

ReMIGRA: Return Migration as an Interdisciplinary Research Area Using the Example of the South Tyrolean "Return Option"

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Return migration, also termed remigration or repatriation, is still an all too frequently neglected topic within migration studies and migration history. This is also true for those South Tyrolean migrants who left their home during the "voluntary" expatriation that came to be known as the "Option" during the Second World War. In 1939, the so called "option agreement" between the two dictators, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, was announced: The German-speaking inhabitants of the South Tyrol were allowed 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. Until 1943, around 75.000 people left their homeland to find an uncertain future in the German Reich. Only after 1948 could those who had moved abroad apply for the reacquisition or retention of Italian citizenship and legally return to their native country. Historical research so far suggests that about one third of those who had emigrated finally returned to South Tyrol.

The central research question therefore will ask for a reassessment of the history of the "Return Option" based on existing archival material and some collected Oral Histories. In order to be able to do this, it will be essential to find out how the specific return-migration of the South Tyrolean people can be researched using the existing archival fragments, dislocated collections and printed sources.

Because of its complex nature an approach with digital methods and technologies will be used in order to be able to identify archival collections that belong together even though they are housed in different archives and to reconstruct the history of the "Return Option". Due to the combination of traditional and digital take, this project has the benefit of opening up the research area for further studies in the field. In addition, it adds to existing migration research and offers ample room to grow.

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