

Memories of Resistance in the Alpine Borderlands: The 70th Anniversary of Liberation in Bolzano

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This study is about how South Tyrol commemorates the Resistance differently to other Italian cities. The study is in 4 parts. First, I will discuss Anniversary of Liberation celebrations in South Tyrol. Second, I will consider the dominant discourse on the Resistance in Italy, and mention the Japanese context with regards to Italian Studies. Third, I will focus on the historical background of South Tyrol as a borderland. After that, I will describe the memory of the Resistance in South Tyrol. The present study poses two questions. First, how does South Tyrol commemorate the Resistance differently to elsewhere in Italy? And second, what causes these differences? I'd like to start by briefly discussing Italian Liberation anniversaries.

1. The Anniversary of Liberation in South Tyrol

In Italy, Liberation Day ('Festa della Liberazione') on April 25th celebrates the victory of the Resistance, namely the liberation from Fascist and Nazi occupiers during World War II, and has great importance. Liberation Day ceremonies are held in many Italian cities. In 2015, Italy celebrated the 70th anniversary of Liberation. On April 25th, President Mattarella held a ceremony at Vittoriano in the morning, then moved to Milan in the afternoon to participate in anniversary celebrations there.¹ After that, he returned to Rome to host an event, 'Viva April 25th', broadcast by RAI.² Born in 1941, Mattarella is the first President without experience as a partisan or as an anti-fascist.³ However,

¹ 'Il Presidente Sergio Mattarella ascende la Scalea del Vittoriano per deporre una corona d'alloro all'Altare della Patria in occasione del 70° anniversario della Liberazione' <<http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Foto&key=1214>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.
'Intervento del Presidente Mattarella alla cerimonia celebrativa del 70° anniversario della Liberazione' <<http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Discorso&key=57>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

² 'Il Presidente Sergio Mattarella nel corso del programma "Viva in 25 aprile"' <<http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Foto&key=1284>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

³ Former president Giorgio Napolitano (1925-), born in Naples, participated in a group of young anti-fascists as a university student. See the official site of the Executive Office of the President of Italian Republic, 'Presidente emeriti' <<http://presidenti.quirinale.it/Napolitano/nap-biografia.htm>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.



he commemorated the victory of the Resistance in the fashion of former presidents Napolitano and Ciampi, by inviting ‘Historic partisans’—who had taken part in the Resistance—to the ceremonies.⁴ The point of the ceremonies is purportedly to commemorate the achievements of the Resistance.

South Tyrol ceremonies, particularly in recent years, differ from those held elsewhere in Italy. Since 2011, the Province of Bolzano has held an event called ‘Platform of contemporary Resistances’ (‘Piattaforma delle Resistenze’) with support from the European Parliament.⁵ As the plural ‘Resistances’ suggests, the event not only commemorates the struggle against Fascism, but also covers endeavour in a wide range of other subjects including immigration, citizenship, Europe, and ecology.



**The Festival of ‘Contemporary Resistances’ in Bolzano 2013
‘Social textile’ (Tessuto sociale)⁶**

Liberation Day celebrations in other Italian cities concentrate on past, Fascist-era events.⁷ In contrast, the Bolzano commemorations seem to pay more attention to the present and the future. The main objective of this paper is to examine possible causes for this difference.

2. Dominant Discourse on the Resistance in Italy

In the 1990’s, revisionist historians radically challenged the standard history of the Resistance, evoking great discussion in Italy. A historian known for his biography of Mussolini, De Felice (1995), suggested that the Resistance—which had little popular support—essentially engaged in ‘fratricide’. Historian Galli della Loggia (1996) agreed with De Felice that the Resistance had little popular support, and argued that the Resistance caused the ‘death of the homeland’. Most historians disapproved of these revisionist perspectives and criticised their treatment of sources. Mainstream thought considered the Resistance to be a broad-based movement which enabled Liberation from Nazi-fascism, and one which was instrumental in the creation of the Italian Republic.⁸

⁴ ‘Intervento del Presidente Mattarella all’incontro degli esponenti delle Associazioni Combattentistiche e d’Arma nel 70° anniversario della Liberazione’ <<http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Discorso&key=53>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

⁵ ‘Piattaforma delle Resistenze’ <<http://www.piattaformaresistenze.it/it/>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

⁶ See ‘Piattaforma delle Resistenze: edizioni precedenti’ <<http://www.piattaformaresistenze.it/it/edizioni-precedenti/>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

⁷ For example, see the case of Turin and Milan. ‘Città di Torino: 25 Aprile 2015 – Festa della Liberazione’ <<http://www.comune.torino.it/circ5/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/2864>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27., ‘Comune di Milano: I festeggiamenti per il 70° della Liberazione’ <https://search.yahoo.co.jp/search?p=Milano+festa+della+Liberazione+2015&aq=-1&oq=&ei=UTF-8&fr=top_gal_sa&x=wrt>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

⁸ This view is shared by Italy’s presidents. Former president Napolitano commented at 70th Anniversary of Liberation celebrations that April 25th is the day to remember the Italians who ‘fought and died for the liberty and independence—and for the same reunification—of

On the other hand, a considerable number of mainstream historians share the same criticisms of the mythical or stereotypical image of the Resistance. They criticize the mythical image of the Resistance as simplistic, and instead describe it as multi-phasic.⁹ For example, the project ‘sites of memory’ by Isnenghi includes illegal punishments by partisans, persecution of Jews, and wartime massacres in its depiction of the Resistance.¹⁰

In Italy, the Resistance is still considered a topic open for investigation and so discussion of its past will not become ossified. Dominant discourse on the Resistance and its mythical image is now being challenged. Under these circumstances, Liberation Day is considered an opportunity to revise the past and confirm the basis of contemporary Italy.

After World War II, many researchers in Japan showed interest in Germany and Italy as both countries had experienced totalitarianism similar to that in wartime Japan.¹¹ Japanese researchers paid much attention to the fact that Italy had a popular home-based anti-fascism movement, for which Japan had little equivalent. After the war, as Dower (1999) points out, the crushing defeat of Japan became a starting point for the Japanese people. Japanese intellectuals inferred that an establishment of individuals, thinking and acting independently, would have been essential in preventing the totalitarianism which led Japan to a destructive war.¹² Italy’s partisans were considered to be those ideal individuals.

In this context, the Italian Resistance and its background was examined in Japan. Japanese researcher Fujisawa (1997, 2012), for example, investigated the difficulty of building Italian national identity. Ishida (2011, 2013), another researcher from Japan, made observations on the variety of Italian intellectuals including fascists, while Takahashi (1997) studied the insufficient mobilization of Italian Fascism.

Frankly speaking, Japanese scholars paid little attention to South Tyrol as it was far from being a central city of Resistance, unlike Milan or Turin. However, the difficulties surrounding images of the Resistance in South Tyrol suggest parallels to conflicting memories in the Japanese borderlands, e.g. the Ryukyu or the Ainu.¹³

3. Historical background of South Tyrol as Borderland

South Tyrol had a complex history after World War I, especially during the Fascist period.¹⁴ Nearly 90% of German-speaking South Tyroleans chose to emigrate to Germany due to the 1939 South Tyrol Option Agreement (“Option”). However, it was difficult for them to choose a nationality, with their choice not necessarily motivated by national identity.

After the Italian surrender to the Allies in 1943, Nazi Germany occupied Bolzano (as an Operation Zone in the Alpine Foothills) and conscripted inhabitants into German institutions. This situation increased inter-ethnic tensions between the German-speaking population and the Italian-speaking population. The tensions remained after the war and provoked conflicts in South Tyrol.

After the war, in spite of the wishes of the German-speaking population, the governments of Austria and Italy formally agreed that South Tyrol remain Italian territory. This agreement—the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement—confirmed South Tyrol as a local autonomy, but this was not sufficiently realized. In 1960, the United

our country during 19 months’ (of German occupation)’. See website of Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere della sera*, ‘Le riflessioni di Napolitano: La Resistenza e la memoria che oggi unisce l’intero Paese’ <http://www.corriere.it/politica/15_aprile_19/riflessioni-napolitano-resistenza-memoria-che-oggi-unisce-l-intero-paese-f07cbd82-e662-11e4-aaf9-ce581604be76.shtm>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

⁹ For example, see Pavone (1991).

¹⁰ See Isnenghi (1997).

¹¹ For example, see Murase (1962), Yamazaki (1961).

¹² For example, see Maruyama (1963).

¹³ The southern (Ryukyu) and northern (Ainu) borderland cultures are distinct from each other and from Yamato, (what is now known as Japan). They have a history of conflict with, and persecution by Yamato. See Morris-Suzuki (1998, 2000).

¹⁴ See Suzuki (2017).

Nations urged the governments of Austria and Italy to take up new treaties over the South Tyrolean issue. On the other hand, bombing campaigns undertaken by the separatist South Tyrolean Liberation Committee in the mid-1950s made it difficult to achieve settlement. The ethnic rift which remained after the war was at its peak.

However, separatist tensions gradually eased after South Tyrol was granted new autonomous status in 1972. In 1996, the establishment of the Tyrol—South Tyrol—Trentino Euro region by the EU promoted regional peace and cross border cooperation. Most of the younger generation seem to live peacefully alongside each other.¹⁵

4. The Memory of Resistance in South Tyrol

In the previous section, I pointed out that commemorations of the Resistance in South Tyrol tended to marginalise the past. However, in 2015 they followed other Italian cities in inviting former partisans and members of the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI in Italy) to 70th Anniversary of Liberation celebrations, in apparent reverence of the Resistance.

The catch-all party for the German-speaking population, the South Tyrolean People's Party (Südtiroler Volkspartei), was founded by German-speaking partisans in 1945.¹⁶ The founders of this party chose to remain in South Tyrol in 1939, then participated in the Resistance. German-speaking partisans are considered to have made many sacrifices, like their Italian-speaking counterparts.

However, the dominant image of the Resistance in South Tyrol is different to that in other Italian cities. In most of Italy, the Resistance is usually recognized as the movement that enabled Liberation from Nazi-fascism and the foundation of the republic. Autonomy Day on September 5th is an excellent example of the contrast between South Tyrol and other Italian cities. On this day, the partisans' contribution to Liberation is recognized as the basis of the Constitution which realized South Tyrol's autonomy. In this context, it can be interpreted that Italy, namely the nation, has little significance. For South Tyrol, the foundation of the local autonomy has more importance than that of Italian national Liberation from Nazi-fascism.

In discussing commemorations of the Resistance, there is the matter of the 'Option' and its consequences, particularly the rarely noticed fact that the majority of the German-speaking population chose to leave their homeland and emigrate to Germany. At the same time, the ethnic tensions which lasted after the war seem to have been forgotten. The 'Platform of contemporary Resistances' project in Bolzano is a typical example of this phenomena in which memory of the armed Resistance is marginalized. This cultural project covers a wide range of subjects, such as the environment, intergenerational dialogue, intercultural dialogue, citizenship, social inclusion, solidarity, and so on.¹⁷

It can be presumed that this marginalization encourages inter-ethnic contact and communication. Event participants can think of the Resistance not only as a Fascist-era struggle, but also as a reform process for the society they live in. As its historical background indicates, South Tyrol endures inevitably difficult relationships between different ethnic groups. Under these circumstances, it is safe to assume that focusing on the past would increase inter-ethnic tensions. In contrast, it can be said that focusing on the present and future, while quieting the past, enables peaceful coexistence. Moreover, as the previous session examined, it was difficult for German-speaking people in 1939 South Tyrol to choose a nationality. The fact that South Tyroleans were forced to identify themselves along the lines of a nation state is a matter that definitely deserves more attention.

¹⁵ On the other hand, there remains a separatist movement and party. The South Tyrolean Freedom (Süd-Tiroler Freiheit, founded in 2007) calls for a referendum on independence from Italy. See the website <<http://www.suedtiroler-freiheit.com/south-tyrolean-freedom-movement/>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

¹⁶ The founders of the South Tyrolean People's Party, Erich Amonn (1896–1970) and his friends were members of South Tyrolean resistance movement, "Andreas-Hofer-League" (Andreas-Hofer-Bund). See the official SVP website's 'Historical Background' <<http://www.svp.eu/de/italiano/storia/>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

¹⁷ Themes by year: 2011: 'Expansions of Memory', 2012: 'Reconstitution', 2013: 'Social Textile'. 2014: 'Children of Stars: The Europe of people', 2015: 'Sparkle: energy of present to light the future'. See 'Piattaforma delle Resistenze: edizioni precedenti' <<http://www.piattaformaresistenze.it/it/edizioni-precedenti>>. Accessed 2016 Dec 27.

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