Contemporary European History (2023), page 1 of 21
doi:10.1017/S0960777323000139

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

The Un-'Common Sense' of National Identity: Luigi Molina, *Trentini* and the Fascist Italianisation Campaign in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol

Eden K. McLean

Department of History, Auburn University, Auburn, AL, United States
ekmclean@auburn.edu

This article employs the recently discovered memoir of Luigi Molina – the superintendent of schools in Italy's multilingual borderland of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol from 1923 to 1944 – to demonstrate the sizeable and problematic rift between purportedly 'common-sense' understandings of 'Italian-ness' (*italianità*) as they were manifested in Italy's newly annexed Alpine territory and in Rome. In particular, the author focuses on the state's treatment of the region's Italian speakers (*trentini*) in its attempts to 'Italianise' their German-speaking neighbours and solidify fascist control of Italy's northern border. Ultimately, Molina's recollections recount how Rome's struggles to articulate and implement clear and consistent criteria for Italianisation led to the weakening of regional officials' moral authority, political support and 'totalitarian' façade. The simultaneously vague and critical project of Italianisation did not simply illuminate fascism's inability to inculcate an 'Italian identity' among Tyroleans, however; it also served to highlight fundamental difficulties in defining national identities in any nation-state.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the Italian state faced the challenge of changing the former Habsburg territory of Südtirol into the Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige.[1] In the first years of Italian administration, between late 1918 and 1922, the Liberal Government primarily focused its efforts on (re)establishing essential bureaucratic and economic infrastructures that had undergone extensive damage during the war.[2] After Benito Mussolini came to power in late 1922, however, Rome determined that a more extensive and intensive campaign of 'Italianisation' was necessary in the multilingual Alpine region. As with many nationalisation efforts of the twentieth century, the education system became a pillar of that project; the man entrusted to supervise the transformation of

1 Roughly from the twelfth century until Italy's annexation in 1920, the land comprised part of the Austro-Hungarian Princely County of Tyrol that spanned both sides of the Brenner Pass. Particularly in the centuries following the Counter-Reformation, Tyroleans found themselves increasingly separated from the economic, political and social practices of the rest of the Habsburg Empire, and many residents on both sides of the pass identified themselves as distinctly Tyrolean. For a brief overview of this history, see John W. Cole and Eric R. Wolf, *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1974), Chapter 2. After annexation of the territory south of the Brenner Pass, the Italian government established it as the administrative region of Venezia Tridentina. It was renamed Trentino-Alto Adige in late 1926 as a reflection of its administrative division into two provinces. Still today, many people refer to the northern province, Alto Adige, as South Tyrol/Südtirol, simultaneously recognising its former status as part of Habsburg Tyrol and separating it from the predominantly Italian-speaking province of Trentino in the south. Given the frequent changes in nomenclature – and recognising the political weight thereof – I primarily refer to the territory as Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol to avoid confusion.

2 For a detailed look at the process of transforming Tyrol from war to peace, from Austro-Hungarian to Italian in the critical years of 1918–1920, see Oswald Überegger, *Im Schatten des Krieges: Geschichte Tirols 1918–1920* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019); Georg Grote, *The South Tyrol Question, 1866–2010: From National Rage to Regional State* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), ch. 3.

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol's children into exemplars of *italianità* (Italian-ness) through the schools was a young civil servant from Rome named Luigi Molina.[3] At first glance, Molina appears to exemplify the rather faceless mid-level bureaucrat many people associate with the daily workings of any state, fascist or not; he is rarely mentioned in histories of fascist Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, and then largely only as a functionary, a mere intermediary for officials in Rome. Unlike legions of similar administrators, however, Molina offers us a unique entry point into the history of interwar Italy with more than 1,300 pages of autobiographical musings written during and immediately after the Second World War.[4] He devoted most of these pages – which have only recently become accessible to scholars – to his so-called 'Trentine period' in a deliberate attempt to grapple with a twenty-year career working for the fascist regime in its newly acquired border region. Hundreds of small brown sheets of cramped handwriting provide readers with a clear vision of the author's remembered experiences – selective as they surely were – as a regional school superintendent living in Trent between 1923 and 1944; at the same time, his words provide layers of richly detailed material with which to better understand the functions and dysfunctions of Benito Mussolini's government, the nature of Italian fascism, its understanding of *italianità* and, ultimately, the problematic concept of national identity. As such, a study of Molina and his efforts to Italianise Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol joins a growing body of research revealing a fascist bureaucracy defined by conflict, compromise, miscommunication and modification, a reality in direct contrast with its mandate to create and represent a united totalitarian society.[5]

Specifically, Molina's reflections on his time in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol expose the simultaneous power and arbitrariness of the fascist Italianisation project, and of national categorisations more generally. The superintendent and his colleagues enjoyed unrivalled authority as translators of fascist objectives into lived reality and yet were ultimately ineffectual enforcers of fascist policies within the region. Much of this difficulty stemmed from Rome's increasingly draconian measures aimed at achieving Italianisation; just as much, however, can be attributed to unrecognised discrepancies between assumed definitions and expectations of nationality and state power among the diverse parties interested in the future of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. What did it actually mean to be 'Italian'? Who was allowed to be – or become – 'Italian'? (How did one *become* 'Italian'?) And what would the government do with residents it deemed 'un-Italian'? These and related questions were and are asked in regions throughout Italy, just as similar concerns have long dogged most other national contexts. But border regions, and especially multilingual border regions subjected to shifting state boundaries as Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol was, serve to emphasise how varied and inconclusive responses to those questions are.[6] Put

3 Luigi Molina (1887–1961) was born in the northern province of Novara, but spent much of his childhood in Rome, where his father was a Member of Parliament. He became involved in the Italian Nationalist Association before the outbreak of the First World War and remained a member until it was absorbed into the Fascist Party in 1924. He began working as a functionary in the Ministry of Education in 1911 and remained there until he was forced out in 1944. After the Second World War, Molina continued his work as the Head of Rural Education for the National Organization for Redeemed Italy (ONAIR) until his death in 1961.

4 I am grateful to Quinto Antonelli of the *Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino* for introducing me to the archive. Other archives consulted for this article include the provincial archive (hereafter APTn), the archive of the Historical Museum Foundation of Trentino (hereafter FMST) and the Diocesan Archive of Trentino (hereafter ADT) in Trent, the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (hereafter AVV) in Vatican City, and the Historical Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter ASMAE) and Central State Archives (hereafter ACS) in Rome.

5 See, for example, Maura Hametz, *In the Name of Italy: Nation, Family, and Patriotism in a Fascist Court* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012); Jonathan Dunnage, 'Ideology, Clientelism, and the "Fascistization" of the Italian State: Fascists and the Interior Ministry Police', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 14, 3 (2009). The literature on everyday life in fascist Italy has been instrumental in developing this analysis. For a sample of the approaches to this idea, see Joshua Arthurs, Michael R. Ebner and Kate Ferris, eds., *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy: Outside the State?* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). On the power of mid-level bureaucrats to affect national policy, see Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For the theoretical work on street-level bureaucrats, see Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

6 Literature on twentieth-century nationalisation projects along Europe's borders has grown considerably. Alsace-Lorraine is perhaps the most well-researched case study, as well as the most like Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. More recent works

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

another way, it is well known that the fascist regime emphasised the importance of protecting and fortifying the sanctity of the Italian nation and people, of *italianità* itself; far from Rome's steady gaze, however, Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol's Italianisation campaign unveiled just how heterogeneous – just how un-'common' – the administrators' sense of those projects was.

One issue within Molina's expansive memoir stands out as particularly illustrative of both Italy's nationalist conundrum and the discrepancy between state policies and local implementation: Rome's apparent betrayal of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol's native-born Italian speakers. Molina had made his way north in 1923 having heard from his associates at the Ministry of Education of the cold, 'insincere' Italian-speaking population in the south (*trentini*) with a longstanding hatred for its 'foreign', German-speaking neighbours in the north (*Südtiroler*).[7] He had the sense that he would need 'a lot of skill to navigate the rocks in a sea that was anything but calm, a lot of energy to face the vengeful claims of the *trentini* against the ancient rulers of their land, whom historical events had now transformed into subjects'.[8] But, writing of his first days in Trent, Molina claimed to have quickly dispensed with the idea that his new Italian-speaking neighbours were disingenuous or provincial. Instead, he returned to his long-held irredentist conviction that they were some of the most ardent and faithful of all Italian nationalists. Nor, apparently, did Molina long support his colleagues' presumption that the *trentini* hated their German-speaking neighbours. On the contrary, he became convinced that they were some of the most suitable candidates to Italianise the entirety of the region, and he advocated vocally for their central position in the transformation of German-speaking Tyroleans, *Südtiroler*, into Italian-speaking Tyroleans, or *altoatesini*.[9]

At first, the new superintendent reportedly received widespread endorsement for his reliance on *trentini* to staff many of the schools and programmes in predominantly German-speaking communities. This initial backing from both local nationalists and Roman officials reflected a commitment to an

include Volker Prott, 'Challenging the German Empire: Strategic Nationalism in Alsace-Lorraine in the First World War', *Nations and Nationalism*, 27, 4 (Oct. 2021); Alison Carrol, 'In the Border's Shadow: Reimagining Urban Spaces in Strasbourg, 1918–39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 4 (Oct. 2013). For studies of Alsace-Lorraine in comparison to other border regions, see Stefan Berger, 'Border Regions, Hybridity, and National Identity: The Cases of Alsace and Masuria', in Q. Edward Wang and Franz L. Fillafer, eds., *The Many Faces of Clio: Cross-Cultural Approaches to Historiography, Essays in Honor of Georg G. Iggers* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2007); Paul Lawrence, Timothy Baycroft and Carolyn Grohmann, '"Degrees of Foreignness" and the Construction of Identity in French Border Regions during the Interwar Period', *Contemporary European History*, 10, 1 (Mar. 2001); David Laven and Timothy Baycroft, 'Border Regions and Identity', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 15, 3 (2008). Celia Applegate wrote about the German side of the border in Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). In the last twenty years, an increasing number of scholars have studied nationalisation efforts within the successor states of the Habsburg Empire that often involved 'language frontiers' and contested loyalties along the borders. Brendan Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German–Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Jeremy King, 'The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond', in Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield, eds., *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001); Rogers Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). The case of the Julian March, the other newly annexed region of Italy, is much more complicated than that of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, in large part because of the presence of several additional language groups, many of which were Slavic and considered far inferior to Italian or German. See the essays in Borut Klabjan, ed., *Borderlands of Memory* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019).

7 Luigi Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte' (Trent, n.d.), FMST, Archivio Luigi Molina (hereafter ALM), Racoglitore (hereafter r.) 2, Memorie Papa, 2. The region's small but no less important Ladin-speaking population (approximately 5 per cent of the total population) was and is often left out of or minimised in discussions of linguistic politics in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol.

8 Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 2–3.

9 Lucio Giudiceandrea and Alto Mazza identify South Tyroleans' primary language by terming German-speaking residents *Südtiroler* and Italian-speaking residents *altoatesini* in 'Living Together is an Art', in Georg Grote and Hannes Obermair, eds., *A Land on the Threshold: South Tyrolean Transformations, 1915–2015* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

internationally accepted conception of nationality as the basis on which to constitute states. It also reinforced state claims about the *italianità* of the territory. Much to Molina's dismay, however, the broad support for this approach was not as stable as he and others might have expected. Between 1926 and 1934, the fascist administration in Rome ordered a series of amendments to the Italianisation campaign that underscored the regime's increasingly aggressive attempts to assert totalitarian control over Italy's population. Many scholars have studied the impact of these decisions on the German-speaking residents of Alto Adige/Südtirol; very few scholars have investigated how they affected the area's Italian (and bilingual) residents, however.[10] Yet it was the policies' consequences for the *trentini* that exposed the sizeable and problematic rift between purportedly 'common-sense' understandings of what constituted *italianità* and Italianisation as they were manifested in Trent (with Molina and his allies) and in Rome (most prominently within the Fascist Party). Reflecting on the policy changes in his memoir, Molina posited that Rome's motivation lay in a 'grave distrust of and hostility toward the Trentine people' that inevitably doomed the fascist Italianisation campaign to failure.[11] According to Molina, Rome's growing distrust of the *trentini*'s usefulness in consolidating Italy's control over the territory – both perceived and real – fomented Trentine resentment toward the Italian state and greatly limited the extent of Rome's moral and political authority in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol.

At their core, the regime's modifications to the Italianisation project directly contradicted long-established nationalist rhetoric about the provenance and durability of Trentine *italianità*; at the same time, fascist officials justified the reforms with the same rationale that had framed all state policies regarding Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol – that the primary concern was to protect and promote Italian sovereignty along the new border with Austria. Reading Molina's memoir leads one to conclude, therefore, that what shifted in Rome's ideological and administrative approach to Italianisation was not its importance, but the value of Trentine participation in it. This inconsistent evaluation of Trentine *italianità* highlights a broader reality about the malleability of national definitions – even among the most ardent of nationalists – and the fluctuating distance between nationalist 'common sense' in the centre and at the margins, even within a purportedly totalitarian society. Indeed, Molina's reflections put into sharp relief the frequent dissonance between the party and civil state, frontier and centre, theory and implementation of concepts of belonging and hegemonic power in fascist Italy.

The 'Common Sense' of the Italian Nation

Of course, when Molina first stepped into his new office that summer of 1923, he could not predict the course of the fascist Italianisation campaign; he had only his knowledge as an Italian nationalist and irredentist to structure his approach to the task at hand. As such, Molina shared the opinion of a sizeable contingent of Italians who, at the turn of the twentieth century, argued that the addition of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol (as well as the Julian March to the east) helped complete Italy's nineteenth-century unification movement, the Risorgimento.[12] To make this assertion, irredentists

10 For a sample of the sizeable literature on interwar Alto Adige/Südtirol, see Rolf Steininger, *South Tyrol: A Minority Conflict of the Twentieth Century* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2003); Andrea Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta: L'amministrazione pubblica dell'Alto Adige tra Italia liberale e fascismo* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2003); Rainer Seberich, *Südtiroler Schulgeschichte: Muttersprachlicher Unterricht unter fremdem Gesetz* (Bozen/Bolzano: Raetia, 2000); Martha Verdorfer, *Zweierlei Faschismus: Alltagserfahrungen in Südtirol 1918–1945* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik 1990); Leopold Steurer, *Südtirol zwischen Rom und Berlin, 1919–1939* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1980); Antony Alcock, 'The History of the South Tyrol Question', PhD Thesis, University of Geneva, 1970. Roberta Pergher and Oswald Überegger have better highlighted some of the challenges *trentini* faced because of Italian interwar policies. Roberta Pergher, 'Staging the Nation in Fascist Italy's "New Provinces"', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 43 (2012); Roberta Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire: Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy's Borderlands, 1922–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Überegger, *Im Schatten des Krieges*.

11 Luigi Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte' (Trent, n.d.), FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 325–6.

12 Oswald Überegger, 'Tabuisierung, Instrumentalisierung, Verspätete Historisierung: Die Tiroler Historiographie und der Erste Weltkrieg', *Storia e regione. Geschichte und Region*, 11, 1 (Jan. 2002), 133. On the contradictions between this

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

like Molina relied on internationally recognised assumptions about nationality and national self-determination that entwined Italian entitlement to the territory and its people to the degree of their 'Italian-ness'.[13] This equation was regularly employed (and manipulated) to justify territorial and political claims across Europe as nationalists sought to revise the map for a post-war reality.[14] At least in name, the mandate for states and their borders to determine clear boundaries between different national populations – to adhere to a so-called nationality principle – became a mainstay of twentieth-century state-building (and state-breaking) policy the world over.

At the same time, the intensity of these irredentists' conviction regarding Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol's primordial *italianità* was matched only by the imprecision of what it meant to be 'Italian'. Despite the confidence of nationalist activists – and many of the scholars who have studied them – 'nations' are hardly static entities, either as realities or as imagined communities.[15] Instead, as more recent scholars have argued, a 'nation' is more appropriately understood as a process, a collection of practices – collective and individual, public and private – that continuously makes, un-makes and remakes a supposedly cohesive and comprehensive whole.[16] Likewise and necessarily, any national categorisation is the product of perpetual negotiation between its (self- and state-) identified members and non-members, among participants and within state structures. In other words, the contours of *italianità* might have maintained a façade of stability but were (and are) in fact both nebulous and malleable. Nationalists understood the essence of *italianità* to be intuitive, identifiable to all; what it meant to be Italian was, in short, a matter of 'common sense'. But this imprecision was not merely a convenient trait for idealistic nationalists; as Ann Laura Stoler has argued in the context of colonialist ideas of race in the Dutch East Indies, the vagueness in both generic and specific contexts of this or any national, racial or ethnic category was fundamental to its purpose. The lack of concrete, universal definitions of individual nationalities allowed for an important measure of mediation among and between power brokers and members of the communities in question that served to concentrate cultural capital within the state.[17] The supposed fixity and naturalness of *italianità* promoted the goals of

messaging and the reality of Italy's demands in the 1915 Treaty of London – which presaged some of the confusion between rhetoric and policy regarding Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol in the interwar period – see Marco Mondini, 'The Italian Case: The Ambiguities of a Nationalist Cultural Mobilization', in Nico Wouters and Laurence van Ypersele, eds., *Nations, Identities and the First World War: Shifting Loyalties to the Fatherland* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

13 Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century*, Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney, trans. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 31. Interestingly, in 1918 General Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi described a scenario in which the government made no attempts at 'Italianisation' of the territory and treating it simply as a 'militarily occupied canton' rather than a part of Italy. Seberich, *Südtiroler Schulgeschichte*, 47.

14 This demand was heeded almost exclusively when it concerned territories and populations within the former Central Powers; calls for self-determination from populations in Allied states – let alone colonial possessions – were, generally speaking, ignored. Mark Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe', *Daedalus*, 126, 2 (Mar. 1997); Hannes Grandits, 'Changing Legitimations of State Borders and "Phantom Borders" in the Northern Adriatic Regions', in Klabjan, ed., *Borderlands of Memory*, 18; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

15 The most influential case study is Eugen Weber's (1976) *Peasants into Frenchmen*. For two of the foundational works on the nature of nations and nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn. (New York, NY: Verso, 1991); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

16 See, for example, Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 4; Michael Skey, 'The National in Everyday Life: A Critical Engagement with Michael Billig's Thesis of *Banal Nationalism*', *Sociological Review*, 57, 2 (Apr. 2009). On 'nation' as a practice, see Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski and Andrzej Marcin Suszycki, *The Nation and Nationalism in Europe: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

17 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field', in George Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 57. Pergher also employs Stoler to discuss the Italian state policies in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol and Libya. Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*, 27, 121. Brendan Karch aptly describes nationality as a 'flexible container' into which nationalist actors 'conceptually

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

national cohesion and clear boundaries between Italy and neighbouring states; the fluidity of its features simultaneously gave authorities of all sorts the flexibility to emphasise some and ignore others as they deemed appropriate.[18]

The fact that Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol was and is a borderland means that these negotiations were particularly apparent – and relevant. The historically contingent nature of state boundaries means they are sites of political contestation and inherently impermanent; political boundaries are, as Peter Sahlins has written, 'the point at which a state's territorial competence finds its ultimate expression'.[19] Border territories and communities therefore frequently become dynamic sites of political power and consequently agents of change in state definitions of citizenship, sovereignty and nationality.[20] They are, in fact, places where multiple imaginings of the 'nation', 'nationality' and belonging overlap, sometimes harmoniously, many times not. The growing variety of case studies of nationalisation projects in twentieth-century European borderlands simultaneously illustrates the inability of a single theoretical model to explain the diversity of experiences and the importance of those experiences at the peripheries of a state to understanding the nature and limits of power at its centre.[21] Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol was no exception, and the vagueness surrounding the nature of its Italian character hints at a broader difficulty in defining the Italian nation.[22]

Still, Italian irredentists identified some broad regional traits that they argued clearly demarcated Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol as nationally and spiritually Italian. Like Alon Confino's nationalists in Württemberg, Germany, they frequently highlighted geographical and economic characteristics in service of this claim.[23] What appeared to resonate most profoundly among nationalist accounts, however, was the territory's Italian-speaking population that, according to Austria-Hungary's own census data, they claimed, comprised between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of the regional population.[24] It bears noting that this assertion was not as straightforward as it first appears. In his employment of the census data to promote Italian annexation, the outspoken irredentist and trentino Ettore Tolomei

18 Stoler explains the construction of racial categories was based 'not only on a non-visible set of criteria, but on the assessment of a *changing* [emphasis in original] set of features that made up a racial essence'. Ann Laura Stoler, 'Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth', *Political Power and Social Theory*, 11 (1997), 186.

19 Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 2–3. On the idea of borders and frontiers as processes and institutions, see Malcolm Anderson, *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 1–2.

20 Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 4, 13, 53; Andreas Fahrmeir and H. S. Jones, 'Space and Belonging in Modern Europe: Citizenship(s) in Localities, Regions, and States', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 15, 3 (2008).

21 On the limits of any one model of nationalisation, see Laven and Baycroft, 'Border Regions and Identity'. On the value of studying borderlands to understand the 'centre', see Carrol, 'In the Border's Shadow'; Sahlins, *Boundaries*, 8–9.

22 The literature on Italian nationalism – and particularly the perceived need to 'make Italians' – is expansive. See, for example, Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Gentile, *La Grande Italia*; Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi, eds., *Fare gli italiani: Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea. II. Una società di massa*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993); Giulio Bollati, *L'Italiano: Il carattere nazionale come storia e come invenzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983); Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians (1860–1920)* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

23 Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 108–15. Other works on the role of landscape/geography in nationalist visions include Robert Shannan Peckham, *National Histories, Natural States: Nationalism and the Politics of Place in Greece* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001); Joshua Hagen, 'The Most German of Towns: Creating an Ideal Nazi Community in Rothenburg ob der Tauber', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 94, 1 (Mar. 2004); John Agnew, 'European Landscape and Identity', in Brian Graham, ed., *Modern Europe: Place, Culture and Identity* (London: Arnold Publishers 1998); Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

24 According to Austria-Hungary's 1910 census reports as cited in Dennison Rusinow's *Italy's Austrian Heritage*, there were 383,347 Italian speakers, 229,246 German speakers, and 4,263 speakers of other languages in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. These numbers suggest that the population south of the Brenner Pass was approximately 62 per cent Italian-speaking, 37 per cent German-speaking, and 1 per cent 'other'. Dennison I. Rusinow, *Italy's Austrian Heritage, 1919–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 10–11.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

entirely ignored the responses from residents in Alto Adige/Südtirol.[25] Opponents to Italian annexation of Alto Adige/Südtirol like Hans von Voltellini and Emil von Ottenthal, in contrast, emphasised the very limited number of Italian speakers in Alto Adige/Südtirol, noting that Ladin speakers were not Italian speakers, despite the fact that the census did not make that distinction.[26] Very clearly, the idea that the addition of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol would reunite hundreds of thousands of Italians to their rightful fatherland was therefore predicated most often on the popular nationalist belief in a correlation between language and national belonging.[27] Italian nationalists were certainly not alone in this assessment; language was often the first characteristic used to identify national membership among populations across Europe, most notably, but not exclusively, in the twentieth-century nation-building efforts in Central and Eastern Europe.[28] By this logic, speakers of the Italian language were 'Italian' and speakers of the German language were 'German'.

That reasoning appears straightforward enough but, like nationality more generally, this 'commonsense' relationship faced practical challenges. One difficulty that was especially prominent within Italy's borders at the turn of the twentieth century was the lack of a singular Italian language. In fact, by some linguistic measures, little more than 2 per cent of Italian citizens at the time of national unification spoke what nationalists would identify as Italian. This proportion roughly matched that of citizens whose primary language was considered 'foreign', such as French.[29] The majority of Italy's citizens (and would-be citizens, such as the *trentini*) spoke a variety of what nationalists tended to dismiss as regional 'dialects' – mere offshoots of an official Italian language – which were nonetheless often entirely incomprehensible to one another.[30]

25 Ettore Tolomei, *L'Alto Adige* (Turin: Tip. Palatina di G. Bonis e Rossi, 1915), 15. Tolomei has been the subject of several studies. For a recent study, see Maurizio Ferrandi, *Il nazionalista: Ettore Tolomei, l'uomo che inventò l'Alto Adige* (Meran/Merano: AB Edizioni Alphabeta Verlag, 2020).

26 Hans von Voltellini and Emil von Ottenthal, *German and Ladin South-Tyrol* (Vienna: State Printing Office, 1919). Mussolini presented Ladin simply as another Italian dialect. Jörg Ernesti, 'Zwischen Monarchie, Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus: Die katholische Kirche in Südtirol in den Jahren 1918–1940', in Andrea Di Michele et al., eds., *Die schwierige Versöhnung: Italien, Österreich und Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert* (Bozen/Bolzano: Bozen-Bolzano University Press, 2020), 314. Italian linguists have described Ladin as a neo-Latin language 'that has been culturally oriented toward German for centuries'. Vittorio Coletti, Patrizia Cordin and Alberto Zamboni, 'Il Trentino e l'Alto Adige', in Francesco Bruni, ed., *L'italiano nelle regioni. Storia della lingua italiana* (Milan: Garzanti Editore, 1996), 264. More broadly, Ladin is linguistically categorised as a Rhaeto-Romance language similar to Romansch. Still, Andrea Di Michele cites that the 1910 census numbers in Südtirol/Alto Adige alone claimed 237,800 inhabitants, 221,200 of whom were German speakers. That data suggests that, in the northern portion of of the territory, only 7 per cent of inhabitants declared Italian or Ladin (or something else) as their primary language of use. Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta: L'amministrazione pubblica dell'Alto Adige tra Italia liberale e fascismo*, 149.

27 For a brief overview of the history of this connection, see Susan Gal, 'Multiplicity and Contention Among Language Ideologies: A Commentary', in Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard and Paul V. Kroskrity, eds., *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 322–5. For a general discussion of this assumption in Italy and the United States at the start of the twentieth century, see Nancy C. Carnevale, *A New Language, a New World: Italian Immigrants in the United States, 1890–1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 21–42. On the continued popularity of this assumption, see Jan Blommaert and Jef Verschueren, 'The Role of Language in European Nationalist Ideologies', in Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity, *Language Ideologies*, 189–210.

28 Rogers Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 5, 87; Stephen L. Harp, *Learning to Be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850–1940* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 14. J. G. von Herder was perhaps the most famous promoter of this principle in his *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (c. 1791–7). Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 68. On creating an 'official' language as a key part of nation-state-building, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, trans. and John B. Thompson, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 45–8. Scholars long spoke of a distinction between the 'civic nationalism' of Western Europe and the 'ethno-nationalism' of Eastern Europe, particularly regarding citizenship. More recent scholars have rightly questioned such a rigid dichotomy. For an overview, see King, 'The Nationalization of East Central Europe', especially 123–9; Xosé-Manoel Núñez Seixas, 'Nations and Territorial Identities in Europe: Transnational Reflections', *European History Quarterly*, 40, 4 (2010), 670–4.

29 Tullio De Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*, 4th edn (Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1974), 43.

30 For a brief history of this distinction between language and dialect, see Jonathan Steinberg, 'The Historian and the *Questione della Lingua*', in Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., *The Social History of Language* (Cambridge:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The fact that language was considered such an essential determinant of national categorisations was accompanied by the common assumption that an individual's self-identification had to adhere to a single national category. Even in the former multilingual Austro-Hungarian Empire, where a significant portion of the population necessarily spoke more than one language, the last imperial censuses made no allowance for respondents to indicate bilingualism, secondary languages or alternative forms of community as primary forms of identification; citizens were only ever defined by their primary language of use, such as, for example, Czech or Slovenian.[31] This inflexibility worked in tandem with the increasingly vocal demand from nationalists that state borders conform to national boundaries, such that identifying the linguistic categorisation of a community was often tantamount to determining political legitimacy within that community.

Unsurprisingly, then, Italian nationalists long insisted on the fundamentally 'Italian' identity of Italian-speaking *trentini* and found convenient explanations for the existence of two other major language groups in the region.[32] An historical storyline that traced the Trentine population's roots to ancient Rome was particularly powerful in confirming its *italianità* and the foreignness of Ladin and German speakers.[33] Nineteenth-century irredentists had given the southern portion of the territory, where its Italian speakers predominantly resided, the name 'Trentino' as a tribute to the Latin name of its largest city, Tridentum (now known as Trent).[34] Accordingly, Tolomei, who considered himself an expert on Trentine history, declared the city 'wholly Italian in speech and aspect', and a bastion of *italianità* that had for centuries protected the peninsula against a northern tide of 'German-ness' and 'Germanisation'.[35] As Molina himself described it:

Cambridge University Press, 1987). Pierre Bourdieu terms this relegation of non-dominant languages to the category of patois or dialect 'the rejection of all other languages into indignity' which 'fosters both the monopolization of the universal by the few and the dispossession of all others' in the service of strengthening state power. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field', in Steinmetz, *State/Culture*, 62.

31 The census only asked respondents for their 'language of daily use'. Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 6; Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 14; Rok Stergar and Tamara Scheer, 'Ethnic Boxes: The Unintended Consequences of Habsburg Bureaucratic Classification', *Nationalities Papers*, 46, 4 (2018), 580. On the problems this over-simplification produced within the new Italian borderlands, see Marina Cattaruzza, 'Slovenes and Italians in Trieste, 1850–1914', in Max Engman, ed., *Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1992); Maura Hametz, 'Naming Italians in the Borderland, 1926–1943', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 15, 3 (2010).

32 Given the vagueness of the word 'identity', I try to be as precise as possible, privileging terms such as identification and categorisation, or the more specific self-identity or collective identity. On the difficulties of using the word 'identity' unambiguously, see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society*, 29, 1 (Feb. 2000).

33 As an example, Molina chose for the motto for his monthly bulletin, *Schola*, a portion of the *Tabula clesiana*, in which Emperor Claudius granted Roman citizenship to the region's population in 46 CE. Molina wrote of this selection that the declaration was 'a superb title of nobility, a pure symbol of historical continuity, capable of expressing in its immutable bronze the uninterrupted Latin and Italian tradition, which makes the Tridentine region a living member of the body of our great common Mother'. Luigi Molina, 'Introductory Letter', *Schola: Bollettino del R. Provveditorato agli studi della Venezia Tridentina*, 1, 1–2 (Nov.–Dec. 1923).

34 Laurence Cole, 'Patriotic Celebrations in Late-Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century Tirol', in Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield, eds., *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), 113.

35 Ettore Tolomei, *The Trentino and Upper Adige* (Rome: 1919), 17. Horst Schreiber has described Tolomei as the 'gravedigger of South Tyrol' because of his extensive efforts to Italianise the territory before and after Italian annexation. Horst Schreiber, *Nationalsozialismus und Faschismus in Tirol und Südtirol: Opfer. Täter. Gegner.* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2008), 360. For contemporary claims of de-nationalisation (or Germanisation) among Italian speakers in the region, see Alessandro Chiavolini, 'La provincia di Bolzano. Appunto per S.E. il Presidente' (Rome, 30 Aug. 1923), ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (hereafter PCM), Gab., 1923, box (hereafter b.) 695, folder (hereafter f.) 1/1-6; Luigi Molina, 11 Aug. 1923, ACS, PCM, Gab., Affari generali, 1924, b. 738, f. 1/1.11; G. P., 'La difesa dell'italianità nel Trentino per opera della Lega nazionale', *Schola: Bollettino del R. Provveditorato agli studi della Venezia Tridentina*, I, 10–11 (Aug.–Sept. 1924); Italiano Marchetti, 'Scuole d'italianità', *Schola: Bollettino del R. Provveditorato agli studi della Venezia Tridentina*, II, 8–10 (Aug.–Oct. 1925). For academic discussions of these fears among populations across the late Habsburg Empire, see Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*; Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*; Pamela Ballinger, '"Authentic Hybrids" in the Balkan Borderlands', *Current Anthropology*, 45, 1 (Feb. 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> From time immemorial, Germanism and Latinity fluctuated in this transitional region . . . but Trent has always remained as steady as a rock among the towering waves at the outermost reach of a territory which, by its very nature, has never lost its Latin character, not since that distant day on which Rome granted it citizenship. The German wave had come to lap at [Trent's] houses, but its force broke against the rock, its seepage was quickly absorbed, and [Trent's] native constitution remained pure, without contamination.[36]

More significant than remaining true to their 'Italian' spirit in the face of Germanic oppression, Molina asserted, was the fact that the *trentini* had 'always' been on 'the front lines' in the fight to 'return' the region to Italy.[37] He deemed no 'evidence' more salient than the willingness of 'the hundreds, the thousands' of *trentini* lit 'by an inextinguishable flame of faith', to fight voluntarily for Italy in the First World War. When Italy joined the war in 1915, Molina wrote in one 1930 article, able-bodied *trentini* abandoned their financial and material interests to fight for Italy rather than for their Germanic oppressors.[38] Their selfless patriotism was made all the more heroic in light of the treatment the Habsburg government visited upon its Italian speakers during the war.[39] In a 1917 letter to the Vatican, the bishop of Trent described the cruel treatment his Italian-speaking parishioners suffered at the hands of their own government: *trentini* interned or imprisoned (as was the bishop himself), churches and holy sites profaned and private property damaged or confiscated.[40] Even so,

36 Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 328–9.

37 Ibid., 326. It should come as no surprise that Trentine commitment to *italianità* frequently did not match up with this romantic portrayal of *trentini* as wholehearted Italian nationalists. Andrea Di Michele's recent work on Italian-speaking soldiers in the Habsburg military explains how, in the decades before the First World War, most Italian speakers in Tyrol – even those actively working to defend and promote *italianità* within their communities – did not argue for a separation from the Dual Monarchy. Instead, many of them advocated for greater autonomy within the imperial administration. Andrea Di Michele, *Tra due divise: La Grande Guerra degli italiani d'Austria* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2018), 16, 36. Also Pergher, 'Staging the Nation in Fascist Italy's "New Provinces"', 101.

38 Luigi Molina, 'La famiglia del volontario trentino, parte I', *Trentino: Rivista della Legione trentina*, VI, 4 (Apr. 1930), 108–9. This post-war narrative was particularly prevalent in Trentino's urban centres. A much more bitter memory of the war prevailed in rural communities. Überegger, *Im Schatten des Krieges*, 79. In the end, only about 700 *trentini* successfully volunteered to serve in the Italian military. Alessio Quercioli, '"Italiani fuori d'Italia". I volontari trentini nell'esercito italiano 1915–1918', in F. Rasera and C. Zadra, eds., *Volontari italiani nella Grande Guerra* (Rovereto: Museo storico italiano della guerra), 201–14 as cited in Laurence Cole, 'Questions of Nationalization in the Habsburg Monarchy', in Wouters and van Ypersele, *Nations, Identities and the First World War*, 123. No more than 2,500 *volontari irredenti* from Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol and Trieste served in the Italian military. Marco Mondini, 'The Italian Case: The Ambiguities of a Nationalist Cultural Mobilization', in Wouters and Van Ypersele, *Nations, Identities and the First World War*, 63. At the same time, approximately 55,000 Italian-speaking Tyrolean subjects enlisted in the Habsburg military over the course of the war. Di Michele, *Tra due divisi*, 56. More than 11,000 of them would die on the Eastern Front. Marco Bellabarba and Gustavo Corni, eds., *Il Trentino e i trentini nella Grande guerra: Nuove prospettive di ricerca* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2017), 9. As in Germany, a prominent explanation among Austrian nationalists and military personnel for their nation's loss was betrayal from within their own ranks – a 'stab in the back' – and Italian, Croatian and Slovenian speakers were often the first to be accused of such traitorousness. Überegger, 'Tabuisierung, Instrumentalisierung, Verspätete Historisierung', 127–8; Überegger, *Im Schatten des Krieges*, 12. For more on the treatment of ethnic minorities fighting for their governments in the First World War, see Oswald Überegger, ed., *Minderheiten-Soldaten: Ethnizität und Identität in den Armeen des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2018).

39 Allegedly, the great icon of Italy's Risorgimento, Giuseppe Garibaldi, even wrote to the *trentini* volunteers to offer thanks for their bravery. Molina, 'La famiglia del volontario trentino, parte I', 107.

40 Celestino Endrici, 8 Mar. 1917, AVV, Arch. Nunz. Vienna, b. 802, f. 7, Situazione difficile del vescovo. For more on the treatment of Italian-speaking subjects, see Alessandro Livio, 'The Wartime Treatment of the Italian-speaking Population in Austria-Hungary', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 24, 2 (2017). Few Italian-speaking soldiers in the Habsburg forces saw the southern front because of the open distrust the military leadership felt toward their loyalty to the monarchy. Oswald Überegger, 'Auf der Flucht vor dem Krieg. Trentiner und Tiroler Deserteure im Ersten Weltkrieg', *Miliärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift*, 62 (2003). On the experience of Tyroleans in the closing days of the war, see Überegger, *Im Schatten des Krieges*, especially chs. 1 and 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Molina later proclaimed, *trentini* diligently fought to conserve their *italianità* for no other reason than the dream of one day seeing recompense from their rightful fatherland.[41]

When Italy finally did annex Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol in the aftermath of the First World War – with the 'movement of borders over people' as opposed to the movement of people over borders – Rome honoured this facile narrative by naming the region Venezia Tridentina.[42] The general in charge of the post-war military occupation, Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi, insisted on deploying Trentine veterans of the Italian military to administrative positions throughout the newly acquired territory, arguing that *trentini* were of critical importance to establishing a new government.[43] Luigi Credaro, Italy's first civilian administrator of the region, declared Italy's successful appropriation of Venezia Tridentina as a victory for the *trentini* and a recognition of their many sacrifices on behalf of their Italian nation.[44] And the administration of all public services was subsequently centralised in Trent, which meant closing or transferring many offices that were previously maintained in the predominantly German-speaking city of Bozen/Bolzano.[45] These decisions deliberately linked the whole territory to Trent and the *trentini* while avoiding recognition of its German- and Ladin-speaking residents.[46] The result was to suggest an inherent, objective *italianità* throughout the entire region and population through the legendary national loyalty of the *trentini*; such a characterisation was essential to ensure fidelity to the spirit of national self-determination – that is, that the territory was 'Italian' and therefore wanted to be part of the Italian state – for the sake of outside observers and Italian nationalists alike.

At the same time, Italian administrators faced the practical question of what to do with their new, non-Italian-speaking citizens.[47] Despite the diplomatic confirmation of Italian control and the supposed permanence of the new borders on the ground, the presence of 'foreigners' – frequently termed *alloglotti* or *allogeni* – in the new borderland suggested an indeterminacy to Italy's national and therefore political sovereignty.[48] Molina later recalled his supervisor in Rome, Leonardo Severi, remarking in 1923 that 'the presence of a population – perhaps a race – that was unquestionably

41 Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 34. On the contrary, many *trentini* did not see the necessity of identifying with a single language or nation; in 1921, Luigi Credaro explained to the Italian Senate that even Italian-speaking parents hesitated to send their children to Italian-language schools with the rationale that 'our children learn Italian at home; in order to live and conduct business with the Germans, we need to learn German'. Senato del Regno, *Sulla politica nell'Alto Adige. Discorsi del Senatore Luigi Credaro pronunziati nelle tornate del 9 e 10 dicembre 1921* (Rome: Senato del Regno, 1921), 11, 13.

42 On the idea of the 'movement of borders over people' as a form of transnationalism, see Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference*, 8. Rolf Steininger has characterised the Italian annexation of Alto Adige/Südtirol part of the 'spoils of war': Rolf Steininger, '1918/1919. Die Teilung Tirols', in Grote and Obermair, *A Land on the Threshold*, 13.

43 Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta*, 23, 26–31. Gen. Pecori Giraldi served as military governor of Venezia Tridentina from Nov. 1918 to Dec. 1919.

44 Luigi Credaro, 'Chiamato dalla fiducia del Governo del Re' (Trent, 1 Aug. 1919), ADT, Acta Episcopalia Endrici Celestino, 644/1919.

45 Vittorio Emanuele III, 'Soppressione della Giunta territoriale di Bolzano. Unificazione dei servizi nella Giunta di Trento' (Rome, Aug. 1923), ACS, PCM, Gab., 1923, b. 695, f. 1/1–6.

46 Chiavolini, 'La provincia di Bolzano. Appunto per S.E. il Presidente'.

47 The Treaty of Saint Germain that formalised Italian annexation did not automatically grant citizenship to all German-speaking residents. As Stefan Lechner has argued, although German-speaking Tyroleans were citizens, they could never be members of the Italian nation unless they were Italianised. Stefan Lechner, 'Die Grenzen des Faschismus in Südtirol', *Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione*, 20, 1 (2011), 53. On the role of one's 'ethnicity' and domicile in determining citizenship under the Treaty of Saint Germain, see Edward Timms, 'Citizenship and "Heimatrecht" after the Treaty of Saint-Germain', in Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms, eds., *The Habsburg Legacy: National Identity in Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994). On a broader history of citizenship in modern Italy see Sabina Donati, *A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 1861–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

48 Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*, 15. The words '*allogeno*' and '*alloglotto*' were frequently used to describe Ladin and German speakers in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. '*Allogeno*' generally translates to mean 'someone of a different nation or race'. '*Alloglotto*', on the other hand, translates as 'native but foreign', 'minority', 'speaker of a different language', or 'foreign-language speaker'. All these translations suggest a lack of belonging, or at least a description of otherness, ascribed to these linguistic communities within the bounds of the Italian nation-state.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

German-speaking in the so-called Alto Adige presented the Italian state with problems that were delicate and without easy solutions'.[49] Italian statesmen in Rome determined that a clearly defined and visible border of *italianità* was essential to marking the new boundaries of their state power.[50] As Maura Hametz has described in regard to the Julian March (Venezia Giulia), this distinct boundary of *italianità* was meant to act as a 'bulwark' against any potential aggression from the Germanic lands to the north.[51] Especially in comparison to the Julian March, where Italian officials identified 'Slovenes' and 'Croatians' as additional challenges to Italianisation, it was probably fairly easy for the officials in Rome who had never travelled to the Alpine territory to believe in the relative ease with which the region could be 'saturated' with *italianità* and, by extension, unquestioned Italian political and cultural sovereignty.[52]

Gradual Assimilation to the Nation

The pressure to create a fortification of *italianità* against the threat of Germanism took on a greater sense of urgency after Benito Mussolini settled into his role as Duce of the new fascist state in late 1922.[53] His regime believed that integrating German- and Ladin-speaking residents of southern Tyrol into Italian life – Italianising them – was critical to asserting Italy's national, historical right to the former Austro-Hungarian territory.[54] Reminding the Ministry of Education of this ambition in 1924 when requesting additional funds to build nursery schools, Molina's office wrote that 'it is necessary that the German zones in Alto Adige are assimilated to the Italian culture, language and religious customs as quickly as possible, just as it is necessary for Italy to clearly demonstrate its power in all aspects of life to this people.'[55] Unstated, but just as important, was the necessity for assimilation to come under the leadership of Mussolini and the Fascist Party as evidence of their capable command of a truly unified Italian nation-state. The regime consequently undertook a multifaceted and increasingly inflexible project to erase signs of German-ness and emphasise *italianità* throughout Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, just as it did in the Julian March. But this campaign largely left unaddressed what benchmarks it would use to assess success; the wholesale adoption of the official Italian language was an obvious component, but all other standards appeared to be open to interpretation.

For the newly appointed superintendent of schools, this under-defined project required a translation of ever-changing fascist policies into a comprehensive curriculum that conveyed the essence of

49 Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 1. At the time, Leonardo Severi was the head of Giovanni Gentile's cabinet at the Ministry of Education.

50 Berger, 'Border Regions, Hybridity and National Identity', 368. As Europe adjusted to the new, post-war map, numerous nation-states promulgated policies of 'ethnic engineering' designed to eliminate the changeable nature of borderlands and to make them 'comprehensible as an ethnically pure nation space'. Hametz, 'Naming Italians in the Borderland, 1926–1943', 413; Marina Cattaruzza, *Italy and Its Eastern Border, 1866–2016*, Daniela Gobetti, trans. (London: Routledge, 2017), 281; Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe'. A similar case has been made for the importance of Alsace-Lorraine to interwar France. Carrol, 'In the Border's Shadow', 671; Prott, 'Challenging the German Empire', 1018.

51 Maura Hametz, 'On the Periphery/At the Frontier: The Triestines in the Northeastern Borderland', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 5, 3 (Mar. 2012), 277. Also, Lechner, 'Die Grenzen des Faschismus in Südtirol', 52.

52 There are several excellent studies of Italianisation efforts in Venezia Giulia, including Cattaruzza, *Italy and Its Eastern Border*; Andrea Dessardo, *Le ultime trincee: politica e vita scolastica a Trento e Trieste (1918–1923)* (Brescia: Editrice La Scuola, 2016); Hametz, *In the Name of Italy*; Laven and Baycroft, 'Border Regions and Identity'; Ballinger, '"Authentic Hybrids" in the Balkan Borderlands'; Glenda Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border: Difference, Identity, and Sovereignty in Twentieth-century Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

53 Oswald Überegger argues that the 1921 establishment of *fasci di combattimento* in Trent was itself a call to greater centralised authority and Italianisation in the region. Überegger, *Im Schatten des Krieges*, 157.

54 Cesira Zambellini, 'Assillante certamente per la vita italiana', ONAIR, ed. (1923), APTn, ONAIRC, b. 206, f. Relazioni anno 1923.

55 R. Ufficio del Provveditorato agli Studi di Trento, 'Politica scolastica nell'Alto Adige' (Trent, 22 July 1924), APTn, Arch. ONAIRC, 1.3, b. 206, f. Ufficio di Bolzano, relazioni anno 1924.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

italianità to Venezia Tridentina's children.[56] It also depended on selecting teachers who were skilled in creating bonds with their students and who themselves embodied the lessons they needed to impart, particularly for preschool and primary students. Molina wrote in the introductory letter to his bimonthly bulletin that 'he who takes on the arduous task of guiding the first years of the child to the conquest, or rather to the revelation, of the spirit, he who watches with anxious joy at this ever-renewing miracle must truly be fully and profoundly aware of the spiritual value of his work' and its connection to every other aspect of life.[57] This stance reflected contemporary European pedagogical thinking, particularly as it was articulated by Giovanni Gentile, the first Fascist Minister of Education; Molina simply needed to discern who would best be able to take on that 'arduous task' in a territory defined by shifting borders, multiple languages and deep communal loyalty to the authority of the Catholic Church.[58]

It was here where the vagueness of Rome's language about *italianità* and Italianisation in the first years of the fascist regime served Molina and his colleagues in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol well. In his memoir, Molina claimed to have quickly recognised the need to implement pedagogical and administrative solutions adaptable 'to the specifics of the problems to be solved' in the territory.[59] Presuming all parts of the administration agreed on the fundamental goals of Italianisation, as well as on the principal elements of *italianità*, Molina believed it was in everyone's best interest that local officials have the freedom to assess and implement the most appropriate means to achieve the common ends. In other words, local administrators and teachers needed enough autonomy to respond to the needs of their communities without overbearing interference from officials sitting in faraway offices.[60] The imprecision that accompanied the supposedly obvious nature of *italianità* – the heart of Rome's Italianisation policies – gave Molina and his colleagues the space to do just that. For his first few years in Trent, Molina relied on his own 'common-sense' understandings of Italian-ness and the challenges of state-building in a borderland to interpret policy without presenting clear inconsistencies with the regime's expectations – in this case, using *trentini* as the backbone of his Italianisation efforts. The physical and interpretive distance between the 'centre' and 'periphery' granted local bureaucrats the independence to navigate local particularities while concurrently (at least in some cases) establishing a veneer of hegemonic control from the centre. Of course, the revelation of just how far those distances were, and Molina's subsequent moral outrage over the tensions they produced, indicate not just the limits of this decentralised structure in an increasingly authoritarian regime, but also the extent to which the theoretical foundation of Italianisation was neither common nor sensical.

But for a few years at least, the interpretive space generated by a reliance on 'common-sense' assumptions about Italianisation allowed regional officials in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol to sidestep otherwise-national regulations and retain or hire greater numbers of bilingual teachers to serve in predominantly German-speaking communities.[61] The president of the Trentine nationalist organation *Legione trentina*, Giuseppe Cristofolini, publicly argued that it was essential for Venezia Tridentina's schools to employ teachers who already knew German so that these important

56 Annemarie Augschöll, 'Totalitarian School Politics during Fascism in Italy and Their Transgenerational Effects', *History of Education Review*, 47, 2 (2018), 160.

57 Molina, 'Introductory Letter', 2.

58 As Minister of Education, Gentile was instrumental in reforming Italy's public education system. The so-called Gentile Reform of 1923 (which comprised multiple royal legislative decrees over the course of Mussolini's first year in power) was principally based on his 'philosophy of the spirit'. For an English-language overview of his pedagogical ideals, see Giovanni Gentile, *The Reform of Education*, J. E. Spingarn, ed., Dino Bigongiari, trans. (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922). There is a sizeable literature on the Church in interwar Alto Adige/Südtirol. For an overview of the field, see Jörg Ernesti, 'Zwischen Monarchie, Fascismus un Nationalsozialismus: Die katholische Kirche in Südtirol in den Jahren 1918–1940', in Di Michele et al., *Die schwierige Versöhnung*.

59 Luigi Molina, Prot. 2139. Tit. B. classe 23 gennaio. Oggetto: Scuole materne nella Venezia Tridentina (Trent, 1925), APTn, ONAIRC, b. 206, f. Relazioni anno 1925, 8–9.

60 Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 4–5.

61 Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta*, 217–18.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

representatives of the Italian nation-state could more easily communicate and connect with the region's *allogeni*.[62] These connections, so the thinking went, would ease the transition into Italian life for many German- and Ladin-speaking children and prove to their families they had nothing to fear from the new administration. As further support for this process of 'gradual assimilation', Molina observed that, while many teachers from other parts of Italy often aroused suspicion among residents, a vital form of 'Italianising osmosis' took place when Italian and German speakers were allowed to coexist and learn from one another on their own terms.[63] The superintendent therefore supported putting 'the two national groups in as much contact as possible, to encourage them to take part in the same life, to create a community as close as possible to long-term benefit and aspirations'.[64] *Trentini* had lifetimes of entanglement with their German- and Ladin-speaking neighbours that, Molina contended, engendered greater trust between teachers and students and, in turn, exposed German and Ladin speakers rather effortlessly to the Italian language.

Additionally, as long-considered models of *italianità*, Molina believed *trentini* brought much more than the Italian language to the territory's *alloglotti*; they modelled the superior Italian character through their behaviour and, under Molina's leadership, their innovative pedagogical training. He wrote of Trentine teachers as exemplifying *italianità* in that they were 'accustomed to serious work; tenacious; ready to accept hardships and inconveniences; unconcerned about the dangers they sometimes faced, as they were enlightened by a faith of the purest form'.[65] More to the point, the superintendent argued, the warm and generous 'Italian' teacher quickly proved herself a welcome contrast to the rigid and closed attitudes of her 'German' counterpart.[66] Tolomei likewise wrote that Trentine teachers were the 'best means with which *italianità* could penetrate the highest valleys of the region' because they personified a 'conscientious, willing, effective, and fitting spirit, combining kindness with firmness'.[67] What is most apparent in these assessments is the *un*-objective use of affective characteristics to describe the supposedly impartial concept of Trentine *italianità* (and Tyrolean German-ness). No part of nationality is particularly definitive (outside of legal citizenship), but the very clear privileging of 'moral virtues' in determining (and denying) Trentine *italianità* emphasised the instability of the category.[68] It also suggested that the same vague language that gave Molina leeway to interpret Rome's demands as he deemed appropriate also provided ample room for misunderstanding between administrators in Trent and Rome; this tension would become ever less tolerable as Rome moved to expand and centralise its control over Italian life after the resolution of the Matteotti Crisis in 1925.

With his rosy memory of his first 'ten years of happy accomplishments', Molina maintained that 'rare were the weaknesses and faults' of those first cohorts of teachers, and he seldom had to discipline

62 Giuseppe Cristofolini, 'Le deficienze della nostra azione in Alto Adige', *Trentino: Rivista della Legione trentina*, I, 4 (Apr. 1925), 63.

63 Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 86–8. Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 329–30.

64 Ibid., 322–3.

65 Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 86.

66 Ibid., 172–3. Molina was not alone in this opinion. Mario Bendiscioli, 'Per la cultura: Gli asili dell' "Opera Nazionale Italia Redenta" in Alto Adige', *Pro infantia*, XV, 29 (20 Aug. 1928), 951.

67 Ettore Tolomei, 'Le due provincie. Trento e Bolzano', in Ettore Tolomei, ed., *Archivio per l'Alto Adige, annata XXII – 1927* (Rome: Tip. Coop. Sociale, 1927), 217, 199, respectively.

68 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 64. It bears noting that legal citizenship often also has its own hierarchy that reflects ideas about various collective identifications, such as gender, class and ethnicity. Linda K. Kerber, 'The Meanings of Citizenship', *Journal of American History*, 84, 3 (Dec. 1997). Over the last few decades, sociolinguists have developed the concept of 'language ideologies' to explore some of these affective and socio-political associations between languages and their speakers. John E. Joseph and Talbot J. Taylor, eds., *Ideologies of Language* (London: Routledge, 1990); Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 45–48; Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, 'Language Ideologies', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994), 56–72; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity, *Language Ideologies*, 324–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

them.[69] Even if he conceded that 'Italian' teachers in predominantly German- and Ladin-speaking territories frequently faced initial opposition from residents, he was quick to add that 'the suspicion and hostility of the early years were followed by moderate goodwill and finally friendly trust' between teachers and the communities in which they worked.[70] In a final assessment, Molina concluded that his system of gradual assimilation, in which the Trentine population was instrumental, was quite successful among the so-called non-native populations of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol.[71] By the mid-1920s, he reported with a semi-colonialist air that the Tyrolean children had started to smooth their 'naturally rough edges'. He asserted, 'the Italian teacher conquered her children with the virtue of her spirit, the humanity of her manner, and the responsiveness of her character.'[72] Echoing this sentiment in a 1925 article, the Tuscan journalist and children's author Italiano Marchetti described the schools of Venezia Tridentina as the 'most Italian schools', 'wisely ordered, the smallest detail curated with loving exactitude, throbbing with life and enthusiasm'.[73] After less than two years of experience at the helm, Molina was confident that he was making good headway in gradually assimilating the kingdom's new residents to the national community, and that he had the support of the fascist administration to prove it.

Measuring the Distance between Trent and Rome

This apparent idyll was not the full story, of course, and Molina's recollections of Rome's policy shifts between 1926 and 1934 suggest some of the additional considerations at play, illuminating both the instability of fascist definitions of *italianità* and the arbitrary qualifications used to determine its membership. The superintendent devoted particular attention to two executive decisions that confirmed an increasingly untenable gap between how officials in the 'centre' and at the 'periphery' believed the Italian state could best ensure the *italianità* of the new borderland. First was the late 1926 administrative division of a unified region of Venezia Tridentina into two provinces, Trentino (in the south) and Alto Adige (in the north), which concentrated state funds and attention in the northern portion of the territory, away from Trentino and its population. Second, and more damaging in Molina's eyes, came the 1934 announcement that virtually all *trentini* would be removed from their positions within the schools of Alto Adige/Südtirol and replaced with teachers and administrators from Italy's 'old' provinces – that is, those provinces that had been part of the kingdom since its nineteenth-century unification. According to Molina, the forced transfer of the vast majority of Trentine teachers essentially transformed what he considered to be models of *italianità* into potential enemies of a clearly defined Italian populace in the borderland.[74]

That the benchmarks by which Italianisation would be measured remained overwhelmingly abstract allowed the state's various actors to read the same data in dramatically divergent ways. Molina reported that the mid-1920s contained evidence of growing trust between students, teachers and families, and of declining tensions between school officials and Church leadership; *italianità*, principally in the form of Italian language usage, was slowly but surely infiltrating the lives of German- and Ladin-speaking children and their families. But where Molina saw steady progress toward Italianisation, Mussolini and administrators in Rome's Ministry of Education seem increasingly to have read local ambivalence, indifference and even antagonism towards Italian authority. A regime that sought ever-growing uniformity of the Italian character and experience decoded

69 Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 87–8.

70 Ibid.

71 There is ample evidence that the transition was not as smooth as Molina claimed. 'Scuole e questione scolastica', in Ettore Tolomei, ed., *Archivio per l'Alto Adige, annata XVII – 1922* (Bozen/Bolzano: Tipografia Ed. Atesina, 1922), 425. Molina blamed much of the local hostility toward Italian education on their distrust of Italian teachers who came from the 'old' regions of Italy. Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 87.

72 Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 172–3.

73 Marchetti, 'Scuole d'italianità', 315.

74 Luigi Molina, 'Periodo trentino 3a parte' (Trent, n.d.), FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 577–8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

information regarding Tyroleans' limited embrace of *italianità* as proof of the ineffectiveness of gradual assimilation. Any resistance to swift and complete Italianisation, real or imagined, was considered verification of continued danger to the nation-state along its northernmost border.[75] In a brief interview with a journalist from the French newspaper *Le Petit Parisien* that covered a number of issues regarding Italy's foreign relations, Mussolini conceded concern for the continued menace of pan-Germanism in Venezia Tridentina and vowed to make the territory 'Italian'.[76] This reaction to the continued presence of German and Ladin speakers in the region was not unexpected; that the regime would then pursue policies effectively holding the *trentini* responsible for such 'inadequate' progress outraged many Italian speakers in the borderland.[77]

In December 1926, the administration announced its decision to divide Venezia Tridentina into two politically distinct provinces, largely along linguistic fault lines.[78] At first glance, this declaration had nothing to do with Italianisation, the *trentini* or gradual assimilation, as it was part of a kingdom-wide administrative reform of the provincial system. Yet the shift marked a rather significant change in the regime's approach to the assimilation project, particularly considering the substantial overlap between the new administrative borders and what officials viewed as ethno-linguistic boundaries. The northern portion of the territory, Alto Adige/Südtirol, would no longer answer to officials in Trent. Instead, it would have its own line of communication with Rome through prefectural offices in Bozen/Bolzano, at the centre of the German-speaking population.[79] The increasingly centralised fascist state appeared to envision the partition as a means to aggregate and control the majority of the territory's German speakers, with the notable repercussion of limiting Molina's bureaucratic freedom to lean heavily on *trentini* to serve in Alto Adige/Südtirol's schools, even though the Ministry of Education would maintain a unified administration for the two provinces until 1936. These governmental changes would, in theory, protect Trentino's Italian speakers from further risk of Germanisation and allow the regime more directly to oversee the Italianisation of those residents who most threatened Italian state power along the northern border.[80] At the same time, Italianisation would no longer take place primarily through a process of cohabitation and appropriation, relying on the entangled lives of German, Italian and Ladin speakers, and local *italianità*, to see its successful completion.

Molina interpreted the administrative division of Venezia Tridentina as an initial step in Rome's decision – made 'with an indefinable imprudence' – to 'make Bolzano, a city by now Germanised to its roots, the vanguard of *italianità*, the bulwark of our national defence'.[81] The superintendent described how, to do so, party officials 'proposed introducing new elements from the array of Italian provinces, sending them up there as officials, clerks, laborers and peasants, trying little by little to overwhelm the non-native peoples with an ever-increasing national demographic'.[82] In other words, migrants from supposedly more authentic Italian provinces were

75 Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 334.

76 Albert Jullien, 'Une Heure avec M. Mussolini au Palais Chigi', interview, *Le Petit Parisien* (Paris, France), 27 Feb. 1926. I first became aware of the interview in Alcock, 'The History of the South Tyrol Question', 40.

77 The historian Leopold Steuer also recounted one meeting between German and Italian envoys late in 1926 during which Mussolini's representative explained, 'it was clear in Rome that so far they had paid far too little attention to the question of South Tyrol, but that they were now determined to intervene against the guilty party, which they saw as the Trentines'. Steurer, *Südtirol zwischen Rom und Berlin*, 145–6.

78 For more on this decision, see Eden K. McLean, 'A Border within the Borderland: Assimilation through Separation in Fascist Italy's South Tyrol' in 'Myths in Austrian History: Construction and Deconstruction', Günter Bischof, Marc Landry and Christian Karner, eds., special issue, *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, 29 (2020), 285–95.

79 Ettore Tolomei, 'I provvedimenti per l'Alto Aige dopo un quinquennio (1923–1928)', in Ettore Tolomei, ed., *Archivio per l'Alto Adige, annata XXIII – 1928* (Rome: Tip. Coop. Sociale, 1928), 7.

80 Di Michele more directly argues that Mussolini's doubts about the *trentini*'s ability to Italianise German and Ladin speakers fuelled the decision to divide the region. Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta*, 196–7.

81 Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 329–30.

82 Ibid., 325–6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

expected to outnumber and ultimately replace the German- and Ladin-speaking residents of Alto Adige/Südtirol.[83]

Population transfers as a tactic of 'ethnic simplification' were not particularly new to interwar European nationalisation projects, nor to the fascist regime and its attempts to Italianise the margins of its empire-nation.[84] In fact, fascists had encouraged the emigration of Italians from 'older' regions to Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol from the very beginning of their administration.[85] However, in Mussolini's 1926 interview with *Le Petit Parisien*, the core of his plan of action had been the settlement by 'bona fide' Italians, which, according to the Duce, had already begun: 'On the Austrian frontier I have introduced a zone of 30 kilometres, which allows only people we authorise to settle.'[86] Mussolini called for a border wall of *italianità*, but not one whose foundation was the local, 'innate', 'immutable' *italianità* that had been so essential to justifying annexation in 1919; instead, he would import *italianità* to the kingdom's new frontier. And, from 1927 on, this plan was pursued in earnest. The regime encouraged a steady influx of Italians who were not just seasonal workers, but manufacturers, artisans and entrepreneurs, with the idea that they would bring economic growth to the northern borderland and, in turn, encourage other Italians to emigrate. Party leaders in Rome believed this scheme would infuse the local population with the 'vital energies' of more established, more authentic, Italians.[87] Bozen/Bolzano would hold the line of *italianità* against the further invasion of Italy's Germanic enemies.

Other historians have explored the measures Mussolini subsequently dictated with the intent of converting the province of Bozen/Bolzano into a 'province of the future', most notably through the construction of a new industrial sector in which virtually no German speakers were permitted to work; scholars have given far less attention to the fact that many of the resources devoted to this new facet of the Italianisation project were taken directly away from the Trentino and its residents.[88] If, as Mabel Berezin has argued, national loyalty is a product of state efforts and practices, Rome did not appear particularly interested in employing its assets to inspire greater patriotism among the *trentini*.[89] In a reversal of the administrative relocations undertaken in 1919 and 1920, government and military offices, as well as jobs, were transferred from Trent to Bozen/Bolzano at the end of the 1920s, much to the unhappiness of Trentine officials and civilians.[90] Some Trentine authorities even complained to their superiors in Rome.[91] In fact, it was the local Fascist Party leader in Trent, Giuseppe Brasavola de Massa, who reported to headquarters in 1929 that 'the situation, as Your Excellency can see, is critical but not irreversible, as with a not excessive expense it could restore to the province that well-being and peace that its traditions of patriotism and the hardworking, serene

83 Pergher discussed this approach to Italianisation in depth in Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*. Also, Pergher, 'Staging the Nation in Fascist Italy's "New Provinces"'.

84 I borrow the term 'margins' from David Forgacs and 'nation-empire' from Pergher. David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*.

85 Achille Starace, 'Ai deputati Fascisti! A tutti i Fascisti d'Italia!' (Trent, 1 June 1921), ACS, Segretaria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario (hereafter SPD [CO]) 556.428 Bozen/Bolzano: Situazione politica.

86 Jullien, 'Une Heure avec M. Mussolini au Palais Chigi'. In 1928, Tolomei explained that in the first years of fascist rule, Italian emigration to Alto Adige/Südtirol was limited and primarily included veterans from Lombardy and the Veneto. Tolomei, 'I provvedimenti per l'Alto Aige dopo un quinquennio (1923–1928)', 18.

87 Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 331–5.

88 The government expropriated land within Bozen/Bolzano to develop this industrial zone in 1932, after which labour migration significantly increased. Giuseppe Cristofolini, 'Bollettino della Legione trentina dell'Associazione nazionale volontari: Sezione di Bolzano', *Trentino*, 3 (1933), 3; Alcock, 'The History of the South Tyrol Question', 42; Rolf Petri, 'La zona industriale dell'Agruzzo/am Gruzten sino al termine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale', in Gruppo di lavoro, ed., *Semirurali e ditorni, per un Museo nelle Semirurali* (Bozen/Bolzano: Ufficio Servizi Museali e Storico-Artistici/Amt für Museen und kunsthistorische Kulturgüter, 2013); Steininger, *South Tyrol*, 42–5.

89 Mabel Berezin, 'Political Belonging: Emotion, Nation, and Identity in Fascist Italy', in Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture*, 363.

90 Giuseppe Brasavola de Massa, 5 Oct. 1929, ACS, Partito Nazionale Fascista (hereafter PNF), Situazione politica e economica delle provincie, b. 26, f. Trento.

91 L. Vaccari, 25 July 1927, ACS, PCM, Gab., 1927, b. 986, f. 1/1-13.2648.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

discipline of its populations deserve.'[92] In his memoir, Molina was more direct: Trent 'was neglected and offended'.[93] Although perhaps unanticipated, an important consequence of the 1926 provincial division was the economic and cultural segregation of the *trentini*, breeding significant resentment towards the fascist state and, rather ironically, further threatening the supposedly fragile hold on their *italianità*.[94]

Molina was baffled by Rome's disruptive actions, lamenting that they had to be the result of 'a strange and obstinate antipathy toward the *trentini*' in Rome, 'born of I-don't-know-what reasons'. He continued, writing that 'many thought, with obvious injustice, that the former Austrian domination had deformed the nature of the population, so that it was not considered prudent to rely on its *italianità* for any work of greater political importance'.[95] Molina might have been able to rationalise the 'frostiness' he occasionally experienced from some *trentini* as understandable wariness and local character, but others registered it as outright resistance to the rightful expansion of Italian power.[96] The superintendent was not alone in this evaluation. Cristofolini also condemned the criticisms of the *trentini* that 'raged in the aftermath of the establishment of the new border province'.[97] The prominent Italian nationalist was particularly incensed by mounting accusations of widespread 'Trentinism' (*trentinismo*) in the region, countering that they were 'absurd, derived from ignorance and, in some cases, a shallow sense of competition, which insinuates accusations to undermine those in enviable positions and used by some officials as excuses for their own deficiencies'.[98] Although *italianità* was still prevalent in discussions of Trentine identity (both in and outside Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol), growing reference to Trentinism as an equally oblique – but considerably more freighted – term of collective chauvinism suggests a noteworthy shift in thinking about the character of *trentini* in recognition of their relative 'degree of foreignness' next to Italians from the 'old' provinces.[99]

Indeed, the concept of Trentinism and the open debate over its meaning encapsulate much of the ambivalence that fascist authorities expressed towards the *trentini*, not to mention the un-'common sense' of such terms. As opposed to the idealised spirit of *italianità* that nationalists imagined all 'Italians' shared, by the late 1920s increased allegations of Trentinism maintained local characteristics were 'symptoms of recalcitrance toward connecting with their fellow countrymen'.[100] Echoing the ways in which Molina referred to affective traits as indicators of Trentine *italianità*, one local party official described *trentini* – who, he remarked, were 'all more or less Trentinists, the rest are anti-Trentinists' – as 'a mountain people: by nature closed and hateful of everything that may appear artificial hype, very sensitive and suspicious'.[101] This blatant generalisation was indicative of the broader trend in public discussions of Trentinism to identify local habits and behaviours that purportedly revealed an incompatibility between *trentini* and *italianità*. But that is largely where agreement

92 Brasavola de Massa, 1929.

93 Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 330.

94 This sense among *trentini* of being considered neither 'German' or 'Austrian' finds similarities in Brendan Karch's argument about the creation of 'Upper Silesians' along the German-Polish border. Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland*.

95 Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 328–9.

96 Molina reports that Italian transplants often attributed this coldness to hypocrisy and/or pro-Austrian sentiment. Molina, 'Periodo Trentino 1a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 15–16.

97 Giuseppe Cristofolini, 'I trentini e la provincia di Bolzano', *Trentino: Rivista della Legione trentina*, III, 10 (Oct. 1927), 210.

98 Giuseppe Cristofolini, 'La leggenda del trentinismo', *Trentino*, IV, 8 (Aug. 1928), 253–4. Pergher, too, has noted that by 1927 even Mussolini shared reservations about the *trentini* and their ability to be successful stewards of *italianità*, citing their excessive Trentinism. Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*, 149.

99 Lawrence, Baycroft, and Grohmann, '"Degrees of Foreignness"'. As Di Michele notes, accusations of Trentinism predated Italian occupation of the area. In fact, after a 1909 visit to the area, Mussolini himself complained of the provincialism of the population, but the Italian occupation of the territory after Nov. 1918 gave the term additional weight (and ambiguity). Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta*, 185, fn. 79; Überegger, *Im Schatten des Krieges*, 73.

100 Cristofolini, 'La leggenda del trentinismo', 253–4.

101 Dante M. Tuninetti, 5 Sept. 1928, ACS, PNF, Situazione politica e economica delle provincie, b. 26, f. Trento – Situazione.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

over the term ended. In fact, that same local party official, Dante Tuninetti, decided in 1928 to dedicate an entire volume to the variety of interpretations of Trentinism and anti-Trentinism. Tuninetti introduced the volume with his own definition, explaining that Trentinism was 'that localised spirit derived from a small-minded and narrow background that informs the action – and even more the thoughts, opinions, and intentions – of a part of the Trentine people'.[102] Giving a bit more specificity to this regionalism, Tuninetti argued that Trentinists believed that 'barbarians' lived in Alto Adige, or at least 'those undesirable foreigners who do not understand anything other than their immediate gain' and who often ventured into Trentino 'to satiate themselves and plunder like vulgar pirates'.[103] According to this definition, anyone who supported Trentinism only stoked underlying tensions between Italian and German speakers in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol.

In contrast, other contributors to Tuninetti's volume argued that Trentinism led *trentini* to have greater affinity for their German-speaking neighbours, thereby increasing the risk of 'Germanic' sympathies and, correlatively, the potential for anti-Italian and anti-fascist sentiments. Molina later weighed in on this confusion:

> while mistrust in the genuine purity of Trentine *italianità* was not hidden, it was also affirmed by many that no political task in the German zone could be entrusted to the *trentini* because of the ancient and persistent hostility they had harboured against the *alloglotti* of the northern region; a patent contradiction that no one bothered to clarify and resolve, in the stubborn desire to sacrifice the newly redeemed Italians to the whims of an artificial transformation of Bolzano and its territory.[104]

In short, Trentinists were innately Italian but also provincial; part of the Italian nation but working against national interests. And, just to confirm the fact that Tuninetti's volume did little to clarify the relationship between Trentinism and *italianità*, the editor made the point of assuring his readers in the opening pages that 'we' – presumably the fascist state – 'believe the Trentine population to be naturally and intimately Italian in its traditions, blood, culture, and spirit'.[105]

The state's questioning of Trentine *italianità* – either its legitimacy or its durability – was made even more apparent with the regime's growing limitations on the regional employment of *trentini*. Already in 1923 some of the most ardent Trentine nationalists had expressed frustration over a perceived lack of recognition for their contributions to the national cause. They claimed many who had fought valiantly for unification with Italy were being dismissed from positions within the civil government, only to be replaced by others whose history of loyalty to Italy was far less evident.[106] In a letter to Mussolini meant to explain away these complaints, the prefect of Venezia Tridentina at the time reported that only six Trentine civil servants had been transferred to positions in the 'old' provinces and the vast majority of the provincial functionaries remained *trentini*, working peacefully side-by-side with the few officials who had come from elsewhere in the kingdom. He also reassured Mussolini that no one wanted to 'devalue the merits of the good and the best [*trentini*]; no one ignores the patriotism reflected in many of them that is held in the highest regard'.[107]

By the end of the 1920s, however, many civil authorities and party officials, and even some local teachers, were much less concerned with mitigating Trentine resentment. In an article outlining the difficulties of successful assimilation in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, one teacher explained that all remaining teachers who spoke German needed to be dismissed because, even if they were

102 Dante M. Tuninetti, *Trentinismo e antitrentinismo* (Trent: Arti grafiche tridentum, 1928), 9–10.

103 Ibid., 10.

104 Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 331–4.

105 Tuninetti, *Trentinismo e antitrentinismo*, 11.

106 Giuseppe Cristofolini, Italo Lunelli and Prof. Gaccia, 27 Nov. 1923, ACS, PCM, Gab., 1924, b. 740, f. 1/1-11.2525; Camillo Maccani and Alfonso Pasolli, 1 Dec. 1923, ACS, PCM, Gab., 1924, b. 740, f. 1/1-11.2525.

107 Giuseppe Guadagnini, 4 Dec. 1923, ACS, PCM, Gab., 1924, B. 740, F. 1/1-11.2525.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pedagogically well trained, they 'speak Italian like they speak German'.[108] Just as was seen in the wider conversation about the compatibility of *trentini* and *italianità*, the author claimed *trentini* were less well suited to instil *italianità* in German-speaking students because German was part of their culture.[109] This commentary suggested that, despite the government's wartime praise for the great national feeling of the *trentini* and the famed resilience of their *italianità* under Habsburg rule, state representatives publicly intimated that Trentine familiarity with the German language and 'Germanic' customs was proof of a compromised Italian spirit. Tolomei added to this perception when he expressed the administration's concern that their familiarity with German might lead Trentine teachers to rely on that language for easier communication, which would only be damaging to the Italianisation project.[110] Interacting with German and Ladin speakers on a daily basis – something Molina had claimed was fundamental to their superior ability to connect with their German-language students – appeared to highlight the precariousness of Trentine *italianità*. Not only that, but the regime also needed to make sure that these Italian speakers did not defect in the face of 'German propaganda', which many officials at the time, including Molina, believed was crossing the border in a steady stream from the north.[111] In short, the concern became whether the *trentini* were (or ever could be) Italian enough.[112]

The mere concept of the *trentini* – the ambiguity of their national identity and therefore of their allegiance – appeared to threaten the inviolability of the Italian border and the supposed objectivity of Italy's national classifications. As such, officials in Rome began in earnest to transfer state-employed *trentini* to the 'old' provinces as a way to integrate them 'more thoroughly into Italian life, to cure them of their provincial and narrow-minded provincialism that had crystallised in the exhausting and constant defence against prolonged foreign domination'.[113] Many German-speaking teachers had already been transferred or dismissed over the previous four years but, by 1927, Molina's office no longer accepted any applications for appointments within Alto Adige/Südtirol from teachers who spoke German.

The meaning of such rejections was most evident when they directly confronted other educational priorities of the state. For example, for years the Ministry of Education had lamented the limited number of male elementary teachers because they were deemed essential to the effective education of Italy's male students in critical subjects, such as virility and aggression.[114] And yet, most elementary teachers throughout the kingdom and throughout the *ventennio* remained female. It is remarkable, then, that when the administration experienced an uptick in requests from male *trentini* to teach in Alto Adige/Südtirol in the early 1930s, the prefect of Bozen/Bolzano wrote to Mussolini that 'this does not excite me at all because there are already too many *trentini* in the province of Bolzano, and it is well known that, with some exceptions, they are not always the best messengers of pure *italianità* and a spirit of understanding toward the *allogeni*.'[115] Instead, he urged the Minister of Education to solicit or transfer teachers from the 'old' provinces in north and central Italy to Alto Adige/Südtirol, rather gratuitously

108 Girolamo Gaspari, 'I problemi e i fatti dell'assimilazione e dell'educazione nell'Alto Adige', in Ettore Tolomei, ed., *Archivio per l'Alto Adige, annata XIV – 1929* (Rome: Tip. Coop. Sociale, 1929), 81–2.

109 Gaspari further wrote that the political faith of the *trentini* seemed questionable, which meant that 'they are absolutely not the most appropriate teachers to trust the delicate education of Alto Adige to'. Gaspari, 'I problemi e i fatti dell'assimilazione e dell'educazione nell'Alto Adige', 80–2.

110 Ettore Tolomei, 'Cronaca dell'Alto Adige: Vita e problemi del paese. V. Lingua e cultura', *Archivio per l'Alto Adige*, XXIX, no. Parte prima (1934), 472.

111 Ufficio regionale di Trento, *Relazione sull'attività dell'Opera nazionale assistenza Italia redenta nel 1926*, ONAIR (Trent, 22 Feb. 1927).

112 Molina, 'Periodo trentino 2a parte', FMST, ALM, r. 2, Memorie Papa, 326.

113 Ibid., 331–4.

114 Eden K. McLean, *Mussolini's Children: Race and Elementary Education in Fascist Italy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 34–5.

115 Giovanni Battista Marziali, 29 Sept. 1932, ASMAE, Ambasciata italiana presso la S. Sede, b. 10, f. 8 Bolzano, sf. Scuole clandestine dirette in Alto Adige.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reminding him that 'knowledge of the German language is not necessary'.[116] The prefect believed the influx of 'purer' Italians would help reduce the Trentinism that was present in the schools as he asserted that the majority of school teachers, principals and inspectors in Alto Adige/Südtirol were from Trentino.[117] His rejection of Trentine applicants does not mean these teachers were not sent to other parts of the kingdom to support the national education campaign, but it does indicate the relative order of state priorities in the Italian borderland.

Such recruitment efforts had already begun to expand in the summer of 1927, shortly after the decision to transform Venezia Tridentina into Trentino-Alto Adige and Molina stopped accepting applications from anyone who spoke German, but it was not until 1934 that Rome formally completed the shift away from entrusting any of the Italianisation campaign to Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol's Italian speakers. That year, the Ministry of Education announced that any remaining Trentine teachers in Alto Adige/Südtirol were to be relocated to school districts in central and southern Italy and replaced with 'compatriots' born far from the Dolomites. Later that year, an article in Tolomei's *Archivio per l'Alto Adige* declared that most elementary schools in Alto Adige/Südtirol were now headed by teachers from the 'internal' provinces of Italy.[118]

The Limits of 'Common Sense'

Shortly after the announcement in the summer of 1934 that Trentine teachers would be transferred to southern provinces, Molina publicly resigned from his position as superintendent of schools in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol (although it bears noting that he had received information the ministry was about to replace him). The fact that a long-serving and not-reluctant fascist official (one who had met several times with Mussolini himself) was willing openly to express his disagreement with the regime points to the complexity of fascist support within the ranks of the regime's bureaucrats. That he was then able to return two years later as the superintendent of schools in Trentino without discarding any of his resentment (at least according to Molina) also hints at some of the many compromises brokered between the regime, the state and the individuals who ultimately defined them.

Certainly the fascist Italianisation policies in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol were not novel either to Italian borderlands or twentieth-century European borderlands more generally. In fact, Roman bureaucrats were not shy about pointing out the implementation of similar language and education policies in the borderlands of non-fascist states.[119] Still, Rome's fluctuating rhetoric about and treatment of the resident Italian-speaking population between 1923 and 1934 highlighted a growing fissure between the central state's 'common sense' about *italianità* – based on a combination of abstract theories of nationality and immediate political necessity – and the complex realities of collective identifications and statecraft in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. Perhaps, more accurately, where Rome's imaginings of *italianità* were not compatible with those of residents in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, a type of hierarchy of Italian-ness emerged that clearly reflected the fluid process of nation-building.[120] As the regime's desire to stabilise Italian control in the territory became more urgent, however, its efforts undermined the ability of local officials like Molina to delineate the parameters of *italianità* (or at least Italian control) in a region rich with its own cultural and political allegiances that by turns competed and overlapped with the interests of the Italian state. At the same time, Italy's struggles to implement more rigid criteria for Italianisation meant the weakening of officials' moral authority, political support and 'totalitarian' façade in the region and, as a result, the inevitable failure

116 Giovanni Battista Marziali, 29 Sept. 1932, ACS, SPD (CO) 541.261/3.

117 Giovanni Battista Marziali, 2 May 1932, ASMAE, Affari Politici, 1931–1945, Austria, b. 12, f. 2.

118 'Cronaca dell'Alto Adige. Vita e problemi del paese, 1934 – XII: Lingua e cultura', in Ettore Tolomei, ed., *Archivio per l'Alto Adige, annata XXIX – 1934 – XII* (Rome: Tip. Coop. Sociale, 1934), 472.

119 Seberich, *Südtiroler Schulgeschichte*, 69. Also Mussolini's 6 Feb. 1926 speech, 'Difesa dell'Alto Adige', in Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, eds., *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, vol. 22, *Dall'attentato Zaniboni al discorso dell'Ascensione (5 novembre 1925–26 maggio 1927)* (Florence: La Fenice, 1957), 69–73.

120 Pergher, 'Staging the Nation in Fascist Italy's "New Provinces"', 100; Donnan and Wilson, *Borders*, 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of any sort of campaign to establish political or cultural hegemony in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. In other words, by attempting to assert more control over the definition of *italianità* and over the Italianisation process, Mussolini's Rome helped illuminate a fundamental, if ironic, reality that to have any possibility of success in establishing and defending 'national' borders anywhere, states need to rely heavily on both an adaptable understanding of nationality and their street-level bureaucrats to interpret it.

Acknowledgements. This article was helped immensely by conversations with faculty and graduate students from the Auburn University Department of History during two brown-bag lunch presentations. I especially want to thank Monique Laney, Christopher Ferguson, Erica Moretti and Malcolm McLean for reading and commenting on early drafts, and CEH's three anonymous reviewers for invaluable feedback. Research was made possible with financial support from a Barbieri Grant (Trinity College), the American Philosophical Society, and Auburn University's College of Liberal Arts and Department of History.

Cite this article: McLean EK (2023). The Un-'Common Sense' of National Identity: Luigi Molina, *Trentini* and the Fascist Italianisation Campaign in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. *Contemporary European History* 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000139 Published online by Cambridge University Press