

Return and Circular Migration in Contemporary European History

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Edited by

Catherine Brice, Maddalena Marinari,
Anna Mazurkiewicz and Machteld Venken

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Return and Circular Migration in Contemporary European History

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Sarah Oberbichler, Eva Pfanzelter, and Valerio Larcher

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Sarah Oberbichler, Eva Pfanzelter, Valerio Larcher

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List of Contributors

Alessandro Celi has obtained a PhD in Contemporary History at the University of Udine and the archivist diploma from the State Archives of Turin. Contract professor of modern history at the University of Aosta Valley in 2018. He is currently president of the scientific committee of Fondation Émile Chanoux and coordinator of the research project “La Mémoire de l’émigration,” promoted by the Aosta Valley Autonomous Region. Author of over 60 articles and monographs, he is part of the editorial board of *Le Flambeau*, journal of the Comité des Traditions Valdôtaines. His studies on emigration were published in the editions of the report “Italiani nel mondo” in 2020, 2021, and 2023.

Emanuele Ertola is Assistant Professor in Contemporary History at the University of Siena. He has been Research Fellow and Adjunct Professor in the Universities of Siena and Pavia. His research deals with various areas of Italian history including fascism, settler colonialism, decolonization, and emigration. On these topics he has published numerous contributions in Italian and international scientific journals, and various books including *In terra d’Africa. Gli italiani che colonizzarono l’impero* (Laterza, 2017) and *Il colonialismo degli italiani. Storia di un’ideologia* (Carocci, 2022).

Francesca Frisone is a Post-Doctoral Fellow in Contemporary History at University of Messina and Adjunct Professor in Contemporary History. Her research has focused primarily on political struggle and Sicilian elites in the first half of the nineteenth century. Currently she is working on political repression and freedom of association in Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of her main interests is immigration and emigration in Italy both from a political and social perspective. She is author of *La formazione dei Parlamenti siciliani nel periodo della transizione costituzionale 1810–1815* (Aracne, 2017) and “Immigrazione in Italia tra antipolitica e populismo (1992–2018): la Lega Nord e il welfare chauvinism,” *Nazioni e Regioni* 19/20 (2022).

Verena Hechenblaikner studied history at the University of Innsbruck, specializing in contemporary history. Between 2020 and 2023, she worked on a research project at the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Innsbruck. In her master’s thesis, she dealt with the challenges and opportunities faced by return migrants when crossing the border into South Tyrol. Her research interests lie primarily in regional, environmental, and migration history.

David Jacquet is an application developer at the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C²DH) of the University of Luxembourg. He likes working with Java, Databases, and Data modeling. He is the main support for Nodegoat in the center.

Valerio Larcher is a native of Bolzano and was a member of the ReMIGRA research team for the Free University of Bolzano-Bozen from 2021 to 2023. He achieved Bachelor’s (2011) and Master’s (2014) Degrees as well as his PhD (2018) at the University of Padua, in History, Historical Sciences, and Historical, Geographical, and Anthropological studies respectively. His research interests are historical atlases, historical cartography, (return) migration history, public history and video games and history.

Milovanović Miloš is a PhD researcher who is currently employed full-time at Linkoping University in Sweden. He has a degree in Demography and Population Studies from the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Geography, Department of Demography, and a master's degree in Sociology with a specialization in Global Social Change from Corvinus University of Budapest. Miloš's research interests lie in the field of so-called political demography. Currently, he explores the implementation of hierarchical statistical approaches in modelling the impact of ageing on election participation in Sweden, as well as the influence of demographic shifts on the level of human agency.

Giada Noto is currently a PhD student in history at the University of Innsbruck and works as an archivist at the *Frauenarchiv Bozen*. She completed her Bachelor in Communication Sciences at the University of Verona in 2016 and a double master's degree in Historical Sciences (Universities of Bielefeld and Bologna, 2020). From September 2021 to June 2023, she was research assistant in the *Option Digital project* conducted by Unibz and Uibk. Her research interests encompass regional contemporary history, social history, gender history, as well as postcolonial history.

Sarah Oberbichler is a postdoctoral researcher at the Leibniz Institute of European History in Mainz, Germany. She received her PhD in Contemporary History at University of Innsbruck in 2019 and is currently working on projects for the analysis and visualization of digital newspapers and digital archives. Her research interests are European and regional contemporary history, (return) migration history, transatlantic migration, media and discourse, and digital humanities.

Katia Pedevilla is a master's student in history at the University of Innsbruck. From 2021 to 2023, she worked as a student assistant in the research project "Return Migration as an Interdisciplinary Research Area Using the Example of the South Tyrolean 'Return Option'" led by Prof. Eva Pfanzelter and Prof. Andrea Di Michele. As part of this project, she wrote her bachelor's thesis on the internal structure and main tasks of the Office of Resettlement Assistance in Bolzano. Recently (in June 2023), her thesis was published in the fifteenth edition of the journal "historia.scribere" at the University of Innsbruck.

Alessandro Pes is associate Professor of History at the University of Cagliari, and Fellow at the Remarque Institute of the New York University. He deals with the history of colonialism and Fascism in Italy and is currently conducting research on the Italian decolonization and the spreading of the stereotype of the "good colonizer" in post-war Italy. About this topic he has recently edited together with Filippo Focardi a special issue of *Memoria e Ricerca* (2, 2023) which aimed to investigate the relations between the colonial past and the politics of memory and the public use of history in Europe.

Eva Pfanzelter is an associate Professor and Deputy Chair of the Department of Contemporary History, Chair of the Digital Humanities Research Center and Chair of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History – all at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. Her research and teaching focus is on European and regional contemporary history, Holocaust, cultures of remembrance and politics of history, migration history, digital history / digital humanities.

Ivan Stecher is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Innsbruck and currently employed at the Tyrolean Provincial Archives. He studied political science in Innsbruck and Vienna (BA) as well as history and geography in Innsbruck (Mag.). He has worked for the Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology and the Federal Ministry of Digital Affairs and Economy in Vienna, among others, and as a freelance historian on several projects for public institutions and associations. During his studies he had various research stays in Italy, the USA and Slovenia.

Machteld Venken is a Professor of Contemporary Transnational History at the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C²DH). Her main research interests are transnational, transregional, and comparative histories of Europe, migration, borderlands, oral history, the history of families and children, and citizen science.

Lorella Viola is Assistant Professor in Digital Humanities & Society at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Her research investigates how power, latent assumptions and implicit ideologies are manifested through language and circulated in media and society. She also researches the impact of the digital transformation of society on knowledge creation theory and practice.

List of Abbreviations

AAng	Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (Foreign Affairs)
ACS	Archivio dello Stato (National Archives Italy)
ADERSt	Amtliche Deutsche Ein- und Rückwandererstelle (Official German Immigration and Emigration Center)
ADO	Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Optanten für Deutschland (Working Group of Optants for Germany)
AdR	Archiv der Republik (Archives of the Republic Austria)
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMG	Allied Military Government
ANNO	Austrian Newspapers Online (Platform of the Austrian National Library)
ANPAO	National Association of East African Refugees
AOI	Africa Orientale Italiana (Italian East Africa)
ASTAT	Agenzia Provinciale per la Statistica - Südtirol (Provincial Statistics Institute of South Tyrol)
BBÄ	Bestände von Behörden und Ämtern (Inventories of Authorities and Offices)
BMAA	Bundesministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs Austria)
CISEI	Centro Internazionale Studi Emigrazione Italiana (International Center for Italian Emigration Studies)
CRP	Campi per i Rifugiati Profughi (Refugee Camps)
DC	Democrazia Christiana (Christian Democratic Party)
DHMS	Digital Historical Migration Studies
DOEW	Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (Documentation Archive of the Austrian Resistance)
DP	Displaced Persons
DUS	Dienststelle Umsiedlung Südtirol (South Tyrolean Resettlement Office)
EEC	European Economic Community
EHRI	European Holocaust Research Infrastructure
ENTV	Ente Nazionale delle Tre Venezie (National Board for the three Venetian Regions)
FENPIA	Federazione Nazionale Combattenti, Profughi e Italiani d'Africa (National Federation of Fighters, Refugees, and Italians of Africa)
GIL	Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (Italian Youth of the Lictor, Fascist Youth Organization)
GIS	Geographic Information System
GND	Gemeinsame Normdatei (Integrated Authority File)
GVS	Gesamtverband der Südtiroler in Österreich (General Association of South Tyroleans in Austria)
HSR	Historical Social Research
IMISCOE	International Migration, Integration, and Social Cohesion in Europe
ISTAT	Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Italian National Institute of Statistics)
KORS	Kommission für Rücksiedlungshilfe (Commission for Resettlement Assistance)
OCR	Optical Character Recognition
OeStA	Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (Austrian State Archive)
OEZG	Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften (Austrian Journal for Historical Sciences)

ONB	Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Austrian National Library)
OZAK	Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland (Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral)
PCM-Gab.	Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri – Gabinetto (Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Cabinet)
SLA	Südtiroler Landesarchiv (South Tyrolean Provincial Archives)
SOD	Südtiroler Ordnungsdienst (South Tyrolean police force during World War II)
SS	Schutzstaffel (Nazi paramilitary organization)
SVP	Südtiroler Volkspartei (South Tyrolean People's Party)
SVP-LL	Südtiroler Volkspartei – Landesleitung (South Tyrolean People's Party – Regional Management)
TLA	Tiroler Landesarchiv (Tyrolean Provincial Archives)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UVP	Union valdôtain de Paris (Mutual aid society of Aosta Valley emigrants in Paris)
ZZF	Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschungen (Center for Studies in Contemporary History)

1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in studying immigration and emigration, both academically and publicly. The interdisciplinary field of migration studies has gained popularity, not just because of the increased movement of people worldwide due to war, environmental changes and catastrophes, but also as a result of globalization, which has facilitated the movement of humans, goods, technology, and information. However, despite this heightened attention to migration studies, it is important to note that within historical research, return migration or circular migration were neglected for a long time. Even in contemporary textbooks providing a global perspective on historical migration movements, this aspect of migration history has either received minimal coverage or been entirely omitted.¹ However, it must also be emphasised that since the 1990s, as the literary overview by Sarah Oberbichler and Eva Pfanzelter in chapter 2 shows, a growing amount of literature has devoted itself to the topic of return. Nonetheless, there is still much research to be done.

To contribute to filling this research gap with an in-depth analysis of a regional circular migration movement, the transnational and interdisciplinary project *ReMIGRA: Return Migration as an Interdisciplinary Research Area using the Example of the South Tyrolean “Return Option”*² (2020–2023), worked on by historians both at the University of Innsbruck in Austria and the Free University of Bolzano/Bozen in Italy, was designed. The ReMIGRA project aimed to improve the understanding of the complexity of return migration by digitizing, analyzing, and linking a wide range of administrative migration sources that had not previously been used for research. To put their methods and findings in context, in 2022, the ReMIGRA-team invited international experts to share their research and knowledge during a conference held in Innsbruck. This volume brings together the contributions of several conference participants with the aim of emphasizing the

¹ See, for example, Hein de Haas, Stephen Castles, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Sixth edition, reprinted by Bloomsbury Academic (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022); Jochen Oltmer, *Globale Migration Geschichte und Gegenwart* (C.H. Beck, 2012); Albert Kräler, “Zur Einführung: Migration und Globalgeschichte,” in *Migrationen: globale Entwicklungen seit 1850*, ed. Albert Kräler et al., Globalgeschichte und Entwicklungspolitik 6 (Wien: Mandelbaum, 2007), 10–29; Heinz Faßmann, “Europäische Migration im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Migrationen: globale Entwicklungen seit 1850*, ed. Albert Kräler et al., Globalgeschichte und Entwicklungspolitik 6 (Wien: Mandelbaum, 2007), 32–54.

² ReMIGRA Homepage, accessed September 11, 2023, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/zeitgeschichte/remgra/index.html.de>.

complexity and non-linearity of historical migration processes influenced by a range of personal, political, and social dynamics and reflecting on methodological possibilities for return migration research. The contributions in this volume therefore represent a significant step in expanding literature on historical return migration processes.

Being structured in three parts, **Digital Historical Remigration Studies** (part I), **Returnees, National Policies, and Individual Trauma** (part II), and **Socioeconomic, Cultural and Political Aspects of Return to Rural Areas After WWII** (part III), the volume consolidates as well as contextualizes central findings from the ReMIGRA project: Chapters 3, 5, 9, 13, and 14, which came out of the project, show how the South Tyrolean example fits into and adds to the research landscape on return migration, while the other chapters give an insight into examples of return migration, primarily focused on south/south-eastern twentieth-century Europe. These include migration in and out of Luxembourg (chapter 4), Italians returning to Europe from Italy's former African colonies (chapters 7 and 8), return migration to Sicily (chapter 10) and the Aosta Valley (chapter 11), return migration to Serbia (chapter 12), and return migration from the United States to Italy and Austria (chapter 6). The chapters, each focusing on different cases or perspectives of historical return migration movements, are grounded in statistical analysis, surveys, linguistic investigations, oral history, historical cartography, and network analysis and thus combine a wide range of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Together, the contributions shed light on the close connection between power dynamics (mutual economic dependence, national interests, colonialist oppression and discrimination as well as border conflicts) and migration. While return migration, especially in the aftermath of World War II, was often highly regulated, entangled in conflicts of control, or supported for political reasons (see chapters 7, 8, 11, and 13), the migration process itself was often traumatic for the returnees as well as deeply shaped by economic aspects, the planning abilities and social connections of individuals (as explored in chapters 6, 9, and 10), along with the intricate dynamics of migration spaces (as shown in chapters 11 and 14). The contributions also show that return migration, especially in rural areas, had an impact on local economies, social structures, and even democracy (see chapters 10 and 12).

Finally, the volume invites to reflect on increasing data collections and the possibilities for digital research on return migration (see chapters 3, 4, and 5). The ReMIGRA project with the example of the South Tyrolean *Return Option* sought to raise awareness regarding the potential of migration data, and underscores the need for continued research and examination of the return migration phenomenon.

South Tyrol as an Example of Historical European Return Migration

The frame of this volume is the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option* movement that took place between 1939 and (roughly) 1955. It is a migration and return migration movement that bears the signs of fascism, national socialism, and democratization, with the issues of going away and coming back containing voluntary and involuntary elements, and being both organized and unorganized.

The South Tyrolean *Return Option* and migration following World War II serves as a noteworthy instance of migration characterized by a nuanced interplay between voluntary and involuntary factors, alongside a structured and coordinated repatriation process. When annexing the South Tyrol after the Treaty of Saint Germain in 1919, Italy not only obtained more territory but, by moving its northern boundary to the main Alpine ridge, it also acquired a mostly German-speaking population. The inhabitants of the region, now renamed the Province of Bolzano, had been part of the Habsburg crown land Tyrol and resented their incorporation into the Italian state. After the fascists' rise to power in 1922, the Germanophone inhabitants were subjected to forced Italianization, a ban of the German culture and language, an influx of Italian laborers from southern areas, and increasing economic and political oppression. Despite the people's limited possibilities to counteract the fascist policies, the "South Tyrol question" remained a stumbling block between Italy and Austria during the 1920s and between Italy and Nazi Germany during the 1930s.

The two dictators, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, therefore aimed at finding a permanent solution for the problem. As a result, in June 1939, the so-called *Optionsabkommen* (*Option* agreement) was announced: the German-speaking inhabitants of South Tyrol would be able to "opt" for an emigration to the German Reich and thus become German citizens or they could "opt" to stay in Italy and consequently accept the Italian language and culture. The "voluntariness" of the subsequent migration movement alone would later produce a flood of academic research and publications.³ After months of bitter debate, around 86 percent of the eligible voters opted to move north of the Brenner Pass. It remains unclear how many people this concerned, with the only indication of the population residing in the Province of Bolzano in the 1930s provided by the census of 1936 – a census conducted in a fascist state with deliberate political intentions and limited

³ Institut für Zeitgeschichte Innsbruck, "Literaturverzeichnis Option und Erinnerung," accessed April 14, 2023, <http://www.optionunderinnerung.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Literaturliste-Option-und-Erinnerung.pdf>.

methods of counting, which states a figure of 277,720 for the people living within the existing boundaries of the province.⁴ There is, however, no indication of the language the people spoke. A reconstruction of historical statistical census data by the South Tyrolean statistical institute ASTAT from 2001 concluded that in 1910 – before the region's affiliation with Italy – 89 % of the population declared to use German as their colloquial language, 3–4 % to use Italian, and 4 % to use Ladin. By 1961, the numbers had changed significantly: 61 % used German, 34 % Italian and 3 % Ladin as their spoken language.⁵ The expatriation of *Optants* (the people who had declared a desire to move to the Third Reich) began during the war in 1940 but slowed down considerably when war efforts were reinforced in the following years. After the fall of Mussolini's regime and Italy's change of sides in the war in 1943, the *Option* (as the expatriation came to be called) was stopped. At that point, around 75,000 people had already left their homeland to find an uncertain future in the German Reich – mostly in the neighboring regions of the former Austrian Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Salzburg, and Carinthia.⁶

After the war in 1945, the Province of Bolzano remained part of Italy although Austria brought forth a strong plea to the Allies to reincorporate the southern part of the Tyrol. The situation for the inhabitants of South Tyrol at this point was almost dramatic; all those who had opted for the German Reich were stateless, with the Italian government treating them as foreigners without civil rights and political representation.⁷ Only the *Dableiber* (Remainders – those who had declared a desire to remain in Italy) and the *Non-Optants* (those who had refrained from opting at all) possessed Italian citizenship. It took arduous and lengthy negotiations until the *Optantendekret*, the law for the "Revision of the Options of the South Tyroleans" of February 2, 1948, reversed the *Option* agreement and created the legal basis for reassumption of the Italian citizenship for the *Optants*. The situation was more complex for those who had moved abroad; already during World War II, some South Tyroleans occasionally returned to their homeland, but their number was limited. Immediately after the end of the war, the emigrants faced an uncertain future; should they, who had now become stateless, go back to

⁴ "Elenco dei comuni del Regno e loro popolazione residente al 21 aprile 1936," accessed March 3, 2024. <https://ebiblio.istat.it/digibib/Censimenti%20popolazione/censpop1936/IST0005666ElencocomuniRegnoepopres21Apr936.pdf>, 29.

⁵ "Südtirols Bevölkerung – Gestern, Heute, Morgen – Von 1936 bis 2010. Quadro Demografico Della Provincia Di Bolzano – Dal 1936 Al 2010" (Demographic Framework of the Province of Bolzano: from 1936 to 2010), (Bozen, 2001), 42–43.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Stefan Lechner, and Helmut Alexander, "Die Rücksiedlung," in *Heimatlos: Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler*, ed. Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmaier (Wien: Deuticke, 1993), 181–273, 191.

their homeland, or should they try to strengthen their foothold in their country of immigration? In the first few days after the end of the war in May 1945, those who made up their minds quickly had the opportunity to illegally cross the newly re-inforcing borders between the occupying powers and find their way back to the Province of Bolzano via the Brenner or the Reschen Pass. After a couple of days, this illegal transition was only possible via the mountains, e.g., via the old smuggler and cattle trails in the Ziller Valley, or together with Italian returnees on resettlement trains.⁸ Only after 1948 could those who had moved abroad apply for the reacquisition or retention of Italian citizenship and eventually move back to their country of birth.

The *Optantendekret* distinguished between three groups of *Optants*. First was the so-called “simple *Optants*,” those who had opted for the German Reich, but never received German citizenship. This group had the possibility to revoke the *Option* and thus retain Italian citizenship (Art. 1). Second were the *Optants* who had acquired German citizenship, but never emigrated, who were able to revoke the *Option* and thus renounce their German citizenship to regain Italian citizenship (Art. 2). Third were *Optants* who had acquired German citizenship and emigrated from South Tyrol; whether they had returned to Italy or not, they were able to request the re-acquisition of Italian citizenship. The application for re-acquisition of Italian citizenship had to include the declaration of revocation of the *Option* and the surrender of German citizenship (Art. 11), however, those who had temporarily resided abroad for reasons of study, business, or military did not fall into this category (Art. 15).⁹

The return, however, was denied if the applicant had been a member of the SS, the Gestapo, the SD, or the SOD (the *Südtiroler Ordnungsdienst* was the South Tyrolean military police installed after 1943). The same applied if they had held a major position at the offices organizing the *Option* resettlement programme, the ADERSt (*Amtliche Deutsche Ein- und Rückwandererstelle*, Official German Immigration and Repatriation Office) or the ADO (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Optanten für Deutschland*, Working Group of *Optants* for Germany), or if someone had been convicted of war crimes. Also excluded were those who had demonstrated explicit “Nazi partiality” when making propaganda for the *Option*. This, of course, was a very vague phrasing, which allowed for subjective decisions and personal

⁸ For the situation at the end of the war: Eva Pfanzelter, *Südtirol unterm Sternenbanner. Die amerikanische Besatzung Mai–Juni 1945* (Bozen: Edition Reatia, 2005).

⁹ Legislative decree of February 2, 1948, no. 23 – Revisione delle opzioni degli alto atesini (Review of Alto Adige Options), accessed March 3, 2024, www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1948/02/05/048U0023/sg.

judgments.¹⁰ The number of those who were finally allowed, and still wished, to return is still unknown today, with historian Stefan Lechner estimating that about one third of the 75,000 emigrants returned to the Province of Bolzano after 1948.¹¹ If they came back, many returnees faced various difficulties and uncertainties, as it was not clear whether they would find jobs and housing and whether integration in their former homesteads would succeed.¹² The question of capital transfer also remained an open one; simultaneously, those who decided to stay in Austria and Germany were often faced with no less urgent problems. Here, too, the question of citizenship remained open for debate until the late 1940s and it was not clear until then whether the re-settlers would remain on an equal footing with Austrian citizens because by then they had a legal opportunity to return to Italy.¹³

The studies of the *Return Option* that are being interwoven with comparable studies in this volume here show striking similarities but also differences to other return migration movements.

Part I: Digital Historical Remigration Studies

Part I of this volume gives insights on how the advent of digitization has facilitated the gathering and analysis of extensive archival data sourced from diverse repositories and nations. Through case studies on the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option* and remigration to Luxembourg, it will be demonstrated how the digitization enhanced the feasibility of investigating historically under-documented and under-researched phenomena, such as return migration, through more accessible archive holdings. Both cases demonstrate how the digitization, linking, and matching of previously “invisible” cultural heritage across borders and languages helps to understand the complexity and socio-economic dynamics of return migration movements as well as to reveal return migration practices that were not documented as such in the past.

¹⁰ Legislative decree of 2 February 1948, no. 23 – Revisione delle opzioni degli alto atesini (Review of Alto Adige Options), accessed March 3, 2024, www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1948/02/05/048U0023/sg.

¹¹ Stefan Lechner, “Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945,” in *Das 20. Jahrhundert in Südtirol: 1940 –1959*, ed. Gottfried Solderer and Helmut Alexander (Bozen: Ed. Raetia, 2001), 76–87.

¹² See Ivan Stecher’s contribution in this volume.

¹³ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 250–259.

Part I starts with comprehensive insights into the impact of the digital world on regional migration and return migration research by Eva Pfanzelter (chapter 3). Pfanzelter highlights the value of regional projects within the field of *Digital Historical Migration Studies (DHMS)* and their potential to contribute to a de-nationalized migration history. Using the case study of the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option*, she shows how a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analyses can help to deal with fragmented archival material and enhance our understanding of (re-)migration history. The fourth chapter by Machteld Venken and David Jaquet, who analyzed their recently created Nodegoat database of information on migrants in Luxembourg from the perspective of return, illustrates the potential of digital databases and analytical techniques to uncover hidden aspects of historical migration. Venken and Jaquet further provide digital hermeneutical reflections within the framework of examining the historical remigration practices of foreigners to Luxembourg. In doing so, they discuss the need for flexibility in research methods, emphasizing that as research questions evolve, new data searches, tools, dataset adaptations, and interpretations become necessary. They also reflect on the digital workflow they employed to address a phenomenon not prominently reported in historical records and show how network and spatial analysis can shed light on the circularity of migration movements. Part 1 concludes with Valerio Larcher's contribution (chapter 5) on the visualization of the movements of returnees and spatial networks via interactive maps. Larcher's chapter highlights the potential of using GIS-based technology to analyze and depict return migration, focusing on the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option* between 1940 and 1952.

Part II: Returnees, National Policies, and Individual Trauma

The essays in part II of this volume delve into the policy approaches, conflicts of control, and debates of both sending and receiving countries, which revolve around managing, supporting, or controlling return migration in the context of decolonization, organized as well as voluntary return. Together the chapters show how states negotiate return migration in political debates and the media and how migrants themselves reflect on their return. Migration not only makes people "foreigners" in their new home but often also estranges them from their own homeland, while the homeland also becomes foreign to them. Return migrants challenge the conventional notions of social belonging, as they find themselves situated somewhere between being "newcomers" and "natives." The return

process proves to be challenging due to the discrepancy between what migrants have become during their migration and what they were before their migration.

In chapter 6, Sarah Oberbichler and Lorella Viola, by looking at both the perception of migration in the sending countries (Austria and Italy) and of the migrants themselves (in the United States), give insight into the interplay of national debates and the individual trauma of people who had moved overseas. Oberbichler and Viola use national and immigrant newspapers (1850–1950) to disclose aspects such as cultural identity, integration, and the challenges of dealing with different social and cultural contexts. They further show that the perception of return migration was deeply intertwined with economic and political aspects, sometimes connected with discussions of reintegrating into the home country or the return to the country of immigration (circular migration). National policies and conflicts of control have further especially played an important role in processes of decolonization.

Alessandro Pes' chapter (chapter 7) analyzes political debates on the return of Italian settlers to the former colonies, returnees who still had property and work there, and reflects on how, starting in 1946, labor emerged as the dominant trait in the institutional reconstruction of the Italian colonial past. This shows how the narratives were accompanied by an interpretation of Italian colonialism as a migratory movement of proletarians, different from that of other European colonial powers. Not only the narratives but also the process of decolonization and the return of settlers differentiated Italy from other colonial powers, especially through the length of the movement, as Emanuele Ertola shows in chapter 8. Italy did not face a single mass exodus but many stages of remigration over 30 years, however, Erola also highlights the similarities in the current international debate on settler return. For example, returnees in Europe shared the difficulties and trauma of uprooting.

Although the chapters in part II reflect on a mixture of forced and voluntary migration, the decision-making processes at the individual level are far more complex than the classic distinction between voluntary and forced migration would allow, as also Ivan Stecher was able to show in Chapter 9. On the basis of 25 interviews conducted with South Tyrolean *Optants* Stecher examines in detail the nuanced distinctions within the decision-making processes and at the same time discusses the essential characteristics of the reintegration of returnees. In particular, he emphasizes the role of time, alongside factors such as social networks, jobs, accommodation, gender, and age in the decision-making process of returnees.

Part III: Socioeconomic, Cultural, and Political Aspects of Return to Rural Areas After WWII

The last part of this volume highlights the importance of situating research on return migration within a broader framework that encompasses various socio-economic, cultural, and political factors of the country of return. Those factors significantly influence whether migrants decide to return to their home countries and the extent to which they can serve as agents of change upon their return. Part III of this volume includes five chapters on return migration to rural areas after World War II (Sicily, Aosta Valley, Serbia, and South Tyrol) that shed light on how both the motivations behind returning to rural areas post-World War II and the subsequent impact of returnees on these regions are intricately linked to the prevailing conditions within the region of return.

The first chapter of part III, chapter 10, by Francesca Frisone, discloses newly discovered archive materials collected between 1964 and 1965, containing a representative survey on Sicilian emigrants who returned from the Federal German Republic to Italy and those who remained abroad. This survey set out to investigate whether these returning emigrants acted as catalysts for change in three rural villages near Enna. Frisone interprets and contextualizes the survey, while highlighting the importance of time and space when analyzing the impact of return migration. Alessandro Celi (chapter 11), on the other hand, analyzes interviews with returnees from the Aosta Valley, collected by a workgroup formed by the government of the Valle d'Aosta Autonomous Region, and identifies five key aspects of why people return. Celi further investigates the role of associations and politics for the return to the Aosta Valley and concludes that the real driving force for return was the dialogue between migrants, populations, and politicians. Milovanović Miloš further shows in chapter 12 how returning migrants can transform the economy, society, and politics of a country. Using the case of Serbia, Miloš concludes that a higher share of returnees from abroad can be associated with a decrease in infant mortality and the unemployment rate, while having a positive effect on both public investments per capita and educational level at the municipal level. In addition, the consequences of higher turnouts were greater competitiveness in the elections and a tendency for victory of the opposition party's candidate.

Using the case of the South Tyrolean *Return Option* once more, Verena Hennenblaikner and Katia Pedevilla show in chapter 13 what difficulties were involved in the organized return migration of South Tyrolean *Optants* to Italy after the World War II. Closed borders between Italy and Austria, and the slow implementation of the resettlement assistance due to different viewpoints between the

Italian and Austrian governments, led to high numbers of illegal returns. On the other hand, the example on South Tyrol also shows how, in the difficult situation after World War II, resettlement assistance successfully integrated returnees.

In the last chapter of this volume, chapter 14, Giada Noto investigates reasons for “non-return”. Using the case of the Kanaltal (1930–1950), where statistical data shows that the majority of the people who left their home in the context of the *Option* agreement in 1939 did not return to their home villages, Noto shows how a series of overlapping events in the country of return were hindering return migration. The Kanaltal changed through intensive Italianization, with the economic conditions after World War II worsening and the lack of autonomy of the region resulting in a neglect of minority rights, all of which illustrates how the political and economic conditions in the sending country can act as barriers to individuals’ return.

Overall, this volume brings together studies on return migration that certainly ask for a deeper reflection on migration as a one-way process, especially in regard to the period after World War II.

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Sarah Oberbichler, Eva Pfanzelter

2 European Historical Return Migration Research. A Literature Overview

Abstract: This chapter provides a literature review of return migration in Europe, tracing its evolution from its basic approaches in the early twentieth to the twenty-first century and highlighting the remarkable diversification of scholarly production over the past three to four decades. The theoretical framework has expanded in parallel with the growth of migration studies, resulting in numerous detailed historical analyses that address regional, national, global, ethnic, gender, educational, and various other issues. Taken together, these contributions enrich a thriving field.

Introduction

In 2000, Russell King, a geographer and migration studies scholar, stated that “[r]eturn migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration.”¹ Indeed, even though return migration has been part of every migration movement, and even though it has been documented by authorities and the administration (especially since the 1850s²), historical research has been slow to follow. Focusing on Europe alone, there are numerous examples of return movements throughout modern and contemporary history: the return from overseas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries after mass emigration, the return of war veterans, prisoners of war and refugees during and after the two World Wars, the return of exiles and concentration camp survivors after World War II, the return of recruited migrant workers to their native countries between the 1920s and 1980s, and the return of war refugees after the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s and 2000s. Despite knowing about these return movements, migration was often viewed and analyzed as a one-way process, especially in historical studies,

¹ Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, “Introduction: Definitions, Typologies and Theories of Return Migration,” in *Handbook of Return Migration*, ed. Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, Elgar Handbooks in Migration Series (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), 1–24, 1.

² George Gmelch, “Return Migration,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9 (1980): 135–59, 135, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2155732>.

beginning with the uprooting of people at the point of origin and ending with their assimilation into the adopted culture and country.³

Research conducted over the past two decades, however, indicates that worldwide many people left their home countries with the notion of returning home at a certain point not so far in the future. Johnathan Azose and Adrian Raftery in their 2019 study highlighted that between 1990 and 2015 global return migration was substantial, “making up 26–31 % of movements in each time period.”⁴ In addition to outbound and return migration, transition migration, where people only temporarily settle in a region after emigration, has to be taken into account, since it amounts to nine percent of the overall global migration movement in the same period.⁵

While numerous emigrants, both those who left voluntarily and those who left involuntarily, returned to their homelands without belongings but with compromised health, or shattered aspirations, a considerable portion also brought financial assets, fresh perspectives, and acquired knowledge back with them. In the realm of migration studies, this knowledge transfer⁶ has been explored, along with newly gained skills such as entrepreneurial expertise.⁷ Concurrently, those who had never left their native land often saw their return quite differently. The returnees were not always welcomed with open arms; there was mistrust of, for example, changed (political) ideas of migrants, and there were fears that their return could increase problems in an already existing tight labor market or a housing shortage. Those who had left could also be seen as “traitors” who had abandoned those who had remained or, equally, as bearers of hope who brought promises of a better future with them.⁸

Many of the topics and issues mentioned concern remigration worldwide. This literary overview here, however, concentrates on European research on historical return migration movements, which was published in English, German, Italian, and French. This means that very important research areas and historical

³ Peterson Glen, “Return Migration,” *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (2013): 1–5, 1, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444351071.wbghm453>.

⁴ Jonathan J. Azose and Adrian E. Raftery, “Estimation of Emigration, Return Migration, and Transit Migration between All Pairs of Countries,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 116, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 116–22, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1722334116.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Charlotte Mueller, “Diaspora Return and Knowledge Transfer,” in *Handbook of Return Migration*, ed. Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, 331–44.

⁷ Giulia Sinatti, “Return Migration, Entrepreneurship and Development,” in *Handbook of Return Migration*, ed. Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, 344–58.

⁸ Annemarie Steidl, “Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* ÖZG, no. 19 (2008): 15–42, 30.

remigration movements both within Europe (e.g., Spain,⁹ Portugal,¹⁰ Greece,¹¹ or Eastern¹² as well as Northern European¹³ countries) and on a global scale,¹⁴ where the first bibliographies on return migration had already come into being in 1984,¹⁵ will not be examined in detail here. In order to contextualize our text,

⁹ E.g., Thomas Straubhaar, *Arbeitskräftewanderung und Zahlungsbilanz: Eine empirische Untersuchung am Beispiel der Rücküberweisungen nach Griechenland, Portugal, Spanien und der Türkei*, Berner Beiträge zur Nationalökonomie, Bd. 45 (Bern: Verlag Paul Haupt, 1983); Gerardo Delgado Aguiar and Carmen Ascanio Sánchez, *El retorno reciente de emigrantes canarios: Distribución espacial, caracterización social y perfil económico*, Colección „Guagua“ 82 (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, 1998); Barbara Laue, *Identitätsprobleme spanischer Remigrantenkinder: Leben im Spannungsfeld zwischen zwei Welten*, Studien und Dokumentationen zur vergleichenden Bildungsforschung 46 (Köln: Böhlau, 1990).

¹⁰ E.g., Rui Pedro Pena Pires and Manuela Silva, *Os retornados: um estudo sociográfico*, 1st ed., Instituto de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento 14 (Lisboa: Instituto de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento, 1984); Paulo Filipe Monteiro, *Emigração: O Eterno Mito Do Retorno*, Sociologias (Portugal: Celta Editora, 1994).

¹¹ E.g., Maria Dietzel-Papakyriakou, *Krankheit Und Rückkehr: Frühinvalidität ausländischer Arbeiter am Beispiel griechischer Rückkehrer* (Berlin: Express Edition, 1987); Liana Unger, *Zweite Generation und Rückwanderung: Rückkehr in Die Heimat oder in die Fremde?: Eine empirische Studie zur Remigration griechischer Jugendlicher*, Bielefelder Studien zur Entwicklungsoziologie, Bd. 33 (Saarbrücken: Breitenbach Publishers, 1986).

¹² E.g., Barbara Dietz, *Erwartungen an die neue Heimat: deutsche Aussiedler aus der Sowjetunion vor dem beruflichen und sozialen Neubeginn in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Forschungsprojekt „Deutsche in der Sowjetunion und Aussiedler aus der UdSSR in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,“ Arbeitsbericht 5 (München: Osteuropa-Institut, 1991); Janusz Wróbel, *Na rozdrożu historii: Repatriacja obywateli polskich z Zachodu w latach 1945–1949* (Łódź: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009); Kornélia Papp, *Remigranten in der SBZ/DDR und in Ungarn nach 1945: Ein Vergleich* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009); Birgit Glorius, Izabela Grabowska-Lusińska, and Aimee Kuvik, eds., *Mobility in Transition: Migration Patterns after EU Enlargement*, IMISCOE Research (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017).

¹³ E.g., Pirjo Takalo, *Inkerinsuomalaiset paluumuuttajina: selvitys inkerinsuomalaisien integraatiosta ja viranomaispalvelujen käytöstä*, Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön monisteita 20 (Helsinki: Painatuskeskus, 1994); Keijo Kantanen, *Takaisin kotiseudulle: tutkimus paluumuuton merkitysestä ja mahdollisuksista maaseudun erilaistumisprosessissa*, Joensuun yliopisto, Karjalan tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja, University of Joensuu, Publications of Karelian Institute 97 (Joensuu: Joensuun yliopisto, Karjalan tutkimuslaitos, 1991); Ingvar Henricson and Hans Lindblad, *Tur och retur Amerika: utvandrare som förändrade Sverige* (Stockholm: Fischer, 1995); Christina Markopoulou, *Sociocultural Effects of Intra-European Migration: A Cyclical Research Study in Greece and Sweden* (Göteborg: Department of Sociology, University of Göteborg, 1981).

¹⁴ E.g., Richard Black and Khalid Koser, eds., *The End of the Refugee Cycle?: Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction* (Berghahn Books, 2022), accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1515/9780857457189.

¹⁵ International Labour Office, ed., *Bibliography on International Return Migration*, International Migration for Employment 16 (Geneva: ILO Working Papers, 1984).

we want to mention only a few of the areas where remigration has been tackled in academia; notably, research is being done on African¹⁶ and Middle Eastern¹⁷ remigration, on the circular migration movements between the two Americas,¹⁸ and on similar topics concerning different Asian countries¹⁹ (especially China, Japan, and India). Some topics have also gained interest in many European societies in recent years explaining the problematic relationship of inhabitants of former colonies with their colonial powers.²⁰ Having said this, we would also like to underline that we are fully aware of the Eurocentric perspective on return migra-

16 E.g., Tim Allen and Hubert Morsink, eds., *When refugees go home: African experiences*, 1st American ed. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994); Henri LeMasne, *Le retour des emigrés algériens: Projets et contradictions* (El Djazair: Office des Publications Universitaires [u.a.], 1982); Marlyn H. Fetterman, *Migration and Remigration in Didinga*, Research Report (Khartoum, 1980); Timm Voss, *Die algerisch-französische Arbeitsmigration: ein Beispiel einer organisierten Rückwanderung*, Materialien zur Arbeitsmigration und Ausländerbeschäftigung, Bd. 8 (Königstein: Hanstein, 1981).

17 E.g., Arnold Stenzel et al., *Auszug in ein fremdes Land? Türkische Jugendliche und ihre Rückkehr in die Türkei* (Weinheim: Dt. Studien-Verlag, 1989); Gaby Strassburger and Gudrun Cyprian, *Offene Grenzen für Remigranten: Wiederkehrwünsche türkischer Remigrantinnen und das deutsche Ausländerrecht*, Beiträge Zur Migrationsforschung (Berlin: VWB, 1992); Chaim I. Waxman and Michael Appel, *To Israel and Back: American Aliyah and Return Migration* (New York, NY: Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations Jewish Communal Affairs Dept., American Jewish Committee, 1986).

18 E.g., Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, *They Should Stay There: The Story of Mexican Migration and Repatriation during the Great Depression*, trans. Russ Davidson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469634265.001.0001; Refugiados y Desplazados, *El reasentamiento en época de paz* (Guatemala: CEAR, 1997); César Castañeda, *Lucha por la tierra, retornados y medio ambiente en Huehuetenango* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 1998); José Hernández Alvarez, *Return Migration to Puerto Rico* (Institute of International Studies, University of California: Greenwood Press, 1967).

19 E.g., Fabrice Mignot, *Villages de Réfugiés Rapatriés Au Laos*, Points Sur l'Asie (Paris: Harmattan, 1999); Suphāng Čhanthawānit, ed., *The Lao Returnees in the Voluntary Repatriation Programme from Thailand*, Occasional Paper Series, no. 3 (Bangkok: Indochinese Refugee Information Center, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1992); On-Jook Lee and On-juk Yi, *Urban-to-Rural Return Migration in Korea* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1980); Court Robinson, Suphāng Čhanthawānit, and Lekha Nou, *Rupture and Return: Repatriation, Displacement, and Reintegration in Battambang Province, Cambodia*, Occasional Paper Series, no. 7 (Bangkok: The Center, 1994).

20 Juan David Sempere Souvannavong, *Los “pieds-noirs” en Alicante: Las migraciones inducidas por la descolonización* (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 1997); Christoph Kalter, *Postcolonial People: The Return from Africa and the Remaking of Portugal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Richard Anderson, *Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*, African Identities: Past and Present (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

tion that is being written about here. Still, by centering on the circular movements of people from and to Europe throughout history, we hope to once again raise awareness of the normality of human migration.

Hesitant Beginnings: 1900–1970

The scholarly production on remigration studies began very slowly in the early twentieth century. While many of the fascinating aspects of remigration in Europe were discovered only in the past two decades, before the 1960s there was barely any mention of return migration within the growing amount of literature on human migration. The few published papers mostly revolved around the question of whether remigration was beneficial or detrimental, especially economically but also socially. For example, the economist Robert Franz Foerster focused on the economic considerations of return migration in his book *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*, published in 1919.²¹ From the perspective of that time, he concluded that returning migrants to Italy typically found themselves in improved circumstances compared to when they had initially departed. However, he also found that those who chose to return were predominantly a select subgroup of the emigrant population, belonging to the category of more successful individuals who had been able to establish themselves abroad.²² On the other hand, in his pioneering book *They remember America*,²³ published in 1956, Theodore Saloutos explored both the reasons behind the repatriation of Greek Americans and the larger significance for Greek society. Saloutos concluded that the repatriates had a minimal overall impact on Greece, primarily arising from ambivalent sentiments they harbored due to their return experience, coupled with their inability or lack of inclination to Americanize Greece.

21 Robert Franz Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Harvard University Press, 1919).

22 Ibid., 502.

23 Theodore Saloutos, *They Remember America* (California: University of California Press, 1956), accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1525/9780520350014.

Gaining Awareness: Economical and Structural Approaches in the 1970s and 1980s

Between the 1970s and 1980s, amid the cessation of labor migrant recruitment in Europe and the implementation of policies aimed at promoting return migration, a stimulating scholarly debate on return migration emerged, predominantly focused on economic repercussions of remigration for the countries of origin. These debates led to the production of some important overviews, mainly on the return of voluntary emigrants and mostly from a socio-economic, political or theoretical perspective, often at the expense of socio-cultural aspects of return migration.²⁴ In 1974, Francesco P. Cerase,²⁵ for example, identified four different types of individuals returning from the U.S. to Italy, emphasizing their aspirations, expectations, and needs. Georg Gmelch's²⁶ paper from 1980, on the other hand, examined typologies of European returnees, and motives of return migration as well as the impact of return migration on home societies. Concentrating on socio-economic perspectives, Rosemarie Rogers²⁷ further discussed return migration in relation to the reasons for returning in 1984. She analyzed census and survey data from several countries and cross-examined them with findings from previous studies, and also highlighted the need for a nuanced investigation of the phenomenon of return migration that would extend beyond the binary conceptual framework of whether it was beneficial or detrimental for the country of origin.

In contrast, Italo Musillo's²⁸ survey from 1981 more specifically focused on the employment rates of a small sample of Italian migrants who had returned to southern Italy. The primary objective was to explore the factors influencing return migration, particularly in relation to the reception policies implemented by Italian national and regional authorities. Investment behaviour of Spanish returnees, problems of social integration, and employment conditions were also investigated

²⁴ Peggy Levitt, "Taking Culture Seriously: The Unexplored Nexus between Migration, Incorporation and Development," *Revue Européenne Des Migrations Internationales* 26, no. 2 (1 September 2010): 139–53, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.4000/remi.5149.

²⁵ Francesco P. Cerase, "Expectations and Reality: A Case Study of Return Migration from the United States to Southern Italy," *International Migration Review* 8, no. 2 (1974): 245–62, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1177/019791837400800210.

²⁶ Gmelch, "Return Migration."

²⁷ Rosemarie Rogers, "Return Migration in Comparative Perspective," *International Migration Review* 17, no. 1 (January 1983): 277–99, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1177/019791838301701S40.

²⁸ Italo Musillo, "Retour et emploi des migrants dans le Mezzogiorno: enquête sur un échantillon de migrants italiens," *ILO Working Papers* (1981), accessed December 12, 2023, <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ilo/ilowps/992106593402676.html>.

by Robert E. Rhoades²⁹ in 1979 and in case studies from both Europe and around the world. Elsewhere, Solon Ardittis³⁰ published the working paper *Migration de retour en Europe du Sud* in 1988, which compared return migration in Greece, Portugal, Italy, and Spain by examining statistics, government programmes to support return migration, and the economic impact of remigration for each of these countries. Ardittis concluded that the impact on the regional economy depended strongly on the length of stay of returnees as well as the job training completed during emigration, and that it can be measured only on a local level. However, he also highlighted the limits of his study posed by the inconsistency of data. Finally, a collection of many chapters concentrating on various case studies and the relationship between remigration and regional economic issues was published by Russell King in 1986 under the title *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*.³¹

While those economic and structural approaches have traditionally centered on assessing the impact of return migration on sending countries, they often overlook the intricate internal dynamics of the return migration process. Consequently, these approaches fail to offer comprehensive insights into how migrants navigate their environments in both the sending and receiving countries, as well as the psycho-social processes they undergo during this transition.

Into the Mainstream: 1990s-Today

It was not until the 1990s that return migration to Europe was also extensively studied from a historical perspective and the amount of literature grew. Overall, for the period from 1990 to today, several special topics in Historical Remigration Studies can be identified that have drawn a lot of attention over the past decades. We will focus on some of the most prominent ones in the following sections.

²⁹ Robert E. Rhoades, ed., *The Anthropology of Return Migration*, Papers in Anthropology 20 (Oklahoma: Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma, 1979).

³⁰ Solon Ardittis, "Migration de retour en Europe du Sud," *ILO Working Papers*, 1988, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ilo/ilowps/992602493402676.html>.

³¹ Russell King, ed., *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems* (London: Routledge, 1986), accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.4324/9781315722306.

Transatlantic Return Migration from a European Perspective

When it comes to the history of transatlantic return migration, two major overview works offer valuable insights into this aspect of remigration history: Mark Wyman's book *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930*,³² published in 1993, and the edited volume *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movements of Emigrants, 1600–2000*,³³ edited by Marjory Harper in 2005. Both books provide comprehensive reports on transatlantic return to a variety of European countries, looking into the stories of returnees rather than trying to find answers on the impact of return migration. Also, national studies such as the book *National Integration of Italian Return Migration*,³⁴ published by Dino Cinel in 2002, or the studies on return migration to Austria-Hungary by Kristina Poznan³⁵ and Annemarie Steidl³⁶ from 2017, shed light on the return from America between 1870 and 1920. Cinel's book is one of the few investigations that highlighted the circularity of transatlantic migration (for circular migration, see Steidl also³⁷) as well as national debates on remigration, even though it also investigated how return migration may have impacted the wider Italian economy. Cinel concluded that for most Italians, return migration to Italy was in fact a negative experience in that it had failed to fulfill either individual or social expectations.³⁸ Kristina Poznan, on the other hand, analyzed state-supported return migration through the Hungarian *American Action* program at the turn of the twentieth century and derived from this that the influence of government programs on the decision to return was limited; instead, return migration seemed to be primarily influenced by the socio-economic factors of both the receiv-

³² Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

³³ Marjory Harper, ed., *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants, 1600–2000*, Studies in Imperialism MUP (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

³⁴ Dino Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration, 1870–1929*, 2nd ed., Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modern History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁵ Kristina E. Poznan, "Return Migration to Austria-Hungary from the United States in Homeland Economic and Ethnic Politics and International Diplomacy," *The Hungarian Historical Review* 6, no. 3 (2017): 647–67.

³⁶ Steidl, "Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie"; Annemarie Steidl, "Dear Brother, Please, Send Me Some More Dollars . . .": Transatlantic Migration and Historic Remittance Between the Habsburg Empire and the United States of America (1890–1930s)," in *Remittances as Social Practices and Agents of Change: The Future of Transnational Society*, ed. Silke Meyer and Claudius Ströhle (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2023), 99–119, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81504-2_5.

³⁷ Steidl, "Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie."

³⁸ Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration, 1870–1929*.

ing and sending countries.³⁹ This conclusion goes hand in hand with Annemarie Steidl's findings, which indicate that there was a close interplay between the unemployment rate in America and migration movements of Austrian-Hungarians. Low unemployment rates led to an increase in emigration, while high unemployment rates led to an increase in return.⁴⁰

Also, regional studies have significantly expanded our knowledge on transatlantic return migration. Gert Eisenbürger and Guido Lombardi, for example, draw on individual stories of emigrants and re-migrants to address changes in specific regions.⁴¹ Others, like Elena Saraceno⁴² and Alessandro Celi (see chapter 11 in this volume), embed return migration histories into the history of a region, thus providing insights into the complexity of migration movements with the help of clearly delineated cases.

Migration data such as censuses, shipping lists, or newspaper datasets have also received increasing attention. James P. Maher, for example, compiled and edited North America to Britain ship passenger lists from 1858 to 1870 on a CD-ROM in 2004.⁴³ In the paper *To the New World and Back Again*,⁴⁴ published in 2019, Ran Abramitzky, Leah Boustan, and Katherine Eriksson⁴⁵ compiled large data sets from Norwegian and U.S. historical censuses to study return migration during the Age of Mass Migration (1850–1913), with their findings suggesting that men with lower skills seemed to have had the strongest economic incentive to return to Norway. Studying passenger lists and statistical migration data, Drew Keeling,⁴⁶ on the other hand, found in 2010 that up to half of North Atlantic mi-

³⁹ Poznan, "Return Migration to Austria-Hungary from the United States in Homeland Economic and Ethnic Politics and International Diplomacy."

⁴⁰ Steidl, "Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie."

⁴¹ Gert Eisenbürger and Informationsstelle Lateinamerika, eds., *Lebenswege: 15 Biographien zwischen Europa und Lateinamerika* (Hamburg: Verlag Libertäre Assoziation, 1995).

⁴² Elena Saraceno, "The Occupational Resettlement of Returning Migrants and Regional Development: The Case of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy," in *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, ed. Russell King, (London: Routledge, 2015), 69–78, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.4324/9781315722306-3.

⁴³ James P. Maher (comp./ed.), *Returning Home: Transatlantic Migration from North America to Britain and Ireland 1858–1870* (Dublin, Ireland: Eneclann Ltd, CD-ROM/electronic resource, 2004).

⁴⁴ Ran Abramitzky, Leah Boustan, and Katherine Eriksson, "To the New World and Back Again: Return Migrants in the Age of Mass Migration," *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* 72, no. 2 (March 2019): 300–22, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1177/0019793917726981.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Drew Keeling, "Repeat Migration between Europe and the United States, 1870–1914," in *The Birth of Modern Europe: Culture and Economy, 1400–1800. Essays in Honor of Jan de Vries*, ed.

grant crossings were part of multiple-move “back-and-forth” transfers. Migration data such as newspaper datasets (see Sarah Oberbichler and Lorella Viola, chapter 6 in this volume) will also continue to offer fresh insights into past overseas return migration movements in the future.

Remigration During and After World War II

Return migration movements during and after World War II must be understood in the context of two interconnected and partly overlapping historical phenomena: the movements strongly connected to the aftermath of the war, when millions of refugees, concentration camp survivors, displaced persons, and prisoners of war were on the move, and the movements caused by decolonization, when settlers of former colonies returned to their “motherlands.” For both return migration flows, some significant publications have emerged in recent decades. In 2010, Elena Agazzi and Erhard Schütz,⁴⁷ for example, dealt with the return from war, concentration camps, prison camps, evacuation, and exile after World War II to Germany. Arthur L. Smith⁴⁸ in 1985 examined the return of German prisoners of war after World War II, as did Günter Bischof, Stefan Karner, and Barbara Stelzl-Marx in 2005.⁴⁹ Between 2001 and 2017, Waldemar Zacharasiewicz,⁵⁰ Wolfgang Neugebauer and Siegwald Ganglmair,⁵¹ Helga Embacher,⁵² and Katharina Prager together with

Laura Cruz and Joel Mokyr (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 157–186, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/56g1k33h>.

⁴⁷ Elena Agazzi and Erhard Schütz, eds., *Heimkehr: Eine zentrale Kategorie der Nachkriegszeit: Geschichte, Literatur und Medien*, Schriften des Italienisch-Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Trient, 23 (Trent: Duncker & Humblot, 2010).

⁴⁸ Arthur L. Smith, *Heimkehr aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: Die Entlassung der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen* (Stuttgart: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1985).

⁴⁹ Günter Bischof, Stefan Karner, and Barbara Stelzl-Marx, eds., *Kriegsgefangene des Zweiten Weltkrieges: Gefangennahme – Lagerleben – Rückkehr; zehn Jahre Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institut für Kriegsfolgen-Forschung*, Kriegsfolgen-Forschung, 4 (Wien; München: Oldenbourg, 2005).

⁵⁰ Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, ed., *Return from Exile – Rückkehr aus dem Exil: Exiles, Returnees and Their Impact in the Humanities and Social Sciences in Austria and Central Europe* (Wien: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017), accessed December 12, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1xp3w37>.

⁵¹ Wolfgang Neugebauer and Siegwald Ganglmair, “Remigration,” in *Jahrbuch 2003* (Wien: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, 2003), 96–102, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.doew.at/cms/download/4kijs/remigration.pdf>.

⁵² Helga Embacher, „Eine Heimkehr gibt es nicht? Remigration nach Österreich?“ *Jüdische Emigration zwischen Assimilation und Verfolgung, Akkulturation und jüdischer Identität* 19 (2001): 187–209.

Wolfgang Straub⁵³ examined the return of (Jewish) refugees, exiles, and expatriates to Austria. Agostino Bistarello⁵⁴ studied the return of Italian veterans and the difficult process of their reintegration into the national community in 2007. Finally, in 2023, Seth Bernstein⁵⁵ in his book *Return to the Motherland* analyzed the history of the repatriation of Soviet Displaced Persons, while Claire Eldridge, Christoph Kalter, and Becky Taylor⁵⁶ investigated the return of settlers from former colonies to Britain, France, and Portugal.

These numerous studies give insights into forced, supported and organized return migration movements, while recent research also highlights the circularity of such movements (see Alessandro Pes, chapter 7 in this volume). In summary, studies on return migration movements during and after World War II come to the conclusion that the act of returning during this time period embodied a particularly distressing form of homecoming. Traumatized prisoners of war returned to destroyed homelands. Those liberated from concentration camps, forced labor, and oppression were tragically often unwelcome and perceived as disturbing elements. Returning settlers from former colonies lost their status, work, and houses, sometimes living in refugee camps for up to 10 years in their country of origin (see Emanuele Ertola, chapter 8 in this volume). Tragically, many of those who returned to their homeland after having been persecuted by National Socialism⁵⁷ were unwelcome in their countries of origin. In turn, the complexity of the history of migration and remigration of those who were part of resettlement programmes during World War II, such as the German-speaking inhabitants from northern Italy to the German Reich as a result of the *Option Agreement* in 1939, are re-evaluated in this volume. The studies provide insights into the potential of spatial networks to study the South Tyrolean *Return Option* (see Valerio Larcher, chapter 5), take a closer look at decision-making processes (see Ivan Stecher, chapter 9) and regions with unusually low return flows (Giada Noto, chapter 14), and analyze the impact of resettlement assistance (see Verena Hechenblaikner and Katia Pedevilla, chapter 13 in this volume).

⁵³ Katharina Prager and Wolfgang Straub, eds., *Bilderbuch Heimkehr? Remigration im Kontext*, Arco Wissenschaft (Wuppertal: Arco Verlag, 2017).

⁵⁴ Agostino Bistarelli, *La storia del ritorno: I reduci italiani del secondo dopoguerra*, Nuova Cultura 149 (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007).

⁵⁵ Seth Bernstein, *Return to the Motherland: Displaced Soviets in WWII and the Cold War*, Battlegrounds: Cornell Studies in Military History (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023).

⁵⁶ Claire Eldridge, Christoph Kalter, and Becky Taylor, "Migrations of Decolonization, Welfare, and the Unevenness of Citizenship in the UK, France and Portugal," *Past & Present* 259, no. 1 (1 May 2023): 155–93, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtac005.

⁵⁷ Wolfgang Benz, "Schwierigkeiten der Heimkehr. Eine Einführung," in *Heimkehr 1948*, ed. Annette Kaminsky (München: C.H. Beck, 1998).

Recruitment of “Guest Workers” in Europe from the 1920s to 1970s

The recruitment of migrant workers in Europe from the 1920s to 1970s represents another significant chapter in researching the history of return and circulation movements. While literature on the return of labor migrants is still scarce, some early studies from Germany came to the conclusion that about 60 percent of these migrants intended to return to their country of origin, however, the same studies also revealed that less than 20 percent of those who envisaged a return did in fact return.⁵⁸ This shows that the decision-making process was highly influenced by factors such as time and space (see Francesca Frisone, chapter 10 in this volume).

In 2002, Amelie Constant and Douglas S. Massey further argued that immigrants were most likely to return after failing to achieve stable employment and having strong economic and social contacts in the sending country, while immigrants who had their family in Germany and were well integrated were less likely to return.⁵⁹ The impact on the sending country of returning labor migrants was investigated in 1986 by Russell King, Allan Strachan, and Jill Mortimer;⁶⁰ in their case study on southern Italy, they summarized that although labor workers returned with skills and capital, those inflows were not used to their full potential. Similar findings were published by Saverio Calleo,⁶¹ who concluded that the potential of returnees was wasted due to the minimal use of their resources.

More recent studies also examine the return of second-generation labor migrants. For instance, in 2013 Nilay Kilinç delved into the return of second-generation Turkish-Germans to what they perceive as “home.” His work sheds light on the disparities between their homecoming expectations and reality. Additionally, Kilinç’s research underscores the varying experiences of life within the diaspora and upon

⁵⁸ Christian Dustmann, Samuel Bentolila, and Riccardo Faini, “Return Migration: The European Experience,” *Economic Policy* 11, no. 22 (1996): 213–50, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.2307/1344525; Amelie Constant and Douglas S. Massey, “Return Migration by German Guest-workers: Neoclassical versus New Economic Theories,” *International Migration* 40, no. 4 (2002): 5–38; Christoph M. Schmidt, “The Country of Origin, Family Structure and Return Migration of Germany’s Guest-Workers,” *Vierteljahrsshefte Zur Wirtschaftsforschung* 63, no. 1/2 (1994): 119–25.

⁵⁹ Constant and Massey, “Return Migration by German Guestworkers.”

⁶⁰ Russell King, Allan Strachan, and Jill Mortimer, “Gastarbeiter Go Home: Return Migration and Economic Change in the Italian Mezzogiorno,” in *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems* (London; New York: Routledge, 1986).

⁶¹ Saverio Callea, “Different forms, reasons and motivations for return migration of persons who voluntarily decide to return to their countries of origin,” *International Migration* 24, no. 1 (March 1986): 61–76, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.1986.tb00102.x.

return, with notable distinctions between men and women.⁶² More and more historical studies indicate further that there was a constant back and forth of individuals between sending and receiving countries, which highlights the circularity of the movements. Migration researcher Vladimir Ivanović,⁶³ for instance, concluded in 2014 that a significant proportion of Yugoslav emigrants who returned to their home country from Austria eventually came back to Austria again after a few years. Studies from Italy and Germany further show a lively circular mobility of Italian emigrants in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁴ Network and spatial analysis further underline the hypothesis of circularity of labor migration in Luxembourg and even make the varying patterns between different migrant groups visible (see Machteld Venken and David Jacquet, chapter 4 in this volume).

Stigmatization and racialization of returnees has been further subject of some very recent studies. Michelle Lynn Kahn⁶⁵ and Kunuroglu et al.,⁶⁶ for example, show that Turkish “guest workers” who came to Germany between 1960 and 1970 as part of the labor recruitment and returned to Turkey were racialized and stigmatized as “Almancı” (Germanized Turks) and felt discriminated against. The status of those who returned to their “homeland” as Almancı also led to a changed discourse and even to return programs in Germany. In this context, questions were raised about whether “guest workers,” after decades of living in Germany, could still be considered “foreigners.”⁶⁷

⁶² Nilay Kılınç, “Second-Generation Turkish-Germans Return “Home”: Gendered Narratives of (Re-) Negotiated Identities,” *Working Paper University of Sussex* (November 1, 2014), accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.30449.38249; Nilay Kılınç, “Lifestyle Returnees at ‘home’: The Second-Generation Turkish-Germans” (Doctoral Thesis, University of Surrey, 2018).

⁶³ Vladimir Ivanović, “Der Traum von der Melange: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Rückkehr der jugoslawischen ArbeitsmigrantInnen,” in *Aufbrechen, Arbeiten, Ankommen: Mobilität und Migration im ländlichen Raum seit 1945*, ed. Rita Garstenauer, Jahrbuch für Geschichte des ländlichen Raumes 2014 (Innsbruck; Wien; Bozen: Studien-Verlag, 2015), 146–164, 147.

⁶⁴ Loretta Baldassar, “Ritorni e visite in patria: la circolarità dello spazio migratorio,” in *Migrazioni*, ed. Paola Corti, Storia d’Italia Annali 24 (Torino: Einaudi, 2009), 467–84; Sonia Haug, *New Migration from Italy to Germany*, Società e trasformazioni sociali (Venezia: Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, 2015), accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.14277/978-88-6969-011-2/006.

⁶⁵ Michelle Lynn Kahn, *Foreign in Two Homelands: Racism, Return Migration, and Turkish-German History*, Publications of the German Historical Institute (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

⁶⁶ Filiz Kunuroglu, Fons van de Vijver, and Kutlay Yagmur, “Return Migration,” *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 8, no. 2 (1 January 2016), accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1143.

⁶⁷ Michelle Lynn Kahn, “Between Ausländer and Almancı: The Transnational History of Turkish-German Migration,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 66 (2020): 53–80.

The Dichotomy Between Voluntary and Forced Return Migration

The voluntariness of migration has been heavily discussed in recent migration studies,⁶⁸ since the distinction between voluntary and forced return migration is essential in the global discourse, particularly in a political or legal context. However, differentiating between forced and voluntary return can be complex. So far, in historical return migration literature, voluntary decisions to return have been grouped together with discourses on motivations, including economic factors (such as economic success, setbacks, or shifts in economic and socio-political conditions in their country of origin), social and familial considerations (such as homesickness, difficulties in the host country, or family members' requests to return),⁶⁹ gender-specific reasons for return, and the development of transnational ties.⁷⁰ Forced return migration movements, on the other hand, are typically related to deportation and assisted return migration programmes, with examples including the forced repatriation of Soviet Displaced Persons in the aftermath World War II,⁷¹ or the forced return of settlers of former colonies (see Emanuele Ertola, chapter 8 in this volume).

But there are many gray areas. While in 1945, the repatriation of Soviet nationals was considered by many to be a compulsory act with many individuals preferring suicide rather than return to the Soviet Union, the Soviet-American Repatriation Agreement in 1945 and a 1946 United Nations resolution declared repatriation to be a voluntary act. Propaganda and pressure, however, continued to accompany this return, forcing many Soviet DPs to remigrate even though they might have had many reasons to remain in the West, like being members of an

⁶⁸ King and Kuschminder, "Introduction: Definitions, Typologies and Theories of Return Migration," 2.

⁶⁹ Mark Wyman, "Return Migration - Old Story, New Story," *Immigrants & Minorities*, Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora, 20, no. 1 (2001): 1–18, 4, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2001.9975006.

⁷⁰ King and Kuschminder, "Introduction: Definitions, Typologies and Theories of Return Migration," 1–2.

⁷¹ Pavel M. Polian, "Le rapatriement des citoyens soviétiques à partir de La France et des Zones d'occupation françaises en Allemagne et en Autriche," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 41, no. 41/1 (January 1, 2000): 165–90, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.35; Bernstein, *Return to the Motherland*; Laure Humbert, *Reinventing French Aid: The Politics of Humanitarian Relief in French-Occupied Germany, 1945–1952*, 1 Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

underprivileged class or a persecuted minority in the Soviet Union.⁷² Another example is the several “assisted aid” programmes that governments in the European Union apply today to repatriate undocumented or unwanted migrants.⁷³

Also, the South Tyrolean *Re-Option*, the focus of several chapters in this book, is difficult to describe either as voluntary or forced; many people in 1939 had “voluntarily” chosen to leave Italy, where they had been persecuted because of their German language and culture, but the reality of life in a war-driven German Reich had caught up with them very quickly and disillusionment prevailed. At the end of the war, they were stateless and had sold their possessions in South Tyrol, making decisions on whether to return to Italy or to stay in Austria difficult. However, in order to obtain Austrian citizenship, as a prerequisite they were forced to fill out the *Re-Option*-forms, asking for a reacquisition of Italian citizenship. In addition, support for the return of the emigrated South Tyroleans to Italy was refused, among other things, arguing that the emigration between 1939 and 1942 had been a voluntary one, i.e., the emigrants had had an alternative, namely the option to remain in Italy.⁷⁴

Current research, therefore, indicates the need for a more nuanced classification of the degree of voluntariness or forced migration, introducing categories like “semi-voluntary” or “semi-forced” and “assisted voluntary.”⁷⁵ For example, returning home after unemployment may be a free choice but the lack of alternatives, especially in times of economic crisis, might force people to choose to go back (see Sarah Oberbichler and Lorella Viola, chapter 6 in this volume); this category of return would therefore be semi-voluntary. In contrast, assisted return can be voluntary, or semi-voluntary (see Verena Hechenblaikner and Katia Pedevilla, chapter 13 in this volume).

In general, voluntary return presupposes the existence of alternatives, which requires a full understanding of the context in which decisions to return were made.⁷⁶ For historians, this also means taking into account the choices people did

⁷² Humbert, *Reinventing French Aid*; Mark Elliott, “The United States and Forced Repatriation of Soviet Citizens, 1944–47,” *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (1 June 1973): 253–75, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.2307/2149110.

⁷³ King and Kuschminder, “Introduction: Definitions, Typologies and Theories of Return Migration,” 2.

⁷⁴ Stefan Lechner and Helmut Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” in *Heimatlos. Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler*, ed. Tiroler Landesinstitut (Wien: Franz Deuticke Verlagsgesellschaft, 1993), 181–271.

⁷⁵ King and Kuschminder, “Introduction: Definitions, Typologies and Theories of Return Migration,” 15–16.

⁷⁶ Marta Bivand Erdal and Ceri Oeppen, “Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 6 (April 26, 2018): 981–98, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384149;

or did not have at a particular point in history, which in many cases may be difficult to reconstruct, while a more important goal for historical research might be understanding the context in which voluntariness is important for the historical argument. In summary, the question of whether the categorization of return in (semi-)voluntary or (semi-)forced contexts is even necessary for historical research depends on the individual historical case.

Finally, to sum up research trends in historical remigration in the twenty-first century, growing transnational ties, practices, and resources of returnees have become especially visible in return movements.⁷⁷ Important studies in this realm, for example, conclude that the return of Yugoslavian refugees, who had fled from war during the early 1990s, and returned to former Yugoslavia at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, had a positive effect on exports performance.⁷⁸ What is also noteworthy is that studies published recently have come to the conclusion that most current return movements, whether following voluntary or involuntary emigration, seem to have a positive effect on economies, societies, and politics of sending countries that experienced a comprehensive population outflow, such as the return of labor migrants to Serbia (see Milovanović Miloš, chapter 12 in this volume) or the return of war refugees to Syria.⁷⁹

Conclusion: The Heterogeneity and Complexity of Historical Return Migration Studies

In summarizing the literature review on European historical return migration, it becomes clear that the definition of remigration or return migration is not uniform and varies from study to study. However, what most definitions have in common is that they describe return migration as a relocation back to the country

Marta Bivand Erdal and Ceri Oeppen, “Theorising Voluntariness in Return,” in *Handbook of Return Migration*, ed. Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, 70–83.

77 Remus Gabriel Anghel, Margit Fauser, and Paolo Boccagni, eds., *Transnational Return and Social Change: Hierarchies, Identities and Ideas*, Key Issues in Modern Sociology (London; New York, NY: Anthem Press, 2019).

78 Dany Bahar et al., “Migration and Knowledge Diffusion: The Effect of Returning Refugees on Export Performance in the Former Yugoslavia,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, January 25, 2022, 1–50, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_01165.

79 Serdar Kaya and Phil Orchard, “Prospects of Return: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Germany,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 18, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 95–112, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2019.1570579.

of origin or as an individual's return to their home country after an extended period abroad.⁸⁰ Some definitions are even broader, i.e., not limited to the country of origin, and some are intergenerational. Not being limited to the country of origin means that the term "return" can also refer to remigration to a former country of immigration,⁸¹ as part of circular migration movements that were common in history (as will be shown in this volume). Elsewhere, intergenerational return refers to a return across generations.⁸² There is a reason for the vagueness of return migration definitions, namely that the complexity and heterogeneity of historic remigration movements complicate systematic access to the topic.⁸³ The historical constellations which brought a homecoming about were so diverse that generalizations are difficult and thus inherently faulty. Even concerning prisoners of war, just to mention one of the most widely researched topics, no general statements can be made; the treatment of POWs varied from country to country, the way they (were) returned varied from place to place, and the reasons for their illegal or legal, premature, or belated return were manifold.⁸⁴

Due to this heterogeneity and complexity, it is difficult to articulate universal statements, agree on generally valid theses, and apply established structured research methods. Such difficulties are compounded by the lack of empirical material; it will, for example, always remain challenging to cite exact numbers of returnees and it can still only be roughly estimated how many people who emi-

⁸⁰ Edda Currle, "Theorieansätze zur Erklärung von Rückkehr und Remigration," *Sozialwissenschaftlicher Fachinformationsdienst soFid*, Migration und ethnische Minderheiten 2 (2006): 7–23, 12; King and Kuschminder, "Introduction: Definitions, Typologies and Theories of Return Migration," 3–4.

⁸¹ Claudia Olivier-Mensah and Sarah Scholl-Schneider, "Transnational Return? On the Interrelation of Family, Remigration, and Transnationality – An Introduction," *Transnational Social Review* 6, no. 1–2 (May 3, 2016): 2–9, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1080/21931674.2016.1186371.

⁸² Dovelyn Rannveig Mendoza and Kathleen Newland, "Circular Migration and Development: Trends, Policy Routes, and Ways Forward," *MPI Policy Brief* (Washington: Migration Policy Institute, 2007), accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.eldis.org/document/A31498>; Louise Caron, "An Intergenerational Perspective on (Re)Migration: Return and Onward Mobility Intentions across Immigrant Generations," *International Migration Review* 54, no. 3 (September 2020): 820–52, accessed December 12, 2023, doi.org/10.1177/0197918319885646.

⁸³ Katharina Prager and Wolfgang Straub, "Die Rückkehr zur Remigration. Zur Einleitung," in *Bilderbuch–Heimkehr? Remigration im Kontext*, ed. Katharina Prager and Wolfgang Straub, Arco Wissenschaft, 30 (Wuppertal: Arco Verlag, 2017), 9–19, 11.

⁸⁴ Elena Agazzi and Erhard Schütz, "Heimkehren – Ein Vorwort," in *Heimkehr: Eine zentrale Kategorie der Nachkriegszeit: Geschichte, Literatur und Medien*, ed. Elena Agazzi and Erhard Schütz, vol. Schriften des Italienisch-Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Trient, 23 vols. (Trent: Duncker & Humblot, 2010), 7–20, 7.

grated later returned to their home countries;⁸⁵ indeed, George Gmelch cited the lack of an empirical basis in 1980 as a major reason for the ongoing neglect of return migration in academic research.⁸⁶ Equally, it remains essential to expand return migration research in the historical field. Regional approaches have proven to be fruitful in studying historical migration developments, particularly when archival material is scarce, and sources are lacking. This is also reflected in numerous publications and projects as well as in recently created migration archives, such as the *Migrationsarchiv der Stadt Salzburg*,⁸⁷ the *Archivio Memoria Migranti* (Rome),⁸⁸ the *Memoria e Migrazioni* (Genoa),⁸⁹ or the planned *Haus der Einwanderungsgesellschaft* (Cologne)⁹⁰ where the dispersed findings of migration histories are being collected, sometimes digitized, and often made available to the public in different ways. This development further leads to growing data collections on migration and remigration, thereby necessitating the development of interdisciplinary methods and workflows to address these expanding collections.

To put it in a nutshell, the historiography of European historical return migration has grown significantly especially over the past three decades but there is still much to be done, both on theorizing return migration and in enriching the history of remigration with historical case studies.

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⁸⁵ Prager and Straub, "Die Rückkehr zur Remigration. Zur Einleitung," 11.

⁸⁶ Gmelch, "Return Migration," 135.

⁸⁷ Migrationsarchiv der Stadt Salzburg, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.stadt-salzburg.at/internet/websites/migration.htm>.

⁸⁸ Archivio Memoria Migranti, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/>.

⁸⁹ Memoria e Migrazioni. Un sito alla scoperta del passato per comprendere il presente, accessed December 12, 2023, http://www.memoriaemigrazioni.it/prt_home.asp.

⁹⁰ Haus der Einwanderungsgesellschaft in Köln (Arbeitstitel), accessed December 12, 2023, <https://domid.org/haus-der-einwanderungsgesellschaft/>.

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Part I: Digital Historical Remigration Studies

Eva Pfanzelter

3 Digital Historical Remigration: The Example of the South Tyrolean *Return Option*

Abstract: Historical migration research has evolved in response to the transnational nature of the field and technological advances in the “digital age.” While studies on migrants’ use of digital technology emerged in the 1990s, it took until the 2010s for migration studies to fully embrace digital media as a subject of study, a data aggregator, and an integral part of migrant experiences, with various terms coined for this interdisciplinary field, including “Digital Historical Migration Studies (DHMS).” This chapter explores the practical application of conducting a “Digital Historical Migration Study,” using the case of the South Tyrolean *Return Option* from 1945 to 1955. It highlights the importance of mixed methods, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, to comprehensively understand migration dynamics. The analysis draws from two research projects and underscores the significance of datafication in historical research.

Introduction

Historical migration research has been deeply affected by both the transnational nature of this research field and the digital age¹. Since migration and media are deeply intertwined, studies on the use of digital technology by migrants surfaced as early as the 1990s.² However, it took another two decades before migration studies acknowledged digital media as an object of study, an aggregator of data,

¹ Some conceptual details in transnationalism, migration, and digital technology can be found in Kerstin B. Andersson, “Digital Diasporas: An Overview of the Research Areas of Migration and New Media Through a Narrative Literature Review,” *Human Technology* 15, no. 2 (2019), accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.17011/ht.urn.201906123154.

² E.g., Marie Sandberg and Luca Rossi, “Caring for (Big) Data: An Introduction to Research Methodologies and Ethical Challenges in Digital Migration Studies,” in *Research Methodologies and Ethical Challenges in Digital Migration Studies*, ed. Marie Sandberg et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), accessed August 1, 2023, 8; Andersson, “Digital diasporas: An overview of the research areas of migration and new media through a narrative literature review,” 143.

and an integral part of the contemporary migrant's experience.³ Several attempts at naming this interdisciplinary field have been made: *Doing Digital Migration Studies*⁴ was the preferred wording of Koen Leurs and Prabhakar Madhuri in 2018, while Kerstin B. Andersson addressed the crossroads of "migration and new media"⁵ in 2019. Focusing on the "dynamics that link international migration and digitalisation," the *Research Handbook on International Migration and Digital Technology*, edited by Marie McAuliffe in 2021, recognized "that the pace of technological change through increasing digitalisation is intensifying at an unprecedented rate, creating uncertainty and disrupting societal norms"⁶ thus calling for intensified research in the field. Later, "Digital Migration Studies"⁷ came to the fore in Sandra Ponzanesi and Leurs' special issue *Digital Migration Practices and the Everyday* of the journal *Communication, Culture and Critique* as well as in the volume *Research Methodologies and Ethical Challenges in Digital Migration Studies* edited by Marie Sandberg and Luca Rossi in 2022. Finally, in May 2023, Koen Leurs condensed the topic to *Digital Migration*,⁸ a concept designed to embrace a multitude of migration studies disciplines, digital technologies, and the everyday practice of migrants of the twenty-first century.

³ E.g., Sonja de Leeuw and Ingegerd Rydin, "Migrant Children's Digital Stories," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2007), accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.1177/1367549407081948; Sarah Bormann, Pathma Krishnan and Monika E. Neuner, *Migration in a Digital Age: Migrant Workers in the Malaysian Electronics Industry: Case Studies on Jabil Circuit and Flextronics* (Berlin: WEED, 2010); Sirima Thongsawang, "Mobile Technology in the Lives of Thai Immigrants in Germany," *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2016), accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.14764/10.ASEAS-2016.2-8; Sandberg and Rossi, "Caring for (Big) Data: An Introduction to Research Methodologies and Ethical Challenges in Digital Migration Studies," 8; Mihaela Nedelcu, "Migrants' New Transnational Habitus: Rethinking Migration Through a Cosmopolitan Lens in the Digital Age," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 9 (2012), accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2012.698203.

⁴ Koen Leurs and Madhuri Prabhakar, "Doing Digital Migration Studies: Methodological Considerations for an Emerging Research Focus," in *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies*, ed. Evren Yalaz and Ricard Zapata-Barrero, IMISCOE Research Series (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), accessed August 1, 2023.

⁵ Andersson, "Digital diasporas: An overview of the research areas of migration and new media through a narrative literature review," 143.

⁶ Marie McAuliffe, "International Migration and Digital Technology: An Overview," in *Research Handbook on International Migration and Digital Technology*, ed. Marie McAuliffe, Elgar handbooks in migration series 880 (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021), accessed August 1, 2023, 2.

⁷ Sandra Ponzanesi and Koen Leurs, "Digital Migration Practices and the Everyday," *Communication, Culture and Critique* 15, no. 2 (2022), accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.1093/ccc/tcac016.

⁸ Koen Leurs, *Digital Migration* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2023), 3–5.

From a historical perspective, the term “digital methods” in combination with “historical migration research”⁹ was used when digitality was an issue. Paul Longley Arthur and Isabel Smith coined the term “Digital Historical Migration Studies (DHMS)”¹⁰ thus focusing on history as a specific subject within the field. It is this latter definition that is embraced by this chapter because it quite precisely reflects the way historians approach the topic: taking note of growing data collections (and contributing to expanding them on a regional level), advancing methods and tools to analyze them, and, finally, telling a critically reflected (his/her) story about the findings.

Using a specific historical case study, namely the South Tyrolean *Return Option* (or *Re-Option*) that took place between 1945 and 1955, this chapter aims to explore the practical application of conducting a “Digital Historical Migration Study.” I demonstrate that mass digitization and quantitative analysis can support research on migration and return migration, even – or especially – at a regional level. However, I also argue that a quantitative approach alone is insufficient for comprehending past (and present) migration and remigration dynamics. In order to fully grasp the motivations, policies, historical contexts, and personal experiences, quantitative data must be supplemented with a diverse array of documents, voices, and other historical material. In looking for (and digitizing) additional data, historians leverage their core competencies by engaging in qualitative analysis of individual migration cases, politics of migration, and specific debates. As such, it is through a mixed methods approach that scholars can effectively navigate the substantial volumes of digitized information at their disposal.

The analysis draws from two research projects that I was able to co-lead over recent years: *ReMIGRA: Return Migration as an Interdisciplinary Research Area Using the Example of the South Tyrolean “Return Option”* (2020–2023)¹¹ and option-

⁹ Christoph Rass and Ismee Tames, “Negotiating the Aftermath of Forced Migration: A View from the Intersection of War and Migration Studies in the Digital Age,” *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 45, no. 4 (2020), accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.12759/HSR.45.2020.4.7-44.

¹⁰ Paul L. Arthur and Isabel Smith, “Human Journeys in the Digital Age: Advances and Challenges in Digital Historical Migration Studies,” *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 4 (2022): 1, accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.3389/fhmd.2022.915978.

¹¹ “ReMIGRA: Return Migration as an Interdisciplinary Research Area Using the Example of the South Tyrolean ‘Return Option’,” accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/zeitgeschichte/re migra/>, funded by the Autonome Provinz Bozen Südtirol/Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano Alto Adige in collaboration with Andrea Di Michele from the Free University of Bolzano.

MUDI: Option museal/Option digital (2021–2023)¹². Both projects had digital components, wherein a portion of the primary sources was digitized either by the researcher teams themselves or through the engagement of a professional digitization company. Equally, some of the analysis and storytelling are conducted digitally. This chapter focuses on the return migration (*Return Option*) aspect, but it will become clear that it is difficult to perform such an analysis without integrating the migration history of the South Tyrolean *Option* from 1939–1945.

The analysis begins with a literature overview of the influence of digital advancements on studies related to historical migration and return migration. Subsequently, the discussion briefly contemplates the current status of research on the history of the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Re-Option* and finally directs its attention toward the work done to uncover the intricate remigration path of the *Optants*.

The Impact of the Digital on Historical Migration and Remigration Studies

Scholars identifying as digital historians have been discussing the transformative power that comes with the digital age, sometimes advocated as the digital turn or digitized turn, over the past decades. Discussions about theoretical and methodological changes in historiography are ongoing and the discourses about epistemological or ethical aspects are fruitful and subject to constant adjustments. However, while there is a trend to dismiss digital history as the next hype in quantification (this time the quantification of big data), few historians are aware of the daily digital routines that have become part of our research and teaching practices; the online search for literature and archival material has turned the historical practice into an inherent transnational endeavor since digital catalogues ideally can be accessed without time, place, and border restrictions. In 2016, historian Lara Putnam pointed to the acceleration and place of independent web-based search possibilities as crucially changing the entire discipline in terms of speed, ease, and connectivity, while also introducing new concerns.¹³ While, in the 1990s, the increasing possibili-

¹² “optionMUDI: Option Museal / Option Digital,” accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/zeitgeschichte/regionalgeschichte/optionmudi.html>.

¹³ Lara Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast,” *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (April 2016): 379, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/121.2.377>.

ties of finding literature from multiple nations through online library catalogues widened the transnational research possibilities, mass digitizing efforts such as JSTOR's (retro-)digitization of academic journals since the mid-1990s or Google books' book digitizing project announced in 2004 have multiplied access to full-texts drastically.¹⁴

Likewise, many efforts have been made by archives, organizations, and companies around the world to digitize migration-related content and grant the public online access to digitized material. While this is true for many fields of research, migration research is particularly affected by these efforts in multiple ways: migrants' – including return as well as circular migrants' – necessity to organize their movement process led (from at least the nineteenth century) to many forms of recording their identities, possessions, and routes, and to counting and re-counting people in censuses; communities gave proof of birth, marriage, death, and right of domicile; regional authorities issued identity cards; parishes vouchsafed for their religious affiliation; railway and shipping companies sold tickets and seats; job and housing agents recruited and rented; and, last but not least, newspapers functioned as the vehicle for the exchange of information and advertising.

Also, organizations and companies interested in family history and genealogy collect and digitize data, thus creating global databases of family affiliations and ties – resources that can be crucial for migrating people when looking into (re-) establishing connections with relatives. Most of the databases collecting migration processes, therefore, are now integrated into the global ancestry searches like "family search"¹⁵ or the for-profit websites "ancestry,"¹⁶ "findmypast,"¹⁷ and "genesreunited."¹⁸ To name only a few examples of digitized data that have had a significant impact on historical migration studies in recent years, the databases of

14 Ibid., 378–80.

15 The Genealogical Society of Utah, which is the organization behind Family Search, has been operating since 1894. The first website was launched in 1999, and in 2002, the 1880 U.S. Census records became the first publicly available and searchable digitized files. The website is operated on a non-profit basis and its over five billion images are free of charge: "FamilySearch," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/de/>.

16 "Ancestry" is the world's leading for-profit site for genealogy. Designed to establish relationships between Mormons in the USA it was created in 1990 as a collection of floppy disks. As of 2021, the databases contain over 30 billion records, including birth, death, and marriage certificates, immigration and emigration lists, church and military records, historical telephone and address books etc. Today, "Ancestry" is an international corporation well known for its direct-to-consumer genealogical DNA tests. "Ancestry," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.ancestry.com/>.

17 "Findmypast," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>.

18 "GenesReunited," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.genesreunited.co.uk/>.

emigration and immigration offices as well as ports¹⁹ must be mentioned; in Italy, which was a country of mass emigration in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, the archive *Dal Porto al Mondo*²⁰ (“From the Harbor to the World”) of the CISEI (*Centro Internazionale Studi Emigrazione Italiana*) brings together passenger data from places of provenance with that of places of destination. Elsewhere, the database searches²¹ of The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation enable users to research the passenger and ship records of the largest migration movement in modern history. Further afield, the National Archives of Australia²² offer several online collections to help in migration research, like passenger arrival records, citizenship records, migration accommodation centers, alien registration records, and many more. In Austria, the *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes*²³ traces the tracks of persecuted and displaced people mainly during and after World War II. Finally, part of UNESCO Memory of the World, the Arolsen Archives in Germany are quickly becoming one of the largest collections of archival material enabling research into international refugee organizations and “an unprecedently good empirical basis especially for quantitative migration analyses,”²⁴ as Jan Eric Schulte summarized.

These and many more collections of personal data of millions of migrants worldwide enable migration research to cross national, geographic, and temporal boundaries. Likewise, historical migration research remains closely linked to governmental administrative interests, which traditionally are part of state- and nation-building processes. Even though transnational and transcontinental migration has received much more attention than internal movements, migration definitions, counting modes, and statistical methods remain deeply national. While digital transnational collections can help critically reflect these national research frame-

¹⁹ Léa Renard, “Mit den Augen der Statistiker. Deutsche Kategorisierungspraktiken von Migration im historischen Wandel,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 15 (2018): 435–41, accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.14765/ZZF.DOK.4.1290.

²⁰ “Archive ‘Dal Porto Al Mondo’,” accessed August 1, 2023, http://www.ciseionline.it/porto_mondo/default.asp.

²¹ “Passenger Search. Connect with Your Heritage,” accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.statueofliberty.org/discover/passenger-ship-search/>.

²² “Immigration and Citizenship,” accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/immigration-and-citizenship>.

²³ “Erforschen – Projekte – Datenbankprojekte,” accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.doew.at/erforschen/projekte/datenbankprojekte>.

²⁴ Jan E. Schulte, “Nationalsozialismus und europäische Migrationsgeschichte: Das Archiv des Internationalen Suchdienstes in Arolsen,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 4 (2007): 232.

works, they cannot avoid the criticism of limiting the complexity of migration history to administrative metrics and available technological innovations.²⁵

To counter that criticism, some of the above-mentioned mass data collections²⁶ have begun to focus on diverse migration practices and motivations by integrating interview collections, stories about migration objects, photographs, posters, postcards,²⁷ and many other voices and personal belongings of migrants into their archives. Moreover, digital-born data consisting of mobile technology and Social Media Content of migrants has become the everyday archive in recent years, which comes in many formats (text, image, videos, emojis, hashtags, comments, links, likes, etc.), thus undermining traditional administrative collection efforts. In fact, as Ette and Erlinghagen point out, there is “a growing body of qualitative research that points to the heterogeneity of migration motives,”²⁸ yet it remains a challenge to combine the different types of data that make up the migration experience within one collection or project and remains an ever-greater challenge to link different collections globally. So far, the data on the Holocaust and its aftermath as found through the gateway of the “European Holocaust Research Infrastructure” (EHRI)²⁹ is a pioneer project when it comes to reflecting the complexity of (forced) migration and relocation.

Given these extensive data collections, the historical analysis of migration or remigration comes with many biases, as Marlou Schrover highlights, such as historical migration and remigration studies frequently adopting a western-centric, male, national perspective.³⁰ The availability of administrative processes dominated by western administrative offices entails the use of databases from ports and emigration offices, population registers and censuses, inevitably shaping research inquiries

25 Sigrid Wadauer, “Historische Migrationsforschung. Überlegungen zu Möglichkeiten und Hindernissen,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 19, no. 1 (2008): 7–9, accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.25365/OEZG-2008-19-1-2.

26 E.g., CISEI – Centro Internazionale Studi Emigrazione Italiana, “Archive ‘Dal Porto al Mondo’.”

27 E.g., “Online Resources and Tools: Personal Stories of Migration,” accessed August 1, 2023, <https://museumsvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/online-resources-and-tools/>.

28 Andreas Ette and Marcel Erlinghagen, “Structures of German Emigration and Remigration: Historical Developments and Demographic Patterns,” in *The Global Lives of German Migrants: Consequences of International Migration Across the Life Course*, ed. Marcel Erlinghagen et al., IMISCOE Research Series (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021), 58.

29 “EHRI – European Holocaust Research Infrastructure,” accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.ehri-project.eu/>.

30 Marlou Schrover, “Migration Histories,” in *Introduction to Migration Studies. An Interactive Guide to the Literatures on Migration and Diversity*, ed. Peter Scholten (Cham: Springer International Publishing), 28–33, accessed August 1, 2023, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8_2.

around these collections,³¹ with statistics on migration dynamics therefore a standard source for academic accounts on the subject.³² Several disciplines, like economy and sociology, and different approaches in academic spheres, like research in the USA, have a stronger tendency towards quantitative methods using different databases (also of historical migration movements). Others, like anthropology and history, or the European academic sphere in the humanities, tend to rely on qualitative studies,³³ since here it has become apparent that if we want to understand migration, collected quantitative data has to be contextualized.³⁴ Recently, there have also been strong voices arguing for mixed-methods and interdisciplinary approaches.³⁵

For historians, the variety of existing data in historical migration studies – be they digital or not – advocates the latter combining the potentials of large-scale quantitative studies with the insight gained from qualitative research. As Arthur and Smith summarize, the “opportunities for integrating data on macro and micro scales and finding new ways to combine and explore tensions between quantitative and qualitative materials, and between external observations of migrants and migration and self-representations by migrants” have increased significantly due to the “digital turn,” which lead to “multifaceted representations of migration.”³⁶ The advance in the development of digital methods, tools, and storytelling can lead to

³¹ E.g., Ette and Erlinghagen, “Structures of German Emigration and Remigration: Historical Developments and Demographic Patterns.” See also Elena Agazzi and Erhard Schütz, eds., *Heimkehr: Eine zentrale Kategorie der Nachkriegszeit: Geschichte, Literatur und Medien*. Vol. Schriften des Italienisch-Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Trient. 23 vols. (Trent: Duncker & Humblot, 2010).

³² See in detail: Albert Kraler and David Reichel, “Migration Statistics,” *Introduction to Migration Studies. An Interactive Guide to the Literatures on Migration and Diversity*, ed. Peter Scholten (Cham: Springer International Publishing), accessed August 1, 2023, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8_2.

³³ Justyna Salamońska, “Quantitative Methods in Migration Research,” in *Introduction to Migration Studies. An Interactive Guide to the Literatures on Migration and Diversity*, ed. Peter Scholten (Cham: Springer International Publishing), 425–26, accessed August 1, 2023, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8_2.

³⁴ Ricard Zapata-Barrero and Evren Yalaz, “Qualitative Methods in Migration Research,” in *Introduction to Migration Studies. An Interactive Guide to the Literatures on Migration and Diversity*, ed. Peter Scholten (Cham: Springer International Publishing), 411–12, accessed August 1, 2023, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8_2.

³⁵ Salamońska, “Quantitative Methods in Migration Research,” 425–26.

³⁶ Arthur and Smith, “Human journeys in the digital age: Advances and challenges in Digital Historical Migration Studies,” 1.

new research questions, novel analysis,³⁷ multimedia and multimodal visualisations,³⁸ and innovative forms of migration or remigration storytelling.³⁹

The project on the South Tyrolean *Re-Option* has been designed accordingly, as the following chapters will show. Although deeply embedded in a western-centric academic field, the study focuses on the migration experience of the German-speaking minority from Fascist Italy to Nazi Germany, followed by its remigration from the Austrian Republic to the Republic of Italy after the conclusion of World War II. Notably, this specific migration and remigration movement is not included in national migration databases and data collections of both Italy and Austria, an omission which stems from the fact that it took place as a result of a formal agreement between the two authoritarian regimes, namely Fascism and National Socialism, and concerned only the German-speaking minority living on Italy's northern border. Also, most of the migration administration for those leaving Italy was conducted by offices of the German Reich and the files are therefore located in Austrian archives. The return movement, in turn, was then administered by both Austrian and Italian authorities.

State of the Research Concerning the South Tyrolean *Re-Option* of 1945–1955

As early as the 1980s, George Gmelch⁴⁰ identified the absence of an empirical foundation as a significant factor contributing to the continued oversight of return migration in scholarly investigations. According to Prager and Straub,⁴¹ this is still true today, and the gathering of empirical material is therefore still an essential factor of remigration research. This is not only true for global or transnational studies but also national approaches and regional studies, and is equally true for the analysis presented here: for the *Return Option* of the South Tyrolean

37 E.g., Henning Borggräfe, Lukas Hennies, and Christoph Rass, “Geoinformationssysteme in der historischen Forschung. Praxisbeispiele aus der Untersuchung von Flucht, Verfolgung und Migration in den 1930er- bis 1950er-Jahren,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 19 (2022): 148–69, accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.14765/ZZF.DOK-2404.

38 E.g., Nikola Sander, Guy J. Abel, and Ramon Bauer, “The Global Flow of People, 1990–2010,” in *Global International Migration Flows*, ed. Wittgenstein Center, February 2014, accessed August 1, 2023, http://download.gsb.bund.de/BIB/global_flow/.

39 E.g., Helen Simondson, *Connecting through Digital Storytelling*, Australian Center for Moving Images, last modified October 2009, <https://www.cbaa.org.au/article/connecting-through-digital-storytelling>.

40 Gmelch, “Return Migration,” 135.

41 Prager and Straub, “Die Rückkehr zur Remigration,” 11.

migrants after World War II, a systematic appraisal of this particular remigration issue is still pending.

While the South Tyrolean *Option* has been widely researched and has gained continuous attention in the academic community, this is not equally true for the *Return Option* topic, with the history of this specific return migration to some extent uncertain today. The first in-depth research on the return to South Tyrol was carried out by the historian Stefan Lechner in 1989.⁴² Together with Helmut Alexander and Adolf Leidlmair, in 1993 Lechner published the first major study on the *Return Option* in the book *Heimatlos* ("Homeless"),⁴³ and continued to dedicate some of his future research to this topic, e.g., with two studies in 2000⁴⁴ and 2001⁴⁵ and short essays in 2014⁴⁶ in 2020.⁴⁷ In addition, some degree theses have dealt with these specific historical events.⁴⁸ The edited volume *Einmal Option und zurück. Die Folgen der Aus- und Rückwanderung für Südtirols Nachkriegsentwicklung*⁴⁹ by historians Martha Verdoner, Günther Pallaver, and Leopold Steurer brought circular migration processes into the discussion, which by and large increased the perspectives of this remigration. Still, this specific return migration hardly ever gained topicality.

This means that some important issues concerning the *Return Option* remain in the dark. For example, the political discourse in the Italian government that led to the *Optantendekret* of 1948 has rarely been investigated while, equally, the

⁴² Stefan Lechner, "Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol" in *Die Option. Südtirol zwischen Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus*, Innsbrucker Forschungen zur Zeitgeschichte 5, ed. Klaus Eisterer and Rolf Steininger, Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 1989.

⁴³ Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmair, eds., *Heimatlos: Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler* (Wien: Deuticke, 1993).

⁴⁴ Stefan Lechner, "Zwischen den Landesteilen. Südtirols Optanten 1945–1948," in *Südtirol – Stunde Null? Kriegsende 1945–1946*, ed. Hans Heiss, Veröffentlichungen des Südtiroler Landesarchivs Bd. 10 (Innsbruck, Wien, München: Studienverl., 2000).

⁴⁵ Stefan Lechner, "Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945," in *Das 20. Jahrhundert in Südtirol: 1940-1959*, ed. Gottfried Solderer and Helmut Alexander (Bozen: Ed. Raetia, 2001).

⁴⁶ Stefan Lechner, "Auf der Suche nach der Heimat Südtirol: Rückoption und Rücksiedlung," in *Le Opzioni rilette: Die mitgelesenen Briefe*, ed. Ulrike Kindl (Bolzano: La fabbrica del tempo, 2014).

⁴⁷ Stefan Lechner, "Rückfahrkarte statt Selbstbestimmung," in *80 Jahre Option: Das dunkelste Kapitel der (Süd-)Tiroler Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Andreas Raffeiner, Schriftenreihe Studien zur Zeitgeschichte (Hamburg, Germany) Band 115 (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2020).

⁴⁸ E.g., Ivan Stecher, "Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten. Genese, Ablauf und Reintegration anhand ausgewählter Fallbeispiele sowie fachdidaktische Ausarbeitung der Thematik für den Schulunterricht" (Diplomarbeit, Universität Innsbruck, 2020).

⁴⁹ Martha Verdoner, Günther Pallaver, and Leopold Steurer, *Einmal Option und zurück: Die Folgen der Aus- und Rückwanderung für Südtirols Nachkriegsentwicklung* (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2019).

negotiations between the two countries concerning human and material border crossings have been analyzed only from an economic point of view. One of the reasons for this is that the archival situation of files documenting the *Return Option* is unclear, with questions concerning the extent of the return movement, its implementation, and the procedures during and after the return process remaining obscure. Moreover, questions about the re-integration of the returnees have been addressed only sporadically, with these omissions arising from a lack of adequate data, widely dispersed and missing source material, and, simply put, a lack of interest.

These research gaps were recently being addressed by the project ReMIGRA. The central research focus, therefore, was on a reassessment of the history of the *Return Option* based on existing archival fragments, dislocated collections, and printed sources as well as collected oral histories.

Fragmented Archival Collections of the *Return Option*

The main challenge when researching the *Return Option* is the difficult archival situation. The primary sources needed are dispersed in various archives mainly in Italy and Austria but, at the same time, within the archives sometimes only fragments of the original collections can be found. The following archives were found to be central to the study of the *Return Option*.

In Italy, the most relevant archive for the topic was the *Archivio di Stato di Bolzano*, the “State Archive of Bolzano,”⁵⁰ in South Tyrol’s capital. It holds parts of the collection of the *Ufficio per la revoca opzioni*, also known as the *Rückoptionsbüro* (“Return Migration Office”), with this office re-using parts of the collections from the *Option* administration from 1939–1943 (the ADERSt) for the processing of the return movement. Most importantly, the State Archive also holds the personal files, card indexes, and lists of returnees encompassing the following groups: the card index of *Optants* who had moved to the German Reich (around 23,000 pages marked with a stamp *Trasferitosi in Germania*, “Moved to Germany,” and collected under the heading *Optionskartei II*, “Option index card II”), the card index of those who had moved abroad only temporarily – meaning they had already returned either during or shortly after the war (around 5,000 cards marked with

⁵⁰ “Archivio Di Stato Di Bolzano / Staatsarchiv Bozen,” accessed August 1, 2023, <http://www.archiviodistatobolzano.beniculturali.it/>.

a blue number and filed under the heading *Optionskartei IIb*, “Option index card IIb”), the card index of those whose files had to be examined by a specially appointed commission (around 1,300 labelled *Passata alla Commissione*, “Passed to the Commission” and filed as *Optionskartei IIc*, “Option index card IIc”), the card index of rejected returnees (around 2,000 cards), and personal files of *Optants* who revoked the *Option* (several hundred but incomplete).

In Rome, the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*,⁵¹ the “Central State Archives,” preserves the administrative files of the nation. In the post-war period, the issue of returnees was dealt with by several offices, but in particular by the *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*, “Presidency of the Council of Ministers,” responsible for the political consultation of the Italian government, and by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was responsible for all matters related to the acquisition and loss of Italian citizenship. Most importantly, the Archivio Centrale archives the remains of the *Ufficio per le Zone di Confine*, “The office of border areas,” where the political debates and national policies of Italian governments at the borders (and therefore also in South Tyrol) after the World War took place. For example, the 1948 law regulating the right to regain Italian citizenship for returnees was drawn up by the *Ufficio per le Zone di Confine*.

The *Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri*,⁵² the “Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” preserves the files produced by the central offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and documentation of the Italian embassies abroad. Their collections are important because the issue of what to do with the *Optants* became central in the post-war negotiations since they had an uncertain legal status; Italy used the threat of not returning Italian citizenship to them as a weapon in international negotiations concerning the future state affiliation of South Tyrol.

The *Südtiroler Landesarchiv*, the “South Tyrolean Regional Archive,” in Bolzano proved to be important for its collection of the archive of the Südtiroler Volkspartei, the South Tyrolean Peoples Party who was the main political representation for German-speaking inhabitants of the Province of Bolzano.

In Austria, the *Österreichische Staatsarchiv* (“Austrian State Archives”) in Vienna houses the records of the Archives of the Republic, which contains the contemporary files of Austria’s central administrative bodies. The central holdings for *Return Option* matters turned out to be the Austrian Embassy in Rome, its files having been added to the Archives in Vienna only in 2020. To a lesser extent,

⁵¹ “Archivio Centrale Dello Stato” (“Central State Archives”), accessed August 1, 2023, <https://acs.cultura.gov.it/>.

⁵² “Archivio Storico Diplomatico” (“Historical Diplomatic Archives”), accessed August 1, 2023, <https://web.esteri.it/archivistoricodiplomatico/>.

the files of the Austrian legation in Rome also shed light on the diplomatic discourses surrounding the issue. The holdings of the *Bundesministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten*, the “Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” completed the collection of data.

The *Tiroler Landesarchiv*, the “Tyrolean Regional Archive” in Innsbruck, archives the administrative files of regional offices and bodies. Most importantly, it houses the archives of the *Amt der Tiroler Landesregierung*, the “Office of the Tyrolean Provincial Government,” with part of this collection the holdings of the so-called *Referat S*, or *Referat Südtirol* (“Referat South Tyrol”), a body of the provincial government specifically installed to deal with the difficult South Tyrolean question after World War II. The holdings of the *Kommission für Rücksiedlungshilfe*, the “Commission for Resettlement Assistance,” were equally important, which were only made accessible in 2017.

In addition to the administrative archives, individual researchers and initiatives gathered oral histories, with some conducted during the 1980s and others as part of diverse projects. These interviews are essential for providing context and enhancing the administrative records, due to their emphasis on individuals and their firsthand experiences.

Digitization of Index Cards and Sample Records

The digitization in the project consisted of two different activities. On the one hand, funding was accessed to partially digitize the index cards of *Return Optants*, and we decided on digitizing the index cards of the *Optionskartei II*, *Optionskartei IIb*, and *Optionkartei IIc*. The digitization in the State Archive in Bolzano was implemented during the difficult Covid-19 lockdown months throughout the year 2021 by the digitization company Innsbruck University Innovations (iui), a spin-off of the University of Innsbruck that specializes in digitizing all sorts of (historical) materials. The roughly 30,000 index cards were digitized automatically, and the images were uploaded to Transkribus, a software designed to transcribe historical documents. However, despite training several algorithms (layout and text-transcription models), the index cards proved to be too challenging for the automatic text recognition system due to the many different types of handwritten entries and OCR challenges, so an additional manual correction of the names and birth years of the people indicated on the cards needed to be performed. This collection, the “stabz_optionskartei” (“State Archive Option index cards”), became one of the central data collections for the project (for a better overview, see Table 1).

To better understand the individual migration and remigration histories of families, some examples of personal files that are archived in the *Tiroler Landesarchiv* in Innsbruck were also (manually) digitized by the iui-team. Each personal file consists of the original emigration application of the head of the family from 1939/1940, data collected during the emigration process 1939–1943, information on the new residence in the German Reich (1939–1945), and, in an ideal case, information about the individual's or families' return to South Tyrol after World War II. The size of the archival files per head of family varies significantly and can range from eight to over 100 pages.

As examples, we chose one valley where all the citizens had to “opt to move” out of their native villages, the Kanaltal/Val Canale (“TLA_Optionsakten_Kanaltal”),⁵³ with roughly 11,500 pages of data. This valley was a thorn in the eye of the Italian fascists since its villagers predominantly spoke the German language but the area surrounding the valley was inhabited almost exclusively by Italian-speaking people. For these emigrants, we also have 26,000 pages of digitized data containing the estimates of the *Wertfestsetzungskommission* (“value assessment commission”), an organization responsible for the calculation (and transfer) of assets and belongings (“TLA_Optionsakten_Vermögen”). The second example, consisting of around 11,000 pages, contains the data of the so-called *Deutsche Sprachinseln* (“German language islands”), a name attributed by the *Option*-authorities to German-language villages and communities outside the borders of the Province of Bolzano (“TLA_Optionakten_Deutsche_Sprachinseln”). These are especially interesting for our study since people here were surrounded by Italians in close proximity (neighbors and neighboring villages) and thus might have had different reasons for emigrating to the German Reich.⁵⁴ The third example was that of a city in Tyrol, a region that was then part of the Reich's *Gau Tirol Vorarlberg* district; Jenbach was a typical incoming community since it had a large arms factory, the *Jenbacher Heinkel-Werke*, that became highly relevant during World War II and where especially skilled workers (like blacksmiths) from South Tyrol were needed.⁵⁵ The 5,900 pages of migrants coming from the Province of Bolzano to Jenbach were digitized by the staff of the *Tiroler Landesarchiv* (“TLA_Optionsakten_Jenbach”).

All the personal files were also uploaded to Transkribus. However, in this case, the focus of the (manual) transcription was placed on the names and birth dates of the applicants since these are needed for the linking of the data with the

53 See chapter of Giada Noto in this volume.

54 Currently, Alexander Renner, team member of the ReMIGRA project, is working on these “German language islands” in his master's thesis.

55 See chapter of Ivan Stecher in this volume.

index cards. For copyright and privacy reasons, the 54,400 pages of the personal data of applicants were omitted from the transcription process, because a lot of this data will not be available to the public and can only be seen after a registration process for academic analysis – which will consist of qualitative analysis of the stories of the migrants.

On the other hand, the ReMIGRA-team visited the other archives in Rome, Vienna, and Bolzano (the *Tiroler Landesarchiv* in Innsbruck did not allow the use of personal phones or scans of the documents) throughout 2021 and 2022, taking photographs of archival documents on their mobile phones using different phones, different operating systems (Apple and Android), and different Apps (although Microsoft Lens proved to be the most suitable for our project), with this collection amounting to 24,000 pages. This data, which we named “ReMIGRA political discourse,” was uploaded to Transkribus and several models were trained to better transcribe the data in Italian and German. These collections contain a lot of unstructured data, ranging from memos to letters to statistics to laws to opinion pieces and much more. This is why the project team manually added tags to these files containing not only the dates, person names, institutions, and geographic locations mentioned but also a general tag on the contents of the document (e.g., politics, economy, statistics, law).

Finally, the team of both ReMIGRA and optionMUDI collected oral histories of contemporary witnesses of the *Option* and *Re-Option* movements, with 25 audio interviews from the 1980s and 92 video interviews conducted in different projects since 2013 digitized and uploaded to the streaming server of the University of Innsbruck. This multimedia collection has to be tackled differently, both from a methodological point of view and from a digital one, since it contains a lot of private data, worthy of special protection but at the same time valuable for a rich history of the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Re-Option*.

Table 1: Overview of digitized data within the projects ReMIGRA and optionMUDI.

index card collections (pages) (quantitative analysis)	miscellaneous material (pages/number) (quantitative and qualitative analysis)
stabz_optionskartei (31,000)	TLA_Optionsakten_Kanaltal (11,500)
tla_optionskartei (220,000)	TLA_Optionsakten_Vermögen (26,000)
	TLA_Optionakten_Deutsche_Sprachinseln (11,000)
	TLA_Optionsakten_Jenbach (5,900)
	ReMIGRA political discourse (24,000)
	Oral histories audio (25)
	Oral histories video (92)

Mixed Methods Applied to the Digitized data

Summarizing the above, a clear difference arises concerning two distinct categories of data. Firstly, digitized index cards harbor a plethora of personal information suitable for quantitative analysis, including details such as birthdates, birthplaces, residences, occupations, and familial relations. At the time of writing, our index card collections were scheduled for publication on the open-source platform Omeka S,⁵⁶ with their availability to the general public expected by the end of 2023. The online publication of the cards is also designed to benefit descendants of the *Optants* and *Re-Optants* by providing them access to their ancestors' records held within the Tiroler Landesarchiv in Innsbruck, Austria, and the Staatsarchiv in Bolzano, Italy, thus facilitating direct requests for relevant personal files. It is, however, expected that the data will require a subsequent effort of focusing on correcting transcriptional inaccuracies, which will involve a more expansive crowd-sourcing initiative.

The data collected with the index cards call for quantitative analyses. The possibilities are manifold and range from numbers of first names to averages of numbers of children per family to female heads of family etc. Not only do these cards contain a wealth of information for genealogy, they also provide valuable insights into the economic and social history of South Tyrol during these years. At the same time, the information contained in these cards calls for innovative forms of quantitative assessment and visualization. As demonstrated by Valerio Larcher's contribution in this volume,⁵⁷ the potential for historical spatial representation of both sets of index cards is considerable, which is due to the geographic mobility of the events and people involved.

A prominent challenge when working with digital data involves establishing interconnections among collections and between the data within these collections and pre-existing external sources, databases, and metadata. An illustration of this challenge lies in the task of integrating the *Re-Option* index cards (Image 1), originating from the period 1948–1952, with the index cards from the optionMUDI project, the “tla_optionskartei.” The latter contain data about emigrants from the years 1939–1943 (Image 2).

For instance, by establishing connections between the occupations mentioned in Image 2 under the heading *Beruf oder Gewerbe* (“profession or trade”) and those in Image 1 under *Qualifica* (“Qualification”), and subsequently cross-referencing them with the “Integrated Authority File” (*Gemeinsame Normdatei*, GND) of the

⁵⁶ “Omeka S,” accessed August 10, 2023, <https://omeka.org/s/>.

⁵⁷ See chapter of Valerio Larcher in this volume.

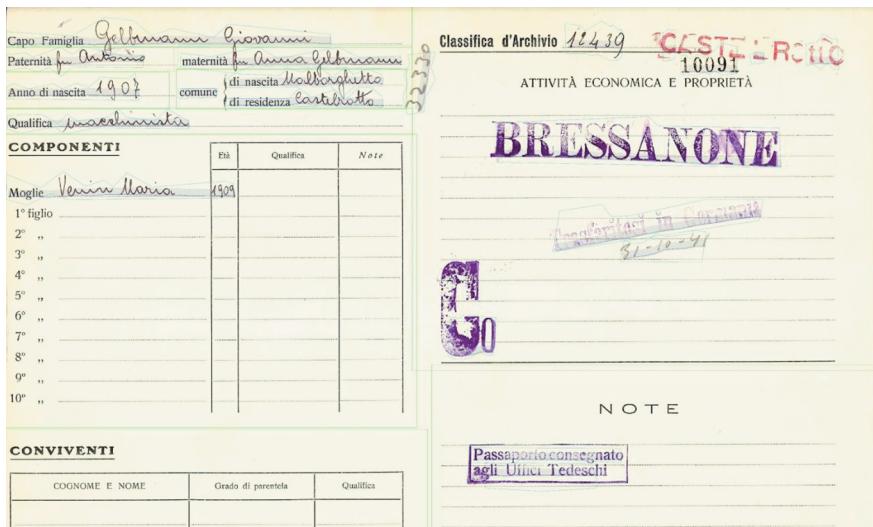


Image 1: Index card of Gelmann Giovanni (German: Johann) from the “stabz_optionskartei.” The card originates from Gelmann’s *Option* in 1940. He had migrated to Germany with his wife Maria Wenin on October 10, 1941 (Trasferitosi in Germania 31-10-41). Only the number 32,330 written crosswise in pencil shows that he and his wife returned to Italy. Also, the corresponding card in Innsbruck (shown in Image 2) has neither an “R” (for returnee) behind the name nor a return-migration-stamp on the back; these two markers would indicate that the returnee legally filed for a return in Austria. Since Gelmann’s card in Innsbruck does not have these markers, his return to Italy was an illegal one.

Deutsche Nationalbibliothek⁵⁸ and the *Classificazione delle Professioni* (“Classification of Professions”),⁵⁹ historians will be able to gain insights into the labor dynamics prevailing among the inhabitants of the Province of Bolzano. This work alone will provide an overview of the economic history of Alpine regions during the World War II era and its aftermath. Moreover, inquiries into gender and gender roles can become an interesting topic for exploration, particularly when evaluating the profiles of female “heads of families” (*Capo Famiglia* in Image 1 and *Zuname/Vorname* in Image 2) and their respective professions.

Still, despite the numerous fascinating quantitative analyses that historians will be able to conduct with these cards, the data will neither provide insights

⁵⁸ “The Integrated Authority File/Gemeinsame Normdatei GND,” accessed August 1, 2023, https://www.dnb.de/EN/Professionell/Standardisierung/GND/gnd_node.html.

⁵⁹ Istat, Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, ed., *La Classificazione Delle Professioni / Categorisation of Professions* (Rome: Istat, 2013).

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
A	Zuname: G e l b m a n n			geb. am 22.5.1907	Rennziffer: 315.556	St.
	Vorname: Johann				Anreihziffern:	
	geb. in Malbergrette				57/	
	Staatsangeh.: ital.		Volkszugeh.: deutsch,			
	Familienstand: verh./verw./eig./Agtz.		Glaubensbekenntnis: kath.			
	Beruf oder Gewerbe: ¹⁾ Schmied			²⁾ Seilbahn Mechanist		
	Anschriften:			59219		
	St, U l t r i c h, Überwasser, Einbürgerungs- Urkunde vom			ausgehän- digt am	Einbürgerung abgelehnt	
B	Vorname: ³⁾ Maria Wenin	geb. in St, Pankraz	geb. am 21.9.1909	Beruf: Hausfrau		
C						
A Antragsteller B Ehefrau C minderjährige Kinder ¹⁾ erlernt ²⁾ ausgeübt ³⁾ bei der Ehefrau auch Mädchennname Bearbeiter: 20.8.1940 Termin: abgelegt Dat. abgegr.						

Image 2: Index card of Gelbmann Johann (Italian Giovanni) from the “tla_optionskartei” opting for the German Reich on August 20, 1940.

into the motivations of people for their emigration and subsequent return nor will it enable the retracing of the political actions associated with these events or dig deeper into the personal histories, which is why it was essential to provide researchers with materials that enable qualitative analysis. We have therefore, secondly, chosen examples of personal files, political discourses, and oral history interviews that, even though they contain quantitative data, are pivotal for our qualitative endeavours; the personal files of the *Kanaltal*, *Jenbach*, and *Deutsche Sprachinseln* regions, alongside the index cards and the interview materials, are currently being used for thorough examination of the historical narratives within these three areas. Several outcomes from these analyses are featured within this volume; Giada Noto focuses on the matter of return migration in the Kanaltal,⁶⁰ while Ivan Stecher amalgamates the personal files from Jenbach⁶¹ with selected

⁶⁰ See chapter of Giada Noto in this volume.

⁶¹ See chapter of Ivan Stecher in this volume.

interviews gathered from contemporary witnesses of the same municipality. Furthermore, a master's thesis is presently in progress, exploring the subject of the *Deutsche Sprachinseln*.⁶² It should be noted that personal files will not be made accessible to the general public, as they include information safeguarded by privacy legislation. However, together with the quantitative information contained on the index cards, they provide historians with some of the necessary context of the migration histories and the events of the time (again see Valerio Larcher's contribution here, in which he used statistical data of the *Ufficio per le Zone di Confine* enriched with other archival material).

The documents included in the political discourse collection are so far primarily being used for detailed analysis of distinct aspects of return migration, as illustrated by the contributions of Verena Hechenblaikner and Katia Pedevilla in this volume.⁶³ Hechenblaikner, in particular, has employed these materials for her master's thesis,⁶⁴ while Pedevilla has authored an article⁶⁵ delving further into the contents of these files. Yet, the motivations for the *Optants* to choose to move abroad or the *Re-Optants* to return can ultimately be surmised only through the oral history narratives. It should also be noted that some of the personal files, some of the oral histories, and some visualizations from the quantitative data will find reuse within an "Option exhibition" at the Jenbacher City Museum, with the narrative elements of chief importance for this public display. To summarize, all the historical studies here adopted a mixed methods approach.

It is also important to mention that copyright laws imply that access to the two distinct types of data will need to differ. The two collections containing political discourses regarding the *Re-Option*, both in Italy and Austria, as well as the oral histories and the personal files, will be protected through a login-wall mechanism, with availability for analyses only possible upon individual request. The political discourse is complex to deal with, due to variations in archive consent concerning the publication of scans, and will thus be made available through Transkribus' own

⁶² Alexander Renner, Die Option der „Deutschen Sprachinseln“: Quantitative und Qualitative Ergebnisse, Masterarbeit, Innsbruck 2023 (in progress).

⁶³ See chapter of Verena Hechenblaikner and Katia Pedevilla in this volume.

⁶⁴ Verena Hechenblaikner, "Der Grenzüberschreitende Personenverkehr zwischen Nord- und Südtirol 1946-1952. Die Aktenlage aus Österreichischer Perspektive" (Master's thesis, Universität Innsbruck, 2023).

⁶⁵ Katia Pedevilla, "Solidarität mit System. Die Rolle des 'Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe an Optanten' in Bozen für die Integration von Rückoptant*innen," *historia.scribere*, no. 15 (2023), accessed August 1, 2023, doi:10.15203/historia.scribere.15.624.

publication platform “read&search” (Image 3), with access to this collection subject to specialized permissions granted (or denied) by the archives themselves. Notably, the “read&search” publication will incorporate visualization of metadata and tags (Image 4), with ongoing refinement being conducted in collaboration with computer scientists from the University of Innsbruck.

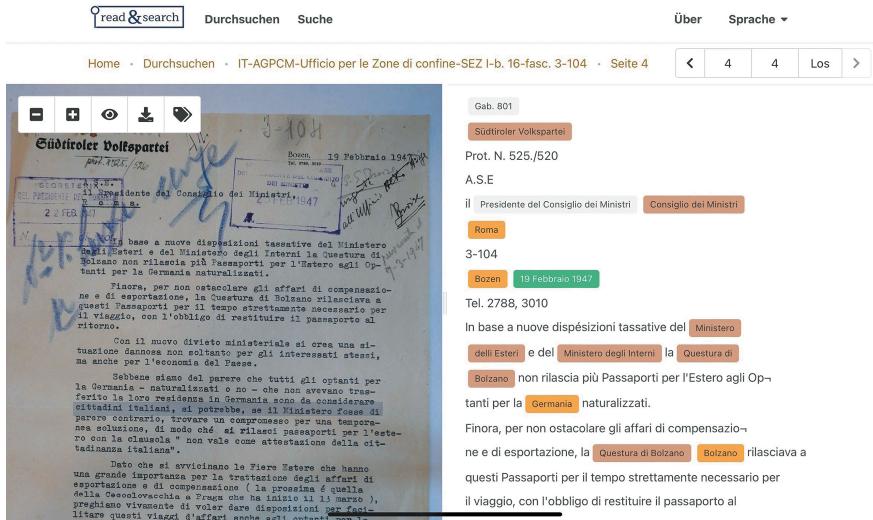


Image 3: The documents from archives in Italy and Austria containing the political discourses will be hidden behind a login wall in Transkribus’ publication platform “read&search”.

Conclusion and Outlook

The digital collections of the ReMIGRA (and optionMUDI) projects have created an abundance of documents from which historians and others can look into the history of the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Re-Option*. Although the mass digitization of the quantifiable data on the index cards is nothing new in the migration studies’ field, the collections created here have a particular drive; they do not reflect migration and remigration movements of national importance (although some aspects certainly are also true for such studies) and are therefore not in the focus of national archives. On the contrary, these collections were made possible through the financial support of regional funding bodies and the work of scholars in the field. Despite this, the online publication of the index cards will not have a solely regional effect; the trend towards the use of Open Access online data is undimin-

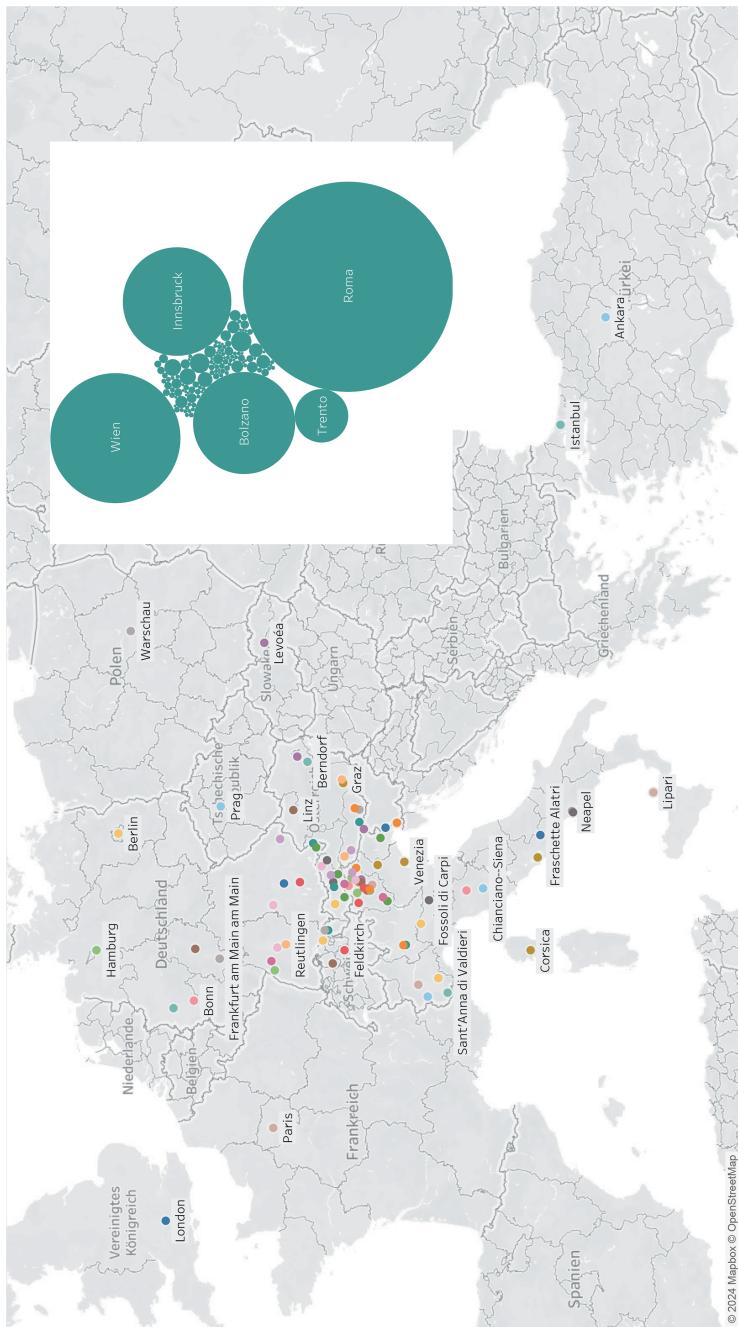


Image 4: Sarah Oberbichler, Geographical visualization in Tableau of the places of origin of the correspondence contained in the collection “ReMIGRA political discourse,” August 2023. The discovery of the many different places of origin is surprising.

ished and the possibilities for cross-linking with other migration databases covering the same time periods are vast (e.g., with the Arolsen Archives). “Online First,” in the sense of rapid online and “free” availability,⁶⁶ is not only true for academic text-publishing, but also for the publication of primary sources and, as in our case, data collections. By drawing attention to the *Option* and *Re-Option* collections, this particular regional migration movement has the potential to contribute to a de-nationalized migration history.

Given that the data found on the index cards offers an expansive yet predominantly quantitative insight into the migration history of South Tyrol, the projects also incorporated the collection and digitization of other primary sources. These sources not only serve to augment the numerical data but also facilitate a more profound exploration of the political debates in the offices in Rome, Vienna, Bolzano, and Innsbruck and of migrants’ and remigrants’ personal experiences and memories. It is important to emphasize that the online accessibility of the different source collections gathered from a range of archival repositories offers a concentrated, efficient, and well-documented research opportunity. Therefore, in alignment with numerous other digitally enriched historical initiatives, this chapter underscores the necessity of hybrid methodologies when navigating large volumes of digitized data.

To round off the achievements in the study of South Tyrols’ *Re-Option* history, a glimpse at the progress of the ReMIGRA project is necessary. One of the key obstacles for an in-depth study of the return movement was the challenging archival situation. Fragmented and dislocated collections will continue to accompany the study of the *Re-Option*, but the publication of the *Archivführer: Rückoption der Südtiroler Optant:innen*⁶⁷ in German and *Guida Archivistica: Le Riopzioni Sudtirolese*⁶⁸ in Italian (“Guide to archival collections: Return Option of the South Tyrolean Optants”) will be of valuable help both for historians and archivists. This guide, alongside the digitization and tagging of documents by the teams of both projects, has brought many research focus areas into the spotlight. Examples include how the primary concern during the post-war era revolved around the citizenship status of the

⁶⁶ Milan F. Klus and Alexander Dilger, “Success Factors of Academic Journals in the Digital Age,” *Business Research*, no. 13 (2020): 1120–22, accessed August 11, 2023, doi:10.1007/s40685-020-00131-z.

⁶⁷ Sarah Oberbichler and Valerio Larcher, “Archivführer: Rückoption Der Südtiroler Optant: Innen” (Innsbruck, 2023), https://www.uibk.ac.at/zeitgeschichte/remigra/ergebnisse/dateien/findbuch_v1_14-3-23.pdf.

⁶⁸ Valerio Larcher and Sarah Oberbichler, “Guida Archivistica: Le Riopzioni Sudtirolese” (Innsbruck, 2023), https://www.uibk.ac.at/zeitgeschichte/remigra/ergebnisse/dateien/findbuch_ita_14032023.pdf.

Optants, since all the people who had participated in the *Option* in 1939 – around 86 percent of the German-speaking population of South Tyrol – had given up their Italian citizenship; consequently, they found themselves stateless by the end of the war. Economic issues and clarification of individual cases were also high on the list of political discourses between Italy and Austria. Furthermore, the negotiations regarding the *Return Option* Law, as well as the administrative procedures pertaining to the repatriation of the migrants, constituted important aspects of the interactions between the two countries.⁶⁹

As shown above, some of these aspects are being addressed by the research team, but we hope that all the collections created and made accessible online will encourage further studies into this particular “voluntary” migration history; in particular, the difficult repatriation process sheds light on the consequences of “population movements” inspired by autocracies and dictatorships under the guise of nationalism and patriotism. Likewise, we hope the project will reflect how regional research and digitization projects can be a valuable asset for “Digital Historical Migration Studies.” While national archives and libraries continue to invest heavily in digitizing millions of archival pages connected to national migration movements, the projects presented here represent examples of how to enrich migration and remigration history with regional movements that are not in the focus of national endeavors. They shed light on the ever-present migration of people for very different reasons, addressing issues of “voluntariness” and engaging in discussions about organized migration movements that extend beyond centralized, national narratives.

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⁶⁹ For further details see: *ibid.*, 7–10.

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Machteld Venken, David Jacquet

4 Remigration to Luxembourg. Examining a New Research Question by Means of Digital Hermeneutics

Abstract: The chapter demonstrates how revisiting a recently composed Nodegoat database with information about migrants moving to the Luxembourgish municipality of Dudelange in the year 1924 to unravel remigration, a practice that was not documented as such in the past, turned out to be a fruitful exercise. The process of asking a new research question and testing it out using an existing database by playing around with the data and several digital tools enabled the authors to unravel, analyze, and compare past remigration practices to and from Luxembourg and the Minett region. Two periods of time generating most outmigration were identified: World War I and the years 1923 and 1924. The war mostly provoked a direct outmigration-remigration pattern among Italian, and to a lesser extent German, remigrants. While the rapid outmigration of Italian migrants was already documented in historiography, the fact that only a few German foreigners remigrated indicates a new finding. We found a comparable number of German and Italian remigrants who had outmigrated during the years 1923 and 1924, but while German foreigners tended to move back and forth between Germany and Luxembourg, many Italian foreigners preferred to frequently migrate within, or beyond but still in the vicinity of, the Minett.

“We had never thought of that,” was our reaction when Eva Pfanzelter and Sarah Oberbichler asked us whether we could decipher remigration practices in our database of migrants arriving in the Luxembourgish municipality of Dudelange in the year 1924. We accepted the invitation to revisit our database and reinterpret the data from the perspective of remigration, as this challenged us to go beyond the administrative categorizations used by policy-makers at the time; remigration was not reported in the source we had based our analysis on, the forms used to declare the arrival of foreigners in municipalities of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, or in other historical sources documenting migration to the country.¹

¹ Machteld Venken and Arnaud Sauer, “Arrival declaration forms. A new gateway for mapping migration to Luxembourg,” *Front. Hum. Dyn.* (2022): 1–19, accessed March 3, 2023, doi: 10.3389/fhmd.2022.931758.

This chapter uses a case study approach to ask the question of how best to research remigration practices of foreigners. To that purpose, it revisits the database of migrants arriving in the Luxembourgish municipality of Dudelange in the year 1924. Fickers, Tatarinov, and van der Heijden wrote that: “Depending on how the research question is approached, and modified over time, new searches for data have to be made, new tools to be tested, datasets to be adapted and modified, and visualizations or interpretations to be revised and refined.”² We accompany our analysis with a hermeneutical reflection, investigating the conditions for knowledge production on remigration by means of our self-composed digital workflow. We describe how much digital intervention is needed to unravel a phenomenon that was not specifically reported in the past, and also outline the extent to which that digital intervention is based on assumptions and presents data that can be scientifically interpreted. After offering a critical assessment of the source of our analysis and the main tool we used, the software program Nodegoat, this chapter will introduce the reader to migration and remigration to Luxembourg. A systematic comparison of remigration to Dudelange in the year 1924, after outmigration during either the First World War or the years 1923 and 1924, follows. The conclusion reflects upon the usefulness of the concept of remigration for understanding past (re)migration and mobility practices in and beyond the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Remigration and Digital Hermeneutics

This article presents a case study based on data contained in the declaration forms of arrivals of foreigners in 1924 from one municipality in the Grand Duchy. The municipal archives of Dudelange hold a complete collection of declaration forms from 1893 to 1947, as do other local archives in southern Luxembourg, such as the city archives of Differdange and Esch-sur-Alzette. The case study does not seek to draw conclusions on remigration practices across the entire Grand Duchy over an extended period, and instead explores a research question that could be further investigated using a larger collection of declaration forms in the future.

Our reflection starts by situating and evaluating the steps we took to prepare the source base for digital interpretation. The source base consists of 1,115 decla-

² Andreas Fickers, Juliane Tatarinov, and Tim van der Heijden, “Digital History and Hermeneutics – Between Theory and Practice: An Introduction,” in *Digital History and Hermeneutics. Between Theory and Practice*, ed. Andreas Fickers and Juliane Tatarinov (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 19.

ration forms of foreigners who arrived in the Luxembourg municipality of Dudelange in the year 1924, a pivotal period during which migration flows to the Grand Duchy were increasing and diversifying. The forms include the personal data of the declarant and his or her family members, as well as information about his or her migration trajectory before arrival in Dudelange. Whereas it was an obligation for foreigners to declare their arrival, clandestine migration and therefore also, possibly, clandestine remigration did exist. The latter is, however, not considered in this chapter.³

During a pilot project, the data were included manually in a self-composed database in the software program Nodegoat. In our pilot, we had found a way to use digital techniques to adjust a limitation in our source base, but our method was not applicable for researching remigration. When a family of foreigners arrived in Dudelange in the year 1924, officials registered the father as the declarant and mentioned the migration data of his wife and children on the same form. In our data model, however, we made wives and children more visible by creating the possibility to include them, along with their husbands or fathers, as “persons” instead of “declarants,” and to link them to a specific declaration form. Nevertheless, the way migration was reported administratively made it impossible for us to retrace the remigration practices of married women and children; at this stage of our research, we were only able to pinpoint them if the husband, wife, and children migrated and remigrated together to Dudelange. In the case of Angelina Strappaza, the wife of Francisco Corrazol, for example, we know that she arrived with her husband in Dudelange in 1924. We also know that the couple married in 1920, and that her husband had already migrated to the French border town of Audun-le-Tiche in the Minett region the year before, but we have not been able to trace whether or not she joined her husband for his stay in France.⁴

Apart from being biased in terms of gender and age, the source base did not classify remigration administratively. However, the administrative text box “residence during the last ten years” on the declaration forms was meant to document the migratory trajectory of foreigners before their arrival in Dudelange. As officials generally also tended to document previous migration trajectories of incoming foreigners (prior to this ten-year period), we possess richer data than what was legally required to be documented. Although this additional information offers us the opportunity to trace remigration over an even longer period of time, it

³ The ongoing research of Irene Portas “examines the clandestine pathways of refugees, smugglers and miners in the Franco-Luxembourgish border throughout the first half of the twentieth century” (www.c2dh.uni.lu, last consulted March 6, 2023).

⁴ Municipal archives of Dudelange, Declaration forms of arrival for the year 1924 (further – DA 1924), 948.

should be kept in mind that all migration data from more than ten years before migrants' arrival in Dudelange in 1924 that we refer to in this chapter are the result of officials' willingness to exceed legal requirements.

Remigration practices could not always be easily distilled from declaration forms of arrival, however, because of the imprecise way officials reported space and time, as well as the imprecise way we as historians may have interpreted the reporting of space and time. Officials inaccurately transcribed the Cyrillic alphabet, for example, making it impossible for us to localize the former places of residence and retrace the migration trajectories of Russian foreigners, which consequently leaves the question of their possible remigration open.⁵ In addition, we distorted the spatial and temporal information provided in the declaration forms in our own way. We used the website service "Geonames"⁶ to indicate the geolocalization of the municipalities and cities mentioned in the declaration forms, and we were also able to include the geolocalization of historical regions – such as "Lothringen (DE)" to indicate that it belonged to the German Empire between 1871 and the end of the First World War – but were sometimes unable to geolocalize small historical villages which in the meantime may have disappeared.⁷ In addition, officials often used estimations when documenting how long a person had resided in a specific place (e.g. "for two and a half years" or "since the war"), and in our interpretation of the way officials estimated time we were forced to make approximate calculations and ultimately accept a certain margin of error.⁸

Our reflection continues with an evaluation of the possibilities of the software tool Nodegoat to digitally process and geographically visualize remigration practices. The software uses iterative data modeling, allowing researchers to adapt and further develop their data model while inserting and interpreting data.⁹ We exploited the possibility of changing objects and sub-objects, cross-referencing data and adapting and modifying filters in our existing data model through a "hands-on approach that combines playful tinkering with critical thinking"; this "thinkering" was embraced as "a heuristic mode of doing" and knowing.¹⁰ In other words, we chose "screwing around" with data, as Joris van Zundert called it, as our method

⁵ DA 1924, 786.

⁶ "Geonames," last consulted March 6, 2023, www.geonames.org.

⁷ DA 1924, 455.

⁸ DA 1924, 1068.

⁹ Pim van Bree and Geert Kessel, "Iterative Data Modelling. From Teaching Practice to Research Method," abstract retrieved from *Digital Humanities Montreal* database, 2017, 2.

¹⁰ Fickers et al., "Digital History and Hermeneutics," 7.

and saw that task as the central part of our analysis.¹¹ Revisiting our data from the perspective of remigration through playful thinkering was a suitable approach given the fact that we found ourselves at an early stage of the research cycle and had a relatively small and therefore easily adjustable dataset. The exercise sat “particularly well as an additional layer in the hermeneutic process of hypothesis formation,” as it prompted us to evaluate the potential of our database for scientific research.¹² On the other hand, the size of the dataset also means that our findings can only be indicative; a larger dataset will need to be built in the future in order to draw broader conclusions.

Four figures resulting from our playful thinkering show the adjustments we made in Nodegoat. First, we decided that the borders of the zone in which people needed to reside as a foreigner, leave, and remigrate to could not be limited to the national borders of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg but needed to include the wider Minett region as well. This hub for iron ore mining in Europe – the second largest iron ore deposit in the world – is a cross-border space stretching over a vast area from contemporary northern France to southern Luxembourg and south-east Belgium. In this chapter, the spatial zone of reference for remigration includes the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Minett region, to which some municipalities in southern Luxembourg, such as Dudelange, belonged.

We included a new object in our Nodegoat data model called “remigration” and selected foreigners who found themselves within Luxembourg and the Minett, changed their place of residence at least once for a place outside Luxembourg and the Minett, and then declared a municipality within the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Minett region to be their place of residence again.

Afterwards, we created search categories to unravel the mobility practices of migrants, as explained in Figure 3. For each remigrant we needed to find three specific places of residence: (1) the first place of residence within Luxembourg and the Minett = chronologically the first place of residence of the category INSIDE; (2) the first place of residence outside Luxembourg and the Minett after (1) = EXIT, and (3) the first place of residence within Luxembourg and the Minett after (2) = chronologically the second place of residence belonging to the category ENTER. A Nodegoat search enabled us to find all places of residence within Luxembourg and the Minett, but we could not make a filter to find the first place of residence, as this is a relative search for the first place over a period of time,

¹¹ Joris J. Van Zundert, “Screwmeneutics and hermenumericals: the computability of hermeneutics,” *A new companion to digital humanities* 15, no. 12 (2015): 331.

¹² Shawn Graham, Ian Milligan, and Scott Weingart. *Exploring Big Historical Data: The Historian’s Macroscopic* (London: Imperial College Press, 2016), 163.

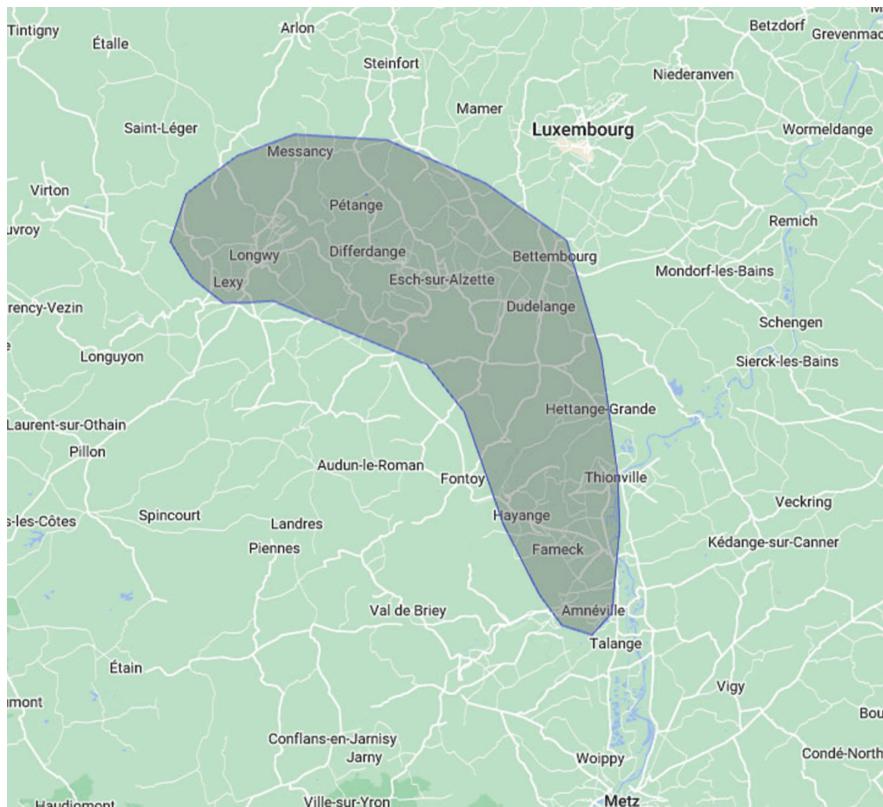


Figure 1: A geographical visualization of the cross-border Minett region as a Nodegoat zone.¹³

13 The Minett region as a Nodegoat zone consists of the following 75 contemporary municipalities. In France: Algrange, Amnéville, Angevliers, Audun-le-Tiche, Cosnes-et-Romain, Ebange-et-Daspich, Fameck, Fensch, Florange, Gandrange, Gorcy, Haucourt-Moulaine, Hayange, Herserange, Hettange-Grande, Hussigny-Godbrange, Knutange, Lagenberg, Langlaville, Longwy, Mexy, Micheville, Mont-Saint-Martin, Nilvange, Ottange, Rédange, Rehon, Remelange, Russange, Saulnes, Soetrich, Suzange, Thil, Thionville, Villerupt, Vitry-sur-Orne, Volmerange-les-Mines, Warnimont, Wolmeringen, and Zoufftgen. In Luxembourg: Bascharage, Belvaux, Bergem, Bettange-sur-Mess, Bettembourg, Buringen, Clemency, Differdange, Dudelange, Esch-sur-Alzette, Fond-de-Gras, Kayl, Lamadelaine, Lasauvage, Limpach, Linger, Mondercange, Niederkorn, Noertzange, Oberkorn, Oberdonven, Pétange, Reckange-sur-Mess, Rodange, Rumelange, Sanem, Schifflange, Schouweiler, Soleuvre, and Tétange. In Belgium: Athus, Aubange, Messancy, and Musson (Musée nationale des Mines. Rumelange, ed. V. Kremer. Panorama d'ensemble du Bassin minier et métallurgique de Longwy et d'Esch (France, Grande Duché de Luxembourg, Allemagne, Belgique), no date.

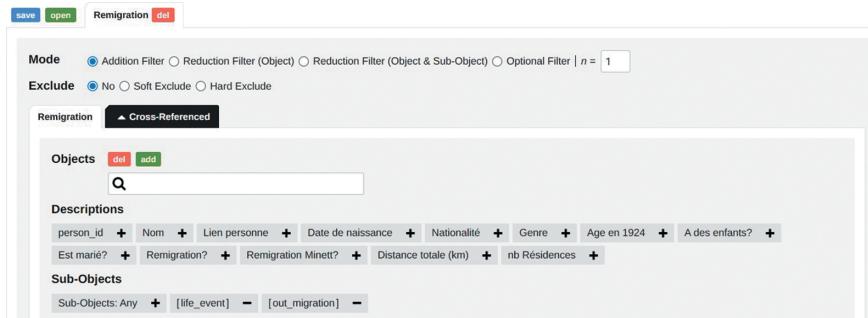


Figure 2: Inclusion of a remigration filter in the Nodegoat data model.

Search category	Explanation
BEFORE	A place of residence outside Luxembourg and the Minett before migration to Luxembourg and the Minett
OUTSIDE	A place of residence outside Luxembourg and the Minett in between migration out of Luxembourg and the Minett and remigration to Luxembourg and the Minett
ENTER	The last place of residence before entering Luxembourg and the Minett
INSIDE	A place of residence inside Luxembourg and the Minett
EXIT	The first place of residence after leaving Luxembourg and the Minett
EXIT/ENTER	The last place of residence before entering Luxembourg and the Minett and the first place of residence after leaving Luxembourg and the Minett are identical

Figure 3: Overview of search categories with explanations.¹⁴

whereas Nodegoat required us to insert a fixed date, e.g. “<1914” or “a date between 1914 and 1918.” To find the data that matched the search categories, we therefore needed to think beyond Nodegoat. We needed to export our data in CSV, Comma-Separated Values, a file format used to store tabular data such as spreadsheets or databases in a plain text format, and insert them into our own data model created in MySQL without being influenced by the Nodegoat interface. There, we could use the following aggregation function to find the first place of residence within Luxembourg and the Minett: `SELECT MIN(date) FROM`

¹⁴ In Nodegoat: `SELECT distinct (remigration_state), count (*) FROM remigration.life_event group by remigration_state.`

events WHERE code='LU'. The same logic was then followed for detecting (2) and (3), and we could then inject the output of the first query as input to the second query, for example SELECT * FROM events WHERE date > (SELECT MIN(date) FROM events WHERE code='LU') AND code <> 'LU'.

The database we created outside Nodegoat enabled us to perform several calculations, but these calculations could not be visualized geographically. We approach maps as “primary modes of knowledge production,”¹⁵ having the potential to “generate questions that might otherwise go unasked, reveal historical relations that might otherwise go unnoticed, and undermine, or substantiate, stories upon which we build our own versions of the past.”¹⁶ In order to exploit that possibility, we transformed our data via several SQL scripts (calculation of remigration routes, distances of migration trajectories, duration, etc.), exported these data in CSV format, and then imported them into Nodegoat again. Figure 4 shows which data from an individual remigrant were generated in Nodegoat (in black) and which were calculated in a database outside Nodegoat and subsequently imported into Nodegoat for visualization (in blue).

—	person_id	9676230	<i>Link to database ID</i>
—	Nom	T. Giulio	<i>Link to person within the primary model in Nodegoat</i>
—	Date de naissance	26-02-1890	
—	Nationalité	Italienne	
—	Genre	Homme	
—	Age en 1924	34	
—	A des enfants?	Non	
—	Est marié?	Oui	
—	Distance totale (km)	4.425.128	
—	nb Résidences	5	
—	flag	MIGRATION_WW1, MIGRATION_1923	
—	Exit_to_italy?	Oui	

Figure 4: Data about the migration trajectory of Giulio Tomasetti processed in Nodegoat (black) and our MySQL database before being reimported into Nodegoat (blue).¹⁷

¹⁵ Johanna Drucker, *Visualization and Interpretation: Humanistic Approaches to Display* (Cambridge; Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 2020), 17.

¹⁶ Todd Presner and David Shepard, “Mapping the geospatial turn,” in *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2015), 209.

¹⁷ DA 1924, 1006.

Date Start	Location	Event type	Distance km	Migration type	Age
26-02-1890	Fiuminata (IT)	Birth		ENTER	0
1911	Differdange (LU)	Residence	887.178	INSIDE	21
01-08-1914	Nocera Umbra (IT)	Residence	887.392	EXIT/ENTER	24
02-08-1923	Differdange (LU)	Residence	887.392	INSIDE	33
23-03-1924	Nocera Umbra (IT)	Residence	887.392	EXIT/ENTER	34
06-11-1924	Rue Gare-Usines Unter-Italien Dudelange (LU) 43	Residence	874.438	INSIDE	34
08-11-1924	Dudelange (LU)	Declaration		INSIDE	34

Figure 4 (continued)

Figure 9 included and discussed in this chapter is an example of a visualization that enabled us to detect certain migration patterns by visualizing them on a geographical map. But once we had visualized these patterns, we found that the possibilities offered by Nodegoat to analytically interpret the displayed data were limited. Although it was possible to hover over dots on the map, interpreting the meaning of these dots and understanding how they were interrelated with other categories of analysis, such as age, gender and citizenship, was sometimes very difficult within Nodegoat. We therefore imported the data displayed on the map into Excel and used its search functions in parallel to our investigations in Nodegoat.

Migration and Remigration to Luxembourg

Our search for remigrants started in a database containing the data from 1,115 declaration forms of foreigners who arrived in Dudelange in the year 1924. As discussed in previous work:

Given the strong demand for industrial workers as well as the low availability of local workers who were employed in agriculture, industrial companies had already extended their recruitment policies in the last quarter of the 19th Century. Foreign workers were invited from neighboring countries first, from the Italian peninsula since the end of the 19th Century, and later increasingly also from the Eastern Empires which transformed to various young interwar states in Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War (. .). Dudelange, a municipality in the south of Luxembourg situated at the border with France and

belonging to what soon became one of Europe's most dynamic industrial regions, grew exponentially from a little village into a municipality.¹⁸

Among the 1,115 foreigners declared in 1924, the biggest groups of foreign workers came from Italy and Germany, while there were also French, Belgian, Polish, Austrian, Spanish, Russian, American, Swiss, Yugoslav, Dutch, and Czechoslovakian citizens. Before the First World War, some of these foreigners had already migrated to Dudelange¹⁹ and possibly also outmigrated from Dudelange.²⁰ The first remigration to Luxembourg occurred as early as 1904.²¹ Most of the foreigners declaring residence in Dudelange were male migrants between the ages of 20 and 40.²²

Our collection includes foreigners displaying immigration, outmigration, and remigration practices which involve just two addresses of residence: one in the country of origin, and one in Luxembourg and the Minett. A typical example is Giovanni Cruciani, who was born in Foligno in Italy in 1889, came to Dudelange in 1913, and left at the beginning of the First World War on August 1, 1914. Afterwards, his declaration form reads, he resided in Foligno for ten years but, given the fact that he was most probably enrolled in the Italian army during the war, it is uncertain whether he stayed in Foligno or also fought on the battlefield as a soldier. He married in 1915 in Foligno and returned to Dudelange in August 1924 without his wife.²³ However, remigration to Luxembourg and the Minett was often much more complex for two reasons. Firstly, the turnover of foreign laborers was often very high; although foreign laborers were initially recruited as an additional temporary workforce to compensate for a local labor shortage, by the 1920s they had become a structural solution. The steelworks in the town of Dudelange reached 1,799 foreigners in 1927 out of a total workforce of 4,105 people, and these figures hide the turnover; between 1919 and 1939, 13,503 declaration forms for foreigners were signed in the municipality.²⁴ The Minett was indeed a cross-border employment market characterized by a highly volatile in- and out-flux of foreign labor. The French sociologist Piero-D. Galloro has called the foreign

¹⁸ Venken and Sauer, "Declaration forms," 3.

¹⁹ See for example DA 1924, 747.

²⁰ See for example DA 1924, 563.

²¹ DA 1924, 213.

²² Search in Nodegoat: SELECT count(*), age_of_arrival FROM person WHERE have_fiche=1 AND is_dudelange_1924=1 GROUP BY age_of_arrival ORDER BY age_of_arrival.

²³ DA 1924, 734.

²⁴ Denis Scuto, "Histoire des immigrations au Luxembourg (XIXe-XXIe siècles)," in *25 ans d'action pour l'immigration, 1985–2010*, ed. OGBL, Département des Immigrés (Luxembourg: OGBL/Département des Immigrés, 2010), 13–38.

laborers working on the other side of the French-Luxembourgish border in Lorraine “princes of the wind” to indicate their nomadic lifestyle within the Minett; they often changed employers and sometimes moved across the national border as often as every two weeks, the typical duration of a labor contract for miners and steel workers at the time.²⁵ And secondly, although during the First World War the Luxembourg national authorities had decided to steer a neutral course, in practice the country was occupied by German troops. Most importantly for our study, a German military post hindered and eventually stopped the cross-border supply of iron ore, which led to the closure of the steelworks in Dudelange and to the majority of the labor force in the municipality losing their jobs.²⁶ In 1910 Dudelange had 2,037 Italian inhabitants out of a total population of 10,788, but most subsequently returned to Italy as they feared being stuck in exile during the war.²⁷ About 18,000 Italians left the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in the summer of 1914, and others followed once they were called up to join the Italian army in 1915. As Luxembourg maintained a neutral stance during the war, Italians could continue living in the country without being transferred to internment camps, unlike Italian citizens living in Belgium and France.²⁸ The steelworks reopened during the war but recruited differently; 15-year-old Luxembourgish girls were no exception.²⁹

In order to capture the specific characteristics of mobility within and beyond the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Minett, we decided to employ a broad definition of remigration. Initially, to be included in our remigration database, a foreigner who declared his or her arrival in Dudelange in 1924 needed to have resided within the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Minett as a foreigner, and to have moved away from and later returned to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Minett at least once. During our analysis, however, we realized that we needed to clarify our definition. One problem we encountered was that of local women marrying foreigners; Anna Wahl, for example, was born in Lux-

25 Piero-D. Galloro, *Ouvriers du fer, princes du vent, Histoire des flux de main-d'œuvre dans la sidérurgie lorraine (1880–1939)* (Metz: Éditions Serpenoise, 2001).

26 For more information, including reactions of the population, see: Sandra Camarda, Antoinette Reuter and Denis Scuto, *Être d'ailleurs en temps de guerre (14–18). Étrangers à Dudelange / Dudelangeois à l'étranger* (Dudelange: CDMH/C²DH, 2018), 15.

27 Ständige Kommission für Statistik (ed.), *Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 1. Dezember 1910 nebst Ortschaftsverzeichnis. Heft XXXVI* (Luxembourg: Charles Beffort, 1911).

28 Maria Luisa Caldognetto, “Autour d'une photo. Des prisonniers de guerre italiens au Luxembourg en 1918.” *Mutations. Mémoires et perspectives du bassin minier* 10 (2018): 120.

29 Jacques Maas, “Rails et poutrelles, bombes et luttes sociales. L'usine sidérurgique de Dudelange à l'époque de la Première Guerre mondiale,” *Mutations. Mémoires et perspectives du bassin minier* 10 (2018): 13–28.

embourg, and when she married an American man in 1919 in Dudelange, she exchanged her Luxembourgish citizenship for American citizenship in accordance with the law.³⁰ When she left Dudelange for Paris in 1923, she did so as a foreigner, and hence falsely appeared in our database.³¹ Another specific feature was the redrawing of the French-German border after the First World War, when Alsace and Lorraine, which had become part of Germany following the French-German War in 1871, became French again. We had included “Lothringen (DE)” as a historical region in our database but had not specified the change in national status of smaller entities within Lothringen, such as “Algringen” and, as a result, Arthur Deichfischer, for example, appeared in our database as a remigrant, whereas he outmigrated from Algringen (nowadays Algrange) to Stuttgart during the First World War as a German citizen, not as a foreigner.³² The last adjustment we made was to erase those migrants from the database who spent less than 14 days between outmigration and remigration, which was based on the typical length of a labor contract for a miner or steelworker at the time. It was, of course, arbitrary, as any other decision regarding the number of days that would define mobility as distinct from remigration would have been. While one could argue that the decision was justified given that the majority of foreigners in the Minett worked in the mining and steel industries and that most of these workers were male, that decision nonetheless makes female migrants in the database appear as remigrants according to a query based on a male migration pattern. One example of a mobility pattern excluded from our definition of remigration was a Polish man registered as “Wladislaus Sloma” (the man only held a certificate for foreigners issued outside his country of origin and probably mentioning the same name, but his real Polish name was likely to have been Władysław Sloma), a driver who collected three places of residence within nine days in August 1924; he left Dudelange for Luxembourg City and was found in Esch-sur-Alzette two days later, after which he travelled to Trier in Germany before returning to Dudelange six days later.³³

Using our definition of remigration, i.e. excluding Luxembourgish women married to foreigners, taking into account the historical changes of state border lines and considering at least 14 days between outmigration and remigration, we

³⁰ The French Civil Code of 1803 required women who married foreigners to change citizenship. In Luxembourg, this remained a legal requirement until 1934, and again between 1940 and 1975 (Scuto 2012: 345–346).

³¹ DA 1924, 507.

³² DA 1924, 188.

³³ DA 1924, 353.

counted 149 remigrants among the foreigners who declared their arrival in Dudelange in 1924 (Figure 5).

Citizenship	Number
Italian	82
German	53
French	10
Belgian	2
American	1
Swiss	1

Figure 5: A total of 149 remigrants among the 1,115 foreigners who declared arrival in Dudelange in 1924.³⁴

Figure 6 shows the number of outmigrations of foreigners whose data can be found in the declaration forms filed by officials in 1924 from Luxembourg and the Minett each year, which indicates that most departed during the First World War or during the period encompassing the years 1923 and 1924.

Since foreigners were only legally required to declare their location for the ten years prior to their arrival, the declaration forms of 1924 provide systematic reporting of mobility and migration patterns from 1914 onwards. To research remigration for a period before 1914, one would need to use declaration forms from an earlier year. Based on the distribution of outmigrations over time, we decided to focus on a comparative analysis of remigration to Luxembourg and the Minett in 1924 for the two time periods generating the most frequent outmigration: the period of the First World War (July 28, 1914 until November 11, 1918) and the period encompassing the years 1923 and 1924. The total number of remigrants who left Luxembourg and the Minett during the First World War was 33 and the total number of remigrants who left Luxembourg and the Minett during the years 1923 and 1924 as documented in the declaration forms produced in the year 1924 was 59. The total number of outmigrations does not correspond to the total number of remigrants, as seven foreigners outmigrated more than once; they might be referred to as “double remigrants.”³⁵

³⁴ Search in Nodegoat: SELECT count(*), n.base FROM person p, person_nationalite pn, nationalite n WHERE p.is_dudelange_1924=1 AND (p.is_remigration=1 OR p.is_remigration_minett=1) AND p.id=pn.person_id AND pn.nationalite_id=n.id GROUP BY n.base ORDER BY count(*) DESC.

³⁵ List of “double remigrants” outmigrating during the First World War and the years 1923 and 1924: DA 1924, 286, 640, 832, 907, 1006, 1009, 1089.

Year	Number of foreigners migrating out of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Minett
1903	1
1904	1
1905	1
1906	1
1907	1
1909	2
1910	1
1911	3
1912	2
1913	6
1914	31
1915	2
1916	3
1917	3
1918	3
1919	3
1920	6
1921	9
1922	20
1923	29
1924	29

Figure 6: The number of outmigrations from Luxembourg and the Minett each year.

Remigration Following Outmigration During the First World War

We now discuss and compare remigration practices for the two time periods by looking at changes in places of residence and especially focusing on potential differences between the two biggest groups of remigrants: Italian and German citizens. We first consider the 33 people who migrated from somewhere in Europe or the United States of America to Luxembourg and the Minett before the First World War, left the Minett at some moment during the period between July 28, 1914 and November 11, 1918, and migrated to the municipality of Dudelange in 1924. We demonstrate that this major international crisis was most likely to provoke an outmigration-remigration pattern between two places of residence.

Among the 33 remigrants, there were 28 Italians, four Germans, and one Swiss national. The most popular place of residence among the foreigners who moved to

Luxembourg and the Minett before the First World War and remigrated to Dudelange in 1924 was actually Dudelange; this municipality was the place of residence for 44 migrants, and the second and third most popular destinations (Kayl-Tétange in Luxembourg, five individuals; and Esch-sur-Alzette in Luxembourg, four individuals) were only respectively five and 16 kilometers away. This demonstrates that when migrants returned in 1924, they did so to a place they had already known and where they had most likely already worked before. One might question whether remigrants were reemployed by the same employer, or within the same profession, in 1924, however, these questions cannot be conclusively answered because the declaration forms of remigrants were not compared with their initial declarations upon arrival in Dudelange or another municipality in southern Luxembourg. Given that the most likely employers for male foreigners in southern Luxembourg were a limited number of big steel companies, it is plausible to assume that many remigrants were reemployed by the same employer.

The fact that six remigrants had two different places of residence in Luxembourg and the Minett before outmigration indicates that already before the First World War, there was a tendency to migrate within Luxembourg and the Minett. One of these remigrants was Pasquale Pezzuti. Born in Villa Sant'Angelo in Italy in 1889, he moved to Dudelange in 1906, but just half a year later he declared residence in the United States, where he stayed for two years; afterwards, he came back to the Minett and settled in Herserange on the French side of the French-Luxembourgish border in 1909. His declaration form does not provide us with more information about where he lived, and what he did, between 1909 and 1923. We do know that he married in his birth village in 1923 and returned to Dudelange shortly afterwards, 18 years after having declared residence in the municipality for the first time.³⁶

The outmigration of Italians at the beginning of the war was rapid. By the end of August 1914, 20 of the Italian citizens who later remigrated to Dudelange in 1924 had already left Luxembourg, and by the end of the year, another five had followed. The migration pattern of Venanzo Cherubini is an example of a typical practice for an Italian steel worker including both internal migration within the Minett and migration between Italy and Luxembourg. His trajectory consisted of a direct travel route from Italy to Dudelange, internal migration within the Grand Duchy and the Minett, a direct journey back to Italy in 1914, followed by a direct path back to Dudelange in 1924. Born in 1886 in Nocera Umbra in the middle of Italy, Venanzo Cherubini arrived in Dudelange on September 23, 1913 and, just two and a half months later, on December 4, 1913, he registered in another Luxem-

36 DA 1924, 1008.

bourgeois municipality in the Minett region: Kayl-Tétange. Cherubini left Luxembourg to return to his place of birth in October 1914, where he stayed for “10 years in Nocera Umbra” (we have no information about what he did during the war), after which he returned to Dudelange in October 1924.³⁷

Just three Italian citizens emigrated from Luxembourg between 1915 and 1917. It may very well be that Amadeo Lisarelli and Ambrogio D’Ambros waited until they were called to arms to serve in the Italian army, although the declaration forms did not document this; for example, we know that Ambrogio D’Ambros left Luxembourg and declared residence in Seren on June 4, 1915. In 1924, it was reported that he “came from Seren (IT), where he spent 9 years, after spending 11 years in Ettelbruck (LU).”³⁸ Interestingly, Giovanni Valdini migrated to Luxembourg during the First World War; he declared residence under number 135 on May 20, 1916 as a blue-collar worker in Dudelange, where he stayed for about a year, before returning to Verona in Italy.³⁹ He was not alone; it may come as a surprise that 74 Italians declared their residence in Dudelange in 1916, as did 87 German citizens.⁴⁰

The outmigration of German citizens who left Luxembourg and the Minett during the First World War and declared residence in Dudelange in 1924 concerned fewer individuals and differed in nature. Among the men, there were two who only returned to Dudelange once they had retired; they never returned to the Luxembourg labor market. Peter Muno had already lived in Dudelange between 1882 and 1918, and after spending five years 100 kilometers further south in the German municipality of Völklingen, he decided to return at the age of 68.⁴¹ Ernst Ries, on the other hand, was born in Germany, moved to Luxembourg City during the First World War in August 1914, returned to Germany in December 1916, and moved back to Dudelange on Christmas Eve 1924 as a retired person.⁴² The two remigrants who did join the Luxembourg labor market had both already lived in Luxembourg before the war. One German remigrant had followed his parents to Luxembourg as a minor in 1913, stayed until he turned 18 in 1917, then moved back to Hassloch in Germany, where he had been born, probably to join the German army; he moved back to Dudelange in 1924 as an adult.⁴³ Alfred Koch was born in the German municipality of Schwanebeck in 1892 and lived in Luxembourg before the war as a

37 DA 1924, 934.

38 DA 1924, 501, 907.

39 DA 1924, 73.

40 Municipal archives of Dudelange, Declaration forms of arrival for the year 1916.

41 DA 1924, 51.

42 DA 1924, 1109.

43 DA 1924, 297.

German citizen until he was called up for the German army in 1915. The declaration form does not inform us where he spent the rest of the war, but it was most probably outside Luxembourg; after living for three years in the German municipality of Hirschberg following Germany's defeat, he remigrated to Luxembourg.⁴⁴

The only example of a remigration trajectory of a migrant not holding German or Italian citizenship is that of Charlotte Offenbach, a Swiss citizen who never actually lived in Switzerland.⁴⁵ She declared residence by herself in Dudelange in 1924 at the age of 39. She arrived alone, without her adult child and while living separately from her husband, and she earned her own money.⁴⁶ Figure 7 displays her lived social space, which encompassed the German municipality of Sankt Johann in the vicinity of Koblenz, the Minett and Alsace. This indicates that researching remigration

[01 Before LU]	24-03-1885	-	City [Located]	Sankt Johann (DE)
[01 Before LU]	25-04-1911	-	City [Located]	Boulange (FR)
[01 Before LU]	11-06-1912	-	City [Located]	Esch-sur-Alzette (LU)
[02 During LU]	12-06-1912	-	City [Located]	Esch-sur-Alzette (LU)
[02 During LU]	12-06-1914	-	City [Located]	Knutange (FR)
[03 Start outmigration]	13-06-1914	-	City [Located]	Knutange (FR)
[03 Start outmigration]	13-06-1917	-	City [Located]	Brumath (FR)
[04 outside]	14-06-1920	-	City [Located]	Brumath (FR)
[04 outside]	15-06-1920	-	City [Located]	Maizières-lès-Metz (FR)
[04 outside]	15-06-1923	-	City [Located]	Metz (Moselle) (FR)
[04 outside]	16-06-1924	-	City [Located]	Strasbourg (FR)
[05 end outmigration]	17-06-1924	-	City [Located]	Strasbourg (FR)
[05 end outmigration]	01-11-1924	-	City [Located]	
[02 During LU]	02-11-1924	-	City [Located]	
[02 During LU]	03-11-1924	-	City [Located]	Dudelange (LU)
[02 During LU]	05-11-1924	-	City [Located]	Dudelange (LU)
[02 During LU]	07-11-1924	-	City [Located]	Dudelange (LU)

Figure 7: The migration trajectory of Swiss citizen Charlotte Offenbach.⁴⁷

44 DA 1924, 66.

45 The Swiss state granted citizenship based on descent rather than place of birth. This meant that a person could be a Swiss citizen by virtue of being born to Swiss parents, even if they never actually lived in Switzerland.

46 DA 1924, 999.

47 DA 1924, 999.

through the lens of the Minett's iron ore and steel industry imposes a filter that highlights steel workers' migration practices and possibly hinders us from unraveling the less frequent and more uncommon migration trajectories of independent women.

The Years 1923 and 1924

The second period under consideration in this chapter is the years 1923 and 1924. Fifty-nine migrants who declared residence in Dudelange in the year 1924 had already migrated away from Luxembourg and the Minett at least once in the years 1923 and 1924; unlike the First World War, this was a peaceful period when foreign labor was in high demand across various national borders within and beyond the Minett. We demonstrate that while industrial competition resulted in repeated remigration practices among the foreign labor force, these practices had a different spatial dimension for Italian and German workers.

The outmigrations of Italian and German migrants were more balanced in the years 1923 and 1924 in comparison to the period of the First World War; in total there were 27 Italian, 28 German, and four remigrants holding a different citizenship. Although the direct outmigration-remigration pattern was most common among remigrants who left Luxembourg and the Minett during World War I, and there were only six remigrants who had two places of residence before outmigration, the period 1923–1924 shows the opposite. The fact that only one remigrant held one place of residence within Luxembourg and the Minett and 56 held at least two residences before migrating outside that spatial universe in 1923 or 1924 demonstrates a more volatile migration pattern (Figure 8).

Number of residences	Italian remigrants	German remigrants	Remigrants holding another citizenship	Total
4 residences	3	0	0	3
3 residences	8	1	1	10
2 residences	15	25	3	43
1 residence	0	1	0	1

Figure 8: Number of residences before migrating out of Luxembourg and the Minett in the years 1923 and 1924.

A geographical visualization (Figure 9) clearly shows how different the spatial migratory universes of Italian and German remigrants were. While German migrants had a greater tendency to move back and forth between Luxembourg and the Minett and Germany, two groups of Italian remigrants could be distilled based on their migration trajectories: those who had a greater tendency to be mobile within or near the Minett, and those who traveled back and forth to and from Italy. This implies that while the German and Italian remigrants in our study frequently lived and worked together in Luxembourg, they did not do so – or at least not as often – when working in other places in the Minett, where a relatively higher percentage of Italian migrants was found, or in Germany, where Italian workers were an exception.

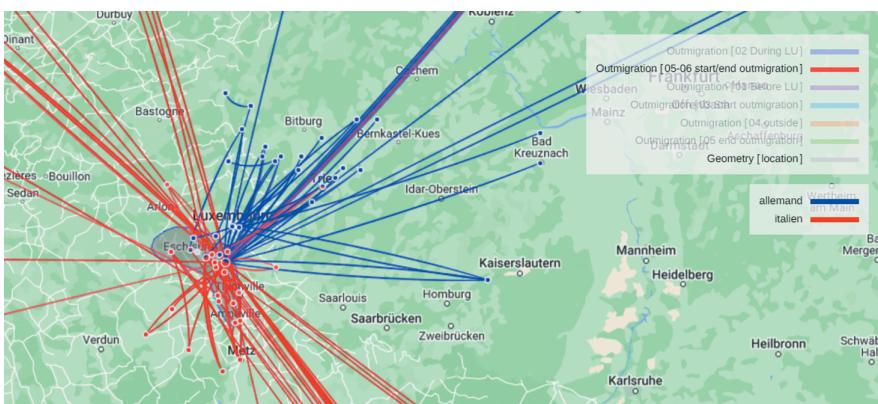


Figure 9: The migration trajectories of German and Italian remigrants to Dudelange during the years 1923 and 1924.

The 28 German migrants mostly left a specific place in Luxembourg and the Minett for a municipality in Germany in the years 1923 and 1924 and returned from that German municipality to Luxembourg and the Minett, most frequently to the same municipality they had left.⁴⁸ An example of a person showing a typical remigration pattern was Peter Kickert, born in Wallendorf, on the German side of the German-Luxembourgish border, in 1873, who migrated for the first time to Dudelange in May 1923 and stayed until the end of the high season in November, when he returned to Wallendorf for the winter; that Kickert was a

⁴⁸ See for example DA 1924, 69.

seasonal worker is acknowledged by the fact that he moved back to Dudelange at the end of April 1924.⁴⁹ Interestingly and contrary to the profile of German remigrants who outmigrated during the First World War, the cohort of German migrants declaring residence in Dudelange in 1924 after having outmigrated in the years 1923 and 1924 did not have a documented history in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg or the Minett during the First World War.

Inspired by the geographical visualization, we decided to divide the 27 Italian foreigners who arrived in Dudelange in 1924 after having outmigrated in the years 1923 and 1924 into two groups based on the number of kilometers between the last place of residence within Luxembourg and the Minett before outmigration and the first place of residence within Luxembourg and the Minett after remigration. Seventeen Italian workers did not return to Italy after leaving Luxembourg and the Minett in the years 1923 and 1924; unlike the German migrants, these 17 Italian workers outmigrated to municipalities in Belgium, France, and Luxembourg, mostly in geographical proximity to Luxembourg, however, like the German migrants, most displayed a direct outmigration-remigration pattern.⁵⁰ Francesco Corrazol, however, born in Pedavena in Italy in 1895, displayed a more frequent migration pattern; he moved to Bouligny in France for three months in 1922, then moved 33 kilometers north and entered the French part of the Minett, specifically the municipality of Audun-le-Tiche, where he stayed for one year. He then moved 100 kilometers south-east within France, where he stayed in two different places of residence within 15 kilometers of each other for one year in total, before traveling another 90 kilometers to Dudelange in October 1924.⁵¹

The second group consists of the 10 remigrants who traveled more than 500 kilometers back and forth between Luxembourg and the Minett and Italy. The fact that these migrants stayed outside Luxembourg and the Minett for a period ranging from 33 to 591 days demonstrates that they did not necessarily always need more time to remigrate than the other 17 remigrants who traveled between 18 and 370 kilometers within a time frame ranging from 16 to 398 days, which indicates the importance of taking time-space contraction into consideration.⁵² The

⁴⁹ DA 1924, 285.

⁵⁰ See for example DA 1924, 153, and 862.

⁵¹ DA 1924, 948.

⁵² See for example Randy Widdis' "spatial grammar," which approaches borderlands as spaces of flows and networks displaying various roads of "people, goods, capital and ideas" through time and space; borderlands vary in spatial extent and can embody different kinds of flows (Randy W. Widdis, "A Spatial Grammar of Migration Within the Canadian-American Borderlands at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *Entangling North America: Space and Migration History*, ed. Alexander Freund and Benjamin Bryce (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015)).

fact that traveling more kilometers did not necessarily influence the migration practices of Italian remigrants prompts us to question whether instead of imposing a static spatial universe (Luxembourg and the Minett) on our definition of remigration, it would be more meaningful to let the trajectories of the migrants determine space and remigration; for example, other than kilometers, gender proved to be a decisive factor in determining whether an Italian foreigner moved within the Minett or returned to Italy. As Figure 10 shows, women were less than half as likely to remigrate, and they were less likely to travel back to Italy as men. Future research could investigate whether other categorizations, such as the job titles of migrants as recorded in the declaration forms, were also significant in determining the remigration practices of individuals.

Gender	Remigration to Italy	Remigration to non-Italian municipalities
Men	8	14
Women	1	4
Total	9	18

Figure 10: Gender distribution of Italian remigrants outmigrating to Italy or to other places within and beyond the Minett during the years 1923 and 1924.

One of these women was Margaretha Rauchs. Born in Schiffange (LU) in 1891 as a Luxembourgish national, she probably followed the Italian migrant Nicola Di Felice to Pietracamela following the outbreak of the First World War, where she married him in 1915. Margaretha migrated together with her husband to Dudelange in 1920,⁵³ and later outmigrated to the Belgian coal mining municipality of Lize in 1924 for two months and returned to Dudelange afterwards, probably without her husband, as she traveled alone and therefore received her own declaration form. On that form is nevertheless mentioned between brackets that her husband worked 24 kilometers south of Dudelange across the French border, in a French municipality that was referred to by its former German name of “Hayingen-Lothringen,” and that her living expenses were paid from his salary.⁵⁴

The three remigrants who outmigrated from Luxembourg and the Minett both during the First World War and in the years 1923 and 1924 were all Italian workers, and they were not typical seasonal workers who had traveled to Luxembourg and the Minett for the summer months. Amadeo Lisarelli, for example, outmigrated to his place of birth in 1915, probably to join the Italian army, and once

⁵³ Municipal archives of Dudelange, Declaration forms of arrival for the year 1920, 63.

⁵⁴ DA 1924, 241.

again between August and December 1923.⁵⁵ Some remigrants holding other citizenships displayed different practices from those of German or Italian remigrants. Mathilde Meyer, for example, was a French woman born in 1905 who followed her mother to Dudelange in 1924 for one month, then went to Paris for some months, maybe to work as a domestic servant, and returned to Dudelange by the end of the year.⁵⁶ Given the small number of migrants holding a citizenship other than German or Italian, we did not further analyze their remigration practices. Such analysis would be feasible if data from a larger collection of declaration forms were included in another study.

Conclusion

Revisiting our recently composed Nodegoat database with information about migrants moving to the Luxembourgish municipality of Dudelange in the year 1924 to unravel remigration, a practice that was not documented as such in the past, turned out to be a fruitful exercise. The process of asking a new research question and testing it out using our empirical sources by playing around with the data and several digital tools enabled us to unravel, analyze, and compare remigration practices in the past, as well as evaluate the potential of our data model. The fact that we were still in an early phase of our research process was to some extent an advantage as we could freely practice iterative data modeling within a relatively small database including data from 1,115 declaration forms of arrival. It was also a disadvantage as our dataset was too small to draw larger conclusions, meaning that our findings are indicative and need to be verified with further research.

Through playful tinkering, we were able to establish a definition of remigration that aligned with the practices of a majority of remigrating foreigners arriving in Dudelange in 1924. We define as remigrants those individuals who had arrived in Luxembourg and the Minett as foreigners, declared residence in Luxembourg and the Minett, left Luxembourg and the Minett and then returned after at least 14 days to Luxembourg and the Minett, at least once. Using this definition enabled us to identify the two periods of time generating most outmigration: the First World War and the years 1923 and 1924. The war mostly provoked a direct outmigration-remigration pattern among Italian, and to a lesser extent German, remigrants. While the rapid outmigration of Italian migrants was already docu-

⁵⁵ DA 1924, 907. See also DA 1924, 241, 1006, and 1089.

⁵⁶ DA 1924, 88 and 958.

mented in historiography, the fact that only a few German foreigners remigrated and that they had specific profiles – they were either retired migrants or had lived for a longer period in Luxembourg before the outbreak of the conflict – indicates a new finding. We found a comparable number of German and Italian remigrants who had outmigrated during the years 1923 and 1924, but, as Figure 9 shows, while German foreigners tended to move back and forth between Germany and Luxembourg, many Italian foreigners preferred to frequently migrate within, or beyond but still in the vicinity of, the Minett.

Our definition of remigration is not without flaws. We decided to set the temporal period to distinguish migration from mobility at 14 days, a decision which, although justified based on the usual length of labor contracts for foreign workers in the iron ore industry in Luxembourg and the Minett, remains somewhat arbitrary, especially for foreigners not working in iron ore mines or steelworks. The definition does exhibit a gender bias, as the query is based on a male migration pattern. Moreover, it can be discussed to what extent our imposition of a spatial zone consisting of Luxembourg and the Minett emphasizes the migration trajectories of certain foreigners, most prominently miners and factory workers, possibly to the detriment of others (such as independent working women). This observation does indeed call for a more fluid spatial understanding of the migratory universe of individual migrants composed by their many places of residence, both within and outside Luxembourg and the Minett. This is also supported by the fact that advances in transportation had made the geographical distance between Luxembourg and Italy easier to manage, meaning that distance no longer always played a decisive role in where an Italian foreigner leaving Luxembourg settled next.

During the exercise, we acquired new empirical knowledge on how to read, evaluate, and adapt our Nodegoat database, as well as how to let the data speak in tandem with other digital tools, such as another version of MySQL and Excel. This knowledge will be fruitful when adapting the data model both to include more data from different sources in the database and to answer new research questions. Data from other sources could enable a more detailed explanation of the reasons why foreigners migrated, outmigrated, and remigrated. This chapter demonstrated that while one can extract factual data from administrative sources about a phenomenon not explicitly reported, it is not possible to extract the underlying reasons for that phenomenon.

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Valerio Larcher

5 A Historical Atlas of the South Tyrolean *Option*

Abstract: The South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option* events share great potential for historical spatial representation due to the intrinsic geographic mobility of their events and people involved. Moreover, a cartographic-historic approach to the study of these topics may offer new research opportunities, both academically and in terms of dissemination. This chapter aims to introduce the possibilities of analyzing and depicting a return migration, via GIS-based technology, by showcasing some interactive historical maps created with the ArcGIS suite on the subject of the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option* between 1940 and 1952. The interactive maps that will be presented, some of which are already available online, have been created as part of the ReMIGRA project, a joint project of the universities of Innsbruck and Bolzano on the return migration of South Tyrolean *Optants*. These maps ideally represent a form of testing ground for a possible future interactive Historical Atlas of the “South Tyrolean *Option*” and derive from statistical data obtained by the digitalization and analysis of archival documents collected during the project. The chapter will highlight how visualization of the movements of people and spatial networks (via interactive maps) may represent a useful research tool for historical migration studies, as well as for historical divulcation. The active comparison of different data categories and times within the same map, thanks to the use of layers and chronological sliders, will be particularly underlined due to its potential for boosting the analytical possibilities offered by various statistical data obtained from the archives.

Introduction

The South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option* share great potential for historical spatial representation, due to the intrinsic geographic mobility of their events and people involved. Moreover, a cartographic-historic approach to the study of these topics may offer new research opportunities both academically and in terms of dissemination. The paper-mode historical atlas has been a fundamental didactic tool for teaching history both inside and outside school classrooms since at least the nineteenth century. The possibility of spatially “visualising” history, and the substantial overlap between map and reality in the positivist mentality, were widely exploited with great success both for didactic and propaganda purposes, especially

during the first half of the twentieth century. Now, in the twenty-first century, a different and more interactive approach to historical maps is possible, thanks to the representation and geo-cartographic analysis applications based on GIS technology.

This chapter aims to introduce the possibilities of analyzing and depicting a return migration via GIS-based technology by showcasing some interactive historical maps created with the ArcGIS suite on the subject of the South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option* between 1940 and 1952, and to display the potential for dissemination and transmission of these new maps. The interactive maps presented here have been created as part of the ReMIGRA project, a joint project of the universities of Innsbruck and Bolzano on the return migration of South Tyrolean *Optants*. These maps ideally represent a form of testing ground for a possible future interactive Historical Atlas of South Tyrolean *Option* and derive from statistical data obtained by the digitalization and analysis of archival documents collected during the course of the project.

The chapter will also highlight how the visualization of the movements of people and spatial networks via interactive maps may represent a useful research tool for historical migration studies, as well as for historical divulgation. The active comparison of different data categories and times within the same map, thanks to the use of layers and chronological sliders, will be particularly highlighted due to its potential for boosting the analytical possibilities of using various statistical data obtained from the archives.

Historical Atlases: Tools for Both Research and Teaching

Historical atlases (and school historical atlases in particular) have been a key tool for nation building and development of national consciousness since the nineteenth century.¹ For this reason, these cartographic products have been, and

¹ Jeremy Black, *Maps and history constructing images of the past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997);

Jeremy Black, "The Historical Atlas: A Tool and Its Limitations," *Teaching History* 73 (1993): 30–32; Jeremy Black, "The Historical Atlas: Teaching Tool or Coffee-Table Book?" *The History Teacher* 25, no. 4 (1992): 489–512;

Patrick Lehn, *Deutschlandbilder: Historische Schulatlanten zwischen 1871 und 1990: ein Handbuch* (Köln: Böhlau, 2008);

Sylvia Schraut, *Kartierte Nationalgeschichte: Geschichtsatlanten im internationalen Vergleich: 1860–1960* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2011).

sometimes still are, subject to the heavy hand of state (and even non-state) propaganda in their making.² Such propagandic use of historical atlases has been thoroughly analyzed by scholars and, thanks to the many resulting published studies, the cartographic tools developed for propaganda purposes have vastly deepened the knowledge and necessary skills in historical map making. For instance, there is now consciousness and consensus among scholars on the importance of historical (and not only historical) cartographic features such as map projection, use of colors and map juxtaposition.³ Moreover, the constantly evolving and increasingly pervasive use of GIS technology in cartographic production has had the two-pronged effect of relatively facilitating the creation of new historical atlases and providing potential historical cartographers with a new tool for both dissemination and research purposes. The combination of these two effects has unfolded a new era of historical atlas-making in which there is space for non-state (and non-state sponsored) actors and in which scholars have many new tools available for creating and studying maps. Given these premises, these powerful tools and research methods are now applied here to an important case study of migration history studies: the South Tyrolean *Option* and subsequent *Return Option*.

The South Tyrolean *Option* and *Return Option* as Spatial Events

While literature on the topic of the *Return Option* is comparatively scarce, there seems to be practically no spatial and cartographic analysis in this field which, given the intrinsic geographic denotation of the history of the *Option*, this fact is quite surprising. There was in fact an attempt to create a historical atlas of the whole Tyrol region as part of the *Tirol Atlas* project of the University of Innsbruck, but it only produced a rump Trentino-focused atlas⁴ and did not depict the *Option*

2 Jeremy Black, *Maps and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Edoardo Boria, *Carte come armi: geopolitica, cartografia, comunicazione* (Roma: Nuova cultura, 2012); Guntrum Henrik Herb, *Under the Map of Germany: Nationalism and Propaganda 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 1996).

3 Barbara Bartz Petchenik, “Cartography and the Making of an Historical Atlas: A Memoir,” *The American Cartographer* 4, no. 1 (1977): 11–28; Mark Monmonier, *How to lie with maps* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Vera Kleinschmidt, “Nationalsozialismus und Schulatlas. Die Entwicklung der Rassen- und Völkerkarten 1933 bis 1942,” *Praxis Geschichte* 12, no. 4 (1999): 52–55.

4 Fridolin Dörrer, *Il Trentino nelle carte storiche del Tirol-Atlas* (Innsbruck/Trento: Provincia Autonoma di Trento/Institut für Geographie der Universität Innsbruck, 2001).

at all. So, for all intent and proposes, there are no specific cartographic representations of the South Tyrolean *Option*. The intent of this chapter is therefore to present some maps that have been specifically designed to represent this historical event and which will hopefully be the basis for a more comprehensive historical atlas of the South Tyrolean *Option*. All the data that provide the historical source for these maps have been located, analyzed, and digitalized in the context of the ReMIGRA project, a joint research project of the Department of Contemporary History of the University of Innsbruck and the Faculty of Education of the Free University of Bolzano, which focuses on return migration as an interdisciplinary research area using the example of the South Tyrolean *Return Option*. For this reason, all of the maps that will be presented will depict the *Return Option* aspect of the wider *Option*. Most of the data used, for these maps in particular, come from the Italian “Office of border areas” (*Ufficio per le Zone di Confine*), which was responsible for acquiring statistical data about the so-called border zones. The archives of the *Ufficio per le Zone di Confine* are located in Rome inside the *Archivio Generale della Presidenza del Consiglio* in Rome and have been visited as part of the ReMIGRA project; other documents used in this chapter come from the *Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero per gli Affari Esteri*, which are in Rome as well. To design the maps, the University of Bolzano provided a copy of the ArcGIS suite, with ArcGIS Pro and the online Map Viewer and App creator being the most frequently used software and tools.

As noted in the introduction of this volume, a special law had to be drafted by the Italian parliament to allow *Return Optants* to regain their Italian citizenship. A heated debate about the *Return Option* and reinstatement of the South Tyrolean *Optants*’ Italian citizenship had already emerged in the months following the end of the war, especially between the newly founded South Tyrolean People Party (SVP) and the Italian population of South Tyrol; the SVP maintained that the Mussolini-Hitler agreements on population transfer were void and proposed to cancel them completely,⁵ while the Italian population did not understand why they should accept “300,000 Austrians” back at the same time that millions of Germans were being forcibly removed from East Prussia.⁶ The Italian government

⁵ Stefan Lechner and Helmut Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” in *Heimatlos. Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler*, ed. Alexander Helmut et al. (Wien: Deuticke, 1993), 193.

⁶ Archivio Generale della Presidenza del Consiglio – Ufficio per le Zone di Confine, sez. I, b. 4, f. Ministero dell’Interno. Delegazione presso la Commissione per lo Studio dei Confini e delle Frontiere del Regno d’Italia. Relazioni originali (Giulio Russo), Relazione sulla questione dell’Alto Adige, 19. General Archive of the Presidency of the Council – Office for Border Areas, section 1, folder 1, file Ministry of the Interior. Delegation to the Commission for the Study of Borders and Frontiers of the Kingdom of Italy. Original reports (Giulio Russo), Report on the South Tyrol question, 19.

itself was in no hurry to reinstate many former *Optants*, especially before the signing of the De-Gasperi-Gruberi agreement, mainly because of the ongoing possibility of a self-determination referendum on the status of South Tyrol. As the *Optants* who had already been naturalized as German nationals were in fact no longer Italian citizens, they could not vote in the potential referendum, thus shifting the likely results towards the Italian preference.⁷ Another factor was the status of the South Tyroleans who were compromised by the Nazi Regime and the war crimes and various anti-Italian activities that they committed under its protection, since the Italian Government was adamant in not reinstating their citizenship. Moreover, as they were initially not persecuted by either the Allies or the Italian judiciary, the Italian population of South Tyrol felt that the South Tyroleans had been handled with too much leniency (though that applied to many Italian fascists in the province as well), thus increasing the already high tension. The first draft of this so-called “*Return Option Law*” was produced by the Italian government on September 20, 1946,⁸ but the aforementioned debates on the scope and limitations of the law between the Italian and Austrian Government, as well as the South Tyrolean provincial administration, delayed the promulgation of the law⁹ which was by then heavily amended to February 2, 1948.¹⁰ This law divided the South Tyrolean population that “opted” for Germany into three categories, the *semplici optanti* (simple *Optants* or Art.1 *Optants*),¹¹ *optanti naturalizzati* (naturalised *Optants*, or Art.2 *Optants*),¹² and the *naturalizzati emigrati* (naturalised

⁷ Archivio Generale della Presidenza del Consiglio – Ufficio per le Zone di Confine, sez. I, b. 13, f. Alto Adige. Liste elettorali, Silvio Innocenti, Appunto per la Direzione generale dell’amministrazione civile, Rome, August 24, 1945. General Archive of the Presidency of the Council – Office for Border Areas, section 1, folder 13, file Alto Adige. Electoral Lists, Silvio Innocenti, Note for General Directorate of Civil Administration, Rome, August 24, 1945.

⁸ Archivio Centrale dello Stato – Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri – busta 3729 fasc. 36435-2. Nota 80505-36435-2 I.6.I della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri al Maggiore Ralrh R. Temple della Commissione Alleata in Italia a Roma, September 20, 1946. State Archive – Presidency of the Council of Ministers – folder 3729, file 36435-2. Note 80505-36435-2 I.6.I of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to Major Ralrh R. Temple of the Allied Commission for Italy in Rome 20 September 1946.

⁹ Leopold Steurer, “Südtirol 1943-1946: Von der Operationszone Alpenvorland zum Pariser Vertrag,” in *Südtirol – Stunde Null? Kriegsende 1945–1946*, ed. Hans Heiss et al. (Innsbruck-Wien-München 2000), 48–106, especially 57–60; Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 195.

¹⁰ D.Lgs. 2 febbraio 1948, n. 23., Revisione delle opzioni degli alto atesini. Legislative decree of February 2, 1948, no. 23. Review of option of Alto Adige citizens.

¹¹ Art. 1, Revisione delle opzioni degli alto atesini. Legislative decree of February 2, 1948, no. 23. Review of option of Alto Adige citizens.

¹² Art. 2, D.Lgs. 2 febbraio 1948, n. 23. Revisione delle opzioni degli alto atesini. Art. 2, Legislative decree of February 2, 1948, no. 23. Review of option of Alto Adige citizens.

emigrants, or Art. 11 *Optants*)¹³ and, at least at first, imposed heavy limitations on reacquiring Italian citizenship for those who had collaborated in any way with Germany after 1943.¹⁴ The first two categories included South Tyroleans who never left the province (the *semplici optanti* never obtained German citizenship, while the *optanti naturalizzati* did) and whose process of regaining Italian citizenship was little more than a bureaucratic formality, while the *naturalizzati emigrati* comprised both those who returned to South Tyrol around the end of the war and those who remained abroad. For the latter category, 38,282 requests arrived at the relevant offices: 15,611 from within Italy and 22,671 from abroad.¹⁵ Since the *Option* requests had been presented as households and not as individuals, the *Return Option* had to be elaborated in the same way, so these figures do not represent the total number of people who left South Tyrol, but from the same data source we know that 13,754¹⁶ of those had already come back and 28,408 of those abroad had their Italian citizenship restored, for a grand total of 42,162. From these numbers, it can be inferred that of the approximate 75,000 people who left South Tyrol during the war, just more than a third (28,408) decided to legally reapply for Italian citizenship while still in Austria. This comparatively small number of requests¹⁷ is probably due to multiple factors; for instance, many of the South Tyroleans decided to remain abroad due to better economic opportunities in Germany (many of those who were in Austria moved to Germany), but another reason may be found in the difficulties that they expected to experience in reclaiming their properties once back in Italy.

Most of these people, especially those who actually left South Tyrol, experienced the *Option* and *Return Option* as a primarily geographical movement and, for this reason, a spatial visualization of these movements is helpful. Between the *Return Optants* we can find a great difference in the original place of origin (South Tyrol *per se*, some Trentino German-speaking valleys, and some areas of both the provinces of Belluno and Udine such as the Kanaltal), social background, and profession. Moreover, the numbers tell us that most of the South Tyrolean people who

¹³ Art. 11, D.Lgs. 2 febbraio 1948, n. 23. Revisione delle opzioni degli alto atesini. Legislative decree of February 2, 1948, no. 23. Review of option of Alto Adige citizens.

¹⁴ Stefan Lechner, "Späte Entnazifizierung. Die Reoption 1948 und der Ausschluss von der italienischen Staatsbürgerschaft." in *Einmal Option und zurück*, ed. Günther Pallaver, Leopold Steurer, and Martha Verdonfer (Bolzano: Raetia, 2019), 83–126.

¹⁵ Data from *Archivio Generale della Presidenza del Consiglio – Ufficio per le Zone di Confine*, SEZ III-b. 49-fasc. 324, December 15, 1952.

¹⁶ The apparent contradiction in this number is due to the fact that 6,291 requests (almost half of the total) were transferred to group 2 (*naturalizzati emigrati*).

¹⁷ According to Lechner and Helmut (1993), around 70 % of the remaining *Optants* reapplied for Italian citizenship.

“opted” for Germany never actually left the province and many returned home before the end of hostilities in 1945 (these two categories are not included in the aforementioned numbers). Fortunately, all these data are available in the fortnightly statistical surveys of the *Ufficio per le Zone di Confine* from June 1948 to December 1952, although the profession and social background data are sadly not tied to any geographical information. To analyze the data, the statistical surveys were digitized and then processed with the AI-powered text recognition, transcription, and searching of historical documents platform *Transkribus*, and then converted to *Excel* tables.

Mapping Issues

With *Excel*, it is possible to create graphs as well as maps by using the pivot graph and 3D map tools. With the latter, it is also possible to create some animated map “tours” which can also display a temporal sequence of those data, a feature that is very useful for historical research. However, while certainly useful and visually appealing, the maps created with this tool are not suited for historical data visualization due to the limitations of the tool itself. For instance, it is not possible to manually geolocalize the geographical information provided by the data; the application has an automated geo-recognition tool that “puts names on the map” (for example, it knows that *Bolzano* in the data corresponds to the city of Bolzano, South Tyrol, Italy and that *Sweden* corresponds to the Kingdom of Sweden). This system works well for its intended purpose, to display geographically denoted statistical data for the present-day world, but it does not work so well for historical data, which deal for example with political entities or regions that no longer exist (such as the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, or the province of East Prussia). In this respect, it should also be noted that the maps provided within *Excel* only depict the political-geographic state of the present-day world and are by no means constructed to display non-administrative based data, meaning that it is impossible to display features such as language distribution, construction type maps, or any thematic data which is not tied to administrative units. For these reasons, it was decided to switch to a more ad-hoc and versatile mapping application: the Esri ArcGIS suite. This suite was not intended for historical project purposes either, but its versatility enables much useful research, visualization, and dissemination features (chiefly time sliders and layers selection), while also granting the possibility to greatly customize map borders and entities.

The ArcGIS suite, and chiefly *ArcGIS Pro*, *ArcGIS online*, *WebApp Creator*, and *ArcGIS StoryMaps*, despite some initial setbacks, allowed me to effectively create maps for the ReMIGRA project that are accessible and useful for research pur-

poses and at the same time allow a potential user to easily navigate and visualize the key aspects of our research and results. In the first part of the chapter, I present the results of the statistical-cartographic research that have been achieved using both the GIS and more traditional spreadsheet tools, while in the second part I present the latest version of the ReMIGRA *StoryMaps* and highlight its features and capabilities.

Results

The *Ufficio per le Zone di Confine* fortnightly reports provide great insight into the history of the South Tyrolean *Return Option* and, above all, the number of people that applied to regain Italian citizenship compared with the number of those who actually received it. Moreover, these people are divided geographically – i.e., according to their original province of residence, or foreign country of migration if they were still there – and qualitatively.

By combining all this data, it became possible to compare the numbers of requests and restoration of Italian citizenship between the various Italian provinces and foreign countries (and the requests between those foreign countries) as well as between the various “kinds” of *Optants*. In addition, it has also been possible to calculate the reinstatements per requests ratio between the various provinces and foreign countries. All these data and analysis have been elaborated in *ArcGIS Pro* and visualized in a cartographic representation structured in layers.

These layers depict, in both numbers and percentage of total, the geographic distribution of the requests of reinstatement of Italian citizenship and the reinstatements themselves, as well as the aforementioned reinstatements per requests ratio for all the various *Optant* groups. Moreover, the layers have been rendered comparable via layer selection and chronologically navigable through a time slider. The outcome was some very interesting results that helped us shed some light on the history of the South Tyrolean *Return Option*, as depicted in Figure 1:

- Most of the overall requests came from the Province of Bolzano (91.93 % at the last report) and Trento (6.7 % at the last report), where most of the German- and Ladin- speaking minorities resided (at the time, most of the South Tyrolean southern Adige Valley was part of the Province of Trento).
- It is interesting to note how these numbers differ significantly only in the naturalized *Optants* and emigrated *Optants* cases, where – beside the obvious case of foreign countries where emigrated *Optants* comprised the vast majority – the percentage of the province of the Province of Udine almost doubles

from an overall 0.97 % (at the last report) to an “Art. 11” 1.71 % and more than triples with an “Art.2” 3.37 %. These were the inhabitants of the Kanal Valley in the municipality of Tarvisio and it seems that not only were they more eager to leave for the Reich than their South Tyrolean counterparts, but comparatively more of them wanted to return to their home valley.¹⁸

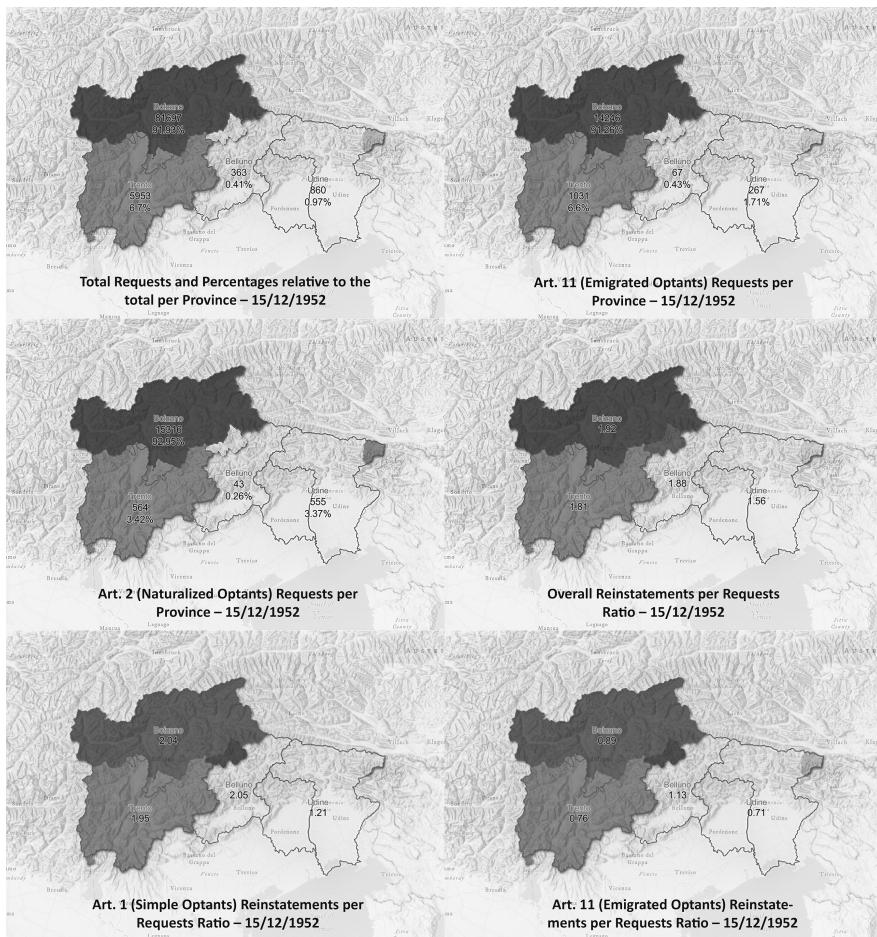
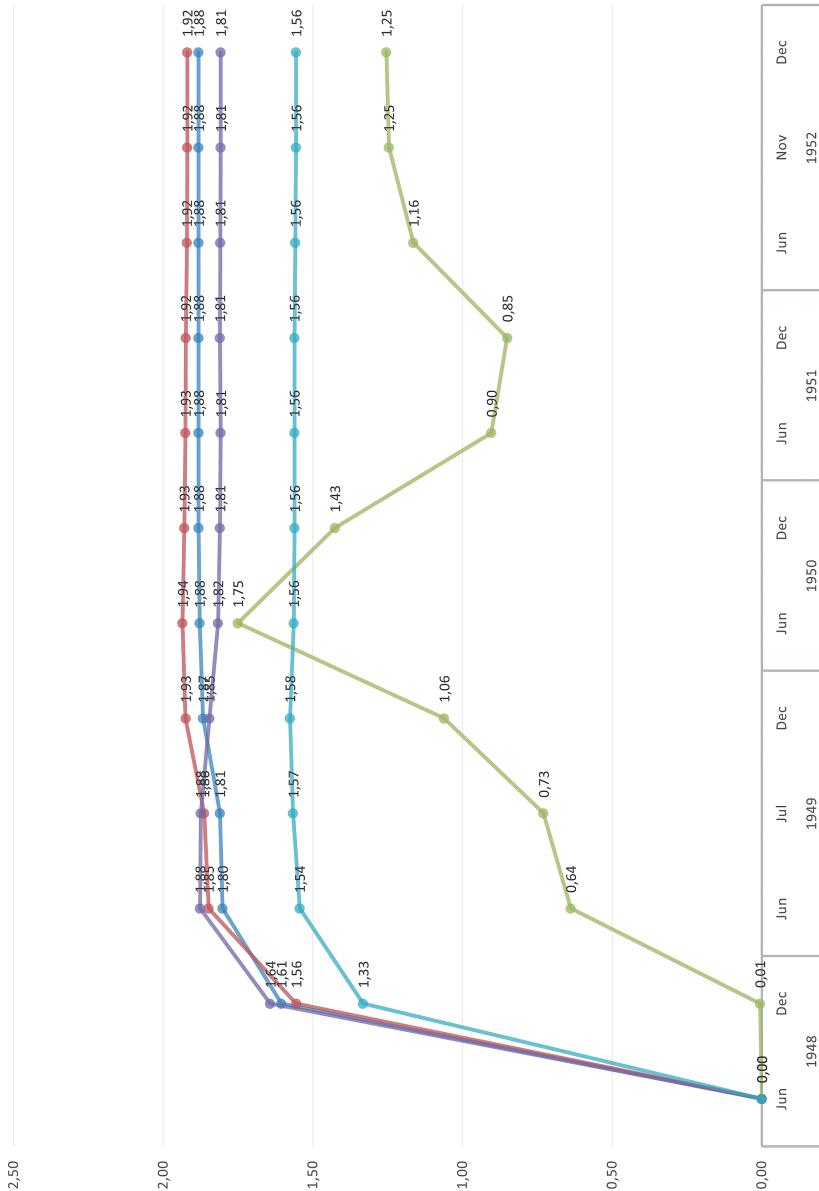


Figure 1: Various layers of the ReMIGRA maps.

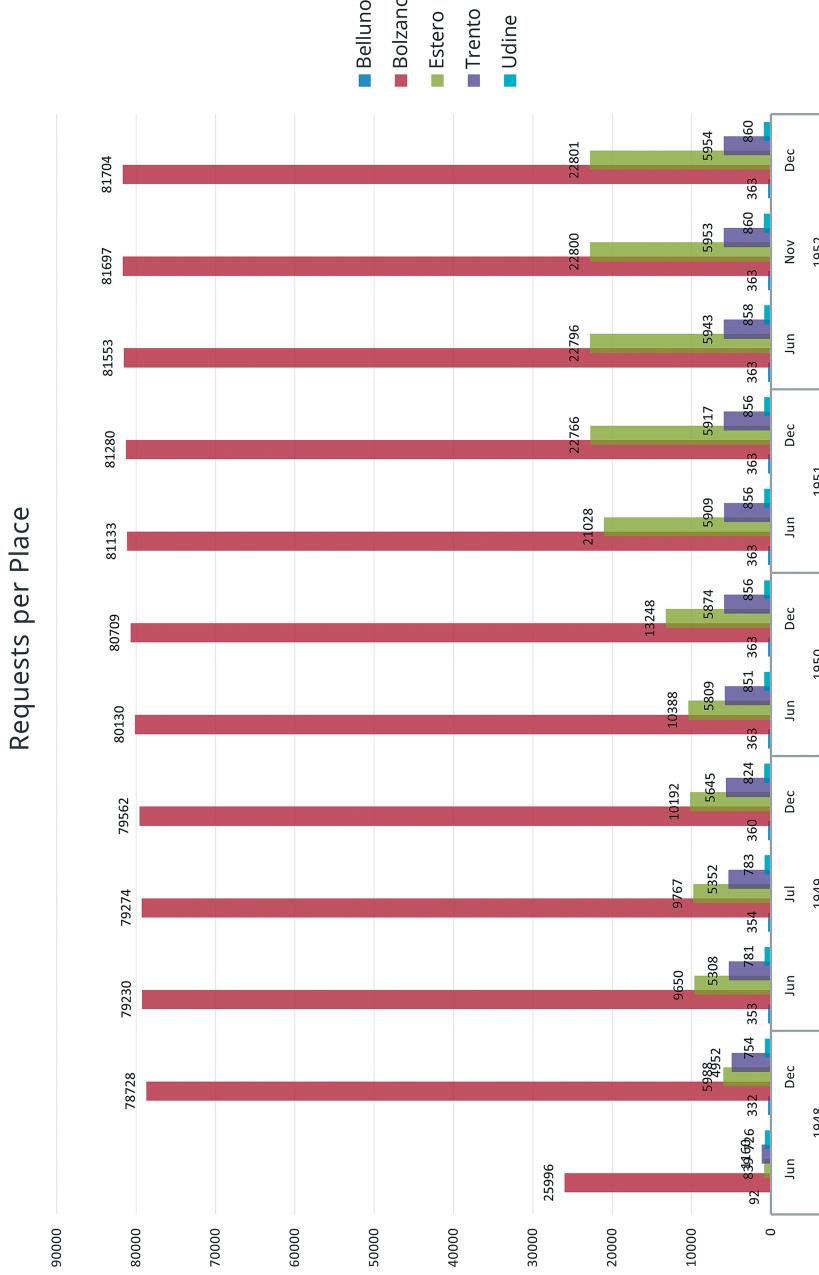
18 As Giada Noto observes in this very volume, both the *Option* and *Return Option* in the Kanatal had a distinct economic angle, which may explain the apparent discrepancy.



Graph 1: Reinstatement per request ratio from June 1948 to December 1952.

- The Kanaltalers were also less likely to reacquire their Italian citizenship; the Overall Reinstatements per Requests Ratio (see Graph 1) in the Province of Bolzano at the last report is 1.92 (Trento 1.81 and Belluno 1.88), while the ratio in the Province of Udine is just 1.56 (the ratio is usually greater than 1 since the requests were family-based, while the reinstatements were personal). This is even more visible in the simple *Optants* case where the Province of Udine scores 1.21 versus 2.04 Bolzano, 1.95 Trento, and 2.05 Belluno. It seems that there was little pressure and few reasons for restoring the *Kanaltalers*' Italian citizenship and that most of the families which remained there were not large in size. It is likely that, given the greater economic difficulties in that valley, the more numerous households left for the more prosperous *Reich* and were less likely to come back.
- Most of the emigrated *Optants* who came back and made their request from within Italy (many of them illegally returned in the last months of the war and immediately afterwards) were not households but individuals. The reinstatements per requests ratio for the “Art. 11” motivation is 0.89 for Bolzano, 0.76 for Trento, 1.13 for Belluno, and 0.71 for Udine (the ratio is often less than 1 because many of the Art.11 category were “transferred” to “Art.2”). It is likely that most of these “Art. 11” were young men who joined the German Army.
- As illustrated in Graph 2, the requests from foreign countries peaked between June 1950 (10,388), December 1950 (13,248), and June 1951 (21,028). This is likely due to the Italian-Austrian Treaty on the Restitution and Refund of the *Optants*' Properties, which was defined in July 1950 and signed on October 4, 1950. This seems to be confirmed by a similar spike in the requests by country data where Austria doubled its numbers from 9,671 in June 1950 to 18,712 in June 1951 (by comparison, Germany remained at 1,874), as depicted in Figure 2.
- The spike in requests from foreign countries – especially Austria – coincides with a sink in the reinstatements per requests ratio for those countries, from 1.75 in June 1950 to a minimum level of 0.85 in December 1951, before stabilizing throughout 1952 at around 1.25. It is possible to infer that the prospected financial burden of the Restitution and Refund Treaty prompted a stricter attitude from the Italian side.

The last two observations are particularly interesting, since negotiations for the aforementioned Italian-Austrian Treaty on the Restitution and Refund of the *Optants*' Properties, which lasted from January 1949 to July 1950, were very difficult. It seems that both parties had interest in securing a result with the least burdensome financial impact for their respective countries, while also maintaining a façade of good will towards the potential *Return Optants* for political reasons, thus



Graph 2: Total Return Option requests per place from June 1948 to December 1952.

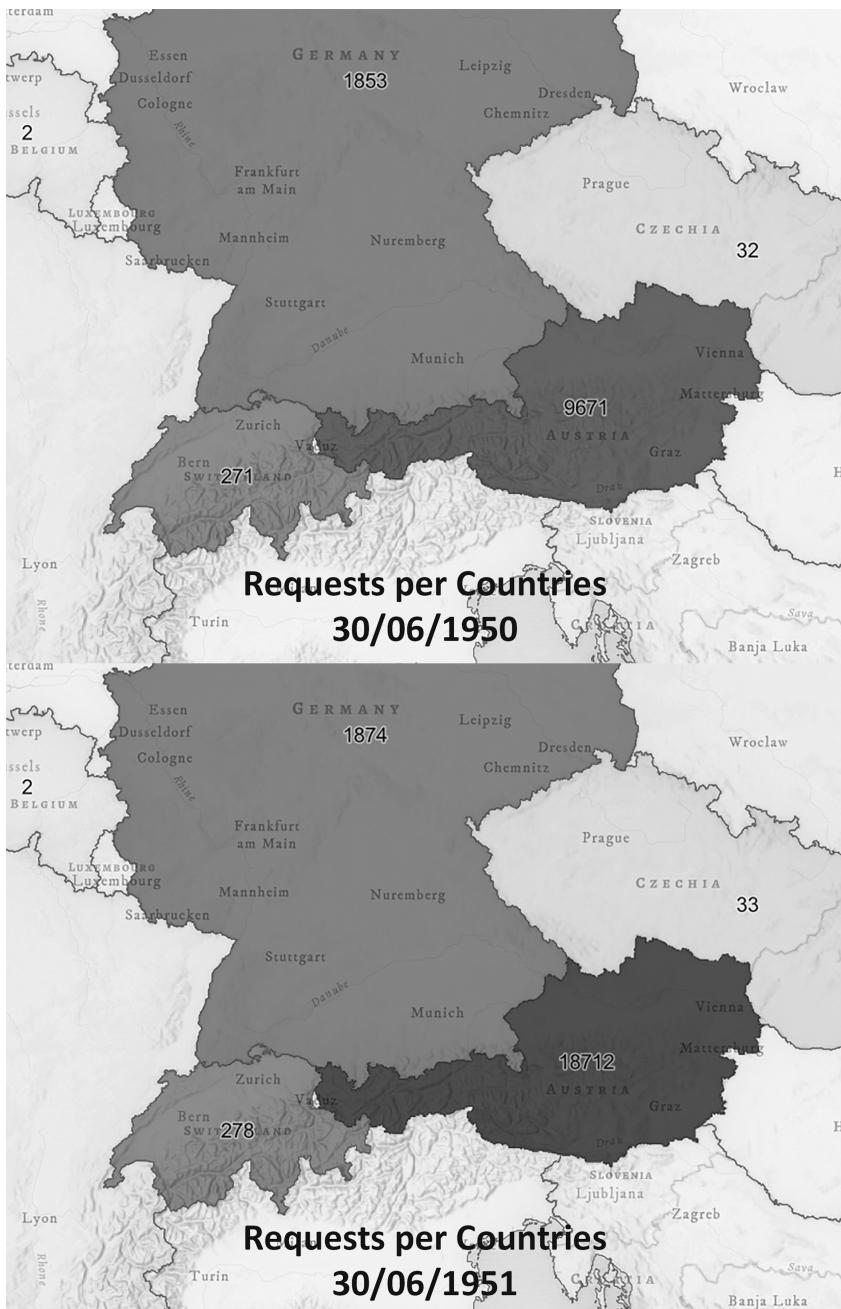


Figure 2: Comparison of the Return Option requests from Austria, June 1950 to June 1951.

stalling or accelerating any progress according to circumstantial convenience. For example, an Internal Note of the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri* on May 2, 1950 stated that an inter-ministerial meeting was held, in which it was decided to wait and not officially respond to a previous Austrian proposal of July 1950 until the Austrian government was ready to accept the real exchange rate between Lira and Schillings (previously, the Austrian government had proposed a “flat-rate” exchange rate to change the *Optants*’ Schillings into Lira, which would have greatly favored the Austrian position) and the non-applicability of the *Rückstellungsge-setz* to the South Tyrolean *Return Optants*.¹⁹ It is interesting that, according to the last paragraph of the note, this decision was taken both to “establish peculiar incentives in maintaining the return option and in repatriating the *Optants* that reside in Austria” and “avoid possible criticisms aimed at the Italian Government for not closing the deal.”²⁰ Moreover, during the June 21, 1950 talks in Rome, Austrian Delegation Head and Plenipotentiary Max Loewenthal pushed to close the deal because of the Austrian government’s fear of possible speculation and capital flight as the final date approached to apply for naturalization in Austria on December 31, 1950 without an actual deal for assessing the *Optants*’ assets and properties.²¹ In the end, the negotiations were concluded on July 6, 1950 in Rome. The *Agreement between the Italian Government and the Austrian Federal Government regarding patrimonial transfer of South Tyrolean Return Optants*,²² finally signed in Rome on October 4, 1950, reached a compromise in which:

- all the *Return Optants*’ assets and properties would have to be assessed at the precise date of the initialling of the treaty for the *Return Optants* who had already returned to Italy, and until December 31, 1951 for those who would return afterwards. All requests had to be made before the end date of December 31, 1950.
- this included the new Austrian State Bonds at their nominal value, thus mitigating the effects of the 1947 Currency Reform according to which one new

¹⁹ This law provided for restitution to the original owner of those properties that were acquired during the Nazi Regime and the overall seizure of NSDAP party properties by the Austrian Government, which included many of the dwellings constructed with the *Optants*’ money.

²⁰ Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Busta 111 fasc. AA-3/30. Diplomatic Archive, Folder 111, file AA-3/30.

²¹ Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Busta 111 fasc. AA-3/7. Diplomatic Archive, Folder 111, file AA-3/7.

²² *Accordo tra il governo italiano e il governo federale austriaco circa i trasferimenti patrimoniali dei riopianti alto-atesini / Uebereinkommen zwischen der Oesterreichischen Bundesregierung und der Italienischen Regierung über den Vermögenstransfer der Südtiroler Rückoptanten*. “Agreement between the Italian government and Austrian Federal Government regarding transfer of assets and property of Alto Adige Return Optants.”

Schilling amounted to three old Schillings, with a potential 2/3 capital loss of the *Optants*' bank accounts and deposits.²³

- the *Return Optants* would have to prove to the Austrian National Bank that they had indeed taken up residence in Italy and only after this step would the Austrian National Bank authorize the transfer.
- the assets and properties would have to be monetized and deposited at the Austrian National Bank.
- the Austrian National Bank would transfer a correspondent sum in US dollars to the Italian Exchange Office, which would be made available to the *Return Optant* in Italian Lira.
- to fund the reimbursement, the Austrian government would also make use of *Neue Heimat* patrimonial activities.²⁴

As this agreement clearly shows, the Italian government basically obtained everything it requested from its Austrian counterpart, since most of the financial burden for the *return of Optants* would lie (at least initially) on Austria's shoulders. The reason for this ostensible Austrian capitulation may be found in the different aims that the two countries pursued; the Italian government was more concerned with direct financial matters regarding the settlements of *Return Optants*, while the Austrian government pressed for closure of the deal as soon as possible for fear of a mass application for Austrian citizenship by the *Optants*. To further reinforce this view, it is worth mentioning that, after heated discussions, the question of the D.A.T. banking account and debt towards the Innsbruck D.U.T.²⁵ was gradually left to fade into the background by the Austrian delegation during the various

23 As mentioned in the *Verbale d'Intesa tra le delegazioni italiana e austriaca in merito alle questioni patrimoniali concernenti i riopianti altoatesini* on July 6, 1950 – Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Busta 111 fasc. AA-4/22 (Agreement between Italian and Austrian delegations regarding patrimonial transfer of Alto Adige Return Optants) and clarified in the Telegram no. 9147, June 8, 1951, *Ufficio Italiano di Collegamento a Innsbruck*.

24 Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Busta 111 fasc. AA-4/22. *Verbale d'Intesa tra le delegazioni italiana e austriaca in merito alle questioni patrimoniali concernenti i riopianti altoatesini* on July 6, 1950. Diplomatic Archive, Folder 111, file AA-4/22. Agreement between Italian and Austrian delegations regarding patrimonial transfer of Alto Adige Return Optants on July 6, 1950.

25 The *Deutsche Aussiedlungs-Treuhandsgesellschaft* or D.A.T. ("German Resettlement trust company") was a company based in Bolzano and created within the framework of the Mussolini-Hitler 1939 agreements that collected all the *Optants*' money, derived from the sale of their properties. The D.A.T. would later transfer its assets to the *Reich*-run *Deutsche Umsiedlungs-Treuhand* or D.U.T. ("German Resettlement trust"), which in turn would then help the South Tyroleans *Optants* to settle in other territories. According to the Austrian government, the D.A.T. still owned the – now Austrian – D.U.T. some 35,000,000 Schillings contained in an alleged "Alto-Adige account."

negotiations rounds; in the final agreement, no word of it was made at all. Moreover, according to a clarifying note of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 6, 1950, this debt never existed in the first place and all the *Optants*' money had been transferred to an impersonal interest-bearing banking account in Germany;²⁶ it seems that afterwards the Austrian government at least tacitly agreed to this view because it never contested the note. One possibility is that there was a sort of *do ut des* agreement between the two governments because, after six more months of notes being exchanged, on December 30, 1950 (the day before the planned deadline for applying) the management of *Österreichische Sparkasse* confirmed that the bank was under no circumstances considered as successor of the *Deutsche Reichspost*, where many of the *Optants* invested their money, thus barring them from recovering any money that they had deposited in the Austrian branches of said bank, an operation that was instead possible for Austrian citizens.²⁷ To recover these funds, the *Optants* had to contact the German administrator of the former *Reichspost*, a rather difficult process considering that all the former state assets in Germany had been seized by the Allies. In the end, it may be theorized that the Italian government tacitly agreed to bolster the *Return Option* in return for Austria funding most of the reimbursement for *Return Optants*, with the perspective of a future similar agreement with the German Federal Republic for recovering the money deposited by the *Optants* in the *Reichspost* account. Even with the *Reichspost* money setback, the importance of the Italian-Austrian agreement in the mind of the potential *Return Optants* who resided in Austria cannot be underestimated, as seen in the maps' data. Indeed, the agreement was so successful in the *Optants'* eyes that it was first extended to the *Optants* who had never left Italy and then prolonged several times after the initial planned deadline until March 31, 1954.²⁸

These insights spur us to continue statistical-cartographic research on the *Return Option*, which will be greatly enhanced by analysis of the *Option* (and *Return Option*) Index Cards that have also been digitalized and at the time of writing will soon be available for study.

The data were at least already partially readable in the *Excel* tables, but the visualization of statistical data through cartography helps provide a broader per-

²⁶ Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Busta 111 fasc. AA-4/19. Diplomatic Archive, Folder 111, file AA-4/19.

²⁷ Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Busta 111 fasc. AA-3/36. Diplomatic Archive, Folder 111, file AA-4/36. Telegram no. 18055/1885 from the *Legazione d'Italia a Vienna* to the *Ministero per gli Affari Esteri*.

²⁸ Archivio Storico Diplomatico – Busta 111 fasc. AA-4/28. Diplomatic Archive – Folder 111, file AA-4/28. Nota Verbale 348/152-Wpol/53 from the Austrian Federal Government to the Italian Government, September 24, 1952. Note Verbale 348/152-Wpol/53 from the Austrian Federal Government to the Italian Government, September 24, 1952.

spective on the topic. For instance, the possibility of navigating through both spatial and temporal data via simple mouse scrolling, and easy comparison of various *Return Optants*' group behaviors through data level selection, have been invaluable tools for assessing the various *Return Option* trends. Moreover, as discussed in the next section, these tools are exceptionally suited not only to research purposes but also dissemination.

The ReMIGRA StoryMap: A Work in Progress

The *StoryMaps* feature of the ArcGIS suite allows us to combine *WebApps* – the online available interactive maps that have been created so far using both ArcGIS Pro and ArcGIS online – with many non-cartographic features, including a timeline and images. The most useful tool available is, however, the possibility to embed other interactive and non-interactive online resources in the story; for example, it will be possible to embed some chronologically interactive charts that can match the maps' features. As for the maps *per se*, they are designed to be both visually pleasing and to effectively present all the essential information.

- For the aesthetic aspect, some warm and feature-neutral hues have been used, which match the color-palette of the ReMIGRA project.
- The essential information is conveyed through various maps and label layers, which can all be easily navigated by users by activating and deactivating them, thus enabling them to compare the various data.
- The time slider is one of the most essential features of these maps, as it facilitates chronological navigation through the evolution of the *Return option* data. We must underline how this feature is appealing for both academic and didactical use of the maps.
- A map slider was considered, in order to enhance the potential for comparison of the various layers, but in the current version of the app it has been decided to overlook this for simplicity's sake and not to overload the user interface.
- All the maps can be navigated in full scale and include the possibility to save the current view as an image and to share them on various social media.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that both the *ReMIGRA StoryMap*²⁹ and the maps contained within are very much a work in progress and that the final objective is to produce and make available (to scholars, students, and teachers) a

²⁹ The current version can be found at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/117f2b5b3386431caa5bf53c2e56e0>.

complete and interactive version of a historical atlas of the South Tyrolean *Return Option* and *Option*, once the above-mentioned Index Cards' data is available. The hope is that more data and more visualization options will coincide with both more research possibilities and didactic potential.

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**Part II: Returnees Between National Policies
and Individual Trauma**

Sarah Oberbichler, Lorella Viola

6 National Narratives and Immigrant Voices: Transatlantic Return Migration to Italy and Austria, 1850–1950

Abstract: This chapter examines the narratives surrounding transatlantic return migration to Italy and Austria(Hungary) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While much research has focused on the impact of return migration, this study explores the perception of return migration both in the sending countries and by the migrants themselves. Using national and immigrant newspapers, the chapter combines quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze narratives of return migration. The aim is to understand how economic and political circumstances may have influenced concepts of foreignness and belonging.

Introduction

The return of emigrated people is part of migration. Examples are the return of emigrants from overseas in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the return of war veterans or the repatriation of war refugees during and after World War I, and the return and repatriation of prisoners of war, refugees, exiles, and concentration camp survivors during and after World War II. However, despite the large body of knowledge dedicated to the study of historical migration, return migration – also known as remigration or repatriation – has largely focused on its impact of return migration, that is around the question of whether remigration is beneficial or detrimental, especially in economic terms but also socially (particularly for the sending country).¹

¹ Theodore Saloutos, *They Remember America* (University of California Press, 1956), accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.1525/9780520350014; W. R. Böhning, “Basic Aspects of Immigration and Return Migration in Western Europe,” *ILO Working Papers*, 1975 (University of California Press, 1956), accessed November 2, 2023, <https://ideas.repec.org//p/ilo/ilowps/991611463402676.html>; Italo Musillo, “Retour et emploi des migrants dans Le Mezzogiorno: enquête sur un échantillon de migrants italiens,” *ILO Working Papers*, 1981, <https://ideas.repec.org//p/ilo/ilowps/992106593402676.html>; Rosemarie Rogers, “Return Migration in Comparative Perspective,” *International Migration Review* 17, no. 1 (January 1983): 277–99, accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.1177/019791838301701S40; Daniel Kubat and Center for Migration Studies (U.S.), eds., *The Politics of Return: International Return Migration in Europe: Proceedings of the First*

Therefore, the literature about remigration remains mostly positioned between the assessment of the impact of return migration from a political and economic point of view on the one hand and the conceptual binary of integration/failure to integrate in relation to the reasons for returning on the other. In other words, large-scale investigations devoting attention to the public perception of return migration as well as the inner voice of migrants remain comparatively rare. This chapter aims to answer the following questions: how were return migrants framed in national and immigrant newspapers? Was the perception of return migration influenced by economic and political circumstances in the sending (place of original departure) and receiving country (country of destination)? To what extent did national narratives differ from emigrant narratives, and how did Italian-language narratives differ from German-language narratives? The complexity and heterogeneity of return migration (historical contexts, motivations, and intentions vary widely) make it difficult to systematically address the topic. Thus, to account for this variety, we keep our definition of return migration broad. Specifically, we endorse the definition of Edda Currle² as well as the typologization of Dovelyn R. Mendoza and Kathleen Newland.³ Currle describes a returnee as a person who temporarily or permanently leaves the country of origin and returns at a later point while Mendoza and Newland further include the permanent return of later generations as well as those who temporary return. We include both temporary migration and circular migration in our definition, without giving a numerical limit on the length of stay in the host country. Due to the difficulty in distinguishing voluntary return from forced return,⁴ we do not take these categories into consideration.

We assume that narratives of return migration – just as those of immigration – are built on justification and legitimization (especially when societies feel threatened) and fluctuate with the development of economic needs and political agendas. We further assume that the concepts of foreign and belonging become blurry through return migration and that individuals can become strangers in their homelands or that homelands can become strangers to returnees. We empirically verify

European Conference on International Return Migration (Rome, November 11–14, 1981) (Rome; New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1984).

² Edda Currle, “Theorieansätze zur Erklärung von Rückkehr und Remigration,” *Sozialwissenschaftlicher Fachinformationsdienst soFid*, no. 2 (2006): 7–23.

³ Dovelyn Rannveig Mendoza and Kathleen Newland, “Circular Migration and Development: Trends, Policy Routes, and Ways Forward,” *MPI Policy Brief* (Washington: Migration Policy Institute, 2007), accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.eldis.org/document/A31498>.

⁴ Marta Bivand Erdal and Ceri Oeppen, “Theorising Voluntariness in Return,” in *Handbook of Return Migration*, ed. Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, Elgar Handbooks in Migration Series (Northampton; Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), 70–83, accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.4337/9781839100055.00013.

our hypothesis through a qualitative analysis of digitised Italian and Austrian (immigrant) newspapers and, combine qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e., advanced keyword searches/frequency analysis) to locate, extract, interpret, and ultimately contextualize our sources.

Socio-historical Context of Transatlantic Return Migration to Europe

European transatlantic migration (including emigration and return migration) caused a massive population displacement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Academics today agree that transatlantic emigration was far less permanent than assumed in older studies and that the term seasonal⁵ or circular would be more accurate for much of the movement. Uncertainty also surrounds question of the (economic) impact of migration on the sending and receiving countries. What we do know is that governments in both the sending and receiving countries were facilitating or hindering emigration as well as return migration in order to protect their own (economic, political, and social) interests. For example, in 1901 the Italian government established the General Commissariat for Emigration (*Commissariato Generale dell' Emigrazione*). in order to regulate emigration while in Austria-Hungary, the Hungarian government tried to influence return migration flows through the *American Action* program at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶ Hopes of solving the problem of unemployment through emigration or return migration, however, proved to be just as illusory as ideas of guaranteeing the success of migration through mere economic agreements.⁷

To appreciate the dimension of European transatlantic return migration between 1850 and 1950, the numbers should be analyzed. However, due to inconsis-

⁵ Annemarie Steidl, “Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 19 (2008): 15–42.

⁶ Kristina E. Poznan, “Return Migration to Austria-Hungary from the United States in Homeland Economic and Ethnic Politics and International Diplomacy,” *The Hungarian Historical Review* 6, no. 3 (2017): 647–67.

⁷ Gerda Neyer, “Auswanderungen Aus Österreich: Von Der Mitte Des 19. Jahrhunderts Bis Zur Gegenwart,” in *Demographische Informationen 1995/96* (Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 1995), 60–70, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23026764>.

tencies in historical sources as well as in circular and illegal migration issues, we can only speak broadly about the return of European emigrants to their country of origin. Nonetheless, statistics compiled by the U.S. government, passenger lists, and also historical newspapers give some hints of the dimension of return migration from the United States to Europe. For example, in 1905, the German-language immigrant newspaper *Der Nordstern* compared the numbers of immigrants who entered the United States from the port of Bremen and emigrants (returnees) who left the United States and returned to the port of Bremen from 1900 to 1904; during these five years, an average of 25 percent of European migrants left the United States and went back to Europe.⁸ The U.S. government further counted immigrants as well as emigrants between 1908 and 1923 according to artificial categories of race or nationality; for instance, Italian migrants were divided between Southerners and Northerners.

In Italy, data on return migration was gathered by the *Commissariato Generale dell' Emigrazione* in the years 1905–1906,⁹ which showed that most Italians returned to Italy after two to five years. *I ritornati*, “the returnees,” as they were called, totaled about 40 percent of the original emigrants, and were predominantly male (90 %), young (between 14 and 44), uneducated, and unskilled. Moreover, numbers vary greatly depending on the Italian regions of origin; for example, recent counts show that while 60 percent of the immigrants coming from the South of Italy returned, only 37 percent of Northerners eventually came back.¹⁰ Although certainly valuable, this information is inaccurate as it does not include the returnees entering Italy through ports other than Genoa, Naples, Palermo, and Messina, or by railroads and similar.

To estimate the number of returnees to the multi-ethnic Austria-Hungary, Anne-marie Steidl¹¹ evaluated New York passenger lists from 1910. In this year, 20 percent of Austrians with German nationality, 28 percent with Hungarian nationality, and 40 percent with Slavic nationality returned. Steidl also conducted a survey on the gender of returnees, which showed that the percentage of female returnees was low (about 20 percent of overall returnees); this is because for many of the women, a

⁸ “Überseeische Rückwanderung,” *Der Nordstern*, August 17, 1905.

⁹ Alberto Beneduce, “Sul Movimento Dei Rimpatriati Dalle Americhe,” *Giornale Degli Economisti e Rivista Di Statistica* 41, no. 9 (1910): 225–58.

¹⁰ Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018), 11.

¹¹ Steidl, “Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie,” 33.

return to their country of origin would have meant a deterioration in their living situation and a return to conservative traditions.¹²

The backgrounds, intentions, and motivations of transatlantic returnees were manifold. Some return migration was planned, whereas other returns were not anticipated; some emigrants returned home disillusioned, with empty bags and ruined health, while others brought financial resources, new ideas, knowledge, and skills.¹³

However, there were factors that contributed to the decision making process, such as success, failure, homesickness, rejection in the new country, changes in the economic or socio-political conditions in their native countries, or perhaps requests from family members asking them to return.¹⁴ The intention to return may have existed even before leaving the home country, or may have arisen at a later date even though permanent emigration was originally planned.¹⁵ While psychological factors such as homesickness or the desire to return are key motivators, many other factors must be considered. These factors are an interplay of events in the receiving country and in the sending country, as summarized in Figure 1:

One important factor was the steamship prices, with faster and cheaper steamships not only increasing the number of people migrating to America but also of those who returned.¹⁶ Fluctuations in steamship prices affected the return migration by meaning that more, or fewer, people could afford a legal return to their home country. The German-language immigrant newspaper *Arkansas Echo*, for example, reported that, due to mass return migration, steamship prices in 1907 increased from \$21 to \$32.¹⁷

A major reason for return was the labor market situation in the receiving country. Whenever the U.S. would experience economic crises such as the September Crash of 1873, the stock market crash in New York in 1893, the coal strike in America around 1900, and the panic of 1907, remittances would decline and return migration

12 Marita Krauss and Holger Sonnabend, *Frauen und Migration*, Stuttgarter Beiträge zur historischen Migrationsforschung 5 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2001), 13.

13 Steidl, "Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie."

14 Mark Wyman, "Return Migration - Old Story, New Story," *Immigrants & Minorities, Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 20, no. 1 (2001): 1–18, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2001.9975006>; Charles Guzzetta, "Return Migration: An Overview," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Services* 2, no. 1–2 (September 22, 2004): 109–17, accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.1300/J191v02n01_07.

15 Russell King, ed., *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 1986), accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.4324/9781315722306.

16 Wyman, "Return Migration - Old Story, New Story."

17 "Wochenrundschau – Inland," *Arkansas Echo*, November 29, 1907.

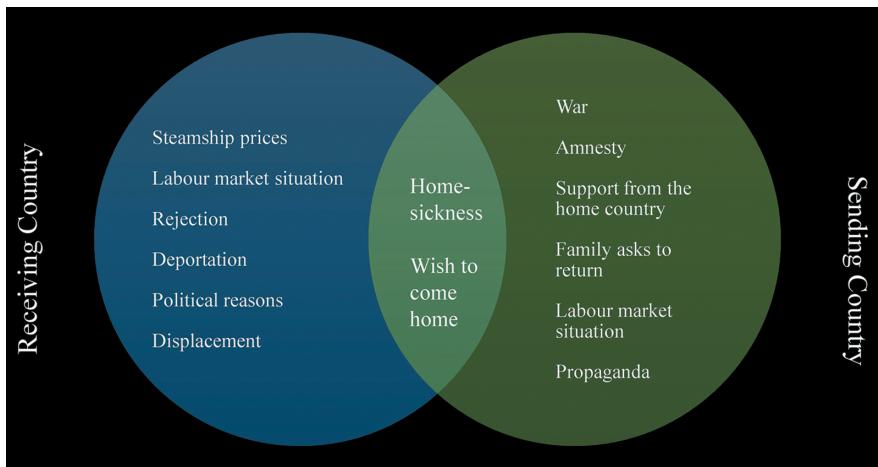


Figure 1: Factors in receiving and sending countries that influence decisions about return (image: Sarah Oberbichler).

would rise, with consequences for the sending countries as well as for the receiving countries.¹⁸ Between 1850 and 1950, there were several major economic crises that increased return migration sharply: the economic crises resulting from the September Crash of 1873 (bankruptcy especially in railroad and real estate industries), with consequences that lasted until 1877; the New York stock market crash in 1893; the coal strike in America around 1900; and the panic of 1907 (financial crisis resulting in the bankruptcy of banks and companies). The panic of 1907, especially, led to a mass return migration movement to Europe, with Italy and Austria-Hungary in particular having to deal with a return rate that far exceeded the emigration rate in those years. For example, according to the Italian Commissioner, only 5,033 Italians departed for the United States in December 1907, while 52,532 returned.¹⁹ According to Steidl,²⁰ there was a close interplay between the unemployment rate in America and migration movements of Austrian-Hungarians. Low unemployment rates led to a surge in emigration, while high unemployment rates led to an increase in return.

¹⁸ Sharon Stanton Russell, “Remittances from International Migration: A Review in Perspective,” *World Development* 14, no. 6 (June 1986): 677–96, accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(86)90012-4.

¹⁹ Robert Franz Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Harvard University Press, 1919).

²⁰ Steidl, “Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie.”

An outbreak or end of war in the sending country further led to further heightened return migration, causing not only an acceptance but also a prompt return of emigrants. For example, between July 1914 and December 1915, for every 100 Italians who left their country, 412 returned. In Austria-Hungary, the call to return for conscripts (if the emigrants were not yet American citizens) led to another wave of return migration. The promotion of repatriation (e.g., by free steamship tickets) through the sending country also meant that those who had not been able to afford to return before now seized their chance to do so.²¹

Another way to encourage return migration was to promote return through governmental programs. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Hungarian government, in particular, was an active promoter of return migration in order to support its economic and nationalistic agenda, with the easiest way to promote return migration simply to subsidize return journeys for migrants and guarantee their entitlement to property/assets. However, not every Austrian-Hungarian emigrant was welcomed to return, as potential return migrants were assessed for suitability and those in possession of greater financial resources as well as specific “patriotic morals” were actively encouraged to return. Propaganda played an important role in the decision to return among Austrian-Hungarian communities in America.²²

As this brief historical overview shows, transatlantic return occurred for many different reasons, with economic, political, or social circumstances in both the sending and receiving countries always playing a role in the decision-making process. For numerous returnees, however, the return was not permanent. Many of the returnees found re-integration into the old homeland difficult, while subsequent reverse migration was pushed through for the same reasons as mentioned above.

Sources and Methods

Our research is based on digitized historical newspapers, which we used as the basis for the qualitative analysis for several reasons. Firstly, historical newspapers are among the most valuable and detailed sources for learning about narratives and thinking about migration throughout history.²³ Secondly, newspapers

21 “Die Rückwanderung nach Europa,” *Arkansas Echo*, May 6, 1919.

22 “Das amerikanische Echo,” *Arbeiter Zeitung*, August 28, 1914.

23 Lorella Viola, “ChronicItaly and ChronicItaly 2.0: Digital Heritage to Access Narratives of Migration,” *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing* 15, no. 1–2 (October 2021): 170–85, accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.3366/ijhac.2021.0268.

allow longitudinal studies for the discovery of important trends in perceptions of migration, in both the sending and receiving country. Given the significance of news reporting for societies, it should come as no surprise that the discourses of newspaper reporting are essential objects of investigation,²⁴ especially when the topic is migration, where other sources are sometimes scarce or widely spread.²⁵

The immigrant press in particular not only allows us to explore questions of belonging within the hosting society, but also those questions of identity in relation to the experience of migrants. The immigrant press is a phenomenon associated with the mass migration from Europe to the Americas between the 1880s and 1920s.²⁶ During this period, it is estimated that in the USA alone, approximately 1,300 foreign language newspapers were read by about 2.6 million people.²⁷ As for the Italian immigrant press, recent counts estimate that in the period in question, between 150 and 264 Italian language newspapers were published in the USA, 98 of these uninterruptedly.²⁸ In terms of reach, their circulation ranged from few hundreds to many thousands.²⁹ These already impressive numbers should, however, be doubled or even tripled, since most Italians were illiterate and newspapers were often read out loud.³⁰ For the German-language press, it is estimated that by 1890, up to 1,000 newspapers operated across the United States. However, starting with the outbreak of World War I, German-speaking newspapers

²⁴ John E. Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (New York: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2007).

²⁵ Dirk Rupnow, "Geschichte und Gedächtnis der Migration in Österreich. Gegenwärtige Trends und zukünftige Herausforderungen," in *Migration, Flucht–Vertreibung–Integration*, ed. Stefan Karner, Barbara Stelzl-Marx, and Dieter Bacher, Veröffentlichungen des Ludwig Boltzmann Instituts für Kriegsfolgenforschung (Graz: Leykam, 2019), 227–42.

²⁶ Lorella Viola and Jaap Verheul, "The Media Construction of Italian Identity: A Transatlantic, Digital Humanities Analysis of *Italianità*, Ethnicity, and Whiteness, 1867–1920," *Identity* 19, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 294–312, accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2019.1681271.

²⁷ Leara Rhodes, *The Ethnic Press: Shaping the American Dream* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Ulf Jonas Bjork, "Ethnic Press," in *History of the Mass Media in the United States: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret A. Blanchard (Chicago: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 207–8.

²⁸ Graziella Parati, Anthony Julian Tamburri, and Bénédicte Deschamps, eds., "The Italian Ethnic Press in a Global Perspective," in *The Cultures of Italian Migration: Diverse Trajectories and Discrete Perspectives*, The Fairleigh Dickinson University Press Series in Italian Studies (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2011), 81; Peter G. Yellon, *A Great Conspiracy against Our Race: Italian Immigrant Newspapers and the Construction of Whiteness in the Early Twentieth Century, Culture, Labor, History Series* (New York; London: NYU Press, 2014).

²⁹ Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Italian Immigrant Press and the Construction of Social Reality," in *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, ed. James P. Danky and Wiegand A. Wayne (Urbana; Chicago; Springfield: University of Illinois, 1998), 17–33.

³⁰ Viola and Verheul, "The Media Construction of Italian Identity."

slowly disappeared from the market due to rising xenophobia towards German-speaking immigrants. Moreover, many German-language newspapers had financial partners from the beer industry and, with the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, this revenue disappeared.³¹

Three digital heritage collections built the basis for a mixed methods approach. For the analysis of Italian immigrant newspapers, we used *ChronicItaly 3.0*,³² a deep-learning, contextually enriched digital heritage collection of Italian immigrant newspapers published in the USA between 1898 and 1936, which totals 8,653 issues and contains 21,454,455 words. Featuring mainstream, anarchic, and independent newspapers, ChronicItaly 3.0 includes the following titles: *L'Italia*, *Cronaca sovversiva*, *La libera parola*, *The patriot*, *La ragione*, *La rassegna*, *La sentinella del West Virginia*, *L'Indipendente*, *La Sentinella*, and *La Tribuna del Connecticut*. Due to economic struggles, immigrant newspapers often had to be abruptly discontinued; this is reflected in the composition of the collection, which presents gaps across titles as well as differences in the numbers of issues within the same titles as shown in Figure 2. Despite these historical limitations, the collection maintains an acceptable degree of balance between titles from different political orientation and numbers of issues throughout the period. The authors nevertheless acknowledge that although the resource provides a reasonably comprehensive picture of the discourse of migration by the Italian American community, issues such as over- or under-representation of some titles and potential polarization of topics may arise.

For the analysis of German-language Austrian newspapers, we accessed the platform *ANNO*³³ of the Austrian National Library (ONB) for locating and exporting relevant newspaper clippings. *ANNO* provides free access to over 26 million newspaper pages published in Austria(-Hungary) and more than 1,700 different newspapers in 18 languages; in addition to magazines, almost all regional and national Austrian newspapers are fully accessible through the platform. Figure 3 shows the number of pages per year and per language that are digitally available through *ANNO*, with German-language newspapers shown in gray in the figure. As the paper focuses on German-language narratives on return migration, we only analyzed German language newspapers.

³¹ Jana Sina Keck, “The Denglish Press? Reprinting and Code-Switching in Nineteenth-Century German-American Newspapers,” *Journal of European Periodical Studies* 7, no. 1 (July 4, 2022), accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.21825/jeps.84812.

³² Lorella Viola and Antonio Maria Fiscarelli, “ChronicItaly 3.0. A deep-learning, contextually enriched digital heritage collection of Italian immigrant newspapers published in the USA, 1898-1936” (Zenodo, March 11, 2021), accessed November 2, 2023, doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.4596345.

³³ See: <https://anno.onb.ac.at/>.

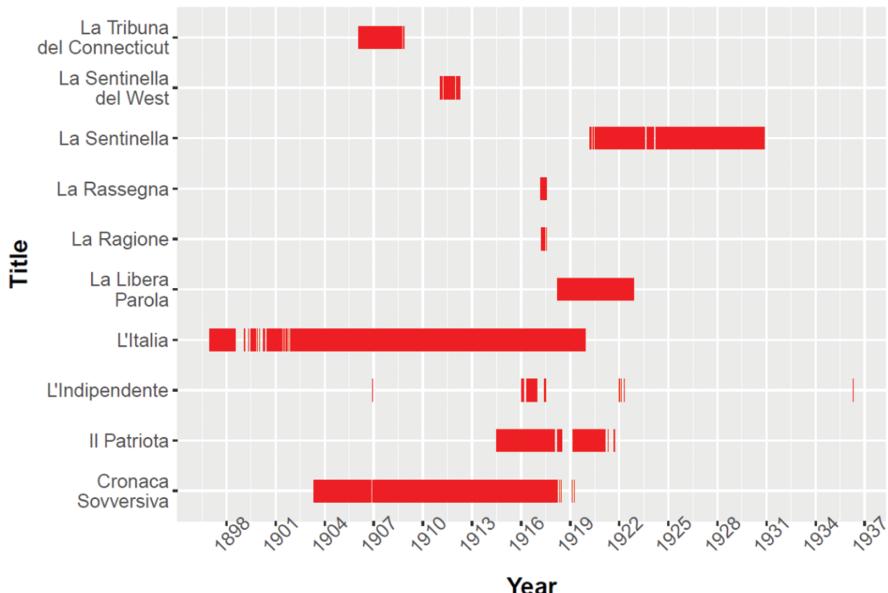


Figure 2: Distribution of issues within *ChronicItaly 3.0* per title. Red lines indicate at least one issue in a three-month period.

We also accessed the platform *Chronicling America*,³⁴ an open access newspaper platform made available by the Library of Congress, to locate and export newspaper clippings from German-language immigrant newspapers. *Chronicling America* contains U.S. newspapers published between 1789 and 1963 and gives access to mainstream, minority, and independent newspapers, including immigrant newspapers. In total, 78 immigrant newspapers in German are digitally available. While there is only one newspaper that was aimed explicitly at German-speaking Austro-Hungarians (*Siebenbürgisch-Amerikanisches Volksblatt*), most of the German-language immigrant newspapers addressed a large German immigrant readership, highlighting news from the German provinces, Austria, and Switzerland and including local and national news as well.

Such a broad variety of historical newspapers offers different viewpoints and political orientations (maximum variation sampling) to this study. Methodologically, we performed the search in two steps. In the first step, we defined keywords for our search, considering that simple keywords related to terms that are

³⁴ See: <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

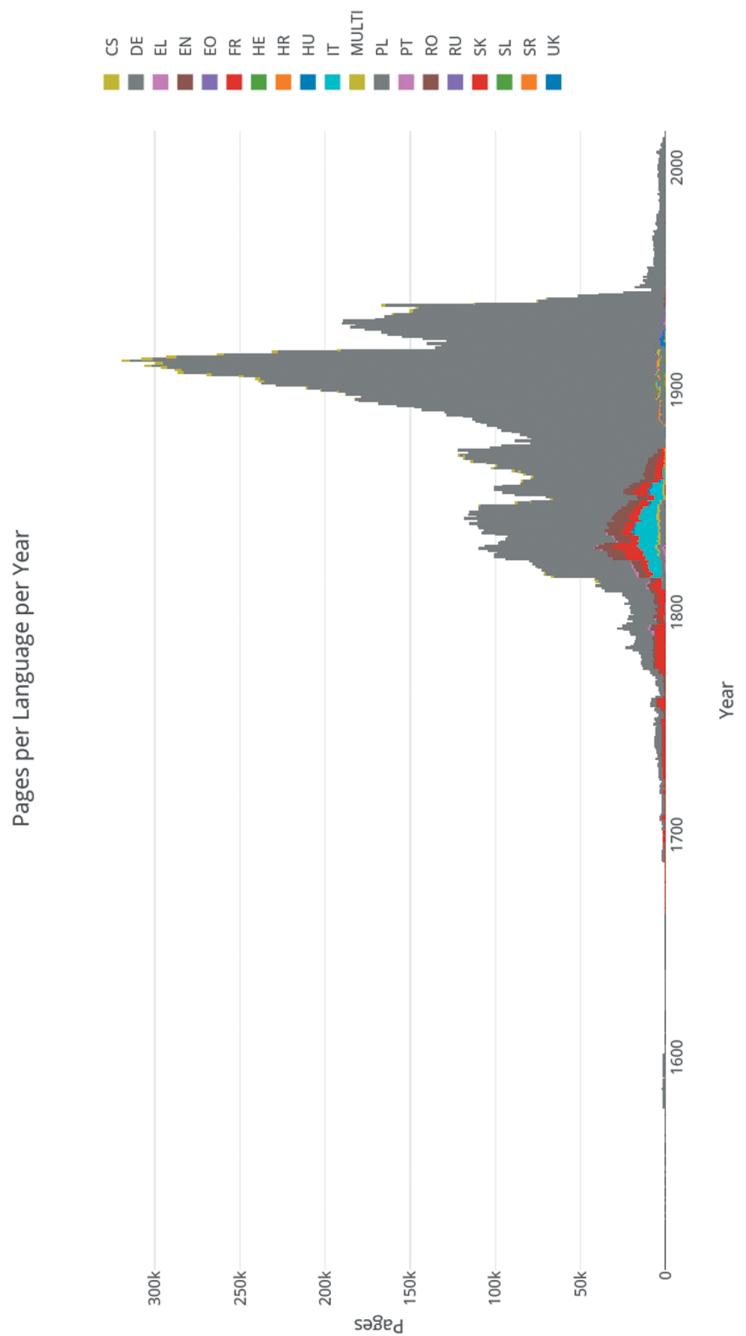


Figure 3: Pages per language per year available in the ANNO platform. Source: <https://labs.onb.ac.at/de/tool/sprachen-in-anno/>.

difficult to define conceptually (such as return migration) have their limitations.³⁵ We met this challenge by searching for lexical bundles and therefore considering the context of keywords in a second step. Additional text mining techniques such as bi-grams and collocations (combinations of words, which frequently occur together) helped to refine the search and find relevant articles.³⁶ As a result of our search, we were able to build smaller corpora exclusively on the topic of transatlantic return migration.

For the qualitative analysis, we investigated the main narratives and patterns of return migration. We considered that every (mass) return migration movement was accompanied by public discourses, which supported, promoted, regulated, or prohibited the return of people to their country of origin. As a result, we specifically searched for patterns in the narratives, which could reveal how return migration was perceived over time.³⁷

Narratives on Transatlantic Return Migration

The return of migrants to Europe in times of transatlantic mass migration was part of public debates, both within immigrant circles and in national debates. The European and American perception of migrants and efforts to control emigration fluctuated according to the development of economic needs and political agendas. While American nativists welcomed the return of all migrants to their country of

³⁵ Sarah Oberbichler and Eva Pfanzelter, “Tracing Discourses in Digital Newspaper Collections,” in *Digitised Newspapers – A New Eldorado for Historians?*, ed. Estelle Bunout, Maud Ehrmann, and Frédéric Clavert (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 125–52, accessed November 10, 2023, doi.org/10.1515/9783110729214-007; Sarah Oberbichler and Eva Pfanzelter, “Topic-Specific Corpus Building: A Step towards a Representative Newspaper Corpus on the Topic of Return Migration Using Text Mining Methods,” *Journal of Digital History* 1, no. 1 (September 1, 2021): 74–98, accessed November 10, 2023 doi.org/10.1515/jdh-2021-1003.

³⁶ Those corpora did not include advertisements, appeals, or articles with purely statistical content since we are concentrating on narratives and discussions on return migration. In addition, large amount of archival material allowed for a theoretical saturation, which means that using and analyzing even more newspapers would not have provided new or different insights.

³⁷ Dietrich Busse, “Begriffsgeschichte – Diskursgeschichte – Linguistische Epistemologie. Bemerkungen zu den theoretischen und methodischen Grundlagen einer historischen Semantik in philosophischem Interesse anlässlich einer Philosophie der ‚Person‘,” in *Diskurse der Personalität. Die Begriffsgeschichte der ‚Person‘ aus deutscher und russischer Perspektive*, ed. Nikolaj Plotnikov and Alexander Haardt (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008), 115–42, accessed November 10, 2023, doi.org/10.30965/9783846744321_009.

origin, the views of Americans sympathetic to migration were more diverse.³⁸ For example, influential newspapers such as *The New York Times* – which in the early twentieth century attempted to determine the extent of return migration and its impact on the country – concluded that return migration was an economic loss to the United States spreading a negative image about returning migrants.³⁹ Similarly in Europe, negative but also naïve images about returnees were diffused, as it will be shown here.

In this section, we present the results of the qualitative analysis for Italy and Austria, combined with secondary research for the historical, political, and socio-economic contextualization. Although our analysis is based on large newspaper corpora, for the purpose of this chapter we use the statements that best summarize the narratives as examples.

Italy

(R)emigration and the National Debate at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

As already described in section 2, a considerable number of Italian returnees re-emigrated to the U.S. Why did they not stay? To answer this question, it is necessary to analyze Italian migrants' experience of remigration as well as the national debate of remigration as embedded within the wider national debate of the Italian economic situation after the political unification (1861). For example, discourses on migration (both emigration and return migration) entered the public debate as a way to solve the so-called *Questione meridionale* – the southern problem, the worsened economic conditions of the South after 1861. After decades of failed attempts, politicians started to highlight the positive consequences of emigration, such as that emigration was relieving the South of Italy from unemployment whereas migrants' remittances were making Italy rich. The argument was that Italian migrants would always come back richer,⁴⁰ more skilled, and more experienced, thus contributing to the cultural modernization of Italian society.

³⁸ Poznan, "Return Migration to Austria-Hungary from the United States in Homeland Economic and Ethnic Politics and International Diplomacy"; Neil Larry Shumsky, "Let No Man Stop to Plunder! American Hostility to Return Migration, 1890-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 2 (1992): 56–75.

³⁹ Shumsky, "Let No Man Stop to Plunder! American Hostility to Return Migration, 1890-1924."

⁴⁰ Agostino Bertani, "Atti della Giunta per l'inchiesta agraria sulle condizioni della classe agricola," Relazione 10 (1886), accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.unilibro.it/libro/bertani-a->

These arguments culminated in the first Italian law on emigration in 1901. Viewing migrants (and especially returning migrants) as a national asset, the law aimed to control migration in all matters, particularly in economic terms. Remittances, for example, started to be regulated so that the highest possible amount of money would reach Italy. Accordingly, permanent emigration was discouraged, as was American naturalization. The 1901 law remained practically unchanged until the rise of fascism. During this period, national discourses of migration, return migration, and remittances continued to be praised for their ability to compensate for the government's shortcomings over the past decades.⁴¹

Narratives in Italian American Immigrant Newspapers

One main narrative of transatlantic remigration believed Italian migrants to significantly contribute to the Italian national economy by sending remittances to their families in Italy. Although certainly true to an extent, the narrative greatly exaggerated the actual impact of remittances as being a miracle cure for all the economic problems of the South. The discourse also romanticized migrants' experience in America, diminishing their struggles and harsh living conditions, and painting a picture of migrants as being able to make money easily. Accordingly, those migrants who decided to settle permanently abroad were harshly criticized and labelled as being amoral individuals or disloyal to the nation and its values.⁴¹ In contrast with this exalted domestic discourse, migrants' narration of emigration was more nuanced. As it reflected their migratory experience, it portrayed a more realistic and less romanticized account of the struggles and tough challenges they had to face in America. The following excerpt is taken from *L'Italia* of September 3, 1912 (emphasis mine).

*Dicano le storie vere degli emigranti, e non le **fantasie degli esaltati**, che sono ben pochi i lavoratori italiani ai quali l'emigrazione ha fatto scuola di socialismo e di civiltà. E' vero piuttosto il fenomeno inverso. E non lasciamoci impressionare da quei benedetti 800 milioni che vengono ogni anno in Italia. Pensiamo che sono anche 800.000 ogni anno gli Italiani che emi-*

cur-/atti-giunta-inchiesta-agraria-sulle-condizioni-classe-agricola-rist-anast-1881-86-vol-10-relazione-porto-maurizio-genova-massa-carrara-/9788827159606.

⁴¹ Stefano Jacini, "Inchiesta Jacini. Atti della giunta per la inchiesta agraria e sulle condizioni delle classi agricole" (Rome, 1885); Francesco P. Cerase, "A Study of Italian Migrants Returning from the U.S.A.," *International Migration Review* 1, no. 3 (1967): 67, accessed November 10, 2023, doi.org/10.2307/3002741; Francesco P. Cerase, "Expectations and Reality: A Case Study of Return Migration from the United States to Southern Italy," *International Migration Review* 8, no. 2 (1974): 245–62, accessed November 10, 2023, doi.org/10.1177/019791837400800210.

grano e che son quasi 8 milioni i nostri proletari all'estero. Facciamo i conti ed invece di rallegrarci, inorridiamo. (*L'Italia*, September 3, 1912)

The true emigration stories, and not the *fanatics' fantasies*, tell us that there are very few Italian workers who have learnt civilization and socialism from emigration. The opposite is true. And let's not be impressed by the blessed 800 million that reach Italy every year. Let's think instead that every year, 800,000 Italians emigrate and that almost 8 million Italian proletarians are abroad. Let's do the math; rather than being cheerful, we should be *horrified*.

The sharp contrast with the national narrative suggests that Italian migrants felt that their struggles were downplayed or even denied and that their experiences were overall deeply misunderstood. It also shows that the Italian migrants' community was aware of the propaganda-style discourse of emigration by the Italian government, which emphasized the benefits of emigration while obscuring its dark side.

After World War I, however, the national debate on remigration shifted from framing remigration as being “good for the country” to being discouraged as harmful. This was caused by the fact that post-war Italy was struggling to confront the economic costs of the war, with inflation, product shortages, and unemployment among the worst challenges to be faced. The following excerpt is taken from *L'Italia* on 7 October 1919 (emphasis mine).

*Ed in quanto agli Italiani degli Stati Uniti, in mezzo ai quali si va manifestando uno crescente movimento di rimpatrio, essi faranno **opera saggia e proficua – per se e per la patria** – a rimanere al momento presente là dove si trovano. Qui verrebbero ad aumentare i disagi e la disoccupazione: costa' potranno continuare ad accumulare i loro ben meritati e non difficili guadagni e nel tempo stesso ad aiutare in patria lontana coll'invio di una parte dei loro risparmi come già facevano ottimamente in passato sotto forma di **sussidi alle proprie famiglie**. Coloro che desiderano tornare qui temporaneamente o permanentemente, aspettino a farlo quando le condizioni saranno notevolmente migliorate.* (*L'Italia*, October 7, 1919)

As for the Italians in the United States, who are increasingly showing a desire for repatriation, they will make a *wise and beneficial choice – for themselves and for the nation* – if they stay for the moment wherever they are. Here [in Italy] they would worsen *problems* and increase unemployment: over there, they will be able to accumulate their well-deserved and *not-difficult to make earnings* whilst at the same time *help their families* by sending them their savings, as they were doing before. Those who would like to return either temporarily or permanently should wait until conditions have improved.

The excerpt was published on the front page of the mainstream immigrant newspaper *L'Italia* as an appeal to Italians in the United States not to return to Italy. The passage reveals the opportunistic view through which migrants were seen in Italy. By means of moral blackmail (i.e., “a beneficial choice for the nation”), it

was deemed best that migrants should stay in America from where they could continue to help their families; if they repatriated, they would selfishly worsen the Italian situation. The excerpt also shows how the myth of “easy money” was often used in reference to migrants’ remittances, an oversimplified narrative that would encourage more people to migrate, since migration was coined as being beneficial for the country. In reality, like millions of other migrants, Italians were often exploited as cheap labor and forced to work in extremely poor conditions.

For over two decades, the Italian government had promoted emigration as a necessary, yet temporary evil. Remigration had been encouraged, indeed even expected. Emigration without return was considered as proof of the Italian failure to modernize and grow. For this reason, naturalization was actively discouraged; for example, according to the law, Italians acquiring other countries’ citizenships would immediately lose the Italian one. Once back in Italy, regaining Italian citizenship was so difficult that many Italians gave up returning altogether. But the millions of Italian migrants who were naturalized felt exploited and betrayed by the Italian government. The following excerpt is taken from *La Sentinella* of August 5, 1922 (emphasis mine).

Ora non e' giusto che dieci milioni di cittadini non abbiano diritto di essere rappresentati al Parlamento e non godano dei vantaggi civili sol perche' sono andati fuori della Patria e lavorare pel bene della Patria stessa. E con atroce ironia, quella stessa autorita' che fa appello al rivoilo d'oro delle rimesse degli emigrati, e' la stessa che si affretta a cancellarli dalle liste elettorali non appena viene loro rilasciato il passaporto. (La Sentinella, August 5, 1922)

Now it is *not fair* that ten million citizens do not have the right to be represented in the Parliament and to benefit from civil rights simply because they *left the nation to work for the nation's own good*. It is with atrocious irony that the same authority that appeals to the *golden river of migrants' remittances* is the same that rushes to delete them from the electoral rolls as soon as they are issued a passport.

The passage highlights how Italian Americans felt exploited by the Italian government. Emigrants had been forced to migrate but they were only appreciated for their economic value to the nation for as long as they were sending remittances to their families in Italy; migrants felt abandoned by a nation that would not listen to them if they continued to stay abroad. The passage reveals how migrants resented the Italian government for seeking economic interests and for regarding migration and migrants exclusively for their economic value.

Austria

The National Debate Between 1850 and 1950

The earliest reports of return migration from the Americas to Austria-Hungary documented in Austrian national newspapers can be traced back to 1853. Compared to Spain, Portugal, or England, transatlantic emigration from Austria-Hungary was slower and more restrained; as a result (mass) return migration started later. Prior to 1850, religious or political reasons were the primary drivers for leaving Austria-Hungary. From 1821 to 1890, approximately 430,000 people left the Habsburg monarchy,⁴² while it is estimated that between 1876 and 1910, around five million people emigrated from the country.⁴³ This mass emigration consequently led to mass return migration movements (up to 50 %), which sparked public debates, especially when the number of returnees exceeded that of emigrants.

Prior to 1904, Austrian national newspapers predominantly featured stories of failed migrants, highlighting themes of delusion and disappointment, which can be attributed to the Austrian government's migration policy, which opposed emigration by the end of the nineteenth century and aimed to prevent it. Newspapers served as a platform to disseminate negative experiences of emigrants, not only for informational purposes but also to deter potential emigrants. Some articles were even explicitly titled *Warning for Emigrants*, as seen in the *Gemeinde-Zeitung: Unabhängiges Politisches Journal*.⁴⁴ In these warnings, the act of returning to one's home country was portrayed as a failure resulting from difficult economic situations or even as a fraudulent scheme by emigration agencies.⁴⁵ In many of those stories, allegedly deceived returnees also explicitly warned against emigration (emphasis mine):

Gestern Nachts kamen aus Genua 227 österreichische Auswanderer [. . .] hier an und mußten mit Hilfe milder Spenden gespeist und untergebracht werden. Dieselben behaupten, getäuscht und betrogen worden zu sein, und warnen nun vor der Auswanderung nach Brasilien. (Gemeinde-Zeitung: Unabhängiges Politisches Journal, December 19, 1873)

⁴² Neyer, "Auswanderungen aus Österreich: Von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart."

⁴³ Michael Hüter, *Vertriebene und Auswanderer: Österreichischer im pazifischen Nordwesten der USA* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 1996).

⁴⁴ "Zell in Tirol (Warnung für Auswanderer)," *Gemeinde-Zeitung: Unabhängiges Politisches Journal*, December 19, 1873.

⁴⁵ "Traurige Rückkehr aus Amerika," *Epoche*, September 15, 1878.

Last night 227 Austrian emigrants [. . .] arrived from Genoa and had to be fed and accommodated with the help of donations. They claim to *have been deceived* and now warn against emigrating to Brazil.

Only in the early twentieth century did the framing of returnees change towards a more positive picture, especially before, during, and after the World War I. Due to the failure to prevent emigration, the monarchy became an active promoter of return migration, hoping to achieve economic as well as nationalist goals (especially in Hungary) through returnees,⁴⁶ with the narratives on return migration in the newspaper mirroring this development. It is also not surprising that the motifs of delusion and disappointment appeared primarily when emigrants returned to Austria in the context of economic crises in America. It was easy to portray returnees who fled economic crises as failed emigrants and to use those stories of failure as a campaign against emigration.

The perception of returnees correlated with the quantity of returning emigrants. A notable instance was the 1907 financial crisis in the United States, which triggered a substantial wave of return migration, with about 129,000 emigrants departing the United States for Europe during November 1907 alone. This occurrence led to a shift in how returnees were depicted in the public eye. Amid this crisis, prevailing patterns in the narratives on return migration revolved around both threats and benefits of return. While returnees could bring useful skills and capital back to their country of origin, cases of destitution, dependence, and liberal thoughts were labeled as a threat to the domestic economy or the government.⁴⁷

Especially in the winter months of 1907, the returnees were perceived as a danger, both politically and economically. Political consequences were expected from the return of those emigrants who had previously wanted to escape the nationality conflict in Austria-Hungary. It was feared that those migrants, who had enjoyed a certain personal and political freedom in America, would now become pioneers in the fight for their own nationality and “noticeably strengthen the anti-Magyar nationalist movement.”⁴⁸ This was especially true for Slavic-speaking migrants, believed to have developed a stronger “nationalism” towards their own minority in the United States and to have resisted the monarchy’s privileging of German- and Hungarian-language ethnicities. Also, migrants in general might have held more

⁴⁶ Kristina E. Poznan, “Return Migration to Austria-Hungary from the United States in Homeland Economic and Ethnic Politics and International Diplomacy,” *The Hungarian Historical Review* 6, no. 3 (2017): 647–67.

⁴⁷ Drew Keeling, *The Business of Transatlantic Migration between Europe and the United States, 1900–1914* (Zürich: Chronos, 2012).

⁴⁸ “Die Heimkehr der Auswanderer,” *Reichspost*, December 17, 1907; “Die Rückwanderung aus Amerika,” *Salzburger Chronik für Stadt und Land*, November 29, 1907.

democratic convictions than was desirable for the monarchic institutions in the empire. The spread of separatist nationalism, democracy, and socialism were all threats that the Austro-Hungarian government carefully considered when return migration movements increased.⁴⁹ Economic consequences for the domestic labor market were equally feared “because the thousands who return from the inhospitable New World come over to us looking for work and compete with the local worker.”⁵⁰ Likewise, lower wages and higher living costs were expected due to mass return migration. The *Salzburger Chronik für Stadt und Land*, for example, reported in 1907 (emphasis mine):

Folge dieses Rückströmens von Hunderttausenden arbeitsuchenden Konsumenten wird eine Vermehrung des Arbeitsangebotes und der Nachfrage nach den notwendigsten Mitteln des Lebensunterhaltes sein. [. . .] Die Häufung der Arbeitsnachfrage muß auf den Arbeitslohn senkend einwirken, während die vermehrte Nachfrage nach jenen notwendigsten Mitteln des Lebensunterhaltes den Preis dieser letzteren nur noch mehr zum Steigen anregen dürfte. (Salzburger Chronik für Stadt und Land, November 29, 1907)

The consequence of the return of hundreds of thousands of consumers looking for work will be an increase in the supply of labor and demand for the most necessary means of living. [. . .] The accumulation of the demand for labor *must have a diminishing effect* on wages, while the increased demand for those most necessary means of living should only *stimulate the price* of the latter to rise even more.

Already at the beginning of 1908, however, the media image of returnees veered towards a more positive portrayal of returnees. While masses of unemployed and destitute returnees were initially expected to plunge Austria-Hungary into an economic crisis, the focus now shifted to the prosperity that the returnees brought with them. “Among the recent returnees,” media reported in February 1908, “there were very few destitute poor, but mostly people who had worked in America for a few years and returned home with their savings.”⁵¹ In this context, the danger-argument forwarded in the newspapers disappeared and the narrative of the benefit became the dominant pattern.

⁴⁹ Poznan, “Return Migration to Austria-Hungary from the United States in Homeland Economic and Ethnic Politics and International Diplomacy.”

⁵⁰ “Volkswirtschaftliche Wochenschau,” *Innsbrucker Nachrichten*, November 30, 1907. German original: *Denn die Tausende, die aus der ungastlichen Neuen Welt zurückkehren, kommen zu uns herüber, um Arbeit zu suchen und machen dem hiesigen Arbeiter Konkurrenz.*

⁵¹ “Bei Rückwanderung aus Amerika übertrieben,” *Salzburger Chronik von Stadt und Land*, February 17, 1908. German original: *[. . .] gab es unter den Rückwanderern der letzten Zeit [. . .] nur sehr wenige mittellose Arme, sondern zumeist Leute die einige Jahre in Amerika gearbeitet haben und mit den Ersparnissen in die Heimat zurückkehrten.*

Benefit narratives, however, were often followed by arguments of uselessness, based on the perception that the expected benefits from return migration, such as manpower or general prosperity, did not materialize; again, the most frequent use of this narrative occurred in 1908, in the wake of the “Panic of 1907.” Newspapers reported that employment agencies set up for the returnees in 1907/08 remained empty because returnees brought enough savings to avoid having to work and would go back to America when the crisis was over.⁵² The *Wiener Montags-Journal*, for example, reported in December 1907 (emphasis mine):

Es ist bereits wiederholt darauf hingewiesen, daß diese Rückwanderer [. . .] erfahrungsmäßig so schnell wie möglich und auf dem kürzesten Wege in ihre außerdeutsche Heimat zurückzukehren wünschen, und sich hier, wo sie mit ausreichenden Geldmitteln eintreffen, zunächst von der Arbeit gründlich ausruhen. (Wiener Montags-Journal, December 30, 1907)

It has already been repeatedly pointed out that these returnees [. . .] wish to return to their non-German homeland as quickly as possible by the shortest route, and that here, where they arrive with sufficient funds, they first take a thorough *rest from their work* [. . .].

For many returnees, the return to their country of origin was only temporary and they had no interest in finding work or re-integrating into Austria-Hungarian society. Others may have been planning a permanent return and were looking for work but could not settle in their home country.

The era of the wars in the twentieth century had changed the perception of returnees in Austria again. Before, during, and after the two world wars, former Austrian emigrants were encouraged by the government to return to their country of origin, with free passage and the promise of aid providing the necessary impulses. For men in the right age group, coercion or an appeal to patriotism complemented these narratives if emigrants were required to do military service.⁵³ In July 1917, the *Parlamentarische Chronik*, for example, reported the following from the plenary session of the Hungarian Reichstag (emphasis mine):

Ackerbauminister Mezőssy erklärt, daß die Regierung alles daran setze, damit der durch den Krieg bewirkte Ausfall an Menschenmaterial auf jedem Gebiete so rasch als möglich und so gut als möglich ersetzt werde. Namentlich was die Rückwanderung betreffe, seien alle notwendigen Verfügungen getroffen worden, und er habe schon jetzt die detaillierteste Statistik ausarbeiten lassen damit die Rückwanderer schon beim Betreten der Heimat entsprechend informiert werden, wo sie Grund und Boden erhalten können. (Parlamentarische Chronik. Beilage Zur Politischen Chronik, 1917)

52 “Rückwanderung,” *Die Neue Zeitung*, January 15, 1908.

53 “Die Regelung des Auswanderungsverkehrs in Österreich,” *Innsbrucker Nachrichten*, July 4, 1914.

Minister of Agriculture Mezőssy declares that the government is doing everything possible to ensure that *the loss of human material caused by the war is replaced as quickly as possible and as well as possible in every field*. In particular, as far as return migration is concerned, all the necessary arrangements have been made, and he has already had the most detailed statistics worked out so that the returnees are already informed accordingly when they enter the homeland, where they can obtain land.

However, many European emigrants were stranded in America for the duration of both world wars. Thousands of European emigrants who had originally planned their stay in America to be a temporary one became permanent citizens due to their prolonged stay during the war and the benefits of Americanization – and their allegiance to their new homeland – during the conflict.⁵⁴

Narratives in German American Immigrant Newspapers

In German-language U.S. immigrant newspapers, debates about return migration reflected national U.S. and European debates. Immigrants also used these channels to share their own experiences, stories, and thoughts. Two key narratives that frequently appeared in German-language immigrant newspapers in connection with the topic of return migration were those of alienation and losing their money in America.

Narratives about alienation provided insights into the fears and thoughts of European emigrants. For example, Stefan Großmann, a Viennese who had emigrated to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century and was considering a return, described his doubts in the newspaper *Deutscher Herold* in 1911 as follows (emphasis mine):

Ich kehre also als Rentier mit einer halben Million nach Wien zurück, bin Amerikamüde, fahre von Calais über Genua im Eiltempo nach Wien und – ich finde es nicht mehr! Das heißt: Es gibt zwar noch einen Bahnhof namens Wien, aber in Wirklichkeit ist es nur eine kleine Stadt an der Donau oder so ähnlich. (Deutscher Herold, September 2, 1911)

So I return to Vienna as a pensioner with half a million, I'm tired of America, I drive from Calais via Genoa to Vienna in a rush and – I can't find it anymore! That means there is still a train station called Vienna, but in reality it is just a small town on the Danube or something like that.

⁵⁴ Poznan, “Return Migration to Austria-Hungary from the United States in Homeland Economic and Ethnic Politics and International Diplomacy.”

This narrative, in which returnees become strangers to their homelands or homelands become strangers to returnees, gives a unique insight into the concerns and anxieties that accompany return migrants. Stefan Großmann no longer found his hometown as he remembered it. “Every day an old piece of Vienna falls, about which one would not have to cry, if only the new Viennese language were bearable,”⁵⁵ he further complained in his comment. Großmann’s home had changed during his absence and a return implied integrating into a new world. His example shows how returnees had to juggle with transnational identities that combined their old and new lives. All these factors could have negative psychological consequences for returnees, as there was a discrepancy between who they became and who they were before their migration. In addition to these psychological and identity related factors, the war in Europe had also caused the homeland to become a foreign country for returnees.⁵⁶ In 1908, the struggles of “people whose home has become a stranger and the stranger has become home”⁵⁷ even became a political issue in the United States, after many emigrants fled due to the “Panic of 1907” and took their savings back to their country of origin, with this mass return causing concerns of economic loss in the United States.⁵⁸ Oscar S. Straus, the Secretary of Commerce and Labor in the United States, however, noticed that many returnees had difficulties re-integrating in their homeland, which brought a considerable number of them back to the United States. In order to make their return easier, he issued an order exempting returnees from the examination process when entering the U.S., which did not as yet distinguish between migrants from Europe or returnees who migrated again.⁵⁹

Historian Neil Larry Shumsky wrote in 1992 about the fear of economic consequences of return migration for America:

For more than three decades, influential Americans, representatives of the government, press, and economy opposed return migration from the United States. [. . .] They feared that these returnees, manipulated by foreign institutions, would take the enormous hoards of cash [. . .] and they became truly alarmed about the potential effects on the American economy.⁶⁰

However, return migration was not only criticized in the public discourse but also within immigration circles themselves. In 1907, for example, the German-

⁵⁵ “Das demolierte Wien,” *Deutscher Herold*, September 2, 1911.

⁵⁶ “Aus Österreich zurückgekehrt,” *Der Deutsche Correspondent*, October 16, 1914.

⁵⁷ “Rückkehrende Eingewanderte,” *Freie Presse Für Texas*, December 24, 1908.

⁵⁸ Shumsky, “Let No Man Stop to Plunder!” American Hostility to Return Migration, 1890-1924.”

⁵⁹ “Rückkehrende Eingewanderte.”

⁶⁰ Shumsky, “Let No Man Stop to Plunder!” American Hostility to Return Migration, 1890-1924.”

language immigrant newspaper *Der Deutsche Correspondent* reported: “Of course, a good amount of gold is lost to this country by this backflow [. . .]. That our gold reserves are diminished by the return migration, even considerably, is natural.”⁶¹ Especially after World War I, when a mass return movement was expected since many migrants had not been able to return home during the war, the fear of loss of money was strong. The immigrant newspaper *Nord Stern* reported in 1919 (emphasis mine):

Die American Bankers Association ist bereits in Angst gerathen, da all die Rückwanderer Geld mitnehmen [. . .] nachdem sie Haus und Heim [. . .] versilbert haben. Sie möchten die Leute jetzt halten, denen Unvernünftige hierzulande so oft zugerufen haben ‘Go back where you came from’. (*Nord Stern*, September 5, 1919)

The American Bankers Association is already in fear because all the return migrants are taking money with them [. . .] after they have sold their house and home [. . .]. They now want to keep the returnees at whom unreasonable people in this country have so often shouted ‘Go back where you came from.

The numerous debates in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German-language immigrant newspapers about the (economic) losses to America give insight into a situation in which return migration was not supported by compatriots. According to sociologist Charles Jaret, immigrant newspapers provided a voice for immigrants who settled permanently in the United States and played an essential role for Americanization and socialization.⁶² Returnees, on the other hand, were handled as “not true Americans”⁶³ and immigrant newspapers, like the *Arkansas Echo* in 1919, continued to underline: “The foreign-language press has, on the whole, spoken out against return migration, and the same may be said of many eminent persons among the foreigners.”⁶⁴

Conclusions

This chapter investigated return migration through the narratives of migration, both in the public discourse and by migrants themselves, and compared two use cases: Italian and Austrian transatlantic migration and remigration. The analysis

61 “Rückwanderung,” *Der Deutsche Correspondent*, November 7, 1907.

62 Charles Jaret, “The Greek, Italian, and Jewish American Ethnic Press: A Comparative Analysis,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 7, no. 2 (1979): 47–70.

63 Shumsky, “Let No Man Stop to Plunder!” American Hostility to Return Migration, 1890–1924.”

64 “Die Rückwanderung nach Europa.”

identified several patterns in the way migration and returned migration were narrated and perceived versus how they were narrated and experienced. It also highlighted the intricate relationship between migration, nationalism, economic policies, and political stability in both the sending and receiving countries.

Return migrants often engaged in discussions about their identity and sense of belonging, both in the host country and their country of origin, with these narratives revealing questions such as (cultural) identity, integration, and the challenges of navigating multiple social and cultural contexts. The discourse of return migration was deeply intertwined with economic aspects and sometimes connected with discussions of reintegrating into the home country. The analysis of narratives of Italian migrants in particular brought into sharp focus the perpetual clash between the individual and the government, especially the inability of the government to understand the complexity of migration as a traumatic psychological experience, both for the migrants and for the national citizens. For example, in national debates, Italian returnees were praised for their acquired entrepreneurialism and for transferring the skills acquired abroad to the home society. Depending on the extent to which returnees would adjust to this narrative, they were assigned to more or less rigid categories (e.g., migrants of failure, migrants of retirement, good Italians, bad Italians). By contrast, the narratives identified in the Italian immigrant newspapers revealed how the more authentic voices of the migrants attempted to counter the official narrative of migration and return migration. It also showed how such categories influenced the public perception of migrants, triggering a mutual feedback loop between the public discourse of migration and return migration and the perception of migrants and returnees by the public.

The Austrian example illustrates how narratives on return migration (national debates as well as immigrant voices) reflected changes in the political and economic climate of both America and Austria(-Hungary). While legitimization strategies prevailed in national debates on return migration to achieve economic and political goals, immigrant newspapers played a vital role in shaping public opinion on return migration and promoting Americanization. The results of the analysis further show that Austrian national narratives changed over time; before 1904, Austrian newspapers often portrayed returnees negatively, framing their return as a failure and discouraging emigration, however, the failure to prevent emigration and a shift in migration policy at the beginning of the twentieth century led to a more positive portrayal of returnees in Austrian newspapers. During the 1907–08 financial crisis in the United States, the narratives on return migration focused on both the potential economic benefits and the perceived threat to the domestic labor market as well as political stability. On the other hand, the personal experiences of migrants revealed that returnees struggled

with transnational identities that combined their old and new lives, and many found it challenging to reintegrate into their homelands.

The analysis of different narratives of return migration highlighted the sharp contrast between migrants' expectations and the actual experiences upon return. This included discussions about anticipated opportunities, social status, and the challenges faced during the reintegration process.

Finally, although this was not the main focus of this study, it is important to state that discussions around return migration cannot be disconnected from policy and governance considerations. The role of governments and institutions in facilitating or hindering return migration, including policies related to reintegration, citizenship, and the recognition of skills acquired abroad was a common thread in the analyzed narratives and future studies could further explore the impact of such a role in the public perception of return migration.

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Alessandro Pes

7 *Colonists or Migrants? The Political Debate on Returns From the Former Colonies in Post-war Italy*

Abstract: After World War II, the end of Italian colonialism was marked by the 1947 Peace Treaty and subsequent UN resolutions in 1949. From 1946 to 1949, post-war Italian governments sought to regain control of their lost colonies by crafting narratives emphasizing Italian colonists' efforts to establish a "right" to "return to Africa." This chapter, drawing from a range of sources including diplomatic archives and colonists' associations, examines how labor emerged as the focal point in the reconstruction of Italy's colonial history from 1946 onward. The narratives portrayed Italian colonialism as a migration of proletarians and lower-class individuals, distinguishing it from other European colonial powers' exploitative practices. Examining the evolution of these narratives, this chapter assesses their impact on how post-war Italian society perceived its colonial history and depicted Italian former colonists as migrants.

Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to refute the belief that a hagiographic reading of the Italian colonial past, widespread in republican Italy, was a mere legacy of Fascism and to affirm that, precisely in its initial phases, the Italian Republic contributed to generating such a reading with the political objective of obtaining the administration of the former colonies. According to the theory developed in this chapter, the new democratic institutions used the figure of the "Italian refugees from Africa" (the Italian returnees from the colonies) to affirm the special, virtuous, hard-working, civilizing nature of Italian colonialism. The archival sources, in particular those relating to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with the analysis of articles on the colonial theme published by the newspaper *Il Popolo* (organ of the Christian Democrats, the main government party of the time), allow us to reconstruct how the Italian Republic tried between 1946 and 1950 to construct a reading of the colonial past centered on the work experiences of the Italian colonists. To support their right to return to the former colonies, the first democratic governments after Fascism generated a hagiographic reading of

the colonial past that significantly influenced the way in which Italian society would elaborate and conceive that past in the following decades.

Between 1946 and 1948, Italy, which was taking shape after the end of World War II and the conclusion of the Fascist period, tried to build a new social pact between the state and citizens through the work of the Constituent Assembly. Within a social and economic panorama in which the constituents found themselves thinking that the new Italy was bleak and the material and moral rubble of the war and the fascist dictatorship were present without interruption throughout the peninsula, from a political point of view, rethinking the nation was undoubtedly a challenging undertaking. In the same years in which the Constituent Assembly was trying to build a new Italy, the government was entrusted with managing the end of Italian colonialism. The relinquishment of the colonies had already been imposed on the Kingdom of Italy in the armistice clauses and then subsequently reaffirmed in the relevant clauses of the Peace Treaty of February 1947, however, these clauses left open various possibilities for a possible Italian administration in the former colonies, especially under the form of trusteeship.

In conjunction with the Assembly's term of office, the Italian government implemented a policy to take over the former colonies' administration from the victorious powers of World War II.¹ This policy materialized through intense diplomatic activity accompanied by propaganda work on both domestic and international fronts. The ultimate goal of the propaganda campaign was the interpretation of the Italian colonial past in a positive key; the result of this campaign was the emergence, on the institutional side, of a shared reading of what the colonial past had been and of the main characteristics by which the Italian colonists could be identified. The institutional documentation, the speeches given, and the numerous conference initiatives constituted moments through which the Italian government provided its official position on the colonial question, however, at the same time, they resulted in the essential passages through which Italian society would, from that moment, select its colonial past and choose which aspects of that history should be part of the republican identity and which would be rejected instead. The rhetoric and propaganda on the colonial issue implemented by the Italian government had a dual objective: to influence the countries that would need to vote resolutions on the administration of the former Italian colonies at the UN, and to unite internal public opinion around a specific and positive reading of the colonial past.

¹ See Gian Luigi Rossi, *L'Africa italiana verso l'indipendenza* (Milan: Giuffré, 1980); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale. Nostalgia delle colonie* (Rome; Bari: Laterza 1984); Pietro Pastorelli, *Il ritorno dell'Italia nell'Occidente, Racconto della politica estera italiana dal 15 settembre 1947 al 21 novembre 1949* (Milan: LED, 2009).

The political and propaganda effort to construct a narrative of a “positively-colonizing” Italy certainly preceded the period under examination, beginning in the years of the colonial presence.² The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how, especially during the period in which the future of the former Italian colonies was being discussed at the UN, the new Italy made a fundamental contribution to how its colonial past would subsequently be narrated and partly perceived, both by other countries and by the Italians themselves.

An Old Yet New Narrative for Italian Colonialism

The first element that characterized the Italian action plan was that of separating the colonial experience of liberal Italy from that of fascist Italy. By making this separation, the Italian government explicitly affirmed the legitimacy of the colonies conquered or acquired in the liberal period, instead distancing itself from the colonies, the Ethiopian empire which had been conquered during the fascist period. A dichotomy of this type did not question the legitimacy or otherwise of colonialism but dissociated itself from the methods of colonial conquest used during Fascism. In order not to lose its influence over the former colonies, the Italian government worked diplomatically, trying to obtain the support of France, Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The same discussion on the future of the former colonies developed mainly between a few stakeholders: Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and France, with Italy playing a marginal role.³

Similarly, if we exclude the investigation carried out in the former colonies by the Quadripartite Commission, Eritreans, Libyans, and Somalis did not play an essential role in decisions on the future of their territories. Like the colonial period, the whole debate on the fate of those territories took place between subjects outside the African context, relegating Africa to the object of contention. The only, (albeit very significant) element of difference concerning the past was the climate of decolonization which surrounded international discussions on the future of the former Italian colonies: a future which, as was reaffirmed in all circumstances, could not be disregarded, with the final objective being the independence of the popula-

² Cfr. Emanuele Ertola, *Il colonialismo degli italiani. Storia di una ideologia* (Roma: Carocci, 2022); Andrea Ungari, “I monarchici italiani e la questione coloniale,” in *Quel che resta dell’impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), 393–16.

³ Antonio Morone, *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2018). See also Derek Duncan and Jacqueline Andall, eds., *Italian colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Bern; New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

tions concerned. Already at the end of World War II, according to the perspective of a New Zealand official, the trusteeship formula itself had to be understood as the antithesis of colonialism and not its continuation through a different method of administration.⁴ However, the whole debate converged on the common belief that those populations were not capable (due to the level of civilization) of providing for themselves; based on this conviction, all the dynamics of Italian politics were based on the belief that it was necessary to trust in diplomacy, bypassing Africa in an attempt to posit the question of the former colonies within a more general rearrangement of alliances that was taking shape after the end of the world war.⁵

The Italian government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) and the Ministry of Italian Africa, acting as the Undersecretariat of the MAE, prepared numerous memoranda which had the purpose both of illustrating the Italian colonial past to the delegations of the UN member countries and supporting the request for Italian administration of the former colonies. This documentation avoided any criticism of the Italian work in the colonial period, and the reconstruction of Italian colonialism was resolved through the narrative of the civilizing work carried out by the colonizer towards the local populations. In particular, the work completed by the Italians in the colonies was exalted: both the activity concerning the exploitation of territories defined as “desert” and “wild” before the arrival of the colonizer and the work of “elevation” of the colonized populations.

In the official documentation, this attitude can be considered a constant, so much so that it became the primary key to understanding how, in a republican Italy setting, pre-fascist colonialism was presented in the international forum when requesting administrative power over the former colonies.

Colonial Politics and Propaganda in Post-war Italy

An example of such ministerial documentation is the memorandum prepared by the Cabinet Office of the Ministry of Italian Africa prepared in the summer of 1946, a memorandum on the clauses relating to Italian possessions in Africa contained in the draft peace treaty elaborated in Paris by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Allied Powers.

⁴ William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay 1941–1945, The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 2.

⁵ Gian Paolo Calchi Novati, *L’Africa d’Italia: una storia coloniale e postcoloniale* (Rome: Carocci, 2011), 351–52.

The Ministry's Border Commission prepared a study to support the legality of Italian claims in the former colonies. The long memorandum ended with annexes which, in the view of the commission, were to account for the treatment that the Italians had suffered in the former colonies from the British administration and the importance of the Italian presence in those territories.

Attachment 2 refers to the text of a complaint forwarded on June 14, 1946 by the elders of the Italian population of Tripolitania to the British Command of Tripoli. The complaint underlined that the lack of a fit body to represent the Italian community made it necessary for the authors to relate directly with the British command. The Italians complained that starting from 1943, there had been a constant deterioration of the political attitude towards their community, explaining that the British authority had allowed the occurrence of facts which inevitably led to the worsening of the condition of the Italian community and clarifying that this referred:

For example to the permitted presence in the territory of elements who have already left, notoriously anti-Italian; to the consent to a violently anti-Italian campaign by the local Arab press strictly controlled by the BMA, a campaign which in the last few days has culminated in a vulgarly and provocatively offensive publication [...] we are alluding again to the offensive order of non-fraternization which is maintained in this country [...] This order of non-fraternization has undoubtedly influenced the deleterious development of the situation we are dealing with because placed by a European population (English) towards another European population (Italian) in an environment of a population of non-Western civilization, there has undoubtedly mortified and humbled in the face of the latter towards which the British authorities have been generous with friendly and cordial treatments. We are alluding again to the condition of material misery into which a policy of wages and hunger has plunged the Italian community made up almost entirely of salaried workers and workers [...] once the war is over. It's long over, expect this spirit of understanding and degrading submission by a European population, which is treated as a colonial population of the lowest order; means wanting to bring it to exasperation and despair [...] we must therefore, in the name of civilization, human solidarity, the right to life and property, officially and formally ask the sole authority which here is responsible for order and therefore for our lives and our assets, to declare to us whether it can guarantee Italian men, women and children in Tripoli and outside Tripoli their life and property.⁶

In a secret report dated November 29, 1946, sent from Mogadishu to the Information Office of the Ministry of War, the informant pointed out how the industrious spirit of the Italians in the colony was weakened by the British authorities, who tried in every way to erase the positive effects of the Italian presence in the Red

⁶ Historical Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (henceforth MAE), Political Affairs (henceforth AA.PP.) 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, folder 15.

Sea region. The report highlighted that the British administration's constant policy was aimed at "gradually erasing every trace of Italian domination; mainly means, that of tiring the tenacity of the Italians, by opposing all kinds of obstacles to their activity. The aim is largely achieved and, with each steamer, hundreds of settlers repatriate."⁷ The document negatively underlined the behaviour of the British administration towards the Somalis:

Regarding the indigenous people, the administration pursues a policy of exploitation, paying low wages for the jobs – albeit insignificant – and imposing taxes. There are numerous unemployed natives, and discontent and poverty have, as a consequence, frequent cases of crimes against property. Although the various 'guy men' hired by the occupier carry out propaganda in its favour, the indigenous element misses Italy and protests against British impositions [...] the moral state [of Italians] is always very low, given the difficult conditions of life and uncertainty about the fate of the colony; of the Italians still, resident, estimated at around 4,000, around half want to be repatriated.⁸

Reports of the same nature reached various government offices in large numbers. On April 2, 1947, the Italian legation in Cairo sent a telex to the Italian embassy in London informing them that two Italians from Mogadishu had come to the legation's office; they were two Navy engineers resident in Somalia since 1939 who, during a long conversation, had provided information on the situation in Somalia. As regards the conditions of the Italians in the former colony, the two engineers had stated that 2,800 Italians still resided in the territory but that around 2,000 would shortly embark on the steamer "Vulcania" to repatriate. The economic status of the remaining 800 was considered secure, as most of them worked for the British authorities or managed their own companies.⁹

The story of the two Italians also focused on the living conditions of the Somalis who, it was noted, welcomed the British occupation in 1941. In the early years, according to the two engineers:

among the indigenous element, effective propaganda against Italian colonization was carried out by the British. Subsequently, the natives had the opportunity to note the economic decline of the colony and suffered the immediate consequences [...] today; similarly to what happens in Eritrea, many natives remember the Italian domination with nostalgia and come to freely express their sympathy for our country, expressing regret for the departure of his compatriots.¹⁰

⁷ MAE, AA.PP. 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, folder 15, news on the situation in Somalia.

⁸ MAE, AA.PP. 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, folder 15, news on the situation in Somalia.

⁹ MAE, AA.PP. 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, folder 15, News from Somalia.

¹⁰ MAE, AA.PP. 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, envelope 15, news on the situation in Somalia.

But the elaboration and crystallization of the idea of Italian colonialism as a movement of people and workers, which thus detached itself from the colonial process characterized by usurpation and power politics, find confirmation above all in the document that the Italian government presented to the Council of Foreign Ministers and which underwent numerous substantial changes during its drafting. The fulcrum of the speech concerned the political position that Italy assumed on the question of the former colonies. The central part of the speech was entirely aimed at illustrating the work that Italy had done in Africa in such a way as to support the final request for a trusteeship over all the former colonial territories. The speech referred to the rhetoric also used during the colonial expansion; Italy was represented as a “poor” and “migrant” country, and its colonialism, depicted as “special,” differed from the European and capitalist phenomenon of conquest and exploitation of overseas territories due to its “migrant” characteristic: “Italy – stated in the speech – has not sought in Libya, Eritrea and Somalia a fruitful use of capital, nor the implementation of grandiose industrial enterprises with the rational use of rich raw materials already existing on the spot [...] Italy has been to Africa, and now wants to go back, to contribute to the political, economic and civil evolution of those territories with its work.”¹¹ According to the Italian government, this peculiarity of Italian colonialism was full of consequences, the most important of which was the problem of Italian workers: “Farmers, workers and technicians, whose work has been necessary for Libya, Eritrea and Somalia and who cannot be excluded from those territories without compromising their chances of future progress.”¹² In the following passage of the speech, the reference to Italian work, which until then had been essentially linked to the economic and social development of the colonized populations, was also anchored to the progress of the Italian nation: “The Italian government, when it asks, as it does today, the trusteeship over those territories [...] essentially poses the problem of Italian labor which in the current situation of Italy constitutes the essential basis of the whole system of political and economic reconstruction of Italian life.”¹³ The speech continued with the government’s interesting and significant consideration on who the “Italian workers” referred to in the last part of the document were. This part of the speech changed from the final draft; while the first draft stated that the Italian emigrants in the former colonies should be considered as one of the populations settled in those re-

¹¹ MAE, AA.PP. 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, envelope 15, Draft of the speech to the Conference of Substitutes.

¹² MAE, AA.PP. 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, envelope 15, Draft of the speech to the Conference of Substitutes.

¹³ MAE, AA.PP. 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, envelope 15, Draft of the speech to the Conference of Substitutes.

gions, the final version added a significant example to this paragraph, calling the Italian emigrants “Italians of Africa” and comparing this presence in the former colonies to that of Afrikaners in South Africa. After these changes, the document stated that: “they [the Italian colonists] are no longer only Italians; but in reality, they are Italians from Africa, citizens of Libya, Eritrea and Somalia, as Afrikaners are from South Africa.”¹⁴

This approach to the question also reverberated in parliamentary work, as demonstrated by the discussion that took place in the Chamber of Deputies in December 1949. The socialist deputies Giuseppe Lupis and Riccardo Lombardi signed an interpellation with the President of the Council of Ministers, interim minister of Italian Africa, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

To know, faced with the repetition of tragic episodes of violence against Italians in the territories of the former colonies, what international action has taken place and what guarantees it has obtained in defence of the life and property of our compatriots; and also to know – in the face of the almost definitive liquidation of our ex-colonies – what negotiations it has promoted, also for a gradual return of our compatriots to those territories, where they had now resided for decades and where their children were born.¹⁵

Lupis-Lombardi's interpellation referred to the killings of some Italians, which took place on November 19, 1949 in Eritrea and complained of the government's silence regarding a long list of deaths in overseas territories. Lupis accused the government of a scant consideration of the problem; this, according to the socialist deputy, derived from the fact that the government did not consider, as it should have, these problems as essential questions of the “defence of Italian life, property and work abroad.”¹⁶

Lupis debated the almost 40 Italian deaths in Eritrea between 1948 and 1949, accusing the government, but above all the Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlo Sforza, of having underestimated the incident in order not to disturb an international balance which Italy had not yet acquired. Sforza had previously described

¹⁴ MAE, AA.PP. 1946–1950, Italy Colonies Section, envelope 15, Draft of the speech to the Conference of Substitutes.

¹⁵ *Parliamentary Acts*, Chamber of Deputies, December 12, 1949, 14218. With similar interpellation also, the deputies: Guido Russo Perez (Fronte dell'Uomo qualunque), Giorgio Almirante (Mixed Group), Arturo Michelini (Mixed Group), Roberto Mievile (Mixed Group), and Giovanni Roberti (Mixed Group). The honorable Gaspare Ambrosini (Democrazia cristiana) also intervened with another interpellation on the same subject.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the Italian deaths in Eritrea as the cause of a mourning that would leave “a deep imprint on the sentiment of the Italian people.”¹⁷

In essence, the interpellation placed a request on the government regarding the conditions of security for the Italians in Eritrea and a clear position in demanding that Great Britain guarantee protection of the Italians in Eritrea. One of the most interesting aspects of the interpellation can be found in the final question that Lupis posed to the government, in which he made clear reference to work as an explicit characteristic of the Italians in Eritrea, stating that he wanted to know if: “there is the hope that the tranquillity, security, the guarantee will return for those of our compatriots who defend the free right of Italian labor in Africa with their very presence.”¹⁸ Italian labor emerged, also in Lupis’ interpellation, as the main beneficial element of the Italian presence in the colony.¹⁹

Political Parties’ Press and the Colonial Question

One of the channels through which political parties addressed the issue of the former colonies was the party press. For the main ruling party, the Christian Democrats, the party newspaper *Il Popolo* repeatedly hosted articles on the colonial theme during the period of the Constituent Assembly. If, on the one hand, reports of the international discussions on the future of the former Italian colonies published by the newspaper fulfilled the need to inform readers of the events of the contemporary present, on the other hand, those articles contributed to constructing a historical reinterpretation of the Italian colonial past. On February 5, 1946, Guido Gonella published an article entitled “Who is self-harming?”, a response from the entire Christian Democrats to the accusations of a lack of a foreign policy line made by the journalist Italo Zingarelli. The journalist accused the DC and the Italian government of a self-harm approach for not having developed its position in foreign policy; after the party replied by stating that it had voted on a foreign policy motion which had subsequently been endorsed by the “neo-Centre of diplomatic personalities,” Zingarelli underlined that it was clear that the foreign

¹⁷ Speech by Carlo Sforza at the National Congress of the Italian Republican Party in 1949. *Atti Parlamentari*, Chamber of Deputies, December 12, 1949, 14220.

¹⁸ *Atti Parlamentari*, Chamber of Deputies, sitting of December 12, 1949, 14220.

¹⁹ See Pamela Ballinger, *The world refugees made. Decolonization and the foundation of postwar Italy* (Ithaca; New York: Cornell University Press, 2020).

minister De Gasperi, “who is the chief of the Christian Democratic Party, did not take it into account.”²⁰

According to Gonella, the most authoritative foreign policy text drafted by the Italian government was the letter sent by De Gasperi to US Secretary of State James F. Byrnes. The article summarized the various points developed by the foreign minister in his letter. In summarizing and emphasizing the language used in the letter, Gonella wrote that De Gasperi had clarified that: “the original Italian colonies do not touch each other, except for strategic guarantees to England and concessions of an economic and commercial nature to Ethiopia.”²¹ Gonella rejected the accusation of self-harm on behalf of the party, stating that De Gasperi had gone to the London meetings not to “offer up pieces of Italy” but to defend the homeland. The founder of *Il Popolo* recalled how the Christian Democrats were the first who

arose to defend the Italian spirit of Trieste, the inviolability of our ethnic borders, the irreplaceable civilizing work of Italian labor in our colonies. Naturally, we have been attacked as ‘fascists’ as if we could be shocked by appearing what we are not, as if those opponents of ours who do not distinguish the defence of Italian blood and labor rights from megalomania, continue to be infected with the fascism imperialism of yesterday and the self-defeating sadism of today.²²

Already in 1946, Gonella made public through his editorial what was to become the official representation of the debate on the Italian colonies. The defense of the colonies was not to be interpreted by public opinion as the defense of a colonial system of oppression but as the defense of the essential needs of the Italian people; the defense of Italian labor in Africa to the bitter end diverted the question from the dynamics of prestige politics even though the reference to the civilizing work constituted a direct reference to the late nineteenth-century colonial logic that imposed a civilized/uncivilized dichotomy which in itself justified (in the eyes of public opinion of the colonizing countries) the oppression of one people by another.

Just two days after Gonella’s editorial, the London correspondent Vincenzo Cecchini intervened in the newspaper with an article on the meeting between the big four at Lancaster House. The journalist explained the extent to which the fate of the former Italian colonies was of interest not only to the populations directly involved but also to Egypt and Ethiopia, who looked to those territories as possi-

²⁰ Guido Gonella, “Chi è autolesionista?,” *Il Popolo*, February 5, 1946, 1.

²¹ Guido Gonella, “Chi è autolesionista?,” *Il Popolo*, February 5, 1946, 1.

²² Guido Gonella, “Chi è autolesionista?,” *Il Popolo*, February 5, 1946, 1.

ble places for expansion. At the beginning of 1946, Cecchini posited the trusteeship formula as the solution by now accepted on an international level; according to the journalist, it was only a question of evaluating who should administer the former colonies. According to the correspondent, the crux of the matter lay in the need for continuity in the administration and thus in the administrator, who alone could guarantee the best interests of the African populations.²³ Cecchini closed his report by asking his readers to consider why the recent clashes between Arabs and Jews in Tripolitania had not occurred during the Italian administration; the implicit answer lay in the unequivocal skills demonstrated in the past by colonial Italy, qualities that people tried to set aside and ignore during any discussion on the future of the former Italian colonies.

From a doctrinal point of view, the Christian Democrats accepted the new position on colonial issues assumed by the pope. In his address to the new cardinals, Pius XII harshly criticized modern imperialism, contrasting the need for territorial expansion of national states with Christian imperialism founded on universalism. Guido Gonella gave an account of the pontifical clarification on the “healthy” imperialistic spirit which was to inform Christians in his article of February 21, 1946, writing that “the Church [. . .] universal society follows the opposite path to that of modern imperialism. In its excessive tendency towards expansion, this sacrifices mankind, while the Church forms Man, modelling and perfecting the divine likeness in him. Therefore, the presupposition, the procedure, and the end are different.”²⁴ The article went on to criticize the materialism of contemporary imperialism which bends the needs and freedoms of people to the will of a few countries. By speaking on the question of imperialism, the pontiff was simultaneously giving doctrinal indications to the Christian community and expressing a clear political position on the issue that Catholics had to adopt. Gonella highlighted how Pius XII’s words established a schism in the ways in which the relationship between peoples and nations had to be rethought in the post-World War II context. According to the author of the article, the pontiff’s speech placed the Catholic Church in a new role compared to the past:

In the face of the gigantic political bodies that the end of the war has made even more gigantic without adding any moral nourishment to them, in the face of the empires that are maintained solely by force and with the external constraint of material conditions and juridical expedients without any support in the intimate adhesion of peoples. The pontiff has demonstrated how vast the influence of the Church can be on the foundation of human soci-

²³ See Valeria Deplano, *La madrepatria è una terra straniera. Libici, eritrei e somali nell’Italia del dopoguerra (1945–1960)* (Milan: Mondadori-Le Monnier, 2017).

²⁴ Guido Gonella, “Contro l’imperialismo moderno. Il discorso di Pio XII ai nuovi cardinali,” *Il Popolo*, February 21, 1946, 1.

ety as regards the solidity and security of her institutions, the cohesion and balance of her organisms, the equality of her members and her normal development in space and time. With its supranational nature, the Church presented itself, according to Pius XII, as a prototype of a universal society “freed from all narrowness of sects and from all exclusivity of imperialism.”²⁵

In the first part of 1947, the future of the former Italian colonies returned to the fore with an interview that Alcide De Gasperi gave to Radio Roma and which the Christian Democrat daily newspaper reported in full. The prime minister and *ad interim* minister of Italian Africa first expressed the possibility that Italy could obtain the trusteeship of those territories. De Gasperi underlined that when referring to the former Italian territories, the word “colonies” should not be used since it was directly related to a concept that, according to the prime minister, belonged to the past. On this point, De Gasperi added that: “the idea of the domination of one people over another is repugnant to the new democratic Italy, which could be implicit in the concept of a colony.”²⁶ As can be seen, while De Gasperi rejected the use of the term “colony” due to its being potentially linked to a vision of the world which one must reject, he nevertheless left open the possibility that there exists a virtuous colonialism which can disregard the domination of one population over another. Regardless of the international decisions that would arrive, De Gasperi affirmed that Italy intended to establish a democratic government in those territories based on cooperation, with equal rights between Italians and natives. The prime minister also explained that Italy would not take hasty decisions on important issues such as the institutional structure of the former colonies before having heard the opinion of the populations “of each territory entrusted to our care.” In an extreme attempt to represent Italy as a peacemaking country, De Gasperi affirmed that the government would not in any way prosecute individuals and political groups who, during or after the war, had assumed anti-Italian attitudes. Concerning Libya, De Gasperi highlighted the significant progress made by the country in the previous 30 years, progress achieved for “Italy’s undeniable merits”; it was natural in the eyes of the Italian prime minister that “the Arab-Berber populations [...] especially in their more educated classes, today find themselves sharing the ideas and aspirations of all the other Arab peoples.” The representation of Italy as a virtuous colonizer was anchored, in Degasper’s discourse, to the evidence of Italian liberality which, already after World War I, had allowed Cyrenaica and Tripolitania to maintain their own parliament. This appeal

25 Guido Gonella, “Contro l’imperialismo moderno. Il discorso di Pio XII ai nuovi cardinali,” *Il Popolo*, February 21, 1946, 1.

26 Alcide De Gasperi, “L’Italia in Africa,” *Il Popolo*, April 9, 1947, 1.

by De Gasperi to the pre-fascist colonial policy was functional in demonstrating that the government of Rome had already given proof as a colonizing power “of the will to initiate that population into self-government concretely.” The question of Eritrea appeared more complex for De Gasperi, with this complexity related to “the variety of races that inhabit that country and the religious division of the population.” However, at the same time, Eritrea presented a more straightforward situation than that of Libya because “Italy has been able to make this country, thanks to its balanced action, an inseparable unity in which all religions and races, including the Italian element, lived for over fifty years in imperturbable harmony.” The sincere affection of the Eritreans for the Italians, affirmed by De Gasperi, was the most explicit testimony of Italy’s positive work as a colonizing power in Eritrea. As far as Somalia was concerned, De Gasperi explained that if Italy had been entrusted with the task of administering Somalia, it could only have continued its civilizing effect, returning to where:

It has transformed the driest bush into green cultivation, it has brought civilisation to where slavery existed, in days not so far [. . .] only with the Italian administration will the populations of Somalia be able to continue to evolve, starting now to participate to a large extent in the government of their country.²⁷

De Gasperi closed the interview by stating that Eritrea, Libya, and Somalia could be certain that the era of the “old colonial system” should be considered closed, an affirmation which constitutes an essential element of the process through which post-fascist Italy looked at its colonial past. De Gasperi defined which elements of the colonial past should emerge in the national narrative and which characteristics of that experience should be traced back to the national character.

On October 21, 1947, the newspaper carried a front page account of the first day of work of the Congress of African Refugees in the Tre Venezie, where Foreign Undersecretary Brusasca spoke at the congress, representing the government. The newspaper reported that in describing the government’s action on the issue of the former colonies to the audience, Brusasca had stated that “Italy wishes [to] return to Africa only to offer work to a part of its unemployed.”²⁸ The article went on to describe the work activities that the Italians had “brought” to the African colonies, with the epic tones of the description making those workers’ efforts comparable to heroic deeds and not far from the tones of the descriptions that had accompanied the demographic colonization during fascism; in this context, the peasants became, for example, those who asked to return to cultivate

27 Alcide De Gasperi, “L’Italia in Africa,” *Il Popolo*, April 9, 1947, 1.

28 “I profughi d’Africa hanno diritto a tornare,” *Il Popolo*, October 21, 1947, 1.

“those lands reclaimed with their efforts.” According to the article, Italian work in the former African colonies was not only necessary to solve the problem of unemployment in the peninsula partially but also because it was fundamental for the elevation of the populations of those territories. Pascoli’s theme of the great proletarian was mixed in this article with the late nineteenth-century European rhetoric of the civilizing mission; the chronicle of the congress held in Padua anchored the description to nodal points which were not questioned, the representation of the populations of the former colonies as different and inferior, and the existence of a hierarchy among peoples, within which the former colonized individuals could only occupy the lowest position. The article also clarified that the work that the Italian refugees intended to pursue with their return to African territories was utterly free from any nationalist demagoguery and aimed “to ensure their own families the certainty of the future, while at the same time assuring the natives ways and means of improving their living conditions.”²⁹ The article ended with the communication that the Commission of Inquiry for the Italian colonies had been set up in London, which was supposed to plan a trip to the territories of the former colonies to consult the local population. The newspaper reported that the Italian embassy had sent a letter to the commission, stating that most of the population of the three colonies had returned home after the war and constituted an essential part of the population to be questioned.

The newspaper returned to the topic of Italian labor in the African colonies on October 25, 1947, with an article by the special envoy Vittorio Cecchini at Lancaster House. The article gave an account of the programmatic work of the commission and then presented the position of the Italian government through an analysis of the three written notes sent by the Italian government to the commission. The first note asked that Italy be heard, a request that was accepted. The second and more relevant note concerned a lengthy report of the Italian point of view on the question which, according to Cecchini, the government had sent to the commissioners to act as a guide since it was elaborated “with specific knowledge indisputably superior to theirs.”³⁰ The third note asked the commission to consider the reasons of the resident Italian population not in terms of its numerical “value” but for its economic significance: the reasons driving the refugees who, according to the embassy’s calculations, represented 66 % of the permanent population in the colony in 1939. Providing a reading of the question from his own London perspective, Cecchini concluded that it seemed necessary to separate the generic theme of

29 “I profughi d’Africa hanno diritto a tornare,” *Il Popolo*, October 21, 1947, 1.

30 Cecchini, “Il ritorno dei lavoratori italiani in Africa e la nostra amministrazione fiduciaria,” *Il Popolo*, October 25, 1947, 1.

Italian labor in Africa from that of the return of Italians as trustees of the UN; the journalist maintained that at that juncture “the problem of Italian labour must not interfere with that of the Italian administration, nor compromise it.”³¹ On November 20, 1947, an article in the newspaper announced and emphasized the Italian government’s official request for a mandate over all former colonies. The report concerned the presentation on November 19, 1947 of the Italian point of view on the question by Ambassador Gallarati Scotti who, assisted by the former governor of Scioa and Harrar Enrico Cerulli, had read a government declaration to the Trusteeship Council. The declaration, read by the ambassador, highlighted the characteristics of the Italian colonial presence in Africa, essentially emphasizing the problem of Italian labor. The declaration read by Gallarati Scotti justified the assignment of the trusteeships based on the consideration that “the Italians of Africa, who coexist with the other Libyan, Eritrean and Somali populations in those territories, are by now linked to them by the sole common interest of driving Libya, Eritrea and Somalia to a rapid civil and economic evolution,”³² an objective which, in the article as in the declaration, was described as natural and achievable only by Italy.

In the period in which the issue of the administration of the former colonies was still being debated in the international forum, the newspaper gave ample space to the news of incidents arriving from those territories, often putting them in direct relation with current arguments in the discussion on their administration by the colonies themselves. On December 2, the newspaper reported on serious incidents that had taken place in Teramni in Eritrea where, on the occasion of the visit of the quadripartite commission carrying out the fact-finding investigation into the Italian colonies, around 3,000 supporters of the movement for union with Ethiopia had demonstrated in the streets to support their political line. According to the report, the protesters had clashed with supporters of the Muslim League and the Liberal Party; the newspaper reported that the attack was the work of the unionists, who had “attacked with stones and sticks a procession of Muslims who opposed the request for the union of Eritrea with Abyssinia.”³³ The reconstruction of the incidents, functional to the Italian cause and to the attempt to positively represent the Italians and those who supported a future Italian administration in Eritrea, was strengthened at the end of the article by a reference to police statements, according to which the incidents had been premeditated by the unionists, who had moved en

³¹ Cecchini, “Il ritorno dei lavoratori italiani in Africa e la nostra amministrazione fiduciaria,” *Il Popolo*, October 25, 1947, 1.

³² “Manifestazioni e violenze in Eritrea da parte dei sostenitori dell’unione con l’Etiopia,” *Il Popolo*, November 20, 1947, 1.

³³ “Manifestazioni e violenze in Eritrea da parte dei sostenitori dell’unione con l’Etiopia,” *Il Popolo*, December 2, 1947, 1.

masse from Asmara to impress the quadripartite commission. On December 5, the newspaper presented readers with a description of Eritrea's political and social situation in the days when the commission of substitutes was present, charged with carrying out the investigation into the former Italian colonies. The article presented a front in favor of independence or a ten-year British trusteeship, a line espoused by two parties, the Muslim League and the Liberal Party. According to the article, a party in favor of the Italian administration had recently been formed, the New Eritrea Pro Italia party, made up mostly of former employees of the previous Italian administration, which was much more compact than the pro-independence party. The article contained a clear comparison of the virtuosity of the two blocs; the independence camp became, in the words of the editor, the bloc of pro-Ethiopian Eritreans, who "continue to make clamorous demonstrations in order to highlight their numerical importance,"³⁴ while "the Italians are content to wave their tricolor flags on the balconies and roofs of their houses."³⁵ Reports from Asmara on the work of the commission of inquiry continued on December 10, with an exotic account of events. The newspaper reported how each "village and fraction of tribe appointed its representatives and sent them to confer with the Commission"³⁶ and, according to the journalistic reconstruction during the hearings, the commissioners sat in the shade of the trees and,

all around the representatives of the district's political movements, numbering four or five hundred. Each representation has a placard bearing the name of the village or tribe [. . .] The hearings last six to seven hours [. . .] the unionists have predominated, who is also the most colourful. Priests and notables can be seen in rich attire, umbrellas in polychrome wedges, innumerable red-yellow-green flags and flags, and billboards with all kinds of writing, including those against Italy. The 'negarit' rhymes with 'fantasies'.³⁷

The article also focused on the disparities between the different political forces; the unionists were described as better organized and, above all, with unlimited financial resources since the Ethiopian government financed them. Furthermore, the numerical consistency of the unionist movement was questioned, emphasizing that: "one recognises among the unionists faces met at previous rallies. Rumour has it that they are being moved from one place to another in trucks." The exotic representation of the party to be discredited continued with a note on the

³⁴ "Come procede il sopralluogo della Commissione in Eritrea," *Il Popolo*, December 5, 1947, 1.

³⁵ "Come procede il sopralluogo della Commissione in Eritrea." *Il Popolo*, December 5, 1947, 1.

³⁶ "La Commissione interroga e ascolta sotto gli alberi del 'negarit,'" *Il Popolo*, December 10, 1947, 1.

³⁷ "La Commissione interroga e ascolta sotto gli alberi del 'negarit,'" *Il Popolo*, December 10, 1947, 1.

high presence of women and children among the ranks of the unionists, detailing how the women “emit their characteristic high-pitched trill during the demonstrations.” On the other hand, the representation of the movement in favor of the Italian administration portrayed a more sober group close to the civilization of the colonizer; “the members of Pro Italia and the Muslim League are more serious and disciplined with their tri-color and red-green flags.” On January 6, 1948, the newspaper highlighted news of an attack on the printing press of the weekly *Il Popolo* in Mogadishu, which took place on January 5, a few days before the members of the commission of inquiry arrived in the Somali city. Its article explained that the attack was anti-Italian since the newspaper was conducting a campaign in favor of the Italian administration in Somalia and that the British military authorities had agreed to protect the printing house subject to the cessation of publications in favor of the Italian administration. The article also highlighted that, unlike the British administration, “the Somali population is almost unanimous in asking for Italian administration.” In the margin of the article, an insert in italics explained to readers that “our friends in Somalia, near and far” defended the interests of Italy and of all Italians.

Conclusions

The period of action of the Constituent Assembly coincided with a particularly significant moment in the history of Italian colonialism, and the relationship between Italian institutions and society and their colonial past. Compared to the fascist period, some deep schisms are evident concerning the background in which the Italian colonial discourse developed. In the Italy of the Constituent Assembly, the governmental discourse could not disregard the consideration that the populations of the former colonies had to achieve independence and self-government; in this sense, it was certainly not possible to build or seek a line of continuity with the colonial discourses that accompanied the expansion in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. The moral question linked to colonialism as a process of usurpation of one people over another was partly resolved by the Christian Democrats and the Italian government with the repudiation of the fascist expansion policy, which alone embodied all the problematic issues related to that process. Based on that perspective, the pre-fascist colonies had to be reclaimed because they derived from the “positive and fruitful Italian civilizing activity.”³⁸

³⁸ Paolo Acanfora, *Miti e ideologia nella politica estera Dc. Nazione, Europa, Comunità atlantica (1943–1954)* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2013), 33.

In this period, the theme of “Italian work” seems to emerge in all its preponderance as a common trait in the colonial discourse between the colonial and republican periods. Before being colonizers, Italians in Africa had to be considered workers;³⁹ this aspect was reaffirmed in all venues, from the diplomatic settings to the rooms in which the numerous conferences organized to support the Italian requests for a return to the former colonies were held. What was done can be considered a real proletarianization of the Italian colonial experience. By superimposing the role of workers on that of colonizers, Italian colonialism appeared neutralized of the negative charge that accompanied the evaluations of the colonial process in the era of decolonization; what emerges from that representation is not the usurpation of someone else’s territory and the deprivation of freedom of self-determination towards other populations, but the need for work for a proletarian people.⁴⁰ In this sense, it appears simple and banal, but also inevitable, to build a link between Pascoli’s rhetoric which accompanied the Libyan war and the representations made of Italians in Africa towards the end of the 1940s.

“Labor” appears to be a self-absolute mantra that accompanied the Italian colonial conquest from the liberal period onwards. The “proletarian Italy” that conquered in order to export labor and the unemployed in the liberal era became an “empire of work” during fascism and then took on the guise, during decolonization, of a generous country that fertilized the territory of others with its work.

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³⁹ For an analysis of how, in the Christian Democrat ideology, work becomes a characterising element of the new national character in the Republican era, see: Agostino Giovagnoli, *La cultura democristiana* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1991).

⁴⁰ On the implications relating to the “proletarianization” of Italian colonial expansion in the elaboration of national identity, see Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds., *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures* (Bern-New York: 2010), 9-28.

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Emanuele Ertola

8 “The End of the World as we Know it”. Framing Settlers’ Return to Italy Within the Current International Debate

Abstract: The relationship between migratory flows and decolonization has only recently received specific attention. Scholars, particularly Andrea Smith, have thoroughly analyzed the “return migration” of former settlers, questioning concepts such as “reflux” and “return,” which, however, have proven inadequate.

This chapter deals with the Italian case, starting from two fundamental assumptions. I base my arguments on Pamela Ballinger’s hypothesis that decolonization of the former Italian colonies was a 30-year long process. I also draw on Lorenzo Veracini’s theory of the impossible cessation of settler colonialism until the settlers had completely departed.

These two complementary premises will allow me to suggest how this process manifested itself for the Italian settlers in a long and unsuccessful attempt to adapt to post-colonial circumstances without losing their previous status. A necessary renegotiation between former colonizers and the former colonized did not actually occur; instead, we see attempts to maintain roles and privileges, followed by (forced or voluntary) departure.

I will discuss the act of leaving as a key premise in the end of the settlers’ colonial world, particularly in the Italian case, and how we cannot treat this departure detachedly when deconstructing and analyzing it.

Introduction

The migration of former Italian settlers from Africa to Italy must be considered within the context of two interconnected and partially overlapping historical phenomena. These two phenomena involve the flow of people following World War II, when millions of refugees and displaced persons of all kinds crossed Europe, and the flow caused by decolonization, when the former colonies’ independence caused the departure of British, Dutch, Belgian, and, above all, French and Portuguese settlers who moved en masse to Europe, along with some former colonial subjects. As both Italy and Japan lost their colonial empires after World War II, these two phases overlapped. In some cases, this was a dispersed and mostly peaceful migration to the metropole or other countries. However, in most cases,

significant portions of the settler population were forced to flee the decolonizing countries under traumatic circumstances.¹

This movement has been depicted as a “reflux” or “settler return” from former colonies to the homeland.² Some recent studies, however, have reconsidered the notion of “return,” examining individual national cases within a broader framework: how the end of empires in the twentieth century, including colonial empires, caused forced migrations,³ and how these migrations reshaped Europe.⁴ A comparative approach has also enabled us to highlight the similarities, but more importantly the differences, between the two concepts while cautioning against generalizations.⁵

In most cases, comparison can shed significant new light on a migratory flow that has had a massive social, economic, and political impact. The one million Europeans who immigrated to France from Algeria in the summer of 1962,⁶ or the 500,000 Portuguese who left Angola and Mozambique between 1974 and 1976 and who contributed to a 7 % rise in Portugal’s population,⁷ are two particularly pertinent examples. However, not every departure of settlers had a profound social

¹ Ron Eyerman and Giuseppe Sciortino, eds., *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonization: Colonial Returnees in the National Imagination* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2019).

² Ceri Peach, “Postwar Migration to Europe: Reflux, Influx, Refuge,” *Social Science Quarterly* 78 (1997): 269–83.

³ Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee, *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁴ Manuel Borutta and J.C. Jansen, eds., *Vertriebene and Pieds-Noirs in Postwar Germany and France: Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Dietmar Rothermund, *Memories of Post-Imperial Nations* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Éric Morier-Genoud and Michel Cahen, eds., *Imperial Migrations. Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁵ Lionel Babicz, “Japan–Korea, France–Algeria: Colonialism and Post-Colonialism,” *Japanese studies* 33 (2013): 201–11; Andrea Smith, “Coerced or free? Considering post-colonial returns,” *Removing Peoples: Forced removal in the modern world* 395 (2009): 395–14.

⁶ Sung-Eu Choi, *Decolonization and the French of Algeria: Bringing the Settler Colony Home* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). See also Pierre Baillet, “L’intégration des rapatriés d’Algérie en France,” *Population (French edition)* 30 (1975): 303–14.

⁷ Elsa Peralta, ed., *The Retornados From the Portuguese Colonies in Africa Memory, Narrative, and History* (New York: Routledge, 2021). See also Stephen C. Lubkemann, “The moral economy of Portuguese postcolonial return,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 11 (2002): 189–13; Stephen C. Lubkemann, “Unsettling the Metropole: Race and settler reincorporation in postcolonial Portugal,” in *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

impact. The 560,000 Britons who left the British empire did not constitute a single “mass” return,⁸ and only a part of these has received historical attention.⁹

How does the Italian case fit into this picture? In terms of proportions, it was not far behind the others; from 1942 to 1949, approximately 200,000 people moved from former colonies to Italy.¹⁰ Nonetheless, this case study has never been thoroughly examined. Since the colonies were lost early, and not as a result of a push for independence but as a result of defeat by other Europeans, it was widely denied until recently that Italy had undergone a process of decolonization. The Italian case is simply not – or only partially – addressed in the major international histories of decolonization.¹¹ Even among scholars of the Italian case, “decolonization from above” has been the prevailing interpretation for a long time,¹² an “atypical case of early decolonization”¹³ that was less painful and traumatic than in other colonial contexts,¹⁴ an interpretation which also claimed that the

⁸ Elizabeth Buettner, “‘We Don’t Grow Coffee and Bananas in Clapham Junction You Know’: Imperial Britons Back Home,” in *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons Over the Seas: Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series*, ed. R. Bickers (Oxford: Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series, 2010): 302–328.

⁹ Alexandra Carter, “Le Long Retour du colonisateur: les Britanniques et le choc de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Malaisie (1941–1948),” *Relations internationales* 2 (2008): 19–35; Pamela Shurmer-Smith, “Once the dust of Africa is in your blood: tracking Northern Rhodesia’s white diaspora,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 10 (2011): 82–94; Rory Pilosof, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: White Farming Voices from Zimbabwe* (Harare: Weaver Press; Claremont: UCT Press, 2012); David Lucas, Barbara Edgar, and Gwilym Lucas, “Overseas Destinations for Elite Southern and Northern Rhodesians and Zimbabweans” (paper presented at the 39th African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) Annual Conference, The University of Western Australia, December 5–7, 2016).

¹⁰ Pamela Ballinger, “Borders of the nation, borders of citizenship: Italian repatriation and the redefinition of national identity after World War II,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49 (2007): 713–41.

¹¹ See Raymond F. Betts, *Decolonization* (London: Routledge, 2004); Bernard Droz, *Histoire de la décolonisation au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006); Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹² Giampaolo Calchi Novati, “Mediterraneo e questione araba nella politica estera italiana,” in *Storia dell’Italia repubblicana*, ed. F. Barbagallo (Torino: Einaudi, 1995): 205.

¹³ Colette Dubois, “L’Italie, cas atypique d’une puissance européenne en Afrique: une colonisation tardive, une décolonisation précoce,” *Materiaux pour l’histoire de notre temps* 32 (1993): 10–14.

¹⁴ Christopher Seton-Watson, “Italy’s Imperial Hangover,” *Journal of contemporary history* 15 (1980): 177.

Italian case was a cultural non-event.¹⁵ In recent years, these rejections of classification of the Italian case as decolonization have undergone significant revision. First, Nicola Labanca asserted that “the end of Italian colonialism did not come at the same time for all its subjects”¹⁶; then Antonio Morone denied the existence of a “clear historical caesura,” instead speaking of “the long end of Italian colonialism”¹⁷; and finally there were the arguments by Pamela Ballinger who, since 2007, has dedicated a series of insightful studies to the subject, demonstrating the historiographical groundlessness of the “pervasive belief in Italy and abroad that Italian decolonization proved quick and relatively unproblematic.”¹⁸

In response to this literature, I begin my analysis by assuming that decolonization is not a self-contained event but rather a lengthy and theoretically endless process.¹⁹ This “extended history” goes beyond the mere institutional transfer of power, and includes both the former colonies and the former metropoles.²⁰ In particular, I draw from two theoretical constructs. The first is a recent book by Pamela Ballinger, who suggests considering the Italian case from the perspective of “long decolonization” or a decolonization that was a protracted and complicated process that took place over a number of decades.²¹ The second fits perfectly into this initial hypothesis and is the theory of decolonization in settler societies developed by Lorenzo Veracini, one of the founders of settler colonial studies and a leading scholar in this field. He developed this theory to explain how decolonization in settler countries can only occur once the settlers leave, which the Italian situation exemplifies. Colonel Gaddafi’s Libya, for example, cele-

¹⁵ Karen Pinkus, “Empty Spaces: Decolonisation in Italy,” in *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. P. Palumbo (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2003): 300.

¹⁶ Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2002): 440.

¹⁷ Antonio M. Morone, “L’eredità del colonialismo per la nuova Italia,” in *Imperi coloniali. Italia, Germania e la costruzione del “mondo coloniale”*, ed. V.F. Gironda, M. Nani, and S. Petrungaro (Napoli: L’Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2009): 74.

¹⁸ Pamela Ballinger, “Entangled or Extruded Histories? Displacement, National Refugees, and Repatriation after the Second World War,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25 (2012): 372. See also Pamela Ballinger, “Colonial Twilight: Italian Settlers and the Long Decolonization of Libya,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51 (2016): 813–38.

¹⁹ Lorenzo Veracini, “Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation,” *Borderlands e-journal* 6 (2007), accessed March 3, 2023, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/1337>. See also Martin G. Thomas and Andrew Thompson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁰ Buettner, *Europe after Empire*, 4.

²¹ Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made. Decolonization and the foundation of postwar Italy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2020).

brated Independence Day every year as a symbol of the end of colonial power, while marking the day of Italian evacuation as a symbol of the definitive break with the colonial past.²²

I will discuss the migratory flow of former Italian settlers as part of a long and failed process of decolonization that began with World War II and ended in the 1970s with the exodus of the vast majority of settlers from Libya and the Horn of Africa, drawing on these two interpretative proposals and leaving aside the difficult process of decolonization of culture and the imaginary also taking place in Italy.²³

The Multiple Waves of Settlers’ “Return”

First of all, it is useful to subdivide the various phases of a flow that is not unique. In fact, this flow went through several waves over a period of about 30 years. The very first to return were approximately 13,000 children who, with Italy's entry into the war in June 1940, were repatriated from Libya and hosted in the summer camps of the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*, before finally being tragically separated from their families due to the war events.²⁴ Only two years later, following the British occupation of Italian East Africa, another wave of former settlers boarded the *Missione Speciale in AOP*'s so-called “white ships”: a massive evacuation carried out by fascist Italy between 1942 and 1943 to repatriate women, children, the elderly, sick and disabled. The transatlantic liners used for the mission transported around 28,000 people during the three voyages around Africa.²⁵

A second wave occurred between 1947 and 1952, while the United Nations decided the fate of Italy's former colonies. The naval routes with Italy were reopened at the end of 1947, following Italy's definitive waiver of any claim on the former colonies (now administered by the British, with the exception of Ethiopia where the legitimate sovereign Haile Selassie returned to the throne). The flow was almost unidirectional because the British Military Administration permitted, indeed favored, the flow towards Italy but prohibited (with very rare exceptions) the opposite movement. The flow was also gradual; we do not have exact figures but

22 Veracini, *Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation*, 3.

23 Emanuele Ertola, *Il colonialismo degli italiani. Storia di un'ideologia* (Roma: Carocci, 2022).

24 Erica Moretti, Alejandro Mario Dieguez, “Gli italiani profughi di Libia: memorie di traversate e clandestinità,” *Contemporanea* 2 (2023): 251-284; Rosario Pollicino, “Testimonial Literature and Trauma: The Case of Grazia Arnese and the 13,000 Italian-Libyan Children,” *InVerbis* 2 (2021): 185-197.

25 Emanuele Ertola, “Navi Bianche. Il rimpatrio dei civili italiani dall'Africa Orientale,” *Passato e Presente* 91 (2014): 127-43.

according to an International Refugees Organisation report, more than 200,000 Italians moved to Italy from the former colonies between 1942 and 1949: approximately 94,000 from Libya and 112,000 from East Africa.²⁶

It is an exodus worth investigating in depth because it did not affect all former settlers in the same way, but rather followed primarily social and generational influxes. These were social because those with no prospects were the first to try to flee; first, there were children and women who had been left by their husbands, who were mostly interned in British camps, and then there were the poor and the workers. Beginning in late 1947, when the travel route with Eritrea was restored in the form of bimonthly voyages of the steamer *Toscana*, approximately 2,000 settlers went to the Italian representative to register for repatriation, including unemployed people, horse-drawn carriage drivers, taxi drivers, carters, carpenters, bricklayers, unskilled workers, and small artisans. According to the Italian official in charge of planning the repatriations, they were all persons with occasional employment who typically struggled to survive.²⁷

The second influx is noteworthy because it reflects a generational shift. After the end of the 1940s, the largest social group to gradually leave the country was composed of young people who were not able to pursue professional or educational development in former Italian Africa. "I remember classmates who had to leave school in the middle of the year. This exodus was continuous – one witness reports –. When I came to Italy in 1951 to study at university, many of them travelled with me."²⁸ Another witness recalls that

What did Italian students do? Some who completed high school, like myself, continued their education at a university [in Italy or abroad]; those who studied to become surveyors went on to work in Saudi Arabia's oil fields[. . .] others who studied as accountants, took positions in banks. But there were fewer and fewer of these banks [. . .] therefore the girls were left without boys [. . .] because the Italian boys were no longer there.²⁹

In the case of Eritrea, the transition from Italian colony to Ethiopian federation (in 1952) was a difficult type of decolonization, so much so that many Eritreans regarded it as a mere shift from one annexation to another. As a political and social group, the settlers were defeated. Even in terms of demography, their population declined from over 39,000 in 1944 to 25,000 in 1948 to approximately

²⁶ Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made*; see also Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, eds., *Italian mobilities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

²⁷ Emanuele Ertola, "La comunità italiana d'Eritrea nel dopoguerra. Economia e società fra continuità e mutamento," *I sentieri della ricerca* 16 (2013): 193–227.

²⁸ Interview with Pier Angelo Pollera, born in Eritrea in 1933.

²⁹ Interview with Claudio Baracetti, born in Eritrea in 1938.

18,000 (1950). Some 75 % of the settlers had fled the country between 1941 and 1950, with the stress generated by the world war, the economic crisis, the loss of the privileged status of rulers, and the perceived insecurity created by terrorism that hit the nation in the late 1940s probably factors in their exodus.³⁰ At the same time, as Lorenzo Veracini pointed out, most of the settlers had no interest in attempting to build decolonized relationships. Their departure was the ultimate manifestation of how difficult, if not impossible, it was for them to imagine “the very possibility of a relation between colonizer and colonized after the discontinuation of a settler colonial regime.”³¹

The settlers who remained in Africa were mostly males, either poor white individuals who could not afford a ticket or those who had no further interests or links in Italy, and in most cases, they had already integrated into African society and had long-lasting relationships with African women. To these must be added a small group of experts, dealers, and industrialists who, thanks to their technical and entrepreneurial abilities, became collaborators with the new African states and economic institutions following independence.³² Thus, a tiny Italian elite continued to play major roles in post-colonial societies, contributing to the efforts of Haile Selassie in Ethiopia and King Idris in Libya.³³ However, the compromise of decolonization (which resulted in former colonies’ independence but not the emancipation of their societies, which were subject to conservative and authoritarian regimes on the one hand and the persistent socio-economic monopoly of a few settlers on the other) was doomed to fail. The socialist-inspired military revolutions that brought Muammar Gaddafi to power in Libya in 1969, and the Derg in Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1974, arose from the objection to this political and social system.³⁴

The new revolutionary orders shattered the unwritten agreement with the Italians, who became the subject of economic nationalization and the Africanization of the state administration. Thus, the last and final wave of migration from

³⁰ Emanuele Ertola, “Blowing against the Winds of Change: Settlers Facing Decolonization in Eritrea, 1941-52,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (2023): 71–91.

³¹ Veracini, “Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation,” 4.

³² See, for example, Emanuele Ertola, “La società italiana nell’Etiopia di Haile Selassie,” in *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*, ed. Antonio M. Morone (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2018).

³³ Angelo Del Boca, *Nostalgia delle colonie. Gli italiani in Africa orientale*, vol. 4 (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1984); Angelo Del Boca, *Dal fascismo a Gheddafi. Gli italiani in Libia*, vol. 2 (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1988).

³⁴ See, among others, Giampaolo Calchi Novati, *Il Corno d’Africa nella storia e nella politica. Etiopia, Somalia e Eritrea fra nazionalismi, sottosviluppo e guerra* (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1994); Federico Cresti and Massimiliano Cricco, *Storia della Libia contemporanea* (Roma: Carocci, 2015).

the former Italian colonies occurred in the 1970s: the mass expulsion of approximately 20,000 Italians who remained in Libya in 1970, as well as the flight of the few thousands who remained in Eritrea and Ethiopia, deprived of their assets by nationalization and terrified by the Mengistu regime's violence and the ongoing war against the Eritrean liberation fronts in the second half of the decade.³⁵

In conclusion, Italian postcolonial mobility cannot be understood as a single monolithic block. Instead, it must be articulated in its successive phases, which differ in chronology and direction of flow: the former colony of origin changed over time, without taking into account – and a systematic study in this regard is still lacking – the fact that the destination was not always Italy but in many cases other colonies or countries abroad. During the approximately 30 years of the “long decolonization,” Italian settlers migrated multiple times “back and forth across the Mediterranean in a framework heavily constrained by economics and politics” until this complex flow culminated in a forced (re)migration.³⁶

Reception and Agency

Unlike the historic settler colonies of Oceania and America, the settler societies created between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in African colonies were a small population minority with – in most cases – little political influence, and subordinate to the colonial State.³⁷ Despite their lack of relevance in the political process of decolonization, settler societies have frequently been singled out by public opinion in the metropoles as a destabilizing factor that fueled conflicts; on the other hand, former settlers have (almost everywhere) activated a narrative of themselves as victims, betrayed or forgotten by the State, and regretted by the colonized populations with whom they had friendly relations.³⁸ Exile, psychological

³⁵ Antonio M. Morone, “Italiani d’Africa, Africani d’Italia: da coloni a profughi,” *Altreitalie* 42 (2011): 20–35. See also Patrizia Audenino, “Memorie ferite: esuli e rimpatriati nell’Italia repubblicana,” *Meridiana* 86 (2016): 79–96; Patrizia Audenino, *La casa perduta. La memoria dei profughi nell’Europa del Novecento* (Carocci: Roma, 2015).

³⁶ Ballinger, “Colonial Twilight: Italian Settlers and the Long Decolonization of Libya,” 24.

³⁷ For a general overview see Edward Cavanagh, and Lorenzo Veracini, eds. *The Routledge handbook of the history of settler colonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

³⁸ Éric Savarese, “Mobilisations Politiques et Posture Victimaire Chez les Militants Associatifs Pieds-Noirs,” *Raisons politiques* 30 (2008): 41–57; Emmanuelle Comtat, “Les disparus civils européens de la guerre d’Algérie. Processus de construction d’une cause victimaire militante,” *Pa-pelles del CEIC, International Journal on Collective Identity Research* 1 (2017), accessed March 3, 2023, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1387/pceic.16907>.

trauma, material needs, claims against the government, and the need for recognition: all of these factors contributed to the formation of an identity that did not emerge in the colony but rather after repatriation, when “colonizers turned ex-colonizers overnight immediately became cast as helpless and innocent victims.”³⁹

But, after they returned to the metropole, were the returnees forgotten, ignored, and powerless? Again, in order to successfully address this question, we must first examine the migrant waves independently. Not only must this migratory movement be divided internally, with distinct periods and socioeconomic and generational lines of separation; the way they were greeted in Italy, as well as the organizations created to promote their interests, must also be differentiated. The successive waves of migration gave rise to associations with rather different circumstances and strategies. Due to the constant stream of refugees from Libya and in anticipation of the Special Mission of Evacuation in AOI, in 1941 Mussolini approved an ordinance with which the State handled repatriation from the colonies as a specific issue for the first time. The ordinance introduced the category of “refugee from Italian Africa” describing such an individual as an “Italian citizen resident in Italian Africa who was returned for reasons entirely linked to the state of war”; starting on January 1, 1942, and continuing throughout the war, refugees in a determined condition of need would be awarded a one-off subsidy “to cover the expenditures of their first settlement in the Kingdom” as well as a monthly payment.⁴⁰ In 1945, new regulations revised the matter and for the first time, in addition to the subsidy, the legislation also provided for hospitalization in refugee camps (CRP).⁴¹ From 1949, support to former settlers was provided together with that given to refugees from other regions where Italian control had ended due to a peace treaty, refugees from other countries, and victims of conflict on Italian soil. More precise requirements were added: to be classified as such, African refugees had to have lived in the colony prior to June 10, 1940.⁴² Finally, on March 4, 1952, the Law on “Assistance for Refugees” addressed the issue comprehensively for the first time, repealing previous laws and definitively establishing all necessary measures to resolve the refugee issue along three main lines of action: subsidy, housing, and reintegration into the labor market. The first measure was a monthly stipend. The second aspect that welfare policies had to address was housing in refugee centres (theoretically for a maximum of one year), which were located in former barracks or other public buildings and designed to prevent returnees from settling, even temporarily, in suburban bidonvilles. The

³⁹ Buettner, *Europe After Empire*, 230.

⁴⁰ Bill of December 27, 1941, no. 560279.

⁴¹ Lieutenant’s Decree of June 14, 1945, no. 509.

⁴² Legislative decree of April 19, 1948, no. 556.

third pillar of support was in the employment sector, with measures such as requiring enterprises involved in public works (even if partially subsidized by state or municipal governments) to hire refugees as 5 % of their staff.⁴³

In a country suffering significantly from war and with a high unemployment rate, Italian refugees from Africa were a small group within the massive influx of displaced individuals caused by World War II. In this setting, the government's efforts took more than 15 years to achieve some tangible results. Refugees entered the job market slowly, and many people did not even apply for work because the state subsidy was more than the average pay for a big family unit. Ex-settlers remained in CRPs for more than ten years: there were still 27,871 refugees in the camps in 1952, approximately 9 % of whom were ex-settlers from Italian Africa.⁴⁴

How did the refugees from Africa, now residing in Italy and receiving governmental support, perceive their condition? In this regard, they were not a monolithic and homogeneous group of beneficiaries of public assistance, nostalgically bonded to the past; on the contrary, they organized associations, published newspapers, and entered public life as an active political force. The first generation of organizations was formed in Italy at the same time as the initial immigration of former African settlers. It was a constellation of few or very small realities that arose as a consequence of nothing more than individual endeavors, were extremely modest in scale, and were mostly of a local nature. Two realities emerged from this multifaceted galaxy in the early 1940s, establishing themselves as the main points of reference, the only associations of national importance: the National Association of East African Refugees ANPAO and the National Federation of Fighters, Refugees, and Italians of Africa FENPIA.⁴⁵

Anpao, the most prominent of the two, was created in September 1944 in Rome by the Sicilian Francesco Cavallaro, who had migrated to Italy in January 1943 from Addis Ababa where he worked as a notary. The first national congress was convened in Rome on July 8, 1945, and the association had roughly 30,000 members a year later, according to a Ministry of the Interior source. During its early years, ANPAO mainly carried out assistance activities for bureaucratic procedures, searches for lost luggage, subsidy applications, and clothing distribution. Furthermore, through its political link with the dominant party Christian Democracy, ANPAO lobbied with institutions on behalf of refugees, requesting reimbursement of war damages

⁴³ Emanuele Ertola, "Orfani dell'impero: l'assistenza pubblica ai profughi dall'Africa orientale italiana, 1942-1956," *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana* 14 (2018): 58–67.

⁴⁴ Ertola, "Orfani dell'Impero," 58–67.

⁴⁵ Emanuele Ertola, "Ritorneremo: le associazioni di profughi d'Africa nell'Italia del dopoguerra," *Italia contemporanea* 288 (2018): 11–37.

and exploring the prospect of returning former settlers to Africa. It was via lobbying and propaganda that refugees became a cohesive group with shared interests.

The other major organization, with headquarters in Milan and chaired by General Augusto Ugolini, was founded a few years later in 1949. It was far smaller and more political, with few governmental contacts and hence no power to exert pressure on institutions; thus, it mostly dealt with denouncing the existing situation of former settlers who had been living in refugee camps for years due to a lack of housing and jobs. Through its publication, *Vergogna* (Shame) and then *Riconquista* (Reconquest) – a powerful choice of names – it launched a scathing attack on Italian institutions over the claimed right to return to Africa: “We refugees have sworn to maintain ourselves permanently at war against those who, by promises, deluding us with flattery, gaining trust and qualifying it as naivety, they would like to – and they will – sacrifice us beyond what is right.” To those “traitors,” according to whom “we are the remnants of an imperialist mindset,” the Fenpia said that “we were, are and will be at the service of Italy, eager to serve any government of the people that has the decency not to succumb to foreigners.”⁴⁶

In all former colonial powers, “The request for compensation became the totemic claim through which the repatriated from different colonies – and in different times – could find a symbolic unity as victims whose pains had to be recognized and addressed.”⁴⁷ The Italian case was no different. The associations of the ex-settlers built, through a self-representation focused on their labor (in Africa) and their status as victims (in Italy), a recognizable, and politically spendable, collective identity.⁴⁸

With the conclusion of the international dispute over the destiny of the former Italian colonies in 1952, the first generation of ex-settlers’ associative entities ceased to exist. For example, this occurred in France, where the 1962 associations gradually faded away during the 1970s, giving way to a second generation of associations characterized by the so-called *nostAlgérie*, in which political goals gave way to the preservation of a “collective colonial memory” through the organization of meetings, pilgrimages, and the publication of newspapers. Similarly in Italy, as the refugee crisis subsided – if slowly – and all expectation of a “return” to Africa vanished, with the former colonies now utterly removed from public discussion, the first generation of refugees from Africa’s associations vanished. In its place, about 20 years later, a second generation appeared, born in the early

⁴⁶ Ertola, “Ritorneremo,” 27.

⁴⁷ Eyerman, Sciortino, *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonization*, 18.

⁴⁸ Emanuele Ertola, “Repatriates, Refugees, or Exiles? Decolonization and the Italian Settlers’ Return. 1941-1956,” in *Europe between decolonization and integration (1945-1992)*, ed. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (London: Routledge, 2020).

seventies, and divided into two very different types: on one hand, the associations of refugees expelled from Libya in 1970 who knew how to carve out a public role and exert some pressure on national governments thanks to a very incisive and great ability to interact with politics; on the other hand, the associations of former settlers from East Africa, above all from Asmara and Addis Ababa, disinterested in politics and mostly concentrated on safeguarding memory and on nostalgic recollection of the years spent in Africa.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Was the exodus of previous Italian settlers, in essence, a “return migration”? Only a tiny percentage of them had never been to Italy: the smallest children and “old colonists”⁵⁰ born and raised in Africa, a small portion of the overall settler population, which rose exponentially only in the second half of the 1930s. It was a repatriation for everyone else. Or, more accurately, an evacuation, a forced migratory movement caused by constrain (those expelled by Gaddafi and those forced to leave after the Derg’s nationalizations or fleeing the war between Ethiopia and the Eritrean liberation front) or by unfavorable (or perceived-as-unfavorable) circumstances, including the loss of the privileged status that denoted the colonial condition. Certainly, for many of them it was not a “return home” because of the material difficulties they faced, the trauma of being uprooted, and the difficulty of Italian society recognizing them as a category even in terms of their name (generic “refugees” among others, without a specific label as awarded instead to the Portuguese *retornados*, the French *pieds noirs*, and the Japanese *hikiagesha*).⁵¹

It was a forced (re)migration also because they still saw the colony as their actual home. The former settlers therefore wanted to stay, even after colonial domination ended; they saw themselves as removed, driven out, alienated, and once in Italy they asked to return. “We shall return” was their fundamental motto, the ideological core of their associations. But they meant to stay or return in that (former) colonial space, retaining their historical status of privilege in dealings with former subordinates. Lorenzo Veracini suggests that the construc-

⁴⁹ Alessandra Vigo, “Dealing With ‘Returns’: African Decolonization and Repatriation to Italy, 1947–70,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 57 (2022): 751–74. See also Del Boca, *Nostalgia delle colonie*; Labanca, *Oltremare*.

⁵⁰ An expression used among the settlers in Italian East Africa to refer to the first generation of Italian immigrants.

⁵¹ Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made*.

tion of new re-negotiated and decolonized relationships not only fails, but is usually not even attempted. In this regard, the Italian case is entirely consistent with comparable international examples. Former settlers departed, sometimes forced by circumstances, sometimes coerced by post-colonial regimes, and sometimes freely; in all cases, their movement to the metropole – in Italy, as in France, Portugal, or Belgium – represented the failure of the potential of rebuilding and re-negotiating. Leaving, whether forced or voluntarily, eliminates the prospect of establishing a post-colonial relationship between equal subjects.⁵²

So, how should the migration of former Italian settlers be seen in comparison? It seems consistent with other international cases. This migrant movement has been a major difficulty for the motherland to manage in practically every nation, and in some cases a true emergency. In several circumstances, such as in Italy, it was essential to establish temporary housing complexes and give public subsidies for their upkeep. Of course, from this perspective, Italy's crisis management, with former settlers having to remain in refugee camps for up to 10 years, does not appear to be the most effective model of reintegration. Despite the catastrophic proportions of Algerian immigration, France required less time to assimilate former colonists into French society. The fundamental distinction is that the emergency in France began in the 1960s, at a time of economic success, but in Italy it began between 1940 and 1943, during World War II, and then continued throughout the reconstruction years.⁵³ In this regard, the Japanese example lends itself best to comparison. Even in Japan, the exodus from former colonies coincided with the conclusion of the war and its aftermath, and was only finally resolved with the economic boom.⁵⁴

What seems to be more genuinely unique to the Italian case was not the migrant flow itself, nor the emergency it created in Italy, nor the claims for “return” and compensation for lost goods supported by the category's representative organizations. Instead, its peculiarity seems to lie in its temporality: the fact that Italy did not face a single mass exodus coinciding with the end of colonial rule, but rather a 30-year movement defined by numerous internal stages and dynamics. It was the protracted period of migration of Italians from Africa to Italy (and, rarely, back) which I believe is the most interesting element of the Italian situa-

52 Veracini, “Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation.”

53 For a comparison see, among many, Éric Savarese, *L'Invention Des Pieds-Noirs* (Paris: Seguier Editions, 2002); Jean-Jacques Jordi, *Les Pieds-Noirs* (Paris: Cavalier bleu, 2008); Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, *Devenir Métropolitain: Politique d'Intégration et Parcours des Rapatriés d'Algérie en Métropole (1954–2005)* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2010).

54 Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

tion, and which symbolizes the time it took former colonists and former colonized to realize that the world as they knew it was irreversibly gone. This calls for re-thinking and ongoing analysis of the social and cultural processes set in motion during Italy's lengthy decolonization.

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Ivan Stecher

9 The Decision-making Process and *Return Option* of the South Tyrolean *Optants* from the Perspective of Contemporary Witnesses

Abstract: This chapter first traces the decision-making process of South Tyrolean *Optants* after World War II, as they were obliged to decide whether to remain in their new homeland or return to South Tyrol. Secondly, it discusses the essential characteristics of the reintegration of return migrants into South Tyrolean post-war society. The aim of this study is to categorize the most important reasons for staying or returning, as provided by contemporary witnesses, which shall then be compared with current research and further analysis of the legal and sociodemographic background of that time. The same process applies to the most important factors influencing the reintegration success of return migrants in South Tyrol. This analysis is based on the supposition that jobs, a social network in the homeland, and a system of associations were the most crucial accelerators of integration; at the same time, these aspects also contributed to the fact that many *Optants* refused the *Return Option* after ten years of “homeland remoteness.” This study is based on 25 interviews with contemporary witnesses while, in addition, historical newspapers, relevant historiography, as well as various archival records will be considered in order to enhance understanding of the political background of that time, which contextualizes and complements the output of the oral history element.

Note: Parts of this contribution are taken from the author's Master's thesis Ivan Stecher, "Die Rück-siedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten: Genese, Ablauf und Reintegration anhand ausgewählter Fallbeispiele sowie fachdidaktische Ausarbeitung der Thematik für den Schulunterricht" (Diploma thesis, University of Innsbruck, 2020).

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Introduction

The South Tyrolean *Option*¹ of 1939, an organized mass migration of German-speaking inhabitants of Italy's most northern region, is one of the most intensely researched fields of regional historiography in the Province of Bolzano, Italy. Until 2015, more than 475 publications on this topic from the fields of history, politics, and cultural studies had been recorded.² Content-wise, the focus is mostly on the genesis of the *Option* and emigration, whereas the *Re-Option*³ question was deemed less important.⁴ However, to fully research the *Option* in its entirety, it is necessary to include the history and integration of return migrants in South Tyrol after 1945 which, so far, has only been done to a very small extent.⁵ Two major aspects of the *Re-Option* cannot be explored through traditional sources such as archival records or historical newspapers: reasons for returning and reintegration in South Tyrol. While the initial diplomatic-historical and socio-economic context for return and reintegration has been addressed by some authors,⁶ individual impressions, decision-making processes, and perceptions of integration can only be explored through oral history.

This chapter aims to contrast the political and economic context (macro-history) with individual perceptions of contemporary witnesses (micro-history). Regarding the latter, decisive factors for a resettlement decision and reintegration

1 The South Tyrolean *Option* of 1939 was an agreement between the dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini on the resettlement of the German and Ladin-speaking minorities in Italy. Those affected had to choose between resettling in the German Reich or remaining in fascist Italy.

2 "Literaturverzeichnis Option und Erinnerung," Institut für Zeitgeschichte Innsbruck, accessed April 14, 2023, <http://www.optionunderinnerung.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Literaturliste-Option-und-Erinnerung.pdf>.

3 The *Re-Option* was a treaty of 1948 between Italy and Austria, which gave most of the *Optants* the possibility to re-acquire Italian citizenship.

4 The following contributions focus explicitly on the *Re-Option* in recent years: Günther Pallaver, Leopold Steurer, and Martha Verdonfer, eds., *Einmal Option und zurück. Die Folgen der Aus- und Rückwanderung für Südtirols Nachkriegsentwicklung* (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2019); Stecher, "Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten"; Sarah Oberbichler, "Symbolic control of return migration: The South Tyrolean example (1946–1955)," *SocArXiv* (2024), accessed February 22, 2024, doi:10.31235/osf.io/jn4gd.

5 Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmaier, eds., *Heimatlos: Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler* (Wien: Deuticke, 1993), 181–303; Ivan Stecher, "Die unerwünschten Heimkehrer. Rückkehr und (Re-)Integration," in *Einmal Option und zurück. Die Folgen der Aus- und Rückwanderung für Südtirols Nachkriegsentwicklung*, ed. Günther Pallaver, Leopold Steurer, and Martha Verdonfer (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2019), 127–156.

6 An overview of this can be found in the chapters about the macro-political situation.

will be identified, which is based on a corpus of 25 interviews with contemporary witnesses, whose lives were deeply influenced by the *Option*.

The focus of this paper is on the following research question: “What macro-political, economic, and individual factors influenced decisions about a possible return, as well as the reintegration process, of South Tyrolean return migrants according to the individual perceptions of contemporary witnesses?”

In the case of deciding to return to South Tyrol, it is assumed that particularly the possession of property and family relations, as well as the lack of property and prospects in Austria, worked in favor of a return. On the other hand, better educational possibilities, successful socio-economic and social establishment in their new home country, as well as the uncertainty involved in returning, were arguments for staying in Austria. Successful reintegration in South Tyrol was mainly determined by two factors, accommodation and employment, while being a member of an association or club also promoted social interaction. This chapter will further show that contrary to previous historiographical research, at least in rural areas, reintegration of the return migrants was largely uneventful and ultimately successful since people returning to small towns and villages did not have to enter (urban) housing and job-market competition. However, reintegration could work also in larger towns, such as Merano and Bolzano, if the return migrants were not housed in segregated accommodation. By focusing on decision-making processes and reintegration, this chapter intends to fill the remaining research gaps in the re-migration process of *Optants*.

Historical Background of the Topic

After the end of World War II, about two-thirds of the South Tyrolean *Optants* lived in Austria.⁷ An illegal return was difficult due to closed borders and many uncertainties and. Thus, such a return became the exclusive undertaking of younger, single *Optants* who could hope to rely on a social network in South Tyrol.⁸ If these return migrants managed to return illegally across the “green border,” they were usually tacitly tolerated by the Italian executive. During the negotiations in Paris in 1946, Italy had to refrain from unnecessarily stirring up the political situ-

⁷ “Statistische Erfassung der Südtiroler Optanten in Österreich,” November 19, 1947. Tiroler Landesarchiv (TLA), ATL, Referat “S”, 15/III U/h.

⁸ Stefan Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” in *Die Option: Südtirol zwischen Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Klaus Eisterer and Rolf Steininger, Innsbrucker Forschungen zur Zeitgeschichte 5 (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1989), 365–84, 370–71.

ation in South Tyrol, to give the Allies the impression of behaving generously and democratically towards the German- and Ladin-speaking minorities.⁹

The economic situation in South Tyrol in the first post-war years was better than in Austria or Germany. More specifically, there was no food rationing and everyday goods could be purchased freely. Furthermore, after the fall of the fascist regime, a democratic form of government was established which made free elections possible, and the enactment of the First Statute of Autonomy in 1948 seemed promising as well.¹⁰

Soon after the end of the war, when they were given equal *de jure* status to Austrian citizens, the legal situation of the *Optants* in Austria was determined by a council cabinet¹¹ decision.¹² *De facto* a distinction must be made between those *Optants* who were accommodated in *Südtiroler Siedlungen*¹³ or specially provided flats¹⁴ from 1939–1943 and those who lived in conquered territories of Eastern Europe. The latter were expelled towards the end of the war and fled to Austria and, while the former mostly lived in safe flats, the displaced persons were often accommodated in emergency shelters and former camps.¹⁵

However, the macro-political situation changed significantly during the *Re-Option* period from February 5, 1948 to February 4, 1949. Both Italy and Austria wanted to have as few *Optants* in their country as possible; due to an economic recession after the end of the war, it was in the interest of the Austrian government to resettle destitute *Optants*, since they represented an “additional burden” from an economic point of view.¹⁶ Strengthening the position of German and Ladin speakers in South Tyrol to increase their importance as a minority – especially regarding the German-speaking voter group – was also an argument of the Austrian government. Information and propaganda initiatives aiming at achieving the highest possible

⁹ Stecher, “Die unerwünschten Heimkehrer,” 131–32.

¹⁰ Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert: Vom Leben und Überleben einer Minderheit* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2004), 464.

¹¹ *Kabinettsrat* was the name given to the meeting of government members under the provisional government of Karl Renner in 1945.

¹² “Kabinettsratsbeschluß über die Behandlung der in Österreich ansässigen Südtiroler vom 29.8.1945,” Staatskanzlei Nr. 6043 – 2/1945. TLA, ATL, Referat “S”, 15/II U/c, 2, I.

¹³ TLA, NHT. They were built in the years 1939–1945, mainly in the larger Austrian cities, to accommodate the *Optants*.

¹⁴ Until March 1940 there was a private housing programme for South Tyrolean *Optants* (“Der Beaufragte des Gauleiters für das Wohn- und Siedlungswesen an alle Kreisleiter, Landräte und Bürgermeister,” March 20, 1940. Stadtarchiv Innsbruck (STI), Bauakt Südtiroler Siedlung (Sammung Köfler)).

¹⁵ Ivan Stecher, “Projektbericht Option museal,” unpublished manuscript, February 28, 2023.

¹⁶ Oberbichler, “Symbolic control of return migration,” 7.

number of return migrants were connected to this issue. In addition to Austrian media, the South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP)¹⁷ and the Association of South Tyroleans in Austria (GVS)¹⁸ were especially involved.¹⁹

When it became apparent, that despite those measures, a low number of people had chosen the *Re-Option*, the Austrian Council of Ministers passed a measure on November 27, 1948, which limited the legal equality of South Tyroleans in Austria. Only those who had chosen the *Re-Option* or would later *re-opt* would remain equal to Austrian citizens,²⁰ which was done to incentivize the *Re-Option*.²¹

On the other hand, the Italian state deliberately created insecurity through bureaucratic and political opacity to keep the number of return migrants low. This affected all aspects of social participation, such as access to housing and the labor market, citizenship and related rights, including health and social insurance, payment of travel and transport costs on Italian territory, payment of pensions, conditions of wealth transfer, and the integration of government employees. The reasons for this policy were both socio-economic and ethnopolitical.²² In addition, the Italian state refused all financial support for the creation of infrastructure for return migrants.²³

However, the most serious Italian measure turned out to be an organized migration of Italians from southern provinces to South Tyrol. Demographically, the immigrants were mainly young families of working age.²⁴ Since South Tyrol was in

17 The South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP) was founded in May 1945 to protect the interests of the German and Ladin speaking minority in the Italian state, and is still the dominant political party in South Tyrol.

18 The Gesamtverband der Südtiroler in Österreich (GVS) was an interest group of South Tyrolean *Optants* living in Austria, founded after the end of the war, with many regional offshoots.

19 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 465.

20 *Wiener Zeitung*, November 27, 1948. Newly enacted laws were published in the *Wiener Zeitung*.

21 Stefan Lechner and Helmut Alexander, "Die Rücksiedlung." In *Heimatlos: Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler*, ed. Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmaier (Wien: Deuticke, 1993), 181–272, 219.

22 Ibid., 255. For example, there are statements by the Secretary of State at that time and influential Italian politician Giulio Andreotti, according to which, in the interests of the Italian population, no more than 10,000–20,000 *Optants* should return (Revisione opzioni: Precedenza nella trattazione delle domande e rimpatrio optanti, March 14, 1949. Archivio Generale della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (AGPM), UZC, SEZ III b. 19 fasc. 62.2.2) (Optants Review: Priority in the processing of applications and opting repatriation, March 14, 1949. AGPM, UZC, SEZ III folder 19, file. 62.2.2).

23 Stefan Lechner, "Die Heimat ruft?," in *Option. Heimat. Opzioni. Eine Geschichte Südtirols/Una storia dell'Alto Adige, Katalog zur Ausstellung des Tiroler Geschichtsvereins*, ed. Tiroler Geschichtsverein, Sektion Bozen (Wien: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1989), 304–39.

24 Ennio Marcelli, "Le Semirurali di Bolzano," in *Nicht nur Semirurali*, ed. Arbeitsgruppe für ein Museum in den Semirurali and Giuseppe Albertoni (Bozen: Amt für Museen und kunsthistorische Kulturgüter, 2004), 214–43, 206.

the midst of a structural change, in which the agricultural sector was losing jobs and the industrial and administrative sectors employed mainly Italians, the situation for return migrants became increasingly difficult.²⁵ As a result, although more than 15,000 of them found accommodation with relatives or were able to buy or rent their own homes, the remaining 5,000 lived in emergency shelters and camps and later in *Rücksiedler Siedlungen*.²⁶

Theory: Selected Theoretical Aspects of Return Migration

In general, historiography has identified three meta-factors for migrants' decision to return and reintegrate: socioeconomic status (housing, work), social network, and emotion (shame, homesickness). Notably, the social network factor, in the form of migration networks, plays an increasingly important role in recent migration theories.²⁷ The majority of these view migration as a phenomenon influenced by economic parameters and assign a decisive role to the aspect of hope for a better life (better job prospects, higher income). Thus, return migration is often understood as the result of failed expectations.²⁸ The factors mentioned previously (social network and emotionality) are also brought to the fore in network theories.²⁹ The information component, in particular, provided by the social network, mostly conveys a perceived form of existential security. After all, social contacts have the potential to act as a stable anchor in society and ease arrival.³⁰ For sociologists Douglas S. Massey and Monica Boyd, it is these social networks that form the crucial link between the area of emigration and area of immigration in the course of

25 Adolf Leidlmair, *Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft in Südtirol* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1958), 104. Due to a lack of alternatives, the book is considered a standard reference book describing the socio-demographic situation of South Tyrol during this period.

26 Lechner and Alexander, "Die Rücksiedlung," 259. They were built to accommodate the return migrants.

27 Christof Parnreiter, "Theorien und Forschungsansätze zu Migration," in *Internationale Migration. Die globale Herausforderung des 21. Jahrhunderts?* ed. Karl Husa, Christof Parnreiter, and Irene Stacher (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2000), 25–52, 36.

28 Georg Borjas, "Economic Theory and International Migration," *International Migration Review* 23, no. 3 (1989): 457–85, 457–59; Jean-Pierre Cassarino, "Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited," *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 6, no. 2 (2004): 253–79, 255–56.

29 Parnreiter, "Theorien und Forschungsansätze," 36–37.

30 Cassarino, "Theorising Return Migration," 263–64.

the migration process.³¹ This is also the basis for the assumption that return migration movements do not necessarily require economic factors to commence. More precisely, economic dynamics often provide the impetus to consider migration or return migration, and the components of social network and emotion become significant – in a second step – during the decision-making phase.³² A causal link with the effect of the social network has been widely demonstrated in both immigration and return migration.³³

This is directly related to the component of emotionality, which comes into play as the third factor mentioned before. There is a bond between the members of a social network (for example, the family), in the sense of a relationship of trust, which is associated with a multitude of feelings and impressions. Concerning migration, these can likewise promote a return to the homeland.³⁴

An example of the interaction of the three factors mentioned above is provided by an interviewed return migrant to the rural area of South Tyrol.³⁵

The love for German culture, for South Tyrol, is still there. It has always been there and so we wanted to return, especially after we had also received permission [because of the *Re-Option*]. Everything was the same: the old homeland . . . , the old house was still there.

You often read that the return migrants were insulted because they took away other people's space. At that time, jobs were scarce and life was difficult to manage in general. My father was appreciated for his work in the village when he returned. My siblings also never said they were ostracized at school. Never! We were always treated well and most people in

³¹ Monica Boyd, "Family and Personal Networks. International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas," *International Migration Review* 23, no. 3 (1989): 638–70, 641–52; Douglas S. Massey, "The Social and Economic Origins of Immigration," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 5110 (1990): 60–72, 68–72.

³² Douglas S. Massey and Felipe G. España, "The Social Process of International Migration," *Science* 237 (1987): 733–38, 733–35.

³³ Boyd, "Family and Personal Network," 639–40.

³⁴ Parnreiter, "Theorien und Forschungsansätze," 37.

³⁵ Interview with Robert Luzius Wolf, Laatsch (Mals), July 29, 2020. Original: *Die Liebe zum Deutschtum, zu Südtirol, ist immer noch dagewesen. Es war immer schon da und so wollten wir wieder rücksiedeln, besonders nachdem wir auch [durch die Rückoption] die Erlaubnis dazu bekommen hatten. Es war alles beim Alten: die alte Heimat . . . , das alte Haus ist auch noch gestanden. Man hat oft gelesen, dass die Rückoptanten beschimpft worden sind, da sie den Leuten den Platz wegnehmen. Zu dieser Zeit waren die Arbeitsplätze knapp und das Leben war allgemein schwierig zu bewältigen. Mein Vater ist bei seiner Rückkehr im Dorf für seine Arbeit sehr geschätzt worden. Auch meine Geschwister haben nie gesagt, dass sie in der Schule ausgesperrt wurden. Nie! Man hat uns immer gut behandelt und die meisten Leute im Dorf haben sich gefreut, dass wir wieder da sind. Natürlich haben auch die Geschwister gleich gearbeitet und sind niemandem zur Last gefallen.*

the village were happy to have us back. Of course, my siblings also started working right away and were not a burden to anyone.

The emotion factor is addressed here in the form of attachment to one's homeland and a form of cultural conservatism. The village community as a social structure also helped with reintegration while a special role is played by work, which forms the basis for both social recognition and economic livelihood.

Methodology: Oral History and Collective Memory

In the course of the so-called “cultural turn” beginning in the 1970s, oral history gradually began to establish itself as a qualitative method in the academic field of history. At the same time, the new paradigm of “history from below” made it possible to more thoroughly explore the historical fields of everyday life, cultural history, and gender history.³⁶ Since the thematic focus of oral history is on the everyday history of “ordinary people” and their experiences,³⁷ research into the motives for migration and return migration benefits enormously from it.³⁸ For the contemporary historian, the oral history method not only expands the existing pool of sources but also opens up previously unknown perspectives.³⁹

What became apparent during the course of interviews with contemporary witnesses, is the enormous importance of collective memory for the oral history method became apparent. The two historians Julia Obertreis and Anke Stephan also emphasize this: “Oral History is not only a method but also a type of source, for tapping into a collective memory and an interdisciplinary field of research.”⁴⁰

In South Tyrol, memories of the *Option* and the associated schism within the German- and Ladin-speaking population were excluded for most of the second half of the twentieth century. This was done, among other things, for pragmatic-political reasons to present a united front as an ethnic group towards the Italian

³⁶ Cord Pagenstecher, “Oral History and Digital Humanities,” *BIOS* 30 (2017): 76–91, 76–77.

³⁷ Almut Leh, “Oral History als Methode,” in *Handbuch Methoden der Geschichtswissenschaft*, ed. Stefan Haas (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020), 1–20, 2–4.

³⁸ Indira Chowdhury, “Speaking of the Past: Perspectives on Oral History,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 30 (2014): 39–42, 40.

³⁹ Cristof Dejung, “Oral History und kollektives Gedächtnis. Für eine sozialhistorische Erweiterung der Erinnerungsgeschichte,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 34, no. 1 (2008): 96–115, 106.

⁴⁰ Julia Obertreis and Anke Stephan, “Erinnerung, Identität und ‚Fakten‘: die Methodik der Oral History und die Erforschung (post)sozialistischer Gesellschaften (Einleitung),” in *Erinnerungen nach der Wende. Oral History und (post-) sozialistische Gesellschaften*, ed. Julia Obertreis and Anke Stephan (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2009), 9–35, 9–10.

state. Therefore, the experiences of the *Optants* and return migrants were awarded hardly any attention.⁴¹ In the 1990s, research was still greeted with silence, uncertainties, and refusals on the part of contemporary witnesses.⁴²

A younger generation of historians, on the other hand, has profited and continues to profit from the change in the culture of remembrance, which has also led to openness on the part of contemporary witnesses and to their broader social acceptance. Thus, many contemporary witnesses responded to recruitment calls, resulting in a considerable research corpus.⁴³ None of the contemporary witnesses spoke only of their experiences, but always interwove these with the fate of their family or larger communities, such as the *Optant* group as a collective.⁴⁴ Individual memory and collective memory are thus closely related, as the cultural scientist Aleida Assmann⁴⁵ has also postulated. The fixed points of this collective memory have been created by some contemporary witnesses themselves by writing down essential events or significant points.⁴⁶ For the *Re-Option*, this means in concrete terms that, up to now, it has been possible to trace the preconditions for return and reintegration on the macro level of diplomatic history. Nonetheless oral history is needed to understand their mechanisms of impact on microhistory, on people's everyday lives.

Sources: Research Corpus for the Case Study

For this micro-historical case study, interviews with contemporary witnesses were obtained from three projects:

1. Master's thesis by Ivan Stecher⁴⁷ (2019–2021, ten interviews).

⁴¹ Eva Pfanzelter, "Die (un)verdiente Erinnerung an die Option 1939," *Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione* 22/2 (2013): 13–40.

⁴² Example of Martha Verdonfer, *Zweierlei Faschismus. Alltagserfahrungen in Südtirol 1918–1945* (Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1990).

⁴³ Such a corpus, for example, can be found in: Eva Pfanzelter, *Option und Gedächtnis: Erinnerungsorte der Südtiroler Umsiedlung* (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2015).

⁴⁴ Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention* (München: C.H. Beck, 2020), 16.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17–18.

⁴⁶ Assmann, "Kollektives Gedächtnis," in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, ed. Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 10–16.

⁴⁷ Interviewer: Ivan Stecher. Excerpts were published in Stecher, "Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten."

2. “Option museal. Die Südtiroler Option von 1939. Fallstudie Jenbach” Project, Institute of Contemporary History, Innsbruck⁴⁸ (2021–2023, 11 interviews)
3. Eurac Research, Centre for Autonomy Experience, Bolzano⁴⁹ (2022, four interviews)

Thus, the case study is based on 25 interviews with contemporary witnesses, which are supplemented – where available – by file entries and relevant personal records of the interviewees. The inspection of the *Dienststelle Umsiedlung Südtirol* (DUS) files⁵⁰ in the Tyrolean Provincial Archives considerably facilitated the reconstruction of the *Option* path of most of the contemporary witnesses since, in addition to accommodation and work assignments, train tickets and various applications were found.

The interviewed contemporary witnesses have the following socio-demographic characteristics: The majority of the interviewed *Optants* (20) moved to Austria with their families. Four families were settled in Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia), and one in Germany itself.⁵¹ Concerning the total number of *Optants*, Austria *Optants* are slightly overrepresented in the corpus, while Germany *Optants* are underrepresented. This is because, of the total number of *Optants*, about two-thirds went to Austria and 15 % to Germany.⁵² The native language of all interview partners is German.⁵³ With 13 men and 12 women, the gender

⁴⁸ “Option museal. Die Südtiroler Option von 1939. Fallstudie Jenbach,” Institut für Zeitgeschichte Innsbruck, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/zeitgeschichte/optionmudi/option-museal/>. Interviewer is Ivan Stecher and the interviews will be uploaded to the homepage soon.

⁴⁹ “Option. Stimmen der Erinnerung. Le Opzioni in Alto Adige/Südtirol,” Centre for Autonomy Experience, eurac research Bozen, accessed April 22, 2023, <https://www.eurac.edu/de/institutes-centers/center-for-autonomy-experience>. Interviewer is Ivan Stecher and the interviews will be uploaded to the homepage soon.

⁵⁰ TLA, DUS, Personalakten. The *Dienststelle Umsiedlung Südtirol* was an organization of the Nazi bureaucracy in Innsbruck, which organized the resettlement of the *Optants* from Innsbruck to other areas of the *Reich*. It was subordinate to the *Gauleiter* Franz Hofer. This file preserves numerous documents on biography and migration way of the applicant and their family as well as socio-demographic data. In addition, the family's complete *Option* path can be traced up to the day of leaving.

⁵¹ The countries are the national borders of 2023.

⁵² Leidlmaier, *Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft*, 99.

⁵³ The overwhelming majority of the *Optants* were of German mother tongue. The *Option* of the Italian- and Ladin-speaking South Tyroleans is a separate chapter due to, among other things, the closed settlement area for some of the Ladins. For more information, see Werner Pescosta, *Die Geschichte der Dolomitenladiner* (San Martino in Badia: Istitut Ladin „Micurà de Rü“, 2013), 340–71.

ratio is balanced. The birth years of contemporary witnesses range from 1929 to 1949, with W. Schmid⁵⁴ being the only contemporary witness born after 1945; nevertheless, he physically experienced the *Re-Option*. Fourteen out of 25 interview partners returned to South Tyrol in the course of the *Re-Option*, with six of them being illegal return migrants and eight legal once. Ten return migrants are of peripheral origin and four of urban origin; 12 out of 14 contemporary witnesses resettled in their respective hometown; 13 of the 14 contemporary witnesses resettled within the period of resettlement defined by the historian Stefan Lechner as lasting from 1945 to 1955.⁵⁵ The only exception was Maria Pallaver who did not resettle until 1959.⁵⁶ In terms of social status at the time, the interviewees can be classified similarly to the majority of *Optants*: a disproportionately large number of them, especially those who emigrated in 1939/40, had no property in South Tyrol and only limited job prospects. Thus, they hoped for housing and work in the Reich.⁵⁷ A smaller number of the witnesses still had property in South Tyrol.

The biographical history narrative interviews are based on the guidelines of the “Österreichische Mediathek,” which are structured as follows:⁵⁸

1. The contemporary witness talks freely about his/her life with a focus on the research topic.
2. The interviewer asks questions based on a prepared guideline.
3. A small conversation develops based on “memory objects.” In this study, DUS files which also contain “emotional objects” such as photos of the father of the family or decisive documents were used mostly.

For this chapter, the second part is of high relevance. Basic categories (accommodation, employment, etc.) were formed based on previous scientific findings, migration-theoretical considerations, and taking collective memory into account. In addition, the contemporary witnesses had the opportunity not only to answer questions about the basic categories with yes/no but also to elaborate on their answers in greater detail and describe their experiences and impressions. Then, the

⁵⁴ Interview with Werner Schmid, St. Paul's (Eppan), February 19, 2022.

⁵⁵ Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 380.

⁵⁶ Interview with Maria Pallaver, Schlanders, April 20, 2019.

⁵⁷ Compare with Helmut Alexander, “Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler 1939–1945,” in *Heimatlos. Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler*, ed. Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmair (Wien: Deuticke, 1993), 43–180.

⁵⁸ “Interviews als historische Quellen. Ein Leitfaden für die wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit Lebensgeschichten,” Österreichische Mediathek, accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.mediathek.at/unterrichtsmaterialien/interviews-als-historische-quellen/>.

full interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded with the analysis software ATLAS.ti⁵⁹

Finally, about the significance of the study, since the *Option* and *Re-Option* processes occurred in the years 1939–1955, this is a final attempt to interview the few surviving contemporary witnesses. Due to the fact that individual memory is shaped collectively, the statements of the younger *Optants* are also valid as a result of the interaction with their parents and older siblings, for example.⁶⁰

Decision-making: Initial Macro-political Situation

In 1948, 40,000 South Tyroleans declared their intention to return to Italy. Out of these, around 15,000 stated that they had already secured their livelihood in South Tyrol.⁶¹ Before the actual return, however, there was still a phase of decision-making, with an analysis of this process found in the thesis by historian Sabine Schweitzer.⁶² In general, Schweitzer names three meta-factors: the initial political and economic situation as well as individual reasons. “Economic” refers primarily to occupation because *Optants* who belonged to occupational groups that were in high demand in Austria - mining or construction workers, for example - were less likely to express a desire to return. On the other hand, the desire to return was high among those groups that were particularly needed in South Tyrol, such as skilled workers.⁶³ Furthermore, Schweitzer shows that the desire to resettle decreased in proportion to length of stay,⁶⁴ which was especially true for *Optants* younger than 30, who had spent most of their youth in Austria or Germany due to emigration.⁶⁵ Also, a disproportionately large number of urban *Optants*, who had resettled from the Merano-Bolzano area, expressed a desire to

59 The qualitative data analysis program atlas.ti. ATLAS.ti, <https://atlasti.com/de>.

60 Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen*, 16.

61 League of Alto-Atesini in Carinzia – Review of options 02.09.1948. AGPM, UZC, SEZ III folder. 20 file. 62.2.6).

62 Sabine Schweitzer, “Gehen oder bleiben? Gründe der Südtiroler Umsiedler und Umsiedlerinnen in Österreich zum Wunsch einer Rückkehr nach Südtirol – ermittelt anhand einer quantitativen Auswertung der ‘Erfassung’ der Südtiroler und Südtirolerinnen in Österreich aus dem Jahre 1947” (Diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 1993). Schweitzer refers to a “survey” of all South Tyroleans in Austria from 1947, which she evaluates quantitatively. Some 65 % of the persons recorded stated that they wanted to resettle, the rest expressed a desire to remain. Schweitzer explicitly mentions the necessity of oral history to further develop this research desideratum.

63 Ibid, 159.

64 Ibid, 156–57.

65 Ibid, 150–51.

return,⁶⁶ however, no precise reason is given for this. Schweitzer has further presented a gender-specific study of the decision to *re-opt*,⁶⁷ while reference should also be made to the work of the historian Elisa Heinrich who explored the role of women in the context of the *Option* period.⁶⁸ Women had a certain advantage in terms of knowledge when it came to making the decision of whether to *re-opt*, because most men had been deployed to the front for a long time. The decision for the family to return was made *de jure* – just like the *Option* – by the male head of the household.⁶⁹ The future prospects of their children played a major role in many families. Single women, on the other hand, were guided by the decision of their parents or other close relatives.⁷⁰ The opportunity to learn a profession in the urban areas of Austria was new, especially for young women, and enabled a certain degree of independence that was not available in the event of returning.⁷¹

The standard reference work on the *Re-Option* by historians Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmaier also deals with the decision-making process.⁷² However, their focus is on macro-history, more precisely the political measures of Austria and Italy,⁷³ as can also be found in the more recent contribution by Oberbichler.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, their work also contains excerpts from interviews with contemporary witnesses.⁷⁵ With regard to the decision-making process, two essential factors that favored a return were named: homesickness or hostility in the host region. Conversely, socioeconomic establishment in the new homeland

⁶⁶ Ibid., 154.

⁶⁷ Sabine Schweitzer, “Wandernde Erinnerungen. Südtiroler Umsiedlerinnen und Umsiedler in Österreich,” in *Einmal Option und zurück. Die Folgen der Aus- und Rückwanderung für Südtirols Nachkriegsgesellschaft*, ed. Günther Pallaver, Leopold Steurer, and Martha Verdoner (Bozen: Raetia, 2019), 285–312.

⁶⁸ Elisa Heinrich, “Option – Geschlecht – Erinnerung. Genderspezifische Handlungsräume in der Erinnerung von ZeitzeugInnen an die Südtiroler Option 1939,” *Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione* 22, no. 2 (2013): 94–118.

⁶⁹ TLA, DUS. Personalakten.

⁷⁰ Schweitzer, “Wandernde Erinnerungen,” 300.

⁷¹ Exemplary: interview with Maria Sigmund, Brixen, quoted after Pfanzelter, *Option und Gedächtnis*, 54–55.

⁷² Alexander, Lechner and Leidlmaier, *Heimatlos*.

⁷³ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 181–273. See also Stefan Lechner, “Zwischen den Landesteilen: Südtirols Optanten 1945–1948,” in *Südtirol – Stunde Null? Kriegsende 1945–1946*, ed. Hans Heiss and Gustav Pfeifer (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2000), 281–95.

⁷⁴ Oberbichler, “Symbolic control of return migration.”

⁷⁵ Helmut Alexander, “Wenn man drinnen ist, schaut man, daß man sich weiterwursteln kann,” in *Heimatlos. Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler*, ed. Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmaier (Wien: Deuticke, 1993), 273–303.

(housing and work), uncertainties of a return because of political conditions, or the emotional factor (such as the shame of being confronted with the “wrong decision”) worked against a return.⁷⁶ Alexander also clearly points out that younger people were more skeptical about resettling.⁷⁷

In contrast, several publications⁷⁸ speak of hostility towards the *Optants* by the local population. The reason for this was the relatively high living standards in the *Südtiroler Siedlungen*, which, according to the public perception, were built especially for *Optants*. This is particularly relevant in the cases where hostility or lack of integration is mentioned as a reason for resettlement.

Decision Making: Micro-historical Case Study

Through the evaluation of the interviews and their contextualization within the current state of research, the following factors have emerged that speak for or against a return. Many *Optants* experienced rejection and hostility during the first years. They did so especially because of the *Südtiroler Siedlungen*, which were perceived as being of high quality. However, this did not manifest as a reason for resettlement. Firstly, a network was established within these settlements, predominantly inhabited by South Tyroleans.⁷⁹ Secondly, hostility decreased continuously, especially in the post-war period when the *Re-Option* became an issue.⁸⁰

Moreover, unfulfilled expectations hardly played a role any more for the interviewed contemporary witnesses which, considering earlier assumptions, is surprising.⁸¹ In this case, it only concerned one return migrant family that had changed residence several times and was thus denied accommodation in a *Südtiroler Siedlung* and the job associated with it. Apart from that case, there was hardly any talk of disappointment concerning accommodation and employment

⁷⁶ Ibid., 299–301.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 301.

⁷⁸ Most recently: Marcel Amoser, Sarah Oberbichler, and Eva Pfanzelter, *Von Zugewanderten, Weggegangenen und Dagebliebenen. Beiträge zur Migrationsgeschichte Kufsteins 1930–2000* (Kufstein: Stadtgemeinde Kufstein, 2022); Wittfride Mitterer et al., *Südtiroler Siedlungen. Condominium in mind* (Brixen: Universitätsverlag A. Weger, 2022); Stecher, “Projektbericht Option museal.”

⁷⁹ About 60 % of the *Südtiroler Siedlungen* in the “Gau Tirol-Vorarlberg” were inhabited by *Optants* (Alexander, “Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler,” 130).

⁸⁰ Stecher, “Projektbericht Option museal.”

⁸¹ The assumption that disappointed expectations increased the willingness to return can be found in Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung,” 381.

in post-war Austria. Here, however, an interesting difference emerges in the interviews; those *Optants* who returned illegally in 1945 are more likely to speak of hostility and disappointed expectations than the legal return migrants from 1949 onward. Consequently, hostility must have diminished over time and a process of acclimatization must have occurred with regard to the new homeland. In particular, the *Optants* who settled and worked as farmers in Eastern Europe speak of hostility although, in their case, the previous owners of the farms had been expelled.⁸²

The homesickness factor, in the sense of an emotional or cultural attachment to the place of origin, was relevant for the *Optants* but it hardly figured in the reasons cited for *Re-Option*, which non-return migrants and return migrants alike mentioned. Contrary to these findings, homesickness was mentioned in earlier publications as one of the reasons for returning.⁸³ In the present chapter, however, homesickness was only mentioned as a reinforcer and not as one of the main reasons; many of the people who had not resettled countered this feeling by maintaining relationships in South Tyrol and regularly visiting their old homeland after the end of the war. In this context, migration networks become important since they maintain ties to the old homeland without having to resettle there. In general, this form of emotional attachment to the homeland is to be evaluated, considering the low mobility radius at the time.

The certainty of having a social network in South Tyrol was declared the main reason for returning by almost every interviewee. In addition to the social aspect, this also had advantages in terms of housing and work. After resettlement, many *Re-Optants* first lived with relatives. If there was still property in South Tyrol, it was usually administered by their relatives during the migrants' absence. Furthermore, younger illegal return migrants often worked for their relatives on a farm. In general, two levels can be distinguished in this kinship network: 1) being aware of such a network favored the decision to return, and 2) the network was only activated after the return out of necessity. This applied to *Re-Optants* who were resettled in the areas newly conquered by the German Reich and expelled again at the end of the war. As the research by Massey and Felipe indicates,⁸⁴ the first impulse for return migration comes from economic aspects, while the social network itself becomes relevant in the decision-making phase. This is also reflected in the interviews. Almost all return migrants mentioned ex-

⁸² Detlef Brandes, *Umvolkung, Umsiedlung, rassistische Bestandsaufnahme. NS-“Volkstumspolitik” in den böhmischen Ländern* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 133.

⁸³ Alexander, “Wenn man drinnen ist,” 301; Rudi Christoforetti, *Rieche, es ist die deutsche Faust. Ein Südtiroler “Optantenjunge” erlebt die NS-Zeit in Wels* (Wien: Folio-Verlag, 1999), 171.

⁸⁴ Massey and Felipe, “The Social Process,” 736–37.

isting property in South Tyrol in combination with the social network, whereby the economic dimension of the property was also emphasized. Since a causal connection between the impact of social networks on the extent of immigration or return migration has been proven many times,⁸⁵ a combination of both factors – social network and property – significantly increases the probability of return.

In this case, such property had both an economic and a social advantage: the property was an “anchor point” in the old homeland, and neighborly relations could quickly be rebuilt or were still in place. In our interview, a contemporary witness reported that four families from his neighborhood in the *Südtiroler Siedlung* (Tratzbergsiedlung) in Jenbach in Tyrol had resettled. The reasons he gave for all four’s decisions were the property they still owned and the knowledge of a network of relatives in South Tyrol.⁸⁶

Finally, one group had no decision-making process: return migrants who had primarily been settled in the conquered territories in the eastern Reich.⁸⁷ In their case, the decision-making process was completely omitted and there was an immediate return after the end of the war due to their expulsion. Here, the kinship network was only activated to a certain extent, either after the return or in the face of hardship, as well as in a second step during reintegration. Generally, three types of South Tyrolean displaced persons can be distinguished: families who were able to return home at the end of the war through an act of mercy,⁸⁸ illegal return migrants, and those *Optants* who did not succeed in returning and who lived in North Tyrolean emergency shelters for years.⁸⁹

There were also some factors mentioned that deterred people from a return to South Tyrol. For many *Optants*, the main argument against returning was the successful socio-economic establishment.⁹⁰ However, this does not only refer to their occupation but also to their living conditions and the social network they had built. For some *Optants*, this was still a combination designed by the Nazi system; the *Südtiroler Siedlungen* mainly functioned as a housing program for the industry⁹¹ and the *Optants* worked for the armaments industry or at the front.

⁸⁵ Boyd, “Family and Personal Networks,” 639–40.

⁸⁶ Interview with Erich Wilhalm, Jenbach, April 28, 2021.

⁸⁷ Stecher, “Die unerwünschten Heimkehrer,” 129.

⁸⁸ These number about 600 displaced *Optants* (Wirtschafts- und Finanzfragen zur Rücksiedlung, Karl Gollob, Bozen, October 12, 1946. TLA, ATL, Referat S, 15/III U/g, 3).

⁸⁹ Among others, South Tyrolean *Optants* lived in former Wehrmacht ammunition barracks in the Eichat camp near Hall in Tyrol. *Südtiroler in Nordtirol* (TLA, Sammlung Referat “S”, 15/II U/c, 2, II).

⁹⁰ This thesis can be found in Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 466–67.

⁹¹ “Aktenvermerk über die Dienstreise nach Pfunds,” February 19, 1940. TLA, NHT, 3. Bestand, Box 14, Mappe 4, KG.-Dr.W./Bü. This example shows that the connection to armament factories or other enterprises played a central role in the choice of location for the *Südtiroler Siedlungen*.

This resulted in many *Südtiroler Siedlungen* being built near industrial complexes that, converted to “peace production”, could still offer employment to many workers in the post-war period.⁹² The combination of relatively high-quality housing and secure jobs in industry were benefits that were mostly reserved for Italian workers in South Tyrol.⁹³

Likewise, a long absence from home was an argument against returning.⁹⁴ In the last quarter of 1939 and 1940, more than half of the approximately 75,000 *Optants* had already emigrated.⁹⁵ Thus, until the first legal resettlement transports in June 1949, up to ten years had passed for *Optant* families.⁹⁶ While this long period of absence was less relevant for the parents of *Optants*, it was mainly younger people, who had spent a large part of their youth in their new homeland, and did not want to resettle because of this. They were often only a few years old when they resettled and had not been able to create any emotional ties to their old home. Therefore, this argument was a generational issue.⁹⁷ The Italian Government also artificially increased uncertainty through political means, which was especially common regarding issues such as the possible availability of a job, a home, and a social network.⁹⁸

For those return migrants who had neither property nor job prospects through a social network, the “exploratory trips” became rather important.⁹⁹ These were trips to South Tyrol lasting a maximum of 12 days, for the purpose of finding work and housing for potential return migrants, which were also relevant for some of the contemporary witnesses.¹⁰⁰ This opportunity was temporarily discontinued during a bilateral crisis between Italy and Austria,¹⁰¹ which also explains why property and a social network in South Tyrol were such strong arguments against returning.

⁹² One example is the Heinkel-Werke, which was the largest armament factory in Tyrol during the Nazi era (Stecher, “Projektbericht Option museal”).

⁹³ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 257.

⁹⁴ This theory can also be found in Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 466–67.

⁹⁵ According to the ADERSt, a total of 3245 *Reichsdeutsche* (German citizens) and 40,031 *Volksdeutsche* (“German speakers”) had emigrated by June 30, 1940 (Arbeitsbericht der Hauptstelle der ADERSt und ihrer Zweigstellen. 1939–1942. Band 1: Arbeitsberichte der gesamten Zweigstellen für die Zeit vom 2. Juni bis 24. August 1940. Bundesarchiv Koblenz, R 49/485).

⁹⁶ Dolomiten, June 11, 1949.

⁹⁷ Sabine Schweitzer, “Gehen oder bleiben?,” 156–57.

⁹⁸ This is the subject of Oberbichler, “Symbolic control of return migration.”

⁹⁹ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 261. The authors write about the high importance of exploratory trips, especially for *Optants* without a large social network in South Tyrol.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Alfred Christoforetti, Branzoll, May 11, 2019.

¹⁰¹ *Verbandsmitteilungen*, April 4, 1949.

Somewhat surprisingly, the case study shows that none of the interviewed contemporary witnesses were prevented from resettling by continued *Option* conflicts, which is in contrast to earlier assumptions.¹⁰² One possible explanation could be the change in collective memory. While it was still strongly contested and thus politicized in the 1980s, a historicization of the *Option* can be observed nowadays,¹⁰³ which means that with a détente of historical politics and historicization, memories of this time also changed and became less dramatic. Moreover, the individual memory of the contemporary witnesses is also shaped collectively which implies a certain alignment of individual memories.¹⁰⁴

One argument against a return that has never been addressed is better educational opportunities for children. This argument was exclusively mentioned by contemporary witnesses who came from rural areas of South Tyrol and now lived in larger cities in Austria, such as Innsbruck or Graz.¹⁰⁵

Reintegration: Initial Macro-political Situation

Some historians have attempted to categorize return migrants into three categories based on the success of their reintegration.¹⁰⁶ The first group contains those *Re-Optants* who illegally returned to South Tyrol until the *Optantendekret*¹⁰⁷ was issued in 1948, with their “return home” taking place soon after the end of the war: “They hardly attracted attention.”¹⁰⁸ In addition, several relatively favorable circumstances ensured a good starting position upon return, which included decentralized resettlement in the respective places of origin, the often-available provisional accommodation with relatives, and an adequate economic situation in South Tyrol. Thus, most of the illegal return migrants were not involved in the competition for housing units and jobs, which became increasingly scarce. Conse-

¹⁰² Example Alexander, “Wenn man drinnen ist,” 299.

¹⁰³ The thesis of the “historicization” of the *Option* in South Tyrol can be found in Pfanzelter, “Die (un)verdiente Erinnerung,” 32.

¹⁰⁴ Assmann, “Kollektives Gedächtnis,” 10–16.

¹⁰⁵ Heinrich, “Option – Geschlecht – Erinnerung,” 94–118. In this context, Heinrich writes about the significance for young female *Optants* of being able to complete an apprenticeship.

¹⁰⁶ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 261; Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 467; Stecher, “Die unerwünschten Heimkehrer,” 152–55.

¹⁰⁷ The “Opantendekret” of February 1948 allowed *Optants* to apply for Italian citizenship.

¹⁰⁸ Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 467.

quently, they were significantly less often victims of open aversion and hostility, and integration was probably soon achieved.¹⁰⁹

Legal return migrants who quickly found accommodation – either through acquisition or through living with relatives – and jobs after their return belong to the second group, many of whom took advantage of the opportunity of a legal return soon after the issuance of the *Optantendekret* and the expiry of the decision period in June 1949. Contrary to the first group, their resettlement area was less decentralized; despite a stronger concentration in the urban area, the members of this group did not live in recognizably segregated neighborhoods,¹¹⁰ and were “not discriminated against as much as those who lived in *Rücksiedler Siedlungen*,” Steininger states.¹¹¹ Moreover, the “stigma of resettlement” attached to parts of this group did not prevent their reintegration from being successful over time.¹¹² Workplaces, local associations, and possible social interaction (e.g. going to church on Sundays) were important elements for successful integration. A large number of public appeals (via media and public figures)¹¹³ further helped improve the situation as well as charitable support from various sides, such as the resettlement aid committees¹¹⁴ or the St. Vinzenz association.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, this indicates that a certain degree of public solidarity did indeed exist. However, whether the return migrants were truly “received with joy and goodwill” everywhere, as the *Tiroler Bauernzeitung* wrote in mid-November of 1949,¹¹⁶ is questionable and more likely to be a media strategy.¹¹⁷

The third group consists of those legal return migrants who depended on public support services upon their return – a clear stigma at the time – and, therefore, mostly lived in the so-called *Rücksiedler Siedlungen*, segregated settlements in

¹⁰⁹ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 261; Interview with Andreas Piok, St. Andrä (Brixen), April 18, 2019; interview with Erwin Hofer, Onach (St. Lorenzen), January 25, 2019.

¹¹⁰ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 261.

¹¹¹ Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 467.

¹¹² Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 261.

¹¹³ For example, the then Bishop Johannes Geisler demanded solidarity with return migrants from his compatriots (*Dolomiten*, November 17, 1949). Silvius Magnago, then president of the provincial parliament and vice-mayor of Bolzano, demanded that “prejudices and defamations” as well as “comforts and egoism” with which the return migrants were faced were to be opposed resolutely (*Dolomiten*, July 17, 1950).

¹¹⁴ See in detail in the contributions of Alexander and Lechner, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 181–271.

¹¹⁵ *Dolomiten*, October 8/9, 1949.

¹¹⁶ *Tiroler Bauernzeitung*, November 17, 1949. Original: *Die Rücksiedler wurden überall “mit Freunde und Wohlwollen aufgenommen”*.

¹¹⁷ Oberbichler, “Symbolic control of return migration.”

urban areas.¹¹⁸ Due to this location, the residents were clearly recognizable as return migrants; being a return migrant could become a collective attribution for the residents and the clearly visible spatial demarcation cemented this stigma.¹¹⁹ When the economic situation noticeably deteriorated at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, these return migrants were perceived as competitors for the scarce jobs available. In addition, their emergency accommodation in the *Rücksiedler Siedlungen* was often regarded as “free housing” in times of housing shortage.¹²⁰ The rather poor education of the residents was an additional obstacle in the labor market, with the resulting image as “good-for-nothing” residents ultimately making it more difficult for residents to find work.¹²¹ Associations had a positive effect on all three groups of return migrants in terms of integration. The feeling of “coming back” and of being “accepted” in society was significantly strengthened through social interactions and, therefore, the typical associations of South Tyrol were of central importance for the reintegration of return migrants.¹²²

Reintegration: Micro-historical Case Study

It must be stated that only interviews of return migrants are relevant for this second case study, which concerns a total of 14 individuals. Among these 14 interviewees are four displaced persons for whom the decision-making process was omitted, however, considering reintegration, this small group will become relevant again.

All of the witnesses deemed their workplace as important for their reintegration. Several of them explicitly mentioned its social importance, firstly, in terms of social prestige, and secondly, in terms of interaction with other villagers. For younger *Optants*, finding a job was not a problem, according to their own perception; it was older return migrants who struggled with the job search. This is due to the political fact that there was a high presence of Italian immigrants in urban areas who were favored for jobs in the industrial and public sector.¹²³ Several contemporary witnesses reported that their fathers often worked as day laborers in their villages. The interviewees repeatedly emphasized the integrative component of work; in rural areas, particularly, the expectation prevailed that people

¹¹⁸ Lechner and Alexander “Die Rücksiedlung,” 259.

¹¹⁹ Stecher “Die unerwünschten Heimkehrer,” 146.

¹²⁰ Lechner, “Die Heimat ruft?,” 327.

¹²¹ Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 377.

¹²² Stecher, “Die unerwünschten Heimkehrer,” 155.

¹²³ Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 456.

had to work. Conversely, this also meant that working return migrants were considered to be integrated and accepted by the village community. Many of the younger migrants in rural areas worked as farmhands and maids on their relatives' farms,¹²⁴ and even some return migrants who were accommodated in a *Rücksiedler Siedlung* had hardly any problems finding work.

Almost all of the contemporary witnesses interviewed rated the availability of housing as the most important reintegration factor, next to the workplace. The quality of accommodation was considered less relevant than the fact that housing was usually associated with a return to a kinship or neighborhood network. The interviewed witnesses either still had property in South Tyrol when they returned (an important reason for returning), found accommodation with relatives (particularly the displaced persons), or secured a flat during the "exploratory trips." In particular, during the first period of the legal *Re-Option*, it was difficult to return without housing and work,¹²⁵ only one interviewee returned with his family in 1954 and had to move into a flat of the *Rücksiedler Siedlung* in Rentsch (Bozen) due to homelessness. In this case, the contemporary witness¹²⁶ reported strong hostility towards the residents, as Lechner and Alexander also outlined.¹²⁷ Most of the other return migrants reported scarcely any integration difficulties, with only those who resettled in language-group border areas in the South Tyrolean *Unterland* still speaking of continued language group conflicts and hostility because of their *Option* decision. It is important to note that the group conflicts due to language differences were already significant for the *Option* decision.

The social network was considered very important by the interviewees, with most of them making reference to relatives. In general, the social network organized the search for work, and housing for displaced persons and illegal return migrants, and was hence also responsible for the reintegration process. However, it also promoted integration among legal return migrants from 1949 onwards. For example, relatives often administered the property of potential return migrants,¹²⁸ which in turn made it possible for them to work on their farm¹²⁹ and provide sup-

¹²⁴ At that time, the agricultural sector was of central importance for South Tyrol. Due to the emigration of workers during the *Option*, this share increased again in the 1940s and 1950s. Here, an employment rate in the primary sector of over 50 % can be assumed (Leidlmaier, *Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft*).

¹²⁵ The GVS and the Office for Resettlement Assistance openly communicated that an orderly resettlement was planned and that those persons who already had a job and a flat in prospect in South Tyrol should be resettled first (*Verbandsmitteilungen*, November 15, 1948).

¹²⁶ Interview with Werner Schmid, St. Paul's (Eppan), February 19, 2022.

¹²⁷ Lechner and Alexander, "Die Rücksiedlung," 261–62.

¹²⁸ Interview with Robert Luzius Wolf, Laatsch (Mals), July 29, 2020.

¹²⁹ Interview with Erwin Hofer, Onach (St. Lorenzen), January 25, 2019.

port for a future resettlement,¹³⁰ while they could also pass on information to the would-be *Re-Optants*.¹³¹

The primacy of the kinship network for reintegration is therefore an essential novelty of the study and had not been analyzed in this form before. This network was the most decisive factor for reintegration, regardless of the circumstances of the respective return migrants. Conversely, this means that where such a network did not exist. Reintegration became considerably more difficult, as Lechner and Alexander also point out.¹³² In general, it can be said that group networks always encompass ambivalence. In both cases, when settling in the *Südtiroler Siedlungen* or the *Rücksiedlersiedlungen*, these networks also had the potential to make integration into the host society more difficult. Specifically, the inhabitants of these settlements could be confined and excluded; these networks were effective within the settlement but could not work outside due to segregation. *Optants* were often able to form their own social networks, especially when they emigrated, while some were able to specify a desired destination.¹³³ However, this required proof of kinship or relations with the Nazi bureaucracy.¹³⁴

This also raises the question of whether decentralized settlements were also perceived as an advantage by contemporary witnesses, with the issue of decentralized or centralized settlements deeply intertwined with the question of housing. Most of the interviewed witnesses had the opportunity to move back to their hometowns, which were generally in rural areas. As a result, they hardly attracted any attention and were not involved in the urban struggle for scarce housing and jobs.¹³⁵ However, it is important to emphasize that the location of resettlement – urban or rural – played a very small role in the perception of contemporary witnesses. Thus, this distinction is only relevant at the macro-political level, in which reintegration conditions in rural areas were considered to be significantly better.¹³⁶

Finally, the question, which has recently been raised by researchers is: “How significant were associations for the reintegration process?”¹³⁷ Only some of the return migrants considered characteristic South Tyrolean associations to be cru-

¹³⁰ Interview with Alfred Christoforetti, Branzoll, May 11, 2019.

¹³¹ Interview with Helene Leiter, Algund, April 8, 2022.

¹³² Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 261–62.

¹³³ TLA, DUS, Personalakten. The corresponding document can be found in some of the personnel files.

¹³⁴ Stabsleiter Mayerbrucker an den Leiter der AdO Peter Hofer, April 29, 1943. Südtiroler Landesarchiv (SLA) VKS/AdO, Pos. 256.

¹³⁵ Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 467.

¹³⁶ Stecher, “Die unerwünschten Heimkehrer,” 153.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 154.

cial for reintegration, a factor which ranked clearly behind housing and work. Bands and theatre groups were mentioned as examples of associations,¹³⁸ with the resettled husband of one of the witnesses also involved in a local public office.¹³⁹

Furthermore, the study found no evidence of a correlation (as postulated by Lechner/Alexander and Steininger) between the return period and difficulties or success with reintegration.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

To summarize, the first part of the case study offers the following perspectives: Some factors that countered a return have already been identified by previous studies. For example, it was known that socio-economic establishment, politically enforced insecurity, and the duration of absence reduced the likelihood of return. However, with the help of this study, it is possible to specify the following points. While the duration of the absence was particularly crucial for younger *Optants*, the future prospects of children mainly referred to better educational opportunities in urban Austria. The politically enforced insecurity especially took effect when there was neither a social network nor property at home. The pull factors of return, on the other hand, were different, and the factors of social networks and property in South Tyrol had the most significant influence on the decision to return. The dual role of property was particularly important because it had both material and social components that favored a return to the home town.

Likewise, it can be seen, for the first time, that the emotional factor of “homesickness” occurred among both return and non-return migrants, yet only marginally influenced the decision. The same applies to the emotional factor of shame/fear because of *Option* conflicts or hostility and disappointed expectations regarding life in Austria. These emotions were not, or no longer in later perception, essential for the decision-making process. Also, a special group of displaced people became apparent, for whom there was no decision-making process; they had been settled either in Yugoslavia or Eastern Europe and had to flee from partisans and the Red Army at the end of the war.

¹³⁸ Interview with Martina Pohl, Tarsch (Latsch), March 16, 2019.

¹³⁹ Interview with Maria Pallaver, Schlanders, April 20, 2019.

¹⁴⁰ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 261; Steininger, Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert, 467.

The second part of the case study verified previously defined factors of successful reintegration: job opportunities, accommodation (whether living with relatives or in one's own home), and, to some extent, social interaction through associations or communities of interest. The decentralized dispersion of return migrants to escape urban competition for work and housing, on the other hand, was hardly noticed; without exception, all of them considered their long-term reintegration successful and rated their reception in the respective villages as positive. Some interviewees also mentioned rejection and the (compromising) topic of the *Option* background, although this only affected a minority of the population. Jobs and accommodation were usually linked to the possibility of social participation and interaction, which was particularly important in the, at that time, still traditional social structures of rural South Tyrol. The social and societal dimensions of work in this context were social interaction, "not being a burden because of unemployment," or neighborly help.

In addition, the strong association system in South Tyrol or cultural-religious traditions, such as going to church on Sundays, also played a role in reintegration. The same applies to political or social commitment – usually through the father as the head of the family. In the case of female return migrants, this applied, for example, to children's attendance at local school and clubs which also brought interaction for mothers with other villagers.

The social division during the period of the *Option* process in 1939, which even disrupted small communities such as families, was not addressed as an obstacle to the reintegration of return migrants by contemporary witnesses. In addition, conflicts mainly arose at the language group borders in Bolzano and in the southern part of South Tyrol. Tensions and hostility were present, but these did not relate to a person and their family per se; they were of an ethnic nature and consequently affected the contemporary witnesses as members of the respective group (in this case, the German-speaking group). These conflicts mostly took place in the form of personal disputes, which in turn suggests that "being a return migrant" was a social stigma in these border areas.

Likewise, this chapter showed that political measures at the macro level did influence but not essentially define the decision-making process and the *Re-Option*. While the political and economic actions of Austria and Italy were able to influence the factors of housing and work, this was only marginally possible with the most important factor: the social network.

Another important finding of this chapter is that emotions such as homesickness or shame were not among the main reasons for a decision to return. The decision-making factors identified so far could thus be modified and supplemented by new factors. With regard to reintegration, the case study encountered a research gap – at least in rural areas. Until now, scientific papers have largely

based on return migrants in urban areas or in specially built *Rücksiedler Siedlungen* whose reintegration process tends to be described as difficult and protracted. However, considering most return migrants in this case study, the tendency points in a completely different direction, with their reintegration having been successful on many levels. Thus, earlier theories about significantly better conditions for successful reintegration in rural areas can be verified. These return migrants were not categorized as *Re-Optants* or according to their ethnicity – except in the mixed-language south. Rather, they were judged according to their individuality or family affiliation due to their decentralized resettlement (few families per rural community, the vast majority in their home village). They were also able to escape the urban scarcity of work and housing.

Consequently, a modification of the previous three-group categorization of return migrants is required, especially with regard to the legal status (illegal, legal) as well as the return period. Neither the legal status nor the period of return had a decisive influence on the success of reintegration. In fact, the kinship network and the socio-economic significance of property both significantly influenced the decision to return and facilitated reintegration among the interviewed witnesses.

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**Part III: Socioeconomic, Cultural and Political
Aspects of Return to Rural
Areas After WWII**

Francesca Frisone

10 A Survey on Return Migration in Sicily During the Sixties

Abstract: This chapter was written using previously undiscovered archive materials gathered between 1964 and 1965, focusing on a sample of Sicilian emigrants who had returned from the Federal German Republic and another sample who remained abroad, with the aim to investigate whether these emigrants served as agents of change upon returning to three rural villages near Enna. At the beginning of the 1960s, the theme of human capital and how it could be enhanced by processes of community empowerment had started to attract the attention of the European Community, who decided to support a pilot study on the socioeconomic situation and agricultural prospects in some backwards areas such as Sicily. These materials show us the pioneering effort made by the sociologists to apply a multilayered approach in exploring the emigration phenomenon in Sicily, but also reflect a conventional sociological interpretation of Southern Italian society (and Sicilian society too) quite widespread in those years.

Introduction

In the years between 1948 and 1973, the relocation of the Italian workforce started up again: a one-of-a-kind mobility defined as “essenzialmente economica non solo nelle motivazioni, ma anche nei suoi modi di sviluppo: totalmente trainata e plasmata dalla domanda di lavoro all'estero, e quindi altamente sensibile alle sue fluttuazioni.”¹

¹ Federico Romero, “L'emigrazione operaia in Europa (1948–1973),” in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, vol. I, ed. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 400 (“essentially economic not only in its motivation, but also in its development: totally stimulated and shaped by the demand for work abroad, and therefore highly sensitive to its fluctuations”, our translation). See also Michele Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento. L'emigrazione italiana in Europa, 1945–57* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008); Andreina De Clementi, *Il prezzo della ricostruzione. L'emigrazione italiana nel Secondo Dopoguerra* (Rome: Laterza, 2010).

In short, it was a new migration wave² which privileged mid-range movements toward European destinations,³ encouraged by various bilateral agreements signed by the Italian government from 1946 onward for unskilled labor transfer in exchange for energy resources.⁴

Between 1948 and 1973, a total of 6,781,065 Italians emigrated,⁵ mainly towards France, Switzerland, and the German Federal Republic, where job offers were plentiful and salary and work conditions were better.⁶ Here the industrial sector took off because of the positive economic conjuncture which unfolded with the reopening of the borders and the progressive liberalization of commerce and economic transactions stimulated by European integration.⁷ During these years, Southern Italy and the Islands reached a total of 4,104,477 expatriates.⁸

2 According to the classic definition also used by Antonio Golini, Flavia Amato, "Uno sguardo a mezzo secolo di emigrazione italiana," in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, part I, ed. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Rome: Donzelli, 2001).

3 Michele Colucci, "L'emigrazione italiana verso i paesi europei negli anni '60 e '70," *Quaderni di sociologia*, no. 86 (2021), accessed August 2, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4000/qds.4665>; Luigi Chiara and Francesca Frisone, "Immigrazione ed emigrazione in Italia, profili storici," in *La condizione giuridica dello straniero*, ed. Giovanni Moschella, Luca Buscema (Rome: Aracne, 2016), 54.

4 With Belgium, from 1946; with Switzerland, from 1948; with Argentina, from 1948; with Brazil, from 1950; with France, from 1951; with Australia, from 1952; with the Federal Republic of Germany, from 1955; see Archivio Centrale dello Stato (from now ACS), Direzione Generale Occupazione Interna e Migrazioni – Div. IX, *Appunto per S. E. il Ministro, Riunione C.I.R., Emigrazione, Piano dei Finanziamenti all'emigrazione*, 1950. However, in the years between 1951 and 1955, a new peak in departures towards Latin America and Australia was registered, as explained by Matteo Sanfilippo, "Cronologia e storia dell'emigrazione italiana," *Studi emigrazione*, no. 183 (2011).

5 This estimate does not consider the number of clandestine departures: Sandro Rinauro, *Il cammino della Speranza. L'emigrazione clandestina degli italiani nel secondo dopoguerra* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009); Paolo Borruso, "Note sull'emigrazione clandestina italiana (1876–1976)," *Giornale di Storia contemporanea*, no. 1 (2001); Matteo Sanfilippo, "La clandestinità è una storia vecchia: su alcuni aspetti dell'emigrazione irregolare di italiani," *Giornale di storia contemporanea*, no. 2 (2001).

6 Massimo Livi Bacci, "L'emigrazione italiana verso l'Europa. Elementi per un bilancio sociale ed economico," *Rassegna Economica Banco di Napoli*, no. 1 (1973); Jens Petersen (ed.), *L'emigrazione tra Italia e Germania* (Manduria-Bari-Rome: Lacaita, 1993); Maximiliane Rieder, "Migrazione ed economia. L'immigrazione italiana verso la Germania occidentale dopo la seconda guerra mondiale," *Il Veltro*, no. 1–2 (2006).

7 Until the first half of the 1950s, the Italian government was not expecting a substantial flow of emigration towards European countries, which were close to job market saturation. Alternative solutions on a domestic and foreign policy level were considered; ACS, Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale, Comitato Interministeriale Ricostruzione, *Lineamenti di politica migratoria*, 17 gennaio 1952.

8 See ISTAT, Tavola 2.10.1, *Espatri e rimpatri per regione e ripartizione geografica – anni 1876–2014*; some data were re-elaborated by Luigi Chiara, Giovanni Moschella, *Italia paese di immigrazione. Storia e legislazione* (Rome: Aracne, 2020), 64–65.

In those regions the challenging issue of unemployment which particularly damaged the rural and mountain areas – where a substantial demographic growth was also registered – was not actually resolved despite massive government intervention to sustain development, which determined a substantial resumption of the departures.⁹ Only Sicily had 445,306 expatriations.¹⁰

The labor market which fed this immigration turned out to be “highly cyclical or seasonal”; considering the proximity of the countries of emigration, an elevated turnover of the workforce was possible. This immigration was characterized by an increase in multiple departures and a high rate of repatriation. Return migrations towards the South and the Islands were circa 2,054,744 units, which was equivalent to half the number of expatriations.¹¹

At the same time, the practices of intraregional and interregional mobility in Italy were consolidated. Due to their intensity and continuity over time, these practices represented a phenomenon “of an unprecedented and unequaled vastness in other European experience”¹² which – even more than migration abroad – deeply changed the urban, social, and cultural face of the country.¹³

The intense development of the “Industrial Triangle” had attracted the population interested in moving to the North of Italy, thus determining for the South and the Islands a difference between registry enrollment and cancellations of -2,260,630 units.¹⁴

In Sicily as well, the migratory balance regarding internal population movement was confirmed as negative (-513,118 units), a more alarming number if con-

⁹ We are referring in particular to the ineffectiveness of the Agrarian Reform and of the interventions of “environmental infrastructure” which the Fund of the South provided for; Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell’Italia meridionale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1993), 111; Luigi Chiara, “La Sicilia e la modernizzazione incompiuta (1880–1960),” in *La Sicilia nel Secolo breve. Modernità e sottosviluppo*, ed. Luigi Chiara, Luigi D’Andrea, and Michele Limosani (Milan: Giuffrè, 2013) and the bibliography therein quoted.

¹⁰ See ISTAT, Tavola 2.10.1.

¹¹ The number of departures would start to decrease at the same time as the economic crisis of the 1970s. See Chiara, Moschella, *Italia paese d’immigrazione*, 66–67.

¹² Ercole Sori, *L’emigrazione italiana dall’Unità alla Seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979), 456; Ercole Sori, “Emigrazioni all’estero e migrazioni interne in Italia tra le due guerre,” *Quaderni storici*, no. 29–30 (1975); Bruno Bonomo, “Il dibattito storiografico sulle migrazioni interne italiane nel secondo dopoguerra,” *Studi emigrazione*, no. 155 (2003).

¹³ Amalia Signorelli, “Movimenti di popolazione e trasformazioni culturali,” in *Storia dell’Italia repubblicana*, part II, *Le trasformazioni dell’Italia. Sviluppo e squilibri*, part 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

¹⁴ Our elaboration from ISTAT, Tavola 2.11.1, *Iscrizioni e cancellazioni anagrafiche per movimento migratorio interno e saldo migratorio interno per regione e ripartizione geografica – Anni 1902–2014*.

sidered in relation to the increase in the average population of the region from 1951 to 1971, stable at 235,091 units; the balance of the population, although positive, was not able to compensate for such a mass departure from the island.¹⁵

Overall, considering the number of expats and the migratory balance for internal movement of the population, a total of 6,365,107 individuals departed from the South and the Islands both for destinations abroad and towards other Italian regions; around 958,424 people moved from Sicily, a number which affected the economic development of the region and reopened the critical debate on economic dualism.¹⁶

Indeed, the considerable effect projected by the departing migratory movements on society and on the Italian economy, along with their simpler (but inaccurate) quantification,¹⁷ helped to relaunch historiographic interest in the study of emigration. Despite being long and closely linked to the success of socio-economic history or the so-called history of the subordinate classes,¹⁸ and to the more general debate on Italian development, the study of migration policies, of demographic dynamics, and of the opportunities and disadvantages caused by emigration, have produced an abundance of literature.

Nevertheless, various working hypotheses were overshadowed, such as those relative to the professional training of peasants, and “bottom-up” modernization processes.¹⁹ The latter would have found very useful the data relative to remigrations and its impact on the community of origin; although representing a constant over time in Italian mobility, this data were marginal to the historiography.

15 Ibid.

16 See the book *Problemi dell'economia siciliana, inchiesta diretta dal Prof. Paolo Sylos-Labini*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1966), in particular 141–65; Giorgio Mori, “L'economia italiana tra la fine della Seconda guerra mondiale e il 'secondo miracolo economico' (1945–1968),” in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, II, Le trasformazioni dell'Italia. Sviluppo e squilibri, part 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1995); Giuseppe Barone, “Stato e Mezzogiorno (1943–1960). Il primo tempo dell'intervento straordinario,” in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, I, La costruzione della democrazia. Dalla caduta del Fascismo agli anni Cinquanta (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

17 Dora Marucco, “Le statistiche dell'emigrazione italiana,” in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, vol. 1; Sandro Rinauro, “Le statistiche ufficiali dell'emigrazione italiana tra propaganda politica e inafferrabilità dei flussi,” *Quaderni Storici*, no. 134 (2010).

18 Maddalena Tirabassi, Ercole Sori, “Le Marche fuori dalle Marche,” *Altreitalie*, no. 15 (1997).

19 On this point Luigi Chiara and Francesca Frisone, *La modernizzazione “dal basso”. Lo sviluppo comunitario in Sicilia tra gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta*, paper presented at the X° International Congress of Urban History *Adaptive cities through the Postpandemic Lens*, Turin 6–10 September, forthcoming publication.

In the same years, in the immigration countries, an interest in the problems generated by the processes of integration began to grow²⁰ (also based on studies carried out overseas),²¹ focusing on the psychological dimension²² and sociocultural context of the migrants.²³

In Italy, it was not until the 1970s that an increase in interest towards the issue of return emigration finally emerged (that “situation where migrants return to their country of origin, by their own will, after a significant period of time abroad”²⁴ or “the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle”).²⁵

The renewed interest within Italian historiography, in the wake of the French *nouvelle histoire*, had made it possible to open up to new historical research directions, using new sources and methodologies borrowed from social sciences.²⁶ Sociolo-

20 Within this framework, for example, was the experience of “Progetto Sicilia” started at the Institute of Sociology and Ethnology at the University of Heidelberg between 1962 and 1970 by the anthropologist Wilhelm Mühlmann in order to explore the problems of European migration from south to north, and in particular the problems of adaptability of Sicilian migrants in Germany; Dieter Paas and Salvatore Costanza, *La Sicilia ad Heidelberg. Esperienze di un sodalizio di studi* (Trapani: Margana, 2019).

21 Regarding the reception of the studies by the Chicago School on the issue of urban disorder and integration of the immigrants in the city, and its impact in Italy, see Nicola Pizzolato, “Una situazione sado-masochistica a incastro. Il dibattito scientifico sull’immigrazione meridionale (1950–1970),” *Quaderni storici* 118, no. 1 (2005).

22 Consider the studies dedicated to the relationship between immigration and psychosomatic illness, or to the criminal behavior of foreigners, above all in FRG, or to the psychosocial and ethnomedical treatment of foreign patients; Emil Zimmermann, “Das einstmalige ‘Sizilienteam’ am Institute für Soziologie und Ethnologie der Universität Heidelberg und der Anfang der ‘Medizin der Gastarbeiter’,” *Journal Curare*, no. 34 (2011).

23 Katiuscia Cutrone, “Italiani nella Germania degli anni Sessanta: immagine e integrazione dei Gastarbeiter. Wolfsburg, 1962–1973,” *Altreitalie*, no. 33 (2006); Edith Pichler, “50 anni di immigrazione italiana in Germania. Transitori, inclusi/esclusi o cittadini europei?”, *Altreitalie*, no. 33 (2006); Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann, “Soziologische und sozialpsychologische Probleme italienischer Gastarbeiter,” *Medizinische Sachverständige*, no. 63 (1992): 35–39.

24 Filiz Kunuroglu, Fons van de Vijver, and Kutlay Yagmur, “Return migration,” *Online readings in Psychology and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed August 3, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1143>.

25 George Gmelch, “Return Migration,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9 (1980): 136.

26 Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution. The ‘Annales’ School 1929–1989* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

gists such as Cerase,²⁷ Rosoli,²⁸ Merico,²⁹ Reyneri,³⁰ and demographers such as King³¹ and Livi Bacci,³² were the first to develop a “structural approach” which looked at the motivation of those who repatriated³³ also in terms of how the latter decided to allocate financial and economic resources brought back to their country of origin or put aside during their stay abroad.³⁴ A large part of this research distanced itself from the “myth of a productive return to the area of exodus”³⁵ and contributed to the identification of specific categories of repatriation which were considered valid for many years: the return of failure, of conservation, of retirement, of innovation.³⁶ However, this type of approach revealed itself to be insufficient in order to understand the complex nature and permeability of individual motivations, family strategy, cultural framework, and the social network which influenced the decision to repatriate.

If overcoming the methodological and ideological rigidity which had until then influenced the debate on the “Southern question”³⁷ (and consequently studies on emigration³⁸) had made it possible to evaluate mobility no longer as a product of

27 Francesco Paolo Cerase, *L'emigrazione di ritorno: innovazione o reazione?* (Università di Roma La Sapienza: Istituto di Statistica, 1971); Francesco Paolo Cerase, “Expectations and Reality: A case study of Return Migration from the United States to Southern Italy,” *International Migration Review* 8, no. 26 (1974); Francesco Paolo Cerase, “L'onda di ritorno: i rimpatri,” in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, vol. 1.

28 Gianfausto Rosoli, “L'emigrazione di ritorno: alla ricerca di una impostazione,” *Studi emigrazione*, no. 47 (1977); Gianfausto Rosoli, *Ricerca sull'emigrazione meridionale nelle zone d'esodo. Rapporto di sintesi*, no. 19 (Rome: Ricerche e studi FORMEZ, 1977).

29 Franco Merico, “Il difficile ritorno,” *Studi Emigrazione*, no. 50 (1978).

30 Emilio Reyneri, *La catena migratoria. Il ruolo dell'emigrazione nel mercato del lavoro di arrivo e di esodo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979).

31 Russel King, Jill Mortimer, and Alan Strachan, “Return migration and Tertiary development: a Calabrian case-study,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (1984).

32 Massimo Livi Bacci, ed., *The Demographic and Social Pattern of Emigration from the Southern European Countries* (Florence: Dipartimento Statistico Matematico dell'Università di Firenze, 1972).

33 Corrado Bonifazi and Frank Heins, “Le migrazioni di ritorno nel sistema migratorio italiano: un riesame,” *Studi emigrazione*, no. 122 (1996).

34 An overview in Kunuroglu, van de Vijver, Yagmur, “Return migration.”

35 Gianfausto Rosoli, “Emigrazione e sviluppo,” *Studi Emigrazione*, no. 58 (1980).

36 Cerase, “Expectations and reality”; Cerase, “L'onda di ritorno,” 117–23.

37 A summary in Luigi Chiara, “Dalla scoperta sociologica del Mezzogiorno al nuovo meridionalismo. Intellettuali, società, istituzioni,” in *Università “contro”? Il ruolo degli atenei negli ordinamenti in crisi*, ed. Daniela Novarese, Enza Pelleriti (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2020).

38 Francesco Barbagallo, *Lavoro ed esodo dal Sud, 1861–1871* (Naples: Guida, 1973); Francesco Paolo Cerase, *Sotto il dominio dei borghesi* (Assisi-Rome: Carucci, 1975). An overview in Emilio Franzina, “Emigrazione transoceanica e ricerca storica in Italia: gli ultimi dieci anni (1978–1988),” *Altreitalie*, no. 1, 1989.

backwardness, but of transversal dynamism of social classes, of professions,³⁹ of different geographic realities, and of different historical moments,⁴⁰ then the studies on repatriation also required greater flexibility of interpretation and a multidisciplinary approach.⁴¹

At the end of the Eighties, in *Sozialhistorische Migrationsforschung*,⁴² Klaus Bade suggested the development of a new methodology in which historic research, alongside the “structures” which influenced migration – and therefore economic, political, global tendencies – be open to study the system of values and the collective mentality, without which some phenomena could not be studied and understood.⁴³

The adoption of a new model which privileged “less rigid opposition among economic, social and political causes”⁴⁴ was finally adopted (also in Italy) at the beginning of the new century, with publication of the volumes *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*,⁴⁵ which espoused suggestions deriving from the new methodological approach to the study of migration; this approach emphasized the planning ability of the individual, social relationships, the complexities of migratory spaces and transnationality.⁴⁶

39 Bevilacqua states that for the second part of the post-war period, not only did farmers partake in the wave of exodus but also “vast levels of the poor lower middle class, the class of office workers, individuals and groups from the lower middle-class professionals moved by a search for a higher standard of living for themselves and their children”; Bevilacqua, *Breve Storia*, 111–12.

40 Paola Corti, “L'emigrazione italiana e la sua storiografia: quali prospettive?” *Passato e Presente*, no. 64 (2005).

41 *Studi emigrazione*, no. 72 (1983).

42 It is social and historical research on migration; Klaus J. Bade, “Historische Migrationsforschung. Eine autobiografische Perspektive,” *Historical Social Research Supplement*, no. 30 (2018).

43 Klaus J. Bade, *Europa in movimento. Le migrazioni dal Settecento a oggi* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001) and Grazia Prontera, *Partire, tornare, restare. L'esperienza migratoria dei lavoratori italiani nella Repubblica Federale tedesca nel Secondo Dopoguerra*, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2009), 50.

44 Prontera, *Partire, tornare, restare*, 47; Tirabassi, Sori, “Le Marche.”

45 *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, ed. Pietro Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina, vol. I e vol. II (Rome, Donzelli: 2001 e 2002).

46 Gianfausto Rosoli, “Le popolazioni di origine italiana Oltreoceano,” *Altreitalie*, no. 2 (1989); Gorge E. Pozzetta and Bruno Ramirez, eds., *The Italian Diaspora: Migration across the Globe* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1992); Emilio Franzina, “Emigrazione transoceanica e ricerca storica in Italia: gli ultimi dieci anni (1978–1988),” *Altreitalie*, no. 1, 1989; Emilio Franzina, *Gli Italiani al Nuovo Mondo: l'Emigrazione Italiana in America 1492–1942* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1995); Rudolph Vecoli, “The Italian Diaspora, 1876–1976,” in *Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, ed. Robin Cohen (Cambridge, 1995); Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Danilo Romeo, “L'evoluzione del dibattito storiografico in tema di immigrazione: verso un paradigma transnazionale,” *AltreItalia*, no. 23 (2001).

The broadly outlined reconstruction above seemed useful to us to introduce and contextualize the topic of return migration within the studies on Italian mobility. As underlined, few studies on the topic have embraced (as hoped) the multidisciplinary approach, or worked on the reconstruction of motivations of individuals and groups with regard to repatriation.

In this framework, the analysis here proposed was carried out on previously unknown archive materials collected between 1964 and 1965 and related to a sample of emigrants from the town of Troina (near Enna, in Sicily) who had repatriated from the Federal German Republic, and a sample of people from Troina living abroad,⁴⁵ to verify whether the emigrants had acted as agents of change when back at home.

The original research was unfortunately developed on a relatively limited sample, but it shows a scientific relevance – for the years taken into consideration and despite limitations – for the pioneering approach which explores the mentality and cultural framework of repatriation in relation to the possibility of a new development of the Sicilian agricultural sector.

2 The Survey on Sicilian Emigrants: In Search of “Human Agents of Change”

Until the first half of the Fifties, agricultural areas of the Southern hinterland had not yet been reached by the substantial “environmental infrastructure” interventions supported by the Fund for the South, experiencing instead ongoing sluggishness and a worrying rate of emigration. However, from 1957 onward, new development opportunities opened up due to the more inclusive range of actions of the Fund for the South,⁴⁷ as well as the relaunch of the Common Agricultural Policy⁴⁸ for these rural areas.

⁴⁷ Possibly due to the effect of the new development objectives established by law no. 634 of July 1957; on this point, see Salvatore Cafiero, *Storia dell'intervento straordinario nel Mezzogiorno (1950–1993)* (Manduria-Bari: Piero Lacaita, 2000) and the special issue of *Quaderni Sivmez, La Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. Dal recupero dell'Archivio alla promozione della ricerca*, no. 44 (2014).

⁴⁸ Among the CAP objectives was not only to increase agricultural productivity and improve the conditions and lives of the agricultural populations, but also to address the problem of structural and natural discrepancies among the different agricultural regions. Therefore, provisions for specific financial measures, such as the European Agricultural Orientation and Guarantee Fund were implemented, whose objective was the concession of financial assistance for the improvement or reconversion of agricultural production and for technological development. On this

These unique circumstances determined a renewed interest in alternative strategies aimed at integrating poorer agricultural areas as part of organic plans of development both in Italy and abroad.

In Italy, influenced by early pilot projects launched in the aftermath of World War II on the impulse of international organizations and private subjects,⁴⁹ some businessmen⁵⁰ and enlightened intellectuals proposed innovating the typology of social work and intervention in backward areas,⁵¹ to enhance the natural vocations of the territory and capitalize on its human resources.

The issues of professional training, the centrality of the individual in the developmental process,⁵² and the new courses that socio-educational intervention

point see Rossano Pazzagli and Gabriella Bonini, *Italia contadina. Dall'esodo rurale al ritorno alla campagna* (Rome: Aracne, 2018).

49 I am referring in particular to those projects emerging from the collaboration between Unrra-Casas, UNESCO, and the Centro di Educazione professionale per Assistenti Sociali – such as the redevelopment of the Sassi of Matera (1950–1955) and the Abruzzo Project (1958–1962) – in which building construction and reconstruction went hand in hand with sociocultural promotion for the experimentation of self-regulating communities which become aware of their needs, identified the solutions, and took it upon themselves to implement them; Marilena Dellavalle and Elena Lumetta, “Il progetto UNRRA-CASAS: assistere e riabilitare attraverso l’edilizia,” in *Immaginare il futuro. Servizio sociale di comunità e community development in Italia (1946–2017)*, ed. Marilena Dellavalle and Elisabetta Vezzosi (Rome: Viella, 2018).

50 Consider Aldo Capitini and the experience of the Social Orientation Centres; Adriano Olivetti and his Community movement; Guido and Maria Calogero Comandini, founders of Cepas; Angela Zucconi; from another perspective also Manlio Rossi-Doria and the Agricultural School of the University of Naples, and the Svimez study Centers; Marco Grifo, *Le reti di Danilo Dolci. Sviluppo di comunità e nonviolenza in Sicilia occidentale* (Turin: Franco Angeli, 2021), 116–17.

51 The Professional Social Worker Training Centre was founded in 1946 by Guido and Maria Calogero Comandini, and entrusted to the direction of Angela Zucconi. The center was to train social workers who would propose teaching actions spread by social and community projects. Livia Romano, “Angela Zucconi e il Centro di Educazione Professionale per assistenti sociali (1949–1963),” *Rivista di storia dell’educazione*, no. 2 (2016); Giuseppe Certomà, ed., *Guido Calogero e Maria Comandini. Il servizio sociale in una democrazia moderna. Antologia di scritti 1946–1961* (Rome: Sensibili alle foglie, 2005).

52 Between 1954 and 1956, within the scope of the Section project for UNESCO social research on the effects of the agricultural reform in Italy, even the economist Manlio Rossi-Dori had begun to develop the conviction that an increase in cultural level constituted a decisive growth factor; Michele De Benedictis, “Rossi-Doria at Scandale: a borderline research project,” *QA-Rivista dell’Associazione Rossi-Doria*, no. 3 (2007); Michele De Benedictis, ed., *Un paese di Calabria* (Napoli: L’Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2007); Leandra D’Antone, “Manlio Rossi-Doria e la ‘politica del mestiere’,” *Meridiana*, no. 32 (1998); Simone Misiani, “Osso e polpa. Manlio Rossi-Doria e la Riforma Agraria,” *Storia economica*, XV (2012). Later, other projects were financed by Esso, Ford, the Rockefeller Foundation; on this point allow me to refer you to Francesca Frisone, “Sviluppo, emigrazione e fattore umano in Sicilia. Il caso della provincia ennese (1951–1961),” a paper presented

would have to introduce in the rural areas, were not yet in line with the State-planned programs, having remained the prerogative of those few intellectuals who had independently matured a more modern vision of rural development based on the idea of participative democracy.

Thus, one pioneering work, with the aim of identifying the levers of change and of social redemption, was that undertaken in Sicily by Danilo Dolci through “reciprocal maieutics,”⁵³ and later by Salvinus Duynstee, the Dutch sociologist working in the management of a Centre for Community Development in Palma di Montechiaro between 1960 and 1963.⁵⁴ The methodology of social work deemed useful in tackling conditions of underdevelopment and adopted in these experiences (despite their inherent differences) was community development,⁵⁵ a well-established principle in English-speaking area.⁵⁶

to the Conference *Migrazioni e sviluppo economico nell'Europa mediterranea in età moderna e contemporanea*, Department of Economics, University of Messina, April 21–22, 2022.

53 The “Borgo di Dio Centre” was founded in 1952. The experience of the Centre was surely one of the most significant examples of community development in Italy in the aftermath of World War II. The project was undersigned by representatives from disciplines such as town planners, architects, sociologists, agronomists, and economists, including Ludovico Quaroni, Carlo Doglio, Bruno Zevi, Edoardo Caracciolo, Giovanni Michelucci, Lamberto Borghi, Paolo Sylos Labini, Sergio Steve, Giorgio Fuà, Giovanni Haussmann, Carlo Levi, and others. Ilys Booker, “A Sicilian experiment,” *Community Development Bulletin*, no. 13 (1962); Gerrit Huizer, “Some community development problems in Partinico, one of the centres founded by Danilo Dolci in W. Sicily,” *Mens en Maatschappij*, no. 37.1 (1962); Enrico Appalecchia, ed., *Idee e movimenti comunitari. Servizio sociale di comunità in Italia nel secondo dopoguerra* (Roma: Viella, 2016); Marco Grifo, *Le reti*. For a different interpretation of these experiences, see Luigi Chiara, Francesca Frisone, “La ‘modernizzazione dal basso’. Lo sviluppo comunitario in Sicilia tra gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta,” a paper presented to X° International Conference of Urban History *Adaptive cities through the Post-pandemic Lens*, Turin, September 6–10, 2022; Danilo Dolci, *La struttura maieutica e l'evolverci* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1996).

54 From a different point of view, we have Tullio Vinay’s intervention in Riesi; Giovanni Leone, *Territorio e società in Sicilia negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta, nell’esperienza di Danilo Dolci, Salvinus Duynstee e Tullio Vinay* (Palermo: Anvied, 1993).

55 According to UN, who defined the process in *Social Progress Through Community Development* (1955), “community development can be tentatively defined as a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest reliance upon the community’s initiative”; Jim Lotz, “Community development – a world view,” *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, no. 62 (1971): 4.

56 One of the original examples was Norris Town, the American town created by Roosevelt with the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) and designed to connect infrastructural development with moral and cultural rebirth of the town; Michelangelo Morelli, “Adriano Olivetti tra fabbrica e comunità,” *Pandora Rivista* (2020); Umberto Serafini, *Adriano Olivetti e il Movimento di Comunità* (Rome-Ivrea: Edizioni di Comunità, 2015).

The theme of human capital and how it could be enhanced by processes of community empowerment, with the aim of organic development of the rural areas, started to attract the attention of the European Community: based on contacts made with Salvinus Duynstee,⁵⁷ the Agriculture Division of the EEC decided to support a pilot study on the socioeconomic situation and agricultural prospects in three mountain towns of the province of Enna (Gagliano, Troina and Cerami), entrusting its writing to the International Centre of Social Research of the Gregorian University between 1964 and 1965.⁵⁸

Although limited to three small towns, the survey (according to the researchers) could be confirmed as representative of typical conditions of the greater part of the Southern regions hinterland: absence of essential services, growing demographic pressure, progressive abandonment of the land, high levels of unemployment, and consistent migratory exodus.⁵⁹

In addition to reconstructing the physical, demographic, hydrographic, and infrastructural characteristics of the three towns and the organization of their economic structure, the authors devoted great attention to the mentality and the material and immaterial needs of the population, in order to evaluate developmental potential:⁶⁰

Nel corso delle indagini eseguite dal CIRIS negli ultimi due anni, un'accurata attenzione è stata sempre rivolta a raccogliere tutte le informazioni possibili sulla mentalità e sugli atteggiamenti della popolazione. Il motivo di tale interesse è già stato spiegato [...] non si avrà mai sviluppo di una comunità in nessun senso, se la mentalità delle persone non è incline

⁵⁷ By September of 1962, a delegation from the Agriculture Commission of the European Parliament had visited Palermo, Agrigento, Catania and its province with the objective of evaluating the principal problems of agricultural structures in relation to the future supply of European structural funds; on that occasion the EMPs visited Palma di Montechiaro: "Tous les membres de la délégation ont été très impressionnés par l'action altruiste du père Duynstee ainsi que par celle de ses collaborateurs et collaboratrices; ils ont été bouleversés à la vue de la situation sociale de Palma de Montechiaro que l'on n'observe certainement pas seulement à Palma, mais certainement aussi, dans d'autres régions desservies par des routes moins bonnes"; Historical Archives European Union, issue *Politique économique Régionale en Italie*, vol. 1, (CEUE_PRUC-171), 1961–1965 (from here on HAEU-Politique), *Project de rapport de la délégation de la commission de l'agriculture du Parlement européen sur sa mission d'étude et d'information en Sicilie, novembre 1962*.

⁵⁸ HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto sulla situazione socioeconomica, e le prospettive agricole in tre paesi montani della Sicilia. Studio intrapreso dal Centro Internazionale di Ricerche sociali (Ciris) per la Divisione Agricola della Comunità Europea su richiesta di S. Duynstee*, Rome, 1965.

⁵⁹ The researchers outlined a general decrease in the resident population, indicated (for the decade 1951–1961) as –7.2 % for Troina and –4.5 % for Gagliano, while for Cerami the resident population remained generally constant; HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, IV/3, IV/17, IV/29.

⁶⁰ HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, chapters XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, e XVII.

verso tale sviluppo o se non si mostra aperta ai cambiamenti [. . .] Difatti scoprendo i bisogni e gli atteggiamenti di una popolazione, sarà più agevole muoverne i componenti alla ricerca delle soluzioni per soddisfare questi bisogni, poiché ogni progresso di sviluppo economico e sociale è condizionato particolarmente dalle disposizioni o atteggiamenti dell'elemento umano.⁶¹

One of the elements the researchers chose to explore was the role played by the emigrants in these communities as agents of change, having verified a substantial impact of emigration in terms of demographics.⁶²

About 150 emigrants from Troina and Cerami were contacted “who have migrated to Northern Europe and remain migrants”;⁶³ the majority of these were farmers, unskilled laborers (manual laborers and construction workers) and artisans, but only 34 filled out the proposed form. Despite this small number of successful interviews, one factor results as highly significant and a probably fair indicator of the context examined: the “extraordinary uniformity on all essential points” of the 34 interviews.⁶⁴

Emigrants declared that the reasons for leaving their home were generally: lack of employment opportunities, other economic explanations (cost of farming too high), too low livelihood, and unfair work contracts. They left Sicily with the idea of earning enough by working outside the country to send back home savings to help those they left behind. All those interviewed viewed their emigration as a temporary situation, hoping to go back as soon as the local economy showed

61 “During the course of research carried out by CIRIS in the last two years, accurate attention has always been paid to collecting all possible information on the mentality and attitudes of the population. The reason for this interest has already been explained [. . .] there will never be community development in any sense if the mentality of the people is not inclined towards development or if it does not show itself open to change [. . .] Indeed by discovering the needs and attitudes of a population, it will be easier to move the components in the search for a solution to satisfy these needs, since all progress of economic and social development is particularly conditioned by the dispositions or attitudes of the human element” (our translation); HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, XIII.

62 For the three towns which were indicated by the researchers as having a migratory balance (from 1951–1964), of 2,979 individuals for Troina; 1,364 for Gagliano; 734 for Cerami, calculated on an average population respectively, of about 13,435, 4,904, and 4,729 inhabitants. Relative to the definitive migratory or emigration balance, the authors claim to have extrapolated the data from the town registry office, not including any information regarding the destinations. Therefore, it is not known whether the authors are referring to migration abroad or nationally; HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, IV/11, IV/25, IV/35.

63 HAEU-Politique, *Capitolo Decimo Settimo, Mentalità degli emigrati*, 1.

64 *Ibid.*

signs of picking up; “an overwhelming 80 % indicated that they still intend to return home.”⁶⁵

Among the 20 % who had the intention of not returning home, one possible reason indicated was “the hometown is unattractive.” They used the Italian word “spicevole” to describe a culturally unsatisfactory situation they have learned to recognize: “a new awareness of the cultural deficiencies of a backward insular town, an awareness evoked by the experience of living in culturally advanced places.”⁶⁶

Also interesting are the suggestions collected by the researchers regarding the quality of life of emigrants, who expressed the desire to return home even though their actual income was judged decent, the reception they experienced from their neighbors was “good or even excellent,” and they declared themselves to be earning enough to send savings home. Elsewhere, half of those interviewed described their work as “hard”; three quarters found the language a real difficulty; and the same number complained of the harshness of climate or customs, and poor housing conditions.⁶⁷

Yet even more interesting, in terms of the originality of the survey, is the section which regards return emigration. The CIRIS interviewed 76 workers from Troina, of whom 30 had moved for work within Sicily, 30 to Germany, and 16 to the North of Italy. Of these, 37 % stated that before emigrating they were employed in agriculture, 35 % as manual laborers or construction workers or miners, 12 % as artisans, while the rest did not have a specific profession.⁶⁸ Those who moved within Sicily claimed to have continued to work in agriculture, while none of those who emigrated to the north of Italy worked in agriculture: lacking any type of professional qualification, they had found jobs as manual laborers or construction workers.

The choice to return home was attributed by the majority to reasons which were “essentially economic” (75 %); in other words, either because they were unemployed or because they hoped to find employment in their hometowns. Another 15 % returned for family reasons, and 5 % for “convenience.” It is interesting to note that only 5 % claimed to have returned because they “didn’t like the place.”

At this point, the researchers tried to understand whether the return of the emigrants could be considered definitive or not, and thus what plans they had for the future: “overall almost all of them did not intend to emigrate again. Only 10 % answered decisively that they intended to emigrate again.” It is significant that in

⁶⁵ Ibid, 5.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 6.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, XVII/1.

comparison with the other interviews in Gagliano (not used as a sample in the Report), the researchers state that although unemployed, the returnees all planned to stay in their hometowns.

Overall, the opinion of the researchers on the impact of emigration was rather negative:

What light have we, then, on the question of whether emigration has been conducive to change? Not very much, and what we have seems to indicate that the emigrant responds just about the same way as the generality of the people and the present farmers do [. . .] those who did return perhaps they were not away too long enough for contact with the new to have left its mark upon them. And those whose emigration only brought them into Sicilian towns similar to the ones they had left behind would scarcely find anything to widen their horizons [. . .].⁶⁹

What surprised the researchers in fact was that, despite the brief contacts with more culturally advanced places, these experiences had not determined any break for the migrants with their original values and social traditions, or any need for change: “[. . .] should there not have been more suggestion of the need for basic human education to community values and to cooperation? Perhaps their failure to provide even the slightest indication of this nature is the most unpromising element in the overall picture of our emigrants.”⁷⁰

3 Studying Return Migration Today, Beyond Failure and Conservatism

According to CIRIS scholars, the data consulted were discouraging in view of the emigrants' attitudes toward self-development and empowerment:

Here we had honestly to acknowledge, however displeasing the admission, that the quality of the human factor is not up to the tasks that confront it [. . .] If the pictures that emerges seems only to repeat an already familiar characterization of backward people, it is, at any rate, an accurate and empty [sic] documented portrayal of the people in question. One sure conclusion emerges. Whatever investments authorities may be willing to make of an economic nature, they will accomplish little if such investments are not accompanied by comparable ones destined to bring about improvement in the human factor.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The Report is in Italian and English. This part is in English. HAEU-Politique, *Report Phase Two*, 34.

⁷⁰ HAEU-Politique, *Report Phase Two*, 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 35.

Despite this dire assessment – that reflects the conventional sociological interpretation of Southern Italian society (and Sicilian society too) which was quite widespread in these years⁷² – some elements can be clarified.

The scale we chose for studying mobility phenomena (continental, national, regional, local area, or family level) is an analytic variable of great importance in studies on migration and its effect on society. The interviews with people who emigrated in the aftermath of WWII collected by this Report represent too narrow a sample to evaluate their impact as “human factors of change.” If we analyze the Troinesi interviews in a structuralist way, it seems we are dealing with a typical hypothesis of “return of failure or conservatism”; staying abroad never changed the attitude or mentalities of emigrants, nor ever triggered a virtuous circle connected to the economic, social, or professional skills they had acquired.

But if we refer to the sample of about 21 emigrants who left Cerami in 1950 for Australia or Argentina and returned after 15 years (not included within the conclusions of the official Report), coincidentally these people declared they had returned home not for economic reasons, but for the “desire to see their families again. They had good means to support themselves because of the savings collected abroad and this is why they were truly convinced they would stay in Cerami for the future”;⁷³ in this case we thus have a perfect example of return of “innovation or retirement.”

Time and space seem to be crucial for evaluating the experience reported by emigrants, and we have no data about how long the Troinesi lived away from home. It is hard to establish the degree of integration they experienced, or to assess their ability to assimilate social and cultural models even if the scholars wrote:

about the hypothesis that the Sicilian emigrant does not know how to integrate himself into a new environment, it is generally connected with the short amount of time spent abroad, because they generally report good welcome from neighbors, and – about their permanence in Germany – they report they would become citizens of the Federal Republic if they could be allowed.

Indeed, in both cases, we find that these people had a good attitude towards change, with the low level of education and professional skills reported by the authors not representing a limitation to overcome the economic and cultural difficulties to integration met in the countries of immigration.

72 Chiara, “Dalla scoperta sociologica.”

73 HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, XVII/2.

Putting aside the opinions on Sicilian emigrants expressed by the scholars, we can see that the remittances, and possibility to work far from home, played a key role in encouraging peasants to overcome traditional social relationships connected to the agricultural world.

They gradually became more independent from the long-standing control of the local “notabili” who gave them protection and jobs, in return for obedience. In the same way, as reported in the interviews, the remittances strengthened the local economies, mostly the real estate market and trades. All the savings sent home, if not invested in lands or households, helped to improve consumption for these families and the whole community. It is also significant that among 76 Troinesi, more than half decided to stay within the country because of the high level of internal movement of population brought on by urbanization processes, industrialization, and the service industry.⁷⁴

To conclude, this report shows us the pioneering effort made by the authors to apply, at the beginning of the 1960s, a multilayered approach in exploring the emigration phenomenon in Sicily. They tried to focus on the themes of “active” or “bottom-up” modernization processes, based on the mobilization of civil society around the planning and execution of programs aimed at improving the quality of life of communities. They considered investment in the human factor to be an essential precondition for economic development.

Today in Italy, as the rate of emigration starts to climb again and scholars – even if more focused on studying immigration – notice a non-stop “brain drain,” the importance of the human factor is firmly back in the spotlight.⁷⁵ Governments are arguing whether the return of emigrants is advantageous in terms of skills obtained from an experience in another country, but the question is not so easy to answer. We thus wonder if it is still possible and productive – in the era of globalization – to talk about return migration as a single and independent phase of the mobility experience.⁷⁶

As already stated, it is perhaps more appropriate to talk about transnational migration, due to the close ties that connect people with their country of origin,⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Bevilacqua, *Breve storia*, 111–18.

⁷⁵ Corrado Bonifazi, Frank Heins, and Enrico Tucci, “Dimensioni e caratteristiche della nuova emigrazione italiana,” *Quaderni di sociologia online*, no. 86/2 (2021): 9–30.

⁷⁶ This framework was substantially changed by Abdelmalek Sayad, *La doppia assenza. Dalle illusioni dell'emigrato alle sofferenze dell'immigrato* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina editore, 2002).

⁷⁷ “[. . .] the migrants were called transmigrants when they developed and maintained multiple ties, such as familial, institutional, religious, economic and political both with their country of origin and settlement.” Kunuroglu, van de Vijver, and Yagmur, “Return Migration.”

or circular mobility,⁷⁸ as a primary strategy of coping with temporary unemployment or underemployment in the South European countries without involving the issues of permanent settlement.⁷⁹

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⁷⁸ Anna Triandafyllidou, *Circular migration between Europe and its neighbourhood: choice or necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷⁹ Ibid, 217.

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Alessandro Celi

11 On Emigrating and Returning – Five Examples From the Aosta Valley

Abstract: The reasons for the return of emigrants from Valle d'Aosta can be grouped into five types: those who returned after getting rich, those who failed to integrate in the country of destination, those who returned to die in their native country, those who returned to get married, and those who wanted to engage in cultural and political life of the region for ideological reasons.

The article illustrates each case study with appropriate examples, highlighting the intertwining of the events of emigration and the political life of the region.

Introduction

At the end of 2019, the government of the Valle d'Aosta Autonomous Region formed a workgroup to assess the possibility of creating a museum dedicated to the migrations that have affected the Aosta valley (both as a destination and as a place of departure) over the last three centuries.

The first step to achieving this goal was an analysis of the existing literature dedicated to the subject in the past. It thus emerged that, considering the large impact of migrations on the history of the region, there are surprisingly few studies on the subject. In fact, only two monographs have been dedicated so far to the general topic of emigration from the Aosta Valley: the book of Elio Riccarand and Tullio Omezzoli, *Sur l'émigration Valdôtaine: les données économiques et sociales (1700–1939): une anthologie de la presse (1913–1939)*, published in 1975; and *Emigration valdôtaine dans le monde: la diaspora d'un peuple au cours des siècles*, which presents the content of an exhibition curated in 1986 by the *Association Valdôtaine Archives Sonores* (Association for the Aosta Valley Sound archives).

The remaining 42 titles in the catalogue of the Regional Library of Aosta include the monographs of Pasquale Ciurleo, *Calabria emigrazione: la comunità sangiorgese in Valle d'Aosta*, and Giuseppe Ciardullo, *Dalla piana ai monti: cenni sull'immigrazione calabrese in Valle d'Aosta*, dedicated to immigration from Calabria to the Aosta Valley in the second half of the twentieth century; two books dedicated by their authors to an emigrant ancestor and based on family docu-

ments;¹ five collections of documents and histories related to a single municipality, often published on the occasion of the *Rencontre Valdôtaine*, the annual meeting of emigrants organized by the regional Administration since 1976;² five degree theses, written between 1966 and 2021; the seven articles published in the magazine *Le Flambeau*, the expression of a cultural association of Aosta, the *Comité des Traditions Valdôtaines* (Committee for the Aosta Valley Traditions); and the ten magazines of emigrants of the Aosta Valley in France, published since 1913.³

The remaining titles concern some articles or parts of monographs of varying scientific quality, published both in academic journals and in local publications but not specifically dedicated to the Valley, such as *Quelques aspects de l'émigration des savoyards et des valdôtains dans les pays alémaniques*,⁴ written by the geographer Paul Guichonnet in 1951, or *Fam, füm, frecc: il grande romanzo degli spazzacamini: Valle d'Aosta, Valle Orco, Val Cannobina, Val Vigezzo, Canton Ticino* on the emigration of chimney sweeps from the north-western alpine valleys, written by the journalist Benito Mazzi in 2006.

This clearly shows that, over the years, the migrations that have affected the Aosta Valley have been the topic of impromptu publications or writings on specific and limited aspects of the issue. Moreover, the only two monographs that programmatically address the subject as a whole date back several decades and were followed only by one major study: Stuart J. Woolf's article *Emigrati e immigrati in Valle d'Aosta*, which was edited by Einaudi in the 1995 collective volume *La Valle d'Aosta*.⁵

After this, and for at least 20 years, no new study provided a global view of the migration phenomenon in the Aosta Valley until 2018 when Michela Ceccarelli

1 These are the works of Marco Jaccond and Marise Vuillermet, indicated in the bibliography, as are the other works referred to below.

2 On the *Rencontre*, accessed August 2, 2023, https://www.regione.vda.it/Eventi_istituzionali/manIFESTAZIONI/rencontre/default_i.asp.

3 The large Aosta Valley community in France published the following periodicals: *L'écho de la Vallée d'Aoste: paraissant chaque mois à Paris: organe des valdôtains à l'étranger* (1913–1922), *La Vallée d'Aoste à l'étranger: organe libéral de l'émigration Valdôtaine* (1913–1914), *Bulletin du Secrétariat valdôtain d'émigration* (1917–1920), *La Vallée d'Aoste* (1920–1935), *L'écho de la Vallée d'Aoste: pour l'émigration et la Vallée d'Aoste* (1935–1940), *Bulletin de l'Union valdôtaine et Mont-Cervin réunies* (1937–1939), another *La Vallée d'Aoste* (1944–2004), *Bulletin de l'Union Valdôtaine de Paris* (1955–active), *La lettre valdôtaine* (1983–1984), *O Crierel Bulletin de l'Association des Levallouisiens d'origine Valdôtaine* (2009–active).

4 Paul Guichonnet, "Quelques aspects de l'émigration des savoyards et des valdôtains dans les pays alémaniques," *Augusta Praetoria Revue Valdôtaine de pensée et d'action régionalistes* 1 (1951): 11–18.

5 Stuart J. Woolf, "Emigrati e immigrati in Valle d'Aosta," in *Storia delle Regioni La Valle d'Aosta*, ed. Stuart J. Woolf (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 621–643.

presented her *Émigrés 2.0*, a new overview of migration from the region dedicated to those who have left the Valley since 2000. This book includes a few pages summarizing the history of Valdostano (Aosta Valley) emigration from 1861 onwards, without adding notable information to previously-known elements. However, new data can be found in the *Rapporto Italiani nel mondo 2020*, edited by the Migrantes Foundation of Rome, which contains the most recent description of Valdostano emigration from the unification of Italy to the present day, based on new research findings.⁶

Thus, it appears that for about a quarter of a century emigration was a theme of little interest to researchers. This neglect is due to one of the peculiarities of the local emigration: the important part the emigrants and their associations played in political events of the Region. This feature has made their history the subject of political debate rather than scientific research, thus discouraging further investigations on the subject by local researchers. Even return migration, in some cases motivated by ideological choices, has thus become a delicate topic to deal with.

In order to explore the issue of emigration back to the Aosta Valley and to describe the relationship between the emigrants, their associations in France, Switzerland, and the United States, and the political life in the Aosta Valley, it is necessary to take a closer look at the complex migratory events that affected the region over time, from at least the end of the Middle Ages. Consequently, this article is divided into three parts, the first of which presents the Aosta Valley and the historical trend of migration since the fifteenth century, to highlight the quantitative and qualitative changes in this phenomenon, as recorded since the unification of Italy and with the use of some statistical data. The second presents some exemplary cases of return migration, collected by the workgroup. In fact, after surveying the available bibliography on Aosta Valley migration, the working group carried out an initial inspection of the historical archives out of some of the 74 municipalities of the Aosta Valley, especially those not yet sorted or without a reliable inventory. This is an operation which is still ongoing, but which has already led to the finding of a fair number of documents which allow us to reconstruct the dynamics of emigration and immigration in the various municipalities.

Until now, the archives of Aosta, Arnad, Arvier, Challand-Saint-Victor, Chambave, Charvensod, Châtillon, Introd, Nus, Perloz, Saint-Vincent have been visited, and the inventories of other municipalities have been consulted at the Regional

⁶ Alessandro Celi, "Aosta. Emigrazioni e immigrazioni tra necessità economiche e strategie politiche," in *Rapporto Italiani nel mondo 2020*, ed. Fondazione Migrantes. (Roma: Tau editrice, 2020), 85–93.

Historical Archive. In the latter, the documentary collections that belonged to politicians who had government responsibilities – such as Severino Caveri, long-time president of the Autonomous Region, and Ernesto Page, senator between 1948 and 1958 – were also viewed. Thanks to this investigation, important information was found, relating above all to the relations between the regional administration and the emigrants' associations. Furthermore, the working group had access to some private archives, such as those of the *Pro Schola* association of Champdepraz (active both in Paris and Champdepraz until 1967 and later only in Aosta Valley), of the already mentioned AVAS, or of the Historical Institute of the Resistance and the Contemporary Society of the Valle d'Aosta, as well as to ecclesiastical ones.

The survey promoted by Bishop Giovanni Vincenzo Tasso in 1912⁷ was consulted in the archives of the episcopal curia of Aosta. It is a document rich not only in quantitative data, but also in qualitative data. For example, the parish priest of Quart, an important agricultural centre 8 kilometres from Aosta, stated that around 300 of his parishioners had emigrated, equal to 13 % of the population recorded in the 1911 census, but he also explained that it was not a permanent emigration, but of a *va-et-vient continu* ("a continuous coming and going"), which prevented any kind of organized assistance for migrants. Also in the ecclesiastical sphere, the documents relating to the last few years of activity of the *Secrétariat valdôtain d'Émigration*,⁸ conserved in the Library of the *Grand Séminaire* of Aosta, were consulted. Further documents of the Secrétariat, preserved in the archives of the Chapter of Sant'Orso,⁹ are currently being inventoried and will be the subject of a forthcoming study.

Finally, given the importance of France in the events of Aosta Valley emigration, the *Archives Nationales* de Pierrefitte were consulted, where a small but important fond related to the supervision exercised by the French Ministry of the Interior on the Valdostan emigration associations after World War II was found. The French authorities' surveillance on Valdostan emigration is also confirmed by other documents found in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in La Courneuve, while for the events related to the relationship with the diocese of Paris, some interesting documents concerning the *abbé* Petigat were consulted at the archive of the archbishopric of the French capital.

⁷ The bishop asked all the parish priests of the Valley for a report on the migratory phenomenon affecting the communities entrusted to them.

⁸ The body for assistance to Aosta Valley emigrants in Paris and, more generally, in the Franco-Swiss area, founded by Auguste Petigat (1885–1958), a Catholic priest sent to Paris in 1912 by the bishop of Aosta to assist the numerous emigrants who lived in the French capital and neighbouring municipalities.

⁹ One of the most ancient church of Aosta town, served by a collegiate chapter of priests.

In addition to archival research, the working group has promoted a series of initiatives aimed at arousing interest in the project and attracting possible witnesses.¹⁰ Thanks to the attention given to these initiatives by the local press and the support of emigrant associations, over 50 people were interviewed and described both their own migratory experience and that of their ancestors, as well as the reasons that led some of them to return home, mainly from the USA and France.

These are testimonies differing in quality and number of details, which in any case allowed the collection of a fair amount of information. The latter have been crossed with the archival data and the statistics available in the sites of the Autonomous Region¹¹ and Istat,¹² in the reports of the aforementioned Migrantes Foundation, as well as in the articles published in local magazines, such as *Le Flambeau*, and have allowed the creation of exhibitions,¹³ television documentaries,¹⁴ and academic articles, such as the one published in the *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo* 2020. This procedure made it possible to detect the constants linking the stories of different interviewees; in this way, it was possible to avoid reducing the research to the simple recording of personal memories and, instead, to identify the typologies allowing the individual stories to be grouped together in some macro-categories.

In carrying out this operation, the workgroup benefited from the considerations expressed by Jay Winter about the dynamics of memory in his *The generation of memory*¹⁵ as well as by Gabriella Gribaudi in her *Nel laboratorio dello storico biografia e grande storia s'incontrano*,¹⁶ whose contents were then taken up and developed in her *I ricercatori, i soggetti e la polifonia delle voci nella storia*

¹⁰ In this regard, an online form has been prepared, accessed August 13, 2023, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdewoM_LS1jbRmc7OrTrAem1yXLSV1f7Su2BIAAJeMpBlCQ-g/viewform.

¹¹ Autonomous Region Aosta Valley, accessed August 10, 2023, https://www.regione.vda.it/statistica/osservatorio_economico_e_sociale/default_i.asp#:~:text=Per%20eventuali%20approfondimenti%20in%20merito,indirizzo%20statistica%40regione.vda.

¹² ISTAT, accessed August 10, 2023, <http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?QueryId=11694>.

¹³ List of initiatives accessed August 10, 2023, https://www.regione.vda.it/Eventi_institutional/memoiredelemigration/calendrier_evenements_i.aspx, accessed 10 August 2023.

¹⁴ Seven episodes made by Frank Vanzetti with the title "Mémoire d'émigration," accessed August 10, 2023, <https://vimeo.com/user47993026>.

¹⁵ Jay Winter, "The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the 'Memory Boom' in Contemporary Historical Studies," *Canadian Military History* 10, no. 3 (2001).

¹⁶ Gribaudi G., "Nel laboratorio dello storico biografia e grande storia s'incontrano," *L'indice dei libri del mese* 7–8 (2020): 6.

*Oltre I confine delle discipline.*¹⁷ Winter's considerations on the relationship between family histories and the "times universal context"¹⁸ and the consequent repercussions on museum systems have directed the action of the researchers. Gribaudi's papers highlight – also in response to criticism received from Marcello Flores¹⁹ – the need for a methodological approach that combines oral memories with archival sources in a continuous dialogue that allows the data collected to be confirmed or corrected, in the awareness that oral sources have "la capacità di informarci, più ancora che sugli avvenimenti, sul loro significato . . . non solo sui fatti, ma su quello che hanno voluto dire per chi li ha vissuti e li racconta," according to the acute observation of Alessandro Portelli.²⁰

This last observation turns out to be particularly fitting in a context such as the Aosta Valley, where – as already mentioned – the migratory fact was, throughout the twentieth century, one of the central elements of the local political dialectic, eventually influencing, in some cases, the testimonies of the people interviewed.²¹

This approach is confirmed by further considerations of other historians, like Bruno Bonomo or Alessandro Casellato. The former considers that "prestare attenzione al vissuto delle persone, portarne in primo piano le storie, ascoltarne magari con empatia ma sempre con spirito critico le narrazioni . . . può essere una strada maestra per affrontare le grandi questioni dell'età contemporanea,"²² a judgment that is also valid for the history of Aosta Valley given the relevance of the migratory phenomenon. For his part, Casellato points out that oral history could again help the political history, "nella disponibilità a intervenire sui temi caldi del dibattito pubblico, come le migrazioni,"²³ a statement that, even with the dutiful adaptations, is also valid for the Aosta Valley.

¹⁷ Gribaudi G., "I ricercatori, i soggetti e la polifonia delle voci nella storia. Oltre il confine delle discipline," *Meridiana* 100 (2021), 179–206.

¹⁸ Winter, "The Generation of Memory," 62.

¹⁹ Marcello Flores, "Storia e memorie soggettive: un sincretismo possibile? La memoria dei traumi e la storia," *L'indice dei libri del mese* 6 (2020): 5.

²⁰ "The ability to inform us, even more than about the events, about their meaning . . . not only about the facts, but about what they meant for those who lived through them and recounts them": Alessandro Portelli, *Storie orali. Racconto, immaginazione, dialogo* (Roma: Donzelli, 2007), 11–12.

²¹ In this sense, the nickname "*les curés*" ('the parsons') attributed to the leaders of the Catholic-oriented emigration associations reveals the anti-clerical orientation of the emigrants who use it.

²² "Pay attention to people's experiences, bring their stories to the fore, listen to their narratives perhaps with empathy but always with a critical spirit . . . it can be a main road to addressing the great issues of the contemporary age": Bruno Bonomo, "Storia, memoria, soggettività, fonti orali: un nodo non sciolto?" *Meridiana* 106 (2023): 264.

²³ "In the willingness to intervene on the hot topics of public debate, like migrations": Alessandro Casellato. "Strabismi e convergenze tra Clio e la DEA," *Lares* 85, no. 2 (2019): 345.

The workgroup also benefited from the considerations contained in the collective volume *Faire musée d'une histoire commune*.²⁴ In this work, 40 researchers and experts discuss the new layout of the *Musée national de l'immigration* of Paris. Given the objective for which the workgroup was set up, it was deemed useful to deal with an experience of research and musealization that was not only consolidated but was already being reconsidered.

In addition, some training sessions were organized with anthropologists and researchers who worked on the history and memory of emigration.²⁵ These meetings helped the interviewers in their work, both in the formulation of the questions and in the analysis of the answers.

The third part focuses on the dialectic between associations of emigrants and local political parties, to explain why, despite living abroad, the emigrants remained a constant present in local life even without considering the issue of “return emigration.” A short conclusion then opens the door to new research paths that could be explored in the study of this central phenomenon throughout the history of the Aosta Valley.

The Multiple Migration Waves of the Aosta Valley

Aosta Valley is a small region in the north-west of Italy, which extends from the Mont-Blanc massif to the higher part of the Po Valley and is surrounded by the highest peaks of the Alps. The population was about 40,000 people after the great plague of 1630, with this figure doubling only on the eve of unification of Italy (80,000 people according to the 1861 census); it is 124,000 today, after a peak of 128,000 in 2014.²⁶ As a mountainous region, marked by the absence of plains, it has always experienced the traditional seasonal emigration that is typical of Alpine countries.²⁷

²⁴ Romain Bertrand et al., *Faire musée d'une histoire commune Rapport de préfiguration de la nouvelle exposition permanente du Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* (Paris: Seuil, 2019).

²⁵ In particular, the working group met with experts from the Musée de la Porte Dorée, the Musée de la Vallée of Barcelonnette, the Museo regionale dell'emigrazione dei Piemontesi nel mondo of Frossasco, as well as research managers at the M9 museum in Mestre, the director of Centre d'études franco-provençales in Saint-Nicolas (Aosta), and the manager of the travelling exhibition *Ciao, Italia!*.

²⁶ “Annuario statistico” (“Statistical Yearbook”) of Autonomous Region of Aosta Valley, accessed March 12, 2023, https://www.regione.vda.it/statistica/pubblicazioni/annuari_statist_i.asp.

²⁷ Pier Paolo Viazzo, “Migrazione e mobilità in area alpina: scenari demografici e fattori socio-strutturali,” *Histoire des Alpes = Storia delle Alpi = Geschichte der Alpen* 3 (1998): 37–48.

In fact, since the middle of the fourteenth century at least, the presence of several masons from the lower Valley was registered in Savoy, while during the fifteenth century, the Aosta Valley began to provide teachers to Savoy, and the seasonal emigration (which mainly concerns the agricultural community and peasants) gradually became more important. Departures for other countries were not uncommon in the dominant social classes; the cadets of noble families and cultured persons, who found it difficult in the Valley to secure a political, legal, ecclesiastical, or military career, went abroad in the hope of brilliant success.²⁸ Thus, a difference between nobles and commoners also emerged in this phenomenon; the noble emigration was often permanent whereas, until the nineteenth century, the working-class emigration assumed the characteristics of a seasonal move, with men leaving their villages in the autumn to return in the spring, in time for the busy farming period.

The activities carried out by the emigrants were varied but characterized by a specialization linked to the area they came from: clog-makers came from Ayas, hemp combers from Champorcher, cheesemakers and mountain-shepherds from Nus and Quart, and pit-sawyers from Rhêmes, among others. The communities of Gressoney-Saint-Jean and Gressoney-La Trinité deserve a separate mention: their inhabitants – Walser, of Germanic mother tongue – headed mainly towards Switzerland and Southern Germany, where they practiced peddling, specializing in fabrics. These pedlars were the first to turn their seasonal emigration into a permanent emigration; they made a fortune, formed an association, and settled abroad, especially in German countries, as early as the end of the seventeenth century.

In the same period, the percentage of seasonal emigrants with respect to the total population of the Valley rose to about 5 %: in 1667, the *Conseil des Commis*, the executive body of the local government, estimated there were more than 3,000 emigrants out of a total population of perhaps 60,000. Yet, according to the local authorities, permanent emigration did not involve more than 252 people in 1734, which amounts to 0.4 % of the population.²⁹

From the fifteenth century onwards, the Valley also became a destination for immigration, welcoming groups of artisans or religious communities from different regions of the Rhine corridor, from Flanders to Franche-Comté. Since the Valley was a French-speaking area, many religious orders and congregations from Transalpine countries here founded monasteries and communities, thanks to the

²⁸ Jean-Pierre Ghignone, "L'émigration valdôtaine Aperçu historique," *Nouvelles du Centre d'études francoprovençales René Willien* 43 (2001): 15.

²⁹ Ghignone, "L'émigration valdôtaine", 18.

common language. Thus, there was a community of Flemish priests and artisans in the fourteenth century,³⁰ of nuns from Savoy and Lorraine in the seventeenth,³¹ as well as priests from various congregations who established their houses and colleges in Aosta throughout the modern age.³²

Meanwhile, the Italian peninsula supplied entrepreneurs and workers specialized in specific production areas. For example, a colony of metallurgists from Bergamo was present in the Valley from the second half of the seventeenth century³³ while, at the end of the following century, several architects, and painters from the Sesia Valley and from Campione d'Italia, such as the Artari brothers,³⁴ settled there permanently. This period is therefore one of the key moments in the history of Valdostano migrations, as it shows contemporaneously the first examples of permanent emigration – the Walser peddlers – and numerous arrivals of permanent immigrants.

This is a unique phenomenon, a peculiarity of the Aosta Valley which became more and more significant, especially between the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, from the unification of Italy onwards, the Valley recorded a considerable increase in permanent emigration, while waves of immigration grew increasingly massive. While at the end of the nineteenth century – along with the railroad – just a few hundred people from Piedmont arrived³⁵ to monopolize the local trade, World War I brought thousands of immigrants who settled in the Valley to work in the factories built to support the war effort.

So, as Stuart J. Wolf explained in his article, the Aosta Valley is the only Italian region that experienced two waves of migration in the same period during

³⁰ On the Flemish presence in Aosta in the late Middle Ages, see Alessandro Celi, “La Valle d’Aosta e i Paesi Bassi una relazione pluriscolare,” in *Tra Francia e Spagna. Reti diplomatiche, territori e culture nei domini sabaudi fra Tre e Settecento*, ed. Alessandro Celi and Matthew Vester (Roma: Carocci editore 2017), 142; Raul Dal Tio, *Il chiostro della Cattedrale dal 15 al 19 secolo* (Aosta: ITLA, 2016), 36–37; Alessandra Vallet, “Calici, ostensori e reliquiari: Jean de Malines e la produzione orafa ad Aosta nella prima metà del XV secolo,” in *Corti e città: arte del Quattrocento nelle Alpi occidentali*, ed. Enrica Pagella et al. (Milano: Skira, 2006), 225–33.

³¹ Alessandro Celi, “La Visitation Sainte-Marie,” in *Les Institutions du Millénaire*, ed. Ezio E. Gerbore et al. (Quart: Musumeci, 2001), 329–32; Maria Costa, “La Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Lorraine,” in *Les Institutions*, 85–88.

³² Maurizio Bergamini, “Les ordres religieux,” in *Les Institutions* (Quart: Musumeci, 2001), 237–42; Maria Costa “La Congrégation du Saint-Sauveur de Lorraine,” in *Les Institutions*, 89–91.

³³ Carlo Sapegno, *I Gervasone Breve storia dei mastri ferrai bergamaschi in Valle d’Aosta* (Aosta: Le château, 2002).

³⁴ Lucia Pedrini Stanga, “Artari,” accessed March 2023, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/043744/2009-04-22>.

³⁵ Woolf, “Emigrati e immigrati,” 628.

the last century: one of emigrants, which peaked between 1920 and 1940, and one of immigrants, which began around 1915 and lasted until the 1980s.³⁶ The first saw the departure of about 20,000 people, corresponding to at least 25 % of total residents in 1911, who moved mainly to France, a country that needed to boost its labor force after the demographic decline caused by World War I, and where the Valdostano migrants enjoyed the important advantage of knowing the local language, unlike other emigrants from the Kingdom of Italy.³⁷ The second was the arrival of some 36,000 immigrants, first from Veneto, and later from southern Italy, mainly from Calabria.³⁸ Therefore, over the last hundred years, the region has undergone major ethnic changes due to the replacement of its previous population with immigrants.

Exemplary evidence of this substitution is the fact that in 2012, the three most common family names in the regional capital, Aosta, were Mammoliti, Fazari and Giovinazzo, all originating from the province of Reggio Calabria, while the previous most popular surname (linked to a local toponym), Bionaz, only ranked sixth.³⁹ However, some of the numerous emigrants who left the Valley at the end of the nineteenth century or during the first half of the twentieth eventually returned, a few decades later. We shall now try to explain why, not only through an exploration of their reasons for coming back, but also by looking at the relationship between emigrants, their associations in France, in Switzerland, and in the United States, and the political life in the Aosta Valley.

Because the specificity of the Aosta Valley case lies within the continuous political dialectics between its citizens who are abroad and those at home, this is a context where – given the small size of the local population and the characteristics of the Statute of Autonomy granted to the Region in 1948 – any social or political phenomenon spreads rapidly. As far as politics are concerned, for example, majorities may shift swiftly even if only one or two seats change side after the election of the regional council, a result that could depend on a few dozen votes.

This premise is necessary to understand the importance of the relationship between the emigrants and those who remained at home, the reciprocal influence of both groups, and the reasons that brought some people back to the Valley after the experience of emigration. From a methodological point of view, the consider-

³⁶ Woolf, "Emigrati e immigrati," 627.

³⁷ Their knowledge of French also benefited Valdostano emigrants in the United States. They did not suffer many of the discriminations the other subjects of the Kingdom of Italy had to face, as they could pass for French citizens.

³⁸ Woolf, "Emigrati e immigrati," 628.

³⁹ "I cognomi più diffusi ad Aosta?", accessed March 12, 2023, <https://www.lastampa.it/aosta/2012/04/17/news/i-cognomi-piu-diffusi-ad-aosta-br-mammoliti-fazari-e-giovinazzo-1.36486738/>.

ations presented are not based on quantitative data but (mainly) on qualitative data, such as family memories and documents collected by the workgroup as well as testimonies shared by the emigrants' descendants. It is therefore not possible to be certain of the numbers we are dealing with, except for specific cases of emigration, but the recurrence of some constants in the various narratives allow us to develop a model and an interpretative grid to distinguish and register the various types of "return."

The Winners

The first category of "return" could be defined as that of the "winners," those who managed to earn enough money to come back home and buy a farm, where they could settle down and live, in better conditions than those they had prior to emigration.

One example of this is the family of Vittorio Berthod (1863–1943), who left his native Valtournenche for the United States in 1893, working on several farms, first in Nebraska and then in Colorado where he was joined by his wife and children (others would be born in the United States). In Colorado, Vittorio managed to accumulate a certain amount of money, thanks to the sale of land and springs to a company that intended to build a dam. He then came back to the Valley where, in 1912, he bought a large farm in Saint-Pierre that is still managed today by his descendants. The interesting element of the story is that, in turn, three of his five children opted to emigrate again, settling permanently in the United States. There, they became involved with the association that brought together the Aosta Valley emigrants in New York, "La Valdôtaine Mutual Aid Society," and which never lost contact with the homeland as long as it was in operation.

The story of the brothers Louis and Humbert Favre, Henry Fassy, and the Bougeat family are similar.

The Favre brothers made their fortune in Mexico City, first by running a farm, then a rental car company at the end of the 1910s, before returning to the Ayas valley and opening a hotel with the money they earned. Their case is interesting because it documents the transition from the exploitation of skills developed in the agropastoral context of the country of origin to those acquired in the place of emigration. Once back in the Valley, these latter skills were exploited to undertake a different activity linked to the growing tourism industry, where the availability of car transportation between railway stations and holiday resorts was crucial.

Meanwhile, Henry Fassy was a *cocher de fiacre* (the coachman of a public carriage) between the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century in Paris. With his savings, he built a house in his native village of Pont-Saint-Martin, where he returned shortly before the outbreak of World War I.

The Bougeat family emigrated in the early 1930s to the Canton of Vaud (Switzerland), where they found an already large community of Aosta Valley emigrants. They came back to the Aosta Valley at the beginning of the 1950s, when the economic situation in the Valley appeared more favourable and their accumulated savings allowed the family to find better accommodation than that which had originally prompted their departure.

The Losers

The second category can be allocated to those whose migratory experience turned sour and who can be classified as “losers.” Most cases of this type are probably connected to the United States, for which we have a more precise statistical picture due to the smaller number of people who chose that destination.

At this point, we must stress that the widespread knowledge of the French language by the Aosta Valley population has always favored immigration to French-speaking countries and, particularly, to France, so much so that, even today, this country is the destination of choice for young emigrants from the Aosta Valley, with Switzerland coming in second, while the United Kingdom ranks third despite being the first destination choice in terms of overall Italian emigration.⁴⁰

Research carried out by Enrico Tognan, and published by the *Le Flambeau*, reveals that about 3,000 people from the Aosta Valley migrated to the United States between 1850 and 1930, with a peak between 1905 and the Great War. More than half of these came back after a few years while only 15 % of them died in America.⁴¹

Of course, not all of those who came back did so because the migratory experience defeated them, but it is certainly true for some. Among these, we highlight Victor-Emmanuel Cheraz (1878–1972), who showed up at his brother's house one day in

⁴⁰ Fondazione Migrantes, *RIM – Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo 2020*, ed. Delfina Licata (Roma: Editrice Tau, 2020), 93.

⁴¹ Enrico Tognan, “Les Valdôtains au Montana (Éléments pour une histoire de l’émigration Valdôtaine aux États-Unis),” in *Lo Flambo/Le Flambeau Revue du Comité des Traditions Valdôtaines* 254 (2021): 76.

1952, with a small suitcase and a cage in which he kept a bird. He had worked as a *chauffeur* at the Drake Hotel in Chicago but, when he was no longer able to drive, he found it impossible to secure an adequate pension in the States and could not rely on the support of family or friends. He therefore chose to return to his country of origin, asking for help from his remaining relatives.

Return to End Life in the Valley

The third category can be fitted halfway between the first two and comprises those who returned at the time of retirement. Once their active life was over and they had accumulated sufficient savings, these emigrants chose to return to their homeland, to end their existence where it had begun. In this type of experience, the fact that, while living in another country, they managed to maintain some properties and, above all, the family home, plays a fundamental part. This is the consequence of various factors but above all, of the fact that in Valle d'Aosta, it is customary to divide the family heritage between all the children, instead of passing the bulk to the eldest son.⁴² Scholars trace this practice to both Celtic heritage and Roman law, in addition to the mountain environment and consequent economic organization.

In fact, until the middle of the twentieth century, most of the population of the Aosta Valley worked in subsistence agriculture, which involved altitude shifts depending on the season. In winter, the families remained at lower altitudes and moved to higher altitudes with the warm season, to exploit the fields and meadows as the snow progressively melted.⁴³ This system implied owning houses and other structures at different altitudes and, generally, almost all families owned at least one property, while itinerant laborers or wage-earners were almost never isolated figures but always inserted in a family system, which was linked to a house and a property plot. For this reason, even if the emigrant had brothers who remained in the Valley, he would retain the right to a part of the family properties. Thus, a link with the native country was maintained and the immigrant was almost always certain that he would still have a home when he came back.

The presence of family properties constituted an important motivation for maintaining contacts with the Valley, and still does to this day: grandchildren and

⁴² Book II, Title XII articles II and III of *Coutumes générales du Duché d'Aoste proposées, et rédigées par écrit en l'assemblée des trois Etats, gens d'Eglise, nobles, praticiens, & coûtmiers* (Aoste: Estienne Riondet imprimeur, 1684), 247.

⁴³ Jean-Pierre Ghignone, *Civilisation valdôtaine* (Aosta: Duc, 1982), 52.

great-grandchildren of immigrants, born in another country and citizens of the latter since birth, for example, continue to visit the Valle d'Aosta precisely because they own a house here, which they may now use only for holidays but was never completely abandoned. This is the case of the Honorary Secretary General of the French Senate, Jean-Louis Hérin (born in 1952), who regularly comes to Val-tournenche where his ancestors' house is located, or that of Doris Berthod (born in 1951), niece of the aforementioned Victor Berthod, who spends her summer holidays in Saint-Pierre, where she inherited an apartment.

The “Lovers”

Those who returned for sentimental reasons, out of love for a given person or for their native country, fit into yet another category. Among the people interviewed, some reported cases like this: a person born in France to parents from the Aosta Valley returned to the Valley for holidays during which he or she met their future husband or wife and therefore decided to settle here.

This choice is not without consequences: also, the parents, who have now become citizens of another country and intended to spend the last years of their lives there, may instead decide to follow their child and return to Italy. This is especially true when the son or daughter is the only child of the couple, with the parents tending to follow the one person who can offer them support in their old age.

Another decision linked to an emotional choice is that of those who, despite having completed their working life and acquired a certain quality of life abroad, do not intend to sever the link with the Aosta Valley. They thus move back there not only because they own the family home but also, and more precisely, because of a choice that could be defined as ideological.

Exemplary in this sense is the story of Ernestine Branche (1890–1969), as told in her autobiography *La Race qui meurt*.⁴⁴ Ernestine was a Romance languages teacher in colleges of the East Coast of the United States, but upon her retirement, she returned to the Valley, where she no longer had her parents. Almost all her brothers and sisters, who emigrated too, would also gradually return home to spend the last years of their life in their country of origin.

It appears clear from her autobiography that Branche actually “mythologized” the image of the Aosta Valley as she knew it before leaving for the United

⁴⁴ Ernestine Branche, *La Race qui meurt*, book attached to *Lo Flambò/Le Flambeau Revue du Comité des Traditions Valdôtaines* 247 (2019).

States, at the age of 22. The interesting element of this case is the disappointment she felt as she faced the huge changes that had occurred in the Aosta Valley between the year of her departure, 1912, and the year of her definitive return, 1958, although she came home at least four or five times on vacation during the time she spent in the United States.

Her journeys from one side of the Atlantic to the other have been reconstructed and it cannot be said that she was completely unaware of the economic and social development experienced by the region between the 1930s and 1960s. Nevertheless, her disappointment was indeed severe, as revealed by the title she gave her biography. *La Race qui meurt* is borrowed from the French title of a 1925 film by George B. Seitz, *The vanishing American*, which illustrates the consequences the arrival of Europeans had on the Amerindian people, who are compared to the inhabitants of the Valley. This reference explains the tone of the writing, halfway between an elegy for a lost world and a pamphlet denouncing the betrayal of both their culture and roots by those who remained in the Valley and accepted the language and culture of the newcomers, the immigrants from Italy.

Return to Act

The last type of return is linked to an attitude like that of Ernestine Branche, but not expressed in terms of regret and condemnation; it is rather an active commitment to a specific idea of the Aosta Valley identity. This evolution is well represented by the story of Claudine Chenuil (born in 1946), the daughter of Aosta Valley emigrants who settled in the western suburbs of Paris, at Levallois-Perret. Today this is one of the richest residential cities in France but, 100 years ago, it was a small suburban village for the working class.

In Levallois, the Aosta Valley community was particularly numerous, and its members often came from the lower part of the region (Arnad, Donnas, Perloz, Pont-Saint-Martin, Fontainemore, and Lillianes). The reason for this was that, as is frequent in migratory phenomena, a network of relatives and acquaintances among fellow villagers ensured mutual support. In addition to this, Levallois offered two interesting economic advantages; Citroën opened its second factory near Levallois as did Baron Marcel Bich, the inventor of the disposable pen bearing his (shortened!) name and of many other low-cost everyday objects. Bich's family was originally from the Aosta Valley and the businessman favored employment of people from the Valley in both companies.

Also, Levallois was located beyond the customs and excise restrictions of Paris, meaning that a series of taxes (including those related to the possession of

cars and petrol) were not due there. As a result, many garages and taxi companies, along with their mechanics and coachbuilders, moved to Levallois.

The people from Valle d'Aosta were already active as coachmen in Paris by the end of the nineteenth century and recycled themselves as *chauffeurs de taxi* or *garagistes* (mechanics), which allowed the next generation, precisely that of Claudine Chenuil, to take advantage of a more advanced school system than the Italian one and thus paved the road to other types of work, such as (in this case) becoming an actress. Claudine's story can be seen as exemplary because it is closely linked to the migrants' associations. This emigrants' daughter decided to become an actress thanks to a passion born within an initiative promoted by the *Union valdôtaine de Paris (UVP)*, the mutual aid society of Aosta Valley emigrants founded in Paris in 1897.

At the beginning of the 1950s, the young members of the UVP founded an amateur theatre company, *Le Rideau valdôtain*, of which Claudine was the last president before its dissolution at the end of the 1990s after over 40 years of activity. Meanwhile, Claudine had acquired enough skills to make acting her profession and she thus founded her own theatre troupe, the *Groupe Approches*,⁴⁵ which specialized mainly in French-language entertainment for schools. Therefore, she returned to Valle d'Aosta at a time when the Regional Department of Education was intensely promoting the use of French, especially focusing on a very early approach to the French language, starting from kindergarten. This way, the circle was closed: the daughter of Aosta Valley emigrants, born in an environment we could describe as proletarian or, at least, underprivileged, acquired professionalism in a very sectorial field and made it her profession, deciding to settle back in the Aosta Valley to help maintain the French-speaking identity of the region.

The Dialectics Between the Emigration Associations and Politics

Reference to the emigration associations and the regional political decision to rely on the children of immigration in order to maintain the use of the French language in the Aosta Valley allows us to illustrate one last characteristic of the relationship between emigration and return emigration. One of the main features of the history of emigration from the Aosta Valley has been – and still is, in part –

⁴⁵ Biography of Claudine accessed March 12, 2023, <https://www.cieles3plumes.art/it/artisti/chenuil-joulet>.

the presence of many mutual aid associations among the emigrants, all of which were created between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, when the first large wave of migration from the Aosta Valley occurred and was consolidated, in the period between the two world wars.

In addition to the aforementioned *Union valdôtaine de Paris*, there were three other associations, whose main purpose was to support the schooling of children remaining in the Aosta Valley: the *Pro Schola de Challand-Saint-Victor*, heir of *Les Challandins de Paris*, founded in 1900 but which disappeared in the 1930s; the aforementioned *Pro Schola de Champdepraz*, founded in 1919 and still active today; and, as we said before, *La Valdôtaine Aid Society* of New York, founded in 1909 and whose last representative – Oscar, one of three sons of Victor Berthod who chose the U.S.A. – died in 1992. All these associations always stayed in touch with the Valle d'Aosta and constantly intervened in the local political debate.

In the 1920s and 1930s, this involvement took the shape of a weekly newspaper published in Paris by the emigrants, *La Vallée d'Aoste*, which made considerable efforts to support the maintenance of French as a vehicular language in primary schools following the reform promoted by the fascist minister Giovanni Gentile. Afterwards, the newspaper became, albeit with some yielding, the voice of the Catholic anti-fascists and of those who called for administrative autonomy of the Aosta Valley.

This is how, during and after World War II, these associations became the place where the ideology of independence for the Aosta Valley developed and rooted.

Particularly important in these dynamics was Fidèle Charrère (1906–1991), born in Aymavilles, who emigrated to France; he was a member of the editorial staff of *La Vallée d'Aoste* but also the author of the pamphlet *Notre Pays d'Aoste*, which presented the Valley to Parisian public opinion in 1946. Charrère was the main ideologist of this group that, between 1944 and 1948, advocated the annexation of Valle d'Aosta to France. In the 1960s, Charrère became the leading promoter of the Aosta Valley associations abroad and the first president of Co. Fe.S.E.V., the *Comité fédéral des Sociétés de l'Émigration Valdôtaine*, a federal body created by the emigration associations to become the sole interlocutor of the Valle d'Aosta autonomous Region, which still supports it today with a specific proportion of the budget.

Yet why did the regional public body support these associations? There are at least three possible answers to this question, which all intertwine to form a single thread. Firstly, many of the emigrants had not abandoned their Italian citizenship, so they could vote whenever there was an election in Italy, including at re-

gional level. This meant that despite their living abroad, emigrants constituted a far from secondary component of the electorate of the Aosta Valley.

A second element was the strong communist component within these associations. The preference for the Communist Party among emigrants stemmed from the political emigration drive during fascism; numerous anti-fascists from the Aosta Valley took refuge in France and spread their ideas in working-class circles, such as Levallois. In this regard, it is significant that, between the 1960s and 1980s, the son of Aosta Valley emigrants, Parfait Jans (1926–2011), became the mayor of Levallois and a deputy for the French Communist Party in the National Assembly. The documents and testimonies collected report that in Levallois, the descendants of migrants from Valle d'Aosta constituted an association, which held a festival, the *Fête de la chèvre* (the Feast of the Goat); the main dish they served on this occasion was precisely the meat of this animal, reminding the emigrants of the place they came from. In fact, the breeding of goats and sheep was more widespread in the lower Aosta Valley, whereas cattle breeding prevailed in other areas of the region. More than a thousand people gathered for this feast and there was even a delegation of regional politicians led, of course, by those belonging to the Communist Party. On this occasion, they collected subscriptions to the weekly newspaper of the Aosta Valley communist federation, *Il lavoro – Le travail*, which is how a political newspaper in Italy came to be financed by French subscribers.

The third element linked to politics, even though less evident, was the networks of contacts and personal friendships that these emigrants and children of emigrants constructed over time. This trend has only recently received attention from historians, thanks to some apparently significant archival fonds that have become available for research.

Among other examples, the case of another member of the Jans family stands out: Marcel (died 1997) whose father was *chef de service* (stage manager) at the *Comédie-Française*. Marcel had attended his preparatory class and studied at *École Normale* alongside Georges Pompidou, to whom he wrote placidly even when the latter was prime minister of General De Gaulle, recalling their time on the school benches and the street clashes against the right-wing students, the *Camelots du Roi*, members of Charles Maurras' *Action Française*. Other children of immigration may also be mentioned in relation to important figures of the French Republic, such as the prefect of Paris Maurice Papon, often present on the other occasion that brought together the Aosta Valley emigrants in Paris, the *Arbre de Noël*, the Christmas party organized for the first time by abbé Petigat in 1920, which is still today the main meeting occasion for the *Union Valdôtaine de Paris*, the mutual aid society of Valdostan emigrants in French capital.

The proximity between children of emigrants and high-ranking French figures explains, or rather constitutes, the background of dialectics between outgoing and return emigration of the Aosta Valley. As mentioned, this return was essentially supported, from the outset, by the possibility of maintaining a base in the valley – a house, for example – but the real driving force was the dialogue maintained throughout the twentieth century between the emigrants, the population, and the authorities of Valle d'Aosta.

Temporary Conclusions and New Research

With the beginning of the new millennium, the sociological and political foundations of the situation, described as it was in the twentieth century, have gradually changed. The progressive disappearance of first generations of emigrants and that of mass political parties in Italy after the end of the Cold War, the loosening of family ties, and the changes in economic organization as well as in daily life requirements have contributed to significantly changing the role of migrants in the contemporary Aosta Valley.

However, as evidenced by the *Rencontre Valdôtaine*, we can still find the annual summer meeting between the local population and the emigrants who return to the homeland for their holidays.⁴⁶ At the same time, the first cases of a new return emigration are recorded; young people, who left during the last 20 years to study or to work, have decided to return for the most varied reasons, from the need to look after elderly parents to new employment opportunities.

These latter cases are worthy of study, together with the new emigration wave as a whole and an aspect of twentieth century emigration that, so far, has not attracted the attention of researchers: emigration from the Valley to other Italian regions. The demographic preponderance of emigration to France, as well as some political rhetoric – which have long favored ties with the *République* and other French-speaking countries – have until now hindered a thorough analysis of the movements of Aosta Valley citizens towards Ivrea, Turin, Rome, and other Italian locations.

Therefore, these aspects of the Aosta Valley emigration of the past, as well as the dynamics of the most recent emigration, which began in the early 2000s in a context decidedly different from that of the last century, remain to be explored. Sped up by technological development, work mobility has become a necessity, al-

⁴⁶ Regione autonoma Valle d'Aosta. “Rencontre Valdôtaine,” accessed March 12, 2023, https://www.regione.vda.it/Eventi_istituzionali/manifestazioni/rencontre/default_i.asp.

most a norm of daily life, although cases of multiple displacements were quite frequent even in the past; after all, the aforementioned Favre brothers from Ayas, for example, did not end up in Mexico City directly from their country of origin but rather after spending some time in Chicago, where they worked as plumbers and thermo-hydraulics.

The element to bear in mind, however, is the persistence of political and emotional ties to their region of origin that, today still, characterizes the Aosta Valley emigrants and their descendants, a basic element in making the decision to return to the Valley even after living abroad for one or two generations.

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Milovanović Miloš

12 Returnees to Serbia From Abroad: Suitcases Full of Democracy

Abstract: This chapter explores the link between return migration and both development and political participation in the country of origin, using a case study of the Republic of Serbia. The study builds a panel dataset combining the 2002 and 2011 censuses of Serbia and electoral results at municipal level for the 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections. The findings imply that returnees have a positive impact on local communities, improving public investments and healthcare, increasing both educational level and electoral participation, and reducing unemployment. The rationale for this is that, along with material goods and human capital, these former emigrants (who benefit from their contact with more developed and democratic societies) also adopt new ways of thinking about politics. The results of the statistical model confirm how a higher share of returnees indirectly affects the results of elections and reduces the margin between candidates. Finally, the outputs of this study could have substantial implications for policymakers working in migrant-emitter countries.

Introduction

Although there is increasing evidence of return migration, little is known about the ways in which it affects communities in the homeland. According to Dumont and Spielvogel, the average return rate after five years varies from 28 % for the Netherlands to 60 % for Ireland.¹ Similarly, Dustmann and Weiss report that 40 % of males and 55 % of females of the foreign-born population who emigrated to the UK in the 1990s left the UK after five years.² This promising pathway, although still under-researched, has been explored and verified by evidence from long-

¹ Jean-Christophe Dumont and Gilles Spielvogel, “Return migration: a new perspective,” *International Migration Outlook*, Working paper, 171, accessed March 2, 2023, <https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/43999382.pdf>.

² Christian Dustmann and Yoram Weiss, “Return Migration: Theory and Empirical Evidence from the UK,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 45 (2007): 253, accessed September 22, 2022, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8543.2007.00613.x.

established emigration areas, such as Mexico.³ In particular, the analyses have shown that return migrants may be agents of political change by circulating knowledge about politics acquired abroad.⁴ Also, return migration could stimulate development of the country of origin by increasing education and income⁵ as well as improving healthcare.⁶

This chapter focuses on the Republic of Serbia, a Balkan country which has experienced a comprehensive population outflow. More precisely, in the 2002 census, 5.3 % of the population resided abroad (working, studying, etc.), while in 2011 this share was reduced to 4 %.⁷ In contrast, from 1991 onwards, a different trajectory concerning return migration has been observed (Figure 1). Overall, Serbia has long been a place of both emigration and return and, in this context, an interesting question is whether international migration is a driver of political change and development. More specifically, do returnees increase participation in elections and social-economic conditions in the municipality of return? Accordingly, this chapter investigates whether and how such a migration experience influences both participation in elections and development by observing data collected between 2002 and 2011.

At the same time, democracy in the Republic of Serbia is relatively young and exhibits some weaknesses. After all, the legacy of a one-party rule until the 1990s and the major transformation of government after the 2000s remained essential to the political behaviour of its population, which makes it a good case study for

³ Clarisa Pérez-Armendariz and David Crow, “Do migrants remit democracy? International migration, political beliefs, and behaviour in Mexico,” *Comparative political studies* 43 (2010): 119–48; Christian Ambrosius and Covadonga Meseguer, “Return migration, crime, and electoral engagement in Mexico,” *Electoral Studies* 66 (2020): 1–12, accessed September 3, 2022, doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102161.

⁴ Peggy Levitt, “Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion,” *The International Migration Review* 32 (1998): 926–48, accessed November 2, 2022, doi.org/10.2307/2547666; Pérez-Armendariz and Crow, “Do migrants remit democracy?,” 119–48; Lisa Chauvet and Marion Mercier, “Do Return Migrants Transfer Political Norms to Their Origin Country? Evidence from Mali,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 42 (2014): 630–51; Michele Tuccio, Jackline Wahba and Bachir Hamdouch, “International Migration as Drivers of Political and Social Change: Evidence from Morocco,” *Journal of Population Economics* 32 (2019): 1171–203.

⁵ Benjamin Waddell and Matías Fontenla, “The Mexican Dream? The Effect of Return Migrants on Hometown Development.” *The Social Science Journal* 52 (2015): 386–96, accessed December 12, 2022, doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2015.02.003.

⁶ Peggy Levitt and Deepak Lamba-Nieves, “Social Remittances Revisited,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37 (2011): 1–22, accessed November 19, 2022. doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2011.521361.

⁷ Goran Penev and Jelena Predojević-Despic, “Spatial Aspects of Emigration out of Serbia. Three ‘Hot’ Emigration Zones,” *Stanovništvo* 50 (2012): 35–64, accessed November 12, 2022, doi.org/10.2298/STNV1202035P.

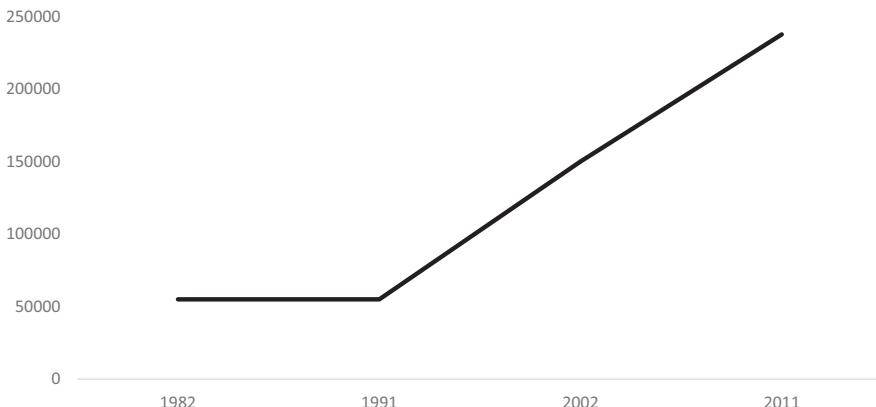


Figure 1: Returnees from abroad to the Republic of Serbia, 1981–2011. Adopted from: Stankovic (2014).

understanding the relationship between current return migration trends and politics. Furthermore, since Serbia is a diverse region in terms of the onset of migration, economic development, and the size of returning population, the analysis will be carried out at municipal level.

While the number of publications investigating the political consequences of out-migration in sending countries is increasing, the number of those focusing on how the return of migrants affects new democracies is still limited. Thus, this study focuses on political participation as one of the fundamental dimensions of democracy. Consequently, it should be perceived as a modest attempt to quantify the impact, if any, of return migration on democracy.

Although the main aim of the analysis is to test potential associations between return migration and electoral participation, this chapter additionally examines how returnees affect levels of development. Do these individuals improve the healthcare, education, and economy of the homeland? The research will provide an initial understanding of these effects and lay a solid foundation for further investigations in the future.

The study uses panel dataset at municipal level (the 2002 and 2011 censuses of Serbia) to explore the impact of return migration on participation rates in the 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections and development. The strategy adopted makes it possible to examine both inter-municipal and intra-municipal associations, enabling assessment of time-invariant unobservable characteristics of municipalities that may be correlated with both outcome and explanatory variables. Finally, census data provide robust information on educational, ethnic, and

economic characteristics that allow us to investigate possible determinants of the response variables.

Our estimates indicate a positive relationship between return migration and both development and voter turnout, in analysis of the share of the population abroad and several socio-demographic characteristics of return municipalities. The study also shows an indirect effect of return migration on greater competitiveness by reducing the margin and increasing the chances of victory for the opposition party's candidate.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows: after reviewing the existing literature on return migration-induced changes, the subsequent section describes the data used in the analysis. The methodology section presents the selected approach, while estimations are discussed in the results section. Eventually, the chapter ends with conclusions.

Literature Review

Cerase's influential article on Italian returnees from the United States identified four distinct types of returnees: (1) return of failure covers those returnees who fail to integrate into their host countries, which further motivates their return; (2) return of conservatism concerns migrants with the sole intention to satisfy their own needs and those of relatives. Namely, they help to preserve the social condition that they left behind; (3) return of retirement refers to retired migrants who decide to return and spend their old age in their homeland; and (4) return of innovation is the return of actors who believe that the skills acquired abroad will turn them into agents of change.⁸

Li, McHale, and Xuan, following Albert Hirschman's Voice–Exit nexus nearly 40 years after it was introduced, identify four avenues through which out-migration is likely to affect the status of political institutions at home: (1) the absence avenue refers to the channel through which the most productive individuals leave the country; (2) the prospect avenue offers the most productive members of society greater bargaining power due to the possibility to migrate; (3) through the so-called diaspora avenue, emigrants are able to help political organizations and activities at home; and (4), the most important area for the study, the return avenue which concerns returnees who support fresh ideas and promote a variety of political goals

⁸ Francesco Cerase, "Expectations and Reality: A Case Study of Return Migration from the United States to Southern Italy," *The International Migration Review* 8 (1974): 245–62, accessed May 27, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3002783>.

(e.g., transparency).⁹ Furthermore, they argue that return migration is still an uncharted territory in terms of the migration-politics nexus, despite the fact that scholarly research has shown that return migrants may be agents of political change by disseminating their views on democracy acquired abroad. Specifically, the number of publications which analyze the political effects of emigration in the emitter nations is growing, but the amount of research on the consequences of the return of migrants on politics is still limited.¹⁰ Therefore, the papers considering return migration should examine whether, and under what conditions, returnees are agents of change. Arguably, some of these migrants are more capable than others of using their knowledge and resources gained abroad.¹¹

A study of Mexican returnees from the United States showed that return migrants are, on average, more democratic than their co-nationals lacking in spatial mobility.¹² Furthermore, based on a 2006 national opinion poll interviewing 650 Mexican citizens residing in Mexico, it was revealed that “migration leads to higher rates of non-electoral political participation, greater tolerance of political and social differences and more critical assessments of both democracy and respect for rights in Mexico.”¹³ Elsewhere, Batista and Vicente documented how the share of return migrants in Cape Verde was positively correlated with demands for greater political accountability,¹⁴ with the assessed outcomes specifically concerning returnees from countries with better governance.¹⁵ Further afield, Chauvet and Mercier applied the fixed effect method to a panel dataset, combining census data (1998 and 2009) and the election results (1998/1999 and 2009) at municipal level in Mali.¹⁶ Finally, the study found a positive impact on the stock of returnees from non-African countries on voting turnout and confirmed a transfer effect from returnees to non-migrants.¹⁷

⁹ Xiaoyang Li, John McHale, and Zhou Xuan, “Does Brain Drain Lead to Institutional Gain?” *The World Economy* 40 (2017): 1454–72, accessed December 10, 2022, doi.org/10.1111/twec.12407.

¹⁰ Li, McHale, and Xuan, “Does Brain Drain Lead to Institutional Gain,” 1454–72.

¹¹ Peggy Levitt, “Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion,” 926–48.

¹² Pérez-Armendariz and Crow, “Do migrants remit democracy,” 119–48.

¹³ Pérez-Armendariz and Crow, “Do migrants remit democracy,” 3.

¹⁴ Catia Batista and Pedro C. Vincente, “Do Migrants Improve Governance at Home? Evidence from a Voting Experiment,” *The World Bank Economic Review* 25 (2011): 77–104, accessed December 16, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23029729>.

¹⁵ Batista and Pedro, “Do Migrants Improve,” 77–104.

¹⁶ Chauvet and Mercier, “Do Return Migrants Transfer Political Norms,” 630–51.

¹⁷ Ibid., 640.

The same positive effect was confirmed by Tuccio and his colleagues.¹⁸ Using data obtained from the “Investigation on the Impact of International Migration on Development in Morocco,” conducted in August–October 2013 for 1,200 households, their paper investigated whether households with returnees and current migrants had different political behaviour compared to non-migrant households,¹⁹ with the results indicating how having a returnee increases the demand for both social and political change, especially in the case of returnees from Western European countries.²⁰ In sum, all of these case studies confirmed how the return of migrants from more democratic societies increases electoral involvement in communities in the homeland.

Conversely, research by Pérez-Armendáriz based on in-depth field interviews showed that returnees tend to disengage from politics shortly after returning to Mexico; namely, around “80 % of returnees who claimed that they had undertaken new forms of civic engagement after returning also reported that they had renounced these new practices within two years of moving home.”²¹ Elsewhere, Ambrosius and Meseguer used data on turnout rates in presidential elections in Mexico from 2000 to 2012 and showed that turnout in municipalities with high rates of return migration was lower, on average.²² The negative effect of return migration on turnouts was also increased in municipalities where crime rates were higher,²³ confirming how the impact that returnees have in their communities is conditioned by the circumstances they face in the municipality of origin.²⁴ Finally, Duquette-Rury and Chen studied how various routes of international migration influenced political participation across Mexican municipalities from 1990 to 2013.²⁵ Using two different

¹⁸ Tuccio, Wahba, and Hamdouch, “International Migration as Drivers of Political and Social Change: Evidence from Morocco,” 1171–203.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1171–203.

²⁰ Ibid., 1187.

²¹ Pérez-Armendáriz, Clarisa. “Cross-Border Discussions and Political Behaviour in Migrant-Sending Countries,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 49 (2014):11.

²² Ambrosius and Meseguer, “Return migration, crime, and electoral engagement in Mexico,” 6.

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Jean-Pierre Cassarino, “Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited,” *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 6 (2004): 253–79, accessed September 28, 2022, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1730637>.

²⁵ Lauren Duquette-Rury and Zhenxiang Chen, “Does International Migration Affect Political Participation? Evidence from Multiple Data Sources across Mexican Municipalities 1990–2013,” *International Migration Review* 53 (2019): 798–830, accessed October 9, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918318774499>.

data sources (panel and longitudinal), they found that return migration decreased turnout in municipal elections by 4 % to 5 %.²⁶

In addition to influencing political behavior, return migration can have a substantial impact on the overall development of the community of origin. Waddell and Fontenla investigated the effect of return migration on health, education, income, and political participation in Guanajuato, Mexico,²⁷ examining the 2000–2010 period and revealing a positive association between returnees and the local economy, education, healthcare, and voting participation. Levitt and Lamba-Nieves also assert that emigrants often remit social and cultural models to their hometowns, affecting the stance of the community of origin in terms of education, politics, healthcare, and business.²⁸

Concerning education, researchers have uncovered a positive impact on the educational level in migrant-emitting regions. Arguably, the migrant experience promotes the importance of education as a fruitful route to acquire a decent career and improve the chances of success.²⁹

Regarding health, Levitt uncovered that emigrants bring back home social practices that have a positive effect on health in Mexico.³⁰

As for economic development, returnees often use capital saved abroad to start private businesses at home. Marchetta found that Egyptians returning from oil-rich Gulf monarchies are more likely both to engage in business ventures and to succeed, as compared to non-migrants.³¹

All in all, the effects of return migration on participation in elections are highly conditioned by the observed socio-demographic and political characteristics of both countries of origin and destination; consequently, returnees could increase voter turnout in the homeland communities by improving the residents' engagement in political decision-making. In contrast, in some countries and communities, the opposite occurs. Thus, once they return home, in order to expand their political capital, non-migrant co-nationals must be open-minded toward these novel views on politics imported from abroad and less skeptical toward

26 Ibid., 817.

27 Waddell and Fontenla, “The Mexican Dream? The Effect of Return Migrants on Hometown Development,” 386–96.

28 Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, “Social Remittances Revisited,” 13.

29 Waddell and Fontenla, “The Mexican Dream?” 393.

30 Levitt Peggy, “community development: The case of migration between Boston and the Dominican Republic,” *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 26 (1997): 509–26.

31 Francesca Marchetta, “Return Migration and the Survival of Entrepreneurial Activities in Egypt,” *World Development* 40 (2012): 1999–2013, accessed October 9, 2022, doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.009.

compatriots who have returned.³² Finally, beyond politics, the reviewed studies provide evidence that return migration can improve health and the economy and support the overall development of the community of return.

All things considered, the study expects to find a positive association between return migration and electoral participation in the case of the Republic of Serbia. Specifically, this chapter envisages a positive effect of returnees through social remittances³³ on the broader society's political participation, which further perceives returnees as agents of change.³⁴ Knowing how most returnees return from areas with more advanced politics³⁵ and following Levitt's perception of these individuals as possible drivers of democratic change,³⁶ a positive correlation between returnees and electoral participation is predicted. Additionally, the same type of relation is expected between the share of returnees in the total population of the municipality and the development of local administrative units.

Data

Serbia is an ideal location for analyzing the impact of return migration on local communities, with the Republic having a long history of emigration to Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia.³⁷ Table 1 outlines the municipal-level balanced panel data.

We estimate the effect of return migration as reflected in census data (2002 and 2011) on voter turnout in presidential elections in the years 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2008. The dependent variable of interest is voter turnout, with this data collected from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia³⁸ and representing the participation figures recorded in the presidential elections at municipal level held in 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2008. The maximum recorded turnout was as high as 77.25 %, while

³² Ambrosius and Meseguer, "Return migration, crime, and electoral engagement in Mexico," 9.

³³ Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion," 926–48.

³⁴ Cerase, "Expectations and Reality: A Case Study of Return Migration from the United States to Southern Italy," 245–62.

³⁵ Vladimir Stankovic, *Srbija u procesu spoljnih migracija* [Serbia in the Process of External Migration] (Belgrade: Statistički Zavod Srbije, 2014), accessed November 28, 2010, <https://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011/Inostranstvo.pdf>.

³⁶ Levitt, "Social Remittances," 942.

³⁷ Stankovic, *Srbija u procesu spoljnih migracija* [Serbia in the Process of External Migration], 15

³⁸ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, "Data on elections for the president of the Republic of Serbia," accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.stat.gov.rs/enUS/oblasti/izbori/predsednicki-izbori>.

Table 1: Summary statistics.

	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Voter turnout (%)	644	51.14	10.69	5.55	77.25
Share of returnees within total population of the municipality (%)	1610	0.73	0.48	9.02e-17	5.63
Share of population with higher education (%)	1610	9.24	6.84	0.48	51.77
Share of unemployed within total population (%)	1610	11.72	4.79	1.39	44.79
Urban/Rural (1 for urban administrative units, 0 for rural)	1610	0.26	0.44	0	1
The ethnic minorities representing the majority in the municipality (1 for the municipality in which ethnic minorities constitute the majority, 0 for those in which Serbs are the majority)	1610	0.10	0.29	0	1
Infant mortality rate	1237	10.18	7.82	1.1	125
Public investments per capita	1605	25,406.33	59908.54	0	75,027.6
Share of population abroad (%)	1610	5.60	6.60	0.37	45.31
Municipal population (log)	1610	10.32	0.87	7.28	12.72
Opposition/incumbent party candidate win	644	0.72	0.45	0	1
Margin (%)	644	5.54	3.08	3.23	10.81
Number of candidates in the elections	644	10.25	3.27	6	15

Notes: The data on the share of returnees, unemployed, population abroad, average age, ethnic composition, share with higher education, rural/urban division, population size, the share of 18+, public investment, and infant mortality rates are drawn from the 2002 and 2011 decennial census files. Data on the distinction between opposition and incumbent party win candidate, the number of candidates in the elections, and the margin are obtained from the Statistical Office of Serbia.

the lowest participation rate was only 5.5 %. The substantial difference in voter turnout among municipalities suggests that there is more behind these numbers than mere chance.

The main explanatory variable is return migration (the share of returnees in the total population of the municipality) over the previous year, measured as the share of population that returned to Serbia from another country in the preceding year. The data for this variable was collected from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS).³⁹ The fact that the average share of returnee migrants in all municipalities increased from 0.38 % in 2002 to 0.84 % in 2011 highlights the growing importance of this distinct population group.

Regarding the correlation between return migrations and development, the outcome variables of interest are the following: infant mortality rates, share of the population with higher education, unemployment rates, and the size of public investments per capita. Several additional socioeconomic controls are included in the model: the share of population abroad, ethnic composition, the share of population aged 18+ (eligible voters), the size of the municipal population (log), and a categorical variable that makes a distinction between urban and rural municipalities.

Importantly, SORS does not publish annual data on return migration and emigration; this is only done for the census year. In order to assemble annual values of both return and emigration time series for the period 2002–2011, for municipalities of interest, the study used linear interpolation to insert missing values. Because emigration and return migration generally evolves steadily, linear interpolation data is not going to put quality of estimations at risk, and it was also used to impute missing values for the share of persons with higher education. Arguably, education levels also develop slowly because they are mainly cohort-driven, and linear interpolation of missing data is therefore relatively harmless in terms of data quality.⁴⁰

Additionally, the model includes two indicators of election competitiveness: the number of candidates (Candidates) and the difference between the winner and runner-up candidate (Margin). Finally, the study uses a categorical variable with a value of 1 when the candidate of the opposition party wins the election, and a value of 0 when the candidate of the ruling party wins (Win).

Finally, certain territorial units were excluded because their administrative status changed between 2002 and 2011, while municipalities from the province of

³⁹ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, “Census of population, households and dwellings,” accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/oblasti/popis>.

⁴⁰ Mikko Myrskylä, Hans-Peter Kohler, and Francesco C. Billari, “Advances in development reverse fertility declines,” *Nature* 460 (2009): 741–43, accessed November 29, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature08230>.

Kosovo and Metohija were not included in the study due to the inability of the authorities of the Republic of Serbia to conduct a census in that part of the territory.

Empirical Specifications

As the study explores clustered data, and clustering generates unobserved heterogeneity across clusters, a random intercept model will therefore be utilized in the following equation format:

$$Y_{ij} = \gamma \text{ Share of returnees} + \beta_1 X_{1ij} + \beta_2 Y_{ij(t-1)} + \gamma_{01} Z_{1j} + \gamma_{02} \bar{X}_{1j} + u_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

where j represents municipalities (clusters) and i represents measurement occasions (years). In order to interpret the effects of control variables more precisely, the within- and between-cluster transformations of all time-varying variables will be performed. β_1 represents the within-cluster effects of the matrix of control variables X_1 (within-municipality effect) while γ_{02} represents the between-cluster effects (cross-municipality effect) of control variables. Also, since this is a random intercept model, e_{ij} represents the within-cluster error, while u_{ij} is the between-cluster error. $\beta_2 Y_{ij(t-1)}$ in turn represents a lagged dependent variable to account for dynamics;⁴¹ including the lagged variable reduces the possibility of autocorrelation originating from model misspecification. The advantages of the proposed model with decomposed effects are that it fixes issues of cluster confounding, accounts for unobserved heterogeneity, fulfills the assumption that level-1 variables are uncorrelated with the random parts ($\text{Cov}(X_{ij}, u_{0j})=0$), permits the introduction of the time-constant level-2 variables, and provides statistical tests of cluster confounding.⁴²

Results

The approximation starts by estimating the relationship between the four dependent variables (infant mortality rates, educational level, unemployment rate, and the size of public investments per capita) and a matrix of independent variables.

⁴¹ Brandon Bartels, “Beyond Fixed versus Random Effects: A Framework for Improving Substantive and Statistical Analysis of Panel, Time-Series Cross-Sectional, and Multilevel Data,” *Society for Political Methodology*, working paper (2008): 1–42, accessed March 2, 2023, <https://home.gwu.edu/~bartels/cluster.pdf>.

⁴² Bartels, “Beyond Fixed versus Random Effects,” 1–2.

Subsequently, the study examines the relationship between the share of returns and electoral participation.

The purpose of the first estimation is to determine to what extent return migrants contributed to development in the 2002–2011 period. Table 2 displays the results of the model specified without the lagged variable ($\beta_2 Y_{ij(t-1)}$). The main variable of interest, the share of return migration in the municipality's population, has a strong positive relationship with all measures of development, suggesting that return migrants may play a key role in development trends in the Republic of Serbia. Furthermore, it includes between-municipality effects, within-municipality effects, and the absolute value of the difference between within- and between-municipality effects (i.e., a test for cluster confounding). Also, the likelihood ratio test supports the specification of the random intercept model over the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) approach. Specifically, at the level of municipalities, there is significant unobserved heterogeneity (u_{0j}). The Rho values indicate that 57 %, 96 %, 94 %, and 38 % of the error variance is accounted for by municipality-level error, respectively.

Regarding individual indicators, a 1 % increase in the share of returnees per municipality is associated with a reduction of five in the infant mortality rate, implying that for every 1,000 live births five fewer die before their first birthday. Conversely, the population abroad is positively associated with infant mortality, namely, a 10 % increase in population abroad is associated with an upsurge in the infant mortality rate by more than three. Similarly, as for the infant mortality rates, the return migration and both education and public investments per capita are directly correlated. Regarding education, Table 2 shows how returnees exert both between- and within-municipality effects on the share of the population with higher education. Consequently, since the statistically significant coefficient of absolute difference for the educational level (3.79) suggests cluster confounding, and since the size of the between-effect is greater than within-effect size (5.12 to 2.42), the interpretation is as follows: a 1 % increase in the share of return migration is associated with an increase in the share of those with higher education (about 15 years of schooling) by 5.12 % across municipalities. Likewise, return migration exhibits a statistically significant within-municipality effect and between-municipality effect on the size of public investments per capita. Since the within and between effects are approximately equal, and the difference between them is statistically insignificant, the interpretation of the coefficients is as follows: for any given municipality, as the share of returnees increases/decreases over time, the public investment also increases/decreases by more than 43,000 Serbian dinars (approximately 360 Euros), and municipalities with a higher share of returnees by 1 % on average have higher average values of public investments equivalent to more than 48,000 Serbian dinars (approximately 400 Euros). Logically, returnees increase the size of the electorate in the municipality of return, thereby increasing both the political importance of the

Table 2: Development in Serbia, by the municipality, 2002–2011.

Development indicators									
Infant mortality rate Coef.		Share of population with higher education Coef.		Unemployment rate Coef.		Public investments per capita Coef.			
Between- effect	Within- effect	Absolute effect	Between- effect	Absolute effect	Between- effect	Absolute effect	Between- effect	Within- effect	Absolute Difference (Within- Between)
Share of returnees within total population of the municipality	-5.08*** (1.52)	-1.01 (.60)	-3.89** (1.63)	5.12*** (1.09)	2.42*** (.09)	3.79** (1.26)	-2.48** (.96)	-1.47*** (.11)	-1.10 (.96) (7945.66)
Share of the population abroad	.32*** (.06)	.11 (.66)	.22 (.26)	-.15** (.06)	.01 (.03)	-.23*** (.08)	.17*** (.05)	.13*** (0.40)	-.29*** (.06)
Municipal population (log)	-1.51 (.69)	-1.38 (.78)	-.06 (4.97)	.91 (.49)	-9.05*** (.49)	11.32*** (.90)	.10 (.43)	-1.71** (.85)	1.57 (.95)
Urban/Rural division	.66 (1.38)	.	.	7.41*** (.99)	.	.	-.98 (.86)	.	17277.84** (7210.25)

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	Development indicators										
	Infant mortality rate Coef.			Share of population with higher education Coef.			Unemployment rate Coef.			Public investments per capita Coef.	
	Between- effect	Within- effect	Absolute Difference (Within-Between)	Between- effect	Within- effect	Absolute Difference (Within-Between)	Between- effect	Within- effect	Absolute Difference (Within-Between)	Between- effect	Within- effect
The ethnic minorities constitute the majority in the municipality	2.51 (1.84)	.	.	.21 (1.31)	.	.	1.71 (1.16)	.	.	1019.88 (9616.97)	.
Constant	28.28*** (6.23)			-5.05 (4.96)			13.53*** (4.36)			-57.019.97 (36263.15)	
N	1,610			1,610			1,610			1,610	
Prob. > X-squared	0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000	
Rho	.57			.96			.94			.38	

Notes: Standardized coefficients reported. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Statistical significance at the .05 level

***Statistical significance at the .001 level

community and the government's interest in investing in a particular municipality. This is further validated by the significant direct within-effect of the municipality population size on the public investments per capita. Contrary to the above, the share of returnees is inversely correlated with unemployment both between- and within- the municipality, and the difference between them is statistically insignificant. Consequently, for any given municipality, as the share of returnees increases/ decreases over time, the unemployment rate significantly decreases/increases by 1.47 %. Regarding the cross-sectional association, municipalities with a higher share of returnees on average have lower shares of unemployment than municipalities with a limited share of returnees, by 2.48 % on average. These findings are in line with that of Waddell and Fontenla.⁴³ Arguably, returnees bring with them not only financial resources but also fresh ways of reasoning that contribute to the development of communities.⁴⁴ In other words, social remittances could have a significant impact on the educational level, political affiliation, and health of those left behind.⁴⁵

Unlike return migration, the variable included in order to control for the effect of the share of the population abroad exerts the opposite sign in terms of effects on all development indicators. Consequently, since the size of the effect of return migration is greater than the size of the effect of population abroad, it can be concluded that return migration counteracts the harmful consequences of out-migration for development in the municipality of return.

Table 3 outlines the results of the model selected to investigate the relationship between voting participation rate and return migrants, with the χ^2 test showing that regression is significant for the adopted model. It incorporates a between-country effect, a within-country effect, and tests for cluster confounding, i.e., the absolute difference between the within- and between-municipality effects.

First, the likelihood ratio test supports selection of the random intercept model over the OLS approach as there is substantial unobserved heterogeneity at municipal level. More specifically, the rho of 0.626629 indicates that around 63 % of error variance is at municipality level. Regarding the results, the within-municipality lag of the dependent variable (Voter turnout _(t-1)) reveals an effect at the 0.001 alpha level. In other words, for any given municipality, as previous values of voter turnout increase, current values decrease. This could be due to voters' disappointment with the presidential candidates and their political decisions, meaning they decided not to vote in subsequent elections. The main explanatory variable, the share of returnees in the total population of the municipality, exhibits a statistically signifi-

⁴³ Waddell and Fontenla, "The Mexican Dream? The Effect of Return Migrants on Hometown Development," 386–96.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 393.

⁴⁵ Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, "Social Remittances Revisited," 1–22.

Table 3: Electoral participation in Serbia, by municipality, for 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2008 elections.

	Between-Municipality Effect	Within-Municipality Effect	Absolute Difference (Within-Between)
	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.
Voter turnout (t-1)	.	-.58 (.05)	.
Share of Returnees in total population of municipality	4.39** (1.41)	-.16 (1.02)	-7.87*** (2.20)
Share of the population abroad	-.47*** (.07)	-.80** (.26)	.03 (.47)
Unemployment rate	.19 (.11)	.07 (.09)	.64** (.02)
Share of people with higher education	-.16 (.09)	.54 (.31)	-5.81*** (.001)
Public investments per capita	-1.79e-06 (.00001)	-4.75e-06 (4.41e-06)	.00004** (.00001)
Share of population aged 18+	.51** (.17)	-.23*** (.07)	1.19*** (.21)
Opposition/incumbent party candidate win	3.32** (1.45)	1.59** (.77)	4.10** (2.02)
Number of candidates in the elections	.	-4.01*** (.15)	.
Margin	.	-4.48*** (.20)	.
Observations	Total Observations=480		
Model χ^2	178.04, p<.001		
rho	.6266229		

**Statistical significance at the .05 level

***Statistical significance at the .001 level

cant between-municipality effect on participation in elections. More precisely, municipalities with a higher share of returnees by 1 % have on average a higher level of voting turnout (4.39 % greater) than municipalities with a lower average share of returnees, which is not a surprise because most Serbian returnees are from European countries with a long tradition of democracy (such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), and earlier literature has revealed that returnees from countries

with better governance tend to increase political participation at home.⁴⁶ In addition, the study found that success of the opposition party's candidate was associated with higher voter turnout. Specifically, the categorical variable controlling the win of the opposition/incumbent party's candidate exhibits both the between- and within-municipality effects and since the difference between the effects is statistically significant, and the between-municipality effect is larger, the interpretation is as follows: when the opposition party's candidate wins the election, the participation is higher by 3.32 %, on average, compared to the case when the incumbent party's candidate triumphs. Consequently, since a higher share of returnees is associated with higher participation rates, it can be assumed that a higher number of returnees could (indirectly) help the opposition party's candidate to succeed. Also, the statistical model, at the conventional statistical level, captured the negative correlation between the percentage difference between the winner of elections and runner-up candidate (Margin) on one side and the share of returnees on the other. To be precise, the share of returnees is inversely correlated with the margin of winning; for a 1 % increase in the share of returnees, the margin decreases by 4.48 %. The result implies that higher voter turnout, which is positively associated with a higher share of returnees, reduces the margin of winning or, in other words, increases the competitiveness of the election. Furthermore, the model revealed a negative correlation between the share of returnees, on one hand, and the number of candidates, on the other. Specifically, for each additional candidate, voter turnout in a particular municipality decreases by 4.01 %. As for the share of the population abroad, it exerts both between- and within-municipality effects on participation rates. Furthermore, since the size of the within effect is almost twice as large as between, the results can be interpreted as follows: within a particular municipality, an increase/decrease in the share of the population abroad over time is associated with a reduction/upsurge in the turnout rate by 0.8 %. Here, the result agrees with the argument that expatriates are less interested in politics at home because they are less influenced by government policy in their country of origin.⁴⁷

Finally, as the statistical analysis reveals, the share of the population aged 18 and over has positive effects on electoral participation in municipalities while for the within-municipalities it exerts an inverse correlation. As the coefficient for the absolute difference is statistically significant, and the size of the cross-sectional association is twice as large as the coefficient of the within-municipality effect, it can

⁴⁶ Batista and Vincente, "Do Migrants Improve Governance at Home," 77–104; Chauvet and Mercier, "Do Return Migrants Transfer Political Norms," 630–51; Tuccio, Wahba and Hamdouch, "International Migration as Drivers of Political and Social Change: Evidence from Morocco," 1171–203.

⁴⁷ Filip Kostelka, "Distant souls: post-communist emigration and voter turnout," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43 (2016): 1061–83, accessed October 5, 2022, doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1227696.

be concluded that for a 10 % increase in the share of the population older than 18, participation in elections increases by 5 % on average. One possible explanation for the observed positive relationship could be the fact that a growing share of those aged 18 and over also means an aging electorate, and a higher turnout among older age groups is a constant finding in various studies.⁴⁸ Importantly, the effect of the share of the population aged 18 and older on the turnout rate is a textbook example of cluster confounding, which demonstrates the advantage of the implemented model in proper interpretation of the results; other statistical approaches commonly used by political science researchers (e.g., OLS, Fixed-effects, or Random-effects models) would not be able to decompose the effect on the cross-sectional and time-series association and subsequently provide a test for cluster confounding that would help to interpret the results correctly.

Conclusions

The chapter examined the consequence of return migration both on development and electoral participation in the Republic of Serbia. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study in the region of the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans that attempts to understand to what extent return migration transforms the economy, society, and politics, by employing panel data gathered for the 2002–2011 period.

The results of the study reveal that a higher share of returnees from abroad is associated with a decrease in infant mortality and the unemployment rate, while having a positive effect on both public investments per capita and educational level at municipal level. In addition, the consequences of higher voting turnouts were greater competitiveness in the elections and the tendency for victory of the opposition party's candidate. Consequently, the results suggest that migrants who encountered a different political environment during their emigration could influence electoral outcomes in the municipality of return. Ultimately, the contribution of return migrants to the political development of their home country is the mixture of social and financial capital they bring back with them, but it also depends on socioeconomic characteristics of the communities of return; thus, the effects may vary even from one municipality to another within the same country.

⁴⁸ Achim Goerres, "Why are Older People More Likely to Vote? The Impact of Ageing on Electoral Turnout in Europe," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9 (2007): 90–121, accessed November 11, 2022, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856x.2006.00243.x; Achim Goerres, *The Political Participation of Older People in Europe: The Greying of our Democracies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

It is important to mention some limitations of the study here. Firstly, the study used data only at municipal level and, thus, the effect of return migration on voter turnout may be due to the higher propensity of returnees to vote rather than the spread of fresh political norms among non-migrants. Unfortunately, data on an individual level about the political behavior of returnees and non-migrants in Serbia do not exist, so any conclusion about a change in individual behaviour due to the influence of returnees would suffer from ecological fallacy. Ultimately, the study only found a cross-municipality association between return migration and turnout, so little can be said about direct causality. The study only demonstrates that municipalities with a higher share of returnees have a higher turnout, on average. In addition, since there is a lack of usable data on remittances to Serbia, a decrease in the size of the effect of returnees after controlling for financial streams from abroad should be expected.

Despite all the limitations mentioned, this research also has important implications for both policymakers and those interested in migration, as it demonstrates how return migration has the potential to alleviate problems that emerge due to extensive emigration and subsequent loss of human capital. Finally, although the analysis is limited to the Republic of Serbia, the results may help researchers as a sound starting point for a similar analysis in other regions, since comparable patterns in both emigrations and return migrations are evident throughout South-Eastern Europe.

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Verena Hechenblaikner, Katia Pedevilla

13 The Organized Return to South Tyrol After World War II. Crossing the Border for Return Migrants, and Resettlement Assistance

Abstract: this chapter deals with the difficulties of legal return to South Tyrol faced by South Tyrolean *Optants* who wanted to return to their homeland after emigrating during the *Option Agreement* between 1939 and 1943. The Gruber-De-Gasperi Agreement of 1946 laid the groundwork for the legal return, but the removal of the visa requirement between Austria and Italy was delayed until 1949, because of fears of a possible “mass return,” and even after legal avenues opened with the *Optantendekret* 1948, bureaucratic barriers remained. The Office for Resettlement Assistance, established in 1949, played a central role as a coordination and information agency for returnees, trying to face the legal difficulties of crossing the border with a variety of practical offers of help. As a result, in the first years after World War II, facilitation and support measures were gradually introduced in the area of cross-border passenger traffic in order to minimize border barriers.

Introduction

“I ask for information on how I should behave or what I have to do to be allowed to return to South Tyrol again” [*Ich bitte um Auskunft, wie ich mich verhalten soll oder was ich unternehmen muss, um wieder nach Südtirol zurückkehren zu können*],¹ wrote an apparently desperate optant living in Germany in 1951 to the South Tyrolean People’s Party (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*). While nowadays we – especially the younger generations – are used to moving within the European Schengen area in a fairly unrestricted manner, crossing borders – for example between North and South Tyrol – was not always so easy. For so-called *Optants* in particular, who had emigrated from South Tyrol during the period of the “*Option Agreement*” from 1939 to 1943, it was very difficult to legally cross the border to

¹ Herr Luzian Galvagni an die Südtiroler Volkspartei, September 2, 1951. SLA, IT-SVP-LL, Bestellnr. 17.

South Tyrol after World War II. For these South Tyroleans living abroad, it was initially unclear whether, when, and under which conditions they could legally return to their old home or even visit their relatives in South Tyrol. Only by obtaining Italian citizenship in the course of legal *Re-Option* were *Re-Optants* able to participate in socio-political life in South Tyrol and Italy.

Although the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement of September 1946 formed an essential basis for passenger traffic, the abolition of the visa requirement between Austria and Italy could not be concluded until July 1, 1949. Different interests of the two countries, particularly Italy's fear of a possible "mass return" of former *Optants*, prevented an earlier conclusion of the agreement, and even when it was possible to return legally to South Tyrol from 1949 onwards as a result of the Decree-Law (*Optantendekret*), the bureaucratic hurdles remained difficult. One possible point of reference for *Re-Optants* was the Office for Resettlement Assistance (*Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe*), established in the spring of 1949 in Bolzano, and this chapter argues that this office played an important role for *Re-Optants*, especially for those who returned legally, as a coordination and information agency in the remigration process.

This chapter sets out to contribute to scientific reappraisal of the so-called *Re-Option* and presents the research results. It focuses on the process of legal return to South Tyrol in the context of the *Re-Option* and aims, on one hand, to analyze the legal aspects and border-crossing treatises that led to the possibility of a legal return and, on the other hand, consider practical implementation of the legal return via the Office for Resettlement Assistance. Therefore, the chapter examines the following questions: which possibilities did *Re-Optants* have to legally cross the border to Italy and which role did the Office for Resettlement Assistance play in this process?

To answer the questions, this paper analyzed a wide range of archival records. Firstly, the Austrian State Archives (*Österreichisches Staatsarchiv*) and the Italian National Archives (*Archivio dello Stato*), especially the department of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Cabinet (*Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri- Gabinetto*), were two important reference points. Recently released records from the Austrian Embassy in Rome were of particular research interest, but the records of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs also offered new insights. Also, regional archives such as the South Tyrolean Provincial Archives (*Südtiroler Landesarchiv*) and the Tyrolean Provincial Archives (*Tiroler Landesarchiv*) provided an important resource for the source material consulted here. One digitalised newspaper (*Dolomiten*) and two information bulletins (*Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland; Südtiroler Heimat*) were also used.

The digitalized material, composed of newspaper articles as well as political and administrative correspondence, was uploaded to Transkribus. After implementing layout and text recognition, the archival material was annotated with metadata. Documents with the following tagged keywords were particularly relevant for the analysis: “border traffic,” “Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement,” “black lists,” “passports,” “mass return,” “transit traffic,” “visa,” “resettlement assistance to *Optants*,” “housing for *Return Optants*,” “exploration tour,” “goods,” “integration,” “repatriation transport,” “help.”

In addition to the archival records, secondary literature has also been included in the chapter. Even though many aspects of the *Re-Option* are still not adequately researched, the works of Stefan Lechner and Helmut Alexander in this regard can be referred to as a fundamental starting point.² Further research on *Re-Option* has also been conducted in the anthology *Einmal Option und zurück* published in 2019³ while more recent research findings, such as those of Ivan Stecher and Sarah Oberbichler, should also be considered.⁴

The chapter aims to build on existing research by providing new detailed insights. It starts with a brief historical background before referring to the regulation of cross-border passenger traffic after World War II and the *Re-Option*. Then, the establishment and activities of the Office for Resettlement Assistance (in particular, those related to the border crossings of *Re-Optants* and assistance with first steps in the home country) are described. The findings are finally summarized in the final conclusion.

² Stefan Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” in *Die Option: Südtirol zwischen Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Klaus Eisterer and Rolf Steininger, Innsbrucker Forschungen zur Zeitgeschichte 5 (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1989); Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmair, eds., *Heimatlos: Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler* (Wien: Deuticke, 1993); Stefan Lechner, “Rückfahrkarte statt Selbstbestimmung,” in *80 Jahre Option: Das dunkelste Kapitel der (Süd-)Tiroler Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Andreas Raffeiner, Schriftenreihe Studien zur Zeitgeschichte 115 (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2020).

³ Günther Pallaver, Leopold Steurer, and Martha Verdonfer, eds., *Einmal Option und zurück. Die Folgen der Aus- und Rückwanderung für Südtirols Nachkriegsentwicklung* (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2019).

⁴ Ivan Stecher, “Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten: Genese, Ablauf und Reintegration anhand ausgewählter Fallbeispiele sowie fachdidaktische Ausarbeitung der Thematik für den Schulunterricht” (phil. Dipl., University of Innsbruck, 2020); Sarah Oberbichler, “Symbolic control of return migration: The South Tyrolean example (1946–1955),” *SocArXiv* (2024), accessed February 6, 2024, doi:10.31235/osf.io/jn4gd. Furthermore, reference can be made to the other contributions on *Re-Option* in this volume by Giada Noto, Valerio Larcher, and Ivan Stecher.

Historical Background

To understand the *Re-Option* or remigration of South Tyroleans, it is necessary to be aware of its historical background. The regions of North and South Tyrol have always been closely intertwined: politically, economically, and socially. Before World War I, both North and South Tyrol were parts of the Habsburg monarchy. The division of Tyrol, as a result of the Saint-Germain Peace Treaty in 1919, marked significant changes in the history of both regions, with South Tyrol awarded to Italy and the border between North and South Tyrol mainly drawn at the watershed. When the Italian fascists came to power in 1922, the German-speaking population of South Tyrol was subjected to increasing Italianization, and the so-called “South Tyrol question” became an important political issue – initially between Italy and Austria, followed by Italy and Nazi Germany in the 1930s. In 1939, the two dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini agreed on a solution to the political conflict. As a result of this “*Option Agreement*,” the German-speaking population of South Tyrol had to decide whether to emigrate to the German Reich and thus become German citizens or to remain in Italy and definitively adopt the Italian language and culture. Around 86 percent chose to emigrate, but only about 75,000 people actually resettled in the years 1940 to 1943 – due to the war and the fall of Mussolini’s regime, emigration came to a halt.⁵

After World War II, questions such as the return of the South Tyrolean emigrants, the protection of the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol, and the (economic) relationship between Italy and Austria needed to be clarified. At the beginning, there was still hope that the border drawn in 1919 between North and South Tyrol could be changed. Although Austria had supported border corrections and various variants were discussed with the Allies – for example, the cession of the Puster Valley (Pustertal) and the Upper Eisack Valley (Oberes Eisacktal) – South Tyrol’s status as remaining with Italy was officially clear by the spring of 1946 at the latest.⁶ With the intention of establishing good neighborly relations between Austria and Italy, the foreign ministers Karl Gruber and Alcide De Gasperi signed the so-called “Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement” in Paris on September 5, 1946. This convention granted the German-speaking inhabitants of South Tyrol an autonomous status within Italy, but also agreed (in Article 3) to facilitate border traffic

⁵ Eva Pfanzelter, *Option und Gedächtnis: Erinnerungsorte der Südtiroler Umsiedlung* (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2015), 15–35.

⁶ Klaus Eisterer, “Die Südtiroler Frage 1945/46 und die Besatzungsmacht in Tirol,” in *Südtirol – Stunde Null? Kriegsende 1945–1946*, ed. Hans Heiss and Gustav Pfeifer (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2000), 107–16; Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert: Vom Leben und Überleben einer Minderheit* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2004), 215–54.

and the exchange of goods within one year. Even though it was still far removed from a definitive agreement for cross-border passenger traffic, this document formed an essential basis for further agreements.⁷

Cross-border Passenger Traffic Between North and South Tyrol

Since the citizenship of the South Tyrolean *Optants* remained unclear for several years after the war, it was very difficult for them to cross the border to Italy legally. Already in the short period from mid-May to the beginning of June 1945, the Provincial Office for South Tyrol (*Landestelle für Südtirol*) in Innsbruck registered more than 900 individuals who wished to resettle in South Tyrol. These requests resulted in a repatriation of 130 people organized by the Allies – the first and only implementation of this kind.⁸ Exceptional and limited numbers of cases⁹ who were also allowed to return to South Tyrol in the following years included orphans, old and sick people, war invalids, and the reunion of spouses. But for most of the *Optants*, it was almost impossible to travel legally to South Tyrol, so illegal returns across the mountains began.¹⁰ According to estimates, about 8,000 to 12,000 people crossed the border illegally – a dangerous undertaking that often resulted in fatalities.¹¹

In order to quickly regulate the cross-border passenger traffic between North and South Tyrol, Italy and France (the occupying force in North Tyrol and Vorarlberg) concluded a temporary pass agreement on November 15, 1946,¹² the so-called “Innocenti-Voizard Agreement” which was valid for Austrian and Italian citizens residing in the French-occupied zone in Austria or in South Tyrol.¹³ For South Tyrolean *Optants*, who had been temporarily granted equal status with Austrian citizens since the Austrian Cabinet Council Decision on August 29, 1945,¹⁴ it was rarely

⁷ Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 361–392.

⁸ Stefan Lechner and Helmut Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” in *Heimatlos: Die Umsiedlung der Südtiroler*, ed. Helmut Alexander, Stefan Lechner, and Adolf Leidlmair (Wien: Deuticke, 1993), 181–271, 240.

⁹ An exact number is not ascertainable.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹² Abkommen über den Verkehr zwischen Süd- und Nordtirol, October 27, 1947, IV – 508/32; Verbalnote vom italienischen Außenministerium, 22.6.1948, Z. 16-19783-70. AT-TLA/BBÄ-KORS-Pos. 59.

¹³ Vorschläge Passierscheinverkehr, II – 277/19. AT-TLA/BBÄ-KORS-Pos. 59.

¹⁴ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 184.

possible to receive a permit. In a letter to the branch office of the Federal Chancellery in Innsbruck, the GVS (*Gesamtverband der Südtiroler in Österreich*, General Association of South Tyroleans in Austria) described the external circumstances of an application for entry as degrading and sadistic for *Optants*.¹⁵ The control mission of the French occupation forces in North Tyrol (*Mission de Contrôle*) issued the border permits (*Laissez-Passer*) and the Italian Liaison Office (*Italienische Verbindungsstelle*) in Innsbruck confirmed them; only the cooperation of both institutions made it possible to cross the border from North to South Tyrol via the Brenner Pass. Conversely, the Questura in Bolzano issued the passes for the journey to North Tyrol, however, in this case, no further countersignature was required from France or Austria.¹⁶ This soon aroused resentment; Austria felt disadvantaged, since considerably more people were allowed to travel from Italy to Austria than the contrary. For example, in the period from January 1, 1947 to July 31, 1947, 60 percent of the pass applications submitted in Austria were rejected.¹⁷ From May to September 1948, 9,121 Italians crossed the border with passes; in comparison, 1,141 Austrians travelled south.¹⁸ Furthermore, the free border permits took a long time to be processed, in some cases more than four weeks, and were often rejected by Italy. The Italian Liaison Office granted more regular visas, but these were subject to a fee of 58 shillings.¹⁹

Thus, the field office of the Federal Chancellery in Innsbruck reported to the Federal Chancellery for Foreign Affairs in Vienna that people applying for pass permits to South Tyrol at the Italian Liaison Office in Innsbruck encountered only difficulties. Two counters were accessible from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., but they opened with great delays and were usually so crowded that most people had to leave

¹⁵ Gesamtverband der Südtiroler in Österreich an das Bundeskanzleramt Außenstelle Innsbruck, Memorandum in der Frage der Einreise nach Südtirol, August 2, 1947. AT-TLA/BBÄ-KORS-Pos. 59.

¹⁶ Außenstelle Bundespolizeidirektion Innsbruck "Grenzkontrolle Brenner" an die Bundespolizeidirektion Innsbruck, May 30, 1947. AT-TLA/BBÄ-KORS-Pos. 59.

¹⁷ Bundeskanzleramt Außenstelle Innsbruck an das Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien, Passierscheinverkehr Nordtirol – Südtirol, December 12, 1947, IV – 647/11. AT-TLA/BBÄ-KORS-Pos. 59.

¹⁸ Bundespolizeidirektion Innsbruck an den Tiroler Landeshauptmann, Reiseverkehr zwischen Nord- und Südtirol mittels Passierscheinen (einseitige Ausnützung des Passierscheinabkommens zugunsten Italiens), October 9, 1948, Z. 70/18/2-48. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-BMAA-Südtirol-Karton 3-11.

¹⁹ Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien an die italienische Gesandtschaft in Wien, Beschwerden gegen die ital. Verbindungsstelle in Österreich wegen Schwierigkeiten bei Einreiseansuchen nach Italien, 14.9.1948, Z. 116.671 – Pol. 48. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-BMAA-Südtirol-Karton 2b-110.175-Pol/48.

without having achieved anything. In addition, information was often incomplete and inadequate:

Instead of immediately telling the applicant what confirmations need to be provided so that everything can be done in one process, people are given obstructive information and asked for a new document over and over again, so many applicants end up abandoning travel altogether.

*Statt dem Antragsteller sofort zu sagen, welche Bestätigungen beigebracht werden müssen, damit alles in einem Vorgang erledigt werden kann, werde den Leuten eine hinhaltende Auskunft erteilt und immer wieder eine neue Formalität verlangt, so daß viele Antragsteller schließlich auf die Einreise überhaupt verzichten.*²⁰

Since a final regulation of the cross-border passenger traffic in the spirit of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement took longer than expected, and complaints about the existing Italian-French agreement increased, negotiations followed between Austria and Italy on a temporary pass agreement.²¹ Austria submitted a first draft in September 1947, and Italian amendments were incorporated at the beginning of 1948, however, in the course of further negotiations, the differing interests of the two countries emerged more and more clearly. While Austria aimed for a temporary agreement as quickly as possible, in order to respond to the numerous complaints from Tyrol and facilitate passenger traffic, Italy pursued a more restrained line. For instance, during the negotiations, Italy repeatedly expressed concern about a possible onslaught of returning *Optants*, while it was also feared that those entering the country might remain in Italy illegally.²²

Inspection Trips in the Context of the Decree-law 1948

In this regard, the ratification of the decree-law (*Optantendekret*) on February 5, 1948 marked a significant change in Italian negotiating tactics in cross-border passenger traffic, providing a legal basis for the re-acquisition of Italian citizenship,

²⁰ Bundeskanzleramt Außenstelle Innsbruck an das Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien, Information Nr. 300, August 13, 1948, Z. 168695. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-BMAA-Südtirol-Karton 2b-110.175-Pol/48.

²¹ Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien an das Bundeskanzleramt Außenstelle Innsbruck, June 2, 1947, Z. 107.223-Pol/47. AT-TLA/BBÄ-KORS-Pos. 59.

²² Aktenvermerk Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien, Passierscheinabkommen NT-ST, June 28, 1948, Z. 114.454-Pol/48. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-BMAA-Südtirol-Karton 3-11.

as well as the right to return. The emigrated South Tyrolean *Optants* had one year to submit their declarations for re-acquisition of Italian citizenship,²³ however, while Italy took hardly any measures to make a return attractive, Austria did everything to persuade as many *Optants* as possible to resettle in the period up to February 4, 1949.²⁴ This is one of the reasons why the topic of border traffic can be found more frequently in Austrian archival records than in equivalent Italian documents, as the historian Sarah Oberbichler pointed out.²⁵ The regulation of cross-border passenger traffic had receded into the background for Italy; instead of signing a temporary agreement to facilitate passenger traffic, Italy now intended to maintain the existing pass agreement until the *Re-Option* was settled, and then conclude a permanent arrangement pursuant to the “Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement.”²⁶

In response, Austria demanded the right for *Re-Optants* of so-called “inspection trips” (*Besichtigungsreisen*) to inform themselves about the conditions in South Tyrol before returning, which was particularly important in order to look for work or housing opportunities. Between November 1948 and March 1949, one member of each family could apply for a provisional Austrian passport, request a visa from the Italian authorities, and take a trip to South Tyrol lasting a maximum of 12 days – those who did not respect the travel deadline of 12 days and stayed in South Tyrol instead lost the right of *Re-Option*.²⁷ Entering Italy was only permitted via the Brenner Pass, even though this was a detour,²⁸ and there were also several other regulations to be observed; the applicants had to submit their request personally to the Italian Liaison Offices in Austria, receive the permit in person, and, after completing the journey, report there again in person. Furthermore, the travellers had to register at the Questura in Bolzano within three days of entering South Tyrol.²⁹

23 Lechner, and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 216.

24 Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, 465–466.

25 Oberbichler, “Symbolic control,” 6.

26 Interministerielle Besprechung im Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien über Passierscheinabkommen Österreich-Italien, July 14, 1948, Z. 115.250-Pol/48. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-BMAA-Südtirol-Karton 3–11; Amtsvermerk des Bundeskanzleramts Außenstelle Innsbruck, Regelung des Reiseverkehrs im Rahmen der Sonderregelung, July 14, 1948. AT-TLA/BBÄ-KORS-Pos. 59.

27 Lechner, and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 241.

28 Bundeskanzleramt Außenstelle Innsbruck an das Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien, Besichtigungsreisen Einreisezwang über den Brenner, July 14, 1998, II – 1497/54. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-BMAA-Südtirol-Karton 3–11.

29 *Dolomiten*, November 25, 1948.

Compulsion and Pressure for *Re-Optants*, 1948 to 1949

As the *Re-Option* applications developed extremely disadvantageously for Austria during the course of 1948, Austria decided to intervene actively in the decision-making process.

The equality of the South Tyrolean *Optants* with Austrian citizens, which had been enacted in August 1945, was now dependent on their individual decision of whether to re-opt or not. After the resolution of the Austrian Council of Ministers on November 2, 1948 and its issue on November 27, 1948, only those persons who applied for *Re-Option* continued to be treated equally as Austrian citizens. Thereupon, the number of *Re-Option* requests increased, with around 70 percent of the applications submitted between November 1948 and February 1949.³⁰ An approved application did not immediately mean resettlement if this was not possible for social or economic reasons,³¹ however, the Austrian resolution was an important instrument of pressure, especially since the nationality of the non-returnees was not clearly defined.³²

On one hand, compulsion and pressure, and on the other hand, concealment and delaying tactics, determined the *Re-Option* issue from both political sides. In response to the Austrian resolution, Italy almost completely stopped examining applications submitted after the resolution in November 1948³³ and, in this context of the Austro-Italian controversy, also ended inspection tours on March 28, 1949. From then on, South Tyrolean *Optants* received a border pass permit only in absolutely urgent cases, which had to be confirmed by the competent municipal or police authority.³⁴ This type of inspection trip for South Tyrolean *Optants* without Italian citizenship was not resumed; only after receiving Italian citizenship was cross-border passenger traffic from North to South Tyrol easier for them.³⁵

On July 1, 1949, the visa requirement between Austria and Italy was removed for people with valid documents and clarified citizenship – a huge facilitation for

³⁰ Oberbichler, "Symbolic control," 11; Stefan Lechner, "Zwischen den Landesteilen: Südtirols Optanten 1945–1948," in *Südtirol – Stunde Null? Kriegsende 1945–1946*, ed. Hans Heiss and Gustav Pfeifer (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2000), 281–95.

³¹ Österreichische Bundesregierung, Ministerratsbeschluß, November 2, 1948, Z. 118.643-Pol/48. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-ÖB Rom-Res Akten-Karton 4–398-456.

³² Oberbichler, "Symbolic control," 11.

³³ Ibid., 12.

³⁴ Lechner, and Alexander, "Die Rücksiedlung," 237.

³⁵ Ibid., 241.

cross-border passenger traffic from which, however, not all individuals profited. The new regulation did not apply to selected categories, who were explicitly excluded from the benefits due to previous convictions (for example, former illegal border crossings) or their political orientation, and were named on so-called “black lists.”³⁶ South Tyrolean *Optants* with provisional Austrian passports, which did not constitute proof of citizenship, were also excluded from the new easements in border traffic.³⁷ For these people, if their *Re-Option* application was approved, their official repatriation began in the summer of 1949, with the recently established Office of Resettlement Assistance (*Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe*) in Bolzano playing a central role as a coordination and information agency.

Reasons for the Establishment of the Office of Resettlement Assistance (*Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe*)

On April 27, 1949, on the initiative of the SVP (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*, “South Tyrolean People’s Party”), it was decided in a meeting of the regional committee that a welfare office (later named the Office of Resettlement Assistance to *Optants*)³⁸ should be established in the provincial capital of Bolzano to take care of legally repatriated *Optants*³⁹ which was subordinate to the Provincial Committee of the Province of Bolzano, which had been entrusted with the implementation of the organised, gradual return of the *Optants*.⁴⁰ The close ties of the office to South Tyrolean provincial politics and to the party politics of the SVP can only be assumed from correspondence of the office, as clear indications that the Office of

³⁶ Österreichische Gesandtschaft in Rom an das Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien, Visumabkommen, Übermittlung ital. Ausschlusslisten, 6.7.1949, 291-res/49. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-ÖB Rom-Res Akten-Karton 8–20-20.

³⁷ *Dolomiten*, 24.10.1949; Bundeskanzleramt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten in Wien an die Österreichische Gesandtschaft in Rom, Passausstellung an Südtiroler und Canaltaler, 30.3.1948, Z. 142.616-6RR/48. AT-OeStA-AdR-AAng-ÖB Rom-Res Akten-Karton 3–144-230.

³⁸ The official name of the office was Office of Resettlement Assistance to *Optants*. The name used in the archival records is shortened: Office of Resettlement Assistance. This name is used from here onward.

³⁹ Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 374; Stecher, *Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten*, 78.

⁴⁰ Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 374; Stefan Lechner, “Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945,” in *Das 20. Jahrhundert in Südtirol. Band 3. 1940–1959. Totaler Krieg und schwerer Neubeginn*, ed. Gottfried Solderer (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2001), 84–85.

Resettlement Assistance was an organ of the SVP can hardly be derived from archival records or secondary literature. That there was at least a close personal connection between the office and the SVP can be deduced from the fact (among other things) that the first head of the office, Dr. Wilfried Plangger,⁴¹ was a party secretary of the SVP until shortly before he was hired as head of this welfare office in May 1949.⁴² There were also close links between the Office of Resettlement Assistance and the SVP in geographical terms, with the first provisional headquarters of the office located in the *Landhaus* in Bolzano, the seat of the regional government which, a little later, moved to the centrally located *Postgasse* in Bolzano for reasons of space.⁴³ The work of the office was financed entirely by the Province of Bolzano and the Trentino-Tyrolean Adige Region, with the Region contributing one third of the budget, and the Province providing two thirds.⁴⁴

Why was the regulated return of as many *Optants* as possible so important to the SVP in the post-war period that it initiated a special welfare office for this purpose? Some of the main motivations lay in the fear that uncontrolled immigration would not only aggravate the socioeconomic situation in South Tyrol in the post-war period (scarce housing and employment) but also ignite ethnic conflicts with the Italian language group.⁴⁵ The Office of Resettlement Assistance was therefore to serve as a kind of control authority for orderly return; by trying to provide answers to the many unresolved questions of the *Re-Option* and to reduce uncertainties among the *Optants* abroad, the office strove to persuade as many *Optants* as possible to return to South Tyrol.

With the first resettlement transport, which reached the Bolzano train station on June 10, 1949, the legal resettlement officially began and the office started its work.⁴⁶ From this point on, the office worked relatively autonomously until 1957, but was still closely tied to the South Tyrolean provincial government and to the

⁴¹ 1911–2004, Country Secretary of the SVP, from May 1949 to December 1952 first head of the Office of Resettlement Assistance, Lechner, “Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945,” 87; Notiz, July 23, 1949, S. 1. IT-ACS-PCM-Gab.-1948-1950-fasc. 36435/704; Brief des Regierungskommissariats für die Region Trentino-Tiroler Etschland an das Grenzonenamt, October 4, 1949, S. 1–2. IT-ACS-PCM-Gab.-1948-1950-fasc. 36435/704.

⁴² Brief des Regierungskommissariats für die Region Trentino-Tiroler Etschland an das Grenzonenamt, October 4, 1949, S. 1–2. IT-ACS-PCM-Gab.-1948-1950-fasc. 36435/704; Notiz o. A., 23.7.1949, S. 1. IT-ACS-PCM-Gab.-1948-1950-fasc. 36435/704.

⁴³ Lechner, and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 251; Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 374.

⁴⁴ Lechner, “Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945,” 84; Stecher, *Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten*, 79, 199.

⁴⁵ Lechner, “Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945,” 85.

⁴⁶ Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 373.

policies of the SVP. While in the first two years of legal *Re-Option* (1949 and 1950) about 3,000 *Re-Optants* returned, from 1952 onwards this number decreased every year until, towards the end of the 1950s, there were even reductions in migration figures due to renewed emigration from South Tyrol.⁴⁷ Therefore, from 1957, the tasks of the Office of Resettlement Assistance were finally divided among the separate departments of the provincial government,⁴⁸ with the office thus dissolved, but no references to an official closure could be found in the influential South Tyrolean German newspaper *Dolomiten*.

During its existence, the Office of Resettlement Assistance endeavored to assist legal *Re-Optants* in returning to South Tyrol, building a new existence, and integrating into South Tyrolean post-war society, in a context where the *Option* wounds had still not healed. Only by obtaining housing and work did *Re-Optants* have a chance of integrating into South Tyrol in the long term,⁴⁹ and an initial opportunity to look around for housing and work were the previously-mentioned inspection trips organised by the GVS (*Gesamtverband der Südtiroler in Österreich*, General Association of South Tyroleans in Austria), an association representing the interests of South Tyroleans in Austria and Germany. The association was founded on October 6, 1946 and provided, among other things, information on the legal and practical possibilities of *Re-Option* in the regularly published information bulletin *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland* (Association news for the South Tyroleans in Austria and Germany), published from 1952 under the name *Südtiroler Heimat* (South Tyrolean homeland).⁵⁰

After March 28, 1949, inspection trips for *Optants* were continued, but under much more regulated conditions, with the so-called *information trips* from then on only possible for *Optants* who had officially obtained Italian citizenship and a valid passport. From April 1950, an expensive passport was no longer necessary for resettlement as an Italian border permit was sufficient.⁵¹ Information trips were co-financed by the Office of Resettlement Assistance for a short time, until the Italian Court of Audit stopped them because there was no guarantee of effective resettlement.⁵²

⁴⁷ Lechner, "Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945," 84.

⁴⁸ Lechner, and Alexander, "Die Rücksiedlung," 251.

⁴⁹ Lechner, "Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol," 377; Stecher, *Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten*, 119.

⁵⁰ Gesamtverband der Südtiroler in Österreich, *50 Jahre Verband der Südtiroler in Österreich 1946 – 1996* (Innsbruck: Gesamtverband der Südtiroler, 1996), 9, 14, 104.

⁵¹ Südtirol im Jahre 1950. Unterlagensammlung Nr. 20 (Teil 1), 143.

⁵² Lechner and Alexander, "Die Rücksiedlung," 241.

The Office of Resettlement Assistance in Bolzano was the central South Tyrolean point of reference for the organization, coordination, and practical implementation of resettlement, and thus also for the integration of return *Optants* into South Tyrolean post-war society. Planned as a supervisory authority for the orderly, legal resettlement to South Tyrol and as a welfare institution for the repatriated *Optants*, the office tried to fulfil its main tasks in many different ways.

Internal Structure and Main Tasks of the Office of Resettlement Assistance

The internal structure of the office was divided into the following units: Department of General Care (*Referat für allgemeine Betreuung*), Social Care (*Referat für soziale Fürsorge*), Legal Advice (*Referat für Rechtsberatung*), Forwarding and Transport Affairs (*Referat Spedition- und Transportangelegenheiten*), and the Construction Section (*Referat für Baufach*). The Department of General Care (*Referat für allgemeine Betreuung*) implemented measures to promote employment opportunities for *Re-Optants*, for example by regularly publishing job advertisements in the GVS's information bulletins *Verbandsmitteilungen/Südtiroler Heimat*,⁵³ which meant that *Re-Optants* could easily look for work in South Tyrol without travelling. Often, jobs were offered in conjunction with housing opportunities, which was intended to facilitate integration for the *Re-Optants*. In addition, the organization of Christmas parties in settlers' homes, the offer of Italian language courses, and the possibility of a holiday colony for children all fell within the scope of general care.⁵⁴ As the central South Tyrolean advice center, the Office of Resettlement Assistance was kept busy with numerous individual cases received by mail and for which the office, due to the confusing situation of legal regulations regarding the *Re-Option*, had to obtain information from the offices concerned in Italy and Austria.⁵⁵ The Department of Social Care (*Referat für soziale Fürsorge*) was responsible for granting financial aid to

⁵³ e. g.: "Stellenangebote des Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe in Bozen," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, February 1, 1950, 4.

⁵⁴ "Kurse für Rücksiedler," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, June 30, 1951, 2; "Weihnachten im Rücksiedlerheim Bozen," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, January 2, 1951, 4; Rücksiedlungshilfe, Tätigkeit des Landesausschusses Bozen – Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe an Optanten, June 1, 1949–December 31, 1952, IT-SLA, SVP-LL, Bestellnr. 1477.

⁵⁵ "Brief von Herrn Marinovich (Direktor der Banca d'Italia-Zweigstelle Bozen an das Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe an Optanten in Bozen," September 9, 1954. IT-SLA, SVP-LL, Bestellnr. 1259.

repatriates (e.g., to build up their own livelihood and as emergency aid) and for advising on pension matters.⁵⁶

The Office of Resettlement Assistance also tried to help as much as possible with the re-acquisition of Italian citizenship, with this key task falling to the Department of Legal Advice (*Referat für Rechtsberatung*), which played an important role in family reunification.⁵⁷ It was often the case – due to the *Option* of 1939 – that one part of a family lived in South Tyrol, while other members lived abroad. For family reasons, many *Optants* abroad wanted to quickly regain Italian citizenship, a move which could not be achieved without the support of the Office for Resettlement Assistance.⁵⁸ The Department for Forwarding and Transport Affairs (*Referat Spedition- und Transportangelegenheiten*) played a central role in organizing the transport of resettled persons and in importing the resettled persons' goods from Austria and Germany to Italy.⁵⁹

One important task of the Office of Resettlement Assistance in Bolzano seemed to have been the procurement of housing for *Re-Optants*, as this was the area where the most archival records could be found. About a quarter of the estimated 20,000 *Re-Optants* were dependent on help from the office in finding housing, while the remaining three quarters were able to find accommodation with relatives or acquaintances.⁶⁰ The beginnings of the Construction Section (*Referat für Baufach*) of the Office of Resettlement Assistance could be seen in the so-called transit homes (*Durchgangsheime*), which were intended as an initial and temporary solution. In reality, however, they remained in use longer and more frequently than originally planned, although living conditions there were not of a high standard.⁶¹ Due to time constraints, the Construction Section carried out conversion work on existing housing structures and erected temporary new buildings made of wood.⁶² From 1952 onwards, the number of resettlements began to slowly decrease, while

⁵⁶ "Rücksiedlungshilfe, Tätigkeit des Landesausschusses Bozen – Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe an Optanten," June 1, 1949–December 31, 1952, IT-SLA, SVP-LL, Bestellnr. 1477; "Brief an das Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe an Optanten (z. H. Dr. Planger)," December 5, 1950. IT-SLA, SVP-LL, Bestellnr. 1051.

⁵⁷ Lechner, "Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol," 375.

⁵⁸ "Das Rücksiedlungsamts in Bozen," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland* February 1, 1950, 2–3, 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Stecher, *Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten*, 68.

⁶¹ Lechner, "Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945," 86; Lechner, and Alexander, "Die Rücksiedlung," 252.

⁶² "Promemoria zur Wohnungs- und Arbeitsbeschaffung für Rücksiedler," without date, IT-SLA, Nachlass Alfons Benedikter, Position 253, Rücksiedlung; Lechner, "Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol," 378.

at the same time the budget for the Office of Resettlement Assistance increased, with this favourable combination of events leading to the Construction Section deciding to build more solid houses with more amenities;⁶³ by the end of March 1954, relatively cost-intensive new buildings had been constructed in the urban centers of South Tyrol.⁶⁴ The South Tyrolean provincial government took up this housing programme in the years 1954 to 1957 and built its own housing complexes, the so-called Repatriate settlements (Rücksiedlersiedlungen), on the outskirts of some of the main South Tyrolean cities.⁶⁵

The Office of Resettlement Assistance not only provided practical assistance in the integration of repatriates, but also tried to make the local population aware of the special plight of their repatriated compatriots.⁶⁶ The public relations activity was an important support for the office in the execution of its tasks because, due to the low budget in the years of strong resettlement (1949 to 1952), it was dependent on the assistance of the population. For example, the office launched an appeal to the 106 municipalities in South Tyrol to establish resettlement assistance committees (*Rücksiedler-Hilfsausschüsse*) that would work closely with the office in Bolzano. By June 1950, such committees had been established in only 37 municipalities, and although some of them did not exist for long, a few worked efficiently.⁶⁷ The tasks of the resettlement assistance committees included supporting *Re-Optants* in their search for housing and jobs, feeding needy repatriates, and collecting donations in cash and kind.⁶⁸

⁶³ Stecher, *Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten*, 68; Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 378.

⁶⁴ “Verzeichnis der Rücksiedlerwohnungen,” March 31, 1954, IT-SLA, SVP-LL, Bestellnr. 223.

⁶⁵ Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 378.

⁶⁶ Ivan Stecher, “Die unerwünschten Heimkehrer. Rückkehr und (Re-)Integration,” in *Einmal Option und zurück. Die Folgen der Aus- und Rückwanderung für Südtirols Nachkriegsentwicklung*, ed. Günther Pallaver, Leopold Steurer, and Martha Verdonfer (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2019), 150.

⁶⁷ Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 375, 378; Lechner, “Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945,” 86–87.

⁶⁸ “Rücksiedlerarbeit in Meran,” *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland* vom Dezember 20, 1950, 2; Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 375; Stecher, *Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten*, 80.

Information and Assistance for Border Crossing on the Way to South Tyrol

In the following sections, the focus will be placed on three areas of responsibility of the Office of Resettlement Assistance that played a special role in connection with legal border crossings and the return of South Tyrolean *Optants* from 1949 onward: the information management regarding border crossings, forwarding and transport matters, as well as the personal support of the return *Optants* at the Brenner Pass and the destination station in South Tyrol. If *Optants* wanted to return to South Tyrol, they were looked after by the Office of Resettlement Assistance during their early days on South Tyrolean soil.

The top and most important priority for the *Optants* willing to return to South Tyrol was to obtain information about the documents needed to cross the border and its legal regulations. The *Verbandsmitteilungen* or the *Südtiroler Heimat* provided a welcome opportunity for the Office of Resettlement Assistance to reach *Optants* in Austria and Germany and to keep them informed about the legal regulations for border crossing (e.g., the decree-law). Elsewhere, the information bulletins of the GVS also played an important role for the Department for Forwarding and Transport Affairs in the Office of Resettlement Assistance in Bolzano. There, *Re-Optants* in Austria and Germany were regularly reminded of the need to comply with the currently applicable customs regulations in the section called Notices of the Office of Resettlement Assistance (*Mitteilungen des Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe*), which was set up for this purpose. In that section, the office provided useful guidance, including information on which goods were not allowed to be imported (e.g., bee colonies) or for which there were import restrictions (e.g., sugar).⁶⁹ It was emphasized time and time again that high additional costs could be incurred for the office and the *Re-Optants* themselves, if they were not well informed:

There are repeated cases of resettlers not reporting to the receiving forwarders or the Office for Resettlement Assistance until several days after the arrival of their removal goods, so that the resettled goods cannot be released. This leads not only to unpleasant difficulties with the customs authorities, but also to considerable additional costs (demurrage, storage expenses) to be borne by the resettler.

Es wiederholen sich die Fälle, dass Rücksiedler sich erst mehrere Tage nach Eintreffen ihres Umzugsgutes bei den Empfangsspediteuren bzw. dem Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe melden, so dass das Umsiedlergut nicht ausgelöst werden kann. Dies führt nicht nur zu unliebsamen

⁶⁹ "Mitteilungen des Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe Bozen," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich*, September 1, 1951, 3.

*Schwierigkeiten mit der Zollbehörde, sondern auch zu erheblichen Mehrkosten (Standgeld, Lagerspesen), die vom Rücksiedler getragen werden müssen.*⁷⁰

Furthermore, additional costs were incurred by the office when *Re-Optants* did not choose its contracted forwarding agents for the transport of resettled goods,⁷¹ and in the *Mitteilungen*, individual cases regarding transport and forwarding affairs were often presented as warnings to other *Re-Optants*. Special import regulations existed, for example, regarding furniture, live cattle, and vehicles.⁷² *Re-Optants* saved some of their (usually limited) financial resources through this important unit's information management and therefore, in the widest sense, the Forwarding and Transportation Department played an important role in preventing poverty among *Re-Optants*. In the *Mitteilungen*, some advice was also published regarding the carrying of passports or travel documents: "It is also pointed out that it is advisable to carry the Italian naturalization decree with you at all times [. .]. Recently, there have been repeated incidents in the execution of customs procedures, where the ministerial decree was requested by the customs office, but the repatriate had packed it in the wagon with his removal goods and in one case had even lost it."⁷³

Once sufficient information on the border crossing had been obtained, passports had been prepared, and resettled goods had been shipped by contract carriers, the return migration could begin. Regarding the transport costs, Austria and Italy had different regulations; Austria was fully responsible for the travel costs for group trips of at least 20 people, but if it was an individual trip and there was a proven necessity, *Re-Optants* were awarded a 25 % discount. Italy, in contrast, al-

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "Mitteilungen des Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe Bozen," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich*, October 31, 1951, 3.

⁷² "Vom Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe an Optanten," *Südtiroler Heimat*, December 31, 1952, 7; "Mitteilungen des Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe Bozen," *Südtiroler Heimat*, February 28, 1953, 4–5; "Vom Amt für Rücksiedlungshilfe an Optanten," *Südtiroler Heimat*, April 30, 1953, 5–6. "Wohnungstausch," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, October 4, 1950, 4; "Mitteilungen des Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe Bozen. Stellenangebote," *Südtiroler Heimat* vom February 29, 1952, 5–6.

⁷³ "Mitteilungen des Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe Bozen," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich*, September 1, 1951, 3; translation: „Weiters wird darauf aufmerksam gemacht, daß es empfehlenswert ist, das italienische Einbürgerungsdekret stets bei sich zu tragen (. .). Es haben sich nämlich in jüngster Zeit wiederholt Anstände in der Durchführung der Zollbehandlung ergeben, bei der das Ministerialdekret vom Zollamt verlangt wurde, der Rücksiedler dieses aber im Waggon bei seinem Umzugsgut verpackt und in einem Falle sogar verloren hatte.“

ways granted a 25 % discount on transport costs.⁷⁴ One of the first stops on South Tyrolean soil was the Austrian-Italian state border at the Brenner Pass, whereas other border crossing points, e.g., between Winnebach and Sillian, were used less.⁷⁵ The staff of the Brenner branch office then took care of the *Re-Optants* and distributed food,⁷⁶ and was also responsible for registering the *Re-Optants* and forwarding details of their arrival to the Office of Resettlement Assistance in Bolzano. The branch office at the Brenner Pass began its work on August 4, 1949, with the arrival of a convoy of resettlers from Upper Austria. It was a one-man business run by a re-optant from Sterzing (who is unnamed in the sources) on behalf of the Office of Resettlement Assistance⁷⁷ who, to be identifiable to his returning compatriots, wore an armband with the inscription “Resettlement Assistance to *Optants*.” In the news section of the Office of Resettlement Assistance in the *Südtiroler Heimat*, the official closure of the Brenner branch office was published on August 30, 1952:

In view of the current limited flow of resettlers, the Brenner office of this office is closed as of September 15, 1952, by order of the Provincial Committee. In the future, an official service will be performed at the Brenner only at times of special demand (transports, etc.).

*Angesichts des derzeit begrenzten Rücksiedlerstroms wird auf Anordnung des Landesausschusses mit 15. September 1952 die Brennerstelle dieses Amtes geschlossen. Ein Amtsdienst wird am Brenner in Zukunft nur zu Zeiten besonderer Anforderungen (Transporte usw.) durchgeführt werden.*⁷⁸

During the first transport missions of *Re-Optants* from Austria and Germany, the head of the Office of Resettlement Assistance, Plangger, and district representatives of the SVP were also at the Brenner Pass to receive the *Re-Optants*.⁷⁹ The presence of SVP politicians in this context can be interpreted as an expression of how important the return of as many returnees as possible was for the political goals of the SVP, with the aim of the party to strengthen the German language group numerically, in order to build up political and cultural weight vis-à-vis

⁷⁴ Lechner and Alexander, “Die Rücksiedlung,” 242.

⁷⁵ Lechner, “Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol,” 370; Lechner, “Alles retour. Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach 1945,” 83.

⁷⁶ “74 Heimkehrer aus Deutschland,” *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, March 18, 1950, 2.

⁷⁷ “Rücksiedlerbetreuung am Brenner,” *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, August 29, 1949, 2.

⁷⁸ “Mitteilungen des Amtes für Rücksiedlungshilfe,” *Südtiroler Heimat*, August, 30, 1952, 6.

⁷⁹ “Der erste Transport aus Oberösterreich daheim,” *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, August, 29, 1949, 3.

Italy.⁸⁰ Over the course of time, however, Planger and well-known SVP politicians no longer came to the Brenner Pass to receive the *Re-Optants*, but were present at the festively organized welcome receptions of *Re-Optants* at the Bolzano train station. At the station, relatives and a ladies' committee consisting of girls and women from Bolzano, who distributed so-called welcome packages (food parcels) to the travellers, were also waiting for the resettlers.⁸¹ The reception of the first groups of repatriates was lavishly arranged, even with traditional music bands, and thus shows parallels to the *Option* period, when the *Optants* were seen off in a similar way before their departure for the Third Reich.⁸²

Conclusion

Just as the South Tyrolean *Option* was a journey into the unknown for the *Optants*, the border crossing of the *Re-Option* was also characterized by legal ambiguity and uncertainty as to how life should continue in the new old homeland. Starting from the questions of how the *Re-Optants* legally crossed the Austrian-Italian border after World War II and what support awaited them in their first steps at home, the following key points can now be stated.

From a legal perspective, in the first post-war years, the situation was extremely unclear for the *Re-Optants*, which led to the fact that many of them returned illegally to South Tyrol. This intolerable situation led the governments of Austria and Italy to the ratification of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement of September 1946, which represented the basis for subsequent steps toward a cross-border passenger traffic regulation. The French-Italian Voizard-Innocenti Agreement signed in November 1946 was a first (but from a long-term perspective, inadequate) attempt to regulate border crossings of *Re-Optants* between Austria and Italy. The practice of issuing border permits was criticized by both Italy and Austria, which both pursued different interests in the *Re-Option* negotiations.

The decree-law (of February 5, 1948) was the next step on the road to regulated border crossing for *Re-Optants*. It formed the legal basis for re-acquisition of Italian citizenship but its practical implementation did not go smoothly, again because of the strongly differing interests of the negotiation partners Italy and Aus-

⁸⁰ Lechner, "Rückoption und Rücksiedlung nach Südtirol," 372.

⁸¹ "74 Heimkehrer aus Deutschland," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, March 18, 1950, 2; "Rücksiedler aus Oberösterreich," *Verbandsmitteilungen für die Südtiroler in Österreich und Deutschland*, March 18, 1950, 2.

⁸² Stecher, *Die Rücksiedlung von Südtiroler Optantinnen und Optanten*, 72.

tria regarding the regulation of legal *Re-Option* from abroad to South Tyrol. Therefore, as part of the decree-law, Austria demanded the right for *Re-Optants* to be allowed to participate in the so-called “inspection trips,” with this highly regulated opportunity in force from November 1948 to March 1949, which enabled the *Re-Optants* to visit South Tyrol for 12 days, in pursuit of housing and employment.

During the course of 1948, problems arose for both Austria and Italy as a result of the inspection trips, with both countries subsequently creating new problems regarding the legal *Re-Option*. The Austrian Council of Ministers released a resolution on November 27, 1948, which granted *Re-Optants* the same rights as Austrian citizens only until their final departure to South Tyrol. This was a means of putting pressure on *Re-Optants*, to which Italy responded with the delayed processing of return *Option* requests and the creation of blacklists. Finally, on July 1, 1949 Austria and Italy found a more satisfying solution for both sides, as the visa requirement at the Austrian-Italian border was removed for people with valid documents and clarified citizenship. From this point on, the legal return to South Tyrol was simplified, but not everyone benefited from the new regulation. People who were explicitly excluded were named on so-called black lists, while South Tyrolean *Optants* generally had to wait for the clarification of their citizenship in order to cross the border legally.

It was in the same year, in 1949, that the Office of Resettlement Assistance located in the *Postgasse* in Bolzano officially started its work by welcoming the first re-optant convoy in June 1949. As an office established by the Provincial Committee of the Province of Bolzano and on the initiative of the SVP, due to political reasons, the Office of Resettlement Assistance in Bolzano was the central South Tyrolean stakeholder for the organization, coordination, and practical implementation of the resettlement, with the management of this office entrusted to SVP party secretary Wilfried Plangger. Especially in the initial phase of return *Option*, from 1949 to 1952, the office had its hands full due to the flow of resettlers. However, this weakened towards the end of the 1950s and eventually the tasks of the office were taken over by individual departments of the provincial government.

The internal structure of the Office of Resettlement Assistance reflected its main tasks, with a Department of General Care, Social Care, Legal Advice, Forwarding and Transport Affairs, and a Construction Section. The wide range of advice offered by the Office for Resettlement Assistance (e.g., on pension matters, citizenship issues) was an important factor in the integration of the repatriates into South Tyrolean post-war society. Through targeted information management between the office and its collaborative partners (like the GVS in Austria), an attempt was made to eliminate any ambiguities in connection with the legal *Re-Option* as much as possible, so that more *Re-Optants* would be willing to return to

South Tyrol. Due to its limited financial means, the office was dependent on the help of the South Tyrolean population for its work and tried to make the population aware of the emergency situation of the *Re-Optants* in regular appeals and campaigns.

The provision of housing and employment for *Re-Optants* were two of the main tasks of the Office of Resettlement Assistance. Regarding the assistance for border crossing on the way to South Tyrol, transnational information management via the GVS-information bulletins (*Verbandsmitteilungen/Südtiroler Heimat*) played a key role in preparation of the *Re-Option* in personal cases, for example informing *Re-Optants* on customs and passport regulations. By installing a one-man branch office at the Brenner Pass, the Office of Resettlement Assistance took care of the newly arrived *Re-Optants* and welcomed them with food, helping them with any kind of transport and passport problems. The festively organized welcome receptions of the *Re-Optants* at the Bolzano train station were an important signal of solidarity.

This chapter was intended to contribute to scientific reappraisal of the so-called *Re-Option* and to present initial research results. However, there are still further research desiderata in the field of the South Tyrolean *Re-Option* and its main organizational actors – e.g., research could focus on a European or international comparison between different post-war welfare offices (such as the Office of Resettlement Assistance) regarding their internal structure and their role in transnational border crossing. It would also be profitable to look at social reactions to welfare offices, such as the perception of the Office of Resettlement Assistance within the Italian language group in South Tyrol and the rest of Italy. Italian archival records on cross-border passenger traffic would also require closer examination, in addition to a long-term study on the consequences of the abolition of the visa requirement and further cross-border passenger traffic between Austria and Italy. Nevertheless, this chapter has already demonstrated that in the first years after World War II, gradual facilitation and support measures in the field of cross-border passenger traffic and practical assistance were initiated to minimize barriers to the legal return to South Tyrol.

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Giada Noto

14 Return Migration in Kanaltal. Valcanale/ Kanaltal/Kanalska Dolina 1939–1950

Abstract: This chapter provides initial findings from a case study that sets out to examine the repercussions of the 1939 *Option Agreement* on the Kanaltal region's territory and population. The study was conducted as part of a larger project involving the digitization of archives from the DUS (*Dienststelle Umsiedlung Südtirol*) archive based in the Tyrolean Regional Archives, which aimed to create a comprehensive database containing information about South Tyroleans who emigrated to the German Reich following the 1939 *Option*. The primary focus of this chapter is on the *Return Option*, which allowed individuals who had previously opted for the Reich to regain Italian citizenship, from 1948 onward. In contrast to the situation in the Province of Bolzano, where many individuals who had chosen the *Option* returned to their places of origin, a significant portion of those in Kanaltal who were eligible for the *Option* did not actually return to their native villages. The preliminary results presented in this study were derived from source materials obtained from archives located in Udine (Udine State Archives), Innsbruck (*Tiroler Landesarchiv*), and Klagenfurt (*Kärntner Landesarchiv*).

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the initial findings of a case study on the *Option* phenomenon in Kanaltal. This research originates as part of the broader *Option Digital* project, which was dedicated to the digitization and digital archiving of the DUS (*Dienststelle Umsiedlung Südtirol*) archive containing records related to the *Optants*. The term *Optants* refers to the German-speaking minority residing in northern Italy who, in 1939, were presented with the choice, as a result of the *Option* agreements between the Third Reich and the Kingdom of Italy, of either becoming citizens of the Reich and subsequently relocating to the Germanic territories or remaining Italian citizens under the fascist regime. This chapter specifically focuses on the case of the Kanaltal, a small valley in the northern area of Friuli Venezia Giulia, which was selected as the subject of study due to its exceptional nature within the context of the 1939 *Option* and its ability to reflect power dynamics among the German Reich, Austria, Italy, and Yugoslavia. Although the geographical area is relatively small, with a population of less than 9,000 inhabitants, its historical location places it within the context of broader dy-

namics and distinct geopolitical identities. Examining the case of Kanaltal allows for an exploration of many local dynamics of a twentieth century border region, which encompass the process of Italianization, Fascism, and Nazism, the 1939 *Option* and subsequent *Return Option*, the effort at self-determination, and the complex relations with Austria and former Yugoslavia in the postwar period.

The period analyzed spans from 1939 to the mid-1950s. The inhabitants of the Kanaltal, a valley located below the Gail River (in southern Carinthia) which became Italian territory at the end of World War I, were also offered the right of *Option* and, as a result, about 81 percent of those eligible decided to leave for the Reich. However, only two-thirds actually ended up moving, with just a tiny proportion of *Optants* returning to the valley as a result of the 1948 *Return Option* agreements.¹ Nevertheless, providing precise numerical data is difficult, and any effort to quantify a migration phenomenon, particularly one of a certain magnitude, inherently involves large margins of error, a challenge which becomes even more pronounced when the migration is a consequence of epochal socio-political upheavals, such as the ethnic metamorphoses that occurred following World War I. In such circumstances, information is often influenced by biases, subjectivity, or even manipulated and directed for political purposes.²

Contributions within this volume reveal how migration is more than a “one way ticket”; somehow, departures are followed by returns. From this perspective, the Kanaltal is unusual since the majority of the people who left their home in the context of the *Option Agreement* in 1939 did not return to their home villages. This chapter takes a closer look at the complexity of migration movements in Kanaltal and reveals how a series of overlapping events were hindering return migration, analyzing some key moments of the territory in the first half of the twentieth century in an attempt to shed light on the factors that may have been decisive in the emigration and “non-return” of Kanaltal *Optants*. Attention will be paid to factors contributing to the decision of Kanaltal residents not to return, with a particular focus on the effects of socio-political changes, the economic question, and the connection to Carinthia. To achieve this, a sample of 80 personnel files concerning the sale of *Optants*’ property from the DUT (*Dienststelle Um-siedlung Südtirol*, “South Tyrol Resettlement Service”) was examined, which represents approximately 20 % of the documents pertaining to the *Optants*’ property which were digitized as part of the *Option Digital* project. It should also be specified that existing studies on Kanaltal appear to be relatively limited, and the

¹ Roberta Bonfà, “Le Opzioni per il Reich in Valcanale” (Master Thesis, University of Milan 1990), 138.

² Purini Piero, “L’emigrazione non italiana dalla Venezia Giulia dopo la prima guerra mondiale,” *Qualestoria* 1 (2000).

available literature on the subject lacks comprehensive data, meaning the process of cross-referencing information from different institutions is deemed crucial in providing clearer understanding of the situation. The archives consulted for this research are the Archives of Tyrol (digitized documents), the State Archives of Udine (archival records of the Prefecture), the *Ufficio Tavolare* in Gradisca (Land Registry Office, archival records of ENTV), the Archives of Carinthia in Klagenfurt (archival records of the Minority referee), and the Provincial Archives of Bolzano (archival records of Karl Stuhlpfarrer).

The detailed examination of 80 valley residents who had sold their property and the cross-referencing of this data with the Udine and Innsbruck Return *Option* files provided insights into the number of individuals who returned to the Kanaltal region after selling their property. Additionally, the archives of Udine and Carinthia yielded valuable information related to reclamation applications made by the Kanaltal people in the postwar period. These research efforts aimed to shed light on the factors that influenced the decision of many *Optants* not to return to their home municipalities in Kanaltal.

Geographical, Historical Backgrounds

The research on Kanaltal appears to be relatively limited, with a lack of comprehensive reference literature and frequent reliance on partial information that does not adequately consider the transnational aspects of the region.³ The present study aims to analyze the dynamics of population movements within the context of the often-changing borders of the area. To understand the reasons that deterred many of the valley's inhabitants from returning to their municipalities, it is essential to approach Kanaltal from geographical and historical perspectives, starting with the World War I.

From a geographical perspective, Kanaltal is a unique region. Nestled within the Alps, the valley is remarkably narrow, and its cultivable land is limited (only 1 % is agricultural land⁴). Traditional Austrian laws regarding *vicinie*⁵ and easement rights were applied to agriculture and animal husbandry in the region

³ Ernst Steinicke, Peter Čede, and Igor Jelen, “Klein-Europa vor dem Verschwinden? Das Kanaltal hundert Jahre bei Italieni,” *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaften* 161 (2019): 9–34.

⁴ Martin Wutte, ed., *Das Kanaltal* (Klagenfurt: Geschichtsverein, 2009).

⁵ Mario Francescutti, *Mille anni di storia della Valcanale e della sua foresta* (Tarvisio: Rotary 1990), 63.

(*Legge sulle vicinie e diritti di servitù*). These *vicinie*, which were aggregations of families or groups linked by similar interests, had their own grazing areas and forests, and were only usable by those who “had fire” in the *vicinia* itself, excluding immigrants,⁶ with this system not only ensuring the protection of the land but also enabling the local population to survive in the challenging and unforgiving environment of the eastern Alps. The *vicinie* was an important form of organized support in a very poor area such as the Kanaltal, which, economically speaking, could not offer great opportunities; in general, the largest incomes in the valley came from trade, iron-lead processing, timber and mining (Raibl/Cave del Predil). Nevertheless, employment opportunities were limited, which by the late 1800s had already led to a major mass emigration involving Kanaltal’s young people, who left their homes to find job opportunities in northern Carinthia.

For many centuries, Kanaltal served as a crossroads where Italian, German, and Slovenian cultures met and lived side by side. The languages mainly spoken in the valley (before the annexation to Italy) were German and Slovenian (*windisch*), and the majority of inhabitants were bilingual. According to data from the 1910 census, the population of the valley consisted of 6,397 German-speakers, 1,682 Slovenian-speakers, and only 10 Italian-speakers, with this linguistic diversity reflecting the historical and cultural complexity of the region.⁷

The Slovene-speaking population mainly lived in the central part of the valley (Ugovizza/Uggowitz and Camporosso/Saifnitz), while the German-speaking population lived on its borders (see Figure 1).

The division of territory was also related to economic issues.⁸ The Slovenian-speaking population worked mainly on livestock farms in Camporosso and Ugovizza and Valbruna and San Leopoldo. German-speaking inhabitants, meanwhile, owned farmlands in Tarvisio and Fusine, managed and worked in the mining settlement at Cave del Predil, and were involved in iron industries in Malborghetto. Additionally, they worked in the transit settlement at Pontafel (which represented the border with Italy for centuries).

During the Great War, Kanaltal suffered massive bombings, which resulted in the evacuation of the majority of the population to the north, above the Gail River in Carinthia in 1915.⁹ These transfers were also due to the fact that Kanaltal was historically part of the Carinthia Region making it, therefore, an intra-regional

⁶ Francescutti, *Mille anni di storia della Valcanale*, 61–71.

⁷ Ernst Steinicke, *Das Kanaltal – Val Canale. Sozialgeographie einer alpinen Minderheitenregion* (Innsbruck: Institut für Geographie der Universität, 1984).

⁸ Wutte, ed., *Das Kanaltal*.

⁹ Victor Paschinger, “Der erste Weltkrieg in Kanaltal,” in *Das Kanaltal und seine Geschichte* (Klagenfurt: Kanaltaler Kulturverein, 1995).

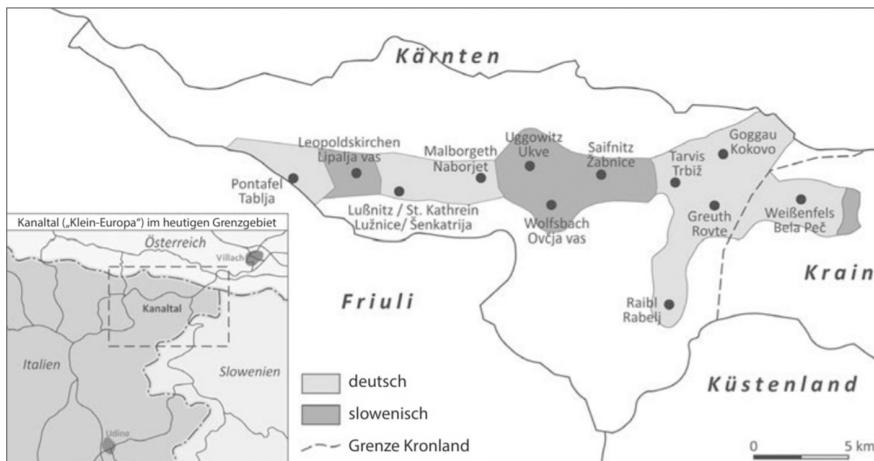


Figure 1: Distribution of language groups in the valley's municipalities. Source: Steinicke 1984, and modified in Ernst Steinicke, Peter Čede, and Igor Jelen 2019.

evacuation. Between 1917 and 1918, many evacuated Kanaltal inhabitants returned to their hometowns, however, in 1919, the valley's municipalities, from Tarvisio to Pontebba, were handed to Italy, to the strong dissatisfaction of the Kanaltal inhabitants, who had petitioned for reunification with Carinthia that same year.¹⁰ As early as 1919, many Kanaltal citizens began to emigrate to Carinthia; indeed, from the 1921 census it can be seen that there were 5,090 German-speakers, 1,106 Slovenes, and 1,200 Italians, in addition to 1,400 “foreigners” (of Slovenian origin, according to Steinicke).

In the 1920s, with the Italianization of the territories acquired after World War I, the situation in Kanaltal became quite critical for the minorities, who were severely oppressed by Italian policies, with the repression against the Slovenian-speaking population even more severe than for other language groups.¹¹ Starting from 1925, the teaching of other languages was forbidden and Italian was the only language allowed.

Despite these circumstances, the Kanaltal managed to preserve the longstanding tradition of the *vicinie* and a certain mobility of the borders, due to the Italian-

¹⁰ Kärntener Landesarchiv (AT-KLA) section 626–359, Memorandum 3 10.20.45 refers to the 1919 petition. See also Mauro Scroccaro, *Dall'aquila bicipite alla croce uncinata. L'Italia e le opzioni nelle nuove provincie Trentino, Sudtirolo, Val Canale 1919–1939* (Trento, 2000), 80–87.

¹¹ Mauro Scroccaro, *Dall'aquila bicipite alla croce uncinata. L'Italia e le opzioni nelle nuove provincie Trentino, Sudtirolo, Val Canale (1919–1939)* (Trento: Museo Storico 2000), 83–86.

Austrian agreements established in 1925.¹² The 1925 Agreements were devised to amicably address territorial interests within the former dukedom of Carinthia. For instance, Title IV and V of the aforementioned document stipulated¹³ that the *vicinie* and their associated rights would be maintained in the same state they were in on that specific date (November 3, 1918). Moreover, the rights pertaining to forestry, grazing, and other private law obligations affecting properties located within the municipality but situated on either side of the new boundary would remain unaffected. However, these dynamics underwent significant transformation in 1939 when the *Ente Nazionale delle Tre Venezie*, a fascist institution established to support agricultural development in mountainous areas facing emigration and to foster the emergence of farms, began seizing 1,500 hectares of the territory¹⁴ to construct military infrastructures and roads. This expropriation had implications for the guarantees enshrined in the 1925 agreements, with 76 families residing on the border, specifically on the Austrian side, commandeered and numerous others seeing their grazing and timber rights compromised.¹⁵ Furthermore, the influx of workers from various areas of Italy, employed to complete fortification and road construction work on the border, strengthened the perception of an inevitable division from Carinthia.¹⁶

1939 was also the year when the *Option* agreements came into force, i.e., the “possibility” of leaving for the Reich granted to German-speaking inhabitants of Kanaltal and also to many of those who spoke Slovenian (apart from those from Upper Isonzo, because their membership in German culture was considered controversial).¹⁷

Considering the changes that took place between 1919 and 1939, it is hardly surprising that the majority of the population chose to acquire German citizenship.

¹² Army. General Staff Corps. Historical Archive, *Storia documentata dei confini del regno d'Italia, Volume III. Confine italo-austriaco* (Polygraphic Institute of Rome, 1930), Doc 66 Implementation of agreement between Kingdom of Italy and Republic of Austria, Rome, June 24, 1925.

¹³ Italian-Austrian agreements, June 24, 1925.

¹⁴ State Archive of Udine (ASU), Fonds of Prefecture, “Opzioni di cittadinanza Tarvisio” (“Option citizenship Tarvisio”), folder 5–5.21.

¹⁵ Kärntener Landesarchiv (AT-KLA), Amt der Kärntener Landesregierung, Minderheitreferat 34, folder 366–383, Various 34/366. AT-KLA – 626–347- Kanaltal-Südtirol 1945/46, Newspaper *Die Neue Zeit*, February 2, 1946 and Mary 13, 1946.

¹⁶ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 29.

¹⁷ ASU, Prefecture, Citizenship Option Tarvisio, folder 4.

Sociopolitical Changes

As a result of the 1939 *Option* agreements, approximately 5,603 people in Kanaltal were admitted to the *Option*, of whom 4,576 of (81 %) left the Italian Kingdom for Carinthia.¹⁸ The procedures for transfer of the first contingents involved a very rapid time frame, as the Italian authorities had a strong interest in dealing with this matter quickly: “(the *Option*) It is a great event in its ideal conception, but painful in its practical applications. It is obvious that, like all painful and unpleasant events, it must be eliminated quickly, and the duration must be minimal,”¹⁹ reported the Prefecture of Udine in 1940.

The Prefecture estimated in 1940 that approximately 1,026 native residents would remain in the Kanaltal area. By August 1942, a report from the municipality of Tarvisio indicated that there were still 1,295 *Optants* who had not yet been relocated,²⁰ which suggests that by August 1942 over 4,000 individuals had already left Kanaltal. Records of the Prefecture in the State Archives in Udine provide evidence that approximately 2,763 people were prepared to leave immediately,²¹ among whom were 126 *Reichsdeutsche* (citizens of the Reich) and Kanaltal citizens who were penniless. These individuals included those without real estate to liquidate, adults from affluent households who possessed no personal assets, unemployed workers who had lost their jobs after the *Option* provided by the state railways and mines, and pensioners.²²

Many of these *Optants* were relocated to the settlement in Klagenfurt, Sankt Andrä im Lavanttal, and Villach.²³ Skilled workers among them were assigned similar jobs within the Reich, such as working for the German railways in Villach,

¹⁸ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet Office, folder 29, Letter of January 16, 1940.

¹⁹ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet Office, folder 29, Letter of January 16, 1940 to Ministry of Internal Affairs (Rome) and to Prefect of Udine from Prefecture of Bolzano: L'esodo dei tedeschi dall'alto Adige/Piano di esodo degli allogenoi dal tarvisiano (The exodus of Germans from Alto Adige / Exodus plan for foreigners from Tarvisio).

²⁰ ASU, Prefecture, Citizenship Option Tarvisio, folder 5.23 List of 1295 *Optants* who did not move to Germany (Tarvisio City Hall, August 25, 1942).

²¹ ASU, Prefecture, Citizenship Option Tarvisio, folder 4.1.

²² Südtiroler Landesarchiv (SLA), *Research legacy of Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Habilitation: Umsiedlung Südtirol*, Archiv Copies, RKFDV (Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums/ R.49), pos. 17.

²³ Tiroler Landesarchiv (TLA), Dienststelle Umsiedlung Südtirol (DUS-Akten) / Kreis Kanaltal.

in a major factory in Villach,²⁴ and at Bleiberger Mine Union in Klagenfurt.²⁵ A communication from the Germanic Office for Migration and Repatriation (AderSt) of Tarvisio stated that *Reichs- and Volksdeutsche* – who “have no more ardent desire than to join the Reich” – could be employed at the Villach railways.²⁶

As for those who had assets to be liquidated, the transfer followed a different procedure. *Optants* who owned real estate were the last to leave, since the valuation and sale of property (carried out by mutual agreement by Italian-German commissions) followed fairly lengthy procedures. Despite the complexity of the sale process and the fact that the Kanaltal’s possessions were often paltry, consisting of small family dwellings and small land parcels (including easement rights), out of the 663 households that had property subject to appraisal (1,813 people),²⁷ roughly 650 properties ended up being sold. This is a surprisingly high amount if compared proportionally to the sale of properties in South Tyrol, where for 75,000 leavers there were only 3,800 properties sold,²⁸ and to better understand the reasons behind these numbers, it is necessary to take a closer look at the political situation in the Kanaltal between 1939 and 1943.

Situation in Kanaltal Between 1939 and 1945

As previously mentioned, from 1939 onward, expropriation and fortification projects along the borders (e.g., construction of military roads etc.) were initiated in Kanaltal by *Ente Nazionale Tre Venezie* (ENTV). Thus, a new flow of military officers and workers from various Italian provinces came to the valley. The arrival

²⁴ SLA, *Research legacy of Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Habilitation: Umsiedlung Südtirol, Archiv Copies, RKFDV*, pos. 17.

Report of Ettel October 1939: “*Reich e Volksdeutsche pagati miseramente non hanno desiderio più ardente che entrare nel Reich il più rapidamente possibile. La loro immigrazione può essere effettuata rapidamente dal momento che non hanno nessuna proprietà degna di nota in alcun modo e c’è un impianto simile nelle vicinanze di Villach nel territorio tedesco, dove alcuni di questi lavoratori qualificati possono essere impiegati.*” English translation: “Reich and *Volksdeutsche*, miserably paid, have no greater desire than to enter the Reich as quickly as possible. Their immigration can be quickly expedited since they have no property worthy of mention and there is a similar plant near Villach in the German territory where some of these qualified workers may be employed.”

²⁵ Scroccaro, *Dall’ aquila bicipite alla croce uncinata*, 77–129.

²⁶ SLA, *Research legacy of Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Habilitation: Umsiedlung Südtirol, Archiv Copies, RKFDV*, pos. 17.

²⁷ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet Office, 29, foreigners, Letter of January 16, 1940.

²⁸ Diego D’Amelio, Andrea Di Michele, and Giorgio Mezzalira, *La difesa dell’italianità. L’ufficio per le zone di confine a Bolzano, Trento e Trieste 1945–1954* (Bologna: il mulino, 2015), 189.

of new workers was framed in a context of significant unemployment, since the *Option* also resulted in the dismissal from public positions of employees/workers who had opted for the Reich, to be then replaced by Italian employees. It often happened – especially around wineries or taverns – that the Kanaltal's firings coincided with the Italian hirings, resulting in real conflicts.

The Cabinet Office documents stored in the Udine State Archives include correspondence and exchanges between the Udine police and Prefecture, from 1940 to 1941, concerning various "incidents" which involved clashes and reprisals between Italian individuals who arrived in Kanaltal in 1940/1941 and the native population. Most of these conflicts were reported in areas outside the central localities of Camporosso and Ugovizza, which were mainly inhabited by a Slovenian-speaking population; the reports also mentioned incidents related to flags with hooked crosses, anti-Italian demonstrations, and *Optants'* meetings.²⁹ This documentation reveals the existing tension, especially in Camporosso and Ugovizza between Italian workers and native inhabitants. In these municipalities, there was a strong connection with the territory; the sociologist Stephanie Vatvi³⁰ speaks of *Dorfzugehörigkeit* ("sense of belonging to the village") and points out how, in fact, the concept of belonging was particularly linked to places rather than languages. Vatvi emphasized how the inhabitants of Camporosso, for example, were keen to show that they belonged not only to the Slovene-speaking community but to the municipality of Camporosso itself: "You are Slovenes. No, we are inhabitants of Camporosso."³¹ Mario Gariup also noted that emigration from Ugovizza, which was relatively lower than in other villages, was influenced by the residents' deep attachment to their homeland.³²

In the following years, the influx of Italians from other nearby provinces persisted. Mario Gariup's research indicated that, in January 1942, the *Podestà* ("Chief Magistrate") of Malborghetto Valbruna wrote to the High Commission for the Execution of the Italo-German Agreements and to the Prefect of Udine, expressing concern about the serious de-population issue in Kanaltal caused by the *Option*. The *Podestà* emphasized the urgent need for repopulation of the area, suggesting a controlled influx of Italians drawn preferably from Carnia or Belluno, which was seen as a measure to address the demographic changes in the region, due to the migration of the *Optants*.

²⁹ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 29.

³⁰ Stefanie Vatvi, "Wir sind Kanaltaler! Regionale und lokale Identitäten im viersprachigen Valcanale in Italien," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 7 (2006): 16–17, accessed March 2, 2023, doi.org/10.17169/fqs-7.1.78.

³¹ Vatvi, "Wir sind Kanaltaler!," 16–17.

³² Mario Gariup, *Le Opzioni per il 3 Reich. Valcanale 1939* (Cividale del Friul: Soc. Coop. Ed. Dom, 1993).

Valbruna's priest, Guion, described the newcomers as "lost" in a completely new environment with different traditions and languages, unable to "fit into the social fabric of the parish town, and they leave much to be desired as far as religious practices are concerned."³³

In fact, in 1941, alongside the transfer of *Optants*, there was a migratory movement in the opposite direction,³⁴ part of the "Project for the Evacuation of the Population of the Eastern Frontier"³⁵ which was revealed by the Padua Military Zone Command/ Mobilisation and Defense Office in March 1941. This project was set up according to norms established by the General Staff of the Royal Army (S.M. R.E.),³⁶ with its primary aim to evacuate the native population in the border zones, particularly those who were subject to military obligations. The project outlined the complete clearance of populations living in the border zone, demarcated by a line passing through Mount Acomizza – Camporosso – Mount Mangart, and contained measures to be carried out in peacetime as well as operations to be carried out in case of emergency. A telegram sent on April 3, 1941, from the Head of the Compartment in Trieste, informed the Prefect of Udine that two trains would be scheduled to leave Tarvisio the following day (April 4, 1941) for displacement.³⁷ On April 5, 1941, Minister Buffarini ordered the evacuation of "natives of Slovenian origin" from the eastern frontier region, which extended from Fiume to Udine-Gorizia-Trieste.³⁸ Meanwhile, the Prefect of Udine, Bofondi, was informed by telegram that the sub-chief of the General Staff Defense Territory had arranged for clearance of the Tarvisio area starting from April 11, with the destination Asti – Como – Alessandria.³⁹ This evacuation was part of the broader political and demographic changes taking place in the region during that period.

According to the Prefect Bofondi's provisions, an Optant of Slovenian origins whose application for the *Option* was pending would be evicted along with other Slovenian natives within the Italian Kingdom. Meanwhile, those of Slovenian origins whose *Option* for Germany had been granted would be allowed to choose

33 Gariup, *Le Opzioni per il 3 Reich*, 204.

34 Stefano Gallo, "Operazioni migratorie belliche transfrontaliere e rimpatri da una parte all'altra delle Alpi," in A.S.E.I. (*Historical Archive of Italian Emigration*), last modified 2017, <https://www.asei.eu/it/2017/05/operazioni-migratorie-belliche-transfrontaliere-e-rimpatri-da-una-parte-all-altra-delle-alpi/>.

35 ASU, Founds of Udine Prefecture, Cabinet Office (ASU-P/G), folder 29, "Progetto per lo sgombero della popolazione della Frontiera orientale."

36 Sheet no.43110, dated March 7, 1941, Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito.

37 ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 29, Telegram Trieste, April 3, 1941.

38 ASU, Founds of Prefecture of Udine, Cabinet Office, folder 29, Telegram Rome, April 5, 1941; from Minister Buffarini to Prefecture of Udine.

39 ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 29, Telegram, April 6, 1941.

exodus to Germany or to stay within the Kingdom, while those who were to be evicted included so-called “suspicious elements.” The displacement plan ordered by Bofondi was to be implemented only upon his order or that of the military authority. Thus, alongside the relocations of the *Optants* to Carinthia, the Kanaltal was hit by a wider migratory flow involving the Slovenian population on the north-eastern border.

After September 8, 1943, Tarvisio was the scene of one last battle between Italian units and the German SS. Subsequently, the administrative authority over Tarvisio and the Kanaltal (akin to the broader region of Friuli and Venezia Giulia) transitioned under the control of the Third Reich (Adriatisches Küstenland), a situation which persisted until May 1945 when Allied forces drove out the Germans.⁴⁰ The Allied Military Government (AMG) was subsequently established, remaining in effect in Friuli and Tarvisio until the end of September 1947.

By 1945, the process of reconstruction had gradually commenced within the valley, though positions within public institutions continued to be predominantly occupied by Italian personnel. Relations between Italians and the native population remained strained, with numerous documented reports in the Cabinet Office detailing instances of aggressions by Allied soldiers toward Kanaltal inhabitants as well as various incidents or issues involving *Optants* who did not leave.⁴¹

An examination of the state of affairs within the valley at the conclusion of World War II reveals a significant transformation in the distribution of linguistic groups as compared to the data from the 1921 census. New Italian Friulian and Slovenian settlers had arrived in the valley, while a considerable portion of the native population had departed, however, accurate demographic information regarding this altered population distribution is lacking due to the absence of a census that accounted for linguistic groups. A communication from the City Hall of Tarvisio to the Allied government states that in 1945 there were 4,299 Italians, 1,531 Slovenians, and 777 Austrians in Kanaltal,⁴² but there is no explicit mention of the Friulian group, and it remains unclear why linguistic categorization was associated with nationality distinctions. However, other studies⁴³ also present similar data; after 1945, only 26 percent of the population was German or Slovenian-speaking, with the German-speaking population the minority. Table 1 presents population-level changes in the years 1910, 1921, and 1945.

⁴⁰ Francescutti, *Mille anni di storia della Valcanale*, 89.

⁴¹ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 55, f.189 Emigrazione, 1946.

⁴² AT-KLA, “Amt der Kärntener Landesregierung-Minderheitreferat” 34, Box 366–383, Tarvisio City Hall, August 27, 1945.

⁴³ Steinicke, Čede, Jelen, “‘Klein-Europa’ vor dem Verschwinden?” 9–34.

Vatvi „Wir sind Kanaltaler!“

Table 1: Kanaltal Census data from 1910 to 1945, by language group.

Source: Steinicke, Das Kanaltal/ Val Canale: Sozialgeographie einer alpinen Minderheitenregion, University of Innsbruck, 1984.

	Italian-speaking	German-speaking	Slovenian-speaking
1910	10	6,397	1,682
1921	1,200	5,090	1,106 + 1,400 foreigners
1945	4,299	777	1,531

Tensions between the native population and the newcomers were particularly strong, partly because of the lack of employment. In a dossier kept in the Udine Prefecture's archives, there is a report of the valley's shocking unemployment rate in 1946, and the possibility of solving the crisis by encouraging emigration was proposed.⁴⁴ Exodus and migration are part of the historical background of the valley, which has never been a fertile ground for economic opportunities but, nonetheless, the unemployment problem of 1946 was linked not only to the consequences of the war and general economic crisis, but also to the massive new migratory flows that passed through the area between 1941 and 1946.⁴⁵

Transfers to Carinthia and Economic Issues

As previously mentioned, Carinthia, located in southern Austria, encompassed the historical territory of Kanaltal. This region was specifically designated for the resettlement of *Optants* from the towns of Tarvisio, Pontebba, Malborghetto, Ugovizza, St. Leopoldo, and Camporosso. To accommodate the Optant families, settlements known as *Siedlungen* were established in Klagenfurt and Villach. Furthermore, to make room for the Kanatal population, individuals of Slovenian descent residing in Carinthia were forcibly relocated.⁴⁶ Between 1942 and 1943, 220 Slovenian families were evicted from their homes and deported.⁴⁷ while 224 Kanaltal peasants were

⁴⁴ ASU, Founds of Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 55, f.189 Emigrazione, Tarvisio, 1946.

⁴⁵ ASU- P/G, folder 55, f.189 Emigrazione, Tarvisio, 1946.

⁴⁶ SLA, *Research legacy of Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Habilitation: Umsiedlung Südtirol*, Archiv Copies, pos. 74 source of the copy: Dokumentensammlung des Österreichischen Instituts für Zeitgeschichte.

⁴⁷ SLA, *Research legacy of Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Habilitation: Umsiedlung Südtirol*, Archiv Copies, pos. 74 source of the copy: Dokumentensammlung des Österreichischen Instituts für Zeitgeschichte, documents of DUT Klagenfurt.

simultaneously transferred to the region.⁴⁸ Historian Brigitte Entner explains that the German plan to remove the population of Slovenian origins from Carinthia was termed K-Aktion,⁴⁹ however, she points out that nationalist policies had been initiated in the region as early as the nineteenth century and were therefore not solely ascribable to Maier Kaibitsch, a National Socialist politician active in the anti-Slovenian policy of the First Republic and, after the Anschluss, to the German Reich. Between 1936 and 1933, 136 German citizens (*Reichsdeutsche*) were already relocated to Carinthia.⁵⁰ Contextually, according to monthly reports in December 1942, 3,576 Kanaltal *Optants* had arrived in Carinthia (and 2,271 South Tyroleans).⁵¹ By displacing and repositioning entire population groups, the biopolitics of the Reich and of fascist Italy intersected in this small valley in the Northeastern Alps.

Kanaltal Economy

By 1939, with the departure of the *Optants*, and the arrival of Italians from neighboring provinces, the Kanaltal territory had radically changed. This change was due not only to population displacements, but also to local economic policies such as the management of the *vicinie* arrangements and easement rights that passed largely under the management of the *Ente Nazionale delle Tre Venezie* (ENTV) once it had acquired the Optant's properties.

It should be specified that the negotiations aimed at determining the actual value of the property of the *Optants* were often frustrating and far from simple. Both Italian and German appraisers would conduct valuations and also consider the owner's estimate,⁵² and would then engage in negotiations to arrive at a mutually agreed-upon value of the property. Frequently, several revisions were necessary before an agreement could be reached. Furthermore, it was common for the interested party, i.e., the property owner (*Optant*), to disagree with the compromise reached by the German-Italian commissions. In many cases, the *Optants* initiated appeals or bureaucratic processes to contest the outcomes, and it is worth noting that in the overwhelming majority of cases, the *Optant's* proposal

⁴⁸ Brigitte Entner and Valentin Sima, eds., *Zweiter Weltkrieg und ethnische Homogenisierungsversuche im Alpen-Adria-Raum* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2012), 126.

⁴⁹ Entner and Sima, *Zweiter Weltkrieg und ethnische Homogenisierungsversuche*, 44.

⁵⁰ Entner and Sima, *Zweiter Weltkrieg und ethnische Homogenisierungsversuche*, 44.

⁵¹ SLA, *Research legacy of Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Habilitation: Umsiedlung Südtirol*, Amt der Tiroler Landesregierung, Referat S| Innsbruck, DUT-Innsbruck, pos. 33, Report December 31, 1942.

⁵² TLA, *Deutsch-italienische Hauptkommission fuer die Wertfestsetzung des Vermögens der Volks- und Reichsdeutschen. Vermögenstransfer Kanaltal* (DUT) [Digitopt Databank].

was not accepted.⁵³ This complexity and the various layers of negotiation and appeals added to the intricacy of the *Optant* property valuation process.

As part of this study, a sample of 80 personal files containing documents related to the property estimation of Kanaltal *Optants* was examined. These files were preserved in the *Tiroler Landesarchiv* and digitized in the *Option Digital* project, with analysis of these documents revealing that in the initial stages of negotiations, the Italian estimates were very different from the German ones, and often even from those of the *Optant* himself. Time and again, the agreement reached (most agreements were concluded between December 1941 and 1942⁵⁴) came closer to the German estimate than to the Italian proposal, clearly suggesting in which direction the balance of power had shifted (it was also found that the estimate proposed by the interested party (*Optant*) was typically not approved). Based on the analyzed sample, the ratio of the German to Italian estimate is approximately 1/ 1.45, which means that the price resulting from German appraisals was considerably higher than that proposed by Italian appraisers. The final agreement was almost never an average between the Italian and Germanic proposal; indeed the ratio of Italian estimate to final agreement was 1/1.23, while the ratio of German estimate to final agreement was about 1/0.85, illustrating how the final agreement was much closer to the German proposal because the ratio is much lower than the ratio in the Italian estimate.

The dissatisfaction with the amounts offered often led the *Optants* to choose not to leave, as they believed the offered sums would not provide a sufficient standard of living in the Reich. One illustrative case is that of Kaus Anna (born Anna Egger Anna and widowed). On October 28, 1942, she appealed to the appraisal commission expressing her concerns about the sum offered to her, which she believed would not enable her to support herself in the German Reich, and asking for a review of the appraisal. However, the estimate presented by the commission on February 1, 1943, confirmed the previous proposal (on October 6, 1942): 40,000 lira. To determine what happened to Mrs. Kaus Anna, an investigation of the *Re-Option* records in the Udine Archives was conducted. It was discovered that, although she had obtained German citizenship in 1940, there is no indication that she actually relocated; instead on February 2, 1948, she regained Italian citizenship, which indicates that the amount of money offered to Anna Kaus probably convinced her not to leave for Carinthia. Therefore, despite the critical economic conditions in Kanaltal, there were instances where staying put

⁵³ TLA, Deutsch-italienische Hauptkommission fuer die Wertfestsetzung des Vermögens der Volks- und Reichsdeutschen. Vermogenstransfer Kanaltal (DUT) [Digitopt Databank].

⁵⁴ TLA, Deutsch-italienische Hauptkommission fuer die Wertfestsetzung des Vermögens der Volks- und Reichsdeutschen. Vermogenstransfer Kanaltal (DUT) [Digitopt Databank].

(especially for individuals like widows) might have been considered less risky and costly than emigration. In discussion of *Return Option*, it is essential (although complex) to distinguish between those who opted but did not leave and those who did choose to depart.

In the case of properties that were sold, they remained under the authority of the ENTV, which had the responsibility of either reselling or renting them out.⁵⁵ It was important for the ENTV to ensure that these properties were entrusted to Italian citizens and there was a particular concern to ensure that these Italian renters had the opportunity to purchase the assets before they might be replaced by Germans or individuals from other nationalities.⁵⁶

Legislation underwent an amendment in 1949 to facilitate the purchase of land by farmers in installments without the need for a mortgage. This change in the law allowed for more flexible payment arrangements, enabling individuals to gradually acquire ownership of the land without the immediate need for a lump-sum payment, with this policy change aiming to support the Italian citizens who were residing in and managing these properties.

Ultimately, Italian economic policies, particularly the role of the ENTV, played a significant role in the transformation of the land in Kanaltal which extended beyond the acquisition of property; it also involved the management of the *vicinie* and easement rights. Once the ENTV acquired the *Optants*' properties, it initiated a gradual resale of these properties while maintaining a certain level of control over easement rights. In his publications on the local history of the valley, Mario Gariup, the priest of Ugovizza, harshly criticized the ENTV's disposal of property, which split real estate and easement rights: "to believe that a colonial family could live on the produce of the land alone without a forested appurtenance is pure utopia."⁵⁷ To gain a deeper understanding of the issue surrounding the separated sales of housing and easement rights, records of the ENTV were consulted at the Land Registry Archives in Gradisca which shed light on the background of the agreements between the *Azienda di Stato per le Foreste Demaniali* – Tarvisio office (State Forestry Company), the *Milizia Nazionale Forestale* (Forestry Militia), the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the ENTV Directorate General in

⁵⁵ Archivio generale della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri ("General Archive of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers"), *Ufficio per le Zone di Confine* (UZC Office for Border Zones), Section. VII ENTV.

⁵⁶ UZC, Section. VII ENTV, folder 7, file. *Ente Nazionale per le Tre Venezie*. "Piccola proprietà contadina"; SLA, *Research legacy of Karl Stuhlpfarrer*, Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Kanaltal, pos 141 – "Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Umsiedlung aus dem Kanaltal. Eine Dokumentation, Wien 1986" (unpublished manuscript).

⁵⁷ Gariup, *Le Opzioni per il 3 Reich*, 205.

Bolzano. These communications date from May to December 1942, a period when the question of how to resell or redistribute the easement rights attached to the former *Optants*' properties in the Tarvisio area needed to be addressed.⁵⁸ The documents revealed an agreement between the head of the ENTV Office in Bolzano, Lino Rizzi, and the Tarvisio State Property Administration which shed light on the intricate process of managing easement rights and the complexities involved in a land redistribution during that period in the Tarvisio State Forest "if they were not explicitly requested by the tenants."⁵⁹

In June 1942, the general director of the ENTV based in the Tarvisio office communicated with the State Company Direction for State Forests in Rome regarding the easement rights associated with the Tarvisio Forest, with these rights granted to users through assignments made by forestry personnel. The assignments were given to the current owners of the entitled houses, as specified in the regulatory documents of these rights, which operated on the principle that "the right is ignited with the fireplace and is suspended with abandonment," thus that the right to use forest resources was contingent on the inhabitation and use of the building; otherwise, the assignment would be denied, and the right to use it would lapse for the current year.⁶⁰ Conversely, if the building was inhabited, the owner could delegate the use of their right to a third party on an annual basis. It is important to note that, following the Italo-Germanic agreements and transfer of properties formerly owned by *Optants*, the easement rights associated with the Tarvisio Forest and linked to the buildings that had come under the ownership of the ENTV were transferred to the ENTV itself. This indicates a shift in ownership and management of these rights in the aftermath of these agreements.

Given the particular circumstances determined by the emigration of the natives, it is easy to understand how it was not always possible for the ENTV to immediately arrange the rental of the buildings taken over, meaning some of them may have been momentarily uninhabited in order to be occupied later on. If this happened at the time of the aforementioned assignment, such temporary condition of the buildings resulted in the year of exercise of rights attached to them being revoked.⁶¹ Consequently, the State Company for State Forests could exploit the easement rights pertaining to these buildings, and delegate "temporary exer-

⁵⁸ Ufficio Tavolare di Gradisca (UTG, Land Registry Office of Gradisca), Founds of ENTV, pos. 326.

⁵⁹ UTG, Founds of ENTV, pos. 326, Correspondence May 1942.

⁶⁰ UTG, Founds of ENTV, pos. 326, Correspondence ENTV Direction of Bolzano and State Forestry Administration May 1942.

⁶¹ UTG, Founds of ENTV, pos. 326, Letter of June 31, 1942 from Executive Director Vito Schirillo of ENTV Tarvisio.

cise of rights" to the State Forestry Administration. Through this arrangement, both the ENTV and the State Company for State Forests gained authorization to manage timber resources and conduct forest clearance activities.⁶²

For instance, in 1945, the servitude rights were only partially transferred because the timber had been previously used for reconstruction of houses that had been damaged or destroyed by aerial bombings.⁶³ It is evident how this situation could have posed significant challenges for families who depended on these timber rights, especially considering the economic crisis that weighed heavily on the residents of Kanaltal during this period.

Postwar Problems

Once the war ended, the population of Slovenian origin who had been evicted from Carinthia returned to their municipalities, demanding the return of the property that had been violently seized from them. In 1945, Austria, liberated by the Allies, was divided into occupied zones, and British military rule was established in Carinthia. Soon the displaced Slovenes obtained the right to have their farms back even though, at the end of the war, only about 20 percent of the farms of the Carinthian Slovenes deported in 1942 were sold to Kanaltal *Optants*, while more than 70 percent of them were still owned by the German *Reich*.⁶⁴ According to research conducted by historian Brigitte Entner, there were 65 farms that were entrusted to Kanaltal inhabitants and had to be returned.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, there was a strong hope among the *Optants* of Kanaltal that, with the peace negotiations, the valley could return to Carinthia. Many letters,⁶⁶ memoranda,⁶⁷ and petitions were delivered to the British military government between 1945 and 1947, requesting Austrian reunification.⁶⁸ As reported to the head of Carinthia's minority office, "the government of Kärnten is continually receiving communication from the population of the Kanaltal [...] protest of a general desire to be

62 UTG, Founds of ENTV/326, Farming businesses of the Tarvisiano region.

63 UTG, Founds of ENTV, pos. 326.

64 Augustin Malle, Alfred Elste, and Brigitte Entner, et al., eds., *Vermögensentzug, Rückstellung und Entschädigung am Beispiel von Angehörigen der slowenischen Minderheit, ihrer Verbände und Organisationen* (Munich; Vienna: Oldenbourg Verlag Ges, 2004), 14–67.

65 Entner, „Wer waren die anderen?“, 41–63.

66 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Österreichisches Bundesministerium für Äußere Angelegenheiten (AT-OeStA-AdR-BMfAA) -ST Südtirol, POL 14 Meldung -Klagenfurt, April 25, 1947.

67 AT-KLA, 626–358, Kanaltal III, Memoranden und Petitionen 33/358.

68 AT-KLA, 626–358, Kanaltal III, Memoranden und Petitionen 33/358.

reincorporated in Austria.”⁶⁹ In 1945, the Kanaltaler *Bund* (“Union of Kanaltal people”) was founded, an association of Kanaltal *Optants* in Klagenfurt whose purpose was to reconnect the valley with Austria and help the emigrated Kanaltal *Optants*,⁷⁰ which played an active role in all these protests. The memoranda, signed by a significant number of Kanaltal residents and particularly those originating from Camporosso and Malborghetto,⁷¹ conveyed a clear message. These documents called for the reunification of the valley with Carinthia, highlighted the economic crisis afflicting the region, and denounced the abuse endured by the local population at the hands of the Italian government. The population’s discontent with the Italian government’s actions was strongly evident from these communications; they detailed various grievances, including the seizing of land and property, violence, and the overall harsh living conditions experienced by the native residents.⁷² For example, Memorandum 4 of November 30, 1945, addressed to the British Military Government for Kärnten, concerned Italian reprisals following the submission of the previous memoranda. It exposed the mistreatment inflicted on the Kanaltal population as a consequence of their requests for reunification with Austria: “The population of Kanaltal was subjected to strong measures of repression following requests for reunification with Austria. The regime took a stricter attitude: many citizens suspected of favouring reunification with Austria received anonymous threatening letters, and in some cases threats were followed by actions (arson).”⁷³ The labelling of *Optants* who had not yet left their homes in Kanaltal as “Foreign Enemies” by Italian authorities was a stark representation of the situation. In light of this, the temporary government of Carinthia appealed to the British Military Government, urging them to undertake suitable measures to forestall any escalation of tensions in the Kanaltal region, and asking that the conditions in that area be maintained at the status quo that existed prior to the appeal made by the provisional government on October 20, 1945. Other memoranda stored in the Klagenfurt Archives made recourse to the many reasons, historical, geographical, and social, why Kanaltal should be reconnected to Carinthia, with this wish also evident in the printed media.⁷⁴ The Carinthian press and various communications, including articles by

⁶⁹ AT-KLA, 626–358, Kanaltal III, Memoranden und Petitionen 33/358.

⁷⁰ AT-KLA, Amt der Kärntener Landesregierung, Minderheitreferat 34, folder 366–383- *Bund der Kanaltaler* 1945, 33/375.

⁷¹ Bonfà, *Le Opzioni per il Reich in Valcanale*, chapter 3.

⁷² Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Österreichisches Bundesministerium für Äußere Angelegenheiten (AT-OeStA-AdR-BMfAA) – ST Südtirol, POL 35, Diverse Beilage Südtirol /1945–46.

⁷³ AT-KLA, 626–358, Kanaltal III, Memoranden und Petitionen 33/358, Memorandum n.4 concerning Italian reprisals in connection with the petition of the population of Kanal-Valley (district of Travis), Klagenfurt, November 30, 1945.

⁷⁴ AT-KLA-626–347 Kanaltal Südtirol Zeitungsartiker 1945.

regional councilor and historian Rudolf Cefarin, as well as letters from the Kanaltal *Optants* to the Carinthian government, consistently voiced demands up to 1947, with these demands centered around two main objectives: 1) The re-establishment of the pre-1918 border: there was a call for the restoration of the border along the Gail River to its previous position from before the events of 1918. This suggests a desire to revert to the historical territorial boundaries prior to the significant geopolitical changes that occurred during and after World War I; and II) Kanaltal Autonomy: additionally, there were appeals for Kanaltal to be granted autonomy, which indicates a strong desire for self-governance and control over local affairs within the Kanaltal region.⁷⁵ These demands and expressions of regional identity and autonomy reflect the sentiments and aspirations of the Kanaltal inhabitants during this period.

It was hoped that, with the Treaty of St. Germain, it would also be possible to resolve the Kanaltal issue. Additionally, in several articles in the newspaper *Neue Zeit* the issue of mistreatments of the Kanaltal native population by the Italian authorities surfaced.

Data obtained through a questionnaire developed by the Kanaltaler *Bund*, retrieved from Carinthian archives, as well as interviews conducted by historian Lara Magri⁷⁶ in collaboration with the Kanaltaler *Kulturverein* (“Kanaltal Cultural Association”), sheds light on the fact that returning to the Kanaltal was not a viable *Option* seriously considered by the *Optants*. The questionnaire, administered to at least 83 *Optants*⁷⁷ who had left the valley, indicates that respondents were generally uninterested in returning if the Kanaltal remained under Italian administration; only 58 of them expressed a willingness to consider a return if the area were to become part of Austria/Carinthia.

Interviews conducted with former *Optants*, approximately 65 years later by Lara Magri, revealed the difficulties faced by those who had left envisioning a return to their home municipalities, which had been disrupted by two decades of Italian nationalist policies. Consequently, when the prospect of reunifying Kanaltal with Carinthia faded, there was widespread disappointment among the population.

In 1948, the *Optants* were granted permission to regain Italian citizenship and return to their original municipalities, however, very few actually chose to do so. This suggests that despite the change in legal status, the socio-political and

75 AT-OeStA-AdR-BMfAA – ST Südtirol POL 33 Diverse 1946.

76 Lara Magri, *Valcanale 1939. La grande storia nel destino di una piccola Valle, documentary/interviews* (Malborghetto: Comunità montana del Gemonese Canal del Ferro Valcanale, 2010).

77 There were 83 completed questionnaires retrieved even though the president of the Union of Kanaltal, Markus Keil, referred in a letter to more than 200 questionnaires. AT-KLA, 626–358, Kanaltal III, Memoranden und Petitionen 33/358.

cultural changes imposed on Kanaltal during the intervening years had significantly altered the landscape and the perceptions of those who had left, making a return unattractive to many.

The archives of the *Ufficio per le Zone di Confine* (“The office of border areas”) of the Cabinet Office of the Presidency of the Council contain records of exchanges of letters with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, revealing at least 56 requests for temporary visas in 1949 for the purpose of conducting inspections in Kanaltal to decide whether or not to exercise the *Return Option*. However, these visits often led to conflicts and disputes when the former *Optants* encountered the new tenants or property owners.⁷⁸ In 1949, there were reportedly 183 requests for return,⁷⁹ along with instances of illegal border crossings. However, an official document from the Kanaltaler *Bund*, sent to the Klagenfurt government in 1962, indicated that the number of Return *Optants* had dwindled to 20. As of the current state of research, it remains challenging to ascertain the precise number of *Optants* who did return to Kanaltal. Based on the information available and secondary literature, it appears that the range could be anywhere between 20 and 200 individuals who returned to the valley.

The motivations for not returning were predominantly economic and social, considering the post-war conditions in the valley and the circumstances enjoyed by the settlers in Carinthia.⁸⁰ Additionally, the emigrant population was dissuaded from returning by the realization of the lack of safeguards and protections in republican Italy.

There is, in the Prefecture’s archive, a great deal of information regarding the treatment of the population and the Italianization effort that seemed to continue even after the end of fascism. Articles and complaints from the Slovenian society in Gorizia about the lack of consideration for the needs of the Slovenian population date back to 1950.⁸¹ Around the same time, there were exchanges between the Prefecture of Udine and the Archbishop’s delegate of Catholic Action regarding the “defense of Italian-ness” (*difesa dell’italianità*) carried out by members of the clergy in the border areas, with grants amounting to millions of lire

⁷⁸ UZC -Section III- folder 85, file 677.

⁷⁹ Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Affari politici 1946–1950, Italia, Conferenza della Pace – Frontiera settentrionale, b. 218 (Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Affairs 1946–1950, Italy, Peace Conference – northern frontier, folder 218).

⁸⁰ SLA, *Research legacy of Karl Stuhlpfarrer, Habilitation: Umsiedlung Südtirol*, Archiv Copies, pos 74 source of the copy: Dokumentensammlung des Österreichischen Instituts für Zeitgeschichte, DO.32/AK-5/38–51 Abschrift.

⁸¹ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 64.

awarded to fight pro-Slavic propaganda and spread Italian patriotic feelings. Here the clergy was considered “not as priesthood, but as the most influential class on the mentality/public opinion of most of these countries (of the province of Udine).”⁸²

Conclusions

Based on this research, it becomes evident that the issue of *Return Option* in Kanaltal should be contextualized within a broader framework of twentieth century migration. Migration, often driven by employment opportunities, has been an integral part of the region’s history, which has long served as a transit point for population movements. As early as the late nineteenth century, the valley experienced significant mass emigrations, and once again during World War I due to bombings, with neighboring Carinthia often being the preferred destination for these movements. The *Option* of 1939 can also be understood within this historical pattern, as what appears to have brought about a radical change in the human geography of the territory was a confluence of multiple events, stemming from an intensive Italianization project. Concurrent to the *Option* was the repopulation of the area with Italian inhabitants and the displacement of those of Slovenian descent. Additionally, deteriorating economic conditions resulting from the war and ENTV policies further disrupted the territory, leading to the disappearance of many of the conditions present at the beginning of the century. On the other hand, Carinthia remained a familiar destination, connected by a common history. The Kanaltal populations often identified with Carinthia,⁸³ and being relocated to Carinthian territory likely mitigated the trauma of forced displacement. Interviews conducted by historian Lara Magri revealed that the economically disadvantaged portion of the population in Kanaltal perceived improved living conditions upon arriving in Carinthia.

Certainly, the lack of autonomy of the Kanaltal and the neglect of minority interests played a role in discouraging the *Optants* from returning to their former communities; moreover, the repopulation of the valley had profoundly altered the social dynamics. In 1948, around a thousand applications for the *Return Option* were submitted, but most of those came from individuals who never emigrated to Germany, and it is likely that very few of those who left actually returned. Nevertheless, press reports and memoranda signed by Kanaltal people reveal their discontent and sense of abandonment, as many were relocated to the *Siedlung* or

⁸² ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 64.

⁸³ Paschinger, “Der erste Weltkrieg in Kanaltal.”

other areas by relatives and spouses. However, while the native population of Kanaltal became dispersed, the cultural memory was not entirely lost. Local traditions (often linked to Slovenian language and culture) endured, for example, within the Fire Brigade and in various small local customs.⁸⁴ In 1979, the Kanaltaler *Kulturtverein*, an association based in Tarvisio and Villach, was founded by a few founding members who felt it was essential to preserve and spread the original language and ancient traditions of the inhabitants of Kanaltal. This association operated in a region spanning three municipalities, Tarvisio, Malborghetto, and Pontebba, and over the years, it has placed significant emphasis on the study of German as the ancestral language. Since the 1990s, efforts have been made to revive the mixed German-Slovenian language⁸⁵ which had long been marginalized, possibly due to a political agenda aimed at Italianizing the valley, even after the end of fascism.⁸⁶

In conclusion, Kanaltal did not witness the same scale of return of *Optants* as seen in South Tyrol. However, in recent decades, there has been a concerted effort to rediscover the cultural memory and heritage of these territories.

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⁸⁴ Interviews with Lara Magri, September 19, 2022.

⁸⁵ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 29.

⁸⁶ ASU, Prefecture, Cabinet, folder 64.

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