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WORKING PAPER

Not a Backlash, but a Multicultural Implosion from Within: Uncertainty and Crisis in the Case of South Tyrol's "Multiculturalism"

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"South Tyrol is a melting pot of cultures and contrasts."

This is the opening statement about South Tyrol from the official website of the provincial tourist agency². It coincides more or less with the idea that I myself previously had about South Tyrol, of which until last year I knew almost nothing except for some vague notions: there had been separatist terrorism in past decades; that groups of lederhosen-clad men called the "Schützen" would occasionally parade a seemingly folkloristic militarism; that from time to time South Tyrol's politicians would offer a provocative statement regarding their province's place within the Italian Republic; and that a number of star athletes on Italian national sports teams (especially winter sports) came from the province, and their thick German accents and sometimes hesitant Italian allowed me to feel a little better about my own heavily (American) accented Italian.

My experiences in the first months after arriving in South Tyrol for a new job³ led me to abandon the melting pot metaphor in favor of another: the autonomous province of South Tyrol is not so much a melting pot or even a "salad bowl"—as suggested by some revisionist analysts of the American multicultural model, in which the various ingredients are tossed together but each maintains its distinctive flavor—as it is instead (to remain within the gastronomic idiom) a "buffet", in which the dishes exist side-by-side on separate plates. On the ethnographic ground, of course, South Tyrol is really neither a melting pot nor a buffet, but in both my daily experiences and in a number of studies I was reading about South Tyrolean society (ex. Medda-Windischer et al. 2011; Chisholm and Peterlini 2011; Riccioni 2009), I found a degree of de facto social separation that astonished me: separate school systems for the three major linguistic groups (German-, Italian- and Ladin-speakers)⁴; separate sports clubs for both youths and adults, separate libraries and music schools; separate Catholic church services and charity organizations; separate cultural associations; separate uses of urban space; and—the drum whose beat sets the general rhythm—separate administrative institutions within the apparatus of the all-important Provincial government. If, as Anderson (1983) noted in his famous formulation, print (and other) media create and consolidate "imagined communities", the media consumption habits of Italian- and German-speaking South Tyroleans would indicate a predominant tendency for separate imagined communities. Indeed, the first time I visited a German-speaking home, I was struck by the extent to which that family lives very much within a German-speaking "bubble" inside of the Italian national imagined community, and I have come to realize that this bubble is rather widespread throughout the autonomous province and much less permeable outside the major urban areas. In short, the Italian/German social boundaries described in Cole and Wolf's classic *The Hidden Frontier* (1974) seem alive and well.

Although over the years I have occasionally heard Italians from outside South Tyrol relate anecdotes of hostility in South Tyrol—a hostility or suspicion they perceived in German-speaking South Tyroleans in brief encounters—such episodes seem to belong to a fairly distant past. In

today's "multicultural" regime, which has been celebrated by several authors as the "model" outcome of the political compromise that led to South Tyrol's status as an autonomous province of the Italian Republic (Steininger 2003; Kymlicka 2007), truly overt forms of hostility amongst the linguistic groups are not very tangible, and while many local people suggest that there is a latent tension between the two major groups (Italian- and German-speaking), the last two decades have seen a climate of relatively peaceful and prosperous, if "passive", co-existence (cf. Baur 2000).

Precisely because the configuration of social relations in South Tyrol is not static, however, we must consider how the current atmosphere of multi-scale crisis and uncertainty is figuring into the processes shaping local forms of "multiculturalism". This paper will offer some preliminary reflections addressing the following questions: To what extent is the discourse of "multicultural backlash" applicable to the South Tyrol context? How are neo-assimilationist tendencies and policies on a national level in Italy being received within the province? What effects might the general atmosphere of social and economic crisis throughout Italy and Europe be having on multicultural discourse in the South Tyrol? In tracing various currents and undercurrents, I will suggest that alongside and despite the risk of increasing/producing "interethnic" tensions in the province, in this interesting and fluid moment, various factors seem to be very tentatively working toward undermining the existing regime of "multiculturalism" in favor of a gradual shift to what might be deemed a more "intercultural" form of social relations.

A brief history

South Tyrol was among the territories annexed to Italy in 1918 after Austria suffered defeat in World War I. Only a few years later, the rise of the ultranationalist Fascist regime in Italy led to two decades of intense repression of the German-speaking South Tyroleans, including the banning of German language and cultural forms, Italianization of personal and place names as well as the administrative apparatus, and a colonialist policy promoting immigration from other areas of Italy. Subsequent to World War II, the province achieved status as an autonomous province, and after a lengthy process of negotiation, the autonomy statutes gave a great deal of administrative power to the German-speaking South Tyroleans, who constitute a minority within the Italian state, but are a majority within South Tyrol, except in the capital city of Bolzano and a few small towns. Given the dramatic historical background of Italian domination in the first half of the twentieth century, the paramount concern of the new provincial leaders was to protect the German- and Ladin-speaking populations from the risk of cultural loss. The system of "ethnic proportion", or "Proporz", was established to make sure that each language group would be represented in the public arena and in access to public resources in proportion to its numerical presence, as determined by the census results regarding the three major linguistic groups (German-, Italian- and Ladin-speakers); the system is also designed to guarantee preservation of German and Ladin language and culture by creating separate institutions for the three major language groups. The logic—whether or not we as analysts choose to term it "multicultural"—is that of a form of positive discrimination, founded on the creation of reified boundaries, in order to protect minority identities. As famously stated by Bolzano's culture alderman in 1980, "The more separate we are, the better we will be able to understand each other" (cited in Baur 2000: 188). Far from being a multiculturalism of hybridity and mixity—which are, to the contrary, viewed negatively among the hegemonic German-speaking forces—from an anthropological perspective, the system clearly bears within it the antinomies of a "multiculturalism" whose extreme reification and reproduction of cultural boundaries risks facilitating ultra-Right discourses of the "right to difference" (Melotti 1997; cf. Holmes 2000).⁵

The Declaration

The "ethnic proportion" is decided on the basis of the results of the "Declaration of

Membership in a Linguistic Group”, a form distributed to the resident population simultaneous to the taking of the census. **[photos: the Declaration form]** With the 2011 census, this declaration was made in an anonymous manner for the first time, but most South Tyrol residents also fill out a separate, analogous declaration which is registered with the Court of Bolzano and serves as their official “ethnic identity” for the purpose of obtaining public jobs or resources allotted by the census-period “Proporz”. Despite the difficulty in estimating the empirical extent of the phenomenon, popular discourse commonly asserts that many Italian speakers have declared themselves “German” as an instrumental use of ethnicity, given that the German-speaking majority has proportionately greater access to the interests at stake. With the Declaration, the essentialization of language as the marker par excellence of ethnic identity and the reification of group membership become total, in that there is no option for persons with multiple language competences (known locally as *mistilingui*). The inflexibility of these categories has been one important ground for critiquing the use of the Declaration on the part of the Greens and the Lega Nord (Northern League) **[photos: posters against the Declaration]**.

The anthropological quandries of the Declaration are even more apparent when the respondents are naturalized foreigners residing in South Tyrol. Faced with the three choices, foreigners and others who do not declare their “membership” in one of the groups are requested to “affiliate” themselves (*aggregarsi*) to one. In short, everyone is required to take sides. Luck would have it that I became a resident of the province a week before the last deadline for being covered by the census, so I managed to have an unexpected ethnographic experience in local ethnic identity construction when the census-taker left me my Declaration form. If I may be permitted to mention it here without being considered too self-indulgent, I pondered for the better part of an evening over how I should fill out my Declaration, weighing various aspects of my own identity and biography that I felt came into play, but also evaluating the strategic option of “helping” a microscopic minority like the Ladins with a possible affiliation. I felt a good deal of resentment over being asked to take sides in a scenario based on a history that was not my own, and that it was not fair that I should make such a choice, which—even if it only involved a single person—would, much as an electoral vote, bear a weight on the real material conditions of other people. I will return to the Declaration below.

Migration, multiculturalism, and “backlash”

As of late, a number of authors responding to the discourse around multicultural backlash have posited that there has been much attention to the level of official policy and media-induced “moral panics”, but that in point of fact it is necessary to look at actual practices on the ground, which in many cases do remain (explicitly or not) inflected with multiculturalism (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Triandafyllidou, Modood and Meer 2012). In this regard, I would suggest that cases such as South Tyrol (but we might also consider Québec, Catalonia, or Belgium) are interesting because their dimension as “divided societies” experiencing a substantial phenomenon of immigration complicates the “multicultural” picture even further (cf. Gilligan and Ball 2011). In an essay countering the proclamation, common in much multicultural backlash discourse, that “multiculturalism is dead”, Kymlicka (2010) argues for the need to distinguish various forms of multiculturalism. He proposes three typologies from his previous work (cf. Kymlicka 2007): a multiculturalism of indigenous peoples; a multiculturalism of sub-state national minorities, of which he cites South Tyrol as an example; and an immigrant multiculturalism. Kymlicka suggests that the discourse of backlash and critique of multiculturalism has more than anything had to do with multiculturalism of the third type, that regarding immigrant populations, whereas indigenous and national minority forms of multiculturalism have, to the contrary, witnessed no retreat and have in many cases been reinforced.

Triandafyllidou, Modood and Meer (2012: 4-5) have critiqued Kymlicka's formulation, claiming that it reflects a North American context of indigenous and ethnonationalist (Québécois) claims, while “multiculturalism” in Europe would, they hold, refer in a more limited fashion to the context of immigration. Yet it seems to me that precisely such slippages in meaning and use of “multiculturalism” are of interest to an anthropological project. On the conceptual level of scholarly debates, one might convincingly argue with Kymlicka that the various existing forms of multiculturalism have a common rooting in a certain human-rights discourse around identity and cultural difference. Quite apart from such debates, however, an anthropological focus invites us to attend to “demotic” discourses of multiculturalism (cf. Baumann 1996) which—as, for example, with South Tyrol's tourism website, or as in the Swiss case (D'Amato 2010)—offer on-the-ground interpretations and lived experiences in which “multiculturalism” does indeed refer strongly or mainly to non-immigrant groups. As Grillo (2007: 981) has stated, it is precisely one of anthropology's tasks to document the complexities of a “fuzzy” concept like “multiculturalism”, imbued as it is with multiple and contested meanings. Similarly, from the perspective of a qualitative, constructivist sociology close to anthropology, Enzo Colombo (2005, 2007) advocates the framework of an “everyday multiculturalism” that seeks to capture the processual and polysemic dimensions of multiculturalism as a lived phenomenon, and which is attuned to relations of power.

My own treatment of Kymlicka's formulation raises a different critique: as he presents them, his three typologies tend to be monolithic, and he does not consider how multiple forms, discourses and policies of multiculturalism linked to the three typologies may reciprocally interact or influence one another. He does not consider at length the interface, as in the case examined here, of national minority multiculturalism and immigrant multiculturalism. What happens in the case of migration to places like Québec, Catalonia or South Tyrol? We need to ask if/how the national minority multiculturalism accommodates “immigrant” multiculturalism. Kymlicka (2010) does treat this to the extent that he argues that multiculturalism is transformative of oppressive ideologies and practices of minority groups, but based on my data in South Tyrol, I would say that empirically this is not necessarily so. German-speaking South Tyroleans are a national minority but a hegemonic majority within their territory, where they constitute an economic and political elite. Essentialist boundary construction is the lynchpin of the social system, and as Colombo (2007) notes, essentialism can play a key role in an intricate relationship of gate-keeping: “[In the essentialist vision...] the development of a new rhetoric of exclusion is fostered, one that is often to the sole advantage of the groups that are dominant and bearing greater resources: those who have sufficient power to construct visible and substantial boundaries can also regulate their passage, impeding access to undesired groups and individuals” (2007: 21, my translation).

Immigrants form approximately 8% of the resident population in South Tyrol, with some areas like the city of Bolzano exceeding 12%, figures which are above the national average for Italy.⁶ Thus, in a territory in which “multiculturalism” has been institutionalized through the *Proporz* system and separate-but-equal public and private organizations, the question of how the immigrant presence is received is not a marginal one. A cursory examination of the general positions of the major political parties in the province can give us a sense of the complexity involved. Within the current regime, the two leading parties in the province (SVP and PD) have shown some openings toward immigrant multiculturalism. The SVP (Südtirolvolkspartei) has been hegemonic in the province for decades; the traditional guardian of sub-state nationalist “multiculturalism” in the province, it has in recent years made ambiguous openings to immigrant multiculturalism. For instance, the SVP supported the 2011 Provincial Law on the Integration of Foreign Citizens, but in subsequent months the longtime leader and President of the Province Luis Durnwalder has backpeddled on the possibility of constructing mosques that he had previously held out as a hypothesis.⁷ The PD (Partito Democratico), the leading center-left party with national affiliations, was the primary promoter of the Integration Law: though it is not opposed to the

Proporz, the PD is not an active protagonist of sub-state nationalism in the province and is furthering a discourse of an immigrant-multiculturalist type.

Groups on the Italian-language Right in South Tyrol (Unitalia, Lega Nord, PdL) are against immigrant multiculturalism, but they are also against “national minority” multiculturalism. For example, in the Provincial Council debate over the Provincial Law for the Integration of Foreign Citizens in September 2011, Unitalia leader Seppi pointed out the contradiction in the provisions for anti-discrimination mechanisms, given that the *Proporz* system made discrimination a built-in element (Consiglio della Provincia Autonoma 2011: 50). The German-speaking Right (Freiheitlichen and Südtiroler Freiheit parties) are ultranationalists who defend “their culture” (they would likely even prefer an ethnonationalist *monoculture* to the current “multiculturalism”) and reject immigrant multiculturalism. In this sense, as a student of mine quipped, “It may be that the immigrants finally give the Italians and the Germans something to agree upon.” Finally, the Lega Nord and the Greens have found themselves to be strange multicultural bedfellows in attacking the separation of schooling and the lack of recognition for “mistilingui” in the Declaration. On the other hand, they are on opposite sides regarding immigrant multiculturalism, with the Greens viewing it favorably while the Lega, replicating its position on a national level, holds an ethnocentric and virulently Islamophobic position.

Immigrant incorporation as a variant of strategic essentialism

In a system like that of South Tyrol, there is an ambivalent tension between impulses toward immigrant inclusion and exclusion which inevitably translates into a partisanship in line with the extant reified social divisions. Immigrant multiculturalism can be wholly rejected, as with the Unitalia, Lega or the ultranationalist German-speaker parties mentioned above, who refute the notion that migrants are a part of the local society with a legitimate claim to recognition. In the Integration Law debate, for example, Unitalia's Donato Seppi voiced a form of backlash discourse which is widespread elsewhere, but with a peculiar South Tyrol twist: “I’ll say it in a heavy-handed way to make myself understood: if I am a bit the “owner” of this house, if you want to integrate in my house, do it; if you don’t want to integrate in my house, go home” (Consiglio della Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano 2011: 48-50). This stance offers a stark choice between a subaltern “integration” and exclusion from the perspective of the son of Italian internal migrants to the area, whose own claim to being “a bit” the owner of the house might well be contested by other social actors, including the hegemonic ones.

Other actors, on the other hand, appear to take a more pragmatic view of immigrant incorporation. Given that a large number of immigrants will end up settling permanently in South Tyrol, in the view of some German-speaking individuals and parties, they risk swelling the ranks of “the other group”. Among Italian-speakers, too, there are those who see the immigrant presence in terms of a “bean count”: tentative 2011 census results led some Italian-language commentators to exult at how immigrants were contributing to gains in the Italian language group (*Alto Adige* 11.06.2012). Fears on the part of some German-speakers came to the fore especially following the passage in 2010 of new immigration provisions on a national level which, embodying a neo-assimilationist discourse, instituted mandatory Italian language and civic culture instruction in order to obtain regular stay and long-term residency permits. In order not to penalize German-language learning among migrants, the provincial government managed to wrangle a provision from Rome that would give those who *also* study German extra points for “earning” their stay permit, thus making it easier to obtain. Looking with a view to longer-term developments, then, the process of migrant incorporation within South Tyrol “multiculturalism” sees migrants as potential, if often ambivalently received, “new recruits” to the three official groups.

If “strategic essentialism” is sometimes used by minority group members as a form of self-representation in order to forward their claims, in South Tyrol we also find a process that works toward the inclusion of non-group members within the existing essentialist framework as a strategy for advancing claims. The moment of the “ethnic census” with the Declaration mentioned above, offering its option of “affiliation”, channels non-group members into the three reified communities. I had a direct participant-observation experience of this with my own Declaration of Membership. When I discussed with various friends and acquaintances the fact that I had to submit the Declaration, I had the surprising sensation that my interlocutors were subtly drawing me in the direction of their respective groups. One Italian friend, knowing that I have lived in Italy for some twenty years and hold dual U.S.-Italian nationality, said to me part-question, part-assertion: “You declared yourself Italian, of course. You don’t speak German, do you?”; he looked at me quizzically when I sheepishly spluttered that my situation was not so clear-cut. I added that I was actually considering declaring myself “Ladin”, since they seem to be on the brink of extinction, to which he replied, laughing, that “They [the Ladins] are better off than everyone else in this province.”⁸ During my travail over the decision, a mother-tongue German colleague semi-seriously reminded me about my “Habsburg” (Austrian) grandfather as a pull factor toward the German “ethnic” group. And finally, even a Ladin acquaintance put in his two-cents worth: espousing the premise that the total number of foreigners in South Tyrol now outnumbers the entire Ladin population, he delicately suggested that it would certainly be of help to the Ladin minority if I would consider joining their cause. In the meantime, I accurately predicted the reaction of my Italian husband, who had no stake in the matter whatsoever: he opined that I should go with the highest bidder.

The role of the educational system

Recruitment to the recognized groups can be favored not only through the practice of making the Declaration, but also, and on a more fundamental level, through the process of schooling. A cardinal element in the reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) of social separation and civil enculturation (Schiffauer, et al. 2004), the educational system in South Tyrol is divided into three separate sub-systems on the basis of language, with three separate administrative and political directorates within the Provincial government.⁹ The basis for the separate systems is the Autonomy Statute, which provides that each of the three official language groups be guaranteed instruction in their “mother tongue.”¹⁰ Although the Italian- and German-language schools introduce instruction of “the other language” (as it is termed in local and institutional discourse) at the primary level and continue throughout secondary school, empirically the overall results of L2 language instruction in the school systems have been very mediocre. Even where school buildings of the two major language groups are physically adjacent or housed within a single building, the students of the two groups do not socialize together, nor are there generally moments that could foster such socialization, since lunch and recreation times tend to be staggered. In short, the separation of the education system directly feeds into the reproduction of social boundaries between the Italian- and German-speaking groups¹¹.

Beginning some twenty years ago, in a trend that has gained even greater impetus in recent years, many parents and a few courageous school principals have pressed for the implementation of forms of L2 language instruction in which “the other language” is taught as a vehicle for subjects, rather than as an object of study. Locally, this approach has been variously denominated as “immersion”, “plurilingualism”, or “CLIL” (Content and Language Integrated Learning), and the experiences of this form of instruction conducted in the schools (mainly Italian) have led to very positive outcomes in language learning. The history of such programs is complex and cannot be outlined here; the important point to note, however, is that although they are much desired by some principals and parents who want to guarantee effective L2 instruction for their children, these programs have been the object of a great deal of political hostility and have often had to tactically

move under the radar as “experimental” programs. Along with the promotion of “plurilingualism” in some schools, I have come across a number of smaller-scale, almost invisible “tactics” (de Certeau) on the part of some teachers to foster L2 learning by creating forms of dialogue with members of the “other” language group.

For the purposes of the questions addressed here, it is interesting to note the tension existing between the “multiculturally” divided school system, aimed at protection of the German- and Ladin-speaking groups, and forms of “intercultural education” emerging as a response in Italy to the presence of students of migrant origin. “Intercultural education” is promoted as a policy at the national level (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione 2007), and on the provincial level it seems to be mainly interpreted with regard to the presence of foreign pupils, who are a rapidly growing presence in the South Tyrol schools. Actual practices of “intercultural education” in South Tyrol vary greatly: some are well-informed by current pedagogical theories, others instead use the term to simply to reference L2 language instruction for foreign pupils, which may in point of fact be conducted within an assimilationist perspective with the aim of “solving” the “language problem” of newly arrived foreign pupils as quickly as possible. Even so, the specific issue of L2 for immigrant students led in 2007 to the creation of an unprecedented common project between the three school systems for offering special services, and in this sense it has had an unintended “intercultural” effect on the system itself with the creation of a new, shared administrative organ: the Linguistic Centers.

With its attention to foreign students, however, “intercultural education” is not necessarily understood to be a proactive approach to promoting intercultural relations between the Italian- and German-speaking groups. Nonetheless, a number of interesting boundary-crossing “tactics” are being deployed in this sphere as well: one trend is for parents (local Italian- or German-speakers, but also immigrants) to enroll their children in the “other” school system with the aim of giving them an immersion experience in that language, perhaps (in the case of locals) returning them to the respective mother-tongue school system at a later date. In terms of their bearing on multiculturalism, such practices are complex and require careful interpretation, distinguishing various subject positions. From preliminary data gathered, it appears that some parents hold an instrumental attitude to L2 learning with no explicit intercultural aim; for others, instead, there is an overt desire for a “cosmopolitan” multicultural competence, which may be further distinguished between self-conscious “elite” approaches and “spontaneous” ones that, especially in the case of immigrants, are an adaptation to perceived hegemonies in the province, but which also often bring into play preexisting experiences with multilingualism from countries of origin.

A final point has to do with enrollment trends. When the children of immigrants began to enter the South Tyrol schools in the early 1990s, the initial tendency was overwhelmingly in favor of the Italian-language school system. All parents in South Tyrol including immigrants are free to choose the system in which their children will be educated. The preference in years past for choosing the Italian-language system was due in part¹² to a perceived closure on the part of the German-language system with respect to non-group members, children of Italian-speaking citizens and foreigners alike. In recent years, however, there is greater openness in the German system to receiving foreign students, conceived in some quarters as a strategy of inclusion to avoid “having them go over to the Italian side”; at the same time, the German-language system has had to accept increasing numbers of enrollments from Italian-speaking and *mistilingue* South Tyroleans. In this way, the logic of the “multicultural” school model as separate systems is being tentatively pried open by the educational strategies adopted by both foreign and South Tyrolean parents. Although there have been calls for unification of the school system¹³, this idea has long been a taboo amongst the hegemonic political forces in the province. In theory, under the existing logic, the presence of foreign pupils could eventually force the system to accommodate “new diversities” as, say, with the creation of Urdu schools for mother-tongue Urdu children; it appears more likely, though, that the

older “multiculturalism” will gradually move in the direction of greater interculturalism, if not actual unification. On a cautionary note, it should not be overlooked how incorporation processes through education may not in fact be neutral with respect to racialized categories: not all foreign students going through a given school system can expect to be subsequently incorporated on equal footing within that linguistic group, and I venture that one may expect the gradual development of an articulated hierarchy of group membership featuring cross-cutting lines of division.

Conclusion: A view to the future in crisis and uncertainty

Many everyday discourses (or rather, local theories) about the peaceful “multicultural” coexistence of ethnic groups in present-day South Tyrol attribute this state of matters to the substantial funding transfers that the autonomous province receives from the central government. The perception expressed in these discourses is that over the last twenty years there has been an abundance of wealth to spread around and keep people satisfied, thereby staving off the threat of a vicious struggle over resources among the three official groups. The current climate of economic crisis might well lead to reductions in these transfers—a prospect that has already been raised by government representatives in Rome—and the question would be whether or not such cuts would have negative consequences for relations between the ethnolinguistic groups, as predicted in such local theorizing¹⁴. In the wake of a racist attack on a refugee reception center in May 2012, there has been an ominous sign that at least some politicians will not hesitate to make reference to a context of increasingly scanty economic resources in their xenophobic ethnonationalist rhetoric, with the aim of pitting the alleged needs of local German-speakers against those of refugees and asylum-seekers. Despite this, many other politicians of all groups and local civil society took a strong position against the attack and such justifications. It is too early to see what future tendencies might be.

On the other hand, and quite to the contrary of the hypothesis of an “ethnic war”, it might also be the case that cost-cutting measures could become a window of opportunity to effect some changes in the direction of restructuring the entire edifice of separate institutions upon which the autonomous South Tyrolean system has been constructed. Such changes, which have been unthinkable to date among hegemonic actors, might become “common sense” (à la Gramsci), if not wholly palatable, through the rationale of economic crisis. One very recent example of this was the inauguration of a new library in the town of Ora/Auer, touted in the local media as a novelty for housing the Italian- and German-language collections and library services under the same roof. In a local (Italian-language) television news report covering the event, Provincial President Durnwalder commented that it was a sensible operation from an economic point of view, adding—with a barely perceptible wink in his tone—that “And then, there is nothing wrong with someone reading something in German sitting next to someone reading something in Italian” (RAI 3 Alto-Adige, 09.06.2012).

Although they show no signs of relinquishing the long-standing *Proporz* system, Durnwalder and his SVP party might indeed have the hegemonic gravitas to slowly steer the society in the direction of greater intercultural dynamics. The SVP gave its tacit approval to the organization of a taboo-breaking meeting of the Italian Alpini military corps, which brought some 300,000 veteran Alpini to Bolzano in May, 2012. Because of their association with World War I, the Alpini have long represented a heavily contested military symbol of the Italian state in South Tyrol. The response to the Alpini meeting on the part of the German-speaking nationalists was a large parade of the Schützen paramilitary corps, but beyond that, all fears of “ethnic” tensions exploding during the Alpini event were put to rest. In the long run, though, the ability of the SVP to remain in power and forge a potential hegemonic consensus over intercultural relations will depend on complex factors that cannot be treated here, including the question of who will succeed the highly charismatic Durnwalder.

In this complex cultural panorama, other forces have continued to exert efforts toward an intercultural dynamic: the deceased Green politician and intellectual Alexander Langer left a strong, precocious legacy of intercultural theory and practice in South Tyrol, and his work is being carried forth by the Greens and the Alexander Langer Foundation, but it is also being discovered anew by different social actors. The Catholic Church itself has heavyweight standing in the province's society, and while several of its institutions and practices have had the effect of reinforcing the cultural separation of language groups through the last decades, it has made moves to alter some of them in a more inclusive way. Here, as with the school system, the immigrant presence might be allowing the Church certain openings for promoting an intercultural discourse, but certainly further investigation of these dynamics is needed.

This paper has offered an analysis of the case of South Tyrol as a multifaceted problematization of oversimplified multicultural backlash discourses. Clearly, in such a discussion it is necessary to specify what form of "multiculturalism" we are intending and the levels at which we are addressing it. If South Tyrol's sub-state nationalist "multiculturalism" has been stringently defended to date, it not wholly incompatible with an opposition to "immigrant" multiculturalism and in fact might actually work against the latter through the intensive reification of ethnic identities. It is also true, nonetheless, that the desire and/or need of many social actors in this context to foster a positive co-existence with immigrant residents and their descendants, typical of "immigrant multiculturalism", seems to be undermining the "passive" ethnic co-existence that has held sway to date. Moreover, in a context of economic and social crisis and uncertainty, there is a highly volatile interplay of forces moving the state of "multiculturalism" here in different directions. Borrowing from Ulf Hannerz's celebrated image of a "river" for a processual and non-reified metaphor of culture (1992), I suggest that the currents, undercurrents, and countercurrents of discourse and practice around "multiculturalism" in South Tyrol are a good example of the complexity that can be attended to in anthropological work.

¹ This paper was presented in a much shorter form at the Workshop "Uncertainties in the crisis of multiculturalism", the 12th EASA Biennial Conference, Nanterre, 10-13 July 2012.

² The original in German reads: "Südtirol ist ein Schmelztiegel der Kulturen und Gegensätze" (<http://www.suedtirol.info/de/> [last access 09.06.2012]).

³ I became a resident of South Tyrol in September 2011, and I was immediately struck by the question of how immigrants are becoming a part of the peculiar local "ethnoscape" (Appadurai 1996). The data for this paper comes from preliminary study (general participant observation, secondary sources, policy documents, media sources) and interviews (informal and semi-structured) in preparation for a forthcoming ethnographic project regarding foreign children in the South Tyrol school system.

⁴ Local parlance shorthands the groups as "Germans", "Italians" and "Ladins", but among the imperfect terminological options I choose to use the cumbersome form of "-speakers" to the attempt avoid reproducing certain implications (e.g. the slippage between language and identity as reified in local discourse; the confusion between language forms and nationality).

⁵ There is a far from negligible presence of extreme Right groups in South Tyrol, some of which have been found to have relations with German neo-Nazism. In May 2012, a racist attack in which three Molotov bombs were thrown against a refugee reception center in Vandoies caused great public outrage.

⁶ Note: general information about major nationalities represented.

⁷ Cf. Renner 2012, for a critique of the logical inconsistency of Durnwalder's position with the ethical underpinnings of provincial autonomy.

⁸ His circle of friends have offered to involve me in their *burraco* card-playing circuit, while I will soon be receiving instruction in *Watten*, which a German-speaking friend underlined is "a *German* game", implying that Italians are not admitted.

⁹ I will consider here Italian- and German-speaking schools, leaving aside the Ladin system.

¹⁰ Even the expression "mother tongue" is a problematic concept for a number of reasons

¹¹ One school administrator told me his child's Italian school has twinning relations with schools in Germany or Austria, but simultaneously have no interaction with the German-speaking school on the other side of the corridor in the same building.

¹² I cannot deal with all of the factors here.

¹³ Strikingly, some 1000 Italian- and German-speaking students marched together for the first time in November 2011 under this banner (*Alto Adige ...*)

¹⁴ But this has also been predicted by some scholars who have observed the situation, for example Baur 2000: 304.

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