Neither Italian nor German:

From Ethnolinguistic Tensions to Intercultural Dialogue in Two Contemporary South-Tyrolean Novels

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Abstract

South Tyrol, an Italian autonomous province bordering Austria and Switzerland, has three official languages: Italian, German, and Ladin. Despite the picture of peaceful coexistence and Alpine idyll, significant tensions between the language groups remain. They stem from traumatic historical events, especially the Italianization policy by the fascist regime after the formerly Austrian part of Tyrol south of the Brenner pass was annexed to Italy in 1919. They are also linked to the persistence of cultural stereotypes. The essay demonstrates the ways in which literature might act as a mediator between language groups through the exploration of one German-language novel, Joseph Zoderer's *Die Walsche* ('The Italian') (1982), and one Italian-language novel, Francesca Melandri's *Eva dorme* ('Eva sleeps') (2010). We show how these novels can be seen as representative of a contemporary South Tyrolean literature whose authors seek to overcome stereotypical images of both German-speaking and Italian-speaking populations in order to initiate stronger intercultural relations. These new voices challenge the monolingual paradigm often promoted by local politicians and advocate for a new approach to multilingual and multiethnic society.

Zusammenfassung

Südtirol, eine italienische autonome Provinz an der Grenze zu Österreich und der Schweiz, hat drei offizielle Sprachen: Italienisch, Deutsch und Ladinisch. Trotz des Bildes der friedlichen Koexistenz und der Alpenidylle gibt es nach wie vor erhebliche Spannungen zwischen den Sprachgruppen. Sie haben ihren Ursprung in traumatischen historischen Ereignissen, insbesondere in der Italianisierungspolitik des faschistischen Regimes, nachdem der zuvor österreichische Teil Tirols südlich des Brennerpasses 1919 Italien zugesprochen worden war. Diese Spannungen sind auch auf das Fortbestehen kultureller Stereotypen zurückzuführen. In diesem Artikel wird erörtert, wie Literatur zwischen Sprachgruppen vermitteln kann, indem wir uns auf einen deutschsprachigen Roman, *Die Walsche* (‚Die Italienerin‘) von Joseph Zoderer (1982), und einen italienischsprachigen, *Eva dorme* (‚Eva schläft‘) von Francesca Melandri (2010), konzentrieren. Es wird gezeigt, wie diese Romane, deren Autoren versuchen, die stereotypen Bilder sowohl der deutsch- als auch der italienischsprachigen Bevölkerung zu überwinden, um die interkulturellen Beziehungen zu stärken, als repräsentativ für die zeitgenössische Südtiroler Literatur angesehen werden können. Diese neuen Stimmen stellen das einsprachige Paradigma, das häufig von Lokalpolitikern gefördert wird, in Frage und plädieren für einen neuen Ansatz in Bezug auf eine mehrsprachige und multiethnische Gesellschaft.

Sinossi

L'Alto Adige, una provincia autonoma italiana al confine con Austria e Svizzera, ha tre lingue ufficiali: italiano, tedesco e ladino. Nonostante l'immagine di coesistenza pacifica e di idillio alpino, esistono ancora notevoli tensioni tra i gruppi linguistici. Esse traggono origine da eventi storici traumatici, iniziati dopo che nel 1919 la parte austriaca del Tirolo a sud del Brennero fu concessa all'Italia e causati soprattutto dalla politica di italianizzazione adottata dal regime fascista a partire dagli anni Venti. Queste tensioni sono dovute anche alla persistenza di stereotipi culturali. Discuteremo di come la letteratura possa mediare tra i gruppi linguistici, concentrandoci su un romanzo in lingua tedesca, *Die Walsche* ('L'italiana') di Joseph Zoderer (1982), e uno in lingua italiana, *Eva dorme* di Francesca Melandri (2010). Mostreremo come questi romanzi, i cui autori cercano di superare le immagini stereotipate dei parlanti tedesco e italiano per rafforzare le relazioni interculturali, possano essere considerati rappresentativi della letteratura sudtirolese contemporanea. Queste nuove voci sfidano il paradigma monolingue sotteraneamente promosso dai politici locali e sostengono un nuovo approccio a una società multilingue e multietnica.

Résumé

Le Tyrol du Sud, province autonome italienne située à la frontière de l'Autriche et de la Suisse, a trois langues officielles : l'italien, l'allemand et le ladin. Au-delà de l'image de coexistence pacifique et d'idylle alpine, il subsiste d'importantes tensions entre les groupes linguistiques. Elles trouvent leur origine dans des événements historiques traumatisants, notamment la politique d'italianisation menée par le régime fasciste après l'attribution à l'Italie, en 1919, de la partie du Tyrol autrichien située au sud du col du Brenner. Ces tensions sont également liées à la persistance de stéréotypes culturels. Nous évoquerons ici la façon dont la littérature peut faire office de médiateur entre les groupes linguistiques en nous concentrant sur un roman en allemand, *Die Walsche* ('L'Italienne') de Joseph Zoderer (1982), et un autre en italien, *Eva dorme* ('Eva dort') de Francesca Melandri (2010). Nous montrerons comment ces romans peuvent être vus comme représentatifs d'une littérature contemporaine sud-tyrolienne dont les auteurs cherchent à dépasser les images stéréotypées des populations tant germanophone qu'italophone afin de renforcer les relations interculturelles. Ces nouvelles voix remettent en question le paradigme unilingue souvent promu par les politiciens locaux et plaident en faveur d'une nouvelle approche de la société multilingue et multiethnique.

> *When South Tyroleans are asked whether abroad or elsewhere in Italy, as to "what" they feel they are, they usually qualify their reply with the word "actually": actually I'm Italian, but not just; actually I'm German, but not like in Germany or Austria; actually I'm Ladin but… And should they now say South Tyrolean, or Tyrolean, or Sudtirolesi, or Altoatesini?*
>
> Fleckinger 2021

This essay[1] focuses on the analysis of two novels describing the identity issues, the intercultural conflicts, and the quest for a better understanding between language groups in South Tyrol. Before turning to detailed discussions of Joseph Zoderer's *Die Walsche* (1982) and Francesca Melandri's *Eva dorme* (2010) – written in two different languages, but dealing with similar topics – we outline some of the historical and sociolinguistic facts that mark South Tyrolean society, notably the general dynamics between the two main language groups – German speakers and Italian speakers – and the ways these groups tend to be portrayed in literature. Although speakers of Ladin – a Rhaeto-Romance language related to Romansh in Switzerland – are also part of this intercultural dialogue, their rich cultural and literary history does not take a central place in this paper, and references to South Tyrolean bilingualism are limited to the Italian and the German.

1. Coexistence (*Nebeneinander*) more than Cohabitation (*Miteinander*)?

Brief historical overview

South Tyrol, a region modest in size (7,400 km^2), has been part of Italy since 1919, at which time it was cut off from what is now the Austrian state (*Bundesland*) of Tyrol, north of one of the most important Alpine passes, the Brenner Pass. In German- and Italian-speaking nationalist circles, the new border was then presented respectively as an 'unjust' one (*Unrechtsgrenze*) that needed to be corrected, or as a 'natural border' that served, finally, to complete Italian unification. The region is now officially considered an autonomous province (*Bolzano Alto Adige* ['High Adige'] or *Bozen Südtirol*), and it enjoys one of the most developed statutes to protect a linguistic minority within a national state in Europe – although comparisons are risky, given the specific nature of its historical and political contexts (Guidiceanderea/Mazza 2019, 120-121).

With the mostly Italian-speaking province of Trento – formerly also part of Austria – the province is part of the region of Trentino-South Tyrol. South Tyrol now has a population of approximately 520,000 people, who speak a variety of languages. The German language group accounts for 69.4% of the population, the Italian language group for 26%, and the Ladin language group for 4.5%. In addition to the three 'historical' language groups, the province is home to 46,000 foreigners.[2]

Despite the province's efforts to portray a picture of peaceful coexistence (see below) and alpine idyll, there are significant longstanding tensions between the two main language groups, although outsiders and tourists might not be aware of them. The reasons are historically based (for an overview of South Tyrol's history, see e.g., Gruber 2008, Mazohl/Steininger 2020, Steininger 2003). For centuries, South Tyrol – like Trentino – was part of the Habsburg empire. Only after the First World War and the Treaty of Saint-Germain was it annexed by Italy, and, as the region saw the rise of fascism, its 'italianization' was set in motion. The fascist regime attracted numerous workers from other parts of Italy, a process that industrialized the region and began to

[1] All the parts of this paper have been elaborated and written by the two authors. For Italian research evaluation, we mention that Massimo Salgaro wrote chapter 2 and 3.
[2] See the official site of the provincial government: https://autonomia.provincia.bz.it/it/un-autonomia-per-tre-gruppi.

'dilute' the German-speaking population, with an objective of rapid assimilation. The regime implemented measures such as the prohibition of the public use of the German language and the closing of German schools – many of which continued to operate clandestinely (*Katakombenschulen*) – as well as an initiative to Italianize people's names. The regime also renamed places[3] by insisting on the use of traditionally attested Italian exonyms (like *Bolzano*), rather than German endonyms (*Bozen*), by coining new toponyms (e.g., *Dietenheim>Teodòne*; *Hafling>Avelengo*), and by translating, phonetically adapting, etymologically reconstructing, or even inventing Italian names. The wounds of this discrimination against the 'German' population are still not fully healed, and a related collective trauma lingers.

In 1940, Hitler and Mussolini agreed on establishing a 'definitive' border between their then allied countries at the Brenner Pass, on the water divide between the Mediterranean (Po watershed) and the Black Sea (Danube). German speakers, many of whom had hoped South Tyrol would be annexed by the *Reich*, as Austria had been in 1938, were forced to either choose German citizenship and move to the *Reich* or to keep their Italian citizenship and stay in fascist Italy. Before those who had chosen Germany – the majority of German speakers – were moved, the region was de facto annexed by Nazi Germany between 1943 and 1945, in the so-called *Alpenvorland*. After the war, the condition of the 'German' population of South Tyrol gained the attention of the international community through the intermediary of the nascent UN.

These efforts resulted, in 1948, in agreements between the Italian state and Trentino-South Tyrol to protect the German-speaking people and their interests, but in this autonomous region, the 'Italians' were a majority. This autonomy statute was therefore seen by many German speakers as insufficient. Under the pressure of Austria, recognized as a 'protecting State,' the quest for a better solution persisted. After an episode of terrorism in the 1960s and consequent arduous negotiations, the post-war autonomy statute was modified in 1972. With this 'second statute,' South Tyrol, while still being part of an autonomous *region*, became an autonomous *province* within this region – one with more self-governing capabilities in many areas of public life, such as agriculture, education, and culture. In a process of rapprochement, the central state made major concessions to the 'German' minority, which agreed in return to stop contesting the organization of national borders (Guidiceanderea/Mazza 2019,131).

A complex identity debate

Today, South Tyrol is one of the richest provinces in Italy, with low unemployment and a relatively high birth rate. Although it is held up by many people as an example for its legislation to protect minorities, it cannot be considered a perfect model – if one exists – for the management of multilingual and multicultural societies. The historical wounds mentioned earlier, as well as competing economic and political interests, have prevented the emergence of a state of true cohabitation (*Miteinander*), a term that implies collaboration and shared identity, and have resulted, instead, in a state of mere coexistence (*Nebeneinander*) between the various language groups. The threat of a potentially violent ethnic conflict (*Gegeneinander*) seems to have been overcome, but observers sometimes take note of a mutual indifference between the groups (*Ohne-*

[3] This is still a sensitive issue in today's South Tyrol, since most of the names that were Italianized during the fascist period remained officially in place after 1945 (alongside the restored German names), unlike in the autonomous region of Aosta Valley, where the French toponyms were reinstated, but the Italian names disappeared (only the capital, Aosta/Aoste, has a double official name).

einander), as well as a lack of knowledge of each other's cultural events, historical references, and founding myths – all of which is reflected in the media (idem, 22-23, 59, 65).

Even if many citizens feel quite at ease with this 'ethnic separation' and with the existence of a multilingual society functioning as monolingual parallel societies, in recent years, some political movements, especially those on the left, have attempted to promote an 'interethnic' perspective (idem, 36-37). Many books and studies have been published to propose solutions to overcome the constant divide between 'us' and 'them' (Atz 2022, Guidicenandrea 2022, Guidice-andrea/Mazza 2019, Renzi/Delle Cave 2022).

One must also take note of efforts to confront and heal – or at least not to aggravate – historical memories, such as the documentary exhibition that opened in 2014 in the 'Monument to Victory' built in Bozen/Bolzano by the fascist regime in order to glorify the region's *italianità* – and considered by many German speakers a thorn in their side. The contextualization of history that is offered in this exhibition (and in the catalogue: *Città di Bolzano* 2016) attempts to 'make us understand the other' and can be seen as a milestone in the dialogue.

Moreover, new debates have emerged: accustomed to the discussion on the relationship between 'Italians' and 'Germans,' South Tyrol has also had to figure out how to integrate immigrants of varied origins and to reflect on the evolution of an increasingly multicultural society, on emerging problems of racism towards 'new foreigners,' on the existence of multiple languages and identities, and on the tension between collective vs. individual rights, globalization vs. localism, etc. Because Italy had long been a country of *emigration*, these changes happened slightly later in South Tyrol than in other Western societies. The shift from the old dynamics between the autochthonous groups to new ones between these groups (who sometimes allied against the people from 'elsewhere') and the newcomers continues to be complex (Guidice-andrea/Mazza 2019, 157). This complexity can be observed in the debates surrounding the compulsory 'declaration of affiliation to a language group,' an enduring irritant whose main features are outlined below.

The 'language group affiliation declaration,' an ongoing irritant

In 1981, for the first time, citizens of South Tyrol were required to identify as either German, Italian, or Ladin on the census, or, more precisely, to declare their 'language group affiliation' (*Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeit*). As a consequence of the new autonomy statute of 1972, this practice was adopted in order to distribute public money to institutions and administrations according to new criteria. If citizens didn't choose an affiliation, they could not work in the public sector or earn state benefits.

This new form of ethnic proportional representation was seen by many German speakers as a step towards a fairer repartition of language groups in the public administration, where Italian speakers were overrepresented. Some promoters of the new rules hoped that this would give the 'Germans' a linguistic and cultural security capable of counteracting the discourse centred on their status as 'victims of history' (Guidiceanderea/Mazza 2019, 134).

For Italian speakers, the measures were often seen as exaggerated concessions to a group which, while it had certainly been battered by history, now had sufficient protection and might not be satisfied until it received an even more radical form of autonomy (*Vollautonomie*) (idem, 144). The new model brought the loss of certain advantages that were difficult to relinquish and was viewed as an attack on the status of Italian as a national language. Many 'Italians' had to adapt to the new policy in record time and learned German to obtain a bilingualism certificate (*patentino*), which was necessary to work in public administration.

There was also a form of resignation to, and then, in the 1990s, a certain acceptance of the importance of learning German. Since the 1920s, the Italian-speaking *altoatesini* had been a very diverse group in terms of geographical origin (idem, 53); they had a less clearly defined group identity than the German-speaking *Südtiroler*, whose experience of resisting assimilation had a unifying impact. But all the changes around the autonomy contributed to making them an Italian-speaking population different from other Italians on the peninsula, who were sometimes described as the 'colonizers' on the 'German' side (idem, 38, Delle Donne 2022, 323).

The new measures were introduced after a heated debate, with opponents – including among German speakers – proposing, at the very least, an anonymous census that would not force citizens to choose 'once and for all.' At the height of the tensions in 1981, Sivlius Magnago, regarded as the 'father of autonomy' and long-time chairman of the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* – the South Tyrolean People's Party that for many decades controlled, and now continues to control provincial politics – declared: "Then you just have to meet at the bar!" ["Trefft's enk hålt in der Bar!"] (Guidiceandrea/Mazza 2019, 7)]. This was his way of signifying that there were still spaces where South Tyroleans of both languages could socialize if they wished, but this statement, pronounced in dialect and not in standard German like the rest of his speech, reflects the tension of the time (ibid, 7-9).

Since then, the 'language group affiliation declaration' (*Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeits-erklärung / Dichiarazione d'appartenenza al gruppo linguistico*) governs many aspects of the daily life of the population, from the way taxes are distributed among the three language groups, to the management of various administrative matters, to the control of media and schools. Many other entities – sports teams, churches, trade unions, cultural associations, etc. – are organized into three distinct sectors. Since one's ethnic affiliation is a personal choice, it is not linked (solely) to biology and origin. Some 'Italian' citizens – or people who live in linguistically mixed families – may choose to identify as 'Germans' (the opposite case is rarer), by virtue of complex understandings of identity and political strategies. But this still leads to a fairly rigid ethnicization of political and social life that, in some comparable societies, might remain more hidden (Peterlini 2022, 317-319). The fact that the decision on 'affiliation' has an impact on social identity that goes well beyond the 'simple' use of a language reinforces the common tendency in South Tyrol to use the terms 'German' and 'Italian' instead of 'German-speaking' and 'Italian-speaking' for members of the two linguistic groups – a practice we sometimes adopt in this paper (even as we employ quotation marks to draw attention to the unusual nature of this practice).

The school system

Even if the choice of the school language is free and unregimented, schools are divided into separate systems according to the three official languages, each system receiving funds proportional to the results of the census. This is a very different system than those we find in more integrated bi/trilingual schools in places such as Luxembourg, Catalonia, the Swiss Canton of the Grisons, etc. The existence of parallel 'German' and 'Italian' schools was and is seen as a way of definitively protecting the German-speaking group from the ever-present danger of assimilation, even if the situation has obviously improved since the fall of fascism. This is reminiscent of the strategy chosen by francophones in the Canadian province of Québec, where many French speakers see parallel French and English school systems as a bulwark against the risks of anglicization.

In South Tyrol, we find a few experiments, especially in Italian schools, with bilingual teaching (some classes are given in the second language), but only the Ladin school system is

really bi/multilingual, in the sense that in addition to the teaching of the Ladin language, German and Italian are taught for the same number of hours, making the Ladins – often presented as a minority within a minority – the group with the most highly developed plurilingual skills in South Tyrol (Guidiceanderea/Mazza 2019, 90), much like their Romansh counterparts in the Grisons.

In the absence of a common bilingual system for the whole population, the choice of school is sometimes a complex strategy. Some 'Italians' and many members of linguistically mixed (Italian-German) families enroll their children in German schools, believing that this will make it easier for their children to become bilingual (since they speak Italian at home anyway) and secure a better professional future (Delle Donne 2022, 298).

As for the children with a foreign passport, in 2019-2022, 25% of them were enrolled in Italian schools, 11% in German schools, and 7% in Ladin schools (ASTAT 2021). This situation has triggered a debate – fuelled by right-wing parties – on an alleged 'foreign overpopulation.' This happened even among the 'Germans,' whose schools are more homogeneous than those of the 'Italians.' In the case of the German-speaking group, there is also the fear that, given that the birth rate of foreigners is higher than that of people born in Italy, the proportion of Italian speakers will increase in South Tyrolean society through assimilation into the native 'Italian' linguistic community, in particular in Bozen/Bolzano, where many of both the 'Italians' and the foreigners are concentrated. This is, of course, the South Tyrolean variety of the debate on 'foreign overpopulation' that takes place in many societies, whether officially uni- or bilingual.[4] Its premise is often based on the requirement for immigrants to assimilate linguistically and the preponderance of the collective rights of autochthonous groups, rather than the consideration of linguistic resources of the population as a whole or the prioritization of individual rights. The emergence of a 'constitutional patriotism' – where identity and identification are defined in territorial and political terms, rather than in ethnolinguistic terms – is not yet on the agenda (Peterlini 2022, 311-320).

A new communication policy, but still no 'real' plurilingual goal

For the authorities, claiming to be multiethnic is not *really* an option in South Tyrol. But things have, to some degree, changed with time. Since 1991, people who refuse to be affiliated with one of the three recognized language groups have had the option of choosing the category 'other' (*altro* - *anders Erklärende/r*). However, they still must select one of these groups that 'matter' for the distribution of subsidies, by filling out (on the same form) a declaration for *Sprachgruppenzuordnung* ('assignment' [aggregazione][5]) instead of *Zugehörigkeit* ('affiliation' [appartenenza]) (Guidiceanderea/Mazza 2019, 17-18).[6] This may appear as an insignificant detail, since the category remains invisible, but it is at least a way to acknowledge symbolically the presence of allophone and plurilingual citizens, whether they are Italian citizens or immigrants. Other pragmatic accommodations were proposed in 2015, such as the possibility, for foreign long-

[4] In 1977, for similar reasons – among other things – the Québec government made French its sole official language; children of immigrants then *had to* attend French schools. English schools became accessible only to children of the 'historical' Anglophone minority when parents had themselves attended an English school.

[5] We use this font when quoting an original that is not in English.

[6] In the statistics (ASTAT 2018, table 6.2, p. 59), one can identify the *others* by looking at the number of people who filled in the declaration of *assignment*. They made up 1.68% (in 2011) and chose the 'Italian' group more frequently than the 'German' group (55.6% vs. 69.6%) compared to those who filled in the declaration of *affiliation* (38.8% vs. 25.8%). They should not be confused with the 10.3% (in 2011) of the category *others* ("altri/andere") which appears by name in the table (6.1, p. 58) that represents the resident population by language groups. This number includes people who are too young or haven't been in the province long enough to fill in the declaration.

term residents, to choose their assignment *ad hoc* when they apply for a subsidy or for a public position (idem, 159).

In the permanent exhibition recently installed in Bozen/Bolzano in front of the parliament to celebrate the 50 years of the autonomy statute (Fleckinger 2021), the government presents South Tyrol as a society where people (almost) "live happily together," but it also depicts a certain feeling of unease as it presents language as potentially "exclusive." While advocating for ethnic representation and a 'separation model' where official trilingualism goes hand in hand with distinct school systems, the authorities also allude to the sociolinguistic no man's land faced by some citizens (through the display of the statement "what about those who come from elsewhere?") and acknowledge that the potential closure of parallel schools is still a "taboo." This use of rather benign and non-polemical vocabulary appears to be a way of responding to the discontent of citizens who live in an 'in between,' as is evident in the statements displayed on the five panels of the exhibition (especially suggestive passages are underlined):

> Language can be both exclusive and inclusive. In addition to the three official languages […], almost every valley in South Tyrol has its own dialect. There are also numerous languages spoken by the immigrants. […]
>
> For different groups to be able to live happily together, no one should feel at a disadvantage. Since 1976, South Tyrolean autonomy has had a mechanism to address this issue: ethnic proportionality. Public sector jobs, many political posts, and part of the provincial budget are assigned in proportion to the size of the three language groups. […]
>
> If you live in South Tyrol, you have to declare for one of the three official language groups. But what about those who are equally at home in two languages? And what about those who come from elsewhere? For those who cannot or will not opt for one of the three language groups, there is now a fourth group to choose from: "others." But, for the purposes of ethnic proportionality, such persons have to 'assign' themselves to one of the three groups. […]
>
> Autonomy also guarantees that each of these language groups has its own school system. Multilingualism is still a challenge for many people. […]
>
> Because of the historical experience of South Tyrol, common multilingual schooling is still officially taboo. However, the choice of school is free: Italian children can go to German schools and vice versa. In school experiments, up to 50 percent of the lessons can now take place in the other regional language. Italian schools make more use of this. (Fleckinger 2021)[7]

It is especially important, in a discussion of the South Tyrolean context, to make a distinction between 'multilingualism' and 'plurilingualism.' Even if both concepts are commonly treated as synonymous, one might also turn to Berthele's clarification, which is largely inspired by the example of Switzerland, a quadrilingual country consisting, for the most part, in unilingual territories. Unlike Switzerland, South Tyrol, with its two official languages, does not follow the principle of 'language territoriality' (1 territorial entity = 1 mandatory official language) but the principle of 'language freedom' (1 territory = choice between 2 official languages, including for school). However, South Tyrol's separated institutions constitute well-defined 'micro-territories' enabling people to function in one (and only one) language. In both societies, the citizens can

[7] The exhibition is presented in German, Italian, and Ladin, but also in English. To observe the logic of the discourse of the provincial government and of the *Südtiroler Volkspartei*, one can consult the catalogue, which provides the numerous legislative texts forming the basis of the language policy: *Autonome Provinz Bozen Südtirol 2021* (in German, Italian or Ladin) [https://autonomie.provinz.bz.it/de/bibliothek-zur-autonomie].

(theoretically) spend their whole life in only one language, which makes the distinction very useful:

> The territorialized coexistence of national languages is a typical case of multilingualism. [...] While an institution can be multilingual ([…] administrations but also schools […]), plurilingualism is a property of individuals.
>
> Das territorialisierte Nebeneinander von Landessprachen ist ein typischer Fall von Vielsprachigkeit. […] Während also eine Institution vielsprachig sein kann ([…] [V]erwaltungen, aber auch Schulen […]), ist Mehrsprachigkeit eine Eigenschaft von Individuen. (Berthele 2010, 225)

The exhibition panels quoted above can be seen as representative of the 'communication policy' of the government, which is aimed at protecting a collective *multi*lingualism that consists of the coexistence of unilingual sub-societies (as in Switzerland). Even if no government would ever officially declare that it favours individual *uni*lingualism, this policy does not necessarily lead to personal *pluri*lingualism. Despite the attenuated wording of the current declaration ('assignment' vs. 'affiliation'), South Tyroleans who identify with two (or three) regional language groups, as well as immigrants must inevitably feel less represented or legitimized by the system.

For Peterlini, a specialist of ethnolinguistically complex societies, including South Tyrol, a "monolingual habitus" ["der monoliguale Habitus"] prevents immigrants and bilinguals (who are essentially asked to choose between their mother's or father's language) from taking their rightful place in society, since their hybrid identity and their status as passers-by ["Brücken- und Zwischenidentitäten"] are not recognized, when they might, instead, be considered "pioneers of interculturality" and "transnationalization" ["Pioniere der Interkulturalität […], Pioniere einer Transnationalisierung"] (Peterlini 2022, 322). Peterlini does not advocate a systematic recognition of migrant groups in the same way as he does for historical minorities (in South Tyrol or elsewhere), which would "crumble any claim to national homogeneity" ["jeglichen nationalen Homogenitätsanspruch […] zerbröseln"] (idem, 324). He does, however, call for people to overcome certain traditional narratives and assimilationist reflexes in order to find new ways of dealing with diversity – in such a way that the people who embody it are not rendered "speechless" ["sprachlos"] – and to remember that migration is nothing exceptional. It is, rather, a "basic experience" and "the actual form of the existence of human beings" ["Grunderfahrung und eigentliche Existenzform der Menschen"] (idem, 325).

Before exploring the ways these questions are reflected in Zoderer's and Melandri's novels, the following section focuses on bilingual language competences in schools and the relationship of teenagers to bilingualism (Italian/German), which are central to the understanding of the cultural and social dynamics of South Tyrol. Have its citizens (as well as its administration) become more bilingual in recent years? It seems that this is not the case…

Declining language skills? The surprising results of a 2017 study

The large-scale study of the linguistic abilities of the school population published by Vettori/Abel (2017) is the best mirror of the fact that South Tyrolean society is not necessarily moving towards more individual bilingual skills. The publication compiles the findings on the second language (L2) abilities of a randomly stratified sample of nearly 3,000 fourth grade pupils. They represent pupils in all secondary schools (grammar schools and technical colleges) with German or Italian as the main language of instruction in South Tyrol during the 2014-2015 school year. This survey was the second edition of an earlier one carried out in 2007-2008, which enabled Vettori/Abel to also draw a diachronic comparison. The tests lasted more than 100 minutes and

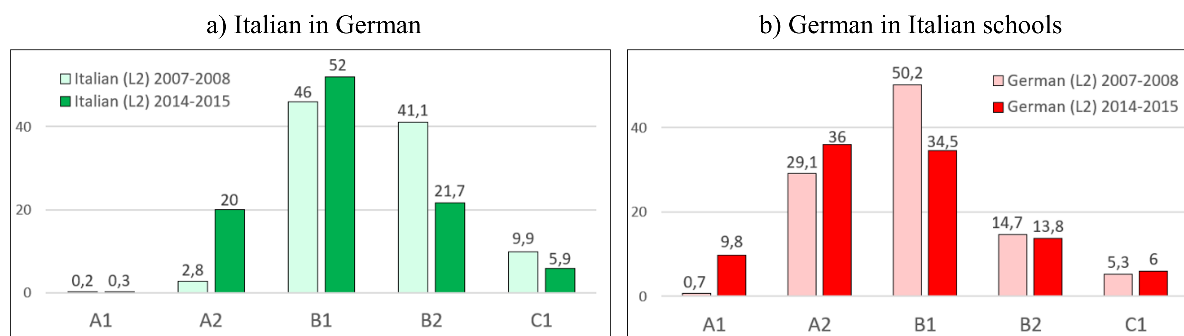
assessed the students' lexical, phonological, and syntactic skills, as well as their sociolinguistic perceptions. The study also considered the psychosocial and extralinguistic components at play in the complex dynamics of learning the language of the 'other.' (idem, 79)

Considering that the provincial government promotes the development of bilingual skills in both German and Italian school systems, the results were rather disappointing (idem, 7). The main finding was that the 2014-2015 results from the same tests revealed poorer language skills than those from 2007-2008 with respect to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) – A1 being the basic level and C1 a level of great currency.

A comparison for Italian as the target language in German school pupils showed a clear downward shift towards A2 (idem, 56). While in 2007-2008, the central areas of competence for Italian ranged between B1 (46%) and B2 (41.1%), in 2014-2015, the B2 level had decreased in favour of A2, and B1 (52%) was now flanked by one fifth each of A2 (20%) and B2 (21.7%) levels (idem, 244) – as shown in Fig. 1a. As for the Italian-speaking pupils learning German, it could be observed not only that they had a lower general command of L2 than the German-speaking ones, but also that there was a similar downward trend. The most common score in 2007 was B1 (50.2%), followed by A2 (29.1%). In the new edition, the percentages went from B1 (34.5%) to A2 (36%), but also A1 (9.8%). As a result, A2 became the most common rating – despite being almost equally represented as B1:

Fig. 1 – L2 in South Tyrol's schools (Vettori/Abel 2017, 245)

a) Italian in German b) German in Italian schools



In L2 education, B1 is regarded as the 'threshold level' for independent language use, allowing the ability to maintain interaction and to express oneself in a variety of situations, as well as to cope flexibly with linguistic problems in everyday life. In summary, it can be stated that for both German and Italian, the target level of B2 for the Matura (state final examination after secondary school) is increasingly out of reach (idem, 245). These results should certainly be complemented by similar, more recent studies, but there is no sign of the trend reversing.[8] Even if 'bilingualism' as a societal goal should not be understood as a 'perfect' command of two languages, the results are particularly thought-provoking: not only because of the numerous lessons and initiatives in the second language, but also because active participation in everyday life in the second language seems limited or impossible for a large proportion of young people in South Tyrol.

[8] For more statistics on language use and identity in the population as a whole, see the 'language barometer' (ASTAT 2004); and for a study on the didactic models at stake see Baur/Mezzalira/Pichler 2008.

South-Tyrolean dialect and the country-town divide

There are different reasons for these disappointing results and the relative failure of the policy towards bilingualism. One noticeable barrier to intergroup communication is the use of the South Tyrolean dialect (*Südtirolerisch*) by German speakers. Albeit not as omnipresent in the political and media sphere as in Switzerland, the use of dialect cuts across all social strata. Since Italian-speaking pupils learn standard German in school, but German speakers speak a very different language in everyday life, the result can be incommunicability between these two groups. The lack of motivation to learn standard German must be linked with the lack of opportunities to make use of it.

There have been some pedagogical attempts to raise awareness of the importance of *Südtirolerisch* among Italian speakers. This is all the more necessary as the younger generations – being among the only groups in Italy not to have their own regional dialect, largely because of the particular demographic history of the region (Guidiceanderea/Mazza 2019, 88-89) – speak a very standardized Italian. To make this diglossic situation less of an issue, German speakers are also sometimes encouraged to understand the importance of speaking standard German with non-native speakers, instead of switching abruptly to Italian, a practice that deprives Italophones of the opportunity to practise German – and, incidentally, gives them an 'excuse' for not doing so (idem, 82-86).

As for the German speakers eager to speak Italian, many of them actually have few opportunities to do so, since it is primarily spoken in towns like Bozen/Bolzano and Meran/ Merano, whereas the German-speaking community is widespread in the rural areas. In Vettori/ Abel's study (2017, 106), about two fifths of (self-identifying) Italian-speaking pupils claimed to have social contact with a German-speaking person at least 4-5 times per week, but only about one fifth of their German-speaking counterparts claimed to have this frequency of contact with an Italian-speaking person. It cannot be surprising that 69.9% of all the respondents believed that the Italian and German language groups "form two distinct and separate groups" ["formano due gruppi distinti e separati"]), rather than "one group" ["un solo gruppo"] (idem, 90)[9], underlining that they *coexist* more than they actually *cohabit* (see above).

The 'ghost community': Making bilinguals and allophones visible

One other reason why Vettori/Abel's research is significant is that, in addition to language proficiency data, it also gathered information on the intercultural relations of the population. Participants, for instance, had to indicate their perceived affiliation with a specific language group in South Tyrol – which should not be confused with the 'official' affiliation (or assignment) described earlier. In addition to selecting one of the three usual language groups, they could also choose 'bilingual' (meaning German/Italian for most of them, but also Ladin/German or Ladin/ Italian for some) or 'other.' Based on the results, 56.3% of them chose the 'German' group, 18.3% the 'Italian' group, 3.7% the Ladin group, 16.6% the bilingual group, and 5.1% "other."

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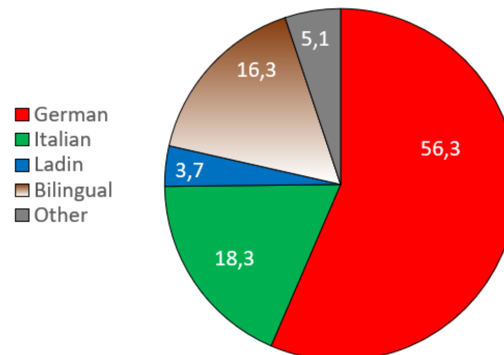
[9] Some parts of the study are in German, others in Italian. If only one language is given, it means that the original is only available in this language.

Fig. 2 – Self-perceived language affiliation in South Tyrol schools (Vettori/Abel 2017, 80)

"Think about the existing language groups in South Tyrol. How would you describe yourself in relation to belonging to one of these groups?"

["Pensi ai gruppi linguistici esistenti in Alto Adige. Come descriverebbe se stesso/a relativamente all'appartenenza a uno di questi gruppi?"

1. Tedesco / 2. Italiano / 3. Ladino / 4. Bilingue / 5. Altro]



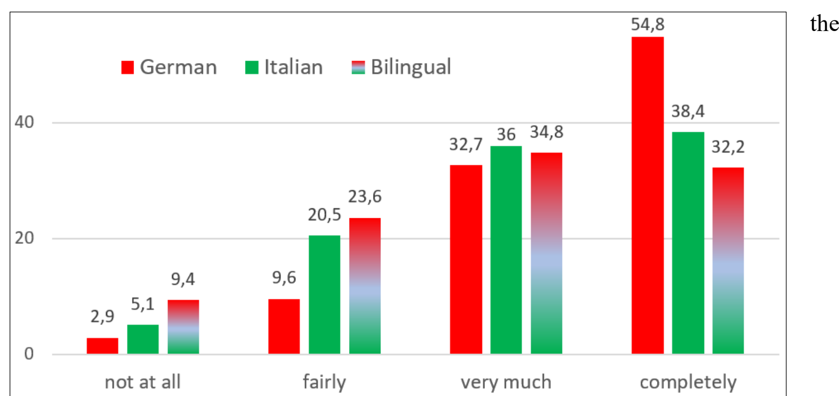
In a question about the degree of identification with one of the main unilingual groups (German or Italian) or with the 'bilingual group' (German/Italian), almost 90% of the German-speaking respondents claimed to identify 'very much' to 'completely' with their own linguistic group. The Italian speakers identified much less strongly to their unilingual group, and at the other end of the spectrum, 9.4% of students who claimed to be bilingual South Tyroleans did "not" identify "at all" (or only "slightly") ["per niente"/"un po'"] with the bilingual group, while 'only' 32.2% identified completely with one.

Fig. 3 – Degree of identification with the two main unilingual groups and the bilingual group in South Tyrol schools (Vettori/Abel 2017, 85)

"How much do you identify with the Italian/German-speaking/Bilingual South Tyroleans?

[Quanto si identifica con gli altoatesini di lingua italiana/tedesca/ bilingui?

1. Per niente/un po'
2. Abbastanza
3. Molto
4. Del tutto]



Vettori/Abel's study shows the peculiar and paradoxical condition of the (non-officially recognized) 'bilingual community' of South Tyrol. The 16.3% of pupils who identified as bilingual had the best language skills to communicate with both main language groups – and to facilitate intercultural dialogue. But judging by the low level of 'spontaneous' identification with a group characterized by 'blurred outlines,' one can assume that this 'in between' generated, and continues to generate, a certain amount of frustration. In the absence of a genuinely bilingual school, bilingual South Tyroleans are not given the opportunity to join a system that reflects their experience.

Although students can identify as bilingual and still 'cope' in a unilingual school – or even enjoy it by 'feeling special' –, the situation can be conflictual and challenge their sense of belonging (idem, 85). The same group that – given the government's emphasis on the bi/trilingual character of the province – should be an ideal representative of multilingual South Tyrol, lacks social representation because *personal* bilingualism (or *pluri*lingualism) is not really taken into account by political parties. These parties favour voters who tend to be monolingual and advocate for a collective *multi*lingualism rather than the generalization of plurilingual skills among citizens.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the bilinguals, this 'ghost community' of South Tyrol, are among the most important protagonists of contemporary South Tyrolean literature – as exemplified in the two novels discussed in the following sections.

And "what about those people who come from elsewhere?" – as asked in the exhibition on autonomy described earlier – or the 5.1% of 'others' shown in Vettori/Abel's study (see Fig. 2)? As mentioned above, recent immigration has made South Tyrol linguistically more complex. Among other immigration channels, tens of thousands of people from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa come every year to pick fruit, especially apples, or to work in the tourism industry, both in summer and winter.[10] Some of them apply for residence in South Tyrol. Still, since the establishment of the European Union, the discourse of the authorities of South Tyrol has largely remained centred on harmony and unity among ethnic German, Italian, and Ladin speakers, leaving the 'others' facing significant challenges. Linguistically, they often appear as 'outcasts,' and whatever official group affiliation (assignment) they finally choose, the fixation on the traditional ethnic balance almost certainly prevents them from feeling always at ease in South Tyrol.

In fact, even if many send their children to the Italian school, we know little about the identification patterns of the allophones – to what extent they see themselves (still) as nationals of their home country, or (already) as Italians, as South Tyroleans. But as at least one of the two novels discussed below demonstrates, these individuals, too, can have a distinct voice.

2. *Die Walsche* and *Eva dorme*: old history and new narratives

A few facts about South Tyrolean literature(s)

The literature of South Tyrol (for on overview of its history, see Butcher 2021, Holzner 1998, Siller 2015, Tiroler und Südtiroler Kulturabteilungen 2016, Wildner 2006) is not easy to categorize and the question of the extent to which its 'voice' is autonomous must remain open (Wildner 2007, 2). It is often understood as the literary production of a German-speaking minority inclined to introduce literature in the German language[11] into Italian culture (with the help of translations), while being connected to the German-speaking world, especially Austria. As established above, in South Tyrol, German speakers form a majority, and those speaking Italian a minority. However, German speakers are a minority not only in Italy as a whole, but also in South Tyrol's largest city and its capital, Bozen/Bolzano. The 'Literature of South Tyrol' might also refer to literary works written in Italian in the region (Grüning 2019, 244-247), but within a tangle of minority/majority groups with shifting status, South Tyrol's literature is, in any case, a minority literature when compared to both Italian and German literature – in whose long traditions the region never played a key role.

Moreover, South Tyrol's literature also includes bilingual (idem, 232-234) or even trilingual works – in cases where Ladin is involved (idem, 248-249).[12] In this "polyglot literature" ["polyglotte Literatur," idem, 231], the function of switching or mixing languages within a single work can vary in its purpose, which can be either stylistic and aesthetic or 'political,' e.g., it might depict

[10] The number of foreign residents in South Tyrol continues to increase, albeit at a slower pace than in the 2010s, reaching 56,891 in 2021 (10.6% of the population). [https://www.provincia.bz.it/news/it/rss.asp?news_action=4&news_article_id=670828]

[11] By 'German' we mean standard German. We do not deal here with literature in South Tyrolean (*Südtirolerisch*, a dialect of High German, see Moser 2015), which merits analysis in its own right, all the more so as it is attached to traditional *Heimat* literature as well as modern formal linguistic experiments, see Wildner 2007, 3-4.

[12] An example is the poetry of Roberta Dapunt, born in 1970 in Val Badia, who published collections in Italian (2008, 2013), as well as in Ladin with German (2012) or Italian (2017) translation. See also Bernardi/Locher/Mall 1999.

interactions considered representative of social life or ideological climate in South Tyrol, or, more generally, it might reinforce realism by incorporating elements of the linguistic landscape (idem, 234-235).

The literature written in and on South Tyrol in the last decades often reflects a rich sociolinguistic context, while also highlighting the separation of the three language communities that sometimes causes a sense of discomfort in parts of the population (as explored in the above sections of this paper). Quest for belonging and rootlessness are common themes in contemporary South Tyrolean literature in the various languages of the region – much like in other literary traditions in multilingual societies that have endured historically tense relations between language groups and that are currently facing increasing immigration (as in Québec or Catalonia, to give two among many examples). These intersecting literary traditions raise in particular the problem of the (non-)coincidence of cultural, linguistic and national borders, and the question of what constitutes a 'national' or 'transnational' literature.

According to Alessandro Costazza, who insists on labelling this body of work a 'minor literature', the malaise expressed in literary texts places South Tyrolean literature more closely to the field of postmodern literature, whose main characters express unease towards traditional values and tend to be preoccupied with the diversity of contemporary societies. The focus on this type of malaise contrasts with *Heimatliteratur*, which sacralizes rootedness in one's homeland (Costazza 2009, 265) and depicts life in the mountain world uncritically by transfiguring it in pathetic and patriotic tones (Wildner 2007, 4). In his periodization of South Tyrolean literature, Grüning (2022, 234, 249-250) also points to a gradual depoliticization, a less direct focus on collective identity – particularly that of German speakers – and an opening up to other contact languages and cultures, but also to more individual themes. The following section explores the treatment of what may appear like an identity crisis in two South Tyrolean novels, beginning with Zoderer's *Die Walsche*.

Die Walsche *or Olga's estrangement: (false) rural harmony and promises of the city*

Joseph Zoderer (1935-2022) spent his first years in South Tyrol before his family chose to take German citizenship and move to Austria in 1940. He returned to South Tyrol after the war, but also studied and worked in Austria. He has sometimes referred to himself as a "German writer with an Italian passport" (quoted by Grüning 2019, 237) and in this way embodies the complex history of his native region. He became known as a prolific writer of novels in German, repeatedly dealing with topics related to South Tyrol, notably the specificities of a life between cultures, while also distancing himself from the glorification of the *Heimat* as 'little fatherland.'

Zoderer's best-known novel, *Die Walsche* ('*The Italian*,' 1982), was translated into various languages – but not into English. Estrangement is a central theme of the novel (see Costazza 2009, 266), one that surfaces in its very title, since the word 'Walsch' (the dialect version of standard German 'Welsch') is a derogatory term to describe the Italians – the very ones sometimes suspected of threatening German speakers' South Tyrolean *Heimat* with their mere presence.

Olga, the protagonist of the novel, is referred to as the *Walsche* since she, despite being born in a mountain village where the majority of the population speaks German, shows an interest in the Italian language at school. She feels like an outsider in her own country and is unable to establish a sense of belonging. She turns her back on her village and moves to the city, where she finds work and lives with her boyfriend, the 'Italian' Silvano. But she does not feel at home in Bolzano either:

> How often had she felt alone, even if usually only for a few moments, with Silvano, or, even more often, with him in the midst of his noisy friends, suddenly like a stranger and without a foothold, in any case without a homeland, as if she and Silvano could never come together completely, never pass through a last wall of separation and finally bump heads with each other. A stranger, she had sometimes indeed felt like a stranger with him in the Italian quarter, but even here, in this house where she had grown up, here in this place of her birth, where everything should have been familiar to her, everything fell on her head and chest in an oppressive strangeness and sank in through her eyes and ears and pressed down on her heart.
>
> > Wie oft hatte sie sich, wenn auch meist nur für Augenblicke, bei Silvano allein gefühlt oder, noch öfter, mit ihm inmitten seiner lärmenden Freunde plötzlich fremd und ohne Halt, auf jeden Fall heimatlos gefühlt, als ob sie, Silvano und sie nie ganz zusammenkommen, nie durch eine letzte Trennwand hindurch und mit den Köpfen endlich zueinanderstoßen könnten. Fremd, tatsächlich fremd, hatte sie sich manchmal mit ihm im Italienerviertel gefühlt, aber auch hier in dem Haus, wo sie aufgewachsen war, hier an diesem ihrem Geburtsort, wo ihr alles vertraut hätte sein müssen, fiel ihr alles in beklemmender Fremdheit auf den Kopf und auf die Brust und sank durch Augen und Ohr hinein und drückte hinunter auf das Herz. (Zoderer 2022)[13]

Wherever she is, Olga feels "a constant foreignness, always exposed to other gazes, always in the shop window" [„Eine gleichbleibende Fremdheit, immer anderen Blicken ausgesetzt, immer im Schaufenster"]. However, because she finally left home to go to the city, her development is set in contrast to that of her father, the "foreignness specialist" ["Fremdheitsspezialist"]. He was a foundling and was always treated as a stranger by the other villagers, a perception aggravated by the fact that he had also studied and become a (somewhat tyrannical) teacher. But he never managed to escape from the village, as Olga did, a feat that brings her a sense of fulfillment, further distinguishing her from her father. These are her thoughts when she returns home for his funeral – the novel ends after this episode; when she gets into a car, readers understand that she will probably return to Bolzano:

> She had come up to this nest a thousand and three hundred metres above the sea, very far from the tide, to this mountain hole from which her father had not been able to get away.
>
> > Sie [war] allein heraufgefahren in dieses Nest auf tausenddreihundert Meter über dem Meer, sehr weit entfernt von Ebbe und Flut, in dieses Bergloch, aus dem ihr Vater nicht wegzukommen imstande gewesen war. (idem)

Unlike Olga, the father consistently maintained a conservative view of home in which 'Italians' pose a threat, as do the women who, like his daughter, marry them. He worked hard to integrate himself into the mountain village's community and believed strongly in *Heimat* ('homeland', 'little fatherland'):

> [He had] probably even more than others sought a *Heimat* and then, when he had not been able to find one among these people, had just clung to the concept, to the very word *Heimat*.
>
> > [Er hatte] wahrscheinlich mehr noch als andere eine Heimat gesucht und sich dann, als er unter diesen Leuten keine hatte finden können, nur noch an das Wort Heimat geklammert. (idem)

According to Arnold Kruse, *Die Walsche* is an "Anti-*Heimat* novel" (2012, 186) through which Zoderer criticizes nationalism and the ideology of the *Heimat*. For Olga, the *Heimat* of her father is not a place where she feels at home, and thus her dual alienation from the 'Italian' and

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[13] The quotations from *Die Walsche* are taken from an e-book – which is why we cannot give the pages – and translated by the authors.

'German' communities ultimately appears as something positive, as a paradoxical liberation. From her perspective, the life in her village is characterized by misogyny and violence against the weak. One such victim is Olga's half-brother Florian, an epileptic and spastic disabled child who is fathered by the school caretaker and who is teased and beaten up by the other children of the village.

In the absence of genuine relationships of solidarity, the only thing keeping the village together is an anti-Italianism through which the 'homeland ideology' is reshaped by ethno-nationalism (Kruse 2012, 202). For many villagers, the *Heimat* has to be protected from the 'invaders,' the Italians who came to South Tyrol after its annexation to Italy in 1919. But for Olga, the danger comes from the exclusionary ideology of her father, not from the 'invasion' by 'Italians.' Since the *Heimat* ideal cannot keep its promises of everlasting harmony, it degenerates into nationalist propaganda (Costazza 2009, 267; see also Sommadossi 2011, 111).

Furthermore, even for the natives, some of the traditions of the homeland no longer seem to represent its core values. The adaptation and expansion linked to tourism demonstrate the unbridled dominance of economic values. When she visits her village, Olga notices that traditional farms are being transformed into hotels that do little more than provide kitschy references to local architecture. For Olga, the word *Heimat* has been degraded to pure ideology not only because it is exploited by various types of parochialism and nationalism, but also because it is used to make money:

> He [Olga's father] knew that for most of them this homeland was only used for shovelling money, that it was divided into drawn-out pieces of cake to be tasted and eaten: in ski highways, in cross-country skiing trails and in all kinds of small and large hotels with hay barn gables. They would have liked to cover the hotel roofs with straw again, to make sure they remained as they once were, while earning some very up-to-date money.
>
>> Er [Olgas Vater] wußte, daß diese Heimat für die meisten nur noch zum Geldschaufeln herhalten mußte, daß sie aufgeteilt war in ausgezirkelte Kuchenstückchen zum Kosten und Verzehren: in Skiautobahnen, in Loipen und in lauter Klein- und Großhotels mit Heustadelgiebeln. Am liebsten hätten sie die Hoteldächer wieder mit Stroh gedeckt, um ganz gewiß die alten zu bleiben, aber das neue Geld damit zu machen. (Zoderer 2022)

Olga's journey didn't take her very far – only to the region's main city, Bolzano –, but it proved to be an interior journey, a maturation process. She distances herself from her German-speaking compatriots and their discriminatory mentality, but she finally also distances herself from cultural stereotypes and tendencies towards superiority prevalent in the Italian-speaking community. When she sees the *Siegesdenkmal*, the (in)famous monument erected in Bozen/Bolzano by the fascists to symbolize their supremacy over a formerly Austrian South Tyrol (see section 1), the omniscient narrator comments as follows:

> Not once had it occurred to her that it was meant to refer to a victory and therefore to a defeat for the others, and that she, Olga, was one of the others, therefore one of the defeated.
>
>> [N]icht ein einziges Mal hatte sie daran gedacht, daß es einen Sieg bedeuten sollte und also eine Niederlage für die anderen, und daß sie, Olga, zu den anderen, also den Besiegten gehörte. (idem)

With this journey, Olga redeems her father. By getting to know the outsider, the Italian, she overcomes the prejudices and stereotypes in which her father has become entangled, but she also learns to identify other forms of prejudice.

Two topoi of South Tyrolean literature: the journey to southern Italy and the 'mixed couple'

Olga's personal trajectory is merely one example of a larger tendency in South Tyrolean novels. Costazza (2017) observes that, in these novels, the protagonist often undertakes a journey to the south of Italy in order to look back on South Tyrol society from a new location. This is not the case in Zoderer's novel *Die Walsche,* but it is the case in another of his novels, *Der Schmerz der Gewöhnung* ('The Pain of Adapation,' 2002), as well as in Francesca Melandri's *Eva dorme* ('Eva Sleeps', 2010, see below) and Sabine Gruber's *Stillbach oder Die Sehnsucht* ('Stillbach, or The Longing', 2011).

The journey to southern Italy has become a kind of *topos* that serves a similar function across these novels, despite differences in both content and form between them. The journey enables a decentred view of history, which, in turn, allows the fictional figures to overcome common forms of ethnic, cultural, and ideological polarization. During these trips, they become familiar with the otherness expressed by Southern Italian culture and start to appreciate it, putting in perspective what they used to hear and believe about 'the Italians.'

There is another leitmotif of contemporary South Tyrolean literature: a German-speaking woman protagonist who has an affair with an Italian-speaking man (see above for *Die Walsche* and below for *Eva dorme*). This type of relationship is, in reality, common in South Tyrol since, from the time that it was annexed to the Italian state, until the 1950s, thousands of men from all over Italy moved there to work, particularly in the public sector and industry. Even as late as 2016, only 3% of German-speaking South Tyrolean males were married to an Italian-speaking woman, while 19% of Italian-speaking males had a German-speaking wife[14], which might be partly explained by women's upward social mobility patterns. While not the subject of this paper, these novels pay particular attention to the intersections between several forms of (internalized) oppression – in this case ethnic discrimination, sexism and classism.

Francesca Melandri's* Eva dorme*: The virtues of an external perspective

The second South Tyrolean novel that is the subject of this paper, *Eva dorme*, was published by Francesca Melandri in Italian in 2010 (transl. into German, *Eva schläft*, 2011; English, *Eva Sleeps*, 2016). It is very different from *Die Walsche* (1982), despite the fact that both works feature female protagonists: Olga in Zoderer's novel, Eva in *Eva dorme*. The latter novel, however, features a second central female figure: Eva's mother Gerda, a German-speaking woman who fell in love with an 'Italian' man. Eva's and Gerda's lives are presented as very much intertwined.

Between the publications of *Die Walsche* and *Eva dorme,* the geopolitical landscape has changed considerably, a fact that is reflected in the latter novel. Whereas the South Tyrol of the 1980s was mostly located in a context of nation states, it is now a region in a Europe that is more politically united – Austria joined the European Union in 1995. As we know, the western part of the EU has become, increasingly, a major destination for migrants from all over the world, an aspect which is taken up with some emphasis in *Eva dorme* (see below).

Our two authors also present distinct points of view. Zoderer, as mentioned before, spent most of his life in South Tyrol and thus knows it from the inside out. He adopts a 'German' viewpoint – although some critics have accused him of portraying Italians too positively, sometimes earning him the label of *Nestbeschmutzer* ('denigrator', 'traitor'; see Sommadossi 2011, 111; Ersterhammer 2006). For her part, Francesca Melandri, born in 1964 in Rome,

[14] [https://www.ansa.it/trentino/notizie/2016/11/17/pochi-matrimoni-misti-in-alto-adige_2b6b9a90-7f4a-416d-a8bf-b87d5c85e0b0.html].

first learned about South Tyrol as a tourist. She did spend fifteen years in Bruneck/Brunico later in life, but she observes South Tyrolean society from a different perspective. Even though she writes in Italian, however, she is widely considered as a South Tyrolean author, or at least as an author having written a "South Tyrol-specific novel" ["südtirolspezifischen Roman", Grüning 2022, 246]. Peterlini describes Melandri as "able to condense" in her novel "all our peculiarities, small follies, stereotypes and the most lovable traits" ["capace di condensare [...] tutte le nostre porticolarità, le piccole follie, gli stereotipi et i tratti più amabili" (2019, 202)]. Costazza finally notes Eva's role as a representative figure for *all* people, both in South Tyrol and in other regions of Italy:

> Eva allowed Italians in general, but also the native Italian-speaking inhabitants of South Tyrol themselves, to consider important moments in the history of that territory from the perspective of South Tyroleans.
>
> > Eva ha consentito agli italiani in generale, ma pure agli stessi abitanti di madrelingua italiana dell'Alto Adige, di considerere momenti importanti della storia di quel territorio dalla prospettiva dei sudtirolesi. (Costazza 2022, 265)

It should also be noted that the general reception of these two works abroad was quite different: Melandri's work was translated into English, French, German, Dutch, Ukrainian, Croatian, Greek, and Hebrew, while *Die Walsche*, although becoming a bestseller in Italy thanks to the translation (*L'italiana,* 1985), has enjoyed a more limited circulation.

Several journeys in one novel

Eva dorme narrates two, arguably three, journeys. The first two journeys, one in space and one in time, are told alternately, independently of each other. The journey in space takes place at the beginning of the 2000s. It follows one of the two protagonists, Eva, on her long train journey across the Italian peninsula, from her rural home village in South Tyrol to Reggio Calabria in Southern Italy. Eva embarks on this trip after receiving a phone call from her childhood father figure, Vito, informing her of his deadly illness. Before returning to Calabria, Vito had been a *carabiniere* – member of the military police – in South Tyrol and had lived with Eva's mother, Gerda. As mentioned above, the trip to Southern Italy is a leitmotif in many South Tyrolean novels that permits its protagonists to put aside their usual point of view. It can be understood as a variation on the centuries-old tradition in which travellers, especially those hailing from the German-speaking world and Northern Europe – like Goethe or Heine –, go to the south of Italy to discover Mediterranean culture, which they view as offering an ideal with respect to aesthetics and daily life – one that sits in decided contrast with the customs of the North.

The second journey presented in *Eva dorme* is a journey through time, shifting between the present day and Eva's recollections of the stories her mother told her about her childhood during the interwar years. This journey also narrates Gerda's memories of her youth and early years in post-war South Tyrol. Melandri's work offers readers a very specific sense of the passage through time and space since its chapter titles convey directly the dates of the life experiences of Gerda and the kilometres Eva covers to reach Vito ("1919," "km 0," "1925-1961," "km 0-35"…), in accordance with the novel structure, which alternates between temporal and spatial references.

The history of Gerda's family is intertwined with the major events of South Tyrolean history, especially as it relates to the considerable ethnic tension between German and Italian speakers in the 1960s and 1970s. Gerda's family members were 'resettlers' (*Rücksiedler*) after they had decided to settle in Germany in the wake of the Hitler-Mussolini Agreement mentioned above. Gerda's brother is a terrorist fighting for South Tyrol's independence from Italy. Thus, the

history of South Tyrol is one of the novel's central themes – along with family, linguistic belongings, and xenophobia.

Like *Die Walsche*, *Eva dorme* is, in some respects, a *Bildungsroman*. Gerda, like Olga, goes on a third, educational journey. Her youth was marked by poverty and the separation between the 'Italian' and 'German' communities. Gerda's open-mindedness allowed her to start a relationship with Vito, an Italian-speaking man – an example of the topos of the 'mixed relationships' mentioned above. In doing so, she opposed the separation dynamics by both provincial politicians and her home community. Gerda could have found a more prosperous husband – one of her suitors is the rich Hannes Staggl – but her personality and desire for freedom lead her to make other choices.

In the novel, Silvius Magnago – the long-time governor of the province quoted in the first part of the paper – describes the separation policy in a condensed form that accurately reflects the arguments used at the time:

> For Magnago, especially now that the relations with the Italian government were being normalized, there was another threat hanging over his Heimat, one that risked, in the long run, eating into its identity. It was most destabilizing, most invasive, most dangerous phenomenon of all: inter-ethnic mixed marriages. […] It was essential that a census be taken of the ethnic communities of Alto Adige, that they be quantified and clearly divided from one another: especially schools and cultural and language institutes, because it was only by separating South Tyrolean culture and language from the Italian ones that you could protect them effectively. The clarity of ethnic boundaries: after so many turmoils, it was the only way to maintain social peace. (Melandri 2016, 326-327)

>> Sopratutto, da quando si stavano normalizzando i rapporti con lo Stato italiano, per Magnago era un'altra la minaccia che incombeva sulla sua Heimat e rischiava di intaccarne, alla lunga, l'identità. Era il fenomeno più destabilizzante, più invasivo, più pericoloso di tutti: i matrimoni misti interetnici. […] era fondamentale che le comunità etniche dell'Alto Adige fossero censite, quantificate, e divise chiaramente l'una dall'altra: le scuole e gli istituti culturali e linguistici, soprattutto, perché solo separando da quella italiana la cultura e la lingua sudtirolese la si poteva proteggere efficacemente. Chiarezza dei confini etnici: solo così, dopo tanti tumulti, si poteva mantenere la pace sociale. (Melandri 2010, 304)

Mixing 'Knödel' and spaghetti? The culinary metaphor and Gerda's emancipation

Magnago, who coined this political vision of South Tyrolean-Italian *Nebeneinander*, also invented a culinary metaphor to synthesize it, which finds its moment of glory in the novel, when he declares, *"You shouldn't mix Knödel with spaghetti"* (2016, 281) [" *'Nicht Knödel mit Spaghetti mischen'*, canederli e spaghetti non vanno mescolati" (2010, 62, italics in the original)]. Spaghetti, of course, is a main dish in the Italian culinary tradition, whereas 'Knödel' are dumplings typical of South Tyrolean cuisine. Since Gerda is a cook, the metaphor is particularly appropriate, especially as she often modifies and enhances the methods of her native culture in the kitchen by incorporating Italian ingredients – unknowingly contradicting Magnano. Mr. Neumann, her mentor, teaches her the art of selecting, storing, and preserving food. Gerda learns how to go beyond the limitations of local cuisine. In the kitchen, they use not only a hybrid style of cooking but also a form of 'culinary bilingualism' – the effect is particularly well rendered in the English translation, which retains both the original Italian and German terms:

> The fish arrived from Chioggia at dawn on Fridays, in wooden crates covered with ice: mullets, pilchards, sea bass, clams. Herr Neumann used their Italian names, as he did with fruit and vegetables, and especially salads: radicchio, lattuga, valeriana, rucola, portaluca, crescione. Radicchio, lettuce, rocket, valerian, purslane, watercress. On the other hand, he used German for

> meat: Rindfilet, Lammrippen, Schienbein. […] This culinary bilingualism was shared by all the staff, as an obligation. (2016, 89-90)

> Il pesce arrivava da Chioggia in casse di legno coperte di ghiaccio, il venerdì all'alba: triglie, code di rospo, branzini, vongole, fasolari. Herr Neumann li chiamava così, in italiano. Anche per verdura e frutta usava i nomi italiani, soprattutto per le insalate: radicchio, lattuga, valeriana, rucola, portaluca, crescione. Per la carne, invece, usava il tedesco: *Rindfilet, Lammrippen, Schienbein.* […] Quel bilinguismo culinario era un uso consolidato, condiviso da tutto il personale, inderogabile. (2010, 82, italics in the original)

The culmination of Gerda's educational journey is the birth of her daughter Eva, which widens her social and linguistic horizons. Gerda, as a native German (dialect) speaker, mispronounces some words when speaking in Italian (2010, 105). But a few decades later, Eva lives in New York. While still speaking Italian, standard German, and *Südtirolerisch*, she also speaks fluent English and expresses a curiosity in foreign cultures. To some degree, she sublimates her mother's life. She is even more 'in between the cultures,' becomes a citizen of the world – which can be seen as a prominent characteristic of the protagonists featured in contemporary South Tyrolean novels.

However, as was the case for Olga in *Die Walsche*, Eva remains uncomfortable with her Italian passport and is uneasy when she feels forced to 'choose sides' – reflecting the 'declaration' that the South Tyrolean administration demands of its citizens. Albeit (or because) she is well used to this kind of plurilingual interaction, she cannot have a relaxed conversation with the Italians she meets on her journey to the south, who are curious about her 'real' identity – and she seeks to describe for them the various perspectives and the intricate complexities of her home region:

> The wife looks at me and catches me by surprise: "Sorry to ask but… Do you feel more German or more Italian?"
> And she didn't even put down her bags before asking me! I catch my breath. Naturally, my answer is well rehearsed. "I have an Italian passport but my language is German, my land is the Southern part of Tyrol, other parts of which, however, like North Tyrol and East Tyrol, are in Austria. We call it Südtirol but in Italian it's Alto Adige, since the difference has always been where you're looking from: from above or below."
> My answer silences her. She looks at her husband.
> "But didn't they speak Ladin in Ortisei?" she asks him.
> "Yes."
> "Which is actually a different Ladin from the one they speak in Val Badia," I say.
> "What a complicated place!"
> "Yes, it is." (2016, 279)

> La moglie mi guarda e, a tradimento:
> «Scusi se glielo chiedo ma…lei cosa si sente, più tedesca o più italiana?»
> E non ha neanche poggiato le borse prima di chiederlo! Prendo fiato. La risposta è ben collaudata, naturalmente. «Il mio passaporto è italiano, la mia lingua è il tedesco, la mia terra è la parte Sud del Tirolo le cui altre parti però, il Tirolo del Nord e dell'Est, sono in Austria. Noi la chiamiamo Südtirol ma in italiano si dice Alto Adige, visto che la differenza è sempre stata quella, da dove la si guarda: da sopra o da sotto.»
> La mia risposta l'ammutolisce. Guarda il marito.
> «Ma a Ortisei non parlavano ladino?» gli chiede.
> «Sì.»
> «Che tra l'altro» dico «è un ladino diverso da quello della val Badia.»
> «Che posto complicato!»
> «Vero.» (2010, 260)

Mr. Song as an incarnation of the multicultural perspective

Melandri incorporates into her novel a multicultural dimension (one largely absent from *Die Walsche*) through the characters of Eva and, more importantly, Mr. Song, a man of Chinese origin. Eva respects and sympathizes with immigrants and their contributions to South Tyrol. As noted in the opening section of this essay, the conflict between Italian and German speakers currently takes its form within a new geopolitical context where the immigration of allophones plays an important role. In the novel, Mr. Song must fill out the declaration of linguistic affiliation. The possibility of checking "other" and fill out an *assignment* declaration (instead of *affiliation*, see above) is not mentioned in the novel (probably because the author is unaware of this subtlety, or because it might alter the desired narrative effect). At any rate, Mr. Song finds himself in a dilemma:

> [D]uring the 2001 census, they asked him to tick one of the following boxes: Italian, German, or Ladin. There was no room for any other option, since these are the only three ethnic groups recognized in South Tyrol. To receive the benefits of the region with special status you had to fill in and sign a declaration of belonging to the language group. The heading on the form said, in German, *Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeitserklärung*. Signor Song told me he stared at that word for a long time. Thirty-six letters. Eleven syllables. Although he is a polyglot (Italian, English, Mandarin, and now also some German), his mother tongue is Shandong dialect: a tonal and especially monosyllabic language. (2016, 28-29)
>
>> [A]l censimento del 2001, gli fu chiesto di mettere una croce su una di tre caselle: italiano, tedesco o ladino. Nessun'altra possibilità era ammessa, solo queste tre sono le etnie riconosciute in Alto Adige. Per partecipare dei benefici della Regione a statuto speciale era necessario compilare e firmare la dichiarazione d'appartenenza al gruppo linguistico. L'intestazione del formulario, in tedesco, diceva *Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeitserklärung*. Il signor Song, così mi ha raccontato lui stesso, fissò a lungo quella parola. Trentasei lettere. Undici sillabe. Benché sia poliglotta (italiano, inglese, mandarino e ormai anche un po' di tedesco), la sua lingua madre è il dialetto di Shandong: una lingua tonale e, soprattutto, monosillabica. (2010, 22)

Eva, who has overcome some of the prejudices of ethno-nationalist thinking, empathizes with Mr. Song, who – like herself – finds himself caught in a paradox. His plurilingual skills are not recognized by a government that claims to promote multilingualism and respect language minorities. The ending of the novel proposes a comically disruptive solution for overcoming linguistic separation and the fact that South Tyrol – like most governments of multilingual entities – only recognizes 'home-made' minorities:

> Eva has made a decision. If there is another census of linguistic belonging, when she fills the *Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeitserklärung*, in the box ethnicity she will write CHINESE. (2016, 368)
>
>> Eva ha preso una decisione. Se ci sarà un altro censimento di appartenenza linguistica, nel compilare la *Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeitserklärung*, alla voce 'etnia' scriverà CINESE. (2010, 344, capitals and italics in the original)

From border obsession to transcultural perspective

Claudio Magris describes (German-speaking) South Tyrolean writers as "obsessed with the border" ["ossessionati dal confine"] (Magris 1997, 223) and the need or difficulty of crossing it. They grieve, but they are also relieved to know that they are 'Italians' among 'Germans' and 'Germans' among 'Italians.' They might suffer from not knowing which world they belong to, he notes, but the (symbolic) border provides something reassuring. By including the stories of the Song family and depicting other languages and cultural traditions, Francesca Melandri looks beyond this

literary paradigm – Alice Perry states that "*Eva dorme* embraces multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism" (2022, 30).

Vito's son Gabriele – i.e., Eva's half-brother – is another interesting character with regard to the focus shift from the 'Italian' vs. 'German' identity debate towards a transcultural perspective. Speaking with him, Eva definitely realizes that the ethnic concept of identity is obsolete. She notices that Gabriele not only doesn't ask her the 'usual question,' but also doesn't seek to define differences between nations, regions, and ethnic groups – in a way that politicians (or intellectuals) do to promote their interpretation of history. Vito's son, by naming the different groups who once came from all directions to Calabria or Sicily, puts current conflicts into perspective:

> "[Eva] You are not asking me." [Gabriele] "What?" "If I feel more Italian or German." "Why should I? It's as if you were to ask me it I feel more Calabrian or Italian. Or rather more Norman, Arab, Greek or Albanian." (2016, 344)

> > «Tu non me lo chiedi.» «Cosa?» «Se mi sento più italiana o tedesca.» «Perché dovrei? Come se tu chiedessi a me se mi sento più calabrese o italiano. Anzi, più normanno, arabo, greco o albanese.» (2010, 322)

This dialogue suggests that any attempt to define identity according to national criteria is doomed to failure because both collective and individual identities are more complex than they appear – and contain traces of other past or hidden identities.

Eva dorme can be classified as a work of transcultural literature that advocates for a global identity rather than a merely national one. It may partly explain its international success, since transculturality is a concept that is commonly explored in contemporary literature about linguistically complex societies. One of the leading theoreticians of 'world literature,' David Damrosch, writes that "[a] work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (Damrosch 2003, 6). To a certain extent, this kind of literature, by placing the discourse of identity in a transcultural context, becomes more flexible and easier to 'export' (Renzi 2018, 45).

3. Reflecting and overcoming stereotypes

In the third and last section of this paper, we propose to approach Zoderer's and Melandri's novels through the lens of social psychology, which explores the way people behave in the presence of other (groups of) people, as well as the emergence of social identity and stereotypes. Whether we consider that literature shapes social reality or, rather, reflects it, it can be claimed that "[f]iction is a set of simulations of social worlds that we can compare, as it were stereoscopically, with aspects of our everyday world" (Oatley 2016, 618). One way of analyzing the two novels is to look at the genesis of in- and outgroups.

The creation of in- and outgroups

In *Eva dorme* and *Die Walsche*, Gerda and Olga each follow a 'path of formation,' which might be described as the search for identity (see Garms-Homolová 2021, 4). A person develops a sense of belonging – the social identity – by believing that he or she is a member of a specific community and identifying with it. Positive characteristics are assigned to this 'ingroup,' which strengthens the self-esteem of its members. Outgroups, on the other hand, are given negative evaluations that can become prejudices. The search of a social identity implies a process of categorization, a "the tendency to divide objects (including people) into discrete groups on the

basis of common characteristics" (idem, 50). The categorization required for stereotyping can occur through broad categories (e.g., nationality, gender, age, language) or smaller ones (e.g., career women) (Petersen/Six 2020, 21). This dynamic seems particularly 'necessary' in a context where, as in South Tyrol, everybody, as part of a changing minority/majority, can feel discriminated against and then accuse others of being disrespectful.

In the novels we are considering, there is an obsessive creation of ingroups and outgroups based on linguistic and cultural features. For example, Olga's father in *Die Walsche* constantly echoes the formula "We Germans" in opposition to the 'Italian' community, which is perceived as the outgroup. His behaviour is exacerbated by drunkenness – which the author renders in a fragmented syntax:

> Not like the others, her father cursed against the Italians; she would have to agree with him one day. We Germans! She had so often heard him say, we Germans! […] Tolerance! he used to yell, from those in the South we can finally learn something. But despite his cries for tolerance, he grumbled like a sergeant, especially when he was drunk, he gave speeches in which he mentioned not only "we Germans" and "the German homeland," but also punctuality and discipline; and the fact that the others who were staying with the Germans, with our people, should have learned these qualities in the barracks.
>
>> Nicht wie die anderen, das musste sie ihm lassen, hatte der Vater auf die Walschen geschimpft. Wir Deutschen! Hatte sie ihn oft sagen hören, wir Deutschen! […] Toleranz! hatte er geschrien, von denen im Süden könne man schließlich etwas lernen. Aber trotz seines Toleranzgeschreis zeterte er, besonders wenn er angetrunken war, wie ein Feldwebel und hielt Ansprachen in denen nicht nur Wir Deutsche und die Deutsche Heimat vorkamen, sondern auch Pünktlichkeit und Disziplin, die die anderen bei den Deutschen, bei den Unseren, in der Kaserne hätten lernen müssen. (Zoderer 2022)

The separation of the two main groups is also described in *Eva dorme*, which depicts reciprocal indifference or symbolic annihilation and the importance of well-defined 'micro-territories':

> Relations between us, *Daitsch* [German] children, and Italian kids were very simple: they didn't exist. They were Walschen, precisely, we were "crucchi" [Krauts] or at most "tralli" [pylons] in homage to the electricity pylons our terrorists enjoyed blowing up so much. There were districts, areas of influence, territories. (2016, 252)
>
>> I rapporti tra noi bambini *Daitsch* e quelli italiani erano semplici: non esistevano. Loro erano Walschen, appunto; noi "crucchi" o al massimo "tralli", in omaggio a quei tralicci che ai nostri terroristi piaceva così tanto far saltare in aria. C'erano zone, aree d'influenza, territori. (2010, 235-236)

Olga's new world: stereotypes of the disciplined German and the joyful Italian

In the passage of *Die Walsche* quoted above, describing the way Olga's father relates obsessively to the 'German' community, various stereotypes emerge. These 'micro-theories' have a primarily simplifying function. They allow people to decipher social phenomena with a set of interpretative tools and to predict which behaviours to expect from the members of each category (see Cavalli/Coletta 2003, 17). They can be both positive and negative, and both projected on others (hetero-stereotypes) or internalized (auto-stereotypes).

However, only a subset of the expected characteristics are actually present in a categorized person. The others are attributed to him or her as a member of the stereotyped category. In the aforementioned passage, Olga's father associates two traits with his 'German' ingroup: *punctuality* and *discipline*, stereotypes he has internalized and that have a positive connotation among the ingroup members (Mazza 2000, 48-49). As for the outgroup members, the 'Italians,' they are logically defined by the opposite, *indolence* and *disorganization*. But as Olga stresses, her father

is not characterized by the features he attributes to his ingroup. Her observation on the discrepancy between her father's lifestyle and his social representations makes it clear to readers that stereotypes stem from subjective viewpoints rather than objective characteristics:

> [H]e, who had arrived in class on time only once, at most accidentally, and who had left teaching not in the line of duty, but drunk on the banks of a stream, was demanding loudly, at the bar and at home, that the Italians who had it too easy be taught how to live.
>
>> [A]usgerechnet er, der höchstens zufällig einmal pünktlich in eine Klasse kam und schließlich nicht in Ausübung seiner Pflicht, sondern besoffen in einer Bachwiese den Schuldienst quittierte, hatte vor der Schank und daheim lauthals einen Schliff für die in den Tag hineinlebenden Italiener gefordert. (Zoderer 2022)

The dynamics of ingroup-outgroup structures and the presence of stereotypes can also be observed in Olga's life in Bolzano. As established above, she experiences her life in the big city as a liberation from rural life. The 'Italian' urban environment acts as a counter-world to the mountain's narrowness. Olga's companion and his friends in Bolzano's 'Italian quarter' represent different ways of behaving and living together. They are a cheerful crowd; they exude warmth and embrace physical contact, elements that Olga missed in her home village:

> There was nothing Silvano's friends liked better than to act all together, at least for a short time, like a family, heating, cooking, eating and cleaning, under the same roof and, if possible at all, in a single room.
>
>> Es gab nichts was Silvanos Freunde lieber taten, als sich alle zusammen wenigstens für eine kurze Zeit wie eine Familie aufzuführen, zu heizen, zu kochen, zu essen und zu putzen, unter einem gemeinsamen Dach und möglichst noch in einem einzigen Raum. (Zoderer 2022)

She also emphasizes her friend Laura's spontaneous affection, as well as her tendency to gesticulate and to seek physical contact while talking.

Moreover, Olga notices that her new Italian friends, while being joyful, drink alcohol without indulging in the excesses of her fellow villagers. As she explains, they don't conclude an excursion "with eating and drinking and often with a fight" ["mit Essen und mit Saufen und oft noch mit einer Schlägerei"]. The German speakers' anti-Italian behaviour she had witnessed is set in contrast from the start with the Italians' supposed general sense of humanity. The same mechanisms that govern the social identity of her father and of her home community are at work here, but the scale of values is reversed. For Olga, 'Italians' are viewed positively – and probably idealized to the same extent as 'Germans' were demonized by her, so that social 'reality,' once again, is not at the centre of the narrative.

Black coffee and blond women

The protagonists of the two novels have similar experiences with regard to stereotypical images of sensuality – be it the strong Italian coffee or the attractive blond German woman. When the 'Walsche' Olga, who has experienced a new way of life, returns home, she juxtaposes the robust Italian coffee with her village's "watery cappuccino." Perry describes this sort of experience as "reverse culture shock" (2022, 52). Before this episode, however, Olga's new friends in Bolzano project the stereotype of 'the blond' onto her. The fact that she is actually not a blond, serves as a reminder to readers of the illusionary character of stereotypes:

> Although she was a brunette, she felt they had made her into a blond, into what they wanted her to be as a cliché, the blond who always had something erotic in Italian eyes.

> Obwohl sie eine Dunkelhaarige war, fühlte sie sich von ihnen zur Blonden gemacht, zu dem, was sie als Klischee haben wollten, zur Blonden, die für die Italiener immer etwas Erotisches hatte. (Zoderer 2022)

In *Eva dorme*, too, there is no shortage of references to sensuality- or sexuality-related stereotypes. Melandri repeatedly describes Gerda as "extremely beautiful" ["bellissima" (idem, 55, 63, 121, 164)]. Gerda tries to integrate into the Italian community by flirting with some carabinieris stationed in South Tyrol (Melandri 2010, 267) and finally meets Vito, the *carabiniere* with whom she falls in love. For his part, Vito imagines the 'German' women of South Tyrol as having "endless legs, rhinestones on their bodices, backcombed blond hair" ["gambe infinite, strass sul corpetto, capelli biondi cotonati" (idem, 227)]. The stereotype of the blond German woman seems to be one of the most ingrained and therefore most prominent in both novels.

Nazi or fascist past, between stereotypes and discrimination

Since stereotypes and prejudices are not necessarily inherently negative, they must be distinguished from discrimination:

> A prejudice exists when this evaluation is transferred to a member of a category, without further regard to the person. If a negative evaluation is expressed in the behaviour of the person, this is called discrimination. (Petersen/Six 2020, 24)

An example of perceived (reciprocal) discrimination is described in *Eva dorme*, where the two communities deal with their problematic past of Nazism and fascism. In one conversation between Gerda and Carlo, an 'Italian,' Gerda notes that "most Italian-speaking South Tyroleans think that you German-speaking South Tyroleans are all Nazis," while Carlo declares that "most German-speaking South Tyroleans think that you Italian-speaking South Tyroleans are all fascists." (Melandri) [la maggior parte degli altoatesini di lingua italiana pensa che voi sudtirolesi di lingua tedesca siete tutti nazisti. […] la maggior parte dei sudtirolesi di lingua tedesca pensa che voi altoatesini di lingua italiana siete tutti fascisti. (2010, 238)]. Even if the two characters in conversation don't endorse these prejudices, the *possible* attribution of a behaviour to "most" people of a community is a reminder of how easy it is to discredit another group through generalizations.

At another moment, Silvano's friends dress up as South Tyrolean farmers and sing mountain songs, including "Nazi songs, although mostly without lyrics because they didn't know them or only knew fragments of words" ["Nazilieder, obwohl meist ohne Text, weil sie den nicht oder nur in Wortfetzen kannten" (Zoderer 2022)]. Although the young men think Olga will enjoy the way 'her' culture is represented, the stereotyping makes her uncomfortable, and therefore becomes a form of discrimination. Their behaviour can be explained by their ignorance of the meaning of the Nazi songs, their naivety, and their lack of historical knowledge (Kruse 2012, 235), but it is perceived by Olga as inadequate. On the other hand, in the depiction of Olga's father mentioned above, 'Italians' are seen as enemies and invaders of the 'German' homeland. This negative perception may be related to the Italianization policy of the fascists, but it also seems to stem from a lack of awareness of the sometimes-difficult life of Italian workers who moved to South Tyrol, or the struggles of their children, who could feel discriminated in various ways.

Reversing clichés

According to Kruse (2012, 235), there is a key difference between the Italian speakers' clichés on 'Germans' and the German speakers' clichés on 'Italians' in *Die Walsche*. The 'Germans' are characterized by their exclusionary and negative perceptions of Italians, whereas the 'Italians' have a positive, albeit naive, attitude towards 'Germans,' especially with respect to

their traditions – cooking, architecture, decorating practices. Kruse's binary view is, however, probably too univocal, since, as observed above, German speakers also carry positive stereotypes (such as a belief in the 'Italian way of life'), while Italian speakers sometimes promote negative ones. Moreover, one can hardly 'prove' which group has more negative stereotypes of the other, since pairs of clichés (negative vs. positive) are often reversible (Kaminska 2019, 198-200). The Italians' supposed 'indiscipline' goes hand in hand with their supposed 'joie de vivre,' while the Germans' proverbial punctuality can be understood as the flip side of the 'art de vivre' associated with cosiness and warmth in the sense of *Gemütlichkeit*...

Zoderer's novel proposes a concept of identity linked to the process of personal individuation, which rejects the identity assigned by a community. Many elements in *Die Walsche* work to counter forms of prejudice or discrimination, which brings out a "multigroup identity" (Sommadossi 2011, 115). For example, Olga's friend Silvano declares that one should choose "solidarity between German and Italian workers" ["Solidarietà fra operai tedeschi e italiani"], i.e., a unity based on political and socioeconomic concepts of class rather than on ethno-nationalist antagonism. Zoderer may have integrated this Italian sentence to reproduce the language mixing and switching sometimes used in South Tyrol (albeit not between Silvio and Olga, since they speak Italian), in order to heighten the realist effect of his novel (see also Melandri 2010, 54, 198), but the very reference to this solidarity helps to put ethnic tensions in perspective.

Close relationships between members of different communities are, following social psychology, an effective way to overcome the traumas caused by history and the stereotypes that arise from them. In the wake of Gordon Allport's 'classic,' *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), many scholars have argued that intergroup contact leads to more reciprocal acceptance, and not to more conflict – although this may also depend on certain economic factors and the symbolic power enjoyed by some social categories. Contact fosters the acquisition of new knowledge about the outgroup, which corrects sweeping negative views and lessens fears and insecurity feelings. This enables people to see their own group, its norms and standards, with different eyes (Petersen/Six 2020, 320; Garms-Homolová 2021, 60).

From that perspective, we can observe that Olga and Silvano, by trying to overcome the barriers between their languages and cultures, appreciate 'the other in the other,' which promises an expansion and enrichment of their social identities. Each experiences unsettling elements when confronted with their partner's culture over the course of their relationship, leading to miscommunication and emphasizing the limits of individual acceptance and adaptability. Nonetheless, their relationship serves as a model of attitudes that enable intercultural relationships. They find themselves in an unstable state in which the boundaries between cultures are not definitively established and are, rather, tensely and continuously negotiated. However, the novel ultimately demonstrates that living in a linguistically and culturally complex environment, while challenging, also comes with advantages. Olga and Silviano's relationship, as a whole, has mostly positive aspects:

> Their misunderstandings probably made them even stranger to each other in a good way, they looked after each other with anxiety, and their strangeness made them more fragile. They had already been experiencing this feeling for a while, without much hope for something really new, they shared their unhappiness with a sense of guilt, as if each other's language were to blame. If they had shared the same language, this guilty feeling might have been lacking, but then they would probably have spared each other less, they would both have been obtusely strong against others and against each other.

> Wahrscheinlich machten die Mißverständnisse sie auf eine gute Art fremder, sie achteten aufeinander mit Ängstlichkeit, und ihre Fremdheit machte sie zerbrechlicher. Sie erlebten schon eine Weile das gleiche, ohne große Hoffnung auf wirklich Neues, sie teilten ihr Unglücklichsein mit einem Schuldgefühl, als ob ihre Sprache schuld wäre. In der gleichen Sprache hätte vielleicht dieses Schuldgefühl gefehlt, aber dann hätten sie sich wohl weniger geschont, sie wären beide stumpfsinnig stark gegen andere und gegeneinander gewesen. (Zoderer 2022)

Conclusion – literature as intercultural dialogue

Critics tend to agree that the couples described in Francesca Melandri's *Eva dorme* and Joseph Zoderer's *Die Walsche* represent a positive multi-identity relationship in which individuals embrace one another's culture, while navigating a variety of stereotypes on 'Italians' and 'Germans.' However, whereas Zoderer's novel proposes an alternative to ethnic separation through the depiction of the relationship between Olga and Silvano (who, however, remain in South Tyrol), Melandri places South Tyrol in a broader context by including an immigrant figure who plays a key role in her novel.

As we explain in the first section of this paper, the autonomous province Bolzano-South Tyrol is the scene of tense relationships between the main language groups, as well as between the autochthonous and allochthonous groups. But there is *also* a desire to 'make things better' and promote a better *Zusammenleben*. Thus, it comes as no surprise that *Die Walsche* and *Eva dorme* put intercultural dialogue at their core. Literary texts set in a region marked by cultural and political conflicts give readers the opportunity to scrutinize fictional characters expressing various prejudices. Especially if readers are themselves members of the depicted communities or can identify easily with certain characters, they may become aware of in/outgroup mechanisms in a way that can help them to see their behaviour patterns towards members of a foreign group from a new angle. 'South Tyrol-specific novels,' even if their 'social power' is impossible to measure, can therefore be understood (also) as micro laboratories in which the theses of social psychology can be reflected. Furthermore, the positive reception of these novels by both members of the public and literary critics suggests that many people want to see the societal challenges approached not only in the media, but also in literary productions.

If, as Peterlini states (2022, 329), the concepts of 'transnationality' and 'transculturality' are sometimes taboo in societies still preoccupied with homogeneity, contemporary novels depicting life in "majority/minority territories" ["Mehrheits-Minderheitengebieten"] (ibid.) like South Tyrol have the potential, in relatively direct, yet unassuming ways, to offer valuable lessons. They remind us that members of historically discriminated minorities – in this case mostly the German-speaking *Südtiroler* – deserve to see a fair representation of their history while simultaneously being encouraged to find in this very history the resources to meet the challenges posed by the injustices sometimes suffered by their 'neighbours' – whether they are descendants of workers from southern Italy or recent immigrants from even further afield.

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