The implementation of the Gentile Reform in South Tyrol and its effects on the educational biographies

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Abstract

The essay presents a study on the implementation and the educational biographical impact of the reform in the predominantly German-speaking province of South Tyrol, annexed to Italy in 1918. Adhering to the theoretical frame referring to school as an "institutional actor" (Fend, 2006), the research analyzes the implementation of the Gentile Reform as a recontextualization process from the macro level of legislation to the meso level of provincial politics and school boards to the micro level of the individual schools themselves, which ultimately became relevant for the school children's educational biographies. In particular, the study focuses on the teachers as actors and their recontextualization achievements. Their interpretations of the order defined on the macro and meso level and their final implementation are therefore of great interest. On the other hand, the study sheds light on the reception of education – organized according to the law – by the school children themselves and the effects of their school experience of the reform on their educational biographies. The empirical basis is formed by source-critical surveys and analyzes of written sources as well as an oral history study on childhood and educational biographies.

Keywords: *minorities; school; Italianization.*

1. Giovanni Gentile's school reform and its focus on the national language

School reforms can be interpreted as organizational and content-related concepts of contemporary visions for social development. They contain ideas and concepts of how the younger generation can be brought up and educated with the aim of shaping a better future and enabling positive development (Fend, 2008). As previously mentioned, the ground on which the vision of "better" is defined is not a vacuum. Gentile's reform – here highlighted with a focus on the linguistic mi-

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norities in South Tyrol – essentially reveals the fertilization of nationalism, the salvation idea of the time.

The understanding that both the development of a country and its foreign policy positions are significantly strengthened by uniformed language and culture (Anderson, 2005: 15) is not an invention of Italian fascism. From the middle of the 19th century, nationalist ideologies determined territorial politics as well as social and cultural politics in Europe and overseas (Weidinger, 1998). Therefore, the potential of the population's education is reassessed, initiating a change of direction in the objectives of school education. Since the Middle Ages, the ideals of the church on the one hand and the innate social status on the other, had formed the most important frame of reference for the orientation of school education and training (Engelmar, 1982). Now, the nationalist vision relied on economic, cultural, social, and military education to strengthen its people and fatherland[2].

Part of this concept was the commitment of the individual to a national identity and the definition of his value through belonging and the fulfillment of his duties towards the nation[3]. The above-mentioned criteria for belonging were predominantly the national culture and its language. Other languages and cultures became elements that weakened and endangered the nation as a space for progress (Langewiesche, 2003: 20-21). In turn, school was a suitable place for the assimilation of the foreign language speakers, the '*allogeni*' in the national collective, ensuring direct and corrective access to the younger generation. One year after seizing power in October 1923, the fascist party proclaimed the Gentile Reform, a comprehensive national reform work that redefined essential parts of the school system. Language was a key area to which the legislature dedicated a lot of space and detailed provisions. With the "most fascist of all reforms"[4], as Mussolini described the Gentile reform, the Duce set a key milestone in his "*battaglia della lingua*" (battle for language), which, according to Salvi (1996: 191), he conceived before the "*battaglia del grano*" (battle for grain). In nine of the

2 The major school reforms in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century (e.g., the *Reichsvolksschulgesetz* 1869 in Austria, the *Legge Casati* 1859) aimed, among other things, to eliminate the influence of the church on schools as far as possible and to bring the design of programs, content, organization (e.g., employment of teachers) and teaching under the competence of the state. The nationalization of educational institutions subsequently led to years of culture wars in many countries (in Italy: Papenheim, 2003: 202-226; Clark, 2014; in Germany: Heinen, 2003: 138-156; in South Tyrol: Pfeifer, Nössing, 2013).

3 Jeismann (1992: 153) refers to the "incarnation of the nation" through the individual, who legitimizes his existence bringing glamour to his nation. Especially in war, the nation "enables" the individual to live his or her purpose up to the point of giving up one's own life (Langewiesche, 2019: 20-24).

4 Mussolini used the expression "the most fascist of all reforms" as a rhetoric reinforcement since part of the government protested it. After Gentile resigned in 1924, the reform was progressively changed (Ostenc, 1981).

law's 26 articles, the language is the main focus or is part of the context of other regulations. After two articles defining compulsory school and a third article that regulates religious instruction, the fourth article of the reform begins with an unequivocal explanation of the foundation of instruction, the teaching language: "*In tutte le scuole elementari del Regno l'insegnamento è impartito nella lingua dello Stato*" (In all elementary schools of the Reign, instruction must be held in the national language). With this affirmation, the school law austerely and explicitly declared the end of all mother tongue schools apart from the Italian ones. The legislature promptly orders the implementation of the regulation. Article 17 strictly specifies the schedule and procedure for the Italianization process of schools:

> A cominciare dall'anno scolastico 1923-24, in tutte le prime classi delle scuole elementari alloglotte l'insegnamento sarà impartito in lingua italiana. Nell'anno scolastico 1924-25, anche nelle seconde classi di dette scuole si insegnerà in italiano. Negli anni scolastici successivi, si procederà analogamente per le classi successive, fino a che, in un numero di anni uguale a quello dell'intero corso, in tutte le classi così delle scuole elementari come delle scuole civiche si insegnerà in italiano. (*Beginning with the school year 1923-24, the first grade of the foreign language – speaking elementary schools, will be taught in the Italian language. During the school year 1924-25, the second grade of the above-mentioned schools will be taught in the Italian language. In the following school years, the same rule will be applied, until, in a number of years equal to that of the entire course, in all the classes of both elementary and civic schools, all classes will be taught in Italian*)

The law stipulates that the second and subsequent grades, which according to the procedure were not yet affected by the Italianization in the 1923/24 school year, must be taught in the "*lingua italiana*" (Italian language) to the extent of five hours a week up to the third grade and five hours a week in the following classes (Article 24). The legislature expressly adds that to be promoted to the next class, the children's knowledge of the national language must be accordingly good (Article 24).

Both Article 4 and Article 17, each in a second part dedicated to areas with different native languages, list the establishment of "*ore aggiuntive*" (additional hours) in a second language. Article 4 speaks of the "*lingua diversa*" (different language) that is "*abitualmente*" (usually) spoken in the communities; in the further explanations (also in article 17) the legislature speaks of a "*lingua seconda*" (second language). The legislature reserves six articles dedicated to the precise regulation of the right to teach in another language (Articles 5 and 6, 18, 19, 20, 25). According to this, the requirement for teaching the foreign language was "*maestri abilitati*" (licensed teachers) with preference given to the class teacher or "*un altro maestro che insegna l'italiano*" (another teacher teaching

Italian) (Article 6). The legislature rewards overtime hours in the second language teachings with an advance of one year in the salary calculation (Article 5). From now on, teacher training diplomas and teaching qualifications acquired "*sotto il regime anteriore alla annessione al Regno delle Province*" (during the regime before the annexation to the Reign of the Provinces) no longer entitle the certificate holder to teach Italian or the second language (Article 18). Teachers with a teaching qualification in another language could now obtain the prescribed qualification for teaching in the state language via an examination, announced by the *Ministero dell'Istruzione* (Ministry of Education) at the end of the school year. Likewise, teachers with a qualification for teaching Italian could apply for a teaching qualification for the second language passing an examination that should be organized analogously to the level declared (Article 20). Teachers with both teaching qualifications had a privileged position in the allocation of posts (Article 20). The obligation of the "*maestri alloglotti*" (alloglot teachers) for the Italian lessons in the not yet Italianized classes (Article 24), on the other hand, was only possible after the approval from the "*provveditore agli studi*" (education supervisor), which in turn was a justified request from the "*direttore didattico*" (didactic director) and of the "*ispettore circondariale*" (district inspector) (Article 24).

2. South Tyrol: historical contextualization

Along with the coastal region and parts of Friuli (Gilbert, 2010: 593; Gernert *et al.*, 2016: 396), the part of the Crown Land of Tyrol south of the Brenner Pass was annexed to Italy during the First World War. The international anchoring of the border on the main Alpine ridge did not take place until the peace negotiations of Saint Germain in September 1919[5] and the annexation[6] by the Kingdom of Italy was formalized on October 10, 1920[7] (Steininger, 1997: 29-51), confirming the division of the former crown land of Tyrol[8] at the Brenner Pass. In addition to the Italian-speaking Trentino,

5 The 'natural border' at the Brenner Pass was part of the promises made in the Treaty of London (April 26, 1915) after Italy's entry into the war on the Allied side (Afflarbach, 2007: 53-72; Überegger, 2007: 117-136).

6 There were also opponents of the annexation in parliament, who were mainly to be found in the socialist ranks (Corsini & Lill, 1988: 127).

7 "The Brenner border, along with Trieste and Istria, was one of those 'few' secured targets presented to the Italian public as a reward for the efforts and sacrifices of the war (460,000 casualties)" (Lechner, 2005: 47).

8 The historic Tyrol with today's Trentino, South Tyrol and North Tyrol has its roots in the Middle Ages and has been part of the Habsburg Empire since 1363. With the rise of nationalism, it became the bulwark between the irredentist aspirations in the south and the pan-Germanist aspirations in the north. In addition to cultural associations, it was the school associations that intended to expand the respective language beyond their borders (Vitali, 2017). The distrust between the language groups reached a peak

the predominantly German- and Ladin-speaking South Tyrol[9] was now part of the Italian state[10].

Until the annexation, the South Tyrolean population – after protests and efforts to obtain international support – hoped for a revision of the turning point that had come about after November 3, 1918. The historian Leopold Steurer (quoted from Lechner, 2005: 23) describes the situation of the South Tyroleans as follows:

> Overnight a world order and value system had collapsed, which was symbolized in the terms 'God-Kaiser-Fatherland' and which was previously considered unshakable. The entry of Italy into the war on the side of the Allies in 1915, the successful defense of the front lines at the language border, the capture of the country without a fight in the days after the signing of the Villa Giusti armistice on November 3, 1918 and the international safeguard of the new border without taking into account the consideration of the ethnic criteria enlisted in President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points, the South Tyroleans got the impression that they had been sacrificed in the bargaining operations of the war winners. The reactions of resignation, anger and irreconcilability shaped the encounters between the South Tyroleans and the new rulers in the following years (Steininger, 1999: 47-54).

During the first months until the moment the Brenner border was safeguarded on a national and international level, the new state and its provincial representatives proclaimed, "hard restrictions, but not yet denationalization" (Steininger, 2016: 210)[11]. The nationalists criticized the king and those responsible at the regional level – the military governor

before and finally during the First World War. The Italian population of Trentino was declared the "archenemy" (Gatterer, 1986). After Italy entered the war in 1915, around 75.000 people, mainly women and children, were deported and interned in Austria, Bohemia and Moravia under the most difficult and degrading conditions, suspected of not being loyal to the "fatherland" Austria (Antonelli, 2008: 30). The execution of Cesare Battisti in 1919 is another example. In addition to high treason, he was accused of "undignified attachment to an enemy who is also despicable from a moral point of view" (Hautmann, 2014: 7). See: Atti dei processi Battisti, Filzi, Chiesa: https://www.cimeetrincee.it/atti.pdf [30/07/2023].

9 In 1910 the South Tyrolean population was composed of (251,451 = 100%): Germans 223,913 (89.0%), Italians 7,339 (2.9%), Ladins 9.429 (3.8%), Others 10,770 (4.3%) (Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, Provincial Statistics Institute – ASTAT Bozen / Bolzano 2007, 2008, 19).

10 Savi (1996: 183-184) lists the following minorities on Italian territory with reference to the 1921 census. "(The newly annexed are enlisted in italics): 80.282 Albanians; 12.236 Catalans; 162.800 Croats; 90.700 French; 19.672 Greek; 1.644 Romanians; 37.475 'Slavs' (the Slovenians of the area around Udine and the Croatians in Molise); 258.944 Slovenians; 208.170 Germans; 14.584 Ladins; 50.589 Friulians".

11 Immediately after the end of the war, the occupiers introduced radical Italianization measures, closed schools, and banned local newspapers to the Slavs and Croats of the newly incorporated areas (Andri & Mellinato, 1994).

and the civil administrator – for this approach. Considering the general dissatisfaction with the territorial concessions of the peace treaty and the economic and social distress in Italy immediately after the war, Benito Mussolini and his fascist development programs offered prospects for the creation of a strong Italy.

The narrative of the "holy borders" (Lechner, 2005: 67) at the Brenner Pass and the "liberation of the national soil" (Ibid.: 65) played an important role in his nationalistic ideas of salvation and progress. The former now had to be asserted unapologetically, while the latter was placed at the top of the Fascist agenda. Even before the fascists came to power, Mussolini declared in the magazine *Il Popolo d'Italia* (08/31/1922: IX): "*La guerra portò il nostro confine politico al Brennero; ora il fascismo vi porta l'Italia!*" (War brought our political border at the Brenner, now our Fascism will bring you Italy!) About the foreseen methods and approaches towards the German- and Ladin-speaking population, he further specified:

> Così il fascismo assicura i confini del nord alla Patria: disaustricando, fino dove è possibile l´Alto Adige; accelerando il processo di penetrazione economica e spirituale italiana; tenendo l´aria irrespirabile per quei tedeschi che sono rimasti all´Italia prebellica e non sanno rassegnarsi a subire quella sorta dalla vittoria (*Ibidem*). (*That is how fascism secures the northern borders of the homeland: de-Austrianizing, as far as possible, South Tyrol; accelerating the process of Italian economic and spiritual penetration; keeping the air unbreathable for those Germans who remained in pre-war Italy and cannot resign themselves to that sort of victory*)

In a commentary on the "*Marcia su Bolzano*" (March on Bozen/Bolzano), during which fascist thugs violently stormed the municipality four weeks before the "*Marcia su Roma*" (March on Rome), Mussolini explained his plans for a ruthless Italianization of the province in the fascist newspaper *Il piccolo Posto*"[12] as follows:

> We have a bigger task ahead of us. It must be done with swift energy. Germanism must be erased from souls as it was erased from objects; this area must become Italian, its inhabitants must become Italian, so that everything here is Italian and only reminds of Italy (quoted from: Steininger, 2016: 27).

On the one hand, the concrete implementation of this program should be promoted sustainably by giving the province an Italian majority. "Soon after the armistice of 1918, a massive wave of Italian immigra-

12 The fascist newspaper *Il piccolo Posto* was printed in Meran/Merano from March 1922 to 1926.

tion to the occupied territories started" (Lechner, 2005: 51). Motivated by state incentives, the immigration rates rose steadily in the following years and, according to ASTAT (2008:18), peaked in 1961 with 34,3% of the population. To better implement the plans of a radical Italianization both of territory and of the individual and collective identity of the inhabitants, Mussolini was able to rely on the preparatory work of the Trentino nationalist Ettore Tolomei, a geographer, historian, and linguist (Benvenuti et von Hartungen: 1998). "*Ettore Tolomei, l'uomo che inventò l'Alto Adige"* (Ettore Tolomei, the man who invented Alto Adige, Ferrandi: 2022, book title), had been active since the 1890s with "numerous pseudo-scientific works" (Steininger, 2023: 39) searching for the proof of the "*italianità*"[13] (Italianness) and "*romanità*" (Roman character) in order to facilitate the incorporation of South Tyrol into the Italian state (Strobl, 2013: 307).

He translated around 10.000 place and field names or created Italian neologisms, which he published in his journal *Archivio dell'Alto Adige*", founded in 1906 (Steininger, 2023: 39). The implementation of the Italianized topography in South Tyrol became part of the extensive Italianization program – including the entire political, cultural, economic, and social life in the province – that Tolomei developed on behalf of the government, after, among others, some meetings with Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile. Approved by the King and the Council of Ministers as *Relazione Tolomei-Preziosi*, he presented the 32-point program[14] on July 15, 1923, in the municipal theater "to stormy applause from his audience, who had traveled with special trains from Trento" (Steininger, 2016: 34-35)[15]. The implementation of the program took place under the guidance of the prefect Giuseppe Guadagnini, who, proud of his work, compiled the ordinances he issued in a special edition and had them published as a book (Guadagnini, 1923)[16]. The South Tyroleans'search for help abroad

13 Tolomei saw another justification for the border on the main Alpine ridge in the "theory of natural law". He created one of the 'pieces of evidence' in 1904 believing that he had climbed the northernmost point on the main watershed to the Mediterranean. Pretending to be its first climber and he coined its name 'Vetta d'Italia' (Peak of Italy). In 1938 the king ennobled him with the title 'Conte della Vetta' (Count of the peak) (Steininger, 2016: 29-31); Senato della Republica: online: http://notes9.senato.it/web/senregno.nsf/4038162380009750c125703d004eed42/dfbed6d5480acfb64125646f00610d9a?OpenDocument# accessed 10/07/2023.

14 Regarding Tolomei's 32 "Provvedimenti per l'Alto Adige", see: https://www.uibk.ac.at/zeitgeschichte/zis/library/19230715.html accessed 30/07/2023.

15 Regarding point 16, the "Italianization of the Germanized surnames", Tolomei published in 1936 with the *Elenco dei cognomi dell'Alto Adige – Restituzione del cognome atesino*, a translation of all South Tyrolean surnames into Italian (Steininger, 2016). Fascism also practiced the Italianization of topography and family names in the other minority areas with the aim of creating a national identity for the "allogeni" (foreigners) (regarding Aosta see: Salvi, 1996: 187; Gatterer, 1968: 30-33).

16 In the process, voices against the fascist policy of nationalism and its minorities were also heard in Italy. Gaetano Salvemini was one who strongly condemned the

was rejected with the reference "that Italy had not committed itself to the protection of minorities under international law and was not bound by any treaty in this regard" (Steininger, 2023: 39).

3. Gentile's Reform and its recontextualization at the meso level (regional politics and regional authorities in South Tyrol)

With Gentile's Reform, the school became a legal instrument for a lasting Italianization of the "*allogenic*" (foreigners) of the newly acquired provinces[17] and of all those who spoke other languages in the old provinces[18]. In South Tyrol, Corbino's Reform (R.D. n.1627, August 28, 1921) had already intervened regarding the language taught at school in the pre-fascist era. The law, drafted by Civil Commissioner Luigi Credaro, provided for compulsory mother tongue schooling, and was intended to prevent Italian-speaking parents from enrolling their children in German schools (Dessardo, 2017: 73-92). The determination of the school children's mother tongue was left to the regional authorities. To achieve the desired number of pupils for the Italian schools, Credaro and Guadagnini manipulated the declarations of linguistic belonging collected during the national census of December 1921 and declared without further ado all persons with an Italian-sounding surname and the Ladins to be Germanized Italians. Based on falsified data, the children of the supposed Italians were now forcibly transferred to the newly established Italian schools, even if they did not speak the language at all (Seberich, 2000: 67-68). The implementation of the law led to the Italianization of 49 schools, mainly in the South Tyrolean lowlands and in the Ladin valleys[19] (Villgrater, 1984: 26). Tolomei com-

minority policy and its ideological makers like Tolomei (Salvemini, 1970: 423, 429, 490, 505, 507).

17 In addition to the schools in South Tyrol, the Gentile Reform caused the closure of Slavic schools with around 52,000 pupils in the province of Venezia Giulia (Salvemini 1952: 455-460). The French-speaking schools in Aosta were already closed following the Legge Casati. The remaining 244 écoles de village in the mountain villages were dissolved in 1924 without replacement (Adler, 1979: 145-150).

18 G. Lombardo Radice also prevented the Gentile Reform's attack on national dialects with its vision of a national standard language. He developed the programs for the elementary schools and underlined the cultural and social importance of dialects (Colaci, 2018; D'Alessio, 2013), also as a methodical approach for the introduction to the common language. Salvi (1996: 192) explains: "Radice's idea consisted in the application of the method «from dialect to language»…It was, after all, the only way to teach Italian to the Italians". Regarding the situation of the language, linguistic minorities, and dialects in Italy up to the time of fascism see: Ara, 1990: 457-488.

19 The Ladin schools, which were organized in the context of the linguistic, social, and economic reality of the valleys with Italian and German as the language of instruction, felt the nationalistic aspirations (in this case Germanization aspirations) of the Austrian government from 1873, which demanded a monolingual, German school. The stubborn school dispute ("Enneberger school dispute") basically dragged on until the

mented that the law enabled only a small step towards the recovery of the "territory denationalized by German acts of violence" following the Roman occupation of the country by Drusus and Tiberius (Villgrater, 1984: 31) and therefore contained only "the most elementary concepts of justice" (South Tyrolean newspaper, July 18, 1923, quoted from *Ibidem*).

The national school reform should therefore enable the completion of the Italianization. Minister of Education Gentile, committed to the philosophy of neo-idealism, initially opposed such plans, but gave in after the interventions of Tolomei and Guadagnini and after consultation with the newly appointed education authority of the Venezia Tridentina, Molina. With reference to the (falsified) data on the declaration of linguistic belonging registered in the census, Molina also defended the enforced conformity of the school in South Tyrol as relevant means of restoring the cultural and political unity of Italy (Adler, 1979: 332-333). Gentile ended up following the same line. "He was able to justify the victory of state interests over the principles of linguistic liberalism inspired by his own philosophy, which said that freedom can only be developed in the state, which in turn finds its full realization in schools" (Ibid.: 334 after De Mauro, 1972: 195).

The first step in implementing Gentile's school reform was to recontextualize the law at the meso level of the provincial administration and the provincial school authority. The nationalist and fascist vision was supported by the self-image of cultural superiority[20], immortalized in the inscription on the victory monument[21] inaugurated in Bozen/Bolzano in 1928: "*Hic patriae fines siste signa. Hinc ceteros excoluimus lingua legibus artibus*"[22].

In this context, the school authority 'translated' all legal provisions for the direct implementation of the school reform in the schools themselves. The 1923-1924 school year, which opened more than three weeks late with the publication of Gentile's Reform on October 24, 1923, began with chaos in South Tyrol (Grentrup, 1930: 52). The biggest challenge was recruiting people with a valid teaching qualification (Riforma Gentile, Art.18) to change the teaching language from German to Italian. The teachers needed, were enticed with a package of benefits for working in the new province, including free housing, salary bonuses, career advancements and an additional value for their pensions (Freiberg, 1994: 227). In this context, the fascist organization O.N.A.I.R. did not only rent private

final Italianization of the schools (Fontana, 1978; Videsott, 2018). The fascists declared the Ladin language to be an Italian dialect.

20 Anna Millo (1989) impressively describes the racist degradation of the people and the culture of the Slavic and Croatian population of the new provinces in the northeast of the kingdom in the pre-fascist occupation times in a 'biografia collettiva' (collective biography).

21 On the victory monument, its symbolism and the still enduring conflicts; see: Pardatscher, 2002.

22 "Here at the border of the fatherland set down the banner. From this point on we educated the others with language, law, and culture".

rooms in remote hamlets and adapt them to classes, but also organized and financed the teachers.

In most of the first grades, the teachers who were assigned to the school according to the plans drawn up in the spring, began teaching in the fall of 1923. In Klausen/Chiusa, a small town in the Eisacktal/Val d'Isarco, on December 1, 1923, Giuseppina Sartori became the first Italian teacher to take up her post[23], replacing Ruppertina Knapp[24], who was fired in April 1923. Since the school in Klausen/Chiusa was organized in three classes, from December 1923 the lessons in the first and second grades were Italianized, from the start of school in autumn 1924 those of the second grade, the third and fourth grades and from the start of school in 1925 the third grade with the last four grades (5th-8th). At the 'Scuola Popolare di Chiusa' (Public school of Klausen/Chiusa) the Italianization process of teaching was thus completed two years after the proclamation of Gentile's Reform.

Prefect Giovanni B. Marziali proudly announced the end of the German-speaking school in South Tyrol in a telegram to the Duce, printed in the newspaper *Il Brennero* (October 2, 1929) at the beginning of the school year.

The German-speaking teachers were dismissed from their service because of '*insufficienza diddattica*' (didactic deficiency). Those who managed to complete the required teaching qualification for the Italian school were transferred to the old provinces of Italy from 1928 (Freiberg, 1994: 227).

The 'ore aggiuntive' (additional hours) in the mother tongue, as stipulated in Articles 4 and 17 of the reform, were initially not approved with reference to Article 24, which only provides for registration before school starts. In the spring of 1924, it was only possible to set up additional hours in the four largest towns in South Tyrol after tough negotiations. Since, according to Article 6, the lessons had to be held by people with an Italian teaching qualification, who, however, usually did not speak German, the lessons soon turned out to be of little help. In addition, in May 1924 the school authorities forbade the use of all didactic aids (primers, exercise books, etc.) apart from the blackboard (Villgrater, 1984: 43). The prefect rejected the demand of the South Tyroleans to set up private lessons in the mother tongue instead of the '*ore* aggiuntive' on the grounds that this would violate the "spirit of the Gentile Reform" (Ibid.: 44). In a circular on January 18, 1925, the school authority informed of the final abolition of the additional hours, the R.D. n. 2191 of 11/22/1925[25].

23 St.A.Kl. Kat. IX 1923, Zl. 14913, Al Comune di Chiusa – Il Provveditore agli Studi, 18.12.1923.

24 St.A.Kl. Protokollbuch des Ortsschulrates Klausen: Niederschrift der Ortsschulratssitzung vom 25.04.1923.

25 The additional hours were also cancelled for the Slavs and Aostans.

The decree for the Italianization of all middle and high schools with a different language was made with R.D. n. 2665 of November 27, 1923, and, in South Tyrol, was already completed by the end of the 1926/27 school year. The exception were four boys' seminaries. As preparatory schools for the Theological Seminary they were protected by the Lateran Pacts (February 11, 1929) and could maintain parts of the teaching in German (Marzari, 2006: 50-56).

Likewise, through the intervention of the Vatican, the South Tyrolean clergy succeeded in obtaining native language instruction in religion in March 1928. The lessons had to be given outside the school building and school hours. The so-called 'parish school' had to strictly adhere to the curriculum for religious instruction and "to avoid German language lessons in particular" (Seberich, 2000: 79). Harassment and petitions made by Tolomei and the authorities against parish teaching continuously remained on the agenda (*Ibidem*).

The resistance of the South Tyroleans against the Italianization of schools manifested itself, apart from the unsuccessful national and international interventions by German-speaking politicians (Adler, 1979: 350, 360), in the development of a secret emergency school system. The clergyman Michael Gamper coined the term catacomb school in an appeal in the newspaper *Volksbote* on November 1, 1923, comparing the secret schools to the first Christians who celebrated their rituals hidden in the catacombs of Rome. Together with others, he developed an emergency school system which, via a central organization, prepared courses for emergency schoolteachers, created didactic materials and coordinated the implementation procedures (Villgrater, 1984). The authorities used the totalitarian resources to act against teachers, parents and children who had been exposed, thereby creating martyrs and heroes in the "fight against Rome" since then permanently anchored in the collective memory of the German-speaking population (Gatterer, 1968).

4. Insights into the recontextualization of the Gentile Reform on the micro level and its reception by the addressees

Legal ordinances only acquire educational biographical relevance at the micro level, i.e., when they are operationalized in the individual schools. A one-to-one transfer of the legal requirements cannot be assumed. Rather, according to Helmut Fend in his definition of "schools as institutional actors" (2006), the implementation of the laws takes place as a recontextualization effort by the responsible actors. Not only the external framework conditions function as contexts, but also personal resources, attitudes, and

ideas of the respective actor himself [26] (Ibid.: 124-190). Accordingly, there is not one school reality but many. The reconstruction of the Italianization measures of the Gentile Reform in South Tyrol and the effect on the addressees therefore strives to explain the analyzed empirical diversities. The focus is on the recontextualization of the corresponding regulations by the teachers on the one hand and the final reception of the school reality created by the school children on the other.

The main sources used for the recontextualization analysis are the teachers' official documents (Libri di Classe – L.d.C. – class registers)[27], written documents from the local school administration and memories of former school children, collected through interviews and in the form of ego documents. In a source-critical view, it must be noted that the former were created as a justification for fulfilling the assignment, the latter do not allow complete documentation of a school reality and the third cannot eliminate the alienation of the retrospective view (Klein, Fischer-Kerli, 2000).

Nevertheless, they enable an understanding approach to the life, learning and work environments of the two main actors, teachers, and students, during the implementation of the Italianization program of the Gentile Reform.

In almost every class register, the Italian teachers from the old provinces describe the violent confrontation they experienced with a world that was completely foreign to them: an incomprehensible language, a foreign culture, and extreme geographical conditions, especially during the winter.

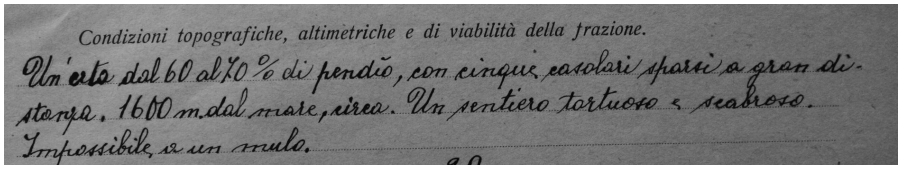

Condizioni topografiche, altimètriche e di viabilità della frazione.
Un'erta dal 60 al 70 % di pendio, con cinque casolari sparsi a gran distanza. 1600 m. dal mare, circa. Un sentiero tortuoso e scabroso. Impossibile a un mulo.

Image 1. L.d.C., Lana di Gais/Lanebach, 1926/27

Little did she know that she would encounter such a foreign world, the teacher Dalfiore described her situation in the mountain school of Lana di

26 Action theories (Max Weber, Niklas Luhmann and Helmut Esser), actor-centered institutionalism (Fritz W. Scharpf) and neo-institutionalism (Christine Schaefers) form the frame of reference for Fend's understanding of school.

27 The study is based on Libri di Classe, the documents filed by the school director of Klausen/Chiusa (one city school and rural schools), autobiographical texts and interviews with contemporary witnesses. The sources were evaluated according to Mayring's (2015) qualitative content analysis.

Gais/Lanebach (see image 2), 1935/36) as "*quasi insopportabile*" (nearly unbearable).

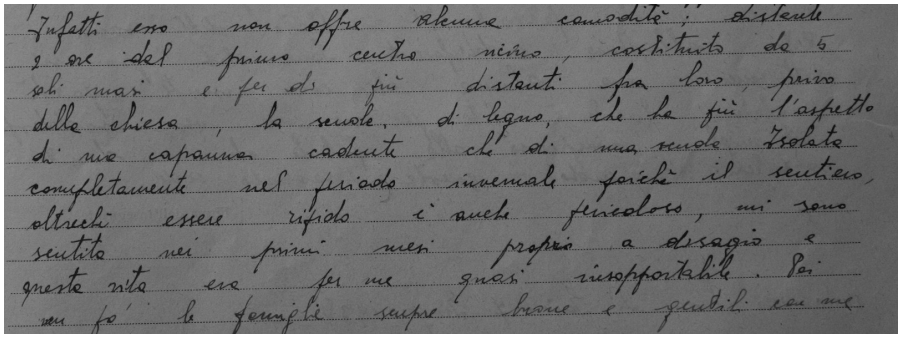


Image 2. Description of the school areas made by the teacher of Lana di Gais/Lanebach, L.d.C.1935/36

In particular, the teachers operating in the remote hamlets were often forced to sublet from farmers, sharing the only heated living space in winter and sleeping in a cold room[28].

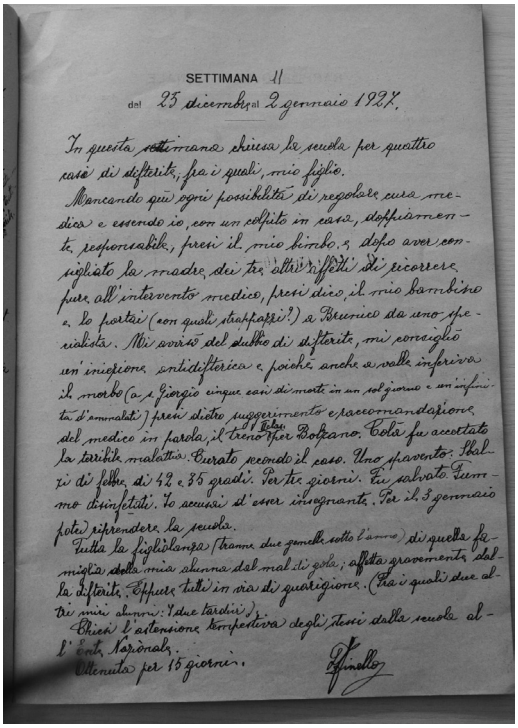
The teachers' reports often describe loneliness, homesickness, and the feeling of being lost:

> … ho lasciato la mia… ridente pianura padana, ho lasciato soli, sconfortati i vecchi genitori, ho lasciato le gioie… della famiglia, con dolore grande… mi si stringe il cuore sentendo… parlare una lingua straniera, mi sento sperduta, mi sembra di trovarsi all'estero! (L.d.C. Prettau/Predoi 1929/30 quoted from Hofer, 1998: 19). (*…I left my…charming Po valley, I left my old parents alone and disheartened, I left the joys of family life, with great regret…my heart is withering here…hearing a foreign language, I feel lost, as if I was abroad!*)

The teachers' motives for taking up a position in South Tyrol must have been diverse. Among them, there were always single mothers who, despite the difficult conditions, earned a living with their child[29].

28 St.A.Kl. Kat. IX 1929, Zl. 48, 17/11/1929.

29 In the L.d.C. (Barbian/Barbiano 1935/36) the teacher S.A. describes her desperation after she had to leave her sick daughter at home with her parents in Rome after the Christmas holidays and waited every day for the postman with news of recovery until finally, in May, she received a telegram bearing news of the little girl's death.



SETTIMANA 11

dal 25 dicembre al 2 gennaio 1927.

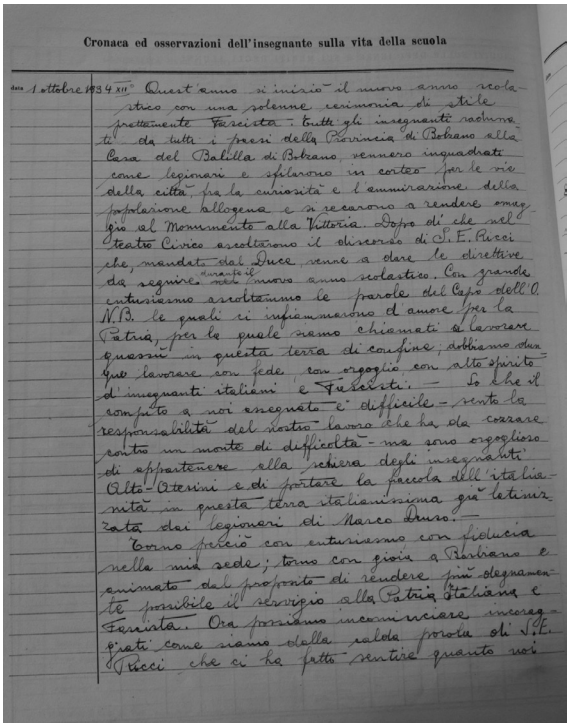
In questa settimana chiusa la scuola per quattro casi di difterite, fra i quali, mio figlio.
Mancando più ogni possibilità di regolare cura medica e essendo io, con un colpito in casa, doppiamente responsabile, presi il mio bimbo e, dopo aver consigliato la madre dei tre altri ragazzi di ricorrere pure all'intervento medico, presi dico il mio bambino e lo portai (con quale strappazzo?) a Brennero da uno specialista. Mi avvisò del diabbio di difterite, mi consigliò un'iniezione antidifterica e poichè anche a valle infieriva il morbo (a S. Giorgio cinque casi di morte in un sol giorno e un infinità d'ammalati) presi dietro suggerimento e raccomandazione del medico in parola, il treno per Bolzano. Colà fu accertata la terribile malattia. Curato secondo il caso. Uno spavento. Sbalzi di febbre, di 42 e 35 gradi. Per tre giorni. Fu salvato. Fummo disinfettati. Io accusai d'esser influenzata. Per il 3 gennaio potei riprendere la scuola.
Tutta la figliolanza (tranne due gemelle sotto l'anno) di quella famiglia della mia alunna dal mal di gola, affetta gravemente, dalla difterite. Effuse tutte in via di guarigione. (Fra i quali due altri miei alunni: I due fratelli).
Chiesi l'astensione temporaneo degli stessi dalla scuola all'Ente Nazionale.
Ottenuta per 15 giorni.

Image 3. L.G., teacher in Lana di Gais/Lanebach and single mother with small child. She describes the freighting situation, far away from medical help (L.d.C.-Lana di Gais/Lanebach 1926/27).

Both from the entries in the class registers as well as from the memories of former students, one can identify teachers who found their motivation in a "special mission that they felt they had to fulfill in this foreign-tongued area" (Gatterer, 2005: 112). They saw their task as a proud duty to the nation and to the fascist ideology. "… *il fatto di dover insegnare nel paese che ospita la scuola italiana che si addentra più al Nord nel continente, … mi rende orgogliosa…*" (… the fact that I must teach in a village that houses the most northern Italian school of the continent…makes me proud…) (Bolelli, L.d.C.- Prettau/Predoi 1932/33 quoted after Hofer, 1998: 19). "*Ed io, proprio qui nell'estremo lembo della nostra Patria… voglio lavorare molto… per fare migliori questi bimbi… Voglio… piantare nei loro animi il tricolore*" (And I, right here, at the furthest edge of our Nation …want to work hard…to better these children…I want to plant the Italian flag in their souls) (L.d.C.- Prettau/Predoi 1932/33, *Ibidem*).

Teachers received the initiation to their task of Italianization and ideologization through tailor-made programs organized by the provincial education authority. This is how teacher M.L. impressively describes how he and his colleagues were lined up like legionnaires in front of the victory monu-

ment at the beginning of school in Bozen/Bolzano, encouraged to love their country, carrying out their assignment with pride and high spirit as Italian, fascist teachers *("con orgoglio, con alto spirito d'insegnanti italiani F a s c i s t I"* – with the pride and high spirit of Italian fascist teachers). They realized how close they were to the heart of their fatherland and how much the Duce preferred them (L.d.C.- Barbiano/Barbian, 1934/35).



Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola

data 1 ottobre 1934 XII Quest'anno si iniziò il nuovo anno scolastico con una solenne cerimonia di stile prettamente Fascista. Tutti gli insegnanti radunati da tutti i paesi della Provincia di Bolzano alla Casa del Balilla di Bolzano vennero inquadrati come legionari e sfilarono in corteo per le vie della città, fra la curiosità e l'ammirazione della popolazione allogena e si recarono a rendere omaggio al Monumento alla Vittoria. Dopo di che nel Teatro Civico ascoltarono il discorso di S. E. Ricci che, mandato dal Duce venne a dare le direttive da seguire nell'anno nuovo scolastico. Con grande entusiasmo ascoltammo le parole del Capo dell'O. N. B. le quali ci infiammarono d'amore per la Patria, per la quale siamo chiamati a lavorare quassù in questa terra di confine; abbiamo dunque lavorare con fede con orgoglio con alto spirito d'insegnanti italiani e Fascisti. — So che il compito a noi assegnato è difficile – sento la responsabilità del nostro lavoro che ha da vincere contro un monte di difficoltà – ma sono orgoglioso di appartenere alla schiera degli insegnanti Alto-Atesini e di portare la fiaccola dell'italianità in questa terra italianissima già latinizzata dai legionari di Marco Druso. —

Torno perciò con entusiasmo con fiducia nella mia sede; torno con gioia a Barbiano e animato dal proposito di rendere più degnamente possibile il servigio alla Patria Italiana e Fascista. Ora possiamo incominciare incoraggiati come siamo della calda parola di S. E. Ricci che ci ha fatto sentire quanto noi siamo vicini al cuore della Patria e quanto il Duce ci predilige come maestri fascisti e come maestri italiani in Alto Adige. —

Alla fine della cerimonia vennero consegnati i Premi Mussolini. È nostro desiderio di mostrare la nostra profonda riconoscenza per il nostro Duce. —

8 ottobre Inizio delle lezioni. —

Image 4. Report on the event organized by the provincial education authority at the start of school 1934/35 (L.d.C. Barbiano/Barbian 1934/35).

Teachers were thus relegated to the role of colonizers with the honor, duty, and burden of being at the frontlines implementing the national vision. According to Memmi (1995), holding this position anew every day and often on your own can only be achieved through a strong identification with the task. Allowing doubts about the legitimacy of colonial action would result in a personal dilemma. At the same time, this also prevents a positive approach to the foreign world.

Written with this conception of self-image, many class registers contain statements about the children's lack of intelligence: "*Quanto mi danno da pensare i miei alunni… manca quasi a tutti l'intelligenza*" (How much will my pupils make me wonder…nearly all of them lack intelligence) (L.d.C. Sarnthein/Sarentino 1928/29), often with an ironic undertone: "*Che bella improvvisata! La collega di Pennes mi ha fatto un regalo: mi ha spedito qua la peggiore della sua classe, T.S. Non mancava che questa a completare la mia bellissima classe*" (What a nice surprise! My colleague from Pennes gave me a gift: she sent me the worst of her class, T.S. She was the one missing to complete my wonderful class) (L.d.C. Sarnthein/Sarentino 1934/35).

Accordingly, in many cases the children did not graduate and left school without a qualification. "*Ho ricevuto 24 ripetenti di 3° and 12 bambine di 4°, quasi tutti ripetenti*" (I got 24 pupils repeating the third grade and 12 girls, nearly all of them repeating the fourth grade) (Pellegrini, L.d.C. Sarnthein/Sarentino 1931/32). M.K., one of the last German-speaking teachers with the necessary qualification for the Italian school who still worked in Sarnthein/Sarentino in 1928[30], also mentioned organizational circumstances for the lack of learning success:

> Sono stata trasferita qui, ho trovato la classe molto disordinata perché e già la quarta insegnante che passa in quest'anno scolastico. È già passata più della metà dell'anno e qualche materia non è stata nemmeno iniziata (L.d.C. Sarnthein/Sarentino 1928/29). (*I was transferred here and found a very disorganized class because they already had four different teachers during this school year. Nearly half of the year has passed, and some subjects were never even taught*)

The children's reception of the Italian school followed a pattern like the one described by the teachers, but in the context of a collectively shared injustice, presenting a massive rejection of everything Italian. In addition to the school language, the Reform's programs concentrated on the history and geography of Italy. The recontextualization operated by the teachers led to a collision with the identity and the self-image of the children. Gatterer (2005: 112) recalls:

30 The German-speaking teachers with teaching qualifications for the Italian schools were in a particularly difficult situation. On the one hand, they were constantly suspected of sabotage by their colleagues and superiors, and, on the other hand, suspected of treason by the population.

> Some teachers, especially younger ones, quite obviously aimed to oppose their authority to the parents' authority, their truth to the parents' truth, the nobility and greatness of Italy to the barbarism and contempt of our fathers, grandfathers and ancestors.

Gatterer (Ibid.: 177) describes the children's resulting profound identitarian discord:

> We were torn. Our childish fantasies were split like what was forming inside of us as personalities. Our cover was a lie: we lied at home about school, at school about home and ourselves.

In almost all cases, the reminiscences of former schoolchildren contain anecdotes about the strategies used for dealing with the contemptuous content and methods practiced at school, utilizing irony and refusal to cooperate.

> We could distance ourselves from everything with our jokes… I didn't really feel addressed when the teacher called me Giuseppe and embarrassed me. After all, my name is Josef, even though I was officially listed as Giuseppe everywhere. It hurt us children, however, that Giuseppe also had to be written on the burial cross of our father, who died young and who was called Josef like me…[31] (Josef. G.*1928, interv. 12/10/2017).

If the teachers were able to build up an appreciative and empathetic relationship with the children, so they recalled, the hurdles of foreignness could at least be partially overcome. Sometimes, when the parents also valued the possibility to learn cultural techniques and motivated their children to take advantage of what the school had to offer, the pupils achieved passable literacy in the school language (Anna A.*1930, interv. 10/11/1917).

5· The effects of the Italianization of school in South Tyrol and the collective memory

The final implementation of the Gentile Reform in South Tyrolean schools came about largely through the interaction between schoolchildren and teachers in the individual schools. The recontextualization of the assignment made by the teachers and the reception of the learning opportunities by the children took place equally through the respective historically manifested concept of self-image: on the one hand the Italianization of the foreigners as a tribute of the winning nation and on the other hand

31 After 1923, the first names were officially Italianized. Those South Tyroleans who either applied for state support or held a license or a public position had to accept the Italianization of their surnames.

the feeling of injustice, resistance, and the tight defense of the linguistic and cultural identity. Under these conditions, a rapprochement to the foreign (Waldenfels, 1997) in the sense of an expansion of the concept of self (Kokemohr, 2015) as a synonym for development and education was thus blocked on both sides. Exceptions were the mentioned empathetic-humane attitudes (Prengel, 2015) of teachers, who helped children to accept learning opportunities and were therefore able to have a positive influence (Augschöll Blasbichler, 2019: 110).

The consequences of the Italianization of schools in South Tyrol are wide-ranging and multifaceted and are often not openly discussed individually and collectively.

The Italian school was directly reflected as a lack of literacy in the educational biographies. Many of them left school with a few learned fragments of everyday Italian, which, according to Gatterer (2005: 63), enabled them just enough so "that the judge could deprive them of an interpreter". "They understand only part of what they read, but they are able to sign whatever is required – on promissory notes as well as on acknowledgments of guilt". Gatterer (*Ibidem*) connects to a theory of the world's development and limitation via the tool language (Wittgenstein, 1970: 6) when, as a historian and a contemporary witness, he sums up that

> people were prevented from becoming people: because today a person, who cannot think his thoughts through to the end clearly in any language and cannot express them as understandable sentences, (…) or to put a thought on paper, to some extent cannot be considered as a full-fledged person.

The manifestation of the deficits in the self-perception of the former school children and the individual and collective handling of them, as a form of multiple different and not always coherent strategies, is among the further far-reaching consequences of Italianization. Witnesses describe shame and the effort to not expose weaknesses, which become self-stigmatization (Link & Phelan, 2001: 145), resulting in a reduction in self-efficacy and self-esteem (Corrigan *et al.*, 2006): "I would have gladly joined a club in my free time, but I was afraid that my weaknesses in writing would have become evident" (Edeltraud G.*1928, interv.10/14/2016).

The strong narrative of the collective memory in South Tyrol hindered and still hinders an argumentative explanation of the deficits of former students at the Italian school. The collective memory remembers the suppression but fails to mention the consequences to the extent that they would make the deficits of those affected evident per se. Rather, the collective memory defines the catacomb schools as heroic resistance under the most difficult conditions. Even if Lechner (2005: 440) states that "the German secret schools were the only form of nationwide resistance", the collective memory goes beyond this meaning and suggests a historically unfounded thesis that those schools gave everyone the opportunity to obtain literacy in their mother tongue.

The experience of school encroaching on the population's own language and identity also manifested itself in a verifiable, transgenerationally transmitted skepticism about school as an educational institution and about the importance of school-based education[32]. The statistics on the achievement of formal educational qualifications prove this with relevant differences between the german, italian and ladin language groups[33]. The qualitative research and analyzes of the present study clearly show a shift towards informal education as an identity feature of the German and Ladin-speaking population (Augschöll Blasbichler & Profanter, 2021). The consequences of the missing educational qualifications were particularly evident after the introduction of the regulation regarding ethnic proportional laws in the allocation of public service positions, negotiated during the 2nd Autonomy Statute in 1972. Due to a lack of formal qualifications, for decades, the German-speaking population could not fully benefit from the jobs reserved for them (Stocker, 2007).

Consulted archives:

City-archive Klausen (St.A.Kl.)
School-archive Sarntal
School-archive Barbian
School-archive Lana/Lanebach/Gais

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32 The mother-tongue school readmitted in South Tyrol after 1945 was essentially an 'Italian' school translated into German (see first Statute of Autonomy: Legge Costituzionale, 26/02/1948, n. 5).

33 Situation in the school year 1955/56: Primary school: approx. 32,000 German-speaking pupils and approx. 12,000 Italian-speaking pupils; secondary school: 3,500 German-speaking pupils and 6,000 Italian-speaking pupils; lyceum: 250 German-speaking pupils and 600 Italian-speaking pupils (Ferrari, 1958: 240); percentage of the population with a university degree in 1981: 1.7% German m.t., 3.5% Italian m.t., 1.5%, Ladin m.t.; percentage of the population with a university degree in 2011: 11% German m.t., 16% Italian m.t. (South Tyrol Census 1981, 2011: Landesinstitut Astat 2011).

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