

Disputed souls

National indifference and identity building among Trentine POW in Russia (1914-1920)

Gabriele Moretti – s2390892

g.moretti@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Leiden University – Faculty of Humanities
MA Cities, Migration and Global Interdependence

Academic Year 2019/2020

First reader: Leo Lucassen

Second Reader: Andrew DJ Shield

[17911 words]

List of contents:

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Historical context: the Empire and its nationalities	7
III.	Going to war	23
IV.	Captivity	36
V.	Patriotic education	45
VI.	Conclusions	56
VII.	List of analyzed sources	61
VIII.	List of illustrations and bibliography	62

I – Introduction

From the late Middle Ages, the current Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige was a Habsburg possession, divided between the Prince-Bishopric of Trent – the southern Italian-speaking area, roughly corresponding to the actual province of Trent – and the County/Princely of Tirol, more or less equivalent to the province of Bozen and inhabited by a German speaking majority. It was only after the Third Italian War of Independence (1866) that the Trentine national question begun to rise: in a climate of patriotic exaltation and relevant geopolitical changes, more and more Trentine intellectuals claimed to be unified to the newborn kingdom. However, a relevant part of the population, whose identification was basically linked to their village or valley, remained loyal to Vienna and, overall, to the figure of Franz Joseph.¹ This entangled framework of identification and nationality persisted until the entrance of Italy in World War I, with as main goal the annexation of Trent and Trieste. In 1914, more than 60,000 Trentine were recruited in the Austro-Hungarian army and sent to the Eastern front. Here, roughly half of them were captured by the Russians and they spent the following five years in prison camps or travelling within Russia. Thereafter, when Italy joined the war and became Russia's allied, they were asked for their nationality and among the ones who declared to be Italian, some were rapidly shipped to Italy via Archangelsk. Others reached Vladivostok, Beijing and the Italian concession of Tien-Tsin. Once there, they were re-recruited in the Italian army to fight the Bolsheviks or, those who refused to join the *Battaglione Nero* [Black Battalion], the anti-Bolshevik Italian forces, was shipped back to Italy and confined in camps for Italianization until the early 1920s.²

The main question of my research is why these Austro-Italian soldiers opted for Italian citizenship. In addition, I will try to reconstruct the negotiating arena in which this bargain on citizenship took place, by posing two sub questions. Firstly, whether these Trentine peasants had a national identification to start with, that is to say whether they believed to be part of a national community or whether their sense of belonging was limited to the local community. Secondly, which means the Italians (government,

¹ Simone Bellezza, "I Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Durante La Prima Guerra Mondiale: Linee e Prospettive Di Ricerca," *Qualestoria* 1-2 (2014): 51.

² *Ibidem*

diplomacy and army) used in order to convince the Austro-Italian soldiers to join their citizenship.

The historiography on Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Russia is quite abundant within Italian historiography³, and, after the dominance of nationalist perspectives,⁴ a more critical turn has focused on the shifting identities of Trentine soldiers, especially thanks to the great work provided by the *Museo Storico Trentino* and its researchers.⁵ These researches were based both on diaries, letters and accounts written by officials – which received a privileged treatment even as prisoners – and on soldiers’ popular writings. They focused mainly on reconstructing the living conditions within Russian prisoners of war camps, on the military operations conducted by the Italian Black Battalion during the Russian Civil War (1917-1920) and, especially in the interwar period, on the exaltation of Trentine’s patriotism. Besides the *Museo Storico*, the best and probably most known work is Marina Rossi’s ‘I Prigionieri dello Zar’ (1997). As researcher at the *Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione del Friuli-Venezia Giulia*. Marina Rossi was one of the first Italian historians that physically went to Russia to explore the local archives in order to study the condition of Russian prisoners during the late Czar’s regime. However, the topic did not receive much attention in the 2000s and the experience of Trentine soldiers has been generally relegated as an interesting curiosity or a piece of local history, instead of an important research topic within national and transnational history. It took to 2016 before another serious research focusing on the question of Trentine soldiers’ national identification during the first world war was: Simone Bellezza’s ‘Tornare in Italia – Come i prigionieri trentini in Russia divennero italiani (1914-1920)’. The book follows the war

³ See G.H. Davies, “The Life of Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-1921,” in *Essays on World War I. Origins and Prisoners of War*, ed. S. Williams and P. Pastor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 163–96; P. Pastor, “Hungarian POWs in Russia during the Revolution and Civil War,” in *Essays on World War I. Origins and Prisoners of War*, ed. S. Williams and P. Pastor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 149–62; A. Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War. Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford-New York: Berg, 2002).

⁴ See G. Bazzani, *Soldati Italiani Nella Russia in Fiamme: 1915-1920* (Trento: Legione trentina dell’Associazione nazionale volontari di guerra, 1933); Giuseppe De Mannicor, *Dalla Galizia Al Piave* (Trento: Seiser, 1926).

⁵ See Quinto Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)* (Trento: Il Margine, 2008); “Combattenti Trentini in Estremo Oriente,” *Bollettino Del Museo Trentino Del Risorgimento* (Trento, 1972); A. Biagini, “La Missione Italiana in Russia e Il Rimpatrio Dei Prigionieri Di Guerra e Degli Irredenti Trentini (1915-1918),” in *La Prima Guerra Mondiale e Il Trentino. Convegno Internazionale Promosso Dal Comprensorio Della Vallagarina. Rovereto 25-29 Giugno 1978* (Rovereto: Comprensorio della Vallagarina, 1978), 579–97; R. Francescotti, *Italiani. L’epopea Degli Italiani Dell’esercito Austroungarico Prigionieri in Russia Nella Grande Guerra (1914-1918)* (Valdagno: Gino Rossato editore, 1991); M. Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell’esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)* (Milano: Mursia, 1997).

experience from the call to arms until the return at home and it dedicated a chapter to the shift of identification among the Trentine prisoners who decided to accept the Italian citizenship (even if their homeland was formally still Austria) and to join the Italian divisions in the Far East. However, Bellezza's main goal is to reconstruct the differences between 'the individual memories of those who participated to the war' and the mainstream post-war national storytelling.⁶ Finally, a recent valuable work has been published by Federico Mazzini, who, moving from the Audoin-Rouzeau's concept of 'culture of war'⁷, looked at the lower class soldiers' writings to shed light on how Trentine's rural society perceived the Great War, and he noted the formation of a both active and passive anti-war culture.⁸

Notwithstanding this quite impressive production, no relevant work is dedicated to the experience of Trentine soldiers experience from a global or at least international perspective nor to their experience as migrants, as displaced people, forcibly taken out from their valleys and projected in a totally unknown environment. As Lucassen and Smit observed, soldiers displaced from their homeland can be considered and studied as 'forced organizational migrants'.⁹ In this peculiar case, Trentine soldiers were not simply displaced from their homeland to a new place, but many of them traveled through Russia from its western border to the pacific. They crossed national and continental borders, national identities, citizenship, and even moving from one side to another of the alliances within a global conflict. Moreover, they were witnesses of a dramatic change in borders, political structures and identities within the host country: the Russian Revolution and the following civil war, in which Italian divisions were actively involved within the White Army. While migrating, these war prisoners built social and labor networks among them and with the Russian inhabitants. They had cultural exchanges with the locals and with foreign

⁶ Simone Attilio Bellezza, *Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016), 14.

⁷ Audoin-Rouzeau Stéphane, « L'après-13 Novembre. Naissance et mort d'une « culture de guerre » ? », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 2017/2 (N° 134), p. 11-19. DOI : 10.3917/ving.134.0011. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-vingtieme-siecle-revue-d-histoire-2017-2-page-11.htm>

⁸ Federico Mazzini, "Patriottismo Condizionato. Identità e Patrie Dei Soldati Trentini, 1914-1920," *Contemporanea* 13, no. 3 (2010): 457-86.

⁹ Leo Lucassen and Aniek X. Smit, "The Repugnant Other: Soldiers, Missionaries, and Aid Workers as Organizational Migrants," *Journal of World History* 26, no. 1 (2016): 1-39, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2016.0024>; Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, "Theorizing Cross-Cultural Migrations: The Case of Eurasia since 1500," *Social Science History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 445-75, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ssh.2017.19>.

companions, they had the chance to reflect on their identities and on the enormous political changes happening both in Russia and at home. Thus, my research also pays attention to the issues raised by the migration studies: local networks and connection with the homeland, the ability to integrate in the new country and to forge social, cultural, and labor relations with the local inhabitants who often offered a job and a shelter to the prisoners. Moreover, I think it is fundamental to frame all this within the broader context of the World War I, the Russian Revolution and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire, both events which brought millions of people to reflect (or, at least, decide) on national identification questions.

I draw my research on primary sources, precisely on a diaries and memorials, first-hand witness accounts of Trentine soldiers. These diaries offer perspectives on soldiers' daily life and, overall, their personal reflections and thoughts about themes like war and national identification. All the sources but one were produced between 1914 and 1920, and written to be kept private, without any aim of publication.¹⁰ Although the soldiers' mother tongue was usually Ladino or Trentine, all the diaries are in Italian, the only written language Trentine peasants learned at school. All the translation to English are mine. These sources offer rare insights into the rural lower classes mentality, precious sources of information in countries like the Kingdom of Italy and Austro-Hungarian Empire, in which the illiteracy range often overcame the fifty percent of the population.¹¹ Hence, these diaries well represent a specific segment of the society, that is to say Italian speaking young adults from rural Trentine. All these primary sources have been published between 1995 and 2005 by local institutions (*Istituto Culturale Ladino* and *Museo Storico di Rovereto*), which left the original text untouched but enriched the edition with prefaces, critical apparatuses and maps. The sources present some limitations too: they present a very individual and private perspective; they are sometimes charged with prejudice and they are obviously biased by the writers' socio-cultural belonging and the wartime propaganda. Nonetheless, these diaries remain very useful, covering all five years of the war and the migration from Italy

¹⁰ The exception is Ermete Bonapace's World War 1 memorial, written in the 1920s with aim of publication.

¹¹ According to Quinto Antonelli, Italian Tyrol (nowadays corresponding to the provinces of Trent and Bozen) had a level of illiteracy inferior to the fifteen percent, while the northern regions of the Empire were around the fifty percent, that was also the average Italian level. Moreover, it is remarkable that these diaries were written by people belonging to the lower classes of a rural, peripheral area, where illiteracy was normally more widespread. See Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 11.

throughout Austria and Russia until China and, from there, back to Italy. They provide a quite detailed account of daily life, of the authors' networks and, overall, their personal reflections on war and nationality.

My source analysis is mainly based on qualitative and contextual methods in order to have a better understanding of the authors' feelings and thoughts and to place them in their precise historical and cultural context.¹² Additionally, the research is divided in four main thematic chapters, which correspond also with the chronological order. First, the pre-war situation: how did the life of these peasants look like before they were enlisted? Which kind of relation did they have with the Austrian State? Second, the call to the arms: how Trentine population responded to war beginning? Third, the period in Russia: what was the impact of being catapulted in this totally new environment, among hundred thousand of foreigners who shared little with them apart from being subjects of the the Habsburg Empire? How did it affect their national identification? Fourth and last, the Italian institutional intervention, the choice between two citizenship and the trip back towards Italy.

¹² See Vanda Wilcox, "'Weeping Tears of Blood': Exploring Italian Soldiers' Emotions in the First World War," *Modern Italy* 17, no. 2 (2012): 171–84.

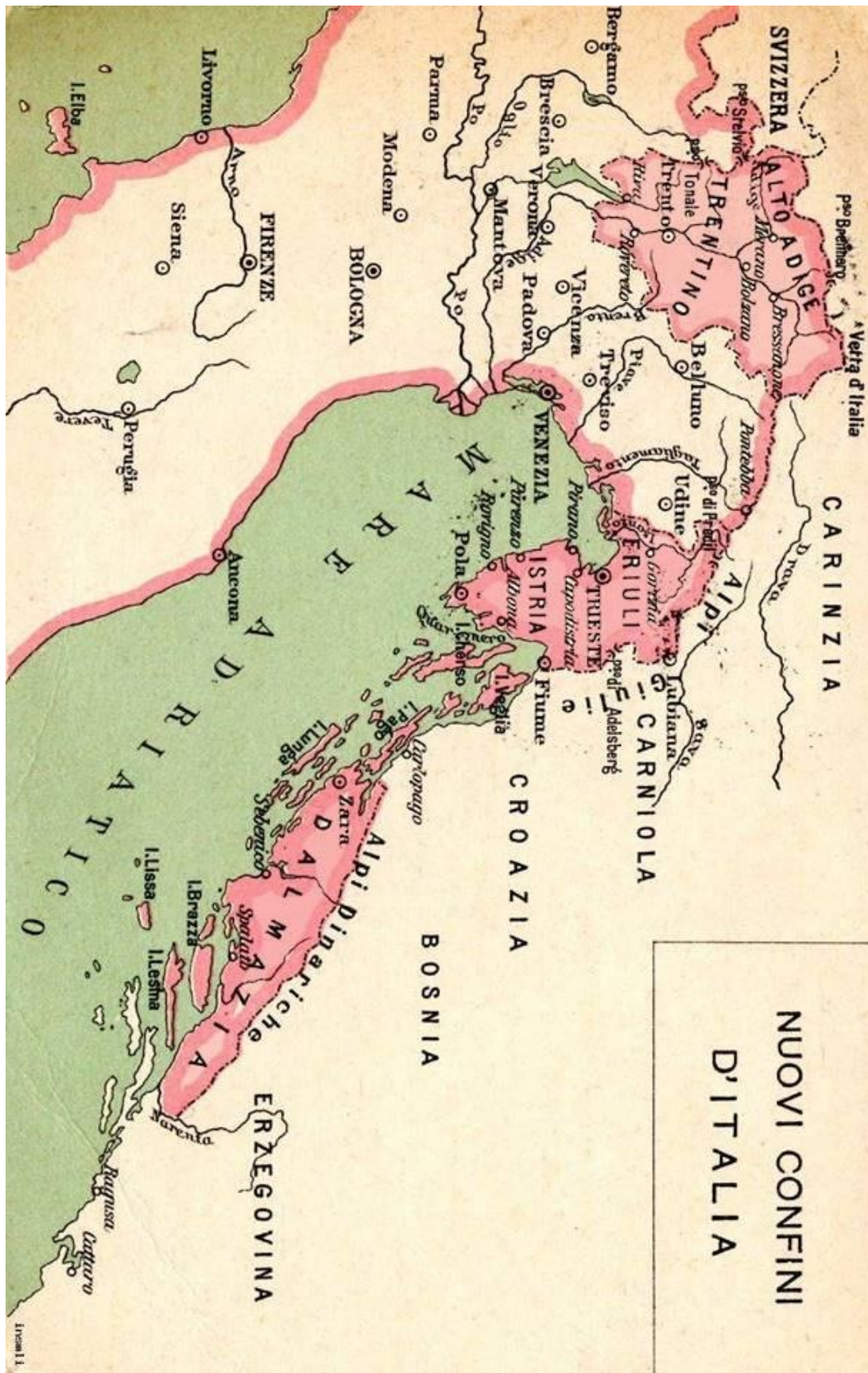


Figure 1 - Italy in 1915. In rose the so-called "unredeemed lands" of Trentino, Friuli, Litorale, Istria and Dalmatia

II - Historical context: the Empire and its nationalities

The complex territorial, institutional and ethnical configuration of the Austro-Hungarian empire at the eve of World War I was the result of a centuries-old history of adjustments. From the thirteenth onwards, the Empire expanded in a messy and inconsistent manner that produced a varied mosaic of regions that were deeply different in their political, socio-economic, cultural, religious and linguistic conditions. The earliest Habsburg possessions were situated between present western Switzerland and Alsace, but in the fourteenth century their dominion already encompassed Carinthia, Carniola, Tyrol, the city of Trieste and Istria. In 1438 Albert V, duke of Austria, ascended to the Holy Roman Empire's throne, and in 1526 a wedding settlement allowed the Habsburg to expand their power over the kingdom of Hungary and Bohemia, which in turn, controlled Moravia, Silesia, Croatia and Slavonia.¹³ This can be considered the turning point for the 'national question', since the Empire ceased to be an almost homogeneous German state and it began to rule with a variety of different language, institutions, forms of governments and 'national' cultures. In the early eighteenth century - as a consequence of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) - the Habsburg rulers gained the duchies of Milan and Mantua in northern Italy and the Spanish Low Countries, while in the last quarter of the century, in the so-called 'Partitions of Poland', Galicia and Bucovina were added.¹⁴ 1781 Joseph II enlightened reform program, pursuing a great plan of institutional modernization and cultural homogenization, put particular emphasis on the role of language and German was raised as official in administration.¹⁵ On the one hand this reform was aimed to go beyond some out of date traditions, such as the use of Latin as the official bureaucratic language in Hungary, but it also caused a sense of disparity and discrimination among the non-German elites. For the first time, the protests against the decree acquired the characters

¹³ Robert A. Kann, *Storia Dell'impero Asburgico (1526-1918)* (Roma: Salerno, 1998), 11-20.

¹⁴ Cinzia Cremonini, "Riequilibrare Il Sistema: Mutazioni e Permanenze in Italia Tra 1706 e 1720. Alcune Considerazioni," *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, no. 13 (2013): 177-88, https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_chmo.2013.43286; Thomas Carlyle, "Partition of Poland," in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle: Volume 19: History of Friedrich II of Prussia, Called Frederick the Great Vol VIII*, ed. Henry Duff Traill and Thomas Carlyle, vol. 19, Cambridge Library Collection - The Works of Carlyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81-129, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511701016.004>.

¹⁵ David F Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750-1914* (Berkley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1984), 11-37; Ernst Wangermann, "Josephinian Reforms and Enlightenment Aspirations," *Jewish Culture and History* 13, no. 2-3 (2012): 194-202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169x.2012.729976>.

of a 'national' defense. These 'national' arguments, presented by a multilingual and cosmopolitan aristocracy, were probably specious.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the stress on language and local identity demonstrated the potential to mobilize very different interests and social classes into politicized classes which until then had been excluded from the arena. By defending regional political traditions, the peripheric aristocracies reinforced their territorial power in opposition to the centripetal tension of the modern state¹⁷. Moreover, in 1815, the Congress of Vienna added a new prestigious *tessera* to the Habsburg mosaic, the territories which belonged to the dissolved Republic of Venice, which were unified with Milan and Mantua to form the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia. Although this new annexation promised to be extremely lucrative from a military and commercial perspective, it revealed to be a major source of national claims.

Some thirty years later, the revolutionary wave of 1848 put a strain on the Austrian Empire institutional framework and even its very existence. At the beginning the riot's hotbeds were Hungary and Italy, but popular protest rapidly spread to Bohemia and Poland and barricades were erected even in the center of Vienna. National demands for autonomy were linked to liberal ideas, in accordance to incendiary spirit of the French Revolution. The imperial army managed to stop the riots with great difficulties and many, the *Kaiser* and the church *in primis*, started to look at it as the only force capable to keep such different lands together. Nonetheless, this was a very delicate balance which could only be maintained through strength and faith. Hence, in the following seventy years, the existence of the Empire would have been based on the constant political compromise between conservative-centralist powers and the centrifugal forces. While the former was basically homogeneously ethnically German and loyal to the House of Habsburg, the latter was a colorful front of languages, cultures and national aspirations. Some simply asked more autonomy, while some others demanded real independence. Some - such as Italians and Romanians - were attracted by a neighboring country, some others - Czechs and Slovenians - desired to build a brand-new nation for themselves, whereas Ukrainians, Ruthenians and Poles aimed to be unified with their compatriots split between Prussia and Russia. After a period of post-revolution adjustment, the brutal defeat in the 1866 Austro-

¹⁶ Marco Bellabarba, *L'impero Asburgico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014), 45.

¹⁷ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 10; Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London - New York: Verso, 1974), 198; 302.

Prussian war represented a serious reduction of Vienna's ambitions on the European stage. Austria was virtually expelled from the German world and it lost its Lombardy-Venetian possessions, which happily became part of the newborn Kingdom of Italy. The Empire became to be seen – both by the other countries and by its most critical subjects – as a 'European China',¹⁸ a too vast and fragmented land dominated by a conservative aristocracy and an intricate bureaucracy that undermined every chance of economic and social growth.¹⁹

In that precarious institutional condition, the Austro-German elites looked at Hungarians as the only group offering the possibility of a solid alliance to hold together the State. In 1867 Franz Joseph recognized them a special status and installed the *Doppelmonarchie*, a peculiar institutional framework maintained until the dissolution in 1918. Thus, the Empire was not Austrian anymore, but Austro-Hungarian. Two independent states – Cisleithania and Transleithania – with the same rights and duties, with two separate capital cities, governments and parliaments (they had only three common ministries: foreign affairs, defense and finance) shared the monarch, who was Emperor in Vienna and King in Budapest. This original solution proved to be effective to strengthen the Hungarian loyalty to the emperor, but surely it could not represent a permanent solution to the Slavic and Italian national demands. Their condition did not improve at all, indeed the *Ausgleich* officially confirmed the German cultural hegemony in Cisleithania and the Magyar in Transleithania. Furthermore, while Austria declared itself a multinational State and decided to recognize the linguistic rights of its inhabitants, Hungary – where half of the population was not Magyar – was established as a national State and did not grant any right to its minorities.²⁰ Hungarian was imposed as mandatory language in schools and in every institutional space and every non-Magyar cultural expression was obstructed, provoking an exasperation of the national conflicts.²¹

¹⁸ Already in 1818 Ludwin Börne, member of the Young German movement, wrote: 'Austria is the European China, a mature but stagnant state. She drives her strong roots well beyond her own territory underneath the soil of other state...'. Later on, Franz Kafka recycled the Austria-China metaphor as a critique for the excessive bureaucratization of the Habsburg Empire. See Hans Joachim Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German-Speaking Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 44; Robert Lemon, *Imperial Messages: Orientalism as Self-Critique in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle*, vol. 101 (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 141.

¹⁹ Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750-1914*, 125–60.

²⁰ Andrea Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria* (Bari-Roma: Laterza & Figli, 2018), 11.

²¹ Kann, *Storia Dell'impero Asburgico (1526-1918)*, 326–65.

Austro-Italians in the Empire

Around 1850s, some five and a half million Italians lived in Tyrol, Lombardy-Venetia and Austrian Littoral, constituting an important part of the Habsburg Empire. Their relevance was not merely demographic, but economic and cultural too. Austro-German intellectuals believed that, besides them, Italians were the only 'nation' with the characteristics of what they called a *Kulturnation* – a nation with a strong cultural and historical background – and for this reason they were especially respected.²² In spite of that, they were far from being a homogeneous community. First of all, they differed in their historical belonging to the Monarchy. When Austrian Littoral (the Free City of Trieste, the Country of Gorizia and Gradisca, the Margraviate of Istria) and Trentino/Sud Tyrol were part of the Habsburg's sphere of influence since centuries, the duchies of Milan and Mantua were incorporated at the beginning of eighteenth century while Veneto and Dalmatia only became part in 1797. If the older domains had built robust relationships with Vienna, this was absolutely not the case in the former Venetian possessions where the population was demanding the unification of Italy even before the annexation. Furthermore, five million Italians lived in the Lombardy-Venetian Kingdom, covering one-eighth of the whole Habsburg territory and hosting twelve of its nineteen biggest cities. Lombardy and Veneto were also an island of ethnolinguistic homogeneity in this multicultural landscape and, last but not least, were extraordinarily prosperous. All these reasons increased the hostility towards Vienna, its fiscal policies, its attempts of undermining the local elites and its repression of every Italian patriotic manifestation. All these factors played a crucial role in 1848 and, overall, in 1866.

Political developments in the other Italian domains differed quite a bit. First of all, they were not *only* Italian regions: Sud Tyrol was roughly divided between a German-speaking area in the north and an Italian-speaking one in the south. In the Austrian Littoral most of Italians dwelled at the coasts and in cities, while Slavic-speakers occupied the countryside. On the institutional side, they have always participated in the imperial governance and in some cases – such as the *Magnifiche Comunità di Fiemme, Cadore* and *Folgaria* – they benefited from a high degree of autonomy since centuries, while the

²² Robert A. Kann, "VIII. Die Italiener," in *Das Nationalitätenproblem Der Habsburgermonarchie. Geschichte Und Ideengehalt Der Nationalen Bestrebungen Vom Vormärz Bis Zur Auflösung Des Reiches Im Jahre 1918* (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1964), 265–73, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7767/boehlau.9783205109693.265>.

Lombardy-Venetian Kingdom was ruled directly from the capital. Even during the period of centralization, they maintained their privileges. Their representatives were active part of the state evolution and they took part in the constitutional assembly in Frankfurt and Vienna. Austrian Littoral and Trentino were also a crucial part of the administrative machine and the majority of public servants there were local Italian-speakers. In a few words, even if the nationalist ideology existed in these areas, the historical and institutional framework is an important element to explain the different attitudes towards the empire. When Milan and Venice often demanded independence, Trento and Trieste just bargained for major autonomy within the Empire. However, these equilibria definitely shifted in 1866, when the Lombardy-Venetian Kingdom was ceded to the newly formed kingdom of Italy. As a consequence of the loss, Italians begun - from day to night - the smallest minority of the Empire.²³

Ethnolinguistic composition of Austro-Hungary

The 1910 census offers a very clear picture of the ethnic demography in Austro-Hungary. Its fifty-one-million inhabitants were distributed over 675,000 square kilometers practicing five different religions (Christian Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy; Judaism; Sunni Islam) and was divided in twelve major ethnolinguistic groups. The two major constituents - Germans the 23,9 and Magyar the 20,2 per cent - did not reach even the half of the population. The majority were the minorities: Czechs (12,6%), Polish (10%), Ruthenians (7,9%), Romanians (6,4%), Croatian (5,3%), Serbs (3,8%), Slovaks (3,8%), Slovenian (2,6%), Italians (2,0%) and Bosniaks (1,2%). Collectively, the Slavs were the striking majority (47,2%), more than the Germans and the Hungarians together. The 780,000 Italians were superior only to the Bosniaks, who were annexed to the Monarchy in 1908.²⁴ That means that, as mentioned before, the 1866's events represented a tremendous break for the Italian community. After the loss of Lombardy and Veneto, Italians were few, isolated and dispersed. Their political and economic weight had suddenly almost vanished and the deep cultural and social differences between Trentino and the Littoral made it difficult to organize a common front. In addition, since the unification of Italy under

²³ Synthetic statistical data regarding Habsburg Empire population and ethnic distribution are provided in Kann, *Storia Dell'impero Asburgico (1526-1918)*, 725-29.

²⁴ *Ibidem*

Piedmontese rule, these regions – identified with the cities of Trento and Trieste – became a crucial part of the Italian nationalist rhetoric, considered as subjugated lands to be liberated. For the Italian nationalist collective imaginary, Trento and Trieste were a concept more than two cities, Siamese twins forcibly stolen to their mother, as the Austro-Italian socialist Lajos Domokos was ironically underlining in 1900: ‘Our dear brothers in the happy Kingdom [of Italy] seriously believe that Trieste and Trento are sisters because of their same faith, habits, traditions and history. They are convinced that one can move from Trieste to Trento and back in a few steps’²⁵. In contrast to the Italian irredentism in the Kingdom, the Trentino and Littoral inhabitants were aware of the great historical, social, economic, demographic and institutional differences between the two regions.

In 1910 Trentino had only two proper cities, and they still were quite little ones: Trento, which counted of 30’000 inhabitants, and Rovereto, with only 11,000. 360,000 people lived in small towns and villages. The economy was based on agriculture, which gave job to the 62 per cent of the population. A little industrial development took place in *Val d’Adige* in the first decade of the twentieth century, based on very dispersed semi-artisanal manufacturing often related to agriculture.²⁶ The Austrian Littoral instead knew a very different development. Trieste was the biggest port and the third bigger city in the Empire. It more than doubled its population in fifty years, from 104,000 inhabitants in 1857 to 224,000 in 1909. The massive urban drift deeply changed the social, demographic, economic and ethnolinguistic profile of the city, providing a strong base for social and national struggles. Trieste was a commercial and financial center of the empire. The most important shipping and insurance company had their headquarters there, the industrial activity was running fast, the city was the most important corridor linking Central Europe to the Mediterranean.

As touched upon before, the regions were profoundly different also from an ethnolinguistic perspective. Trentino was the very southern part of the County of Tyrol, whose capital was Innsbruck, situated in the proper Tyrol, a homogenous German-

²⁵ Lajos Domokos, “La Questione Nazionale e i Socialisti Trentini,” *Il Lavoratore. Organo Del Partito Socialista*, August 8, 1900 in Marco Bellabarba, “Trento e Trieste: Dalla Rivoluzione Alla Nazione (1848-1867),” in *Trento e Trieste. Percorsi Degli Italiani d’Austria Dal ’48 All’annessione2*, ed. Fabrizio Rasera (Rovereto: Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati-Edizioni Osi, 2014), 20.

²⁶ Renato Monteleone, “Il Trentino Alla Vigilia Della Prima Guerra Mondiale,” *Annali Del Museo Storico Italiano Della Guerra 2009-2014* 17–22 (2014): 13–18.

speaking area on the northern side of the Brenner Pass. Southern Tyrol instead had a peculiar situation in comparison to the variegated Habsburg ethnic mosaic, which was usually characterized by a very fragmented patchwork of linguistic groups. It was inhabited by three linguistic groups which were not mixed but they lived in separate areas: Germans in the north of the 'Salorno line', Italians in the south (the proper Trentino) and a few Ladins in the north-eastern mountain valleys. Trentino and Sud Tyrol had a very similar linguistic distribution (393,000 Italian speakers *vs* almost 14,000 Germans in the former, and more a few more than 200,000 Germans *vs* 22,000 Italians and Ladin speakers in the latter).²⁷ Instead, the situation was far more complex on the Adriatic coast. In 1910 Trieste totaled 119,159 Italians, 56,916 Slovenians, 2,403 Croatian and almost 30,000 immigrants from the Kingdom of Italy; in Friuli there were 154,546 Slovenians, 90,151 Italians, 8,947 immigrants from Italy and 4,000 Germans; Istria, Dalmatia and Fiume the complexity was even more entangled: Croatian were the majority with some 180,000 people, Italians were roughly 170,000, Slovenian 60,000, Germans 13,000, Hungarians 6000 and other 17,000 classified as 'other language or citizenship'.²⁸

²⁷ Umberto Corsini, *Problemi Di Un Territorio Di Confine Trentino e Alto Adige Dalla Sovranità Austriaca All'accordo Degasperri-Gruber* (Trento: Comune di Trento, 1994), 3-35 in Andrea Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria* (Bari-Roma: Laterza & Figli, 2018).

²⁸ Robert A. Kann, "VIII. Die Italiener," in *Das Nationalitätenproblem Der Habsburgermonarchie. Geschichte Und Ideengehalt Der Nationalen Bestrebungen Vom Vormärz Bis Zur Auflösung Des Reiches Im Jahre 1918* (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1964), 265-73.

	Trentino	Sud Tyrol	Total
Italian/Ladin	95,9	9,5	64,1
German	3,4	90,5	35,5
Other	0,6	-	0,4

Table 1 - Linguistic composition of Trentino-Sud Tyrol according to the 1910's census (%)

	Trieste	Friuli	Istria	Rijeka	Dalmatia	Total
Italian	64,7	36,2	39,2	53,2	3	44,7
Slovenian	24,6	62,1	14	5,1	-	28,8
Serbo-croatian	1	-	42,9	28,4	97	19,6
German	5,2	1,6	3,3	-	-	3,1
Hungarian	-	-	-	13,1	-	0,6
Others	4,3	-	4,3	-	-	2,8

Table 2: Linguistic composition of Trieste, Friuli, Istria, Rijeka and Dalmatia according to the 1910's census (%)

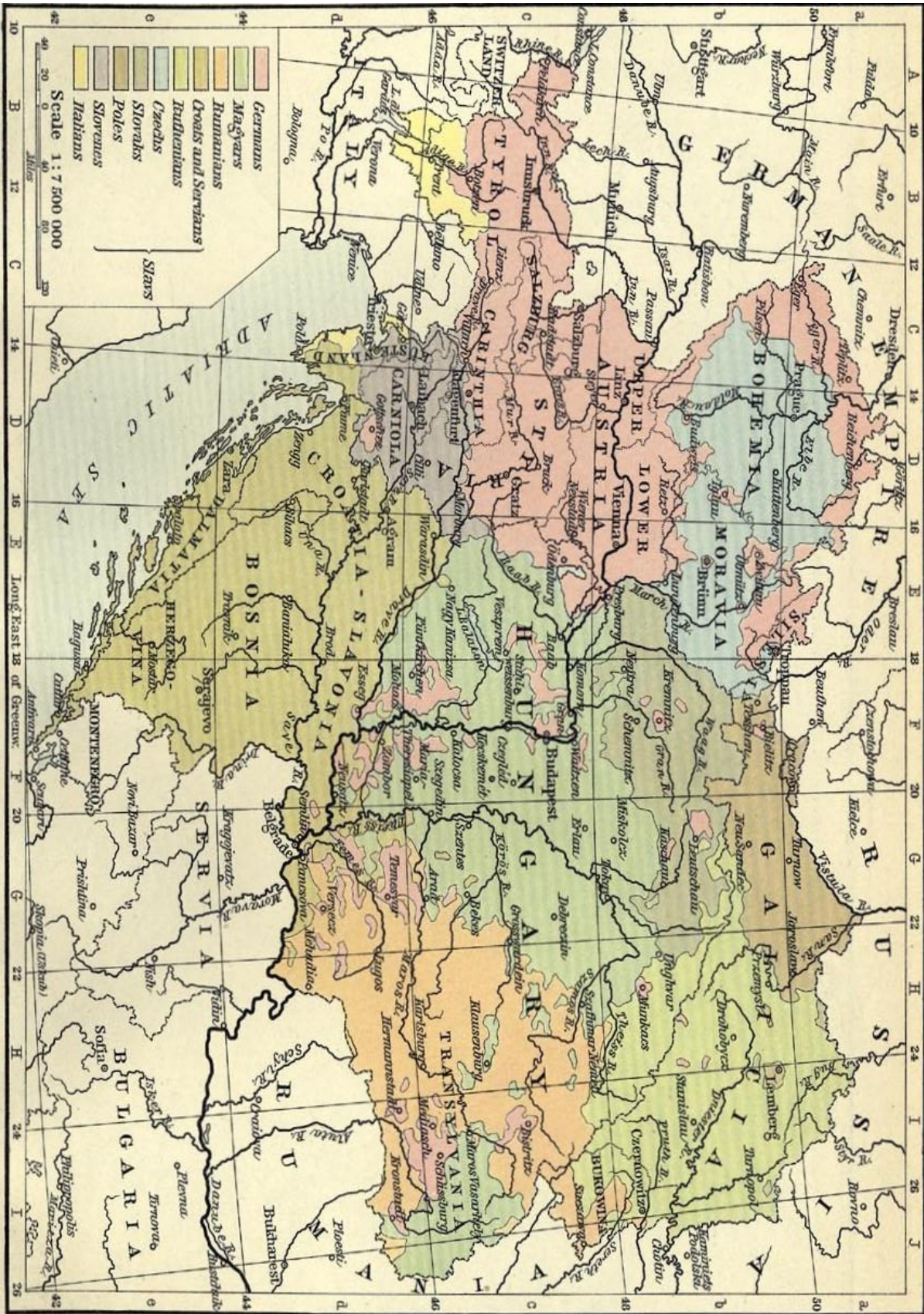


Figure 2: Ethnic composition of the Habsburg monarchy according to the 1910's census.²⁹

²⁹ William Shepherd, Historical Atlas (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1911), 168.

The national struggle in Trentino

In the decades following the 1867 Austro-Hungarian compromise, the nationalist bourgeoisies increased their effort to reinforce – or even to create – national identities across the whole Empire. Where bilingualism and multiple ‘national’ identities were widespread, this process was based on symbols, myths of origin, legendary founding fathers, and on a special attention to the language. The language, as it was happening in the rest of the continent, became the main element of national identification. Linguistic, geography and demography became ancillary sciences for nationalism, tools providing data for tracking new imagined borders, to separate what was deeply interwoven. The imperial authorities gave an involuntary but important boost to this process with the 1880 census, when for the first time the subjects were asked to indicate their mother tongue. In spite of the merely statistic reasons of the census, the output data were used by nationalists to measure the weight and the extension of their ‘nation’. Through forcing people to pick one and only one language, the census was transformed in a powerful mean to simplify the complexity of national identity. As underlined by Judson, Zahra and Cole, a relevant part of the Austro-Hungarian subjects lived what they call ‘national hermaphroditism’, in other words they considered themselves, for instance, Austro-Hungarian, Tyrolian, Italian and part of a very local community, whereas many – especially in the rural areas – were simply ‘indifferent’ to the national problem.³⁰

The case of Bohemia-Moravia is illuminating. There, two third of the inhabitants were linguistically Czech, and one third was German, but the two communities were geographically mixed, even inside villages or neighborhoods. Czech people, which were rapidly increasing its economic and politic relevance, insisted on putting Czech as the only official language, while the German proposed that every single district would be able to choose. In 1897 PM Badeni found a compromise and proposed a reform establishing that both idioms should have been official, hence every public servant should have been able to speak both languages in the next three year or they would have been fired. However, this

³⁰ On the concepts of national hermaphroditism and national indifference see Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93–119, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0037677900016715>; Laurence Cole, “Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy,” *Nationhood from Below: Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 2011, 96–119, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230355354>.

was unacceptable for German nationalist, which prosecuted a harsh parliamentary obstructionism, organized protests and violent mobs both in the hemicycle and in the streets of Prague and Vienna. Badeni was forced to resign, his decrees were withdrawn, and the problem remained unsolved.³¹

The Italian-speaking areas knew an outburst in the national struggle in the decades preceding the World War I too. In Trentino the fight was not about the official language, that was already Italian, but on the request of an administrative autonomy, an institutional separation from Innsbruck. This demand was promoted through appeals, celebrations, memorials and, overall, reform project presented – and systematically rejected – at the Innsbruck parliament. Trentine claims were not merely administrative, but they were related to important economic interests. Innsbruck was accused to do not care about the economic situation in its southern borders and it was undeniable that with the loss of Lombardy-Venetian, that for geographical and historical reasons had deep commercial links with Trentino, the region was somehow cut off from the imperial economy. Thus, the economic condition was used as a leverage to support the idea that the Germans were voluntarily damaging their Italian neighbors in a project of ethnolinguistic discrimination and substitution.

These institutional operations obviously did not create the ethnolinguistic division, but they had a strong impact in their crystallization. Saying it with Brubaker ‘By reifying groups, by treating them as substantial things-in-the-world, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs may, as Bourdieu notes, “contribute to producing what they apparently describe or designate”³². Indeed, the proactive reaction to the institutional attempts of classification was the flourishing of national organizations among the civilians, which tried to coagulate national identity not only according to the main language but also around a more general ‘national culture’ that comprised religion, visual art, literature, music, values and paid a strong attention to the local folklore. Between the 1880s and the beginning of the Great War, a great number of this association was given birth. In the case of Tyrol, the most influential were the *Deutscher Schulverein* – which existed all over the Empire, especially in Tyrol, Littoral, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, with the scope of ‘Germanizing’ the non-German

³¹ Kann, *Storia Dell'impero Asburgico (1526-1918)*, 537–41.

³² Roger Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups,” *Arch.Europ.Sociol.* XLIII, no. 2 (2002): 166.

population throughout schooling – on a side, and the *Lega Nazionale* on the other. The rise of cultural associationism is a great example of political transfer, meaning ‘the migration of political practices across national borders’³³. The development of cultural and linguistic association and national pressure groups, begun around 1880 in the very center of the empire, in Vienna, to promote German culture in the ‘endangered areas along the language frontier’³⁴. Nevertheless, in the following decade, this practice was reproduced by the more diverse ethnolinguistic groups, and it flourished all over the Habsburg possessions where local nationalities had been recognized. The rhetorical success of the *Deutscher Schulverein* was, in a broader perspective, a failure: more than spreading and promoting the German national identity from the core to the peripheries, it provided new schemes of political engagement to their ‘opponents’ which, in turn, gained louder and more compact voices for their claims. In addition, at the end of the century, this kind of associations brought the contention to a new level throughout a process of politicization which involved – even if far more in an urban context than in the countryside – spheres of the society which were absolutely non-political.³⁵ Gymnastic, sports and alpine association, books and theatre clubs, orchestras: social activities and leisure time became sphere of expression for national claims, powerful tools for cementing a sense of national identity, able to politicize every aspect of the public life. For instance, in 1907 a German sport association organized a bicycle race that in order to ‘establish the borders of the future Greater Germany’, and it caused a fight with the Italian-speaking population which involved dozens of people in a trial which, in turn, produced commotions outside the court.³⁶

The same process of politicization of the non-political is detectable in the promotion of a new ‘national’ landscape that found its zenith in the erection of national heroes’ monuments in the city centers. In 1889, the municipality of Bolzano erected a statue representing Walther von der Vogelweide – a medieval itinerant troubadour symbolizing the unity of the German world – gazing at the south, in the city’s main square. To place that

³³ Henk te Velde, “Political Transfer: An Introduction,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 12, no. 2 (2005): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480500268995>.

³⁴ Cole, “Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy,” 104.

³⁵ See Willibald Steinmetz and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, “The Political as Communicative Space in History: The Bielefeld Approach,” in *Writing Political History Today* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2013), 11–33.

³⁶ E Tonezzer, *Il Corpo, Il Confine, La Patria. Associazionismo Sportivo in Trentino (1870-1914)*, ed. Quinto Antonelli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 54–62.

statue at the center of the most southern German-speaking community of the empire had a clear meaning and it was perceived as a provocation, or even a threat, by the Italian community. This latter got even by building in Trent, the capital of Italian Tyrol, a statue of Dante Alighieri fiercely indicating the north, a bronze-made representation of the irredentist's pretenses of a unified Trentino which comprised Bolzano and the whole South Tyrol to the Brenner pass.³⁷ The bronze-made representation of these eminent example of medieval literature were transformed to the symbol of a political contraposition.

Irredentists vs loyalist

However, as I briefly mentioned before, in Trentino as elsewhere in Austria-Hungary, the struggle for national identity was mainly part of the urban culture. Even if in Tyrol all the subjects – from the major cities dwellers to the inhabitants of the most arduous mountain areas – received mandatory schooling in their mother tongue from the age of 6 to the age of 12, this was not enough to develop a common ground in relation to an entangled point such as national identification. On the one hand, the urban 'high' culture was imbued in a classical Italian heritage – as clearly showed by the Dante's monument in Trento – or was even built on an irredentist mythology directly transferred from the Italian *risorgimento*, whose promotion was led by prominent figures such as Fabio Filzi and Cesare Battisti. On the other hand, however, the peasantry and the countryside communities seemed almost indifferent towards the dilemma of national identification and affiliation.³⁸

Moreover, it would be misleading to consider every activity devoted to the promotion of Italian culture as irredentist. The irredentist ideology, indeed, was far from being majoritarian, and the support for the annexation to the Kingdom of Italy was considered an extreme position, far from the moderation of the catholic middle-class. Italian hagiographic historiography provided a Manichean picture of the Austro-Italian, where brave patriots were constantly struggling with infamous Habsburg loyalists. But irredentism is a label that is suitable only for the very 'extremist' minority which desired and projected the change of sovereignty on their lands, as it happened in 1918. This is a reason why an Italian national hero such as Cesare Battisti, when captured and convicted to

³⁷ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divoise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 31.

³⁸ Cole, "Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy," 103.

the death sentence by the Austrian military court in 1916, had been mistreated and insulted by Trento citizens: a relevant part of the population was not really interested in becoming officially Italian, and they considered the irredentists as responsible of the conflict that was ripping their lands and families.³⁹ Indeed, the irredentist movement rose in Italy and from there it spread in Trento and Trieste. There, it slowly reached the urban middle-classes, imbued of the rhetoric of *Risorgimento*, which on the one hand developed a sort of anti-Austrian feeling, but on the other hand they declined it in a moderate and more varied way. Their representatives in Innsbruck and Vienna often thought that to set up the problem on a political level could be far more fruitful. The prevalent approach was a realistic one, which demanded freedom for cultural associationism, defense of Italian schooling, economic support for patriotic society. For Trentine elites the fight against Innsbruck's centralism did not automatically corresponded to a territorial secession. For instance, this was the position of the Liberal-Nationals, leading movement at the time. The Catholics had a slightly different position, asking wider form of autonomy, but they never questioned their belonging to the House of Habsburg. Among the socialists, the national questions became the touchpoint for a collaboration with the liberals. The former, led by Cesare Battisti, supported the idea of a separate autonomy from Tyrol, which year by year increased its national connotation.

Moving out from the official political parties' positions and focusing on the average population, it seems that at the veil of the war some forms of nationalism were extended outside the intellectual elites. More vigorous examples of national 'radicalization' came from the areas in which Italian speakers had to deal with *the other* on a daily basis, such as in Trieste, but Trentino knew moment of harsh contraposition too. University students and seasonal migrants are a perfect example: they often moved from Trentino considering themselves as Tyrolian, but once passed the Brenner or even the 'Salorno line', they felt ridiculed and discriminated. When they came back home, after some months or many years, they matured a strong Italian identity shaped by a process of otherization. They discovered to be Italian because Germans called them Italians.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it is hard to have a clear

³⁹ Paolo Brogi, *Impiccateli! Le Storie Eroiche Di Cesare Battisti e Nazario Sauro a Cento Anni Dalla Morte* (Reggio Emilia: Imprimatur, 2006), sec. 15.

⁴⁰ Renato Monteleone, "Un Documento Inedito: Gli Appunti Di Giovanni Pedrotti Sull'opinione Pubblica Trentina Alla Vigilia Della 1a Guerra Mondiale," *Materiali Di Lavoro* I, no. I (1983): 27-34.

idea of the national identity in the working and agricultural classes before 1914, when a real explosion of manuscript was given birth during the war.⁴¹ According to Giovanni Pedrotti, an irredentist activist who in 1914 conducted a survey about the national question in Trentino, the inhabitants of Trento ‘think in an Italian way’ as ‘all the educated people, the artisans and many employees’, but the rural ‘poor people, uncouth and ignorant, under the influence of the priests, continue to be loyal to the government’.⁴² However, this schematic portrait seems to be euphemistically rigid and classist. In many cases the Habsburg loyalism among the peasantry also grew in contrast to the Italianism of the bourgeoisie. This juxtaposition between urban and rural, bourgeoisie and peasantry, reveals a background of cultural, political and economic contrasts. But most important, the peasantry was characterized by a widespread indifference for the national problem and an honest respect for the Imperial family and, in particular, for Franz Joseph. Regional studies shed some light on the many existing form of identification that are unrelated to the idea of nation or nation-state and that coexists in a complex twist of overlapping identities. The most probable hypothesis is that a great part of Trentine popular masses before 1914 felt, at the same time, part of the Empire, of Tyrol, of Trentino, of their valley, of their town or village, of their parish, and so on.

Nevertheless, the local community appears to be the only widely recognized category of identification. Indeed, in the early-twentieth-century rural Trentine, the division among villages was perceived so strongly by the population that Trentine folklorists considered it a real plague. Studies published by folklore magazine of that time, such as *Pro Cultura*, highlighted how every community considered itself and its village as unique, characterized by its peculiar traditions, sayings, legends, etc. Moreover, this village-based identification was often constructed in opposition to the neighboring villages, which instead were labeled with mocking nicknames.⁴³ Under this light, the use of the word *patria* [homeland] acquires a very different meaning in respect to the more common, nationalistic one. The term *patria* appears quite often in the diaries, but, with a few exceptions, it names the village and its

⁴¹ Cole, “Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy,” 98.

⁴² Monteleone, “Un Documento Inedito: Gli Appunti Di Giovanni Pedrotti Sull’opinione Pubblica Trentina Alla Vigilia Della 1a Guerra Mondiale.”

⁴³ Federico Mazzini, *Cose de Laltro Mondo. Una Cultura Di Guerra Attraverso La Scrittura Popolare Trentina 1914-1918* (Pisa: ETS, 2013), 140-145.

community.⁴⁴ For instance, Rodolfo Bolner (1887-1985), an elementary school teacher in Borgo Sacco, a little village close to Rovereto, which due to his job perfectly managed the Italian language even in its more literary high forms, uses the word *patrioti* [patriots] to define who lived in his same village.⁴⁵

The same happens in Alfonso Cazzolli's diary, who in many times uses the term *patria* to indicate his community at home, and in many other.⁴⁶ So, the identification of *patria* with the village community, the loyalty towards it and the need to find *patrioti* among the army, as it will be shown in the next chapters, probably represented the major factor of selection for group-making and network-building, both fundamental aspects in the choice between Austria-Hungary and Italy.

⁴⁴ Mazzini, 143.

⁴⁵ Rodolfo Bolner, "Il Mio Diario Di Guerra," in *Scritture Di Guerra 10 - Rodolfo Bolner, Giovanni Pederzoli, Francesco Laich*, ed. Gianluigi Fait (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 2002), 8-196.

⁴⁶ Camillo Zadra, "La Memoria Di Alfonso Cazzolli," *Materiali Di Lavoro*, no. 1-2 (1986): 174-207; Bolner, "Il Mio Diario Di Guerra"; Mazzini, *Cose de Laltro Mondo. Una Cultura Di Guerra Attraverso La Scrittura Popolare Trentina 1914-1918*, 147-50.

III - Going to war

The general mobilization in Trentino

On the 31st of July 1914 the general mobilization and the levée en masse were ordered by Franz Joseph. In a few weeks, 2.7 million men had been concentrated in military hubs, equipped, trained and sent to the war fields. From this date to the end of the war, Austria-Hungary would have called to the arms nine million subjects, almost a fifth of its total population, of which 55'000 were Austro-Italians from Trentine.⁴⁷ 26'000 men from Trentine had been mobilized in August 1914 and assigned to the four *Kaiserjäger* regiments and the three *Landeschützen* ones. These regiments were built up on a geographical base and not on an ethnolinguistic one, thus soldiers from northern and southern Tyrol as well as from Trentine were brought to fight together. Italian and Ladin speakers represented about forty percent of each regiment. Despite the skepticism of the commands towards Italians, Trentines immediately responded to the levée and neatly gathered to the main centers of their valleys and, from there, they moved towards the enlistment hubs, as it happened surprisingly almost everywhere in the Empire.⁴⁸ When the war really began, the army organization in Trent continued to flow smoothly. Military reports confirmed the good behavior of the inhabitants, even among the potentially more irredentist layers of society, and their willingness to provide help to the authorities, regardless of their legal obligations.⁴⁹ Here, Austro-Italian soldiers' diaries can provide an internal perspective of their feelings at the eve of their first war mobilization and on their mood about facing the idea of leaving everything behind and sacrificing themselves for the Empire. Among their writings there are some general patterns that, on a side, dampen the Italian irredentist narrative of a subjugated population waiting to be freed and, on the other side, contrast with the enthusiastic glorification of the war – the so-called *Augusterlebnis* or 'Spirit of 1914' – which pervaded both Italian and German elites in the very first stage of the Great War.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Alessandro Salvador, "Considerazioni Sul Rimpatrio e La Smobilitazione Dei Soldati Austro-Ungarici Di Nazionalità Italiana Nel Primo Dopoguerra (1914-1920)," *Qualestoria*, no. 1-2 (2014): 59.

⁴⁸ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divoise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 55.

⁴⁹ Gerd Pircher, *Militari, Amministrazione e Politica in Tirolo Durante La Prima Guerra Mondiale* (Trento: Società Studi Trentini, 2005), 18–20.

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Becker, "Willingly to War. Public Response to the Outbreak of War," 1914-1918 Online, 2017, <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918->

According to the examined diaries, not a single soldier with rural background expressed happiness nor even fascination for the forthcoming conflict. Almost every memorial starts with the writer describing what he was doing when the news arrived: 'we were coming back from the fields...', 'we were coming down from the pastures...', 'I was closing the workshop...', 'I was having dinner with my family...', and so on. The reaction to the levée is never described as an individual one, but it always encompasses a group: firstly, the family. Then, the village as a community.⁵¹ These were the groups in which Trentine rural population identified themselves with, and breaking these relations was a shocking experience. Therefore, the most common reactions they put on paper were dismay, fear and uncertainty for the future, together with a deep sense of desperation due to the forced separation from their families and communities. 'It was a night of anguish and tears' commented Giuseppe Lunelli, a young stonecutter from Villamontagna, 'and the tavern was full of people screaming and crying as they were out of their minds'⁵² Rodolfo Bolner, described the reaction to the general mobilization as 'an enormous sense of consternation' which caused sobs among the poor wives, murmured chatting among the elderlies, and some imprecation among the adults'⁵³. Mario Raffaelli, a construction worker from Volano, provided an even more dramatic account of the departure: 'once we got in the train, everyone just wished a fast return [home], some were crying, some others were screaming, some were stunned by such a scary thing [the war].'⁵⁴ While observing the conscripts which decorated their helmets with flowers as it was (and still is) tradition in Trentine valleys, an anonymous bitterly commented: 'They are already wearing the deceased's flowers; we will never see them again'.⁵⁵ So, desperation, fear and resignation seem to have been the most common feelings, and the elaboration of them involved the entire community and followed a general rituality: a night of binging at the tavern, a few hours' sleep and a last meeting at the parish, where the priest blessed the conscripts and the entire community bade them

online.net/article/willingly_to_war_public_response_to_the_outbreak_of_war; Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 21.

⁵¹ Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 46.

⁵² Antonelli, 47.

⁵³ Bolner, "Il Mio Diario Di Guerra," 12.

⁵⁴ Mario Raffaelli, "Piccola Descrizione Della Vita Di Raffaelli Mario," in Riccardo Malesarti, Giuseppe Masera, Rosina Fedrozzi Masera, Evaristo Masera, Mario Raffaelli, ed. Gianluigi Fait (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 1994), 160.

⁵⁵ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 59.

farewell. Finally, in the early morning, the conscripts started their trip to the closest gathering point.

However, as mentioned above, despite the dreadful atmosphere the process of mobilization flew in a ordered and peaceful way and Trentine people, although scared and sorrowful, got on the trains towards the Russian borders, split between fear and sense of obligation: 'Love and sense of duty were contrasting one each other' – wrote Giacomo Sommovilla – '[...] The first one was suggesting me to not leave [...] but if I had obeyed to it, I would have faced serious troubles'.⁵⁶ A slightly different perspective is offered by Ermete Bonapace, the only Trentine soldier who 'emancipated' himself from the rural community among the examined diaries and memorials. Born in Mezzolombardo, a village on the border between Trentino and Sud Tyrol, that he left to study sculpture at the Art Academy in Rome. There, he developed a sort of more national sense of belonging, but he was certainly not a nationalist, nor a committed irredentist. Indeed, since he was a student in Rome, he could have easily avoided the mobilization, but never mentions the idea of deserting for some sense of loyalty to Italy nor to join the army because of some Austro-Hungarian identity. What really led Ermete Bonapace's decision was fear. On the one hand, he was scared about war, on the other, he feared his family could be persecuted by Austrian military police and, overall, he feared dishonor. Though, his lines suggest he was influenced by the futurist fascination for modernity, machines and war and this cultural background was crucial for the decision of joining the imperial army, together with strong sense of belonging and identification he had with his fellow countrymen and brothers:

In my village they are called to the arms until forty-two years old, two of my brothers among them, should I remain a cold spectator of this tragedy? I was renouncing to move to Austria just because I was scared of dying. I saw myself filthy of cowardice. If every man should have pass through the storm, it seemed ungenerous to exempt myself, me, an artist who needs

⁵⁶ Giacomo Sommovilla, "Libro Di Guerra Di Giacomo Sommovilla," in *Scritture Di Guerra 6 - Simone Chiochetti, Vigilio Iellico, Giacomo Sommovilla, Albino Soratroi*, ed. Luciana Palla (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 1997), 135.

emotions in life, and after all a battle fought with modern instruments must be really interesting [...] ⁵⁷

Languages and national identity in the army

Throughout the analysis of the first chapters of diaries and memorials, and through a crossed comparison with other sources, it is possible to affirm with a good degree of certainty that independently from their personal feelings and identity, with the exception of a few extremists who escaped to Italy, Trentine people responded to the levée with order and discipline. It seems that most of them lacked of a strong national identification, while they did have a strong sense of belonging towards their local communities. However, they considered military service as a non-negotiable duty. Although the respectful obedience to the Empire and its army demonstrated by Trentine population, both in the cities and in the valleys, Austrian military authorities responded with increasing suspicion towards them and the other “unreliable” minorities, and this caused an increasing hostility towards Austrians that began to grow, seriously affecting their loyalty and commitment, since it was their very first experience in the army. As we will see in the next paragraphs, the humiliation Trentine soldiers experienced in the first months of war played a relevant role in shaping their new identity.⁵⁸

On the governmental side, the signs of mistrust towards civilians, and in particular the minorities, were translated into dictatorial measures at the very beginning of the conflict. Between the 25th of July and the 1st of August, Franz Ferdinand signed more than thirty decrees suspending civil rights – freedom of press and speech, of association, inviolability of the household - and stopped the central and local parliamentary activity across the whole Austro-Hungarian territory. Moreover, martial laws were applied on civilians accused of political crimes.⁵⁹ This lack of

⁵⁷ Ermete Bonapace, “Diario Di Un Irredento Trentino Nell’esercito Austriaco e Prigioniero in Russia. 1914-1916 - I Parte,” *Bollettino Del Museo Trentino Del Risorgimento* 11, no. 1 (1960): 18; in Simone Attilio Bellezza, “Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920),” 2016, 31.

⁵⁸ Bellezza, “Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920),” 2016, 34.

⁵⁹ Pircher, *Militari, Amministrazione e Politica in Tirolo Durante La Prima Guerra Mondiale*, 100-105.

confidence towards on the Empire's minorities that characterized Vienna's and Budapest's political elites was even harsher among the military ranks, and Italian speaking soldiers immediately perceived the content of their German or Hungarian officials. Once enlisted, Habsburg privates spent a training period during which they were assigned to companies, battalions and regiments. At that moment, the linguistic problem became a major one: even when a battalion was exclusively composed by Italians, the high-ranking were all Austrian or in some cases even Magyar.⁶⁰ According to the imperial laws, officials were asked to be familiar with the 'regimental language', meaning the language spoken by the majority of the regiment's privates, but the truth is that this did not happen.

	Total population % (1) ⁶¹	Army % (2) ⁶²	
German	23,9	76,1	<i>Table 3: National representation in the</i>
Hungarian	20	10	
Czech	12,6	5,2	
Italians	2	0,7	
Others	41	8	

Habsurg Empire (1) and among army's officials (2).

At the beginning, this situation did not cause resentments amongst Italians, but a sense of estrangement and confusion. Valentino Maestranzi, a twenty-four year-old artisan from Val Rendena with a migratory background in Great Britain, was enlisted for the mandatory military service one year before the war. His account testifies how, in peacetime, he had had the same linguistic problems. However, according to him, German officials were

⁶⁰ Lawrence Sondhaus, *In the Service of the Emperor : Italians in the Austrian Armed Forces, 1814-1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 104.

⁶¹ Kann, *Storia Dell'impero Asburgico (1526-1918)*, 725-29.

⁶² Manfred Rauchsteiner, *No Der Erste Weltkrieg Und Das Ende Der Habsburgmonarchie 1914-1918* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), 57 quoted in Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 50.

willing to help the non-Germans to learn the commands.⁶³ But in wartime the situation was dramatically different. The officials were more rushed and brutal towards who lacked understanding: 'This evening an official with a gun wanted to kill me because I did not understand his command' wrote down Giorgio Bugna, an elementary school teacher from Bersone, whose opinion is particularly valuable since he presented himself as a very pro Habsburg.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, it important to note that in many cases Italian speaking officials, wishful to demonstrate their integrity, were totally aligned with their German peers.⁶⁵ At the same time, whereas the communication between privates and officials was dominated by Germans and Hungarians, the army officially recognized eleven nationalities and in many cases units composed by people speaking the same mother tongue rapidly became national units singing their national hymns and exhibiting their national flags.⁶⁶ This dual condition - a multinational army in which privates were organized on ethnolinguistic schemes but officials punished national peculiarities - created a constant tension between the lower and the higher ranks and strongly encouraged a process of language-centered group-making among the troops.⁶⁷ In this sense, it is very significant that in January 1915 the *Armeeoberkommando* - the Army Higher Command - sent an official communication exhorting the eastern front officials to make an effort in order to lift the Italians' spirit and to take into account their national peculiarities.⁶⁸ Indeed, according to the diaries, the most shocking aspect of military training was the physical and psychological harassment perpetuated by the high-ranks, which was intensified by the feeling of being mistreated only because of their language. In addition, although Italian officials did not behave differently than their Austrian or Magyar peers, the former were a very little minority and they were not perceived as a different category. So, "the official" was immediately related to "the German". Whether it would be hard to find any real sense belonging to Italy in their complains, which were often anti-German but never not pro-Italy, Trentine soldiers soon

⁶³ Valentino Maestranzi, "La Mia Autobiografia," in *Scritture Di Guerra 8 - Guerrino Botteri, Vigilio Caola, Giovanni Lorenzetti, Valentino Maestranzi, Giuseppe Scarazzini*, ed. Quinto Antonelli, Manuela Broz, and Giorgia Pontalti (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 1998), 156.

⁶⁴ Bellezza, "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 37.

⁶⁵ Simone Attilio Bellezza, "From National Indifference to National Commitment and Back. The Case of the Trentine POWS in Russia during the First World War," in *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe*, ed. Maarten van Ginderachter and Jon Fox (London: Routledge, 2019), 39.

⁶⁶ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 50.

⁶⁷ Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," 170.

⁶⁸ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 66.

otherize the officials and created a juxtaposition between “us” – the troops – and “them” – the officials. This polarization will be, in the following years, a crucial aspect in the choice between Vienna and Rome.

On the Galician battlefields

The overwhelming majority of austro-Italian soldiers were sent to the eastern front in Galicia by the Austrian military command. Galicia was the biggest, most populated and remote region of the Empire. Imperial geography was taught in local schools, but it was centered on the exaltation of the size and variety of the Empire more than on its single components. So, Trentine people did not know anything about this area, which was perceived as a *finis terrae*. A day before leaving the training camp, Giacomo Sommovilla clearly expressed his annoyance of being forcibly sent to fight a mysterious war in a totally mysterious land: ‘[Tomorrow] we will go, but where? To a country that no one knows, of which no one could describe its climate nor its soil, nor costumes, temperature or temperament of its inhabitants. Moreover, no one could speak the local language’⁶⁹. When, after long days of being packed into cold and uncomfortable wagons trying to enjoy the landscape throughout the windows, the region and its inhabitants left them quite embittered. Galicia was astonishingly poor and underdeveloped. Its economy was based on such a meagre agriculture that it provoked a mix of piety and disgust even among Trentine peasants who also grew in a poor and relatively underdeveloped agrarian society. ‘Everything is mud, mud, mud! [...] Even people seem to be made of mud here!’ wrote Guerrino Botteri to his wife. Angelo Paoli was even harsher: ‘[...] in some houses they had kitchen, sleeping room and shed all together, people were like bears, very ignorant people and they lacked of any urban development’.⁷⁰ The most accurate description is provided by Giovanni Pederzolli, who emphasized the comparison between Galician people and animals: ‘[...] In the last room there was a woman, still young, probably around thirty years old, but with such a dirty face she looked more like a beast than a woman. In a corner, on the floor, some kids were sleeping all together, like sheep. Hens, ducks and geese populated the backside of this home-shed. In a corner there was even a grunting pig. An atrocious and nauseating stink almost took my breath away. [...] Women here are half

⁶⁹ Sommovilla, “Libro Di Guerra Di Giacomo Sommovilla.”

⁷⁰ Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 57.

naked, full of rags, dirty and barefoot; [...] and the children look more like monkeys than God's creatures. Naked like when they were born, dirty of an indecipherable color, [they are] finally a shame⁷¹.

Military operations on the eastern front started at the end of August 1914. In the first weeks, the *kaiserliche und königliche Armee* won a number of consecutive battles, broke down the enemy lines and penetrated Volinia. However, a strong Russian counterattack, together with glaring tactical mistakes, forced the Austrian army to a precipitous withdrawal towards Przemyśl, beyond San river and some eighty kilometers far from Lviv, Galicia's capital city.⁷² At the end of 1914, after five months of warfare, Austro-Hungary had almost entirely lost Galicia and Bucovina and nearly 85,000 of its soldiers fell in Russian hands. Among them, around 26,000 were Austro-Italians and at least half of them were people from Trentine.⁷³ Even though for many of the protagonists of this research the involvement in combat only lasted a few months, or even only a few days for some of them, their first-hand experience with the tremendous violence of the battlefields was dreadful and it scarred them for the following years. In their writings, Trentine soldiers generally avoid describing many details of the fights they participated, or as Federico Mazzini demonstrated, they tended to describe first-hand violence as a moment of craziness, and often focus on the pitiless violence committed by their army fellows.⁷⁴ During the withdrawal, the fear of traitors and spies made Austrian officials very suspicious and cruel, both on the army's 'unreliable minorities' and on civilians. Violence towards the civil population was a strong matter of concern among Trentine soldiers. This is especially true after 1915, when Trentino became a battlefield too, and they could not avoid the parallel between the inhabitants of Galicia and their families at home. The diaries account a number of episodes of mass hangings, executions, rapes and fires, commented with deep scorn and sadness. Simone Attilio Bellezza reported two passages that are extraordinarily significant

⁷¹ Giovanni Pederzoli, "Ricordo Della Guerra Mondiale," in *Scritture Di Guerra 10 - Rodolfo Bolner, Giovanni Pederzoli, Francesco Laich*, ed. Gianluigi Fait (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 2002), 205-6.

⁷² Di Michele, *Tra Due Divoise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, sec. 73.

⁷³ Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 155.

⁷⁴ Mazzini, *Cose de Laltro Mondo. Una Cultura Di Guerra Attraverso La Scrittura Popolare Trentina 1914-1918*, 180-88. For the reaction to war violence among soldiers' writings see also Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, "Vers Une Histoire Culturelle de La Première Guerre Mondiale," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 41 (June 8, 1994): 5-7,.

for a better understanding of the shock and of its direct consequences in terms of loyalty to the army. The first one is taken from Alfredo Cazzolli's diary, written during his imprisonment in Russia. The second one, instead, comes from the post-war memoir of Ermanno Guarnieri, a miner from San Bernardo Rabbi:

[In] Bucovina I saw various barbarities against humankind, villages and cities burnt down, men hanging from plants, strangled, women brutalized, young girls raped, martyred and at the end, once tied a rope to each foot, hanged upside-down to a branch, with the legs as wide open as possible, in the streets one could find dead babies o in agony, these were the barbarity of Magyars and of Russians too.⁷⁵

On every step one could find the crystal-clear prof of the heinous ferocity [of the Austrian officials]. One could see bodies of these poor local inhabitants hanging from trees everywhere. A simple suspect was enough to convict them to the noose... Will so many crimes remain unpunished? Go, go, decrepit empire, your last hour just rang.⁷⁶

Even though rhetoric and timing of the second extract show Guarnieri's anti-Austrian feelings, his description is not far from many others. The brutality against Russian soldiers were somehow accepted by the troops as a non-negotiable part of a war, but these kinds of groundless violence was not acceptable for many of them and it dramatically increased the resentment towards Habsburg officials as did the will to back out of the conflict. Consequently, Trentine soldiers often fell into Russian hands, contributing to reinforce the idea of 'unreliable minorities' among Austrian the high-ranks and, thus, worsened the relations among officials and privates, encouraging the latter to voluntarily surrender to the enemy.⁷⁷ Another example of the mistreatment Italians – and of other minorities such as the Bohemians – had to suffer, is provided by Giacomo Sommavilla who, during a long nocturnal forced march, lost his last energies and fell exhausted. Instead of receiving some help, he was surrounded by a group of officials mocking and insulting him with the most 'indecent epithets' that made him 'cry for anger and scorn'.⁷⁸ As mentioned in the previous paragraph, even if Sommavilla was not properly an *austriacante*, he joined the army also for

⁷⁵ Camillo Zadra, "La Memoria Di Alfonso Cazzolli," *Materiali Di Lavoro*, no. 1-2 (1986): 193 cited in Bellezza, "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 41.

⁷⁶ Guarnieri Ermanno, "Avventure di un Trentino durante la guerra mondiale 1914-1918": 46-47 cited in Bellezza, "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 42.

⁷⁷ Bellezza, 72.

⁷⁸ Sommavilla, "Libro Di Guerra Di Giacomo Sommavilla," 138-41.

sense of loyalty towards the dynasty – Somnavilla defines his participation to the war as a 'holy duty'⁷⁹ – as many of his comrades did. Mistreatments, lack of confidence and discriminations on ethnolinguistic bases had a particularly detrimental effect on the thousands of Trentines who felt to have sacrificed themselves in order to accomplish their duties as loyal Austro-Hungarian subjects. Whether military service has long been recognized as a crucial aspect for the development of a national consciousness, for some Austro-Italians, the months spent under the Habsburg's army officials had been enough to erase the little sense of belonging they previously had. If in the case of Kingdom of Italy 'the experience of wartime military service, rather than the objectives of the conflict, could in fact serve to help make Italians'⁸⁰ and a similar process has been widely acknowledged for late eighteenth century and early twentieth century France, in the case of Austria-Hungary the warfare experience enhanced the distancing between the Empire and its minorities.⁸¹

Falling into enemy's hands

In the totality of the examined sources, the moment of surrender, independently from the reasons which brought to that, is described as a moment of deep self-reflection. Indeed, even when being captured was the result of a voluntary desertion, it represented a crucial break in the soldier's experience. First of all, the act of surrendering questions the core features of being a soldier: loyalty to the army and ability to fight. Secondly, but not less important, being a prisoner of war meant to put an end to the active participation in the conflict. Trentine soldiers' diaries offer a various range of circumstances in which the protagonist, or some of his comrades, had fallen in Russian hands. Nonetheless, contrarily to the accusation moved by the Habsburg army's high ranks or the idea of patriotic mass desertions promoted by post-World War I Italian historiography, it is not possible to say

⁷⁹ Somnavilla, 137.

⁸⁰ Vanda Wilcox, "Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity during the First World War," *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 3, no. 2 (2011): 291.

⁸¹ For late eighteenth century and World War I period France see Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976), 292–302; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War 1914-1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France During the First World War* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 180–83.

that Trentines were systematically surrendering to the enemy as, for instance, Czech soldiers did with the purpose of weakening Austria-Hungary.⁸²

As mentioned above, by reading the diaries it becomes clear that Trentines were captured in various different circumstances and for disparate reasons. There is who surrendered only at the end of a months-long siege, who did because his company finished the ammunitions or because his rifle stopped working, who got lost and found himself surrounded by enemies, who surrendered during a battle in order to save his own life, who had been wounded and simply woke up after being operated in Russian field hospitals and also who, after weeks spent praying the Virgin Mary to be captured as soon as possible, escaped from the camp to join the enemy's line.⁸³ Even among these latter, no one justified the surrender as a decision moved by patriotism or anti-Austrianism.⁸⁴ By far, the more widespread explanation is exhaustion of being in war and its consequences: lack of food and sleep, officials' mistreatments and the general atmosphere of violence and death in which they had to live for several weeks or months. Indeed, the comments on the first hours as prisoners of war, independently of the author's background and view of life, are quite homogeneous in focusing on the first peaceful sleep, on the first decent meals they were experiencing after a long time of deprivations and on the unexpected good treatment they received from Russian soldiers and civilians.⁸⁵ Battista Chiocchetti, a young Ladin-speaking carpenter from Moena captured on the 22 October 1914, after having described in detail how and why his company had been surrounded and captured, accounts the first hours spent in Russian hands:

[...] We were surrounded by some Russian soldiers and we had to drop rifle, backpack and haversack [...] and driven by a Russian soldier we ran away towards the enemy camp, since the place [where they were] was dangerous. We stopped for a few minutes close to some houses where we could drink fresh water [...] then they brought us to the

⁸² On the 27 May 1915, for instance, the entire 36th Austro-Hungarian regiment managed to pass on the enemy's side. See Ladislav Hladký, "Czech Soldiers during the Great War (1914-1918)," *Tokovi Istorije*, no. 3 (2016): 71-85; Marina Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell'esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)* (Trieste: Mursia, 1997), 37.

⁸³ Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 155.

⁸⁴ Bellezza, "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 42-45.

⁸⁵ Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell'esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*, 1997, 87-91.

Russian camp where several soldiers were resting laid on the ground, and they welcomed us with good manners, one of them actually gave me his portion of meat [...] Once we met the mobile kitchens they gave us some hot soup and Russian soldiers borrowed us their spoons [...] Then, walking in the countryside we got to the main road, where there was a great movement of soldiers and a lot of camps, and they often let us have some rest [...] Encircled by horse-riding Kozaks armed with sabers and spears, we left and walked through the darkness until midnight, when we found some houses [...] and *for the first time we could have a quite peaceful night of sleep.*⁸⁶

Imprisonment was generally perceived as the only available alternative to the suffering of war. Whether spontaneous desertion was not commonly put in practice, it was a very common topic of debate among Trentine soldiers. They were often discussing the possibility of leaving their camps during the night, pondering which the most dangerous risk was: to be discovered by their officials, that meant get immediately executed, or to be arrested by the Kozaks, which Austrian propaganda described as blood-thirsty savages. In any case, it is crucial to notice that while surrendering to the enemy was often a forced choice, deserting was usually a group decision made among *patrioti o compaesani*, that did not mean simply among Italians, but among people coming from the same village or valley community. Indeed, both on battlefields and in prisoners of war camps, the village community was by far the most relevant category of identification and the main factor of group making. But, since the end of May 1915, another factor intervened and complicated the question of national identification: the Italian declaration of war to Austria-Hungary.

⁸⁶ Battista Chiocchetti, *Memorie Della Guerra Austro-Russa 1914*, ed. Mario Gallarati and Claudio Boselli, II (Vigo di Fassa: Istitut Cultural Ladin CUEM, 2002), 48–50. Italics are mine.

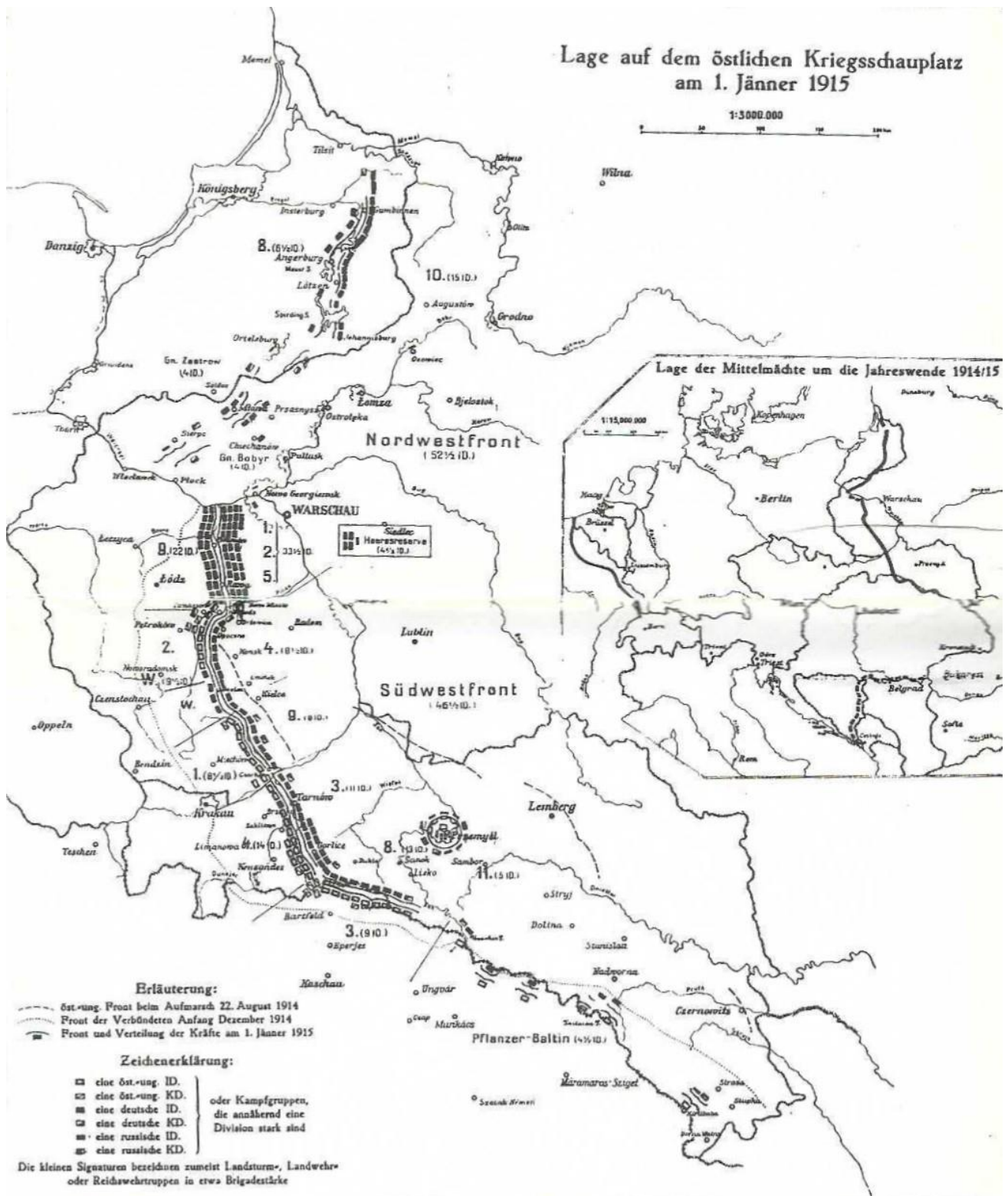


Figure 3: Galician battlefront in January 1915⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell'esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*, 1997, 16-17.

IV - Captivity

Russian nationalistic policy

When, on the 24 May 1915, Italy left the Triple Alliance and officially entered the war against Austro-Hungary with the explicit aim of conquering ‘the sacred limits that Nature established as borders of our homeland’, the Czarist Empire had already secretly rose the issue of Austro-Italian war prisoners to the Italian government. Since the beginning of the war, Moscow demonstrated to be very interested in taking advantage of prisoners in order to enhance conflicts and desertions among the opponent’s army.⁸⁸ This policy became official in October 1914, when the Russian government promulgated a legislation regarding the treatment of war prisoners. Even before these laws were officially adopted, Russian Supreme Command informed every military district about the new regulations regarding Austro-Hungarian prisoners: Slovaks, Galicians, Czechs, Serbs, and Poles had to be sent to Siberia, where they lived separately from Germans and Magyars, and received better living and working conditions. Italian speaking prisoners, instead, were offered to the Kingdom of Italy, together with a diplomatic support for the annexation of Trento and Trieste. On the 23 October 1914 Anatoly Nikolaevič Krupensky (1850-1923), Russian ambassador in Rome, communicated to Italian prime minister Antonio Salandra (1853-1931) that his country was ready to liberate Austro-Italian prisoners.⁸⁹ In order to make this offer public, and to fire up the interventionist lobbies, Krupensky repeated the same offer in some interviews released to major Italian newspapers such as *Il Messaggero* and *Corriere della Sera*, clearly stating that ‘most important meaning of the Czar’s offer’ was ‘the Russian official acknowledgment’ of the Kingdom of Italy’s sovereignty on Austro-Hungarian’s lands from where their ‘nationally Italian prisoner of war’ were coming from belonged to Italy.⁹⁰ The Italian government, theoretically still tied to the Triple Alliance with Austro-Hungary and

⁸⁸ Passage from the official proclamation sent by King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy to the troops, 25 May 1914. Retrieved from: <https://archivioirredentista.wordpress.com/2017/05/23/il-documento-della-dichiarazione-di-guerra-del-regno-ditalia-allimpero-austro-ungarico-vienna-23-maggio-1915/>. Accessed on 08.06.2020.

⁸⁹ Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell’esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*, 1997, 44–45.

⁹⁰ “La Russia Restituisce All’Italia Gl’irredenti Fatti Prigionieri in Galizia Se Il Governo s’impegna a Non Rinviarli in Austria,” *Il Messaggero*, 24.10.1914: 2; “La Russia Riconosce Come Italiane Le Terre Abitate Da Italiani in Austria (Nostro Colloquio Con l’ambasciatore Krupenski),” *Corriere Della Sera*, 25.10.1914: 2.

Germany, was very embarrassed. On the one hand the Russian support for Italian territorial claims was appealing, on the other hand it would have represented the definitive break up with the allies and, very likely, entering the war. Salandra was really upset about Krupensky's manners, who wanted to put Italians 'back to the wall and oblige us to make a decision that we did not want to make or express'.⁹¹ However, Krupensky's venture achieved its goal of exciting the interventionist public opinion. On the 24th of October 1914 a small but tenacious crowd of Trentine expatriates organized a celebration in front of the Russian consulate in Milan.⁹² During the following days intellectuals, city majors and a great number of associations intervened in the debate asking the government to accept the Russian offer.⁹³ Nevertheless, after a few fermenting weeks, the argument fell into oblivion and Krupensky's proposal remained stuck to a dead-end until the Italian intervention in World War I, when Salandra government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs started to plan a route to bring back Austro-Italian prisoners of war through the Balkans.⁹⁴ Notwithstanding the lack of agreement between Rome and Moscow, since September 1914 the prisoners of war were involved into the Russian Central Prisoners Office's policy of national-linguistic division and, since their arrival in the sorting centers of Penza and Darnytsia they were asked to declare their nationality and, according to that, they were forwarded to different war camps spread through the enormous Czarist possessions.⁹⁵ Each prisoner was provided with a cardboard, whose color represented the rank within the army and the national affiliation. Theoretically, German and Austrians were sent to remote areas in Siberia and Turkestan, while Slavs remained in European Russia, where they theoretically should have had better life conditions.⁹⁶ However, especially in the first months of war, this national-based system of identification and distribution was still far from being efficient and, until December 1914 at least, many Italians were sent to Central Asia and Siberia without even passing through Penza or Darnytsia. Among them there was Annibale

⁹¹ Antonio Salandra, *La Neutralità Italiana (1914). Ricordi e Pensieri* (Milano: Mondadori, 1928), 390.

⁹² "Una Dimostrazione Dei Trentini Al Consolato Di Russia," *Corriere Della Sera*, 25.10.1914: 5.

⁹³ See *Corriere della Sera*, 26.10.1914: 2; *Corriere della Sera*, 27.10.1914: 2.

⁹⁴ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divoise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 98.

⁹⁵ Penza is a major railway hub located on the Sura river, about 625 kilometers southeast of Moscow. Darnytsia is nowadays an urban district of Kiev, Ukraine's capital city, situated on Dnepr river's left bank.

⁹⁶ This is because officials received a far better treatment than privates. While the latter were sent to quite inhuman concentration camps and obliged to forced labor, the former received a proper housing and a decent salary in accordance to their rank. See Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell'esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*, 1997, 26-30.

Molignoni, a young Trentine student from Rabbi who wrote a very nationalistic pro-Italian memorial in 1920 which clearly resumes the linguistic division among the prisoners:

Czechs, Poles, Rutenians, and Slavs in general were closer to Russians, who treated them with more respect and consideration. We, poor Italians, stood aside, both because we did not understand the language and because Italy was neutral and there were very contradictory rumors about its attitude. An abyss divided us from German and Hungarians [...] while Russians and Slavs were looking at us with more suspicion than sympathy. [...] All of that just because we did not have a homeland!⁹⁷

This passage, even if is clearly influenced by the strong patriotic attitude of its writer, shows a number of crucial points to understand the limbo situation lived by Austro-Italians prisoners of war. Firstly, as confirmed by other – less patriotic – sources, prisoners of war tended to spontaneously group themselves by nationality or spoken language, regardless of Russian bureaucracy.⁹⁸ It is very interesting to note that whereas private soldiers “naturally” gathered on a linguistic base, some Austro-Italian officials had a very different idea of “nationality” and they officially complained to the Italian ambassador that Slavs from Istria and Dalmatia were grouped with other Slavs despite being Italians, independently of their language, since their lands should have belonged to the Kingdom of Italy.⁹⁹ Secondly, the Italian government’s ambiguity caused daily problems to Austro-Italian prisoners, putting them in an unclear situation which convicted them to general suspicion. Their Austrian and Hungarian comrades already considered them as potential traitors, Slavic nationalists were skeptical about their national identity and Russians considered them as an instrument to drag Italy on their side. However, despite the official rule, Molignoni and many other Austro-Italians, together with Austrians and Germans, were sent in northern Russia, Central Asia and Siberia as forced laborers.

The descriptions of Darnytsia, the main sorting camp for prisoners coming from the southern front, depict total disorganization among Russian authorities and dreadful living

⁹⁷ Annibale Molignoni, *Trentini Prigionieri in Russia: Agosto 1914 - Settembre 1916* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1920), 19.

⁹⁸ Guido Biasi, who did not demonstrate any nationalistic tendency, wrote that ‘Spontaneously, as if they followed an instinctive racial call, every nationality formed a separated group and occupied a different sector [...] The meeting between people coming from the same places and talking the same language created demonstrations of comradeship and solidarity: it seemed to have found a family and a strip of the far homeland’ Bellezza, “Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920),” 2016, 57.

⁹⁹ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d’Austria*, 96.

conditions.¹⁰⁰ Until the end of Autumn 1915, the camp had almost no barracks, but it was nothing more than a forest surrounded by a high fence inhabited by thousands of men sleeping in the open air.¹⁰¹ The lines for food were so long that prisoners often spent their entire day just standing and waiting for a cup of cabbage soup. The sanitary conditions were so bad that dozens of people were dying every night because of the extreme cold, and, overall, because typhus fever and cholera epidemics. Moreover, the overpopulation was unbearable. According to Guido Biasi, who visited Darnytsia in summer 1916, testifies that not less than 30,000 people were entering the camp every single day.¹⁰² In September 1915, Sebastiano Leonardi (?-1965) defined the camp as a 'cemetery for living people', and almost two years later, when he returned to Darnytsia in April 1917, living conditions were not really improved.¹⁰³ Luckily, Darnytsia and Penza were just a relatively brief stop before sending the prisoners to destinations spread all over the Empire. These destinations varied in many aspects: people were transferred in European Russia, in the Urals, in Turkestan and in Siberia. Some were used as forced labor and some did not. Some were hosted by peasant families, some by aristocratic landowners, while some others were stuck in prison camps without the chance of going out and find a job. The luckiest and most dynamic, as Battista Chiocchetti and his friends, earned enough money to even rent an entire house for themselves, to eat meat and white bread and to buy new decent clothes.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, from summer 1915 onwards, rumors and confused proposals about the Italian entry into the war and the consequent possibility of "becoming" Italian and being brought home by Italian authorities, reached Austro-Italian prisoners regardless their geographical location or their conditions of living. While the reactions to the opening of a new front in Trentino were dominated by fear and concern for the families at home without any word of support by the opponents - with the exception of some enthusiastic officials and irredentist such as Giuseppe De Manincor and Annibale Molignoni¹⁰⁵ - the latter put almost everyone in front of a complex dilemma: which nationality was offering the best conditions for them and for

¹⁰⁰ Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell'esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*, 1997, 99-111.

¹⁰¹ Bellezza, "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 56.

¹⁰² Bellezza, 57.

¹⁰³ Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 159.

¹⁰⁴ Chiocchetti, *Memorie Della Guerra Austro-Russa 1914*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Bellezza, "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 90-91.

their families?¹⁰⁶ In 1915, just a few prisoners, mainly officials, perceived this choice as a matter of national identity. For the vast majority, it was simply a matter of survival.



Figure 4: Major Russian camps hosting Austro-Italian POW¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Chiochetti, *Memorie Della Guerra Austro-Russa 1914*, 76–78; Pederzoli, “Ricordo Della Guerra Mondiale,” 204; Bolner, “Il Mio Diario Di Guerra,” 115.

¹⁰⁷ Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell’esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*, 1997, 130–31.

Austria or Italy?

After the Italian declaration of war, irredentists once again raised the issue of Austro-Italian soldiers imprisoned in Russia. Those prisoners became a political problem, as Rome officially declared that Trento and Trieste belonged to the Kingdom of Italy, the irredentists expected Salandra's government to protect its unredeemed sons and take significant diplomatic initiative to bring them back to their homeland. Thus, within a short time after the declaration, a decision about Austro-Italian prisoners was taken.¹⁰⁸ The first step was to order the Italian embassy in Saint Petersburg to organize a mission to the Kirsanov prisoners of war camp, to observe the camp's situation, to inspect the Austro-Italians living conditions and moral, and to arrange all the needed agreements to repatriate them. The Czarist government offered 6,000 prisoners coming from the "unredeemed lands" which were already gathered in Kirsanov, but the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidney Sonnino (1847-1922) had already decided to decline the Russian proposal and tried to repatriate a much smaller number of prisoners. Whereas this decision was publicly justified with practical problems for such an ambitious rescue operation, the epistolary exchange between Sonnino and Andrea Carlotti, Italian ambassador in Saint Petersburg, reveals the real reasons of that choice. Rome was terribly scared of introducing a fifth column in the core of its national territory and opted for a strict selection. Only who declared to be available to enroll in the Italian army could have been brought back to Italy. Contrarily to the expectations created by the Italian nationalist propaganda that described soldiers from Trentino and Venezia-Giulia as a homogeneous group of patriots forced to enroll in the Austro-Hungarian army and excitedly waiting to be brought to their real homeland, just a few prisoners – many officials and some privates, agreed. But the vast majority 'largely made up of peasants' preferred to avoid military service.¹⁰⁹ So, initially, only a few hundred officials were allowed to go to Italy and Sonnino asked to be informed in detail about their feelings about the nation.¹¹⁰ Soldiers' unavailability to participate to war, that was also consistent with the 1907 Hague agreement on prisoners of war, emerges

¹⁰⁸ Alessandro Salvador, "Italian-Speaking Austrian POWs in Russia and the Italian Involvement in the Siberian Intervention 1918–1920," in *Re-Visiting World War I*, ed. Jarosław Suchoples and Stephanie James (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016), 213, <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-653-06610-4/12>.

¹⁰⁹ Salvador, 215.

¹¹⁰ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 120–21.

in all the examined sources.¹¹¹ In May 1915 Battista Chiocchetti had finally found a precarious stability in the village of Jar, Western Siberia, where he was working and renting a house with some Trentine friends. On May 26, however, his newfound stability was broken by a Russian official ordering to Austro-Italians 'to march to Tyumen, from where it seems they will send us to Italy [...] via Omsk, Odessa on the Black Sea, Constantinople, Dardanelles and Greece...'. His first comment is far more doubtful than enthusiastic: 'let's see what will happen'.¹¹² The case of Battista Chiocchetti is also emblematic since it shows to what extent the decision of accepting the Italian offer – although with a high degree of skepticism – was not perceived by Trentine soldiers as a matter of national identity, but just as a way to improve their living condition. Indeed, even though Chiocchetti obeyed and went to Tyumen with the hope of being transported to Italy, he was still referring to the Austro-Hungarian army in Russia as 'our Tyrolians' or simply as 'ours'.¹¹³

Meanwhile the officials began their journey towards their novel *patria*, a long period of uncertainty started for thousands of Trentine prisoners. Many practical obstacles complicated the whole process. First of all, due to Bulgaria's (1915) and Romania's (1916) entrance in World War I, the Balkan route was not a possibility anymore, and the shipping via Archangelsk was possible only in late springtime and summer. Moreover, the members of the Italian delegation in Kirsanov carried out a patient and complicated work in order to gather around 6,000 prisoners willing to go to Italy, both due to the obvious difficulties in reaching people spread around the vastness of the Russian Empire during the war and because the vast majority desired to leave the captivity but at the same time they were scared of the possible consequences. On the one side of being forced to join Italian army, and on the other that their families could have been persecuted by Austrian authorities. Indeed, Austro-Hungarian propaganda was stressing that every Habsburg subject captured on the battlefield fighting in enemy's army would have been immediately brought to the gallows, and overall deserters' families would have been convicted to the confiscation of all their properties.¹¹⁴ Russian officials who were in charge of reaching Austro-Italian

¹¹¹ For international treaties on prisoners of war see Rossi, *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell'esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*, 1997, 23.

¹¹² Chiocchetti, *Memorie Della Guerra Austro-Russa 1914*, 76.

¹¹³ Chiocchetti, 67, 75.

¹¹⁴ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 126.

prisoners and communicate to them the possibility of being sent to Italy, were providing very contradictory information, but Italian authorities were certainly not more encouraging, simply because Rome did not have a consistent blueprint for these repatriations. Adelchi Gazzurelli, Italian consul in Moscow, received a great number of letters from all over Russia asking clarifications about the prisoners' future once arrived on Italian soil. These letters demonstrate how, regardless the personal sense of national identification, almost no one uncritically accepted the Italian offer. Even those who had no doubts regarding his Italianess wanted to be reassured in order to "not take the first steps carelessly, which could turn against us", stating that an Russian official told them they could have been freed and brought to Italy, but without guaranteeing whether they would have been "completely free or enlisted in the army to fight against Austria" because "once arrived there" they did not want to "go to war once again". However, Gazzurelli had no certain answers for them, since, as he responded, the government did not take a definitive decision about that.¹¹⁵ The same doubts and frustration for the lack of information are expressed in every single diary or memorial examined for this research. Some, such as Battista Chiocchetti, who had found a job and an acceptable shelter, did not even move to Kirsanov even when they would have accepted to be drafted in Italian army, since the little safety they obtained was to prefer to an uncertain future in a prisoning camp.¹¹⁶ Under this light, seasons also played a role in the decision. In summer, when the weather was more indulgent and there was great availability of agricultural jobs, many decided to stay where they were. Battista Chiocchetti's diary is yet again enlightening in order to understand the decision-making process among Trentine prisoners of war society. Living conditions were the key. As already mentioned, until he could work, rent a little house and spend his leisure time with his *patriots* from Val di Fiemme, he had no intention to leave the village of Jar. But when he was stuck in a prisoners of war camp in Omsk, perspective radically changed: "rather than spending another winter in Siberia, I will risk everything" he wrote in June 1915.¹¹⁷ From Omsk he was gathered with other Trentines in Tyumen, and from there he should have reached Kirsanov. Nonetheless, when some months later Russian gave him and to his fellow countrymen the possibility to leave the camp and work in the Urals, his

¹¹⁵ Di Michele, 127.

¹¹⁶ Chiocchetti, *Memorie Della Guerra Austro-Russa 1914*, 59-60.

¹¹⁷ Chiocchetti, 78.

perspective totally changed: “In these days 300 Italians who signed to be Italian citizens are leaving, still unknown whether to Italy or other places, but we are going to stay because we do not want to be traitors and we want to come back safely to our villages”.¹¹⁸ Thus, until when they received an official communication from Italian consul in Saint Peterburg in July 1917, Chiocchetti and his group of *fiammazzi* did not really trust to the Italian offer:¹¹⁹

July 1: In some days some Italian volunteers are going to leave towards Italy, I also wanted to go [...] but the conditions are still unknown, and how it is going to work after all?

July 15: Here arrived a letter from the Italian consul in Petrograd with the permission to go to Italy, guaranteeing us that we do not have any responsibility and anything to do with war, that once there we will be free, and after the war we will move freely and safely to our homes [...] Me and the majority of Trentine people we will go, I want to save me until I am healthy, another winter here really scares me.¹²⁰

Nevertheless, meanwhile Chiocchetti and his friends opted for living as almost free laborers for years, thousands of other Austro-Italians took different considerations about the initial Italian offer and they moved earlier to Kirsanov, whose camp soon became a sort of Austro-Italian enclave in European Russia where a few of Italian nationalists tried to develop a program of mass Italianization for their less enthusiastic fellow prisoners.

¹¹⁸ Chiocchetti, 83.

¹¹⁹ *Fiammazzo* is the ethnonym indicating Val di Fiemme's inhabitants.

¹²⁰ Chiocchetti, *Memorie Della Guerra Austro-Russa 1914*, 97-98.

V – Patriotic education

Since winter 1915, a small group of Austro-Italian prisoners of war built up an informal, but very efficient, organization of nationalist propaganda and patriotic education in Kirsanov concentration camp. Initially the group was led by a few irredentists who already considered themselves Italian before the conflict, such as the aforementioned Annibale Molignoni and Giuseppe De Manincor. In a short time, they were joined by a number of prisoners who developed their Italianess during the war and that were very motivated to convert their comrades to this new faith. One of the first Italian to reach Kirsanov has been Annibale Molignoni, who asked to be transferred there in May 1915 when the Balkan route was still open. In his first months, however, nationalist demonstration was strictly forbidden, and he complained that they were not even allowed to expose an Italian flag outside their barracks. Moreover, notwithstanding the continuous bargaining between prisoners and Russian authorities, Austro-Italians who already opted for Italian citizenship were left together with who was uncertain or was a convinced *austriacante*, and sometimes in close contact with German and Austrian soldiers that considered them disgusting traitors. This situation, which was particularly intense in Tambov – Kirsanov's region capital city, in which thousands of prisoners were hosted in former schools, hospitals, prisons and theaters – where frictions often got to proper scuffles. Giuseppe De Manincor reports that all the Italians were hosted in the city theater, divided in two groups. The “ignorant, idiot, mass of sheep, which does not want to come to Italy because is scared of losing its twelve Crowns war pension [...] or because their fellow villagers do not want to go”, that according to De Manincor represent around 360 out of 400 Italians, occupied the parterre, while the small group of irredentists preferred to isolate themselves on the balcony, where they proudly exposed an Italian *Tricolore*.¹²¹ These lines, besides confirming that already in Autumn 1915 only a very little minority of Austro-Italian had opted for joining Italy, confirms once more to what extent the local rural community was important in the individuals' decision making. However, the small group of Italian patriots was fierce and since the beginning of 1916, also thanks to some petitions sent by Austro-Italian officials to the Italian ambassador in Saint Petersburg, they managed to be

¹²¹ Bellezza, “Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920),” 2016, 91.

separated from the “ignorant, idiot, mass of sheep” and to organize a series of irredentist cultural initiatives.¹²² On the 26 February 1916 they published the first issue of *La Nostra Fede* [Our Faith], a patriotic newspaper thought, written, printed and sold in Kirsanov prisoners of war camp. *La Nostra Fede* mixed war news coming from Italian and foreign newspapers which various embassies provided to the prisoners and some very nationalist articles with an open pedagogic aim. “Our program is in the title; our goal is merely patriotic. We hope we can rise the moral of all our friends gathered here. We will publish common interest news coming from every side; [...] and we will also curate a literary-cultural section [...]” stated the first page of the very first issue.¹²³ Indeed, besides providing news about war events, *La Nostra Fede* was very dedicated to the dissemination of Italian history and literature, particularly focusing on the Risorgimento and on the historical destiny of the unredeemed lands.¹²⁴ Moreover, they were also writing far more political articles full of violent words against so-called *austriacanti*, promoting the process of national consciousness “unveiling” and defending the legitimacy of Italy’s war against Austria-Hungary. Not surprisingly, in *La Nostra Voce*’s articles the nationalist tone was very exasperated and germs of fascist *squadrismo* clearly emerge here and there. Indeed, it is exactly among unsatisfied and violent World War I veterans that fascism constructed its force and it cannot be a coincidence if, after 1922, fascist administration of the former unredeemed provinces was mainly entrusted to the most radical irredentist veterans.¹²⁵ Still, patriotic schooling was not limited to words: national symbols were a crucial part of this process. Indeed, they collected enough money to buy enough Japanese silk to sew an Italian flag embroidered with the six unredeemed provinces’ coats.¹²⁶ In addition, they organized conferences about history and current events, a patriotic orchestra and a choir

¹²² About the newspaper *La Nostra Fede* see Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 197; Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d’Austria*, 149; Bellezza, “Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920),” 2016, 92.

¹²³ “Ai lettori”, *La Nostra Fede*, 26.02.1916: 1. Cited in Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 197.

¹²⁴ Molignoni, *Trentini Prigionieri in Russia: Agosto 1914 - Settembre 1916*, 95.

¹²⁵ For instance, on the eight issue of *La Nostra Voce*, published on the 8 April 1916, an anonymous irredentist author proposed to solve the problem of coexisting with non-irredentist Austro-Italians that way: “Someone expressed the idea of covering those people with a blanket on their heads and beat them as a codfish. Desperate diseases need desperate remedies: or they spontaneously announce themselves [as Italian], or they have to forcibly move away from us, or we will resort to use more energetic methods”. “Facciamola finita una volta!”, *La Nostra Fede*, 8.04.1916. Cited in Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 199.

¹²⁶ Bellezza, “Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920),” 2016, 103.

that offered weekly exhibitions and, thanks to Ermete Bonapace's artistic skills, they erected a monument to their dead Italian comrades.¹²⁷ Basically, they were returning a sense of normal life within the camp, they were offering pleasant distractions to their fellow prisoners after years of suffering.

Among the various different stories of national indifference converted to vigorous Italian nationalism, it is especially significant to follow Ermete Bonapace's path, which brought him from being a young national-indifferent art student in Rome into a vibrant nationalist preaching Italian patriotism in a Russian prisoners' camp. As already illustrated in the previous chapter, Bonapace responded to Franz Joseph' call to the arms for two main reasons: solidarity towards his villagers and futuristic curiosity towards modern warfare. Since the beginning of his war experience, the latter seemed to play a prominent role. Contrarily to the great majority of his peers, he describes the fights with an extraordinary fascination: "[...] being in a terrible fight in which homicide turned into something praiseworthy seemed to have become a gift from God. What a pleasure to get in front of targets which were not made of cardboard anymore!"¹²⁸. Bonapace depicts his war experience as a moment of cathartic violence, in which previous moral values lost their importance and were substituted by courage, self-sacrifice, blood and death. However, his enthusiasm for battle in itself did not correspond to his feelings for the *kaiserliche und königliche Armee* and its terrible officials: "I observed that [...] our commanders did not hold us into consideration, that various times more than one of us lost his life because of their disregards and carelessness [...]"¹²⁹. Throughout the pages of his memorial narrating the period spent on the battlefields, one can clearly perceive his anti-German scorn and empathy towards Russian people growing in a rising climax. Of course, this can be caused by the fact that his memorial was written years after World War I when Bonapace was directing the local Fascist artists' Corporation in Mezzolombardo, and was stylistically constructed to underline his anti-Austrianism as much as possible. Nonetheless, whereas he depicted the Austro-Hungarian army as source of every possible atrocity, he seems to have been honest about his national indifference. In that moment he still identified himself with

¹²⁷ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 150.

¹²⁸ Bonapace, "Diario Di Un Irredento Trentino Nell'esercito Austriaco e Prigioniero in Russia. 1914-1916 - I Parte," 12.

¹²⁹ Bonapace, 19.

his “brothers and villagers”, without even naming the Kingdom of Italy or the concept of national identification.¹³⁰ His Italianess is expressed for the first time when he got wounded and recovered in a Red Cross’ hospital, when he asked to be considered Italian and a friend of Russian people. According to his comrade Guglielmo Maurina (1883-1964), Bonapace joined the Italian nationalist side in Omsk, following Maurina and a group of friends coming from his same village.¹³¹ Once more, the choice among Austro-Hungary and Italy did not only result from an intimate reflection on national identity, but it appears as a result of a social process taken within the village community. Giovanni Battista Giacomelli (1879-1939), primary school teacher from Predazzo, experienced a very similar itinerary from national indifference to ardent patriotism. Recruited in May 1915 and captured in the following October, he initially was a fervent pacifist and a loyal Habsburg subject. On December 2nd, for instance, he complains that they were not allowed to celebrate the Emperor’s birthday as they were used to do at home. During his long hospitalization, he admitted missing to hear his mother tongue around, but at the same time he refers to Austria as “the homeland” and he insists in his refusal of nationalism. Nevertheless, when transferred to Kirsanov, he met several friends and here he became totally involved in patriotic propaganda’s group activities. In May 1916 he was already considered as one of the most convinced irredentists in the camp.¹³² These two cases are just an example of a bigger, but surely not general, process of national identification that involved many Austro-Italians during their stay in Kirsanov. The keystone of their transformation was not a rational evaluation of the possible consequences of their choice among Austro-Hungarian Empire and Kingdom of Italy, but the result of an irrational sense of belonging. Those camps obliged prisoners to long periods of inactivity, since they could not spend their time working nor with any other satisfactory activity. In Kirsanov, thanks to the Italian authorities’ funding, the patriotic group offered an extraordinarily appealing alternative to daily boredom: first of all, being part of a group instead of feeling an abandoned individual lost in the middle of nowhere during a meaningless worldwide slaughter; secondly, the group gave men the possibility to concentrate on other issues rather than cleaning lice from

¹³⁰ Bonapace, 22.

¹³¹ Guglielmo Maurina’s diary is cited in Bellezza, “Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920),” 2016, 84.

¹³² Bellezza, 87.

their dirty clothes: they organized concerts, built a monument, sewed flags, published a newspaper, and so on. Essentially, they constructed a diaspora community, in the sense of a tightly bounded solidarity group on the base of common cultural and ethnic reference between their place of origin and arrival.¹³³ Moreover, as it has been shown for Ermete Bonapace and Battista Giacomelli, even in the relatively small Kirsanov prisoners of war camp society, the process of group national identification seemed to follow the Miroslav Hroch's pattern of national consciousness' formation.¹³⁴

Nonetheless, cultural-patriotic activity was not the only daily-life improvement the prisoners obtained in Kirsanov. Whereas the living conditions were initially terrible because of the Russian lack of organization due to the idea that Austro-Italian prisoners should have been transported to Italy in a short time, thanks to the pressures made by the Italian delegation and specifically by Gazzurelli, prisoners received better food, better housing and the possibility to leave the camp for some hours a day. In addition, Gazzurelli drafted a meticulous list covering the name of all the Italians he had reached in Kirsanov, Orlov and Omsk divided in three groups: the first one for who demonstrated to be a firm patriot and desired to fight for Italy on the Austrian front, which encompassed nearly the ten percent of the prisoners; the second and the far bigger one, was formed by who wanted to join Italy but was scared about the consequences; the third and largely minoritarian one, represented who openly declared himself Austrian. All the officials were in the third group. Gazzurelli's help was very appreciated by the prisoners that, after feeling totally abandoned by the Austrian government, now perceived that someone was taking care of

¹³³ For the debate on diaspora, citizenship and national identity see Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal, "Citizenship and Identity: Living in Diasporas in Post-War Europe?," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/014198700329105>; Nicholas Van Hear (1998) "New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities" (London: UCL Press, 1998); Robin Cohen, "Global Diaspora: An Introduction," *International Migration Review* 32, no. 3 (1997): 787-89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2547774>.

¹³⁴ "The development of a national culture based on [...] language [...]; (2) the achieving self-administration [...]; (3) the creation of a complete social structure from out of the ethnic group [...] During an initial period, which I have called Phase A, the energies of the activists were above all devoted to scholarly enquiry into and dissemination of an awareness of the linguistic, cultural, social and sometimes historical attributes of the non-dominant group. [...] In a second period, or Phase B, a new range of activists emerged, who now sought to win over as many of their ethnic group as possible to the project of creating a future nation [...] Once the major part of the population came to set special store by their national identity, a mass movement was formed, which I have termed Phase C." Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe," *New Left Review*, no. 198 (1993): 5-7, <http://www.newleftreview.org/?getpdf=NLR19401>.

them.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, in Rome Sidney Sonnino preferred to prosecute with his strict policy for repatriations, and Kirsanov's prisoners decided to grasp the nettle and commit themselves to make the Italian public aware of their situation. Italian newspapers began to publish letters and pleas sent directly sent by Russian concentration camps, in which the prisoners were harshly attacking Salandra's and Sonnino's immobilism after all their promises. Journalists such as Virginio Gayda (1885-1944) travelled to Kirsanov and wrote vibrant pages on the most important Italian newspapers, while philanthropists as Virginio Ceccato and marquise Gemma Guerrieri Gonzaga (1878-1928) organized money collections in favor of Kirsanov's prisoners.¹³⁶ Hence, thanks to these coordinated efforts, Italian government finally decided to react and to develop a new plan for a mass repatriation. Meanwhile, in August 1916 a new military mission consisting in twenty-one people led by the Army Staff Colonel Achille Bassignano was sent to Saint Petersburg in order to organize the shipping of the first group of irredentists who were selected to be brought to Italy.¹³⁷ So, divided in three distinct voyages organized between August and November 1916, 4,051 of them left Russia accompanied by the Italian Military Mission.¹³⁸ Their journey to Italy started in Tambov, from which they reached Archangelsk, major Russian port on the White Sea, after six days of travel by train. From there, they navigated north-west, circumnavigated Scandinavian peninsula, and continued crossing Great Britain and France by boat and by train. Once arrived in Turin, they were welcomed with a solemn ceremony in which they were officially freed from their status of prisoners of war. Just a few of them accepted to wear a uniform again.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, since the February 1917's revolution, new major problems blocked the repatriations from Archangelsk and extended Austro-Italians Russian captivity for years.

Finally, in Italian's hands

A second group of more than 2,000 prisoners was sent to Italy from Archangelsk in the summer 1917. They had been gathered all around Russia by the new Military Mission

¹³⁵ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 138.

¹³⁶ Di Michele, 142.

¹³⁷ Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 256.

¹³⁸ Di Michele, *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*, 146.

¹³⁹ Salvador, "Italian-Speaking Austrian POWs in Russia and the Italian Involvement in the Siberian Intervention 1918-1920," 213-14.

led by the Carabinieri's Captain Cosma Manera (1876-1958), and the army officials Icilio Baccich and Gaetano Bazzani¹⁴⁰. However, although Bassignano was aware of the importance of repatriating the prisoners after the great expectation created by Italian authorities, their journey stopped halfway, in Vologda, because no ships were available. Moreover, Russian political crisis and wintertime made Archangelsk unreachable, so Cosma Manera planned a new escape route. Prisoners were divided in groups of about forty people, provided with some Rubles and autonomously sent to Vladivostok via the trans-Siberian railway. This long and complex transfer, no matter how frustrating, was the only possible solution at the time. This solution was urgently needed, since there was no assistance for war prisoners in the post-revolution anarchy and Russians weren't providing any kind of supply to the Kirsanov camp. In February 1917, roughly 2,350 men reached Far East Russia. From there, they crossed the Russian-Chinese border to reach Harbin, then Beijing and finally the Italian possession of Tien-Tsin. Here they received a warm welcome, hot meals, and new clothes and many of them expressed their great thankfulness towards Italy in their diaries. "Yes, we suffered, but now everything is over, and a new life is beginning!" noted Fioravante Gottardi, "I ceased to be a working machine [...] Here we are among ours: comfortably accommodated, well fed, kindly treated, waiting to go back to Italy!". However, Italian military authorities immediately understood they could take advantage of the prisoners' gratitude and what should have been just a temporary stage of their return home became a long military training and, for some, a return to the battlefield. Indeed, the pleasant welcoming was followed by months of stubborn nationalist propaganda and vague information about the implications of joining the Italian citizenship.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the Russian revolution provoked a huge power vacuum in the world's largest country. Army's highest ranks, local leaders and adventurers took control of peripheral regions of the falling Empire, creating a mosaic of different more or less legitimized authorities fighting one another. Some of those 'warlords' supported the Bolsheviks, while others stood with the "whites" and the counter-revolution. France, the United States and the United Kingdom decided to intervene in the Russian civil war too. Entente powers had strong interests to bring back Russia to normality and, scared by the

¹⁴⁰ Carabinieri is the Italian military police corps.

¹⁴¹ Salvador, "Italian-Speaking Austrian POWs in Russia and the Italian Involvement in the Siberian Intervention 1918-1920," 216-18.

communist advance in Europe, they actively supported the “whites”. The main reason for the intervention was their interest in the eastern front, which was still considered crucial to control the European warfare scenario. Then, enormous amounts of weapons and supplies sent to Czarist Russia were abandoned in Russian ports, which they did not want to leave to the Bolshevik’s. Although there was a terrible situation in the home front, the Italian government opted for supporting the Entente forces in Siberia and, in July 1918, the Italian Far East Expeditionary Corps left Italy with 1,500 private soldiers and 50 officers. a very symbolic contribution which in Italians’ hopes should have been enough to strengthen the bargaining force in the following peace conferences. The CSIEO’s command was totally unaware of Cosma Manera’s mission and of the possibility to double his ranks with Austro-Italian volunteers until its arrival to China, where an Italian government representant told them a great number of enthusiastic volunteers was waiting in Tien-Tsin. But, as the CSIEO arrived at the Italian barracks in Tien-Tsin, Fassini-Camossi – the CSIEO commander – discovered things were far different from what it was promised some days before.¹⁴² Since their arrival in Tien-Tsin, Italian militaries worked in order to convince as many prisoners as possible to enroll in the newborn Legione Redenta di Siberia or Black Battalion, as they called the Italian anti-Bolsheviks battalions in Eastern Russia. Thus, they developed a number of direct and indirect incentives to do so. Firstly, they used the force of persuasion by stressing the moral debt Austro-Italians had towards Italy. Secondly, they took advantage of the information gaps between authorities and prisoners. After having had the time to restore their bodily and mental stamina, they were asked to sign a military oath that legally tied them to the Italian army, and only later they were informed about the new military mission in Siberia.¹⁴³ Within the analyzed writings, however, there are no signs of developments regarding national identification. The ones who felt proudly Italian maintained their position, while the great majority, who felt indifference, continued evaluating the situation in terms of rational convenience. Prisoners were divided in three separated groups, identified by different uniforms. “They divided us into three categories”, wrote Valerio Maestranzi, “the Mission’s favorites were those who accepted to be enrolled. The second [category] was to just sign up for Italian citizenship, for which they give you a

¹⁴² Salvador, 222.

¹⁴³ Bellezza, “Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920),” 2016, 142.

grey-green uniform but without military badges and this one was my favorite. The third was called 'canaries' because they wore a canary uniform and was composed by those who still didn't believe that Trento and Trieste were Italian".¹⁴⁴ Once divided into these groups, Austro-Italians received months of patriotic education including physical training, speeches, conferences and other cultural activities. For long months, the terms of the signed agreement remained confusing and Italian officials gave unclear information both about the departure and the military campaign in Siberia. Two selected groups had left China in June and September 1918, but, after that, no news on their return arrived for almost a year, and the Italian authorities' communication remained unclear and contradictory.¹⁴⁵ Yet in summer 1918, Cosma Manera was declaring:

My loyal men of the Black Battalion will be the first to leave [to Italy], then, other enlisted and family fathers if there will be free places. The rest will depart later with other ships, but only once they will have accepted to wear the Italian Army's uniform [...] Do not think I want to bring you to the battlefield here in Siberia or wherever: my only task is to bring you back to Italy!¹⁴⁶

Taking this into account, it results more comprehensible why, besides the sense of gratitude, nearly 800 prisoners volunteered. They gave various reasons, but most clearly stated that they chose to enroll because they were promised to have priority for the next journey to Italy. However, things went very differently compared to what Cosma Manera stated in front of the prisoners. The CSIEO troops who had left Italy in July 1918 got to Vladivostok only in January 1919, but the Black Battalion did not wait for them. The group of 800 former prisoners volunteers was sent to Central Siberia in October 1918 and the already low spirits collapsed in front of the perspective of new winter spent in the tremendous Siberian cold. Their writings sharply express their disappointment: "Damn it,

¹⁴⁴ Maestranzi, "La Mia Autobiografia," 174.

¹⁴⁵ The first group was made of people unable to be enlisted for military service, people affected by chronic illnesses and mutilated. They were embarked on the 22 June 1918 on a USA ship directed to San Francisco. From there, they crossed the United States by train and took another ship from New York to Genoa. They finally reached Trentino in the beginning of October 1918. The second group instead was composed by 727 people unable to military service and considered reliable by Italian authorities. Among them, our Battista Chiocchetti and Valerio Maestranzi. They left Tien-Tsin on the 1 September 1918 on Italian steamship Roma which reached Italy in a month after a long and dangerous journey across South China Sea, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Suez and Mediterranean. See Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 231.

¹⁴⁶ Francesco Matteotti, "Le mie avventure nella guerra Austro Russa". Cited in Bellezza, "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 148.

once more on the Trans-Siberian railway but towards Siberia and in the coldest months of the year. It really seems they're mocking us!" laconically wrote Arturo Dellai. Moreover, when they were patrolling the trans-Siberian railway in the Omsk region, the former prisoners received the very frustrating news that the war between Italy and Austria ended, thus they had fully become Italian citizens. All their sacrifices appeared useless.

Rage is increasing. When arrived in Krasnojarsk they told us the war between Italy and Austria was over. Trento and Trieste passed to Italy. This news is a disappointment for all the Italians [...] I am almost regretting having signed that damn sheet that promised us to get to Italy [...] Perhaps Italy abandoned us, I really do not know what we are doing here in Siberia, so far from Italy.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, this new period on the battlefields turned out to be far easier than the warfare they had experienced on the Austro-Russian front. During the ten months in Siberia, the Italian troops counted only three fatalities, but none was caused by the enemy. Two soldiers died crossing a river, and another was killed by the accidental explosion of a flawed grenade. Then, they were saved by Italian internal politics. On 14 July 1919 Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868-1953) was named prime minister and immediately ordered to retire all the Italian troops abroad. In August 1919 the Black Battalion left the Krasnojarsk region and returned to Tien-Tsin. Finally, the repatriation from China began on the 1st of September 1919, when a thousand people from Trentine embarked on the Japanese steamship Nippon, and ended only on the 26th of February 1920, when the last three ships: French Maru, Texas Maru and England Maru left China with 2'800 new Italian citizens. Nonetheless, for many of them the odyssey wasn't finished yet. Thousands of former Austro-Italians repatriated from Russia between 1918 and 1920 and were imprisoned in isolated prisons in Southern Italy and Sardinia for months, because the Italian government, scared by the 1919 Spartacist uprising in Germany, wanted to be sure to have eradicated any possible Bolshevik germ amongst the former soldiers.¹⁴⁸ Ironically, two years later a newborn party founded on war veterans who supported and expressed a mix of socialist and nationalist ideals, the PNF (Italian Fascist Party), took over and installed a dictatorship which lasted until 1943.

¹⁴⁷ Arturo Dellai's diary, 110. Cited in Bellezza, 158.

¹⁴⁸ Bellezza, 200; Antonelli, *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*, 238-40.

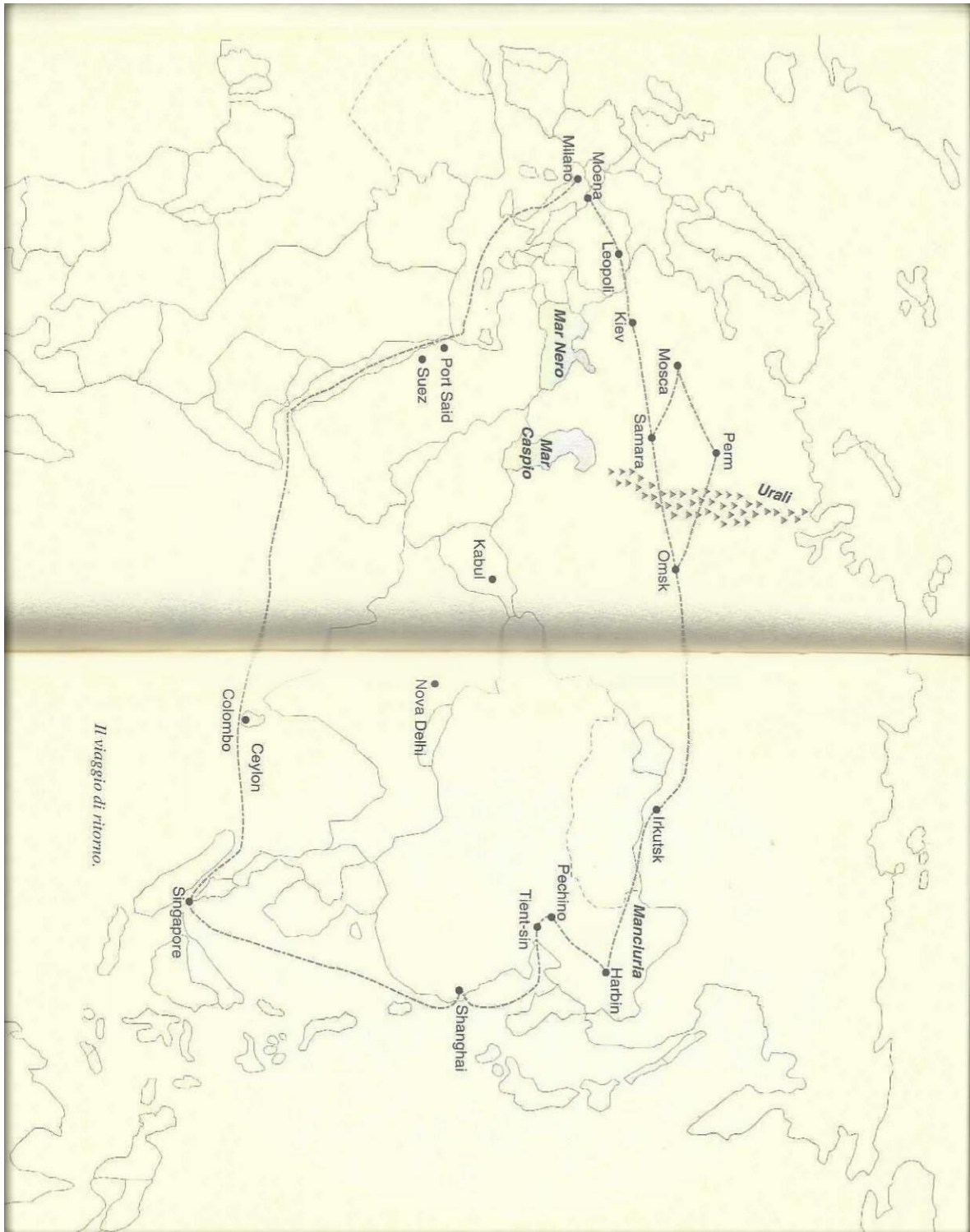


Figure 5: Battista Chiochetti's journey (1914-1918)

VI - Conclusions

The history of Trentine peasants-soldiers' experience in the First World War has been analyzed here from a multifocal perspective which aim is to combine local and global historiographical approaches, in order to highlight the ties between their very local pre-war existences and the global developments that turned them upside down. In particular, my aim was to shed light on how their abrupt projection into the multinational context of the Imperial army and, overall, of the Russian prisoners of war's camps, inspired or influenced their sense of national belonging. Soldiers' first-hand witnesses, their private diaries and letters, were analyzed. In order to do that, I put my research on a very micro level of analysis within the theoretical framework of cross-cultural migrations, trying to divide my analysis into "three phases of desocialization and resocialization" - mobilization, warfare/imprisonment, return - to uncover which kind of social change the war years caused among Trentine soldiers' community.¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the political and diplomatic aspects weren't left aside. Austro-Italians had become important in the relations between Austro-Hungary, Russia and Italy, as they were an important object of nationalist propaganda. After the first months of conflict, Vienna and Rome fought to gain control on Austro-Italian prisoners' national identification throughout multiple and sometimes contrasting means. At the same time, Austro-Hungarian prisoners in general attracted Moscow's attention which, until 1917, pursued a 'nationalistic policy', whose goal was to erode their loyalty to the Habsburg Empire and persuade Italy to join the Triple Entente. However, if on the one hand this policy turned out to be effective with Slavs and especially with Czechs, Austro-Italians demonstrated to be far more indifferent to the national problem.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, even when they chose to embrace the new citizenship, they often appeared skeptical and untrustworthy towards Italian promises. Since the 1914 call to arms, Austro-Italians experienced daily discrimination within the Austro-Hungarian army, harassed by both the officials and their peers. The mistreatment and marginalization they went through certainly played an important role in their national preference. Then, once in Italian hands, they discovered that the promises of a fast repatriation did not correspond to

¹⁴⁹ Lucassen and Smit, "The Repugnant Other: Soldiers, Missionaries, and Aid Workers as Organizational Migrants," 9-10.

¹⁵⁰ Mazzini, *Cose de Laltro Mondo. Una Cultura Di Guerra Attraverso La Scrittura Popolare Trentina 1914-1918*, chap. III.

reality and that the Italian attitude towards them was somehow similar to the Austro-Hungarian one: Trentine peasants were generally perceived as unreliable and disloyal subjects who needed a process of forced Italianization to become real patriots. Indeed, the few committed irredentist Austro-Italians soldiers agreed with that view and during the years spent in Kirsanov concentration camp, they developed a great and convincing machine of pro-Italian pedagogic propaganda on one side and an aggressive pre-fascist discriminating attitude towards *austriacanti* and indifferentist on the other.

Attempting to avoid rough generalizations, I tried to understand the tendencies, the attitude that characterized 'on average' soldiers from rural Trentine facing the struggle for national identification. Despite numerous differences and nuances, one thing stands out as common to all the analyzed sources: the great emotional pressure under which they had to make a choice which was presented as a free one. The decision of remaining loyal to the House of Habsburg or joining the House of Savoy's Kingdom was determined by various entangled elements, of which national identification was one of the less relevant. Almost no one but the few cases I underlined made a choice based on a perceived national belonging, nor on his abstract loyalty to one or the other dynasty. Most of the time they considered the very immediate and material consequences. When they were asked to shift their citizenship and to be brought to Italy, the reactions were generally cold. Many of them, after having experienced battlefields and tremendous Russian prison war camps, found a job and a new place to live in. They were often hired by landowners offering acceptable life conditions and sometimes they even managed to save some Rubles. Thus, those who lived in that condition, demonstrated little enthusiasm onwards the idea of returning to Kirsanov without being completely sure of an immediate and safe return to Italy. The vast majority decided to get the Italian citizenship only after the guarantee that this did not implicate an enrollment to the Italian army nor negative consequences for their families, who were still refugees in Austria. Summing up, they chose the Italian side because *hic et nunc* this option seemed to offer better living conditions. This was due to the fact that the great majority had no interest in being Italian, joining the Italian cause or 'liberating' Trentine from the Austro-Hungarian yoke. The expression of patriotic feelings towards Italy or Austria-Hungary is almost completely absent in the diaries and memorials I examined. At most, they expressed a sense of loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty or respect for the oath of allegiance they

pronounced towards the Italian military mission, but their choices were never based on a pre-existent sense of national belonging, while only in a few cases the war experience allowed them to create one. The home village, its community, its traditions and habits were what these people recognized as *patria*. Their identification was what Tara Zahra defined as 'national indifference', it was free of abstractions and theorization but was an experienced identification 'rising from a practical context.¹⁵¹ It was an implicit sense of belonging that did not need conscious reflections, and which had not to be defined on a daily basis'. Since an explicit celebration of this idea of homeland simply did not exist, nor existed official boundaries, symbols or myths to delimit the homeland from a geographical or demographic perspective, homeland remained a blurred idea. As Zahra's Czech peasants defined themselves as 'people from here', Trentine rural population defined their homeland as a very limited geographic area strictly related to its landscape and *taskscape*¹⁵². *Patria* was the family, the village community and its social network, *patria* were the fields, the pastures, the mountains. This kind of homeland does not need to be created, promoted and imposed on other communities simply because it is perceived as a natural and eternal order of things.¹⁵³ But warfare was the exact opposite: it destroyed community's networks and landscapes, it broke the yearly agricultural cycle, it forbade independence and self-regulation. This is why, people so closely tied to the timeless traditions of rural communities and consequently quite hostile to social change as these Trentine soldiers were, attempted to recreate the village community since the very first days of mobilization, and on Russian land, systematically gathering among people from the same village and trying to maintain solid bonds with their families at home. In that sense, the adoption of

¹⁵¹ Mazzini, chap. 151; Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis"; Bellezza, "From National Indifference to National Commitment and Back. The Case of the Trentine POWs in Russia during the First World War"; Cole, "Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy."

¹⁵² Term proposed in 1993 by Tim Ingold, which has since created wide interest and found considerable application, to refer to the entire ensemble of tasks or actions that a society, community, or individual performs. The idea of the *taskscape* recognizes that all tasks are interlocking, and that any one task is embedded in the way that other tasks are themselves seen and understood. Thus, the very notion of a *taskscape* as a continuous or seamless spread of heterogeneous events and experiences stands in opposition to the widespread western practice of classifying activities into groups such as technological, subsistence, or ritual. See Timothy Darvill, "Taskscape," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology* (Oxford University Press, 2008); Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (1993): 152-74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00293652.2016.1151458>.

¹⁵³ Mazzini, *Cose de Laltro Mondo. Una Cultura Di Guerra Attraverso La Scrittura Popolare Trentina 1914-1918*, 151-52.

Italian nationality was not due to individual decision, but it was a social choice made within the wartime reproduction of the village community.

In conclusion, I very rarely found idealistic patriotic reasons to prefer Italy over Austria, while the great majority was moved by rational and concrete interests. Thus, in order to understand the Trentine adhesion to the Italian cause within the Russian prisoners of war's camps, various concurring elements must be taken into account: the collective aspect of the process, the extreme conditions in which it happened, the fear of being brought back to the war fields (regardless of the uniform), the official and non-official propaganda, the closeness with pro-Italian or pro-Austrian Italian speaking officials, lack news from home and the Austrian censorship.¹⁵⁴ So, what Italian historiography has often defined as acts of patriotism, are really a very complex kaleidoscope of rational reasoning that has very little to do with the common idea of national identification. As it emerges from the sources, whereas nationalism is often intended as a top-to-bottom construction, it is the result of a way more entangled which can greatly vary according to the context and the previous degree of national identification among the subjects. Considering the history of Austro-Hungarian army during the World War I, it seems clear that the encounter with the arrogance of Magyar and German speaking military ranks – and the surprising kindness of Russians – strongly enhanced the process of group-making between minoritarian groups which already felt to be part of a nation, such as many Austro-Slavs and Austro-Italians coming from cities, where nationalism was widespread. However, this kind of social change is less detectable and for sure not homogeneous at all among who, as Trentine soldiers belonging to rural peasants' communities, demonstrated to be indifferent to the idea of national identification. As I stated before, they tended to recreate the village or valley community during their Russian imprisonment. Among them, even if they experienced the mistreatment and the consequent resentment towards Austrian military authorities, the adoption of Italian nationalism is very rare and limited to particular contexts. The main one is the encounter with irredentist propaganda in Kirsanov, where, due to the coexistence of a great number of Austro-Italian with diverse geographical origin and social extraction, a larger and more stratified community had been created. Here the

¹⁵⁴ Bellezza, "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 217-25.

countryman could discuss with the urban intellectual, effective nationalist social dynamics were created, Italian irredentism was used as “social glue”. Nonetheless, it seems that the national indifferent majority remained largely indifferent to both Habsburg and Italian nationalism.

Finally, this analysis allows me to try to answer to some of the theoretical hypothesis that stands behind my research. First of all, as theorized by Lucassen et al., soldiers are perfectly suitable to be analyzed under the lens of migration studies and the army experience can be a relevant factor for social change, both at war and once back home.¹⁵⁵ Secondly, I agree with Mazzini’s hypothesis against the generalization of Audoin-Rouzeau’s idea of a widespread World War I’s culture of warfare.¹⁵⁶ Whether the latter convincingly demonstrated the importance of a rising war culture among the French troops, this is absolutely false for Trentine peasants-soldiers who – with some obvious exceptions – made every possible effort to avoid fighting and put all their hopes in a rapid end of the conflict without giving real importance to the possible winner. Moreover, it seems clear that also the process of nationalization through the army, well demonstrated for the case of France by Eugene Joseph Weber and for Italy by Vanda Wilcox, is not applicable to the Austro-Hungarian army, that far from every homogenizing effort, was a major cause of the centrifugal minorities’ nationalism.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Lucassen and Smit, “The Repugnant Other: Soldiers, Missionaries, and Aid Workers as Organizational Migrants”; Lucassen and Lucassen, “Theorizing Cross-Cultural Migrations: The Case of Eurasia since 1500.”

¹⁵⁶ Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War 1914-1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France During the First World War*.

¹⁵⁷ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen : The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*; Wilcox, “Encountering Italy : Military Service and National Identity during the First World War.”

Analyzed sources' authors:

Name	Profession	Place of birth	Captured	Returned
Bolner Rodolfo	Teacher	Villa Lagarina, 1887	-	Trento, 1916
Bonapace Ermete	Sculptor	Mezzolombardo, 1887	Przemysl, March 1915	Trieste, February 1920
Chiocchetti Battista	Carpenter	Moena, 1887	Przemysl, 21.10.1914	Roma, 1.11.1918
Dellai Arturo	Baker	Pergine, 1889	Przemysl, 9.11.1914	Trieste, February 1920
Leonardi Sebastiano	Peasant	Preore, ?	1.03.1917	Genoa, 1918
Maestranzi Valentino	Peasant	Giustino, 1890	June 1915	Genoa, 1918
Molignoni Annibale	Student	Rabbi, ?	August 1915	Trieste, February 1920
Pederzoli Giovanni	Carpenter	Sacco, 1879	07.07.1915	Vienna, 1916
Simonetti Isidoro	Peasant	Saccone, 1883	03.06.1914	Trieste, February 1920
Sommavilla Giacomo	Employee	Moena, 1878	Przemysl, March 1915	Trieste, February 1920
Zeni Angelo	Carpenter	Saccone, 1888	1.10.1916	Genoa, 1918

List of illustration:

Figure 1 - Italy in 1915. In rose the so-called "unredeemed lands" of Trentino, Friuli, Litorale, Istria and Dalmatia	6
Figure 2: Ethnic composition of the Habsburg monarchy according to the 1910's census.	15
Figure 3: Galician battlefront in January 1915	35
Figure 4: Major Russian camps hosting Austro-Italian POW	40
Figure 5: Battista Chiocchetti's journey (1914-1918)	41

Bibliography:

- Anderson, Perry. *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. London - New York: Verso, 1974.
- Antonelli, Quinto. *I Dimenticati Della Grande Guerra. La Memoria Dei Combattenti Trentini (1914-1920)*. Trento: Il Margine, 2008.
- Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane. *Men at War 1914-1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France During the First World War*. Oxford: Berg, 1992.
- Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane, and Annette Becker. "Vers Une Histoire Culturelle de La Première Guerre Mondiale." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 41 (June 8, 1994): 5-7. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44708870>.
- Bazzani, G. *Soldati Italiani Nella Russia in Fiamme: 1915-1920*. Trento: Legione trentina dell'Associazione nazionale volontari di guerra, 1933.
- Becker, Jean-Jacques. "Willingly to War. Public Response to the Outbreak of War." 1914-1918 Online, 2017. https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/willingly_to_war_public_response_to_the_outbreak_of_war.
- Bellabarba, Marco. *L'impero Asburgico*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014.
- — —. "Trento e Trieste: Dalla Rivoluzione Alla Nazione (1848-1867)." In *Trento e Trieste. Percorsi Degli Italiani d'Austria Dal '48 All'annessione2*, edited by Fabrizio Rasera, 19-34. Rovereto: Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati-Edizioni Osi, 2014.

- Bellezza, Simone. "I Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Durante La Prima Guerra Mondiale: Linee e Prospettive Di Ricerca." *Qualestoria* 1-2 (2014): 41-58.
- Bellezza, Simone Attilio. "From National Indifference to National Commitment and Back. The Case of the Trentine POWS in Russia during the First World War." In *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe*, edited by Maarten van Ginderachter and Jon Fox, 35-55. London: Routledge, 2019.
- — —. *Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016.
- — —. "Tornare in Italia: Come i Prigionieri Trentini in Russia Divennero Italiani (1914-1920)," 2016, 236.
- Biagini, A. "La Missione Italiana in Russia e Il Rimpatrio Dei Prigionieri Di Guerra e Degli Irredenti Trentini (1915-1918)." In *La Prima Guerra Mondiale e Il Trentino. Convegno Internazionale Promosso Dal Comprensorio Della Vallagarina. Rovereto 25-29 Giugno 1978*, 579-97. Rovereteo: Comprensorio della Vallagarina, 1978.
- Bolner, Rodolfo. "Il Mio Diario Di Guerra." In *Scritture Di Guerra 10 - Rodolfo Bolner, Giovanni Pederzoli, Francesco Laich*, edited by Gianluigi Fait, 8-196. Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 2002.
- Bonapace, Ermete. "Diario Di Un Irredento Trentino Nell'esercito Austriaco e Prigioniero in Russia. 1914-1916 - I Parte." *Bollettino Del Museo Trentino Del Risorgimento* 11, no. 1 (1960): 14-26.
- Brogi, Paolo. *Impiccateli! Le Storie Eroiche Di Cesare Battisti e Nazario Sauro a Cento Anni Dalla Morte*. Reggio Emilia: Imprimatur, 2006.
- Brubaker, Roger. "Ethnicity without Groups." *Arch.Europ.Sociol.* XLIII, no. 2 (2002): 163-89.
- Carlyle, Thomas. "Partition of Poland." In *The Works of Thomas Carlyle: Volume 19: History of Friedrich II of Prussia, Called Frederick the Great Vol VIII*, edited by Henry Duff Traill and Thomas Carlyle, 19:81-129. Cambridge Library Collection - The Works of Carlyle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511701016.004>.

- Chiocchetti, Battista. *Memorie Della Guerra Austro-Russa 1914*. Edited by Mario Gallarati and Claudio Boselli. II. Vigo di Fassa: Istitut Cultural Ladin CUEM, 2002.
- Cohen, Robin. "Global Diaspora: An Introduction." *Internarional Migration Review* 32, no. 3 (1997): 787-89. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2547774>.
- Cole, Laurence. "Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy." *Nationhood from Below: Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 2011, 96-119. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230355354>.
- "Combattenti Trentini in Estremo Oriente." *Bollettino Del Museo Trentino Del Risorgimento*. Trento, 1972.
- Corsini, Umberto. *Problemi Di Un Territorio Di Confine Trentino e Alto Adige Dalla Sovranità Austriaca All'accordo Degasperi-Gruber*. Trento: Comune di Trento, 1994.
- Cremonini, Cinzia. "Riequilibrare Il Sistema: Mutazioni e Permanenze in Italia Tra 1706 e 1720. Alcune Considerazioni." *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, no. 13 (2013): 177-88. https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_chmo.2013.43286.
- Darvill, Timothy. "Taskscape." In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology*, 547. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Davies, G.H. "The Life of Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-1921." In *Essays on World War I. Origins and Prisoners of War*, edited by S. Williams and P. Pastor, 163-96. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Francescotti, R. *Italiani. L'epopea Degli Italiani Dell'esercito Austroungarico Prigionieri in Russia Nella Grande Guerra (1914-1918)*. Valdagno: Gino Rossato editore, 1991.
- Good, David F. *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750-1914*. Berkley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1984.
- Hahn, Hans Joachim. *The 1848 Revolutions in German-Speaking Europe*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Hladký, Ladislav. "Czech Soldiers during the Great War (1914-1918)." *Tokovi Istorije*, no. 3

(2016): 71–85.

Hroch, Miroslav. “From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe.” *New Left Review*, no. 198 (1993): 3–20. <http://www.newleftreview.org/?getpdf=NLR19401>.

Ingold, Tim. “The Temporality of the Landscape.” *World Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (1993): 152–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00293652.2016.1151458>.

Judson, Pieter M. *Guardians of the Nation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Kann, Robert A. *Storia Dell'impero Asburgico (1526-1918)*. Roma: Salerno, 1998.

— — —. “VIII. Die Italiener.” In *Das Nationalitätenproblem Der Habsburgermonarchie. Geschichte Und Ideengehalt Der Nationalen Bestrebungen Vom Vormärz Bis Zur Auflösung Des Reiches Im Jahre 1918*, 265–73. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1964. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7767/boehlau.9783205109693.265>.

“La Russia Restituisce All'Italia Gl'irredenti Fatti Prigionieri in Galizia Se Il Governo s'impegna a Non Rinviarli in Austria.” *Il Messaggero*. October 24, 1914.

“La Russia Riconosce Come Italiane Le Terre Abitate Da Italiani in Austria (Nostro Colloquio Con l'ambasciatore Krupenski).” *Corriere Della Sera*. October 25, 1914.

Lemon, Robert. *Imperial Messages: Orientalism as Self-Critique in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle*. Vol. 101. Boydell & Brewer, 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81hwx>.

Lucassen, Jan, and Leo Lucassen. “Theorizing Cross-Cultural Migrations: The Case of Eurasia since 1500.” *Social Science History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 445–75. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ssh.2017.19>.

Lucassen, Leo, and Aniek X. Smit. “The Repugnant Other: Soldiers, Missionaries, and Aid Workers as Organizational Migrants.” *Journal of World History* 26, no. 1 (2016): 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2016.0024>.

Maestranzi, Valentino. “La Mia Autobiografia.” In *Scritture Di Guerra 8 - Guerrino Botteri, Vigilio Caola, Giovanni Lorenzetti, Valentino Maestranzi, Giuseppe Scarazzini*, edited by Quinto Antonelli, Manuela Broz, and Giorgia Pontalti, 150–97. Rovereto: Museo Storico

Italiano della Guerra, 1998.

Mannicor, Giuseppe De. *Dalla Galizia Al Piave*. Trento: Seiser, 1926.

Mazzini, Federico. *Cose de Laltro Mondo. Una Cultura Di Guerra Attraverso La Scrittura Popolare Trentina 1914-1918*. Pisa: ETS, 2013.

— — —. "Patriottismo Condizionato. Identità e Patrie Dei Soldati Trentini, 1914-1920." *Contemporanea* 13, no. 3 (2010): 457-86.

Michele, Andrea Di. *Tra Due Divise. La Grande Guerra Degli Italiani d'Austria*. Bari-Roma: Laterza & Figli, 2018.

Molignoni, Annibale. *Trentini Prigionieri in Russia: Agosto 1914 - Settembre 1916*. Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1920.

Monteleone, Renato. "Il Trentino Alla Vigilia Della Prima Guerra Mondiale." *Annali Del Museo Storico Italiano Della Guerra 2009-2014* 17-22 (2014): 13-32.

— — —. "Un Documento Inedito: Gli Appunti Di Giovanni Pedrotti Sull'opinione Pubblica Trentina Alla Vigilia Della 1a Guerra Mondiale." *Materiali Di Lavoro* I, no. I (1983): 27-34.

Pastor, P. "Hungarian POWs in Russia during the Revolution and Civil War." In *Essays on World War I. Origins and Prisoners of War*, edited by S. Williams and P. Pastor, 149-62. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Pederzoli, Giovanni. "Ricordo Della Guerra Mondiale." In *Scritture Di Guerra 10 - Rodolfo Bolner, Giovanni Pederzoli, Francesco Laich*, edited by Gianluigi Fait, 199-267. Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 2002.

Pircher, Gerd. *Militari, Amministrazione e Politica in Tirolo Durante La Prima Guerra Mondiale*. Trento: Società Studi Trentini, 2005.

Rachamimov, A. *POWs and the Great War. Captivity on the Eastern Front*. Oxford-New York: Berg, 2002.

Raffaelli, Mario. "Piccola Descrizione Della Vita Di Raffaelli Mario." In *Riccardo Malesarti, Giuseppe Masera, Rosina Fedrozzi Masera, Evaristo Masera, Mario Raffaelli*, edited by

- Gianluigi Fait, 157–201. Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 1994.
- Rauchsteiner, Manfred. *No Der Erste Weltkrieg Und Das Ende Der Habsburgmonarchie 1914-1918*. Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2013.
- Rossi, M. *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell'esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*. Milano: Mursia, 1997.
- Rossi, Marina. *I Prigionieri Dello Zar. Soldati Italiani Dell'esercito Austro-Ungarico Nei Lager Della Russia (1914-1918)*. Trieste: Mursia, 1997.
- Salandra, Antonio. *La Neutralità Italiana (1914). Ricordi e Pensieri*. Milano: Mondadori, 1928.
- Salvador, Alessandro. "Considerazioni Sul Rimpatrio e La Smobilitazione Dei Soldati Austro-Ungarici Di Nazionalità Italiana Nel Primo Dopoguerra (1914-1920)." *Qualestoria*, no. 1-2 (2014): 59-75.
- — —. "Italian-Speaking Austrian POWs in Russia and the Italian Involvement in the Siberian Intervention 1918–1920." In *Re-Visiting World War I*, edited by Jarosław Suchoples and Stephanie James, 207–23. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-653-06610-4/12>.
- Sommavilla, Giacomo. "Libro Di Guerra Di Giacomo Sommovilla." In *Scritture Di Guerra 6 - Simone Chiochetti, Vigilio Iellico, Giacomo Sommovilla, Albino Soratroi*, edited by Luciana Palla, 129–68. Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 1997.
- Sondhaus, Lawrence. *In the Service of the Emperor : Italians in the Austrian Armed Forces, 1814-1918*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Soysal, Yasemin Nuhoğlu. "Citizenship and Identity: Living in Diasporas in Post-War Europe?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/014198700329105>.
- Steinmetz, Willibald, and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt. "The Political as Communicative Space in History: The Bielefeld Approach." In *Writing Political History Today*, 11–33. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2013.
- Tilly, Charles. *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992*. Cambridge, MA:

Blackwell, 1990.

Tonezzer, E. *Il Corpo, Il Confine, La Patria. Associazionismo Sportivo in Trentino (1870-1914)*. Edited by Quinto Antonelli. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001.

“Una Dimostrazione Dei Trentini Al Consolato Di Russia.” *Corriere Della Sera*. 1914.

Velde, Henk te. “Political Transfer: An Introduction.” *European Review of History: Revue Europeenne d’histoire* 12, no. 2 (2005): 205–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480500268995>.

Wangermann, Ernst. “Josephinian Reforms and Enlightenment Aspirations.” *Jewish Culture and History* 13, no. 2–3 (2012): 194–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169x.2012.729976>.

Weber, Eugen. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976.

Wilcox, Vanda. “Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity during the First World War.” *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 3, no. 2 (2011): 283–302.

— — —. “‘Weeping Tears of Blood’: Exploring Italian Soldiers’ Emotions in the First World War.” *Modern Italy* 17, no. 2 (2012): 171–84.

Zadra, Camillo. “La Memoria Di Alfonso Cazzolli.” *Materiali Di Lavoro*, no. 1–2 (1986): 174–207.

Zahra, Tara. “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis.” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93–119. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0037677900016715>.