



The voice of Maria Dolens

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Time for alliances

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We have had the opportunity to deal with the 2024 "super election year" with a certain regularity in previous issues of the «Voice», with an initial overview (see no. 42) aimed at illustrating both the extraordinary dimensions of the exercise (half of the global electorate, i.e. two billion people, called to the polls practically without interruption in 70 different countries) and its "strategic" relevance, so to speak. For once in agreement, the experts and political commentators evaluate it as a very reliable sort of "crash test" to verify the stability and resilience of democratic systems in

the face of the worrying advance of markedly autocratic and illiberal regimes perceptible in almost all continents.

In the March editorial, with reference to Turkey, we thus commented favourably on the clear statement (in elections, it is true, at an administrative rather than political level) by the moderate candidates who are more open to cooperation with foreign countries, in the vast majority of the regions and urban realities of a country which serves as a vital link between Europe and Asia.

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STORIES OF TRENINO PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

The postage stamp with the Rovereto castle

FRÉDÉRIC SPAGNOLI, UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR IN FRANCE

We asked various descendants of Trentino emigrants to tell their stories firsthand, emphasizing how their origins have guided and influenced them in life. This would not have been possible without the active and cordial collaboration of the "Trentini nel Mondo" Association, founded in 1957, working for social solidarity and as support for aggregation and assistance for Trentino migrants and their descendants. The figure we present in this issue is Frédéric Spagnoli, a university professor in France originally from Rovereto.

My name is Frédéric Spagnoli. I was born on 8 November 1980 and I have been an associate professor of Italian language and culture at the University of Franche-Comté in Besançon in France since 2009. At this university I am also responsible for international relations and I manage agreements and collaborations with universities all over the world, both for student mobility and for research projects and conferences, from Lebanon to Peru, from Senegal to Armenia and so on. In reality, this essential international dimension in my work today derives partly from my Trentino origins and from the relationship I was able to create with Trentino for my academic research. Allow me to explain.

My grandfather was born in Rovereto, also on 8 November but in 1904. He left Volano, where he was living, in 1923 to go to Grandvillars, in the department of the *Territoire de Belfort* in Eastern France, on the border with Switzerland. I was born and raised in this region, three kilo-

metres from Switzerland and fifty kilometres from Germany: growing up in a border area means being in contact with different languages and from an early age I was interested in languages and travel. Trentino, as an integral part of the family history, was obviously of great interest to me. I remember looking at a 500 Lire stamp with the Rovereto castle as a child and how I dreamed of going to Trentino, until finally during one of the numerous trips to Trentino I was able to see it "in real life".

Until university, Trentino, which for me meant Rovereto and its surroundings, had been a summer holiday destination. All that changed when I had the chance to do a PhD in 2003. After a first degree in languages and commerce and a master's degree in acquisition and logistics with study and internship experiences in Edinburgh, the Milanese hinterland and the German Ruhr, I wanted to try a PhD to move towards an academic career or to be able to work in large international institutions.



Frédéric Spagnoli during a seminar

It was the PhD that allowed me to transform the ties I had with Trentino from my summer holidays into an annual working relationship, and thus to significantly transform my association with the land of my ancestors. After discussions and exchanges with various teachers in Besançon and Trento, I had the opportunity to begin research on Trentino emigration to France in co-supervision between the University of Franche-Comté, in the Italian studies department, and the University of Trento in Sociology, that is, with a supervisor in each of the countries for a single thesis.

At the time, scholars of Italian emigration were very interested in migratory ranges that is, they aimed to study migratory activity in relation to both the starting point and

the arrival point, as a dynamic movement with origins and reverberations in both places. And so, with this idea in mind, I became interested in the migratory trends uniting the Leno valleys - in particular Terragnolo and Trambileno - and the towns of Grandvillars, Delle and the surrounding villages. As established in the co-supervision thesis agreement I arrived in Trento in October 2005 where I stayed for a year and since then my relationship with Trentino has completely transformed. Having begun to study the history, geography and sociology of Trentino in depth to understand the origins of migratory flows as much as possible, I truly began to "experience Trentino" and this has enriched me greatly.

In October 2005, on the advice of Professor Gabriele Pollini who was following me for my doctorate, I knocked on the door of the "Trentini nel Mondo" association to speak with the director at the time, Rino Zandonai. Somewhat naively, I arrived without an appointment and was told that the director could receive me but only for a few minutes. I left an hour later with many new ideas and many suggestions. That's how meetings with Rino were.

What struck me most in coming into contact with "Trentini nel Mondo" is the international presence of the association with over two hundred clubs scattered around the world and the numerous international activities. I began to see the research work on a specific migratory trend in a broader global framework, as if the world of emigration were a mosaic and my research constituted a small piece of it. Since then, this image of the mosaic has accompanied me in all my research on emigration that took me from France to Eastern Europe and Latin America. In addition to helping me understand the importance of the Trentino migration phenomenon abroad, this general overview helped me understand the influence of migration on Trentino itself. Studying emigration with an extensive, historical perspective also means, by extension, studying the evolution of Trentino society, the society of a borderland between Central Europe and the Latin world.

When in autumn 2008 I was awarded a sociology research grant on linguistic minorities in Trentino and the processes of identity transmission, I was also awarded the opportunity to look not only at the Trentino people living outside of Trentino but those living in the province. In January 2009, I therefore began to study the three linguistic minorities of Trentino, the *Ladini*, *Mòcheni* and *Cimbri*. The research I concluded in 2016 attempted to outline a picture of the identity transmission processes from 2009 to 2016 with 2009 being the first year that

Provincial Law number 6 was implemented whereby the so-called "Trentino model" for minority protection was created. I carried out this research by combining different types of sources as well as analysing existing literature on the topic. I was also able to observe the main cultural moments of the communities and interview approximately one hundred people representing the three groups. The time spent in Val di Fassa, Val dei Mòcheni and Luserna, as well as the study of Trentino society in general, allowed me to further strengthen my bond with Trentino and get to know other areas of the province.



The postage stamp depicting the Rovereto castle

Even though I have been an associate professor in France since 2009, I travel four to seven times a year to Trentino, which has allowed me to maintain numerous contacts in the area, both work and personal. In 2019, I created a double three-year degree in languages between Besançon and Trento with a colleague from the Trentino university, Professor Jean-Paul Dufiet, so as to be able to share my interest in Trentino with my students. There are currently seven students from Besançon in Trento.

To conclude, I can say that today, in addition to being the place of origin of my paternal family, Trentino has become a place of work for me that occupies a significant part of my life.

ART AND SOCIETY

The painter who brought an end to the war

War is more spectacular than peace. Hence, there are more films or paintings that tell of battles than those that question why some battles did not happen. Peace doesn't make noise, nor does diplomacy when it works. There is an artist however who has merged two roles, that of

the painter and that of the negotiator. On the one hand he painted absolute masterpieces that evoke the need to defend peace from attacks coming from all sides. On the other hand, he travelled around Europe to convince the royals that it was worth sending the soldiers who were still alive back home.

There is a large painting entitled Minerva protects Pax from Mars ('Peace and War') which was painted in London, between 1629 and 1630, and is preserved in the National Gallery. The artist actually lived in Antwerp, and in those days, one had to have good reason to travel all those kilometres and settle in such a distant place. Who knows how many borders were crossed, how many horses were fatigued, how many dangers were encountered. One didn't go from Antwerp to London on holiday in the 17th century. This man was in fact an envoy of Philip IV of Spain, and had been sent to negotiate peace with Charles I of England. The two countries had been at war for 5 years. Both monarchs wished to reach an agreement. But signing for peace is never easy because kings and queens like



Pieter Paul Rubens, «Minerva protects Pax from Mars» (1629-1630, London, The National Gallery)

to be right even when they lose or reach a stalemate. In any case they need a credible story to tell their subjects and court historians.

And so even when it is clear that the time to stop fighting has come, someone is needed to find an honourable way out for all.

Then there are personal passions, which often play an important role in history. Charles I, for example, was a great connoisseur of art. A passionate collector, he knew and appreciated contemporary architects, sculptors and painters. Philip IV exploited this "weakness" to implement a winning strategy: he sent one of his most capable diplomats, Pieter Paul Rubens, a Flemish diplomat born in 1577 who incidentally also had a certain familiarity with canvases and brushes. The great painter painted a new work for the English sovereign, extremely relevant to his mission. In the centre is depicted the personification of Pax, nude, while she feeds Plutus, the god of wealth, with her milk. Its prosperous and opulent forms best express the ideal of female beauty of the time, but also the pleasantness of peace in contrast with the abomination of war.

According to a discovery resulting from x-rays taken in London not long ago, the picture was initially smaller than today's and was limited to the central group. There was Pax, little Plutus, the group of children on the right with Hymen, the god of marriage, and behind them an armed Minerva pushing away Mars, the god of war, accompanied by a Fury. The English king must have understood the meaning of the work well, which convinced him to accept the proposals of the great painter in his capacity as mediator. Charles I therefore said he was ready to sign for peace, which was concluded eight months later, but probably required an expansion of the work to make it more grandiose and imposing than Rubens had initially conceived. According to some experts, this would explain the enlargement of the painting's format and the apparent haste with which the external parts of the composition were completed, with the addition on the left of two women who are difficult to interpret, a satyr, the whole lower band of the painting and also, in the upper right corner, of a harpy. Rubens, for what it was worth, was knighted, and returned to Antwerp in March 1630. In November a Peace Treaty was signed between England and Spain.

However expert he was, the English king could not have noticed that the group of children in the centre on the right are the portrait of the children of Balthasar Gerbier, an art dealer in the service of the crown where Rubens was a guest during this diplomatic mission in



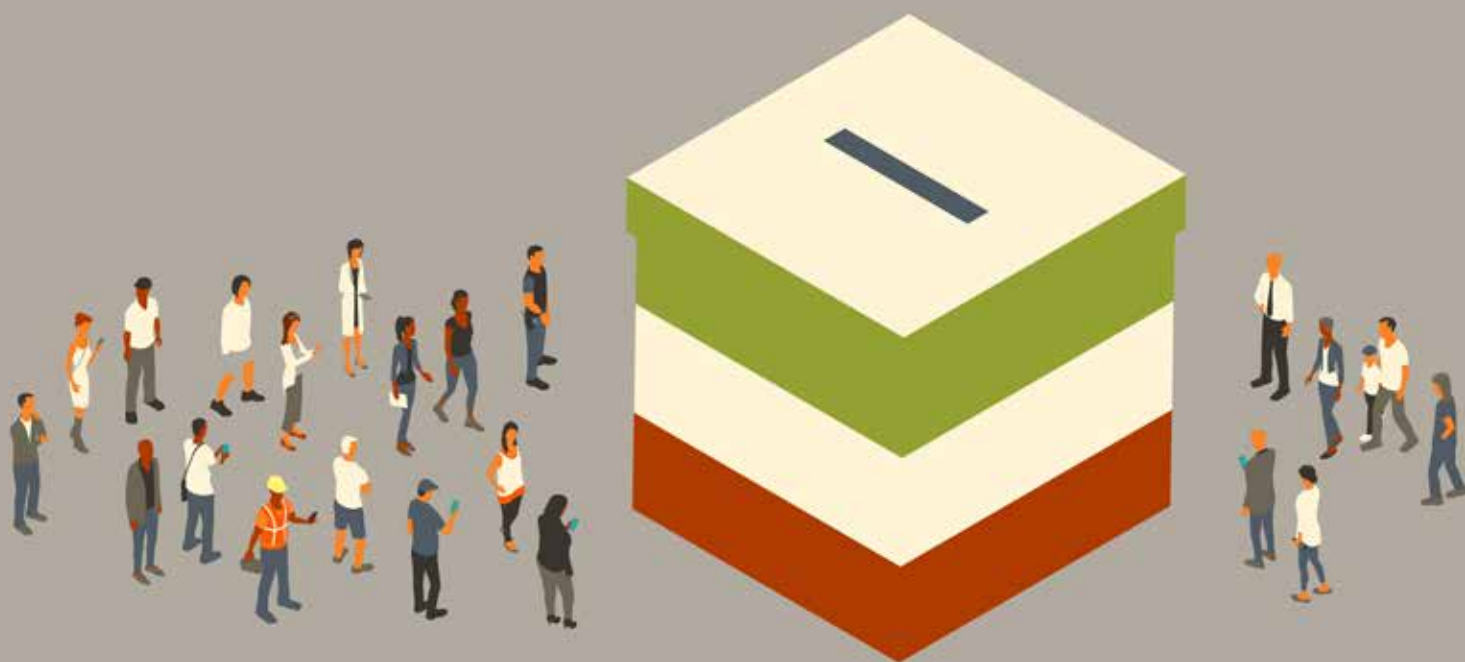
Pieter Paul Rubens, Self-Portrait (1623; oil on panel, Windsor, The Royal Collection)

London. George is the model for Hymen, the boy with the torch, while the girl who is adorned with a crown of flowers is his sister Elizabeth.

The other girl, staring directly at us with large, hopeful, slightly anxious eyes, is another sister, Susan.

It must have been a surprise for the English sovereign to see a painter of that level arrive in the role of negotiator. But Rubens had discovered his passion for diplomacy at the age of 13, when he entered the service of a Countess of Antwerp as a page. Shortly afterwards the artist decided to dedicate himself completely to painting and it cannot be said that he chose the wrong career although the path was tough. Rubens worked every day from four in the morning until five in the afternoon, and it was this absolute dedication that led to his success. Life however is made up of crossroads, and they are usually traumatic events. In 1625, during a terrible plague epidemic, the painter lost his beloved wife. It was at that moment that, in order to distract himself, he returned to accepting diplomatic missions which forced him to travel.

One of the greatest artists of all time was also a great politician, out of passion and also a little by chance. There may not be enough historical evidence to support it, but we like to think that the ability to see beauty, to create, reveal and search for it, was the same that led him to see, create, reveal and search for peace.



To be continued from page 1...

More recent (since they date back to the end of May / beginning of June) are the equally positive findings coming from two other protagonists on the international scene, India and South Africa, united by their common affiliation to two multilateral “fora” of growing influence and prestige, which are the G20 and the BRICS.

In the first case, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, undisputed dominus of the subcontinent from 2014 to today, has been reconfirmed in office for a third term, but his leadership will from now on be decidedly limited. The parties that traditionally support him - first of all the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - have in fact obtained a result that is much lower than expected, resulting in the loss of around 60 seats compared to 2019. In the evaluation of experts, Modi must be acknowledged with the undoubted merit of having brought India, over the last decade, to levels of economic growth and well-being hitherto unmatched in its history. In relation to his failures, the “mother of all questions” pertaining to Indian society, that of “castes”, continues unresolved, further exasperated by the climate of accentuated Hinduism promoted by the Prime Minister. Even some excessively restrictive measures (regarding freedom of the press for example) have ended up alienating some of his support. At this point, Modi will have to come to terms with the opposition (personified, alongside other lesser powers, by Rahul Gandhi’s Congress Party), restoring as necessary, that political dialectic which, particularly during his most recent mandate, was found to be almost non-existent. Moving on to the second case, the African National Congress (ANC) - Nelson Mande-

la’s historic party uninterruptedly in power in Pretoria since the end of apartheid in 1994 - has fallen for the first time, and rather significantly, below the crucial threshold of absolute majority (40.2 percent compared to 57.5 in 2019), finding itself in the unprecedented position of having to form a coalition government to stay in the saddle. Ramaphosa (an influential member of the ANC) correctly assessed the outcome of the polls as a sign of the desire of South African citizens «to encourage constructive collaboration between the main parties, for the benefit of the country and its inhabitants». The recent news of his re-election and the formation of a “national unity government” between the ANC and its direct rival, the Democratic Alliance (DA), a party with which the white minority can identify, consequently seems to be the most logical conclusion to ensure the country a period of prolonged stability, also necessary to regulate a less than brilliant internal economic situation.

Political scenarios in India and South Africa, two realities where we may acknowledge great diversity and not only geographically, suggest the need for an immediate and constructive “functional dialogue” between the forces of the majority and the opposition. This would consolidate internal balance and ensure an adequate position in the international field also in the future. It would lead to a path of virtuous development, particularly significant in the context of the Global South often at risk of authoritarianism, which cannot fail to please those who consider open political debate, though harsh at times, an indispensable founding element of any authentic system of democracy.

The outcome of the election in Mexico, which coincides with those of the two afore-mentioned countries, must be received with a note of greater caution. The election of Claudia Sheinbaum (as of 1 October the first woman to hold the prestigious position) came as no surprise, also because she was clearly supported by the outgoing president, Lopez Obrador. The extent of her success was however less expected, with the main government party "Morena" close to 60 percent of the vote. This cautionary note refers to the possible loss in the pre-existing system of checks and balances given the striking majority of seats in both houses of Parliament. To cite a far from unrealistic example, at the moment there is no possibility for the opposition to block the constitutional amendments, in an authoritarian sense, that the new president clearly intends to submit to close legislative examination once she has taken office.

Given the Mexican "attenuation" (so far only theoretical), the frequent fears that arose at the beginning of 2024 regarding the negative repercussions deriving from the "super election year" in terms of increased instability and a substantial weakening of democratic systems, would seem, for the moment, averted.

A totally different discussion obviously concerns the possibility of loosening the iron control over territories and populations exercised by certain totalitarian regimes through the holding of elections. To clarify, in North Korea, Russia, Belarus and in other dictatorships, the "ritual" appointments with the polls have taken place in 2024, without any doubts whatsoever regarding the final outcome of the vote even before they were held. In all those countries the autocrats

already in power were reconfirmed in their positions very often with unanimous majorities. A not dissimilar scenario will also occur shortly in Iran, with the succession to the late president, in which – save for one exception – only radical and ultra-conservative candidates will compete.

To think that different results could emerge from the polls in these countries, apart from occasional demonstrations of protest by courageous dissidents or "heroic" voters, must be acknowledged as pure utopia.

Having examined the electoral outcomes in geographical contexts that are undoubtedly central in today's global geo-political system but at the same time geographically very distant from ours, the question that would seem legitimate to ask is how to evaluate, as a whole, the resulting vote from the European elections in June.

The discussion is obviously complex, not least due to the lack of homogeneity of the indications received from the 27 member countries, many of which – without beating around the bush – are decidedly negative. The press, both national and international, has dedicated extensive comments and varied interpretations to it, which is why every citizen-voter (a very different category, it should be noted, from that of the inhabitants of the European Union) can draw one's own independent conclusions.

For our part, not least for reasons of space, we will postpone other personal considerations on the topic to a future issue of the «Voice».

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President



FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS - P10

The second casting

The first Bell had now been destroyed. But everyone was ready to recast the second one. There was a large audience on 12 October 1938 at Luigi Cavadini's foundry in Verona. The external bronze decoration was once again entrusted to Stefano Zuech. The applause, however, did not start, as the liquid poured into the mould created such strong pressure that the mould was torn apart. Disappointment in those present and bitterness in Don Rossaro. But the priest from Rovereto knew how to get back up after a fall, no matter how disastrous. It took almost a year before he could try again. The new casting commenced on 13 June 1939, faster than the first, lasting six minutes and thirty-five seconds. This time there was applause. A final inspection was still necessary and would take place the following August, while its creator was immersed in initiatives to celebrate the first chime.

Of course, inaugurating a Bell in memory of the fallen of the First World War while the Second was about to begin couldn't have been easy. That monument to peace weighing over 162 quintals, 3 meters high, with a diameter of another 3 meters and a six-quintal clapper was to "fight" figuratively against too many armies.

Hitler's Germany had already invaded Poland when Don Rossaro thought of involving the embassies of the various countries that had participated in the casting of the first Bell. He did so by requesting a flask with the waters of the most significant rivers of their country,

which would then be used for the "baptism" of the new symbol of Peace. It may have been a naive request, but what other path could be pursued at a time when the armies had already begun to march together?

Behind that initiative there was a hope and an awareness that the priest had the courage to communicate to the foreign ambassadors with a letter in his style, most certainly rhetorical, but unquestionably clear: «Even above the turbid clouds that darken the sky the stars shine; so above and beyond the storm that devastates our horizon, the "ideal" remains sovereign. And it is precisely for this reason that I am honoured to announce to Your Excellency that the monumental Bell of the Fallen, recently recast with cannons from almost all the States of the Great War, is a marvelous success». But his gaze went even further, seeing the need to promote dialogue at the end of a war that had just begun: «We ignore, at the moment, what fate looms over Humanity, and for this reason we have, for now, suspended the program of the great celebrations of its inauguration. Monument of just peace and human brotherhood, the glorious Bell of the Fallen, which belongs to all the nations of yesterday's war, whatever the fate of the people from this dark storm, it will remain faithful to its statute without fail, and we assure you, that the venerable Bell will perpetually celebrate the glorious heroes of our great land, which you represent so nobly».

