final 'hut' existence in many senses symbolized his literal, moral and political isolation from his *Heimat*.⁴⁶ Eva Klotz's portrayal of her father bears many characteristics of the hero in a Greek tragedy. He is larger-than-life, a hero who can only be brought down through conspiracy and intrigue.⁴⁷

In 2003 the journalist Astrid Kofler published *Zersprengtes Leben. Frauen in den Südtiroler Bombenjahren* [Scattered Lives: Women in the South Tyrolean Years of Bombing], which offered a very different perspective on the years of violence. Kofler employs a mixture of social his-

41 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 78.

42 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 147–149.

43 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 103.

44 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 179.

45 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 308.

46 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 327.

47 Klotz, *Georg Klotz*, 177, 181, 248.

tory, politics and psychology as she presents various different women and their recollections of the period. The women are from ‘scattered’ backgrounds including various walks of life and diverse political perspectives who recount their experiences of the bombing era. None of the women interviewed – Rosa Klotz, Anna Amplatz, Pia Widmann, Maya Mayr and Rosa Gutmann, to name but a few – raise the question of guilt, justice, or injustice. As victims of the political circumstances they present a forum of experiences and background information. All of them have their (political) views, but these come second to recollections of a more personal nature. They state ‘our family lives were “blown up to pieces” because our fate was determined by our husbands.’⁴⁸

While Kofler’s interviewees do touch on the reasons why their husbands turned to violence in the early 1960s, which include: cultural suppression,⁴⁹ financial discrimination,⁵⁰ and political repression,⁵¹ the emphasis is on surviving the struggle. Every day life takes centre stage in these narratives which personalize the struggle and its consequences on family life. As Midl von Sölder recalls: ‘Everyday life did not leave us women any time for despair.’⁵² Their children suffered ostracization in school,⁵³ and they were abandoned by the SVP.⁵⁴ These women’s story is one of isolation and betrayal within and beyond the family framework,⁵⁵ despite occasional moments of solidarity.⁵⁶

The women’s narratives are peppered with tales of personal courage. Midl von Sölder challenges the prison priest in the confessional,⁵⁷ Maya Mayr swallows explosive capsules in order to get them past the Italian border

48 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 80.

49 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 219.

50 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 34, 117.

51 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 248.

52 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 82.

53 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 89.

54 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 77.

55 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 242.

56 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 186, 290.

57 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 32.

control,⁵⁸ and Rosa Klotz becomes the ‘Mother Courage’ of the South Tyrolean liberation struggle,⁵⁹ sustaining the fighters with moral support, providing shelter and looking after their abandoned families. This book seeks to explain a complex historical period through the prism of family life, exposing the degree of private suffering and the deep social wounds inflicted at the time. As Christl Kerschbaumer noted, when commenting on the publication, ‘history was not and still is not amusing – it left traces in all families.’⁶⁰ Astrid Kofler refrains from passing political judgment on the 1960s, instead she gives those contemporaries who had not been heard before a public voice and thus contributes substantially to a better understanding of the period of the *Bombenjahre*. This approach also facilitates a personalizing of this history. It is in some senses depoliticized and reconceptualized through the lived experiences of ‘ordinary people’. The implication is that this could be anyone’s story, anyone’s history.

Günter Obwegs’s 2004 biography of Luis Amplatz, *Ein Leben für Tirol* [A Life for Tyrol] serves a similar purpose and adopts a similar approach to Mitterhofer and Obwegs’s *Es blieb kein anderer Weg*. Alongside Kerschbaumer and Klotz, Amplatz was the third in the triumvirate of icons of the 1960s South Tyrolean struggle. Amplatz has generally been portrayed as a man who embraced life and remained an idealist until the day of his assassination in 1964. He was killed by the Italian agent Christian Kerbler in the Brunner Mahder, high above the Passeiertal/Val Passiria. Amplatz is an ideal subject for any biographer: full of life, a family man who embraced tradition and folklore and who had a great sense of humour. Nonetheless, because Obwegs uses the biography to express his anti-Italianism, Amplatz is stripped of his dynamism and appears lifeless and two-dimensional. Obwegs’s study is superficial and serves to obscure his subject. Amplatz is presented as a man who, compelled by the *Zeitgeist* of his time – which the author is at pains to stress – exceeded the imagination of modern-day contemporaries: ‘Today’s people, who are wealthy, may struggle to

58 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 254.

59 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 216.

60 Kofler, *Zersprengtes Leben*, 212.

understand, but what was done then was done because of desperation which was visible and tangible everywhere.⁶¹ However, in his anxiety to elucidate that period, Obwegs presents an oversimplified narrative in which the fascist Italian state is full of sadistic Italian policemen⁶² and noble South Tyrolean freedom fighters. In this context his hero, Amplatz, is forced to conclude that 'politics and talk alone will not change this state.'⁶³ In using Amplatz as a vehicle to express his own political views, Obwegs obscures the historical person.

In 2005, Hans-Karl Peterlini with his survey book *Südtiroler Bombenjahre. Von Blut und Tränen zum Happy End?* [South Tyrolean Years of Bombings: From Blood and Tears towards a Happy End?] sought to track this historical revision of the period. Peterlini's title reveals the central vein of this revisionism: the move to re-imagine the blood and tears as part of, if not responsible for, the happy ending of autonomy. Peterlini retells the story of the *Bombenjahre* and presents them in the context of the millennium, but does not, in essence, revolutionize the view of the period, rather he contextualizes the roles of the main protagonists for a post-1960s generation. This is a considerable challenge as his audience, particularly South Tyrol's younger generation, have no real concept of material poverty and political repression, the two things that define the narrative of the time. He reinterprets the violence of the 1960s from the perspective of a modern South Tyrolean by taking into account the successfully achieved South Tyrolean autonomy.

These twenty-first-century accounts of the violent struggle of the 1960s quite deliberately personalize the history of South Tyrol and the fight for autonomy. In so doing, they place that history at the heart of South Tyrolean society, normalizing the protagonists rather than exceptionalizing them: these are ordinary heroes with families. This emphasis on the personal is underscored by an attempt to retell history as 'lived experience'; hence the

61 Günther Obwegs, *Freund, der du die Sonne noch schaust ... Luis Amplatz: Ein Leben für Tirol* (Bozen: Athesia, 2004), 27.

62 Obwegs, *Leben für Tirol*, 96.

63 Obwegs, *Leben für Tirol*, 31.

decisions made to use violence are recontextualized and thereby reconceptualized as human choices in the absence of hindsight. The bombing years explained in the light of human choices by real people has made the task of inserting these men and women into the history of South Tyrolean autonomy a more morally acceptable undertaking.

Commemoration and Collective Memory

Establishing the South Tyrolean autonomy, politically and economically, has also led to the development of a South Tyrolean collective identity, which remembers the past in a different way to previous generations. The following analysis of selected crucial events in the Province's history reveals the changes in the way South Tyrol interprets its past.

Remembering the Paris agreement

The year 2006 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Paris Treaty, a treaty negotiated by the then foreign ministers of Italy and Austria, Alcide de Gasperi and Karl Gruber. The treaty's core point was an agreement regarding the return of the 75,000 'Optanten' and a significant degree of autonomy for South Tyrol. As has been discussed in a previous chapter, the status of this treaty, which was not actually a treaty, caused considerable anxiety in the German South Tyroleans. In view of this controversy and ambiguity it is revealing to see how the so-called treaty has entered the realm of public memory in South Tyrol as this agreement has proved difficult for modern South Tyrol to evaluate and interpret.

Immediately after the treaty political commentators in both North Tyrol and in Vienna were extremely critical of Gruber. Innsbruck, in particular, was very vociferous in its disappointment that the division of Tyrol had been reaffirmed and, in effect, signed and sealed by this agreement. It believed that a reunification of North and South Tyrol was rendered even less likely by Gruber's Paris agreement. It was difficult afterwards to develop

any vision of a united Tyrol.¹ The view of the South Tyrolean political elite was somewhat more positive, for example, the SVP paper *Volksbote* regarded the agreement as progress because at least Italy had acknowledged the political existence of the South Tyrolean people.²

The Innsbruck based *Tiroler Tageszeitung* hailed the agreement as a compromise between law and power,³ but the *Dolomiten* complained that South Tyrol had once again become a victim of greater interests.⁴ However, there was general relief in South Tyrol that the 'Optanten' issue had now been resolved and that the fellow South Tyroleans, who still remained abroad, would now be allowed to return home. This relief was tempered by uneasiness regarding the geographical size of the region which was to receive a degree of autonomy from Italy under this agreement. These reservations were entirely justified as the emergence of the new amalgamated region Trentino-Alto Adige in 1948 was to demonstrate. A decade later the Paris agreement was all but forgotten as South Tyrol entered a period of increased tensions, a period marked by people's frustration about the political realities of the Region and by the first instances of radical violence. The political slogans of this time were 'Los von Rom!' and 'Los von Trient!', and the SVP managed to capitalize on the meeting at Sigmundskron.

The twentieth anniversary, 1966, was no time to reflect on the Gruber deGasperi agreement. South Tyrol was reeling from the effects of bomb attacks and tough political negotiations. In 1976, the diplomatic relationship between Italy and Austria was worse than ever before, however, thirty years after the agreement, the conflict had largely passed. The Paket had been approved and autonomy for South Tyrol had been granted by Rome. With these secure political foundations public commemoration of 1946 was an option.

In 1976 in an article in *Europa Ethnica* Viktoria Stadlmayer, long-serving and legendary head of the 'Referat S', the South Tyrol department in

1 Jennifer Hegarty-Owens, 'Gedenken an das Gruber-deGasperi Abkommen: 1946 bis 2006' (Unpublished MA Thesis: University College Dublin, 2007), 25.

2 *Volksbote* (12 September 1946).

3 *Tiroler Tageszeitung* (7 September 1946).

4 *Dolomiten* (9 September 1946).

the Tyrolean government in Innsbruck, criticized the Italian state's approach to the 'Pariser Vertrag' arguing that it regarded it as a 'one-off payment' which allowed the state to cast the issue aside.⁵ This she contrasts with the Austrians who considered it as a temporary platform for the existence of the South Tyroleans, which would be developed through further negotiations. For the South Tyroleans the agreement was negative, because they endured worse political and economic hardship than before World War I. Many in South Tyrol had hoped the agreement would be a 'Magna Carta', but only after 1972 and the ratification of the Second Statute of Autonomy, was there any noticeable progress in the area. South Tyrol was well on course to becoming a regional state; however its development was overshadowed by many difficulties and dangers which created an atmosphere of uncertainty. As Stadlmayer noted: 'South Tyrol today is even more at risk than twenty or thirty years ago. It is currently on dry land, while beside it there is political, social and moral marshland. If the waves roll over it tomorrow, will Austria be able to help again?'⁶

The magazine *Südtirol in Wort und Bild* commemorated the thirtieth anniversary with a reprint of an radio interview that Gruber had given the Österreichischer Rundfunk Tirol (ORF).⁷ This piece reflected the contemporary criticism of Gruber as inexperienced, particularly when faced with deGasperi. This inexperience, it was claimed, allowed deGasperi to gain significant ground in negotiations. In 1976, Gruber rejected this allegation, while apologizing for the shortcomings of what he referred to as the 'Gentlemen's agreement'. However, in mitigation he cited the extremely tight time frame in which the agreement had to be drawn up and the difficulties posed by the many different languages employed during the conference and the fact that German was not one of them. He argued that he had been driven by the desire to achieve something for South Tyrol and to define it internationally. Stadlmayer, representing the North Tyrolean

5 Viktoria Stadlmayer, '30 Jahre Pariser Vertrag', in *Europa Ethnica. Vierteljahresschrift für Nationalitätenfragen* Jahrgang 33 (1976), 104f.

6 Stadlmayer, '30 Jahre Pariser Vertrag', 105.

7 Südtirol in Wort und Bild, November 1976, 2–5.

view, waded into the debate by stressing this Austrian weakness referring to South Tyrol as little more than ‘small change in the international market’, to quote Stadlmayer’s famous phrase.⁸ The historian Rolf Steininger entered the debate in 1987 by supporting Gruber’s argument and also pointing out that he had been further hampered by the international climate in which Austria was weak and anti-German sentiment was widespread. In fact, Steininger argued that South Tyrol had been the first victim of international Cold War diplomacy.⁹ However, providing academic legitimacy to Gruber’s view of his own historical role, the historian described the agreement as a major contributing factor in Austria’s decision to bring the South Tyrol question before the United Nations in 1960.

The fact that Gruber felt it necessary in 1976 to defend himself and his role in the brokering of the 1946 agreement, reveals that the agreement and its legacy had new political relevance and potency in 1976 South Tyrol. During this period, South Tyrol was only beginning to define itself as an autonomous region following the granting of autonomy status in 1972. Thus 30-year commemorations revealed an attempt to analyse the Gruber deGasperi agreement in the light of the new autonomy. Gruber as protagonist, Stadlmayer as the voice of diplomatic Tyrol, and Steininger as historian, all played a role in this crucial phase of the agreement’s historicization in the 1970s and 1980s. These debates marked the beginnings of the conceptualization of the Gruber deGasperi agreement as one of the foundation stones of the future autonomy.

By 2006 the idea of the Gruber deGasperi agreement as central to the history of the autonomy of South Tyrol was firmly established. In the commemorations of that year the chairman of the SVP, Elmar Pichler Rolle, hailed the agreement as crucial to the achievement of South Tyrol’s far-reaching independence from Italy. However, there was an awareness that this interpretation could alienate Italians in the region. Therefore,

8 See Viktoria Stadlmayer, *Kein Kleingeld im Länderschacher: Südtirol, Triest und Alcide deGasperi 1945–1946* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 2002).

9 Rolf Steininger, *Autonomie oder Selbstbestimmung? Die Südtirolfrage 1945/1946 und das Gruber – De-Gasperi-Abkommen* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006), preface.

the SVP's official website urged South Tyroleans to 'commemorate' rather than 'celebrate' the significance of the agreement. This distinction implied that the SVP regarded the process of commemoration as somehow more sensitive and respectful of competing traditions in the area. This was not celebratory in a chauvinistic fashion, rather commemorative in a historical sense.

The South Tyrolean Press Office designed a website dedicated to commemorating the agreement. Significantly, the webpage was presented in an educational format containing historical detail, documents and eyewitness accounts. The webpage characterized the agreement as an 'international contract', which stressed its potential role as a model for other minority conflicts. It asked, for example: 'Does the solution of the South Tyrol problem provide a key to the Tibet issue?'¹⁰ This reading of the agreement was echoed by South Tyrol's print media, which by and large praised the agreement as a foundation for South Tyrolean autonomy.¹¹ The significance of the 2006 commemorations lies in the fact that South Tyrol appeared confident enough in its autonomous status to be conciliatory, to be concerned about how its commemoration of that process might be regarded by its Italian fellow citizens.

Commemorating Sigmundskron

November 2007 saw the fiftieth anniversary of the Sigmundskron mass rally. At this rally the young and charismatic new chairman of the SVP, Silvius Magnago, coined the phrase 'Los von Trient!' to spearhead the political struggle for a 'real' autonomy for South Tyrol. This was a critical juncture in South Tyrolean history as Magnago simultaneously confronted those

10 <<http://www.provinz.bz.it/pariservertrag/autonomic/tibetfrage.asp>>, accessed 25 October 2011.

11 Hegarty-Owens, 'Gruber de Gasperi', 41–45.

demanding separation from Italy or 'Los von Rom!' and harnessed the collective anger for the more moderate (and achievable aim) of meaningful autonomy. Effectively, at Sigmundskron, Magnago managed to secure a mandate for his more moderate political demand which went hand in hand with a rejection of radical violence in the political arena. This cemented his role as the main political voice of the South Tyrolean people until 1989.

The commemoration of Sigmundskron has been considerably less problematic than the Gruber deGasperi agreement or the bombing campaigns of the 1950s and 60s. Sigmundskron has been celebrated as a crucial turning point and the beginning of a very successful development which was crowned by the Paket in 1969. A testament to the unproblematic nature of this event in South Tyrolean's collective memory is Margareth Lun and Hans Veneri's 2007 illustrated coffee-table book of the event. In this book the events of 17 November 1957 are aestheticized with beautiful photos that attempted to capture the solidarity of the day. Eyewitness accounts stress the atmosphere and the sense of a collective turning point.¹² The *Dolomiten* also joined the public commemoration of Sigmundskron and published an extra photo supplement entitled: 'November 17 – a day that changed South Tyrol forever'. The SVP took the opportunity to 'thank' Magnago and thereby reassert its connection to him and the successful autonomy. The party also explicitly reaffirmed its position the people's party by also thanking the:

many thousand South Tyroleans who, 50 years ago to the day, followed the call of the South Tyroleans People's party and voiced their support for the party's slogan 'Los von Trient!' Led by Silvius Magnago, their courage and political wisdom turned the event into another landmark on the path of history towards the success of the South Tyrolean autonomy.¹³

In the same commemorative period, writing in the *FF* magazine, the historian Gerald Steinacher offered academic confirmation of Sigmundskron

12 Margareth Lun and Hans Veneri, *Der Tag von Sigmundskron: Eine Kundgebung macht Geschichte, 17. November 1957* (Bozen: Südtiroler Schützenbund, 2007).

13 *Dolomiten* (17/18 November 2007), 48.

as a landmark. Interestingly, Steinacher regarded the commemorations as a process of 'small nation building',¹⁴ whereby South Tyrol was establishing foundation myths and symbols. He compared this region's foundation myths to the role played by the myths of well-established nation states, for example, Switzerland's Rütli oath, the United States of America's Declaration of Independence, the Austrian's Staatsvertrag of 1955¹⁵ and the Germans' Hambach festival of 1832. In comparing South Tyrol's commemorations as foundation myths akin to those created by other nation states, Steinacher used the commemorative process to underscore South Tyrol's nation-like qualities. However, he also offered a contemporary warning that foundation myths could foster complacency and/or a culture of alienation. Thus he urged South Tyrol to build an inclusive commemorative process that represented, or at least did not alienate, its Ladin and Italian people. In the same issue, the historian and politician Hans Heiss echoed Steinacher's warning by reminding the South Tyroleans that those who had supported Magnago had, nevertheless, failed to support those political activists who were tortured and incarcerated following the events of 1961.¹⁶

These debates contribute to keeping these institutionalized days of 'regional' memory from becoming complacent days of self-congratulation. They are also a reminder that commemoration is never neutral, that it is itself a dynamic process that not only reflects current preoccupations, but can also impact and alter the future. It is, therefore, crucial that every generation re-engages with these commemorations and the history they represent, in order to ensure history does not become a pretext for chauvinistic exclusion of any social or political grouping. In 2007, Steinacher by cautioning against commemoration becoming a means to exclude Ladins or Italians, was attempting to draw attention to the danger of cementing the ethnic divisions in the region. Thus commemorations do not just provide an opportunity for historical reflection, they also offer society a chance to reflect on the future it wants to create.

14 *FF*, Steinacher, '15. November 2007', 38–45.

15 *FF*, Steinacher, 43.

16 *FF*, Heiss, 'Basar der Erinnerung', 50f.

The victory monument, the Pascoli School and the Italian-German relationship in South Tyrol

While the German-speaking minority in Italy is now enjoying its special status as a minority, the Italian minority in South Tyrol is being forced to redefine itself as a minority in South Tyrol. This process has been painful and very slow because political coteries in all three linguistic groups have been forgetful of the fact that the autonomy protects all three groups and not just the German-speaking one. Steininger has pointed out that there is no real cooperation between these groups in South Tyrol, but instead a very orderly coexistence of two or three parallel societies.¹⁷ His conviction is supported when one examines the two biggest newspapers in the region, the German-speaking *Dolomiten* and the Italian *Alto Adige*. On a daily basis both papers reflect two very different realities and perspectives usually covering different stories and almost always offering very different views on society. Even their subtitles, *Tagblatt der Südtiroler* and the *Corriere delle Alpi*, suggest that each is taking a different view on South Tyrol. The papers' weather forecast sections also hint at different perspectives: the *Dolomiten* predict the weather for the entire geographical region of the historical Tyrol, from the Austrian town of Kufstein in the North to Rovereto in the South, while *Alto Adige* confines its forecast to the area of South Tyrol and Trentino.

Two parallel societies are nonetheless better than two opposing ones, especially when one takes into account the painful history of the past ninety years. There can be no doubt, however, that South Tyroleans (of all three linguistic/ethnic groups) need to work on improving this interrelationship in order to ensure that the autonomy works in the long run. To this end, history, or rather its use, has not facilitated closer relations or greater understanding among the three groups. First of all, each has its own historical narrative with which to explain the past and which informs three diverging public memories of the twentieth century in South Tyrol. A communal

17 Steininger, *Südtirol vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart*, 116.

history, one which integrates and balances these narratives is extremely hard to imagine at present. The process of ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ [coming to terms with the past], has been so fundamentally different for each group. For the German-speaking group history has been a key to turning suppression into political success. The Ladins are gradually beginning to look to their specific historical narrative, the Italian population has not in any real way embraced its historical roots in the region. Especially the period of Fascism, which is most prominent and has left the deepest scars on South Tyrol, has become an issue where both major groups are diametrically opposed in their interpretation. To the German-speaking South Tyroleans, Italian Fascism symbolizes suppression and injustice, while the Italians in South Tyrol see the era of Mussolini as the period in which they came in large numbers to South Tyrol to work and live in the country. The Italian annexation is, as Lucio Giudiceandrea points out, at the root of both the German South Tyrolean and the Italian definition of themselves as a collective identity. While the German South Tyroleans suffered under Mussolini’s attempts to Italianize them, the Italians followed the fascist myth that they had to bring civilization to South Tyrol. However, Giudiceandrea’s historical analysis indicates that the Italians in South Tyrol could also justifiably be considered as victims of Fascism:

The superior Roman-Fascist Italian was to bring the barbarians culture and was to teach them. During Fascism and unfortunately even later this became the mission given to tens of thousands of families who left their regions and moved to South Tyrol. Following developments, however, revealed that they, just like the German and Ladin-speaking South Tyroleans, had in fact become victims of the state’s nationalist policy.¹⁸

The differences in interpretation of South Tyrolean history is particularly apparent in the way both groups deal with the artefacts of the fascist past. The numerous controversies about these *lieux de mémoires* have always

18 Lucio Giudiceandrea, ‘SüdtirolerIn als Identität: Die schwierige Ausbildung von Identitätsmodellen in Südtirol’, in Georg Grote and Barbara Siller, eds, *Südtirolismen: Erinnerungskulturen, Gegenwartsreflexionen, Zukunftsvisionen* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 2011), 281–292, 282.

come to a head at the Siegesdenkmal [victory monument] by the river Talfer, the sheer existence of which divides the South Tyrolean population deeply, while, at the same time, it suggests to the visitor a very 'relaxed' way of dealing with the fascist past. Many scars of the fascist past have healed and many symbols of German South Tyrol have returned to their old places in Bozen/Bolzano. The monument of Walther von der Vogelweide was returned to its square in 1981, the Laurinbrunnen, which had been damaged in 1933, was restored in 1993 and is now situated in front of the South Tyrolean regional parliament, and even the Bozen/Bolzano Museum was given back its traditional tower.

Nevertheless, Benito Mussolini's face is still staring down from the tax office and opposite that there is the Amba-Alagi Street commemorating the military success of the fascists in Abyssinia in 1935/36. Just up the road is the 'Siegesdenkmal' bearing its chauvinist message. The 'Siegesdenkmal' is surrounded by a low fence, which, however, is not enough to musealize the monument. Thomas Pardatscher provides a detailed analysis of the political conflicts of the 1980s and 90s surrounding the monument, which led to deep rifts among the two national groups in South Tyrol.¹⁹ It has not been possible so far to depoliticize the monument as both sides have used its very existence for their political ends.

In 2002 the Bozen/Bolzano local council decided to rename the square on which the monument stands as the Peace Square rather than Victory Square. Street signs were changed accordingly. The neofascist Alleanza Nazionale (AN) reacted immediately afterwards and conducted a survey of the citizens of Bozen/Bolzano, the vast majority of whom are Italian, which revealed that sixty-two per cent favoured 'victory' rather than 'peace'. The square had to be re-renamed and is still called Siegesplatz to this day. The result of this survey should not, however, lead to the conclusion that all Italian-speaking citizens of Bozen/Bolzano are fascists, but it reveals a deep-seated insecurity among the Italian population and a sentiment of not feeling properly at home in South Tyrol. The vast majority of Italians living in South Tyrol are descendants of immigrants from the South during the

19 See Pardatscher, *Siegesdenkmal*, 182f.

fascist era and have lived in South Tyrol for two or even three generations. As the autonomy developed so quickly after 1972 and the German-speaking group became the driving force in the area, many estranged Italians have simply held on to all things Italian regardless of the political and historical connotations insisting on the integrity of artifacts that remind them of their forefathers' immigration to South Tyrol.

Another striking example which demonstrates this defensive attitude to history is the 2006 controversy over the redesignation of the Pascoli School house. The school, which was built during the fascist era, was lying empty and the local council decided to refurbish it as the city's main library. This scheme would have allowed the centralization in one library of the material scattered throughout smaller libraries all over Bozen/Bolzano. There was a massive protest from the Italian population, whose representatives argued that the school represented Italian art and was thus a part of their understanding of what the German language describes as 'Heimat'.

Irrespective of, or perhaps increasingly because of, South Tyrol's successful autonomy, the historical ownership of the province's monuments, landmarks and events remains contested. It is in the commemoration of historical events that these tensions become particularly obvious. In fact, contemporary tensions are often articulated and played out in the various commemorations. With each recurrence of commemoration of the events like the Gruber deGasperi agreement and the Sigmundskron mass rally, the South Tyroleans repeatedly work out the contemporary relevance of their past. However, these commemorations have, by their very nature, objectified and excluded the Italian population. As the South Tyroleans have gradually outgrown the notion of themselves as victims, sections of the Italian population have begun to regard themselves as the new victims. In fact, representatives of this group, such as the journalist Lucio Giudiceandrea, have argued that the Italians could also be considered victims of Fascism. This reading of the past could offer a bridge between the 'parallel communities' in South Tyrol, as in this reading Fascism becomes the central force of oppression. However, this has not occurred as yet because a significant section of the Italian population regard Fascism and its monuments as sites of their identity and history in South Tyrol.

The case of South Tyrol thus exemplifies the complexity of cultural identity formation over time in an area of Europe that is both unique in its historical, social, linguistic and ethnic composition, but at the same time is typical of the issues which arise from the problematic interface between politics and culture for minority communities worldwide.

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Index

- Adenauer, Konrad 75
Amonn, Erich 71, 107
Amplatz, Luis 102–103
 Milan trials 105
 remembering Amplatz 147, 151,
 154–159
ARGE ALP 122
- Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol (BAS) 92,
 149
Blutsonntag 35–36
Brugger, Siegfried 123
- Canestrini, Sandro 143–144
Ciano, Galeazzo 56, 67
Cold War 1, 74, 99, 164
Credaro, Luigi 32
Crispi, Francesco 10
- DeGasperi, Alcide 122, 127
 and Gruber deGasperi Agreement
 76–85
 commemoration of 162–166, 171
Deutscher Verband 52
 and National Socialism 58
 and the SVP 78
Durnwalder, Luis 114
 and regionalism 130–135
 and the SVP 137, 139
- Europaregion Tirol 132, 134
EXPO Hanover 131
- Falqui, Raimondo 90
Feuernacht 97
 bombing campaign 100–108
 commemoration of 144
fourteen points *see* Woodrow Wilson
Freie Universität Bozen/Bolzano 140
- Galan, Giancarlo 133
Gamper, Michael 38
 catholic resistance 60–62
 ‘Death March’ 86
 influence on Kerschbaumer 149
 and the SVP 71, 78–79
Giolitti, Giovanni 8, 32
Göring, Hermann 51, 56
Gruber, Karl 77
 and Gruber deGasperi agreement
 80–83
 commemoration of 161–166, 171
 influence of 122, 127
- Held, Heinrich 45
Himmler, Heinrich 67, 69
Hitler, Adolf
 anti-Hitler coalition 73–74
 direct rule 70
 the Option 65–68
 relationship with Mussolini 56–57
 repercussion for support of 78
 rise of 51
 and South Tyrol in *Mein Kampf* 53–54
 South Tyrolean hopes for 61–63

- Kerschbaumer, Sepp
 and 1961 100–103
 death of 104
 emergence of the activist 94–95
 and North Tyrol support 95–96
 remembered 147–155
 and Sigmundskron 92–93
- Khol, Andreas 127–128
- Klotz, Georg 94
 and Amplatz 102–103
 and BAS 100
 remembered 147, 153–156
- Kreisky, Bruno 97, 100
- Ladins 13, 40, 128
 and collective memory 143
 commemoration of the autonomy 167,
 169
 and division of Tyrol 27
 history since 1918 116–117
 under Hitler 70
 and Italianisation 35
 and regionalism 141
 and South Tyrol's autonomy 113–115
 and the SVP 78
- League of Nations 20
 Germany leaving 55
 and Weimar 44–45, 49
 and Woodrow Wilson 21
- London Treaty 9
 division of Tyrol 14
 and post-World War I settlement 19–21
 and post-World War II 75
 and self-determination 25
- Madrid Treaty
 introduction of 124
 and South Tyrolean regionalism 129–130
- Magnago, Silvio
 attending Kerschbaumer's funeral 104
 and autonomy 137
 commemoration of Sigmundskron
 165–167
 impact of the night of fire 107–110
 and Kerschbaumer 95
 remembered 146, 149–150
 in Sigmundskron 92–93
 and SVP 89
 as target 103
- Mazzini, Giuseppe 9–10
- Mitolo, Andrea 93
- Mitterhofer, Sepp
 and immigration 87
 remembering the bombing campaign
 152–154, 158
- Mumelter, Norbert 62
 leader of the VKS 65–66
- Mussolini, Benito
 Austrian response 50–51
 in collective memory 169–170
 destruction of Alu Duce 100
 dispute with Stresemann 44–48
 and Hitler 53–57
 Italianization 38–43
 legacy 71, 116, 141
 and minorities 35
 the Option 65–67
 and pre-World War I
 nationalism 17–18
 and Tolomei 37
 Tyrol before 32–33
 Repubblica di Salò 70
 rise of National Socialism in South
 Tyrol 59–63
- Ötzi 135
- Paket, the 109–110
 commemoration of 162, 166
 full implementation 144
 and Georg Klotz 155–156
 impact 114

- and regionalism 122–123
- Paris Agreement, also Paris Treaty
 - and Austria 96
 - commemoration of 161–165
 - creation of 80
 - disputed 93
 - effect 86
- Pecori-Giraldi, Guglielmo 31–32, 46
- Peterlini, Oskar 124
- Pfaundler, Wolfgang 95
 - dispute with Kerschbaumer 100
 - financial support for BAS 96
 - prison sentence 105
 - remembered 150
- Pfunderer Buam 90
 - and Kerschbaumer 149
- Pichler-Rolle, Elmar 135, 164
- Provvedimenti per l'Alto Adige 37–38
 - criticism by Stresemann 47
 - in detail 51
 - in everyday life 61
 - fascist policy 53
- Raffener, Josef 71
- Ramek, Rudolf 50
- Rau, Johannes 124
- Reut-Nicolussi, Eduard 50, 65
- Salandra, Antonio 8
- Salvemini, Gaetano 9
- Scalfaro, Luigi 131
- Second Statute of Autonomy
 - creation 109–100
 - impact on communal life 113–116
 - and progress in South Tyrol 163
 - and regionalism 121
- Siegesdenkmal
 - attacks on 103
 - in collective memory 168
 - conception and building 41–42
 - legacy on the present 170
- Sigmundskron
 - commemoration of 165–166
 - effect on Kerschbaumer 149
 - and Kerschbaumer's funeral 104, 151
 - legacy 171
 - and Paris Treaty 162
 - rally at 91–95
- Sonnino, Sidney 8–9, 18
- St Germain
 - occupation of South Tyrol 28–29, 32
 - and Stresemann 51
 - Treaty of 18
 - violation of self-determination 25
 - and Wilson 23
- Stadlmayer, Viktoria 162–164
- Stalin, Josef 69, 73–74
- Stresemann, Gustav 44–51
- Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)
 - and 1950s Italian politics 88–89
 - the 1960s remembered 152, 154, 156
 - in 2008 135–140
 - in collective memory 162, 164–166
 - cultural autonomy 118, 122
 - early aims 78–81
 - and Europe 126–127, 130
 - founding of 71
 - and Kerschbaumer 94, 97, 149
 - and Magnago remembered 146–147
 - and Sigmundskron 91–93
 - and violence in 1961 101, 107–110
- Tolomei, Ettore
 - fascist calendar 61
 - and italianità 15–18
 - Italianization 39–41, 44
 - and Ladin 116
 - and National Socialism 58–59
 - and the Option 68
 - Provvedimenti 47–48, 51
 - as senator 37
 - as target in 1961 95, 100, 103

- Versailles, Treaty of 18
 and Stresemann 48–49
 violation by Hitler 55, 58
 and Weimar Republic 44–45, 51
 and Wilson 23
- Victory Monument *see* Siegesdenkmal
- Volgger, Friedl 71
- Völkischer Kampfring Südtirol
 (VKS) 38
 formation of 60–63
 between Hitler and Mussolini 57
 hope in National Socialism
 66–68
- Weimar Republic 44
 attacked by Hitler 54
 and Stresemann 48–49
- Weingartner, Wendelin 130–131
- Widmann, Franz 88, 139, 157
- Wilson, Woodrow
 called upon by Kolb 50
 and fourteen points, significance of for
 the end of World War I 19
 Hitler referring to 53
 and peace conference 18–27
 in peace negotiations 21–22
 post-World War II 75
 and Realpolitik 25

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