Acts of Belonging: Second Generation Youth in South Tyrol, Italy

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Abstract

This article studies citizenship beyond its manifestation as a formal legal status, by exploring citizenship as a process shaped by people's everyday practices and experiences of belonging. Through investigating the daily struggles over belonging and membership of young people with migrant background in the autonomous province of South Tyrol in Northern Italy, this study pays particular attention to the ways in which belonging on the macro scale (the nation, the state) and the micro scale (the village, the city, the region) clash, intersect and interact with each other. By highlighting practices of belonging at the margins of a state by actors considered to be at the margins of the state, this article contributes to scholarly debates that "decentre" citizenship by studying it at, from and for the margins.

Keywords: *Citizenship; belonging; second generation; minorities; South Tyrol*

Introduction[2]

Debates on citizenship continue to be state- and nation-centric. They focus on citizenship as a formal legal status that is awarded by state actors to some people but not to others. The way citizenship is experienced, interpreted, and enacted is, however, always contextual to a person's lived experience and a place's local culture and history. These practices of citizenship and belonging often manifest themselves below and beyond the scale of the nation state, in cities and villages, streets and homes, at the margins and in the peripheries (Lister, 2007; Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Jašina-Schäfer & Cheskin, 2020; Kallio et al., 2020).

This article studies citizenship practices by focusing on how young people with migrant background enact citizenship regardless of their formal citizenship, beyond the context of national belonging. Drawing on data gathered through 25 semi-structured interviews of young persons with migrant background conducted in 2019-2020, the article explores lived citizenship within a specific sub-national context – South Tyrol. South Tyrol presents a particularly compelling case for the study of acts of belonging below and beyond the nation-state. Indeed, this autonomous province in Northern Italy is home to a significant German-speaking minority, and a smaller Ladin one. Here, questions of belonging have been – and continue to be – highly politicized, as strong feelings of local identity co-exist, and sometimes clash, with national belonging and formal citizenship. Against this backdrop, the article explores, first, how young people with migrant background negotiate the complexities of multiple belonging (Colombo et al., 2014) while living in a context where the majority population itself is divided along linguistic and cultural lines (Carlà, 2018). Second, it explores how young people with migrant background attempt to bridge these local societal divisions

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through various practices of citizenships that draw on migratory experiences as a highly valuable set of experiences in the management of intercultural tensions.

Beyond formal citizenship

A growing number of scholars emphasize the importance of studying citizenship from the margins to go beyond normative, exclusionary conceptions of citizenship (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999; Kabeer, 2005; Kallio et. al., 2015; Bloemraad, 2016; Sigona & Gonzales, 2017; Jašina-Schäfer & Cheskin, 2020). Considered from the perspective of migrants, women, children and youth, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, and other minorities, conventional meanings and expressions of citizenship have exclusionary potential. As Volpp states, "citizenship is 'Janus-faced', simultaneously projecting the warm embrace of inclusion while excluding those who are outside the borders of belonging" (Volpp, 2017: 151). Yet, even those who are excluded act as citizens as they go about their daily lives: they engage in collective action, they resist oppressive manifestations of citizenship, they transform conventional understandings and practices of belongings. It is through such acts of citizenship that, regardless of their actual formal or normative status and substance, people constitute themselves as citizens (Isin 2008). When considering citizenship from the margins, it is paramount to engage with such bottom-up acts of citizenship associated with experiences, acts and practices of belonging, without, of course, ignoring the very real effects of formal practices of citizenship and exclusion (ibid.).

While not all these acts of belonging immediately seem to be related to what we conventionally understand under citizenship, they are nevertheless "linked to the exercise of agency and declarations of belonging, which […] constitute the very fabric of citizenship" (Jašina-Schäfer, 2020: 105). The key to understanding citizenship "is the construction of belonging" (Jašina-Schäfer & Cheskin, 2020). This construction of belonging is, on the one hand, a top-down project of the nation-state, a subnational territory, a particular community (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Through citizenship law first and foremost, but also through language, integration and education policies, government politics of belonging establish formal and informal boundaries of belonging and exclusion which determine who is considered a full member of a community. Closely intertwined with the political context, the discursive context of public discourse on belonging and non-belonging also contributes to constructing these boundaries of membership (Cinalli and Giugni, 2013; Wisthaler, 2016). And finally, people themselves construct belonging on a daily basis through interactions, relationships, confrontations with others and in and through the spaces which they inhabit. While formal and discursive politics of belonging may create obstacles to full belonging (Dusi et al., 2015), people nevertheless create spaces of belonging for themselves, regardless of whether or not others fully accept them into their community.

For young people with migrant background, the tension between top-down identity politics, particularly related to citizenship law but also to local politics of belonging, on the one hand, and bottom-up daily acts of belonging on the other hand, manifests itself throughout their daily lives. The process for becoming Italian citizens is one of the most discretionary and bureaucratic procedures in Europe (Solano & Huddleston, 2020). Citizenship is not granted automatically to those born on national territory with foreign parents: citizenship is primarily based on blood and descent, not on place of residence. This results in the majority of Italy's 1.3 million people born to parents with migratory background to be foreign citizens – even

though most of them were born in Italy (Istat, 2020). Italy's restrictive citizenship regime has very real implications on the everyday lives of these people (Colombo et al., 2014). Throughout their childhood and youth, they lack many of the rights that their Italian-citizen peers are awarded at birth, rendering full participation in society complicated if not impossible.

At the same time, regardless of their formal citizenship status, young people with migrant background carry out acts of citizenship and, through them, claim spaces of belonging and membership in a particular community (Bloemraad et al. 2008; Jašina-Schäfer & Cheskin, 2020). They appear, for instance, as important actors in national debates surrounding citizenship reforms which call for more inclusive citizenship laws; they participate in petitions and demonstrations, but also law-making and policy processes (Zinn, 2010; Codini & Riniolo, 2018). They also engage in transnational acts of citizenship by participating in diaspora activism (Levitt, 2009; Toivanen & Baser, 2020) as well as activism on the local level. People with migrant background thus challenge and disrupt conventional, nation-based understandings of citizenship, belonging and identity by highlighting the constructed nature of formal, legal citizenship through their hybrid, cosmopolitan, transnational or translocal attachments (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Ambrosini & Molina, 2004; Colombo, 2010; Christou & King, 2010; Wessendorf, 2010; Vila Freyer, 2019; Albanesi et al., 2020). By doing so, they eke out spaces of belonging where they can feel "at home", regardless of their formal membership status (Bloemraad, 2006).

Politics of Belonging: The Case of South Tyrol

South Tyrol represents a particularly intriguing site for the study of the complexities of citizenship and belonging, and the multiplicity of ways marginalized people enact belonging. An autonomous province in Northern Italy, South Tyrol is home to a predominantly German speaking population, a small Ladin minority, Italian speakers and an increasing number of people with migratory background. South Tyrol was part of the Habsburg Empire up until World War I and became part of Italy in October 1920. When Mussolini took power, the fascist government started an Italianization process in the region, prohibiting the use of the German language in public spaces, closing German-language schools, and Italianizing names. In 1939, an agreement between Mussolini and Hitler forced South Tyroleans to decide whether to emigrate to the Third Reich or remain in South Tyrol and accept the fascist Italianization program (Pallaver & Steurer, 2011). 86% of South Tyroleans voted for leaving; about 37 percent actually left (ibid). After World War II, Italy and Austria signed an agreement to protect the minority communities of South Tyrol. However, as it was deemed inadequate by the South Tyrolean population, a wave of protests and tensions emerged in the late 1950s. Ethnic tensions eased with the Second Statute of Autonomy in 1972, which until today provides extensive territorial autonomy and a consociational model of governance that guarantees proportional representation of the three main linguistic communities (Constantin & Carlà, 2019). Rooted in the Declaration of linguistic affiliation or aggregation, which every resident must submit,[3] this governance model includes the proportional representation of the

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[3] The numerical strength of each language group is updated every ten years, when all Italian citizens over the age of 14 residing in the province anonymously declare their affiliation to one of the three groups (Carlà & Constantin, 2019: 163-164). Moreover, a non-anonymous declaration of affiliation is necessary when applying for public-sector employment or public funds. This declaration is only requested once in a lifetime, but may be changed any time. However, there is a time lag between changing affiliation and having the new affiliation recognised – this is to avoid the instrumental use of the declaration for funding or employment purposes.

German, Italian and Ladin linguistic groups in provincial government bodies, the distribution of public employment and public resources among the linguistic groups in proportion to their numerical strength, mandatory bilingualism of public signs and public officers, and mother tongue education. While South Tyrol's autonomy is celebrated as a success in minority protection worldwide, and relations between the language groups are largely peaceful, the autonomy arrangements have also contributed to solidifying ethno-linguistic divisions and reifying the exclusionary aspects of identity (Larin & Röggla, 2018). They construct firm boundaries of belonging and exclusion and shape the sense of belonging of the South Tyrolean population (Carlà, 2018). Thus, divisions between the South Tyrolean linguistic groups continue to pervade almost every aspect of social, economic, and political life (Pallaver, 2012; Medda-Windischer, 2016; Mitterhofer, 2017; Zinn 2018). Children attend separate schools, sports clubs and other afternoon activities, and are thus socialized predominantly within their own language group. People's voting behaviours and media consumption tend to reflect their linguistic background. In short, people "are distanced by a governmental administrative structure of separatism" (Rocha & Costa, 2021: 335). And yet, people find ways to circumvent, challenge and transform this top-down project of belonging and reified categories of identity. Italian parents send their children to German kindergartens and vice versa, others refuse to declare their language affiliation, petition for multilingual schools, vote for a candidate of a party traditionally thought of 'the other', interact with their neighbours, colleagues, friends regardless of their 'official' belonging (Zinn, 2018).

The structural division of life along ethno-linguistic lines has an obvious impact on collective and individual identities and belonging. 80% of the South Tyrolean German-speaking population describes themselves as South Tyroleans, highlighting a strong identification with the local territory and a low attachment to the Italian nation (ASTAT, 2015). Only 10% identify primarily as Italian (ibid). This lack of sense of belonging to an Italian imagined community is accentuated by the fact that many German-speaking South Tyroleans consume primarily German-language media, both local but also Austrian and German media, resulting in a lack of awareness of Italian politics and other current affairs, music, fashion and cultural trends (Anderson, 2006). Moreover, the German-language right-wing parties of the *Süd-Tiroler Freiheit* and *Freiheitlichen* regularly call for dual Italian-Austrian citizenship for South Tyroleans of 'Habsburgian' descent, although support for it amongst the South Tyrolean population is rather weak. A survey of 700 South Tyroleans showed that about 28% of the German-speaking population was in favour of the proposal for double Italian-Austrian citizenship, but only 13% would actually apply for it. The majority of respondents of all language groups considers Austrian-Italian double citizenship as problematic (Apollis, 2019). Thus, for many South Tyroleans, Italian citizenship is merely formal without a deep sense of national identity, rendering "citizenship" – both as formal status and as daily acts (Isin, 2008) – both complicated and controversial.

For the growing number of people with migrant background in South Tyrol, the effects of these rather particular discourses and manifestations of belonging and exclusion are manifold. They grow up in this society divided along linguistic and cultural lines, just like their 'native' peers. They attend either a German- or Italian-language school and afterschool programmes, sports clubs or youth centres, and are thus socialized primarily within one or the other language group. And yet, they are never fully represented by South Tyrol's official three categories of belonging, and express difficulties having to declare themselves as belonging to one – and only one – of the three (Wisthaler, 2016; Zinn, 2018; Carlà, 2018; Medda-

Windischer & Membretti, 2020).[4] A recent study on the effects of South Tyrol's language policies on migrants shows how this language declaration highlights their struggle to fit in, as they feel they cannot, or do not want to, declare themselves as either German or Italian" (Rocha & Costa, 2021: 339). In the South Tyrolean context, the experiences of belonging of people with migrant background are not limited to the usual binary of belonging associated with them in public discourses and political rhetoric (belonging to their parents' homeland, on the one hand, and belonging to the "receiving society", on the other), but are heavily influenced by the local politics of institutionalized and legally codified belonging.

To investigate how these young people enact citizenship and belonging while growing up in a society divided along linguistic and cultural lines, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 young people with migrant background who grew up in South Tyrol and who I had recruited through snowball sampling. The interviews were conducted between 2019-2020. Aged between 18 and 32, about half of the interviewees were Italian citizens while the others were in the process of applying for it. Most had arrived in South Tyrol with their families at age six or younger; two were born in South Tyrol. Their families' countries of origin reflect those most represented in the province: Pakistan, Albania, Kosovo, Morocco, but also Peru and China. All of them spoke South Tyrol's two official languages fluently, those who had attended German-language schools also spoke the local German dialect.[5] 10 of them were active members of one of the two associations of people with migrant background present in South Tyrol: *Giovani Musulmani di Bolzano*, the local chapter of a nationwide organization for Muslim Youth, and *Brücke in die Welt – le nuove generazioni dell'Alto Adige,* an organization which unites second generation youth from all creeds and cultures.

In the following pages, I will explore first, how the young people with migrant background I spoke with negotiate the complexities of multiple belonging in South Tyrol. Second, I explore how they draw on their cultural and linguistic resources and networks when engaging in acts of citizenship that have the potential to transform established discourses on belonging in South Tyrol.

Constructing belonging and enacting citizenship in South Tyrol

In the 1990s, the majority of immigrants to South Tyrol sent their children to Italian-language schools (ASTAT, 2020). The bilingual context of their new home was often not known to them prior arrival, some had already lived in other Italian regions before and thus knew some Italian, and most settled in South Tyrol's largest towns where they majority of the population is Italian-speaking. With Italian schools came Italian-language friends, TV programmes, afterschool activities, etc. The German community was, for many, 'foreign', as they had very limited to no contact. Indeed, studies from the early 2000s show that migrants felt closer to Italian-speakers or other migrants than German-speakers (Rocha & Costa, 2021). This changed as migration to South Tyrol increased and diversified, and families settled for the long-term also in more rural, German-speaking areas. As migrants realized that knowledge of German was essential in securing jobs in South Tyrol, but also that to speak German meant

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[4] Although since 1981 it is possible to affiliate oneself to a fourth group, called "others", when compiling the declaration of belonging a person still needs to declare their "aggregation" to one and only one-of the three established groups (Wisthaler et al. 2021), regardless of their actual feelings of belonging.

[5] According to a study on the languages spoken by South Tyrol's pupils, more than two thirds speak more than three languages, 44% declared to speak four languages, 14% five languages and 10% spoke six, seven, eight or ten languages (Colombo et al., 2020).

to be part of the local "majority", the number of pupils with migratory background in German-language schools increased (Medda-Windischer et al., 2011). Today, about 45% of students without Italian citizenship attend German-language schools, while 55% attend Italian-language schools (Zinn, 2018). As a result, among the young people with migrant background whom I interviewed there was a clear difference between having been educated, and socialized, in an Italian setting and feeling "Italian", versus having been educated in German-language schools and feeling "South Tyrolean"- mirroring thus the sentiments of belonging of the "native" German and Italian population.

Elira,6 a young South Tyrolean woman with Albanian roots, said, *"I grew up as somebody close to the Italians and therefore the Germans were always 'outsiders'"*. Or Sana: *"I went to Italian school and therefore had Italian friends. I didn't know the German world."* Instead, Aisha, whose parents came to South Tyrol from Morocco, and who grew up in a German-speaking village, replied laughing when she was asked whether she felt "Italian": *"I feel a bit of everything! Considering that I grew up here in South Tyrol, German, Italian and Arabic-speaking… I feel South Tyrolean with Moroccan roots. These roots remain, but I am South Tyrolean."* Amir, a young man whose parents arrived to South Tyrol from Morocco before he was born, reflects on these issues of belonging, highlighting those categories of belonging he retains to be key:

> Interviewer: *Did you hang out with everyone when growing up?*
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> Amir: *Not really, because you are Italian and your friends are Italian and therefore it is a bit difficult. It feels unnatural to hang out with Germans. You would just not feel comfortable. It's not that being with them is wrong or something negative…. It's just that you don't feel comfortable.*
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> Interviewer: *Why wouldn't you feel comfortable?*
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> Amir: *You know, if one is used to dressing and speaking in one way, then it is a bit difficult […] In the end, you feel more relaxed when you are with your friends, Italian friends [….]. If you are the only Italian in a group of Germans, then they tend to marginalise you a bit […]. When you are in the minority, even if you want to integrate yourself, the group often seeks to exclude you.*

Similarly, his peer Muhammad explains, *"When I was in primary school […] one didn't talk about Italians and foreigners, but about Italians and Germans."*

While accounts of people with migrant background frequently home in on their position as "outsiders", the reflections of these young people address different concerns. The salient categories of difference in their lived experience of growing up in the divided society of South Tyrol is not that of migrant versus non-migrant, but that of Italian versus German. These young people are, on the one hand, part of these two 'local' communities as they attend the same schools and youth clubs. And yet, they are apart from it - their "migration background" being a factor that prevents them from ever fully belonging in either community, as other young people with migrant background pointed out (Mitterhofer & Jimenez-Rosano, 2019). A minority living in a minority area at the margins of the Italian state, "betwixt and in between" (Anzaldua 1987), their description of the two parallel life worlds of South Tyrol highlight many of the tensions and struggles present within South Tyrolean society and reified by the province's politics of belonging and exclusion. The acts of belonging young people with migrant background perform on a daily basis happen both within and beyond the

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6 All names are pseudonyms.

German or Italian communities. They explain, for instance, how through choosing how they dress, what hairstyle they wear, which TV series they watch (and hence, which cultural references they share), which youth centres they hang out in, they display their affiliation with the Italian, rather than the German community. Amir explained:

> *"If you look at young people here, you see the Germans with their colourful jackets, and the Italians with their grey or black jackets, in muted colours. Already from their clothing choices you understand who is who. And my jacket – it is also black, it's an Italian jacket. But also with jokes – we have different senses of humour! You really need to understand the language, the references of the jokes, to be part of the community. Italian jokes make me laugh -- which means I pass the test that I am part of 'them'".*

Others highlight their identification with South Tyrol rather than Italy by emphasizing their knowledge of local dialects, participating in 'traditional' customs such as local marching bands or the local volunteer fire fighters or emergency services. Aisha stressed this in her comment:

> *"I belong to the small South Tyrolean village where I grew up. I may wear my headscarf, but I am a volunteer at the White Cross! I am a South Tyrolean, a volunteer wearing a headscarf and speaking the local dialect".*[7]

And yet, sometimes they very consciously highlight their "migrant-ness", their "in-betweenness" and their status of a marginalized group: "I am a foreigner", Jack, born and raised in South Tyrol by parents of Senegali descent, stated proudly. Or Marwa:

> *I wear the headscarf, and the salwar kameez, and people judge me as foreign, and I don't care. I am proud of it and even though I grew up here, I don't really feel I belong. I like it here, but I am Pakistani.*

These practices challenge conventional understandings of what 'belonging' should entail for people with migrant background – ultimately assimilation into the so-called host society – by seemingly conscious acts of 'non-belonging'. This may include displaying flags of their parents' country of origin, performing (trans-)national pride and attachment in a highly visible and public manner. Others produce rap-songs about the discrimination and social exclusion they may experience[8] - explicit acts of civic denunciation of the treatment of people perceived as 'different' by majority population. And yet others simply hang out with peers with a similar migratory background, fully aware – and defiant – of the reaction that a group of headscarf-wearing girls, or Black young men, may provoke among the majority population. As John explained:

> *We hang out together – so what? They have to understand that we live here too, and that South Tyrol is also our home. Even if we are Black, even if we wear headscarves, even if we speak Urdu or Albanian or Chinese at home.*

These diverse and sometimes contrasting acts of alternative belonging (and 'non-belonging') in relation to one or the other of South Tyrol's historical linguistic communities and the ethno-

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[7] The White Cross is the largest emergence medical service organization in South Tyrol and is, historically, deeply rooted in the German-speaking society of South Tyrol.

[8] See, for instance, the rap video produced by the Group "Famille" in Sinigo/Merano, and the reaction of press and politics: https://www.rainews.it/tgr/tagesschau/video/2019/10/tag-Meran-Gesellschaft-Rap-Musik-Jugendliche-a5ef1e38-438e-461e-b015-7c66b9aaa00c.html.

linguistic background of their families co-exist in the daily lives of the young people I interviewed. What emerges clearly is how the complexities of belonging in South Tyrol influence the way they enact belonging. When talking about people with migrant background, it is insufficient to adopt a nation-centred perspective (Dahinden, 2016). The local, sub-national context is as important, if not even more, in shaping people's perceptions and experiences of belonging and exclusion. This is true for South Tyrol, but also for any other context located - geographically, ideologically, politically - at 'the margins' . It becomes particularly salient when exploring how persons excluded from (formalized) membership in a nation-state through exclusionary politics of belonging enact citizenship and, through these acts, claim (informal) membership. These acts of citizenship are 'historically grounded and geographically responsive' (Isin, 2008), and, importantly, they may not always fit conventional understandings of citizenship. For people unable to access formal citizenship and struggling to 'belong' within conventional categories of belonging, such situated acts of citizenship carry the potential to "challenge universalising conceptions, moving us towards richer heterogeneity of meanings that citizenship can invoke in particular historic and cultural contexts" (Jašina-Schäfer & Cheskin, 2020). The final section illustrates how young people with migrant background engage in such challenges to established conceptions of belonging, highlighting how, by drawing on the cultural and linguistic resources available to them because of their family background, they actively aim at transforming belonging in South Tyrol.

"Like a bridge": transforming established ways of belonging

Many of the young people with migrant background I interviewed challenged South Tyrol's top-down politics of belonging and exclusion through intentional acts to highlight how their status as outsiders, their already hybrid identities and their multiple roots made them ideal candidates for transforming established meanings of belonging and, by doing so, bridging the divisions in South Tyrolean society (Zinn, 2018). This manifests itself particularly clearly in the initiatives promoted by "*Brücke in die Welt – Le Nuove Generazioni dell'Alto Adige*"[9], an association founded by and for young people with migrant background in South Tyrol. Its bilingual name signals a conscious choice to acknowledge the bilingual reality of South Tyrol as well as the association's mission to 'bridge' societal divisions between South Tyrol's German and Italian communities, on the one hand, and between the 'historical' population and newcomers to the province, on the other. While the association uses Italian as the main medium of communication and most of its members were socialized within South Tyrol's Italian community, it remains very conscious of South Tyrol's particular situation. Sharoom, founder and president of *Brücke in die Welt*, explicitly highlights the association's aim of contributing to bringing together South Tyrol's society by drawing on the members' own experiences of daily juggling different cultures and languages. According to Sharoom, the intercultural and plurilingual skills, lives and experiences of young people with migrant background equip them well to be mediators, translators and facilitators between cultures, be they migratory or native ones (Eurac Research, 2019). Moreover, as people often considered 'outsiders' by the majority populations, they can offer a particular, more detached, perspective on South Tyrol's politics of belonging, and propose alternative ways of managing diversity. To do so, *Brücke in die Welt* regularly engages with other civil society organisations on issues related to civil rights, intercultural living and communication, organizes workshops for schools and companies, and intervenes in local media in an effort to change established

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[9] "A bridge into the world – The New Generations of South Tyrol".

discourses. Its members actively commit themselves to improving the society within which they live (see also Mezzetti & Ricucci, 2019). They do so by participating in South Tyrolean society as active citizens, recognizing the territory's particular history, politics and complexities as part of their own lives – even if some of them are not Italian citizens and are labelled and discriminated as 'foreigners' who do not belong. Simultaneously in- and outsider, they challenge and blur fixed and binary categories of identity and belonging and introduce new layers of complexity to local debates on these issues. They are harbingers of change, challenging the majority population to reflect on what long-standing, reified categories of belonging actually mean.

Conclusions

Conventional discourses about local belonging in South Tyrol do not – yet - foresee a place for people with migrant background and regularly exclude them both formally and informally. Similarly, Italian citizenship law provides a series of hurdles preventing many descendants of migrants from formally becoming part of the Italian nation. Both on the national and the local level, young people of with migrant background are thus marginalized and struggle to be recognized as equal members of Italian society which for many does not foresee a space to fully "feel at home" (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yet, regardless of their formal membership, they perform belonging through a multitude of more or less informal acts, practices and interactions directed toward the society and territory within which they live. These include, first, participating in collective, formalized citizenship campaigns and petitions or the organization of workshops, lectures and other awareness-raising activities by local associations such as *Brücke in die Welt,* all of which aim to affect a change in the current regime of identity politics and belonging. Second, young people of migrant background engage in practices of daily life such as choosing how to dress, what hairstyle to wear, where and with whom to spend their free time. In the context of South Tyrol, these seemingly mundane practices of claiming belonging to one particular community rather than the other can become expressions of everyday, locally embedded citizenship. Third, practices of alternative belonging may include provocative acts such as flying 'foreign' flags or performing controversial rap songs which explicitly express 'non-belonging' and underline a perceived or actual 'outsider' status, on the one hand, and may be open critiques of discriminations, racism and intolerance, on the other hand. Finally, simply 'being' and participating as persons with migrant background in South Tyrolean society through the most mundane acts of everyday life – going to school, shopping, playing football or volunteering – has an impact on local perceptions of identity and belonging by highlighting that the binary conception of South Tyrolean society as Italian, on the one hand, and German, on the other, no longer reflects the reality on the ground.

By investigating this multitude of often complex and creative acts of belonging at a territory at the margins of a state (South Tyrol) by actors often considered to be at the margins of the state (young people with migrant background), this article contributes to scholarly debates that seek to 'decentre' citizenship. It does so, first, by illustrating the importance of the subnational context in shaping how people with migration background enact citizenship and belonging, regardless of their formal status. As the case of South Tyrol showed, young descendants of migrants need to negotiate not only the tensions between (not-) belonging to Italy and their parents' homelands, but also the tensions between a South Tyrolean identity and the affiliation to the Italian nation. A serious consideration of the localized politics of belonging is therefore paramount to fully understand the multilayered dimensions of lived

citizenship below and beyond the nation-state. While this paper is based on research in South Tyrol, much of it applies also to other contexts, particularly those where identity is legally and institutionally reified, and discourses on national, sub-national and local belonging, citizenship and identity are highly politicized even within the 'traditional' communities – for instance, Scotland, Catalonia, Quebec, or Belgium. Finally, the article shows how conventional, nation-based understandings of citizenship are challenged and disrupted through the presence and the acts of young people with migrant background who both intentionally and inadvertently point out the inadequacies of conventional conceptions of 'citizenship' and 'belonging', and call for more inclusive understandings of belonging, both in South Tyrol and beyond.

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