

# **Cultural Representations of Italians in Wales (1920s-2010s)**

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
European Languages, Translation and Politics  
Cardiff University, 2013

## **Summary**

This thesis aims to enrich academic scholarship by investigating cultural narratives of Italians in Wales from 1920s–2010s. It will make use of sources that have been understudied, such as the photographs of Italians in Wales during the interwar period and local newspapers reporting on the incident of the *Arandora Star* sinking during the Second World War. It also provides an original contribution to debates on migration, memory and identity drawing on recently emerged sources, such as the accounts generated by second and third generations of Italian migrants about the traumatic experience of the Second World War and the published works by Welsh-Italian authors such as Servini, Pelosi, Spinetti, Emanuelli and Arcari. Finally, this thesis also provides an original approach by comparing these ‘narratives of belonging’ with the representation of the Italian migrant experience in Anglo-Welsh literature.

## Acknowledgements

My first thanks go to my supervisors Dr. Rachael Langford and Prof. Claire Gorrara for having believed in my potential and supported me a great deal in a delicate phase of my PhD. I owe them sincere thanks for all their help and priceless advice. Their unconditional work ethic and impregnable scholarship remain an inspiration for my academic career and beyond. My thanks also go Prof. Derek Duncan, Dr Loredana Polezzi and Dr Jennifer Burns for their genuine interest in my research and for their precious comments and suggestions. I also want to thank Beth Thomas, Owain Rhys, Richard Edwards (St. Fagans National History Museum), and all archivists and librarians who have helped me with my research. I am very grateful to the late Aldo Bacchetta and to Romeo Basini, President of the Amici Val Ceno Galles Association, for introducing me to the Welsh-Italian community and, above all, for their genuinely caring attitude. I enjoyed attending their talks and social gatherings, during which I met so many interesting and helpful people! I am very grateful to my fellow members of the former Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales for their collaboration in achieving one of the biggest projects of my life: the creation of the First National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales. I also want to thank all my friends, students and colleagues at the Cardiff Centre for Lifelong Learning who through these years have supported me and given me strength. A special thank you goes to my former landlady Rita Guarino and to Robert Savini and his lovely mother. They have always been available in difficult times, and have helped me in many ways to make me feel ‘at home’ here in Cardiff. A special thank you goes to Simon, my fiancé, for his patience, infinite love and constant encouragement. He is the most beautiful thing that could ever happen to me! Finally, I am thankful and grateful to my family who have always supported me financially and morally encouraging me to pursue my dreams. I dedicate this thesis to my late and dearest father whose tenderly smile will always give me strength and perpetuate his loving memory; and to my mother, whose ‘appetite for life’ and unconditional love are both a source of inspiration and endurance.

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# INTRODUCTION

*This is the story of the Avventurieri... the Adventurers, which serves as an accurate and picturesque description of the first Italian emigrants who settled in South Wales towards the end of the last century and started the caf  s without which no township in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire is now complete. [...] The story of this caf   colonisation of an area so different in climate and character from the native land of the colonisers – the Avventurieri – has never been fully told.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Italians in Wales: a brief historical background.**

In 1996, a musical called *Bracchi*, written by Emyr Williams in Welsh, was first performed by Ysgol Gyfun Rhydfelen, a school in Pontypridd, and subsequently by Ysgol Gyfun Cymer, at the Parc and Dare Theatre in Treorchy.<sup>2</sup> The musical takes inspiration from the life of Giacomo Bracchi, an Italian man from Bardi, near Parma, Italy, who migrated to South Wales in the 1880s, in search of a better living. Mr Bracchi became the pioneer of Italian confectionery shops in Wales. His name became synonymous with ‘Italian shop’ across the South Wales valleys, to which many other Italians from the Bardi area migrated to establish their coffee shop businesses. In the ‘note for the performance programme’, the author writes that:

Every character and every situation in this musical play is fictional, although the historical background is based on the real events surrounding the emigration of Italians from Bardi in Northern Italy to South Wales during the twentieth century. The names of the characters, particularly the Italians, are not based on any individuals who lived at the time, as many of the descendants of the families still live in the Rhondda. [...] The play commemorates the contribution of Italians in enriching the life of the Rhondda, their perseverance and the community spirit during hard times.<sup>3</sup>

Although the names are fictitious and only inspired by some of the most well-known Italian families who settled in Wales (the Bracchis, the Contis, the Fulgonis, to name but a few), the story narrated in this musical is representative of the story of many other Italians from the Bardi region. They left the unproductive farming lands of the mountain hills in northern Italy in search of a better living. They came to the Rhondda Valleys in

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Meet the Eminent Emigrants’, *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 19 April 1959, p. 2. ‘By ‘the end of the last century’ the author, Jack Parker, referred to the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> The author subsequently translated it into English by commission of the *Amici Val Ceno Galles*, an association of Welsh-Italians living in Wales from the Bardi area, near Parma, in Italy. The play was nevertheless never performed in English.

<sup>3</sup> Emyr Edwards, *Bracchi*, (1996), trans. from the original Welsh version by the author, music by Caryl Parry Jones, p.3.

Wales between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, attracted by the opportunities generated by the Industrial Revolution and the coalfield societies. The musical commemorates the contribution of Italians to Welsh society by re-enacting why and how they came to Wales, their settlement and vicissitudes up until the Second World War. The musical opens with a group of friends singing and dancing in their local meeting point, the Caffé Piccolo in Bardi (this coffee shop really exists), where discussions take place between Emilio and his grandfather about the hard conditions of life in those days and the possibility of finding a good job abroad:

GR. BRACCHI: (to the waiter) Luigi! Cappuccino, per favore!

WAITER: Ciao Ernesto

GR. BRACCHI: You see, Emilio, the life here in the mountains of the Emilia Romagna is very hard for you and me.

EMILIO: Grandpapa Bracchi, Papa says that there is gold at the other end of the rainbow.

GR. BRACCHI: He's quite right, my boy.

EMILIO: Far away in other lands?

GR. BRACCHI: In America and in Argentina.

EMILIO: In France and in England?

GR. BRACCHI: And in Wales.

EMILIO: Wales? Where's that?

GR. BRACCHI: The other side of England, where there's treasure in the ground. And men dig it up.

EMILIO: Treasure?

GR. BRACCHI: Black gold. They call it coal.

EMILIO: I've never heard of black gold.

GR. BRACCHI: (to the waiter who has brought the cappuccino) Ciao Pietro.

EMILIO: Is there a fortune for everybody there, grandpapa?

GR. BRACCHI: that's where your uncle Alonso went, to open a café, and to sell ice cream.

EMILIO: did he earn his fortune, grandpapa? Did he get his black gold?

GR. BRACCHI: well, he tried his best. It takes a bit of time to find a fortune. EMILIO: That's where I'm going one day, grandpapa. To Wales to earn a fortune.<sup>4</sup>

What is described in this abstract is amply documented by local historian Colin Hughes in his *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla: The Italian Community in South Wales: 1881-1945* (1991), currently the only study of the Italian Community in Wales. Hughes explains that in the 1880s Italy was, with the exception of a few large businesses in the north, an industrially backward country with a high level of illiteracy. The very backward form of agriculture was the *mezzadria*, by which 'a tenant provided tools and labour while the

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<sup>4</sup> Emyr Edwards, *Bracchi*, pp. 8-9.

owner of the land paid rates and taxes, and gave seeds and plant and stock'. 'The profits were divided half and half – as the word *mezzadria* implies – or often more in favour of the landlord'.<sup>5</sup> According to Hughes, the news of the industrial boom in South Wales came via the sea to Bardi as at that time, 'wood cut from the hills around Bardi was sent to Cardiff and Swansea to be used as pit props and coal was sent back to Genova'.<sup>6</sup> However, there are some reservations about this statement, since Bardi, especially in the nineteenth century, was a secluded and remote place in the mountains and was very difficult to reach.

There is some evidence that one third of the Italians in South Wales and Cardigan were connected with shipping: they were either ex-seamen who used to be employed in the merchant navy and who joined the British navy being attracted by higher wages; or they were Italians with no previous experience of the sea, employed in various services related to shipping, such as shipping agents, coal merchants, lodging houses for seamen, etc. Other Italians were known to be itinerant people who came from London, including organ-grinders and ice-cream and chestnut vendors.<sup>7</sup> They were generally recruited under the *padrone* system. The *padroni* were respectable and well-known people in the village where they came from in Italy, who needed apprentices to be employed in their successful business. They tended to employ young workers from their own village, which explains why, for example, eighty per cent of the Italians who arrived in Wales before the First World War were from the Bardi area, while the remaining twenty per cent were originally from the area of Picinisco, near the town of Frosinone, in the south of Italy.<sup>8</sup> It is likely that the *padroni* (the masters) would make a payment to the parents before their son was sent to Wales and that the young apprentice would live with the café owner and his family, who provided food and accommodation. There is some evidence that sometimes these boys were exploited by working very long hours and were treated like slaves by the *padroni*; but this was a small price to pay for preserving

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<sup>5</sup> Colin Hughes, *Lime Lemon & Sarsaparilla. The Italian Community in South Wales, 1881-1945* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1991), pp. 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Lucio Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Realities and Images* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Colin Hughes, *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla*, p. 21.

the hope that the time would come when they could set up their own shop.<sup>9</sup> The *padrone* system eventually contributed to the expansion of another phenomenon called *campanilismo*, an expression of collective identity and affiliation to a particular geographical area of origin in Italy. *Campanilismo* is often an expression of the intention to preserve the link between, and the culture of, their place of origin.<sup>10</sup> The best example of this cultural attachment is the foundation of independent societies by groups of volunteers of second or third generation Italian immigrants. These societies are named after their place of origin in Italy, and in many case the title of the association also refers to either the nation or the town in which it is founded abroad. An example is the Amici Val Ceno Galles association (Friends from the Ceno Valley Wales), which was founded in 1975 by a group of Welsh-Italians with a strong Bardi connection.

The arrival of Italians in Wales coincided with the spread of the Temperance Movement, which in Wales was closely identified with Nonconformism. After the Sunday Closing Act in Wales (1881), the threat of pub closure on the day of the *Sabbath* was welcomed by Nonconformists, but, on the other hand, it represented a social disadvantage in the life of a miner. Although there is no evidence that the Italians took part in the Temperance movement, the first Italian cafés in the South Wales valleys were called ‘Temperance Bars’ to reflect the fact that they did not sell alcohol. The Italian Temperance Bars represented ‘an attractive and cheap non-alcoholic alternative to pubs and clubs’<sup>11</sup>, and for this reason they became more and more popular as friendly, cosy and social meeting points. However, it can be argued that the use of the title ‘Temperance Bar’ was nothing more than a shrewd commercial move by the Italians, as it is known, for example, that they broke the law on Sunday trading by opening on the *Sabbath*, selling sweets to children. There were occasions when Italians were fined for opening on a Sunday, but they paid the 5 shilling (25p) fine and carried

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<sup>9</sup> William Henri Wilkins, ‘The Italian Aspect’ in *The Destitute Alien in Great Britain: A Series of Papers Dealing with the Subject of Foreign Pauper Immigration*, ed. by Arnold White, (London, S. Sonnenschein & Co, 1892), pp.146-151.

<sup>10</sup> The origin of the word *campanilismo* is ‘*campana*’, which means ‘bell’ in English. The bell refers to the bell tower, in other words, the religious symbol of the village. For more information about this phenomenon, I refer to Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor: The Italian Community in Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991), pp. 177-188.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Williams, *Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield 1898-1947* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 72.

on, and it was the Sunday trade that contributed significantly to their profits.<sup>12</sup> The popularity of the Italian coffee shop in Wales was due to the fact it became a social gathering point for the whole community, as documented in this passage published on Monday, 20 April, 1959 in *The South Wales Echo*:

Eventually these caf  s became unofficial clubs in their own right, the ‘debating clubs’ of the valleys with customers spending the best part of the evening gossiping around the coke stove, making a lemonade or a hot cordial last the night while they put to rights the troubles of the world.<sup>13</sup>

The Italian shop would sell soft drinks, cups of Oxo or Bovril and ice-cream, as well as chocolate and cigarettes, and the whole family was involved in the running of the business.

There is also evidence that a number of Italians worked in the mines, at least for some of the time. For example, the Frongoch lead mine, one of the largest mines in North Ceredigion, decided to employ 80 miners from Italy, in 1900.<sup>14</sup> However it was for the caf  s that the Italians in Wales became most famous. By the 1930s, the years that coincide with the decline of the coal industry and the Great Depression, Italians immigrants were fully established and well integrated into Welsh society. Many of them had become naturalised British subjects, and had served in the British Army during the First World War. The fact that Italy was an ally during First World War is likely to have contributed to the welcoming attitude and positive perception of Italians in Wales.

So, Italians were generally well accepted, in spite of the tensions created by Sunday opening. In the interwar period, for example, there were incidents of the windows of the Italian shops being smashed and the shops looted. However, these attacks ‘are more likely to have been spontaneous, the wageless miners reacting perhaps to outward displays of luxury goods no longer available to them’.<sup>15</sup> In the period of the Second World War similar incidents recurred, and this time they were deliberately targeted

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<sup>12</sup> More information on this can be found on the Comenius Project website, promoted by the European Union, in which the Blaengwawr Comprehensive School presented a research project on Italians in Wales and specifically on the Italian Temperance Bars. <http://www.blaengwawr.co.uk/website/downloads/projects/COMENIUS-PROJECT-PROMISE.pdf> [accessed on 6 August 2012].

<sup>13</sup> ‘Meet the Eminent Emigrants’, *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 20 April 1959, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> More information about the Italians employed at Frongoch mine can be found on the following website: <http://www.plwm.org.uk/index.php?q=events/332> [accessed on 31 December 2012].

<sup>15</sup> Colin Hughes, *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla*, p. 73.

against the Italians. The date when Mussolini declared war against Britain coincided with a series of chain reactions (rounding up, internment, sinking of *Arandora Star*) which, as we will see in detail in Chapter Two, challenged the level of relative stability achieved by this migrant group in the previous decades. Families were deprived of husbands and sons, and it was left to women and children to look after family and business.

The post-war years, by contrast, were again a period of prosperity for the Italian cafés and fish and chip shops, especially in the towns.<sup>16</sup> It was so at least until the 1950s, when habits started to change:

Car ownership, the spread of television, the introduction of live entertainment into the drinking clubs, the popularity, for a while at least, of Bingo, and a higher degree of commuting between home and workplace, all served to reduce the appeal of the traditional Italian cafés.<sup>17</sup>

This period also coincided with a new wave of Italian immigrants who came to work in skilled jobs and established businesses. The closure of many collieries in South Wales and the migration of miners to other places to work deprived the valleys and the old communities of its vitality: ‘the once throbbing Italian cafés and the miners’ welfare halls alike, saw their clients drift away’.<sup>18</sup> From the 1960s onwards, many Italian proprietors sold their businesses to developers, and many Italian shops became Chinese take away restaurants, marking the end of an era which changed the Welsh way of life, and the beginning of contemporary society.

### **Cultural memories of Italian immigrants in Wales.**

The history of Italians in Great Britain is generally well documented by authors such as Father Umberto Marin, Lucio Sponza, Terri Colpi, Bruno Bottignolo, Alfio Bernabei and Colin Hughes. These studies explore the Italian migration in the UK from a historical perspective, concentrating on identifying patterns of migration to the UK, such as the recruitment under the *padrone* system, the geographical areas of settlement (Clerkenwell, Bedford, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, South Wales), and the various patterns of employment (organ grinders, statuette makers,

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<sup>16</sup> Colin Hughes, *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla*, p. 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.



chestnut vendors, ice-cream vendors, coffee shop owners, etc). However, more work has to be done to connect empirical study with wider theoretical debates on identity, particularly in the realm of cultural studies. In this respect, Ann-Marie Fortier has moved in this direction with her book *Migrant Belongings* (2000), in which she traces the formation of Italian migrant belonging in Britain by looking at historical narratives, political debates, religious processions and rituals, war remembrances, activities of the Women's Clubs and other performative acts. Wendy Ugolini has also recently published a monograph called *Experiencing War As the 'Enemy Other'* (2011), which explores how notions of belonging and citizenship amongst the Scottish-Italian community are undermined at a time of war. More recently again, Marco Giudici has written a doctoral thesis on the Italian migrant experience in Wales from a historical perspective. His work aims to examine to what extent Italians (the most noticeable minority group in Wales) have influenced the cultural and social landscapes of Wales, and how their positive impact has been used for nation-building purposes, especially in the post-devolution era.<sup>19</sup>

If we look at how historians have over time represented the Italian diaspora, particularly the case of Italian migration to the UK, there has been a tendency to construct Italian migrant identity by simultaneously celebrating the contribution of Italians to the host community, and yet acknowledging the marginal and subordinate status of the Italian migrant community abroad. In his book about the history of Italian emigration, as early as 1919, Robert Franz Foerster recognizes the important place of Italian immigrants in the history of many countries around the world. Furthermore, Foerster envisages and encourages a sort of moral and ethical obligation on the part of historical chroniclers to record and celebrate the contribution of the Italian community to civilized culture, and he emphasises the affable and sociable nature of Italians that has allowed them to mix and interact with people of different cultures around the world.<sup>20</sup> In Foerster's words:

So embracing has been this emigration that a chronicle of its development must constitute an indispensable chapter in the history of the Italian people, whose gifts to civilization and whose qualities in human intercourse have attached them to men everywhere. So memorable likewise have been the contributions of the emigrants in a

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<sup>19</sup> Marco Giudici, *Migration, Memory and Identity: Italians and Nation-Building in Wales, 1940-2010*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bangor, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Robert Franz Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), p. v.

number of lands that chapters setting forth their fortunes there must always hold a place in the histories of the several countries themselves.<sup>21</sup>

Over fifty years later, at the beginning of his celebratory book about Italians in Great Britain, *Italiani in Gran Bretagna* (1975), Umberto Marin, writes:

Dedico queste pagine agli emigrati  
e soprattutto a coloro fra essi  
che mai le leggeranno, perchè condannati ad una sottocultura  
che l'espatrio ha reso incurabile.

A loro ho dedicato anche la vita:  
e furono appunto essi, con le loro diuturne sollecitazioni,  
a impedirmi di scrivere queste pagine  
con più accuratezza e in bella forma.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of the celebrated story of 'success', Marin invites the reader to reflect upon the challenges generated by the encounter of two cultures. In particular, he criticises the social and cultural marginalisation of Italian immigrants in the UK. Significantly, Marin confesses that it was their subordinate position that created a sense of conscious resignation amongst migrant Italians, and that prompted him to dedicate his life to them. Ten years later, Bruno Bottignolo explains that because of the socio-political and cultural ties between member states of the European Union, 'an Italian migrant who enters and lives in Great Britain can go unobserved. He is often described as an "invisible immigrant"'.<sup>23</sup> In spite of the fact there are few obstacles to his integration into British society, he does not find 'many realities to help this insertion or to favour the active practice of the limited rights of citizenship which are conceded him'.<sup>24</sup> Echoing

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Franz Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*, p.v.

<sup>22</sup> In English, it translates: 'I dedicate these pages to the migrant people, and above all to those amongst them who will never read them, because they are condemned to a sub-culture that expatriation has made incurable. To them I have also dedicated my life: and it was indeed them, with their daily requests, who prevented me from writing these pages with more accuracy and in a nice way' (my translation). Umberto Marin, *Italiani in Gran Bretagna* (Roma: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1975), p. v. Umberto Marin was a one of the founder members of the Scalabrinian Centre ( Centro Scalabriniano) in London, and was, amongst other things, Director of *La Voce degli Italiani*, a magazine with news and articles about the Italian migrant community in the UK (mainly London). The book traces the history of Italian emigration to Great Britain from the Middle Ages into the modern era. Marin starts by stressing the influence of many Italian artists, traders, bankers, monks, etc on British culture and society. He highlights aspects of the migration process, such as the contraction of work, the settlement, and the organization of a sort of 'social welfare' for Italian migrant workers, focussing for example on the creation of Unions as well as health, social and cultural institutions. It also provides an insight into the nature of the diplomatic relationship and cultural exchange between Italy and the UK throughout the centuries.

<sup>23</sup> Bruno Bottignolo, *Without a Bell Tower* (Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1985), p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Marin, Bottignolo underlines the factors that constitute the subordinate position of Italian migrants and Italian culture in relation to British culture:

Apart from relations imposed by the immigrant condition, the Italian in Great Britain does not find many clichés of interaction. The linguistic difficulty is the most expressive of these limitations, as it eventually reduces opportunity where a series of limitations of rights already exists. The Italian immigrant's invisibility is ultimately also an expression of his limited socio-cultural relevance. Finally, the risk is correlated to the preparation of the immigrant himself, and his ability to socialise. In this sense the risk is easily detectable when one observes the free and easy adaptation and insertion of young people from Italy for reasons of study or tourism, and compares it with the immigrant's uneasiness on his first arrival and settlement.<sup>25</sup>

The awareness of occupying a subordinate position could also be one of the factors that, in many cases, has prevented previous generations of Italian immigrants in the UK from developing an extensive migrant literature.

This thesis aims to enrich academic scholarship by investigating cultural narratives of Italians in Wales from 1920s–2010s. It will make use of sources that have been understudied, such as the photographs of Italians in Wales during the interwar period and local newspapers reporting on the incident of the *Arandora Star* sinking during the Second World War. It also provides an original contribution to debates on migration, memory and identity drawing on recently emerged sources, such as the accounts generated by second and third generations of Italian migrants about the traumatic experience of the Second World War and the published works by Welsh-Italian authors such as Servini, Pelosi, Spinetti, Emanuelli and Arcari. Finally, this thesis also provides an original approach by comparing these 'narratives of belonging' with the representation of the Italian migrant experience in Anglo-Welsh literature.

Inevitably, the tragedy of the *Arandora Star* occupies a central role in this study of the evolution of migrant identity within the Italian community in Wales. This is due to the significance of the tragedy from a historical and psychological point of view and to the creation in Wales of the First National Memorial of the *Arandora Star* which generated cultural memories and new narratives. The thesis therefore, follows a chronological journey: from the interwar period, a time in which Italians in Wales were generally regarded as fully established and integrated; through to the Second World War and up until the first decade of the twenty-first century to explore the formation of a distinctive, yet complex, Welsh- Italian identity and its (self)- representation.

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<sup>25</sup> Bruno Bottignolo, *Without a Bell Tower*, pp. 71-72.

## **Thesis structure**

Chapter One is a study of the photographic representations of Italians in Wales in the interwar period. It reflects on the role of photography in documenting the Italian migrant experience between the two wars. Photographs of Italians in Wales during the interwar period typically feature Italian cafés, family snapshots, and social gatherings. The chapter engages in a textual analysis of these photographs, inspired by the work of Susan Sontag and David Bate on photography, and, in particular, the work of Marianne Hirsch on family portraiture and post-memory. The analysis focuses on the role of photographs as substitute narratives in the absence of oral and written testimonies of the first generation, and on their role in the trans-generational transmission of memory. Inspired by Hirsch, for example, the analysis reveals how photographs are not static objects, but the way we look at them is conditioned by sociological, psychological, historical, nostalgic and mythical preconceptions. A comparison with photographs of Welsh shops, families and social groupings of the same period highlights the tensions between two cultures, the Italian and the Welsh, in both the differences and the similarities. The analysis of Italians in Wales portrayed in this period therefore, allows for important tropes of Welsh-Italian life to be used as a starting point for the following chapter.

Chapter Two addresses the problematic position of Italians in Wales during the Second World War. During this period, the internment of Italian enemy aliens and the tragedy around the *Arandora Star* sinking represented challenges to the (self)-perception of Italian identity, and complicated the mechanism of formation of a Welsh-Italian identity with stories of enforced cultural divisions, family disruption and memory loss. The chapter highlights how after nearly seventy years of silence, recent commemorative events around the *Arandora Star* sinking have been able to engage second and third generation Italian immigrants in the difficult task of post-memory. The chapter offers a thematic analysis of a selected corpus of written and oral testimonies set against the analysis of how Italians in Wales were represented in the press and national culture during the Second World War.

Chapter Three considers in more detail the delayed emergence of Welsh-Italian narratives, and takes inspiration from the work of Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assman and Stuart Hall on identity and memory, particularly the difference between communicative

memory and cultural memory. The Chapter, therefore, studies the trans-generational transmission of memory in accounts produced almost exclusively in recent decades. The analysis of these texts probes the construction of second and third generation Italian family memories of migration, and how they interpret the experience of their ancestors. It asks how such narratives articulate their sense of belonging to two cultures, for example, how they represent Italy and Wales, and which metaphors or fictional devices are used to represent a sense of cultural identity.

Chapter Four explores the portrayal of Italian immigrants in Anglo-Welsh literature. Fictional and semi-fictional texts were all produced in the post-war period up until the last decades of the twentieth century. They generally testify to the positive impact of café culture upon the Welsh way of life, but they also reflect on the traumatic events that affected both the Welsh and the Italian communities during Second World War. A thematic analysis of these texts identifies, on the one hand, elements of exclusion created by the construction of ‘ethnic othering’ and stereotyping (frequent references to skin colour, bodily features, but also religious tensions), and on the other, elements of inclusion in the portrayal of the family and the role of the mother. This chapter, therefore, examines how authors have interpreted the experience of Italians in Wales, and asks if it is possible to establish a ‘pattern’ of representation amongst these texts, bearing in mind the time span between one text and the other.

In the conclusion of this thesis, I will summarise my research findings, and suggest future areas of research.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Italians in Wales in 1920s-1930s:

### A Visual Perspective.

*Photographs, as the only material traces of the irrecoverable past, derive their power and their important cultural role from their embeddedness in the fundamental rites of family life.*<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

In his study on photography, David Bate noted how in the nineteenth century portraiture gradually shifted from being a privilege for prosperous people who wanted ‘to be pictured in a family tradition’ to a popular ‘means of identification’ for the masses.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the evolution of technology, photography became a relatively inexpensive tool used by the emerging industrial society to portray masses of people; and portraits became ‘a semiotic event for social identity’.<sup>3</sup> Photographs are an invaluable and indispensable source for the documentation and study of migration, as photographs have played and continue to play an important role in cross-border movements.<sup>4</sup> During the Great Depression of the 1930s in America, Dorothea Lange, an American photojournalist, documented the migration of people in search for better jobs. Although her work is more about the consequences of the Great Depression from a human point of view, migrants here being associated with mass inwards re-location for economic reasons, the photographs set up iconic images around the idea of migration. A well-known example is the *Migrant Mother*, which belongs to a series of photographs that Lange made of Florence Owens Thomson and her children in California between February and March 1936.<sup>5</sup> Whilst photojournalists, video-makers, artists specialising in photography and amateurs alike ‘have made possible the creation of indispensable sources of images on the theme of migration’, Moussa Konaté stresses the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Harvard University Press: 1997), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> David Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Moussa Konaté, ‘Pictures from Here for the People over Yonder: Photography in Migratory Circuits’. This is a working paper for the symposium *Staying and Leaving/Toso any Ka taka: Photography and the Representation of African Migration*, Bamako, February 2011, ‘Images d’ici pour Gens de là-bas: La Photographie dans les circuits migratoires’; [www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm](http://www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm) [Accessed on 6 August 2012]. The paper was translated into English by John Barrett.

<sup>5</sup> An overview of Lange’s *Migrant Mother* series of photographs can be found on the following website: [http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/128\\_migm.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/128_migm.html) [Accessed on 10 August, 2012].

sociologists and anthropologists, ‘have paid scant attention to how photography interrelates with migration’.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter is an attempt to study the photographic representation of Italians in Wales against the backdrop of the interwar period, and uses photographs taken from history books, local history projects and private collections. The chapter starts with an historical and sociological overview of Italians in Wales in this period. It then shows how photographs have documented Italian migration in the UK/Wales in general, before gradually moving on to explore the work of some scholars on photography. Ideas by Sontag, Noble, Hirsch and Bate constitute the theoretical framework for the analysis of a selected number of photographs in the main body of the chapter. The analysis is guided by specific research questions whose answers highlight important aspects of Italian migrant identity and of the relationship with the host community in the period that preceded the Second World War. The chapter then concludes with some reflections that create a link with the following chapter.

### **Locating Italians in Wales in the interwar social and historical background**

It is estimated that the number of Italians in Wales in 1921 was 1,533 while in 1931 the number dropped slightly to 1,394.<sup>7</sup> Figures provided by the 1921 and 1931 censuses present gaps and discrepancies in the way Italians in the UK were recorded, mainly due to the insufficient means of recording data at that time. There is no doubt, however, that figures had more than tripled since 1871 testifying to the large impact that the Industrial Revolution played in attracting foreign as well as ‘neighbouring’ workers.<sup>8</sup> Wales specialised in sectors of heavy industry, such as coal, steel and tinplate, which depended crucially on the export market, and therefore on transport, commerce and the ports. When the demand for primary metal and coalmining industries decreased, the economy of the region inevitably resulted ‘in high unemployment rates and the emergence of some acutely distressed areas’.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the decline of the coal industry was a result of the introduction of oil, which replaced coal in many of its former uses.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> [www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm](http://www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm) [Accessed on 6 August 2012].

<sup>7</sup> Colin Hughes, *Lime Lemon & Sarsaparilla. The Italian Community in South Wales, 1881-1945* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1991), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> David Smith, ‘Wales Between the Wars’, in *Wales Between the Wars*, ed. by Trevor Herbert & Gareth Elwyn Jones (Cardiff: Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1988), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Wales was the major exporter of coal, and the more expensive process of coal extraction due to the geological conformation of Welsh soil contributed to the decrease in the production of coal. For more

wide scale unemployment in the coal industry caused many people to leave the valley communities in order to find jobs elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> It is known, for example, that some Italians repatriated between 1921 and 1931, maybe as a result of the Great Depression. Dennis Thomas, however, highlights the fact that whereas it is estimated that four hundred and forty thousand people left Wales between 1921 and 1938, it is difficult to give a comprehensive figure for total migration.<sup>12</sup> So, for example, in his comparative study of immigrant communities in modern Wales, Neil Evans emphasises that ‘Wales was overwhelmingly a net exporter of people, having been a net importer in the period before the First World War’<sup>13</sup>, but fails on the whole to provide more evidence or specific references to the effects of the Great Depression on the various migrant groups. Little is known, for example, about the Irish and the Jewish people, whose migration to Wales coincided with the onset of industrialisation in the nineteenth century, or about the Spanish people, who also arrived in 1900 to work in the South Wales mines, and were well known trade unionists. As for the Italians, surprisingly, Colpi explains that for the Italian community in Britain, this was ‘partly a period of further growth but mostly a period of consolidation’ due to the fact that Italians were almost entirely self-employed and working in small service businesses, which enabled them not only to survive but to some extent prosper.<sup>14</sup> In her own words,

This was the time when the emigrants from the ‘old’ emigration ‘la vecchia emigrazione’ really settled in, progressed and became an integrated part of the fabric of British society. The initial phase of establishment was over, the trauma of the First World War had been surmounted and the Community settled down to hard work, and growing prosperity. [...] every small town in even the more remote areas of Scotland, Wales and the north of England accepted as normal and part of the town’s life their one or two Italian family businesses.<sup>15</sup>

In his study of the Welsh-Italian community, local historian Colin Hughes offers some evidence of this sort of ‘golden era’ described by Colpi in an interview with Marco Fulgoni and Ida Pini from Pontypridd, conducted on 23 November 1986. Hughes

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information on the Depression and its effects, please refer to David Egan, *Coal Society: A History of the South Wales Mining Valleys, 1840-1980* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1987), pp. 120-130.

<sup>11</sup> David Egan, *Coal Society: A History of the South Wales Mining Valleys, 1840-1980* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1987), p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis Thomas, ‘Economic Decline’, in *Wales Between the Wars*, ed. by Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones (Cardiff: Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1988), p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Evans, ‘Comparing Immigrant Histories: The Irish and Others in Modern Wales’, in *Irish Migrants in Modern Wales*, ed. by Paul O’Leary (Liverpool University Press, 2004), p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor: The Italian Community in Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1991), p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.



explains how, despite the economic difficulties around them, the family were able to survive:

The whole family was involved in the running of the business, and their whole life revolved around it. Maria Fulgoni still appeared in the shop, with her own stool, when she was ninety-eight years old. Ida worked there for the full seventy years of ownership. Marco started young, took over the business when his father retired in 1952, and ran it until the end in 1986. As with other Italian cafés customers could stay as long they wished and spend as little as they liked. One courting couple used the café as a meeting place and sat before the fire for three hours each evening, day in and day out, for twenty years. During the three hours they bought one pork pie between them, using two plates and two knives, and two cups of tea. [...] In the long pit strike of 1926, the miners spent even less, but the shop somehow survived.<sup>16</sup>

As Colpi said, the Fulgonis, like the majority of the Italians in Wales, owned their own business and passed it on from generation to generation. Through the decades, and in times of economic difficulty, they were able to adapt to the circumstances, and continued to offer valuable services to the Welsh towns and villages. The informal atmosphere of the coffee shops and the ‘relaxed attitude’ of the Italians (‘the customers could stay as long as they wished and spend as little as they liked’) are likely to have contributed towards attracting customers, who used the shop as a meeting place, whether to discuss the current economic affairs or simply to court and socialise. In many cases, the staff working in the shop were kept on with reduced wages, and

‘the striking miners were welcomed to sit around the stove even if they had no money. A cigarette was given to anyone who would start a song, and this was handed around as others joined in. The butt was awarded to the one who could sit longest on the hot stove.’<sup>17</sup>

A slightly different scenario is the one described by Hector Emanuelli in *A Sense of Belonging. From the Rhondda to the Potteries: Memories of a Welsh-Italian Englishman* (2010). During the Great Depression, his family business suffered so much that they made the decision to migrate to England in search for a brighter future:

Unfortunately, the roots we were beginning to put down in Wales were soon to be torn up. Conditions had deteriorated so much in the Rhondda and trade was suffering so badly that not even my mother’s business acumen was able to turn the tide. I remember Louis and I hearing furious arguments between our parents. We felt something was afoot. The strikes, the hunger marches, the unemployment, the many departures were taking their toll of the business and no amount of hard work seemed to help. In the late 1920s the kindly James family left the Rhondda and moved to England, where prospects were better. My mother was devastated! One day in 1932 our parents

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<sup>16</sup> Colin Hughes, *Lime Lemon & Sarsaparilla*, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

announced a radical and awesome decision. They were going to emigrate! The five of us were to leave the valleys, and we were to go to a foreign country: England!<sup>18</sup>

However historians tend to agree that even in the interwar years the Italians in Wales continued to be a large and visible foreign presence, with several caf  s present in virtually all villages. Hughes, for example, reports that a scrutiny of the *Guida Generale* of 1939<sup>19</sup> reveals that in the 1930s, in Pontypridd alone, there were five Italian caf  s in Taff Street (Servini, Franchi, Fulgoni, Pinchiaroli, Antoniazzi) and at least seven others in nearby streets (Conti, Cordani, Marengi, Orsi, Rabaiotti).<sup>20</sup> Hughes also reports that ‘by 1938 there were well over three hundred caf  s in Wales and Monmouthshire, mostly in the mining valleys of the south, owned by Italian immigrants or their descendants’; and another source refers to fifty-two Italians working in the catering field in Merthyr Tydfil alone.<sup>21</sup>

Another aspect of the Welsh economy of this period is important in explaining why Italians in Wales were only marginally affected by the Great Depression, but it is not always mentioned. While Wales was described and referred to as a land of ‘unremitting depression, unemployment, decline and misery, a hollow-eyed nation in permanent procession to the Soup Kitchen’<sup>22</sup>, holiday resorts expanded on the commercial coastal towns as a reflection of a growth in tourism and holiday-making.<sup>23</sup> Although Hopkin explains that the ‘experience was class-specific’ and the beneficiaries were mainly the middle classes, ‘there is much evidence of working class outings in the apocryphal charabanc to the seaside’.<sup>24</sup> To some extent, the Italians exploited the situation in their favour. So, for example, Colpi points out that in the 1920s and 1930s, the ice-cream

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<sup>18</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense of Belonging. From the Rhondda to the Potteries: Memories of a Welsh-Italian Englishman* (Langenfeld: Six Town Books, 2010), p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> The *Guida Generale* of 1939 is a comprehensive directory of all the Italian businesses registered across the UK, and includes a preliminary section about the Italian Royal Family and Mussolini, as well as some information about Italian consulates in the UK. The book displayed the Fascist symbol (a bundle of rods) on both the front and back cover. When Mussolini declared war on Great Britain, many Italian families who resided in the UK and owned a copy of such book, deliberately burnt it for fear that the Police, coming to arrest Italian males, would find it and use it as evidence of their association with Fascism.

<sup>20</sup> Colin Hughes, *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla*, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Ronald J. Williams, ‘The Influence of Foreign Nationalities on the Life of the People of Merthyr Tydfil’, *The Sociological Review*, 18 (1926), 148-152, (p. 24).

<sup>22</sup> Deain Hopkin, ‘Social Reactions to Economic Change’, in *Wales Between the Wars*, ed. by Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones (Cardiff: Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1988), p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-57. Hopkin also explains that the expansion of tourism was also due to greater opportunities for travel, such as the expansion of the motor car and motor bike with sidecar attached ‘which opened up new horizons for thousands’. Also, in those years, if on the one hand the salaries and wages decreased, on the other hand, the price of goods also decreased, and this made it possible for those who were self-employed to live reasonably well.

parlours proliferated in coastal locations across the UK.<sup>25</sup> This period of consolidation, prosperity and relative stability, however, would be compromised during the Second World War, especially after Mussolini's declaration of war on Britain (June 1940). It was during this period, in fact, that Italian migrants across the UK feared being associated with Fascism, and, in many cases, disguised their most visible signs of Italianness.<sup>26</sup>

### **Photography, history and Italian migrant identity.**

Photographs provide an interesting and invaluable source to document the presence and the relative 'success' of Italian businesses in Wales between the 1920s and the 1930s. If on one hand, there is a lack of first generation Italian migrants' accounts of that period, and a scarcity of memories transmitted and recorded by subsequent generations (the first memoir to be written by any Welsh-Italian was Les Servini's *A Boy from Bardi: My Life and Times* in 1994)<sup>27</sup>, on the other, there seems to be a profusion of photographs that make up for it. Photographs emerge from private and public collections<sup>28</sup>, and particularly from recent oral history projects, such as the Acli-Enaip<sup>29</sup> *Italian Memories in Wales* (2 Feb 2009- 4 Jan 2010), and the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales oral history and memorial project,<sup>30</sup> but also in a number of history books.<sup>31</sup> Maybe because of the recent publication of some of these photographs which made the general public aware of their existence, academics have yet to exploit this

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<sup>25</sup> Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> Chapter Two will discuss precisely the problematic position of Italians in Wales, by looking at their representation in local newspapers, and at the impact of WWII on the Welsh-Italian community in recently emerged second and third generation testimonies.

<sup>27</sup> Chapter Three of this thesis will look at the recent emergence of a Welsh-Italian narrative, and will engage in textual analysis of the texts from the perspective of cultural memory.

<sup>28</sup> Recently, Italian Conti family donated family pictures to the *People's Collection Wales*. The photographs are dating back to the 1890s, and celebrate ice-cream and coffee culture in Wales. These photographs can be found at <http://www.peoplescollectionwales.co.uk/Collection/1550-the-conti-brothers---cafes-in-wales> [Accessed on 15 January 2013].

<sup>29</sup> Acli-Enaip is an Italian Association of Christian Workers that promotes support for Italian workers abroad, and Italian cultural initiatives, with branches all over the world. For more information please visit the website: <http://www.enaip.org.uk/> [Accessed on 15 July 2012].

<sup>30</sup> This is an Association of volunteers founded in 2008 by members of the Welsh-Italian community with the purpose to raise money for the creation of the First National Memorial to the Arandora Star in Wales. I was the secretary of this association. I will discuss more in detail about this association and its initiatives in Chapter Two.

<sup>31</sup> Photographs of Italians in Wales can be found in books published in the Images of Wales Series, part of the Archive Photographs Series, and compiled by Welsh-Italian local historian Aldo Bacchetta and Glyn Rudd. In chronological order of publication: *Porth and Rhondda Fach* (1996); *Porth and Rhondda Fach: The Second Selection* (1998); *Around Porth: The Story Behind the Picture* (2004); and *Porth: Gateway to Rhondda* (2004).

valuable resource to study Italian immigration in Wales and Italians in Great Britain generally.

Photographs portraying Italians in Wales in the interwar period typically feature family portraits, family businesses (primarily café premises and interiors and ice-cream carts), as well as social gatherings. Photographs are not only a useful tool for the retrieval of memory, but the intersection of photographs and narrative shows the role played by visual images in memorializing textual accounts. Often, these photographs are clearly part of a project of personal and familial recollection in the way they can testify to fact without the intervention of the historian or any other mediator.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars like Moussa Konaté have highlighted how beside ‘the function of recording a particular reality, a photograph could equally be defined as a form of seeing or writing’, and can convey ‘a multi-layered message’ (for example, aesthetic, historic, political).<sup>33</sup> Photographs representing the Italians in Wales during the interwar period also appear in Colin Hughes’ *Lime Lemon & Sarsaparilla: The Italian Community in South Wales, 1881-1945* (1991), currently the only published book on the history of Italians in Wales; the *Comenius Project-Promise*, where the Blaengwawr Comprehensive received funding from the European Union to present a research on the influence of Italian immigrants in Welsh society<sup>34</sup>; and Alan George’s website featuring a section called ‘Italians in Merthyr Tydfil’.<sup>35</sup> To a certain extent, these books and projects relegate photographs to a secondary role, in relation to the historical description of fact and events. In this sense, photographs act almost as embellishments that substantiate what is documented with narrative. On the contrary, Terri Colpi’s *Italians Forward: A Visual History of the Italian Community in Great Britain* (1991) fully incarnates what David Bate called a ‘historical project of photography’. Bate’s primary concern was precisely

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<sup>32</sup> In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 80, Roland Barthes mentions about a photograph that he had cut out of a magazine showing a slave market. Barthes stresses the certainty represented by the photograph, as opposed to a drawing or engraving, and the embedded reality given by the absence of mediation by any historian. Perhaps Barthes misreads the presence and mediation of the photographer, as in his own words: ‘the historian was no longer the mediator, slavery was given without mediation, the fact was established without method’. Another example of the same concept is to be found in Nancy M. Shawcross ‘Image – Memory – Text’, in *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, ed. by Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble (Albuquerque, University of Mexico Press, 2003), p. 94. Here Shawcross refers to Kaplan’s memoir *French Lessons* (1994), where in her words, ‘the photograph punctuates the narrative journey’, and act as pure evidence of the Nazis’ massacres.

<sup>33</sup> [www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm](http://www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm) [Accessed on 6 August 2012].

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.blaengwawr.co.uk/website/downloads/projects/COMENIUS-PROJECT-PROMISE.pdf> [Accessed on 6 August 2012]

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/ItaliansOfMerthyrTydfil.htm> [Accessed on 6 August 2012]

the mutual exchange between history and photography lying in the fact that photographs are more than evidence of history. They are historical objects, empowered with a context that entitles the viewer to ‘ask questions concerning the conditions of their production of meaning’<sup>36</sup>, such as ‘why pictures were taken, what they were used for, how they were made to signify, for whom and where’.<sup>37</sup>

As the title suggests, Colpi’s book is a collection of photographs presented in a chronological order, illustrating the history of Italians throughout the UK. In spite of the fact that this book represents the first attempt at creating a comprehensive visual history of Italian immigration in the UK, the book is often neglected by academics. In the words of the author, the aim was ‘to present a complete visual history of the Italian Community in Great Britain from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day’.<sup>38</sup> The book would probably need to be integrated with pictures from the 1990s up until the first decade of twenty-first century; nevertheless, it covers the most important phases of Italian migration in the UK. Interestingly enough, the book was published within the same year of publication of *The Italian Factor: The Italian Community in Great Britain* (1991), by the same author, and in a way it is a visual version of it. At this point, echoing Bate, a question is almost spontaneous: why a book of photographs to talk about Italian migration?

In the introduction to *Italians Forward*, Colpi emphasises the importance of photographs as an efficient and straightforward way of keeping an ongoing and dynamic relationship with the homeland, and therefore with their past:

Photographs have always been important to migrants and their families at home in Italy. When people are separated by great distances for long periods of time, it becomes important to try and keep in touch as best they can, and sending photographs plays a role.<sup>39</sup>

Colpi’s statement also echoes one of Susan Sontag’s observations on photography. Sontag maintains that photographs are practical instruments, with the power to reinstate and revive the past. In her view, ‘People robbed of their past seem to make the most fervent picture takers, at home and abroad’.<sup>40</sup> Although Sontag was referring to the traumatic effect of industrialisation, in causing a break with the past and with people’s

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<sup>36</sup> David Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Colpi, *Italians Forward*, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London, Penguin Books: 1977), p. 10.

traditions, a parallel can be drawn with aspects of the migration process, such as the distance from the homeland, from family and cultural traditions, and the hope to rejoin or recapture them at a later stage. Interestingly, though, for Colpi, the very clue behind the whole process of taking, exchanging and collecting photographs is the importance given to family, which embodies and perpetuates tradition and the link with the homeland. In this sense, the role of photographs is not only to 'keep in touch' with the family. Photographs help understanding migration as a continuous dynamic process, showing attachment and detachment; suggesting notions of home and belonging, inclusion and exclusion; establishing a link between past and present; and last but not least, nurturing intergenerational exchange. In Colpi's own words:

The Family story behind the image is brought out in the captions, often forming a potted, yet fascinating family history. From these, it becomes clear that migration is rarely a one-off static process. Rather a migrant establishes a connection with a new environment, from which travel to Italy and back again to the new country takes place for the pioneering migrant, and then his family, relations and friends.<sup>41</sup>

Some reflections on the portrayal of family in photography are provided by Marianne Hirsch in *Family Frames* (2007). Hirsch says that especially in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century 'the family itself becomes the object of intense social and cultural scrutiny and observation'.<sup>42</sup> For her, family is 'an affiliative group, and the affiliations that create it are constructed through various relational, cultural, and institutional processes – such as "looking" at photography'.<sup>43</sup> Clearly family photographs cannot be considered as transparent objects, but as objects viewed through frameworks of pre-conceptions shaped by sociological, psychological, historical, nostalgic or mythical 'external gazes'.<sup>44</sup> It is important, therefore, to take into account the intervention of the camera that shapes the visual relations. Through what Hirsch calls 'imagetexts' 'the forms of familial looks and gazes can emerge more forcefully and through a variety of lenses'.<sup>45</sup> 'Imagetexts' are narrative contexts (novels, documentary films, albums, exhibitions, etc.) in which photographs are presented through meta-photographic texts, i.e. reproductions, descriptions.<sup>46</sup> Hirsch suggests that 'imagetexts' 'expose and resist the conventions of family photography and hegemonic familial ideologies':

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<sup>41</sup> Terri Colpi, *Italians Forward*, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Only in the context of this meta-photographic textuality and in this self-conscious contextuality can photographs disrupt a familiar narrative about family life and its representations, breaking the hold of a conventional and monolithic familial gaze.<sup>47</sup>

For Hirsch, the power of the ‘familial gaze’ imposes and perpetuates conventional images of the family; and this should be resisted, as it puts ‘human subjects in the ideology, the mythology, of the family as institution and projects a screen of familial myths between camera and subject’.<sup>48</sup> Hirsch is trying to prove that the ideology of the family is subject to historical, social and economic circumstances as well as the lived reality of family life. The existence of a family myth dominates lived reality, and ‘survives by means of its narrative and imaginary power, a power that photographs have a particular capacity to tap’.<sup>49</sup>

To some extent, Colpi’s photographic book presents the characteristics of a family album, as it seeks ‘to construct a visual and historical past for ourselves, a narrative of identity cemented by its retelling’, but also ‘to entertain others and explain to them who we are’.<sup>50</sup> Susan Sontag, for example, goes as far as to argue that a photo ‘could also be described as a quotation, which makes a book of photographs like a book of quotations’<sup>51</sup>, and adds that ‘Photographs– and quotations – seem, because they are taken to be pieces of reality, more authentic than extended literary narratives’.<sup>52</sup> Photographs seem to have an autonomous or independent status from the narrative text, and have to be constructed by participants, observers, actors, analysts, as any narrative claim about the object or ‘truth’ in the narratives has to be argued and justified.

Hirsch’s approach to family photographs seems to be particularly relevant for the analysis of photographs recently published in books about the Second World War, such as Maria Serena Balestracci’s *Arandora Star: Dall’Oblio alla Memoria. From Oblivion to Memory* (2008), the *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales* commemorative booklet (2010), and also in a recent exhibition *Wales Breaks its Silence* launched by the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales on 1 July 2010, in Cardiff. Photographs dating from the period between the two wars portray family members on a number of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Siegel, ‘Talking through the “Photograph Album”’, in *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, ed. by Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble, (Albuquerque, University of Mexico Press, 2003), p. 241.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

occasions, often posing outside their business premises, and accompany the poignant written testimonies of the relatives of the victims and the survivors of the Arandora Star sinking. The combination of photographs and written testimonies produces a contrast that highlights the reality of family unity and acquired social status before the Second World War, and the desperate attempt to articulate the uncertainty and disruption faced during the Second World War. Photographs create a visual impact which, combined with the detailed written testimonies, inevitably induces the reader/viewer to reflect upon the impact of the tragedy on the Italian migrant community. The predominance of individual close ups and family portraits suggests, amongst other things, a communicative intention which reminds us of the importance of generational transmission of memory to guarantee a continuum between past and present. If, on the one hand, ‘the photographs are a poor substitute’<sup>53</sup> for those more or less un-encountered people, places and experiences, on the other hand, the exchange of photographs from generation to generation can bridge the gap between past and present, old and new. David Bate, for example, points out that as well as providing historical evidence, photographs can also remind us of ‘what has been’, and document unknown realities:

A portrait of a person stands in for that person when they are absent and a landscape reminds the photographer of a place they once visited. Memory is a way of keeping something, not losing it. Yet, these pictures, like snapshots, documentary or photojournalism photographs, also show other viewers something (people, places and things) that they may have never visited or seen before.<sup>54</sup>

To reinforce Bate’s idea of the importance of keeping memory, Sontag also asserts that ‘Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness’.<sup>55</sup>

As this section has tried to illustrate, the use of photographs in Servini’s and Emanuelli’s books, and also in Colpi’s *Italians Forward*, and in recent commemorative initiatives, confirms the important role of photographs in the generational transmission of memory, and in the creation of cultural memory. Photographs are clearly artefacts that replace or complement ‘delayed, indirect, secondary’ memory, and contribute

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<sup>53</sup> This phrase is used by Mary Basini, in one of the testimonies published in Paulette L. Pelosi & David Evans (eds.) *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Commemorative Booklet* (Llanelli: MCP, 2010), p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> David Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 8.



towards the salvaging of the records of a culture otherwise fragmented and partially annihilated.<sup>56</sup> In the light of events that unfolded during the Second World War, which changed the way in which Italians were perceived and perceived themselves, photographs become, to use Hirsch's phrase, 'eloquent witnesses of an unspeakable history'. Inserted into a graphic text, they offer 'a representational structure adequate to the task of post memory'.<sup>57</sup> For Hirsch, post memory is 'a generational structure of transmission' which is deeply mediated by 'broadly available public images and narratives', in other words by 'a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images'.<sup>58</sup>

To sum up, this chapter has started by showing how the Italians in Wales were a well-established presence between the two wars. Their presence and history in this period is well documented by photographs featuring Italian cafés, family business and various family snapshots. The section has looked at the various narrative contexts in which these photographs appear, such as history books, a commemorative booklet and exhibition, and written testimonies, to see how photographs can be used to document Italian migration to Wales. The following section will study these photographs following Hirsch's contestatory approach to photo analysis; in particular her idea that photographs are not static objects but that they reflect our views of the family, and also confirm and construct what we think of it. A comparison between the photos of the Italians and the photos of the Welsh is also offered, which will highlight tensions such as integration, differences and anxiety about cultural identity. The section explores the narrative tropes of Welsh-Italian life that are set up by a selection of photographs, which is representative of a wider range of photographs of similar type available at the National History Museum at St. Fagans, Cardiff,<sup>59</sup> and also in the books by Colin Hughes, Maria Serena Balestracci, Les Servini and Hector Emanuelli. The analysis will explore how photographs were used, and whether it is possible to deduce a desire to de-exoticise or 'normalise' the representation of Italians in Wales against photographs of other social grouping. Finally, the analysis will suggest the reasons why these tropes continued during the Second World War, or in what way they were challenged. The

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<sup>56</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 13.

<sup>57</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 29 (Spring 2008), 103-128, (pp. 112-114).

<sup>59</sup> I am grateful to Richard Edwards, archivist at the National History Museum in St. Fagans, for the help provided with the research of photographic material.

answers to this question in particular will create a link with the following chapter in which the position and (self)-representation of Italians in Wales will be discussed.

### **What stories lie behind the photographs of Italians in Wales in the interwar period?**

Quite often, photographs of Italians in Wales in the interwar period feature two recurrent themes: family snapshots or individual close-ups, and the interior/exterior of Italian caf  s displaying the family name. At times, photographs represent a combination of the two themes with family members posing neatly and boldly behind the counter or outside the shop. The recurrence of these themes and the subjects represented suggest the possibility that these photographs were not simply taken to keep an historical record of family, places and events, snapshots of the new life to be sent to family relations and friends in Italy, but that they aimed to convey a specific image and message to the contemporary viewer. This section, therefore, proposes an analysis of these photographs taking into consideration the historical backdrop of the interwar period, and the imagetexts in which these photographs were presented.

### **Family portraits.**

The first part of this section starts with the analysis of photographs representing family portraits during the interwar period, and gradually reveals which family mythology and messages they promote. As already highlighted in the introduction to this section and also in the introduction to the chapter, the importance addressed to family in Italian culture, and even more so within the Italian migrant community in Wales, is particularly evident not only in personal accounts such those by Servini and Emanuelli, but also in the photographs taken at various moments in their ‘new life abroad’. This should not come as a surprise if we consider the central role that family still plays in Italian culture, particularly in contemporary Italian society, where family functions as a ‘social safety valve’ (*‘un ammortizzatore sociale’*) for the younger generations who are bearing the negative consequences of the current national and international financial crisis. Besides, even disregarding the importance of family in Italian culture, David Lackland Sam stresses the fact that for children and adolescents with immigrant backgrounds family has an important role in transmitting the foundation values embodied in the heritage culture.<sup>60</sup> The transmitted values have a protective function as they provide standards of

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<sup>60</sup> David Lackland Sam, ‘Psychological Adaptation of Adolescents with Immigrant Background’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 140: 1 (2000), 5-25, (p. 6).

evaluation of people, events and behaviour.<sup>61</sup> In *The Italian Factor*, Colpi herself highlights how, amongst Italian immigrants in the UK, there was a strong family obligation involved, which consisted of people finding jobs for their relatives, paying the fares and offering them initial accommodation in exchange for work until the newcomers were able to get by independently.<sup>62</sup>

The first photograph is taken from Les Servini's book *A Boy from Bardi: My Life and Times*, and shows his family typically posing outside the front of their own shop in Aberavon, in 1925:



**Figure 1.**<sup>63</sup>

A caption underneath the photograph tells us that the people portrayed are 'My mother, myself, Berni my cousin'.<sup>64</sup> At first sight, it is interesting to note the presence of children, the absence of the father but the presence of the mother. In the centre, outside the family shop, is Servini's mother holding a little boy (presumably Servini himself) by his shoulders. The gesture projects the boy slightly forward, forcing him to stand in a rigid and composed position, suggesting the mother's pride in showing her son. As for the other children, little information is given. For example, we don't know who 'Berni my cousin' is, but we can notice the more relaxed attitude compared with the little boy described earlier: their legs are slightly open and not in line and the first boy on the left holds his hands behind his back. It is likely that the children are all members of the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor: The Italian Community in Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991), p. 199.

<sup>63</sup> 'My Mother, Myself, Berni my Cousin, Aberavon 1925', in Les Servini, *A Boy from Bardi: My Life and Times* (Cardiff, Hazeltree Press: 1994), p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

extended family, and that they work for Mr Servini. The subject of the photograph informs the reader about the importance of family for the Italian immigrants, in the private sphere as well in the public domain, for example in running the shop. The composition of the photograph and stance of the children and the mother also suggest that perhaps this was a photograph taken to be sent to the family back in Italy, as a visual testimony not only of how well the family was doing by owning a shop, but also of how Mrs Servini had settled and was accomplishing her duties by helping in the business as well as being a good mother and wife. On the whole the photograph conveys an image of familiarity which is comforting and inviting.

By comparison, a look at the vast collection of photographs of Welsh life in the archives of the National History Museum at St. Fagans in Cardiff reveals that Italians were not doing anything new in showing their shop and family grouping. However, in non-Italian photographs of a similar type, there does not seem to be the intention to promote a particular family image, as reflected in the fact that children are virtually absent from all groups posing outside the shop fronts. Nor was there any intention to use the photograph as a souvenir or ‘personal statement’ to be sent to the distant relations. The following photograph, for example, portrays the general store belonging to Dafydd Morgan, in Treherbert:



Figure 2.<sup>65</sup>

In spite of the fact that we know this is Mr Morgan's shop, we do not know who the people posing at the door are, and whether they are members of the family or staff

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<sup>65</sup> 'General Store Belonging to Dafydd Morgan', (Tynewydd, Treherbert, c.1910-1920), in *Shop Fronts*, deposited at the National History Museum, St. Fagans, negative 97.3-4. 60.

working for the Morgans. The photograph is likely to have been taken in the light of the common practice of the time to pose outside the shop front to promote the business and respectability.

Another photograph represents the shop front of the Caerau & Maesteg Co-operative:



**Figure 3.**<sup>66</sup>

A short description provided on the index card tells us that the people featured are the staff working in the store, therefore not family. With this information in mind, it is possible to perceive an immediate distance or detachment between the shop and what it represents and the staff posing outside. This image of distance contrasts significantly with the image of familiarity of Servini's shop. As for the dress code of these Welsh people, we notice that unlike the women, the men are all wearing a long apron on top of their suit with the exception of the gentleman in the middle; and the two ladies, one by each side of this gentleman, also dress in a more conservative way wearing, respectively, a simple long skirt and plain blouse and a long dark dress embellished by an ample white collar covering their shoulders. These differences suggest a possible hierarchy in the staff of the store, and highlight distances within the group. This is a typical shop representative of the co-operative model that emerged in Wales in this period, and which was different from the typical family business, i.e. the Italian model.

In a similar way, other photographs found at the National History Museum show Welsh shops and their staff posing outside, without knowing whether staff and family coincide.

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<sup>66</sup> 'Caerau & Maesteg Co-operative Stores and Staff', (South Wales Photo Co: Pontypridd, 1920s), in *Commerce- Shop Fronts*, deposited at the National History Museum, St. Fagans, negative 94.187-88.60.



Interestingly, though, these shops are often stores which required the employment of staff outside the family circle, whereas the Italian shops were often small businesses and therefore almost always family owned and run. This leads to an important consideration about the concept and use of domestic and public space. Taking into consideration that, in virtually all cases, the private house of the Italian shop owner was annexed to the shop, photographs like Servini's shop, portraying women and children together, draw attention to the union between domestic and public spheres. The shop is where the family welcome and serve the public, and the private space being annexed to the public space implies that the family is constantly on the premises, with possible implications of the blurring of the public domain and the private sphere. Unlike the Welsh shop and, by extension, the Welsh workplace (especially the mine) where the private and the public domains are often kept separate, the Italian shop is therefore a hybrid space rather than a distinctly separate one.

More differences are represented by the way the Italians and the Welsh took pictures of family gatherings and social outings. The following photograph, for example, represents Guido Conti's and Eva Cordani's wedding:



**Figure 4.**<sup>67</sup>

The people portrayed in this picture are dressed up for the occasion and appear happy and relaxed. The wedding celebrated in this photograph shows not only the importance of Catholic practices such as marriage, as a form of preserving religious identity, but also how Italian culture, and particularly regional culture, is maintained and perpetuated

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<sup>67</sup> 'Wedding Picture of Guido Conti and Eva Cordani from Bardi', in Maria Serena Balestracci, *Arandora Star: Dall'Oblio alla Memoria. From Oblivion to Memory* (Parma: Mup Publishers, 2008), p. 184.

by marrying people from the same village or area (both the Contis and the Cordanis are from Bardi). However, the literature about the photo informs us that although the two families are both from Bardi, the wedding took place in Wales in 1937, which is rather curious. The choice for the location may well reflect the fact that the two families were now fully settled, established and integrated in Wales. On the other hand, it is also possible that considering the increasing political tensions between Italy and the UK at the time the wedding took place (1937), the choice to remain in Wales to celebrate the wedding was simply a more convenient option. A close look at the details reveals further tensions. The dress code of the people featured in this photograph is perhaps the most intriguing detail: apart from the white dress worn by the girl on the right and the white shirt worn by the little boy on the left, all the guests and even the bride wear dark colours, which is unconventional for a Catholic wedding. The tension created by these elements indicates detachment from the traditions of the heritage culture, and could be seen as reflecting the intention to keep a low-profile.

Perhaps the clue is in the fact that this photograph features in Maria Serena Balestracci's book *Arandora Star: From Oblivion to Memory* (2008), where a caption reports: 'In 1940 Guido was arrested and died on the "Arandora Star", shortly after being informed that his wife Eva had given birth to their first son'.<sup>68</sup> This photograph, therefore, is a testimony of two families sharing the same origins and fate, two families who both established themselves and found fortune in Wales, joined in marriage, integrated socially and culturally, and eventually were split by events and decisions beyond their control. Quite often, especially during the First and Second World Wars, Italian women and children alike were given responsibility for looking after family and business while their men either went back to Italy to fight for their country, or were serving in the British Army. Women took on even more responsibilities and made sacrifices during the Second World War, when Italian men were arrested as enemy aliens, and some never came back. With this in mind, this photograph promotes a positive image of an immigrant family from a poor background who have found stability and a decent way of living in Wales; a family united by work, sacrifice and a sense of obligation towards each other. This sense of obligation towards family generated values such as solidarity, respect and commitment, which contributed to the creation of a cohesive supportive migrant community. This is particularly true of the Italians in Wales, where most

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<sup>68</sup> Maria Serena Balestracci, *Arandora Star: Dall'Oblivio alla Memoria. From Oblivion to Memory*, p. 184.

families came from the same area in Italy (the village of Bardi, on the mountain hills of Parma, Italy), and quite often were intermarried (the Basinis with the Moruzzis, the Carpaninis with the Sidolis, etc.). According to journalist and broadcaster Mario Basini,

The Ferraris, the Bracchis, the Rabaiottis, the Strinatis, the Basinis retained their supportive social cohesiveness which had been essential in the struggle to scratch a living out of a soil which had been better suited to rock climbing than to farming. For a while at least, that cohesiveness was every bit as valuable in the bid to put down fresh roots in the alien, confusing, Kaleidoscopic jumble of South Wales at the height of the industrial revolution'.<sup>69</sup>

The social cohesiveness described by Basini is commonly associated with *campanilismo*, a phenomenon fostered by the recruitment by a *padrone*, a respectable businessman, owner of an established Italian café.<sup>70</sup> *Campanilismo* is an expression of collective identity and affiliation to a particular geographical area of origin in Italy, and often of the intention to preserve the link between, and the culture of, their place of origin.<sup>71</sup> For example, in his book Emanuelli recounts that every Summer the families of those Italians from the Bardi area,

would sign a truce to shut their shops, hire a charabanc or two and head off on a day trip to a not-too-distant resort. This was a great event and was no doubt one of the few where people of Bardi, the Bardigiani, came together as a community.<sup>72</sup>

The following photograph is a visual testimony of a Welsh-Italian outing to Jersey Marine, Swansea, in the 1930s:

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<sup>69</sup> Mario Basini, 'On Being Bracchi', *Radical Wales*, 4 (Autumn 1984), 16-17, (p. 16).

<sup>70</sup> Colpi explains that the origin of the word *campanilismo* in the Italian language is '*campana*' which means 'bell' in English, and implies the sense of belonging to a specific geographical place of origin in Italy. The bell indicates the bell tower, in other words, the religious symbol of the village. Colpi explains that *campanilismo* is an extension of parochialism. For more on this aspect, see Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, p. 177.

<sup>71</sup> The best expression of this cultural attachment is represented by independent societies founded by groups of volunteers of second or third generation of Italian immigrants. These societies are named after their place of origin in Italy, and in many case the title of the association also refers to either the nation or the town in which it is founded abroad. For example, in 1976, second and third generation emigrants from Bardi to South Wales founded the association *Amici Val Ceno Galles* (literally: Friends from the Ceno Valley).

<sup>72</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense of Belonging*, p. 7.



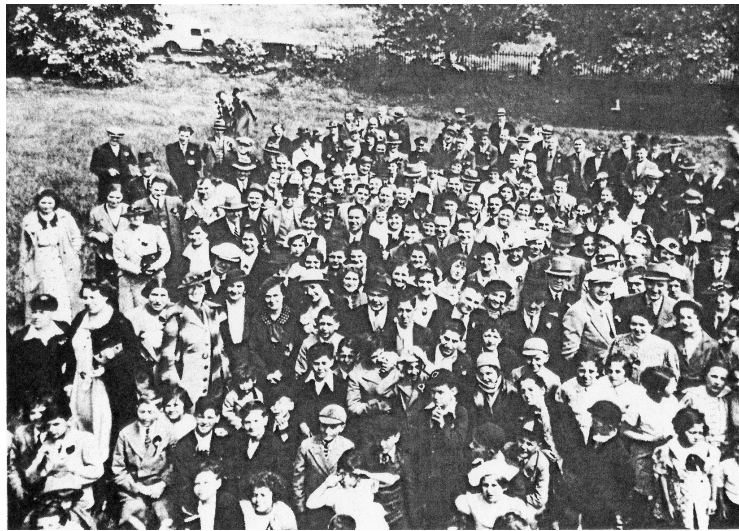


Figure 5.<sup>73</sup>

The photograph represents a group of families and friends posing for a collective photograph that would immortalise this happy moment. People are smiling and seem to dress smartly in spite of the fact that this is a leisurely occasion. This gives the individual people and the collective group an element of respectability, suggesting not only the importance of dress as an Italian cultural factor that was retained within the Welsh-Italian community, but also the importance of looking good as a form of social acceptance and status. The photograph is taken in the open air, in what looks like an open field or a park, and the brightness of the light that illuminates the faces of the people suggests that it is a sunny day, and that the sun has helped to create a joyful and relaxed atmosphere. A look at the angle of this picture with people positioned almost in a triangle, and the focus primarily on their bust and face, suggests that the photographer, most probably somebody from within the group, has taken the picture from above, maybe a nearby hill or bridge, in an attempt to capture as many people as possible, and to immortalise the cohesiveness of the group. Moreover, thanks to this angle, the viewer could also recognise himself and the others who participated in the outing for future reference, suggesting the use of photographs not only as testimonies but also as catalysts in the process of memory.

In a similar way, the following photograph represents a group of emigrants from Bardi having a party in Wales:

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<sup>73</sup> 'A Welsh-Italian Outing to Jersey Marine, Swansea, in the 1930s', in Colin Hughes, *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla*, p. 67.



**Figure 6.**<sup>74</sup>

The picture dates back to the 1920s and is taken once again from Maria Serena Balestracci's book. The appearance of this photograph in a book about the *Arandora Star* is representative of the importance of family and community for support, two 'securities' that were affected by events during the Second World War. In the photograph, we see a group of adults and young children alike dressed in a semi-casual style. A gentleman in the front row is sitting on a chair holding his accordion, an instrument often used and associated with traditional popular songs from the Emilia Romagna region, and also a masculine instrument. The presence of the children who participate by playing the flute also emphasises that this is a family gathering rather than a club activity; men, women and children are all together enjoying a recreational moment. The image contrasts with the highly gender segregated Welsh life in that period characterised for example by the vital importance of the Welsh working men's clubs in providing recreation and in some cases education to the miners and their families. Whereas it was difficult to find photographs of Welsh family groupings, the following photograph is an example of a tea party at the Old Rectory in Aully, in the 1930s:

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<sup>74</sup> 'A Group of Emigrants from Bardi has a Party in Wales', in Maria Serena Balestracci, *Arandora Star: Dall'Oblío alla Memoria. From Oblivion to Memory*, p. 184.



**Figure 7.<sup>75</sup>**

A group of children are gathered around two tables, supervised by Rev. T. O. Thomas and a few adults standing in the backgrounds, showing how in Welsh society, children were much more represented in institutional settings, such as school gathering and church activities.

### **Italian cafés in Wales in the 1920s-1930s.**

The second part of this section concentrates on the analysis of photographs representing Italian cafés in Wales both as symbols of the social status achieved, and also as instruments to promote sociability and integration.

Moussa Konaté highlights how images of migrants are often used in the host country to influence public attitude and opinion towards foreigners.<sup>76</sup> In particular, Konaté argues that

putting this material culture of success on public view somehow enabled migrants to renegotiate their status on the social ladder in their community of origin, as well as empowering them to lay claim to a place and social standing in their host country.<sup>77</sup>

In this respect an article published in the *South Wales Echo and Evening Express* on 3 January, 1938 announces that ‘The New Continental Provides a New Sensation for 1938’. While national newspapers of the time were ‘spreading’ news about the tensions between Italy and Britain, this article chooses to propose an image of familiarity (the

<sup>75</sup> ‘Tea Party at the Old Rectory’, (Aully, copied in June 1979, original from early 1930s), in *Entertainment*, donated by Mr and Mrs Hudson and deposited at the National History Museum, St. Fagans, negative 94.187-88.60.

<sup>76</sup> [www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm](http://www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm) [Accessed on 6 August 2012].

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., [Accessed on 15 December 2012].

refurbishment of the popular New Continental restaurant) which is associated with Italians in Wales. The restaurant was run by the Carpanini family, and the article is full of praise for the excellent standard of modernisation, service and hygiene offered by the premises and the proprietors. The article also stresses the confidence and well-disposed attitude of proprietors who will give ‘permission to see all that has been described in the article and inspect the methods of getting the food ready for consumption’.<sup>78</sup>

To a certain extent, the article confirms Konaté’s idea of the need to renegotiate a place in the host society, and to provide an element of reassurance. As for the photographs of the Italian shops, it is likely that some of them, like the family portraits, were sent back to relatives in Italy to inform them of their progress, and to appeal for more apprentices. In some cases, they were also instruments to negotiate a marriage contract with a local village girl. Konaté himself, for example, observed that these were indeed common practices within the Malian migrant community in France.<sup>79</sup> In both cases, these photographs appear in a format that reminds us of tourist postcards or promotional posters: typically, they show the front of the shop with the name of the owner fully displayed on top, and family members posing by the entrance not to obstruct the sight of the many products carefully arranged on the shelves of the shop window. The following image is an example, representing Mr Tortello posing with his ice-cream horse and cart outside his shop, in Cwmparc, Rhondda, in 1924:



<sup>78</sup> ‘The New Continental Provides a New Sensation for 1938’, in *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 3 January 1938, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> [www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm](http://www.migrationandmedia.com/index.htm) [Accessed on 6 August 2012].

**Figure 8.**<sup>80</sup>

Mr Tortello's smile and posture, with his left hand resting on his hip, and the right one holding the reins of the horse, suggest that he is proud to boast his ice-cream horse and cart to the viewer. His relaxed attitude and appearance in his tidy work uniform creates a sort of complicity with the viewer, who is naturally attracted by the novelty and exotic nature of the cart, and by the advertisement of pure ice-cream ('pure ices') on its right hand side. The photograph also features a young child quietly sitting inside the cart, and looking at the photographer. We do not know who this child is, and we can only guess: he could be Mr Tortello's son, or a very young apprentice working under his supervision and protection. The photograph clearly projects an image of success and accomplishment.

This other photograph is taken from Hector Emanuelli's book, *A Sense of Belonging*, and portrays Ettore Emanuelli himself with a friend, his father, and his brother Louis, outside the family shop in Treorchy, in the 1920s:



**Figure 9.**<sup>81</sup>

The centre of attention in this image is the shop window with its full array of jars, boxes, bottles, and various ornaments such as a framed picture and what looks like a jewellery box or similar. Although the photograph is in black and white, it appeals to the imagination of the viewer, who can anticipate the colourful and exotic atmosphere

<sup>80</sup> 'T. Tortello with his Ice-Cream Horse and Cart Outside his Shop, Cwmparc, Rhondda, 1924', in Terri Colpi, *Italians Forward*, p. 52.

<sup>81</sup> 'A Friend, my Father, Myself and Louis Outside the Treorchy Shop in the 1920s', in Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense of Belonging*, p. 39.

of the shop. The exotic element is also given by the fact that the shop sells luxury products such as cigarettes and chocolate. Interestingly, we notice that the names of these products advertised at the bottom and at the top of the window are British, such as Cadburys Chocolate, Fry's chocolate, and Will's Gold Flake cigarettes. In his memoir, for example, Emanuelli explains the fact that his shop, like many Italian shops, was selling a diverse range of British products:

Apart from the proprietors, there was nothing Italian about our refreshment house. The 'product range' was purely British. Beverages consisted of mugs of hot Bovril, Oxo and tea. Coffee was virtually unheard of until the 1930s. British trade names from the confectionery and tobacco industries, such as Fry's, Cadbury's and Rowntree's chocolates, Wills's gold Flake and Player's Navy Cut cigarettes with their colourful packing took pride of place. Everything was a long way away from the scents and fragrances of a refined Italian 'bar'.<sup>82</sup>

The display of these names and products offered reassurance and familiarity to the customers, and suggests a certain level of integration in showing an appreciation for local taste and traditions.

The photograph presents other interesting details. Mr Emanuelli and the children are posing together outside the entrance of the shop. All appear attentive, looking in the same direction, and wearing clothes that demonstrate working class respectability: Mr Emanuelli is wearing a suit with a tie underneath his work uniform, and two of the children are wearing a tailored jacket with their shorts. The photograph presents tensions given by the combination of the fact that Italians were serving British food and British products, which may have created an anxiety about cultural identity, and the presence of the family posing outside the shop, which projects an image of unity and a positive image of the Italian family. Moreover, it projects the image of the Italian family as serving to the host community.

The presence of the children posing by the entrance is once again interesting. Here there is no intention to promote a specific family image, but their presence represents an undeniable attraction for the younger generations. Perhaps this was meticulously staged in an attempt to smooth some of the local prejudices against selling sweets to children particularly on a Sunday.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense of Belonging*, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Chapter Four will further explore how authors in Anglo-Welsh literature represented these tensions, with particular reference to a short story by Rhian Roberts called 'The Pattern' published in *A View Across the Valley*, in 2002 by Honno Press. Here, Roberts describes how the Italian coffee shops

The following photograph can be seen as an example of friendship between the Italians and the locals who are happily gathering outside the Italian shop:



Figure 10.<sup>84</sup>

The photo, also taken from Emanuelli's book, represents regular customers with Emanuelli's brother, outside the shop in Treorchy, in the late 1920s. The group of young adults are dressed in a semi-formal way; their smile and the hands on each other's shoulder suggest they are happy to be together for this photo shot. The image, like the previous ones, suggests that not only was the Italian shop a meeting point for youngsters and adults alike, but also that the Italians were able to integrate by socialising with the locals and by offering the locals a mixture of familiarity (British products) and novelty (ice-cream and frothy cappuccino). Moreover the presence of the children, and above all the group of Italian boys posing together with local boys, reinforces what Colpi said about the role of children in creating a bridge between the 'old culture' (Italian) and the 'new culture' (Welsh). As the children's acculturation into Welsh norms gradually took place, children seemed to acquire an unprecedented position of influence within family, who relied on them as Colpi suggests in an English context, 'as interpreters of both languages and social behaviour, as transmitters and disseminators of information'.<sup>85</sup>

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challenged the strictness of sabbatarian life by being open on Sunday. The term 'sabbatarian' comes from the word 'sabbath', which derives from Latin *sabbatum*, via Greek from Hebrew *sabbat* or *sabat* 'to rest'. According to the online *Oxford Dictionary of English* is 'a day of religious observance and abstinence from work, kept by Jews from Friday evening to Saturday evening, and by most Christians on Sunday'.

<sup>84</sup> 'Regular Customer with Louis Outside the Shop at 81 Bute Street Treorchy in the late 1920s', in Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense of Belonging*, p. 39.

<sup>85</sup> Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, p. 200.



Finally, having pinpointed similarities and differences, it is clear that the two cultures share in different ways, and for different purposes, a desire to show respectability and to promote their business. In the case of the Italian immigrants in Wales this was even more a necessity, in order to show their integration and to signal acceptance. Indeed, it testifies how close the Italians came to the Welsh models in the period before the Second World War.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has started by locating Italians in Wales in the cultural context of the interwar period, and has then looked at how photographs were used to promote images of family, sociability and integration. A close look at how photographs were used by Welsh-Italian authors such as Servini and Emanuelli, and also by the historian Colpi, has revealed that photographs can be used as phototextual constructions to retrieve the past, and also as a form of writing. In this sense, they function as substitute narratives in the absence of first generation written texts, which were scarce due to illiteracy and economic circumstances (which required constant hard working, with virtually no time for writing). Hence the project of visual history presented by Colpi gives photographs the task not only of documenting the history of Italians in the UK, but also of providing continuity of representation as a popular form. However, inspired by Hirsch's contestatory approach to photo analysis, the photographs studied in the corpus of the chapter can be read as presenting inner tensions that reveal a certain anxiety about cultural identity. A comparison with similar Welsh photographs pinpoints differences and similarities between the Italians and the Welsh. If, on the one hand, there were inevitable differences in the conception of space, where for the Italians the shop is both domestic and public, on the other, there were similarities. These were more evident in the way shop owners and staff dressed and posed outside the shop front, or even in showing outings and family groupings. In this sense, the photographs of the Italians in Wales in the interwar period reveal an intrinsic necessity to conform to Welsh standards and practices, showing a level of integration. Also, it was interesting to note that in the case of the photographs of the Italians, men, women and children all occupy the same spaces (domestic and public) at the same time. This stands out considering the highly gender-segregated nature of Welsh life in that period. In the case of the Welsh photographs, children rarely feature with adults outside the shop fronts, and women and men can appear together but not necessarily as a unit, and often only as 'employees' of an 'invisible' owner (not present in the photograph).



This exercise of phototextual analysis has demonstrated that through photographs it is possible to reconstruct a small part of the history of Italian migration to Wales. To some extent, in her book, Colpi has already instigated a photographic project showing how photography can be a medium for charting changing patterns of self-representations. However, academics so far have failed to exploit this and similar photographic sources in a critical way to talk about Italian immigrants in the UK. In this sense, inspired by Hirsch's approach, this chapter represents an attempt to instigate further interest into the analysis of photographs of the Italians in Wales. By highlighting the tensions in the photographs, one can produce a changing history of Italian migration to Wales through the decades. For example, when one looks at images of families posing outside the shop, and at shop windows displaying Italian names as well as names of British food brands, a common pattern of representation in the interwar period is evident.

As we will see in Chapter Two, to display Italian names and signs of Italianness during the Second World War became problematic, as Italians in Wales and the rest of the UK became enemy aliens. Also, some of the tensions highlighted in the photographs of the interwar period, such as the importance of the family unit, and the fact that Italian men are presented as sharing the domestic responsibilities with women and children, posed further challenges. As many Italian men were interned, women and children were left alone to manage and deal with both domestic and public spheres of business.

Chapter Two, therefore, is going to look at the problematic position of Italians in Wales during the Second World War. It will explore how initiatives to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the tragedy of the *Arandora Star* generated memories of the Second World War in second and third generation Italian migrants. These memories will be set against the images of Italians portrayed in local newspapers of the 1930s in order to provide a comprehensive picture of how the (self)-representation of Italians in Wales from in the 1930s up until 2 July 1940 challenged the images set up by photographs of the interwar period.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Identity Questioned and Betrayed: The Second World War and the Tragedy of the Arandora Star.**

*We realise that the enrichment is only possible through the loss, and it is the awareness of the loss which makes us conscious of the enrichment. It is our longing for something that makes us prone to a sense of nostalgia and to have a more clearly defined perception of our identity.<sup>1</sup>*

#### **Introduction**

As we have seen in Chapter One, the 1920s and 1930s was a period of relative stability and prosperity for Italians in Wales. An analysis of photographs taken during the course of these two decades featuring Italian cafés and family or social gatherings highlighted the intention of promoting images of family, sociability and integration. Inevitably, the way Italians are portrayed revealed tensions in the way that they perceived their identity and sense of belonging (i.e. the role of women, men and children in family groupings, the concept of space, the dress code and the need to show respectability). Chapter Two will now show how events during the Second World War destabilised the images of family, sociability and integration suggested by these photographs, and how they aggravated tensions between the two cultures.

On 10 June 1940, Mussolini's decision to bring Britain into war posed new challenges to the identity and perception of the Italian immigrants in the UK. With the threat of an imminent attack on Britain, and the presence of potential fifth columnists amongst enemy aliens, Churchill commanded an indiscriminate round-up of enemy aliens/internees throughout the country; and this was followed by the War Cabinet's decision to deport them to Canada and Australia. These decisions represented a trauma for many families, friends and relations, as secrecy and swift decisions seemed to have the priority over anything else. On 1 July 1940, the ex-line cruiser SS Arandora Star was transformed into a battleship for the purpose of deporting enemy aliens abroad. It set sail from Liverpool docks carrying 1,673 people, of whom 734 were Italian interned

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<sup>1</sup> Lucio Sponza, *Divided Loyalties: Italians in Britain during the Second World War* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 7.

males.<sup>2</sup> In the early hours of the following day, it was intercepted by a German U-boat 75 miles off the north-west Irish coast, and torpedoed. 805 people lost their life in this tragedy, whilst the Italian loss of life was greatest, with 470 Italians dying, compared with 175 Germans.<sup>3</sup>

The impact of this unexpected tragic event was unprecedented, particularly on the Italian community in Wales, as 53 of those Italians who perished were from Wales, and belonged to families who migrated to this area nearly a century before. Only in the last decade have historians started to investigate and unveil the outcomes and consequences of what has been commonly referred to as the ‘silent tragedy’ or ‘the forgotten tragedy’<sup>4</sup>.

In September 2008, members of the Welsh-Italian community and the Italian community, including the author of this thesis, got together with the intention of raising money for the creation of the first National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales, and, more importantly, to raise awareness of the tragedy. The purpose of this voluntary group was to collect oral and written testimonies that would show to posterity not only the extent of the psychological impact of events leading up to the Arandora Star tragedy, but also the variety of experiences surrounding the Italian community in Wales during the Second World War. In this respect, the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Committee Members have significantly contributed to the generation of new valuable material that is going to be studied and analysed for the first time in this chapter.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The ship had been designed for maximum 500 people, so the fact that it carried 1673 people became eventually a controversial issue in the debate about the modalities in which enemy aliens were treated during the Second World War. Of the 1673, in addition to the 734 Italian males interned as mentioned above, there were 174 officers and crew, 200 military guards, 479 German males interned and 86 German POWs. These figures have been the result of extensive researches conducted by Alan Davis using National Archive resources and personal initiative. It is believed that at least for the number of Italian internees on board the ship, the figures as well as the names cannot be absolutely precise considering the difficulties of war time. Also many Italians changed their names while they were queuing to be embarked in order to be with their loved ones. This makes it even more difficult to know exactly the names of the actual people who were on board. More figures can be found on the following website created by local historian Alan Davies: <http://www.bluestarline.org/arandora.html> [Accessed on 20 May 2012].

<sup>3</sup> More information can be found in the appendix of Balestracci’s book, *Arandora Star: Dall’Oblivio alla Memoria*, published in 2008 by MUP, Parma, Italy.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase ‘forgotten tragedy’ was used by Serena Balestracci in the title of her first book about the Arandora Star, *Arandora Star: Una Tragedia Dimenticata* (Pontremoli: I quaderni del Corriere Apuano, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> This material was collected, edited and published in a commemorative booklet presented at the unveiling ceremony of the first National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales which took place at St. David’s Metropolitan Cathedral in Cardiff, on 2 July 2010 for the seventieth anniversary of the sinking of

### **From memorial to memory.**

Fortier points out that considering the fact that Italians have been settled in Britain for over a hundred years with little return migration, the sense of alienation caused by the Second World War produced ‘a distinctly Italian form of belonging in Britain’.<sup>6</sup> Ugolini, for example, in her recently published book on Scots-Italians during the Second World War, argues that the ‘wartime configuration of Italians as the “enemy within” served to dramatically reinforce a sense of “otherness” and “not belonging” already prevalent amongst the children of Italian immigrants’.<sup>7</sup> In accordance with Fortier, Ugolini also asserts that events in that period contributed to heighten a sense of Italianness.<sup>8</sup> In Wales, the absence of ‘Little Italy’ communities contributed to a heightened sense of marginalisation and exclusion: the dispersed community would imply, for example, that it was difficult to find support amongst other Italians during the war. On the other hand, the absence of a compact community of Italians in Wales can be seen, paradoxically, as contributing to a ‘reintegration’ or absorption into Welsh society as ‘invisible immigrants’ after the wartime.<sup>9</sup>

Ugolini encountered a high level of reticence amongst the Scottish-Italian community to dwell on aspects of their wartime lives, and argues that this could potentially be due to the fact that ‘there is no readily identifiable framework available through which those of Italian origin can articulate their memories’.<sup>10</sup> This is indicative not only of the extent of the psychological impact which has produced a ‘silent narrative’ for decades, but also of the extent of cultural loss, as pointed out by Lafitte, in his monumental study on the internment of enemy aliens:

In the cultural sphere the damage was also great, but is even more difficult to assess. We know of cases of research interrupted or ruined, of half-finished books that may

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the ship. The booklet contains only a selection of all the stories donated to the Committee for the Arandora Star Memorial Star in Wales. More stories have been uploaded on the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Website, and the full content of the website will be offered to the National Library of Wales, in Aberystwyth, in May 2013. See [www.arandorastarwales.us](http://www.arandorastarwales.us) [Accessed on 20 May 2012].

<sup>6</sup> Anne Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the ‘Enemy Other’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2011), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Giudici’s main argument is that despite numerical marginality, geographical dispersed migrants such as the Italians in Wales can resist assimilation and maintain distinct cultural identities. His thesis aims to show how Italians in Wales culturally influenced the host country by being incorporated in its process of nation-building. Marco Giudici, *Migration, Memory and Identity: Italians and Nation-Building in Wales, 1940-2010*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bangor, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the ‘Enemy Other’*, p. 10.

never have been completed, of painstaking intellectual or artistic endeavour that may never come to fruition.<sup>11</sup>

Although the scope of this chapter is not so much to analyse the traumatic extent of events during the Second World War, but to analyse the generational transmission of memories and how generations of Italians in Wales have contributed or not to the creation of a collective memory, it would be equally useful to consider, for a moment, what Ernst van Alphen said about trauma. This would help to contextualise the reluctance experienced by Ugolini and, in some cases, by members of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales<sup>12</sup>; a reluctance that is at the base of the delayed emergence of oral and written testimonies. According to Alphen, an event or situation can become traumatic for someone when that person's symbolic order does not provide consistent frames of reference in terms of which that event or situation can be experienced.<sup>13</sup> For him, what causes trauma is not the nature of the event itself or the limits in the representation of that event, but 'the split between the living of an event and the availability of forms of representation through which the event can be experienced'.<sup>14</sup> In other words, it is the inconsistent or scattered presence of any clear frames of reference at their disposal with which they can easily make sense of events. Far from denying the impact that particularly internment and the Arandora Star represented in itself, many children of the victims or the children of the survivors never saw their father again, and in some cases they did not even know he had died on the Arandora Star, because the silence within the family prevented them from having any clear frame of reference.

In the last decade, however, the proliferation of memorials of the Arandora Star in the UK – Colonsay (2005), Liverpool (2008), Middlesbrough (2009), Cardiff (2010),

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<sup>11</sup> Francois Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (London: Libris, 1988), p. 153.

<sup>12</sup> Seventy years on, there is still discomfort and reluctance within the Welsh-Italian community to remember events that occurred during the Second World War. The well established Welsh-Italian society *Amici Val Ceno Galles* participated only laterally in the activities of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales, maintaining a more conservative approach. Mr Romeo Basini, president of the Welsh-Italian association and a founder member of the Committee for the memorial, objected in particular to the decision not to include the names of the Welsh Guards on the memorial, fearing a political reaction. In an interview for the oral history project related to the erection of the memorial, he himself admitted that originally he did not want to participate, but when he heard that someone else was trying to make political gain from it, he thought that it would be better if a Welsh Committee would do instead. (Romeo Basini, interview with Domenico Casetta, 13 December 2011, privately owned by the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales. This interview, like other interviews mentioned in this chapter, has been assimilated into the archives of St Fagans National History Museum, in Cardiff, Wales, and is in the process of being catalogued. All future references to these interviews will be given via the name of the interviewer and the date, followed by the phrase 'courtesy of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales').

<sup>13</sup> Ernst van Alphen, 'Second Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 27 (Summer 2006), 473-488 (p. 482).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 482.

Glasgow (2011), and London (2012) – as well as initiatives such as Phil Melia’s photographic exhibition *The Arandora Star*<sup>15</sup> and the exhibition *Wales Breaks its Silence ... From Memories to Memorial* (1 July – 4 October 2010)<sup>16</sup> curated by the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales, provided, for the first time since WWII, the necessary input for the creation of an ‘identifiable framework’. The creation of the memorial in Cardiff was welcomed and supported by the Welsh-Italian community as well as the local communities, various patrons and institutions. It was intended to be, and has acted as, a platform through which relatives of the victims and the survivors have been able to articulate not only their grief in an era where it is desirable to do so<sup>17</sup>, but also their memories of events leading to the Arandora Star. Ugolini, however, argues that the creation of memorials of the Arandora Star aims at creating ‘communal myths’, which do not take into consideration the diversity of Italian experience during the WWII. In her words:

the constant emphasis on the Arandora Star tragedy within communal discourses functions essentially to divert attention away from the diversity of Italian experience during the war and, in particular, the different choices made by Italian families in Scotland regarding pre-war membership of the fasci and the related question of military service in the British Forces.<sup>18</sup>

Fortier, for example, argues that the ‘the British Italian community defines itself by the grief over the lives lost in the Arandora Star’.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps this is due to the fact that when historians refer to the British Italian community there is often a tendency to refer to those generations of Italians who had migrated and settled in the UK before the Second World War. This has perhaps contributed to promote a rather homogeneous image of the Italians in the UK which is not entirely correct. As the Italian Memories in Wales oral history project (2009-2010) has amply demonstrated, the Italian community in Wales is far from being a homogeneous community. The project mainly concentrated on those Italians who came to Britain and Wales after the Second World War. This community does not share the same patterns of migration and experiences of those generations who came before the First and Second World Wars, and cannot therefore

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<sup>15</sup> More information and samples of this book and exhibition are provided by Phil Melia’s website [http://www.philmelia.com/articles\\_56634.html](http://www.philmelia.com/articles_56634.html) [Accessed on 20 May 2012].

<sup>16</sup> The exhibition will be later referred to as *Wales Breaks its Silence*.

<sup>17</sup> Joy Damousi, *Living With the Aftermath. Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-war Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Wendy Ugolini, *The Internal Enemy ‘Other’: Recovering the World War Two Narratives of Italian Scottish Women* in *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 24: 2 (2004), 137–158, (p. 141).

<sup>19</sup> Anne Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), p. 57.

define itself by the same powerful communal myths. Moreover, the Arandora Star is arguably the only aspect by which Italians in Wales define themselves, and, therefore, it is only one part of the jigsaw represented by the experience of Italian emigration to Britain. In Wales, the creation of the First National Memorial of the Arandora Star has actually generated new and previously unreleased accounts, and therefore has contributed to the unpacking of a diversity of experiences that otherwise would have been ignored, 'forgotten' and lost.

Another point that Ugolini makes, based on her experience, concerns the 'relative invisibility' of ethnic women amongst cultural representations of wartime experiences.<sup>20</sup>

More precisely, she writes that

The fact that it is often difficult for women who were children and young adults during the war to address their traumatic memories of that period means that some utilise the public discourse of male experience, internment and the Arandora Star tragedy, as a starting point for telling their own stories and, in some cases, to delay addressing more personal and painful events.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Ugolini stresses the fact that wartime memories within the Scottish Italian community tend to focus 'around a very distinct set of memories',<sup>22</sup> which are strongly male gendered, and produce a somewhat more limited and biased discourse. In her view, by excluding Scottish Italian women from this set of memories, the result is that

The past is repackaged into a singular elite narrative which suppresses debate about the meaning of fascism within the pre-war community and denies gender, class and generational difference amongst the Italians in Scotland.<sup>23</sup>

In Wales, what makes the Arandora Star Memorial different from other memorials is the wording on the memorial itself, which reads: 'Il Galles e la comunità italiana ricordano tutti coloro che perirono, i loro familiari e i superstiti' (Wales and the Italian community remember all those who perished, their family members and the survivors). By including the family members (women and children alike) the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales marked a breakthrough within the representation of wartime experience and communal memory, by publicising the intention to commemorate those who were affected by the Arandora Star, and to use the platform of the Arandora Star story as a starting point for telling other stories that have been repressed or 'delayed'.

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<sup>20</sup> Wendy Ugolini, 'The Internal Enemy 'Other'', p. 140.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 142-3.

Bearing in mind Ugolini's concern about the lack of an identifiable framework, it seems particularly relevant to refer to the idea of post-memory and the generational transmission of memory, which seems to challenge her idea that the role of memorials is merely to promote 'communal myths'. Marianne Hirsch highlights an increasing theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory and intergenerational acts of transfer<sup>24</sup>, not only within the traditional Holocaust studies, but also in contexts such as American slavery, the Dirty War in Argentina, or the Soviet and East European communist terror, and, by extension, the more recent contexts of the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and on the London Underground, or the genocides in Libya and Syria. Hirsch, like Ugolini, is particularly concerned about 'the break in transmission resulting from traumatic historical events'.<sup>25</sup> The Arandora Star is just another good example of this break of transmission. In a similar way, other scholars such as Nadine Fresco and Helen Epstein, who have also focused on post-memory and generational transmission of Holocaust memories, have recognised a discontinuity in the family dynamics and communication,<sup>26</sup> which can be described as 'indirect, consisting of silences and obliquities'.<sup>27</sup> For example, without specifically wanting to draw any comparison or similarity between the Holocaust and the Arandora Star, in Fresco's case study analysis of a group of Jews born in France between 1944 and 1948, and who are the children of survivors, Fresco highlights how, in their accounts, they are suffering from a lack of memories and a lack of continuity:

The mother's account always stopped at the same point, just before the war. Then they came to live in France. In changing place, they also changed time. The child grew up, but the stories did not change. And there wasn't much at home to feed or unmask that silence. Not a word had been mentioned about that dead brother or that dead sister. No photograph, no object had been left around to remember them by. Sometimes, children

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<sup>24</sup> Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 29 (Spring 2008), 103-128 (p. 104).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Helen Epstein and Nadine Fresco are amongst the pioneers who studied the dynamics of communications between first and second generation in relation to the Holocaust and trauma transmission. Both analyse the way in which children of the survivor relate to traumatic events such as the genocide of the Jews by Nazis. However, interestingly, Epstein does not use the term 'second generation' but simply refers to them as 'children of the survivors' or even as 'a group with special problems'. Similarly, Fresco uses the phrase 'children of survivors' and points out the fact that they are suffering from a lack of memories and a lack of continuity. For her, their suffering is a 'phantom pain, in which amnesia takes the place of memory', to use a phrase by the already mentioned Alphen, in 'Second-Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and Post-memory', p. 478. For a more comprehensive understanding of their work, see Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: conversations with sons and Daughters of Survivors* (New York: Putnam, 1979); and Nadine Fresco, 'Remembering the Unknown', *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 11(1984), 417-28.

<sup>27</sup> Ernst van Alphen, 'Second Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 27 (Summer 2006), 473-488 (p. 477).



had rummaged in their parents' papers, looking for what had been hidden from them, without actually knowing that anything had been hidden from them.<sup>28</sup>

The reality of the children rummaging through their parents' personal effects is symptomatic of the desire to build a bridge between children and their parents, and the attempt to establish continuity by means of an 'interpretative urge' in the absence of a more direct memory transmission.<sup>29</sup> In this respect Hirsch points out that the break in transmission 'necessitates forms of remembrance that reconnect and reembody an intergenerational memorial fabric that has been severed by catastrophe'.<sup>30</sup> It would seem that Hirsch recognises the importance of collective memory, as forms of remembrance such as the creation of memorials, exhibitions and oral history projects would help in re-establishing confidence in the transmission of memory from to generation to generation. For example, in her analysis of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1987), Hirsch highlights how the story of the Spiegelman/Zylberberg families, who lived through the devastating effects of the Holocaust, is a story 'told, drawn, by the son, who was born after the war'<sup>31</sup>; in other words by someone with no firsthand experience of the Holocaust. The author uses his father's oral testimony and personal artefacts, such as photographs and other memorabilia, showing how the story told can be 'decisively determined by familiar and cultural memory', and therefore, 'delayed, indirect, secondary', but nevertheless important.<sup>32</sup> In reference to the use of family photos and images, for example, she explains that:

within Spiegelman's larger narrative, they become eloquent witnesses of an unspeakable history, in themselves stubborn survivors of cultural genocide. Inserted into his graphic text, they offer him a representational structure adequate to the task of postmemory.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, in Wales, the written and oral testimonies produced by the children and grandchildren of the victims and the survivors of the Arandora Star constitute essentially a memory mediated by the author's ancestors who were, nevertheless 'determinative'<sup>34</sup>; and the creation of a memorial, the travelling exhibition and the oral history project are essential parts of the long process of reconstruction of a multifaceted, transgendered and transgenerational traumatic experience, an experience which,

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<sup>28</sup> Nadine Fresco, 'Remembering the Unknown', *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 11(1984), 417-28 (p. 418).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 477.

<sup>30</sup> Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', p. 110.

<sup>31</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> This is an expression used by Hirsch in *Family Frames*, p. 13.

precisely because its memory has been delayed, has been enriched by the eloquent discourse of ‘silence and obliquities’.

Taking into consideration the arguments proposed in this introduction, and in addressing the problematic position of Italians in Wales during the Second World War, this chapter will proceed with a thematic analysis of an exemplary body of written and oral testimonies. The analysis of the texts will be introduced by a brief excursus on how Italians in Wales were represented in the press and national culture during the Second World War, and particularly at the time of the Arandora Star tragedy. This excursus will look at whether there has been a shift or evolution in the way Italians were portrayed over the war period, and will provide the context in which to set the analysis of the main texts. As for the oral and written testimonies, the main concern is to explore the immediate outcome of the Arandora Star for survivors and the families of the victims, as well as its representation as memory. What are the reasons why such an event starts coming back in public memory after more than sixty years of silence? Who is remembering now?

### **Italians in Wales in the late 1930s-40s portrayed in local newspapers**

The articles presented in this section document the increasingly problematic position of Italians in Britain particularly in the late 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, with specific reference to the Italian community in Wales. They are divided into three sections which highlight three important moments in the escalation of events that characterised this relatively short period and the perception of the Italians in relation to this events: firstly, the anti-Fascist propaganda and the anti-Italian riots across Wales; secondly the arrest and internment of Italian enemy aliens; and thirdly the reports on the Arandora Star sinking.

An article on the *Western Mail*, on 3 January, 1938, accompanied by a cartoon ridiculing Mussolini reports: ‘War on the Air Has Started: Italy’s Fears and Threats’:

Hours before the inauguration of the BBC news service in Arabic, which is due at 6pm today, Italy is alluding to it as the start of a ‘war of the ether’ and a British ‘campaign of lies and calumnies against our country’.<sup>35</sup>

In this article, the British are accused of preparing lies ‘daily and deliberately to serve an organised manoeuvre of British Imperialism against Italy’. It would seem that the

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<sup>35</sup> ‘War on the Air Has Started: Italy’s Fears and Threats’, *Western Mail*, 3 January 1938, p. 1.

reaction of the Italian press to the first BBC broadcast programme in Arabic was dictated by the fact that ‘Italy is one of the most active nations in the world broadcasting to foreign countries’.<sup>36</sup> The article stresses the contrast between the fact that Italian broadcasts were using several languages (‘Italian, English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Hungarian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Arabic and Esperanto’), and the fact that ‘the BBC has never broadcast news in a language other than British’. The article clearly shows the strained relationship between the two countries in the period before Mussolini’s declaration of war, and seems to be dictated by the Fascist anti-British propaganda.

Another article, published on 26 January, 1938 in the *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, reports on the war in Abyssinia. Italians are described as brutal and infamous, deserters, betrayers and spies on one side, but also desperate and victims of the regime on the other, as these examples demonstrate: ‘the ceaseless activity of the infamous Italian Air Force which still continues to use bombs and poisonous gas’; ‘groups of Italian soldiers who have deserted are also found in the ranks of the Eritrean troops which have helped to reinforce the resisting forces’; ‘They have declared that there is general discontent among the Italians compelled to stay in Ethiopia, but that the least manifestation of it is suppressed with unheard of brutality’; ‘Spies, highly paid by the regime, scatter terror, and hatred among the Italians themselves. Barbarous acts on the Ethiopians are considered as inherent in the “civilising mission”’; ‘Suicides among Italians have become for some months past a frightful epidemic’;<sup>37</sup> Italians come across as weak, not to be trusted, and like beasts that need to be contained, controlled, and commanded.

The escalation of the tension between Britain and Italy culminates when Mussolini takes the decision to declare war on Britain and France. On the front page of the *Western Mail*, on 11 June, 1940, a short article entitled ‘Italy cowardly Policy of Plunder’ (ironically written by a diplomatic correspondent) uses offensive and scornful language aimed at deriding and diminishing Mussolini’s power. The correspondent depicts Mussolini and Italians as subjugated by Hitler, and as betrayers in the fight for civilisation. The article obviously promotes the righteousness, high morals and pride of

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<sup>36</sup> ‘War on the Air Has Started: Italy’s Fears and Threats’, *Western Mail*, 3 January 1938, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Italian Losses 6,000’, *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 26 January 1938, p. 7.

the British government against the barbarian and opportunist attitude of Germans and the cowardice of Italy:

So long as Italians are harnessed to the German machine they must expect to be treated on the same footing as Germans. In the struggle between Western civilisation and the pagan hordes of Germany the Fascist Government has waited so as to intervene at the moment of greatest embarrassment to the Allies. It is hoped by this unchivalrous and cowardly policy to secure safely for Italy such plunders as Germany graciously permits her to have.<sup>38</sup>

Following Mussolini's declaration of war, reports on arrests and internment of Italians in Wales became more and more frequent, and Italians were seen as liars, betrayers and untrustworthy. In Wales, where Italian shops and Italian ice-cream vendors had been dotting villages and towns since the end of the nineteenth century, local newspapers of the time reported on several rounds-up and incidents which took place less than 24 hours after Mussolini's declaration of war. On June 11, 1940 the *South Wales Evening Post* announced that 'Scattered in little shops and businesses which many of them have made their homes for years, they await the severance of ties that must follow his act'.<sup>39</sup> The contrast between the phrase 'many of them have made their homes for years' and the phrase 'the severance of ties that must follow' creates a dramatic effect suggesting the inevitable consequences of Mussolini's decision and the resolution of intentions. This is a provocative upfront statement instigating reactions amongst the masses as the article that follows describes the fury of the local demonstrators in Swansea against the Italians, resulting in shop windows being smashed up and shops being barricaded.<sup>40</sup> A number of British contractors also protested against the damage to their properties (most of the shops were rented from British owners), while many shop windows displayed announcements such as 'This is a British firm', or even 'We are Swiss', in an attempt to declare either their belonging or their neutrality. The most violent reactions against the Italians was reported in the Swansea area: 'Since last evening the Swansea Police have been engaged in rounding up all male Italians and quelling raids on Italian shops which are now closed. Today windows were broken and attempts made to pillage goods'.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, on a number of occasions, the police dispersed the mass of people who gathered outside Italian shops in the Grangetown area of Cardiff, while two shop windows were smashed in the Cardiff docks area, and other cafés were boycotted in

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<sup>38</sup> 'Italy Cowardly Policy of Plunder', *Western Mail*, 11 June 1940, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> 'Comb-out of Italians in Britain: Crowds Raid and Smash Shops', *South Wales Evening Post*, 11 June 1940, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> 'Swansea Anti-Italian Demonstrations', *South Wales Evening Post*, 11 June 1940, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> 'Big Round-up of South Wales Italians', *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 11 June 1940, p. 3.

Nelson, in the valleys.<sup>42</sup> In one instance, when a bus arrived to pick up the Italians held at the various police stations around the valleys, a witness reported that the detainees appeared in ‘quite cheerful spirit’, which probably confirms the fact that Italians were taken away from their families without knowing that they were going to be interned and deported outside the country.<sup>43</sup>

These incidents show to various extents the reaction of the local population, and witness the swift change in the way Italians were now perceived: from hard working people who introduced ice-cream and a new way of socialising outside the traditional pub drinking culture, they became, literally overnight, potentially dangerous characters and a threat to the country. A section called ‘Our London Letter’ published in the *Western Mail*, summarises the extent of the perceived menace caused by the Italian presence, and the anger of the local populations across the UK. The section comments that the Italians in London are regarded as ‘the largest group of foreigners’ (particularly in the area of Soho in the West End, and Clerkenwell called Little Italy):

Immediately one goes there a foreign atmosphere is felt. Italian names on the shops, Italian faces inside and in the streets, Italian children at play. In Soho Italian youths from the most numerous section of workers in the West End, catering trade, while in Clerkenwell one finds Italian industrial workers, among them craftsmen attached to the building trade, and a few to engineering.<sup>44</sup>

It is clear that with Mussolini declaring war on Britain, and such a tangible presence of Italians in London, there was a sense of being under attack from the centre, and that the danger may/will spread to the rest of the country. Significantly, the incidents reported in London echo those witnessed in Wales, showing the overall level of tension and insecurity in both the local and the Italian communities. In some cases, Italian shop owners and restaurateurs in London are reported taking their signs of Italianness down, and displaying signboards about their Britishness, or anglicising their names: ‘This firm is entirely British’. In some instances, these changes would be a pretext for reactions such as this:

A man wearing the badge of the Old Contemptibles, shouted to a man in a shop, “If you are British and not afraid, why don’t you pull up your shutters?” The man came out, heated words were exchanged, and the cry came from a large crowd, “Smash his shop up”.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> ‘Big Round-up of South Wales Italians’, *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 11 June 1940, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Our London Letter : Allies not Taken Unawares by Italy’s War Decision’, *Western Mail*, 11 June 1940, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Big Round-up of South Wales Italians’, *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 11 June 1940, p. 3.

Whereas the peak of hostility and prejudice amongst local communities coincided with the arrest and internment of Italians, and was in a way ‘justified’ by the fear of living amongst traitors, the peak of unexpected judgement and utter prejudice, clearly influenced by the anti-Fascist and anti-Italian propaganda, was reached with the reports of the sinking of the *Arandora Star*. Although the ship sank in the early hours of 2 July, 1940, the first news about the sinking, and therefore of the scale of the tragedy, started to appear in Welsh newspapers only two days later. What is rather disturbing is the fact that in spite of the high number of human losses, the tragedy is used to counterbalance the image of Italians seen as violent, irrational and selfish, with the image of valorous and self-sacrificing British. On 4 July, the *South Wales Echo and Evening Express* submitted an article describing the aliens’ desperate attempt to escape. The article is told from the point of view of a survivor, Horace Millward, originally from Bargoed<sup>46</sup>, who was a member of the crew. Initially, Millward reports that he and his mates had reached the deck to get hold of the boats, but found the gangway ‘blocked by German and Italian aliens’ implying that the aliens were encumbering the passage and should not have been there. More precisely, he points out that ‘The cause of this turmoil was that the aliens completely lost their heads, and, although everything possible was made to control them, it proved hopeless’. To support his observation, he also adds that: ‘One sergeant took control of a boat and kept the aliens back, otherwise the boat would have been swamped’. Mr Millward constructs his argument using the language of racism and homophobia towards the aliens. In the second part of the article, however, we witness a sudden change in the tone of the report about the rescue operations. The author is now praising the British Army, and adopting a tone of hope. The language used to describe the British Army expresses organisation, camaraderie, generosity, friendliness and gratitude, as this passage reveals:

I felt confident that an aeroplane would appear and my hope was justified because one came over about three hours after the ship had gone down. The pilot dropped a message “Help coming soon”, circled around and dropped his lifeboat to which were attached tins of bully beef and the few cigarettes he had. There was also a message inside the cigarette packet: “All the best boys”.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> ‘Welsh Survivor, Mad Panic and Alien Ship’, *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 4 July 1940, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

A few lines below, another passage offers a contrast between the despair and uneasiness of those on board the sinking ship and the comfort and caring attitude of the sailors on the rescuing ship:

The sailors on board the ship gave us all the clothing, cigarettes and food they could spare. We landed at a Scottish port on Wednesday morning where we were accommodated at a sailors' home. We gave the ship three good hearty cheers before she sailed again.<sup>48</sup>

Another article on the same page reports the official version by the Air Ministry News Service:

The Arandora Star was found sinking by a Sunderland flying boat of the R.A.F. Coastal Command. [...] The crew of the Sunderland dropped first-aid outfits, all the food they had on board, including emergency rations, and all their cigarettes and tobacco which they placed in waterproof packets and attached to their life-jackets to air to act as buoys. The aircraft then went in search of assistance and found a destroyer which it guided to the scene.<sup>49</sup>

The emphasis in the reports of both Mr Millward and the Air Ministry News Service is on the promptness, efficiency and generosity of the British forces. So far, in all these articles, very little emphasis has been given on the rescue of alien internees, and the language used to refer to them suggests further discrimination, prejudice and marginalisation: "As they rushed the boat with the idea that every man for himself, soldiers and crew had to threaten".<sup>50</sup> The following passage is a more blatant example of the hostile attitude towards the internees, in particular the Germans:

I even saw one German who seemed to have more sense than the rest take a rifle and club his compatriots. On the lifeboat the internees were selfish, too, and when a plane dropped bread and bully beef they grabbed it and a few started to wolf down between them as fast as they could. Soldiers had to seize it from them before it could be shared evenly between us.<sup>51</sup>

The language used is that of violence: on one hand, the violent and extreme attitude of the Germans using a rifle to gather and control their group, and on the other, a taste for violence from the survivor (British), who seems to agree on representing and treating the internees as some sort of 'wild beasts' (club, selfish, wolf). Other passages underline the attitude of the Germans on the night before the incident, when some German Nazis hung a swastika flag in the ballroom; and finally how 200 Germans who were in the lower deck must have gone down with the ship. Surprisingly, nothing is mentioned about the Italians on board, which is quite interesting if we consider that on board there

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<sup>48</sup> 'Welsh Survivor, Mad Panic and Alien Ship', *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 4 July 1940, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> 'Flying Boat Found Them', *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 4 July 1940, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

were 734 Italian male internees against 479 German male internees and 86 German prisoners of war.

Other features in the Welsh papers reveal a certain complacent attitude towards the 'self-inflicted pain' of the Germans who torpedoed a ship with fellow-countrymen on board: 'Nazi sea frightfulness was turned against their own countrymen'.<sup>52</sup> The statements and the general tone of the article reveal the language of Anti-German propaganda in putting all the blame on Germans, and even showing the animosity of the Germans towards the Italians, their allies: 'Panic broke out among the passengers, and the Germans swept the Italians aside in a frantic dash to the lifeboats'.<sup>53</sup> Another statement from two soldiers (survivors) is constructed to suggest the irrationality and selfishness of the internees:

We cursed the U-boat, but not so much as did the Germans and Italians on board, who were almost ferocious in their denunciation of this type of warfare. The internees, particularly the Italians, made a wild scramble for the lifeboats, pushing everyone aside in their eagerness. The Italians and the Germans behaved, said one Londoner, just as one would expect them to behave. They thought of their own skins first. They fought each other in a mad scramble for the boats.<sup>54</sup>

By contrast, the bravery and good conduct of the British is highlighted and praised several times in the article: 'A British ship brought the survivors to port'; 'As the ship went down the captain and several of the ship's officers were standing on the bridge and on the deck. Several of them, we fear, went down with the vessel'.<sup>55</sup>

Interestingly, sixty-nine years after these events, Mr John Roberts from Llanelli and Mr Evan Morgan Jones from Merthyr Tydfil, two Welsh Guards who survived the Arandora Star, agreed to be interviewed for the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales exhibition and oral history project. Mr Roberts was 89 years old at the time of the interview, while Mr Jones was 92, and they have both passed away now.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the reports in the newspapers, their accounts recount their own personal experience in a non-judgemental and non-resentful way: the tone of their discourse is peaceful, at times

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<sup>52</sup> 'Internee Ship on Way to Canada', *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 4 July 1940, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> As founder member of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales, the author of this thesis personally interviewed Mr John Roberts and Mr Evan Morgan Jones. Both survivors met for the first time on 2 July 2010, at the unveiling ceremony of the First National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales, at St David's Cathedral in Cardiff. Mr Roberts passed away on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2011; Mr Jones passed away on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2012.



emotional, but overall objective. Mr Roberts, for example, limits himself to stating that he grew up with Italians, and knew Italian families. Like many others, he felt bitter when Italy declared war on Britain. However, he confesses that the ship was painted like a battleship and did not carry the Red Cross sign, which made it a plausible target for the German submarine. Mr Roberts also states that on the ship he did not know or recognise any of the Italians he grew up with:

*Bruna Chezzi:* What memories do you have of events from 1940 onwards when Italy declared war, before the Arandora Star?

*Mr Roberts:* We were bitter, stabbed us in the back. Then they said they had smashed up some shops in South Wales, so we were a bit bitter.

*Bruna Chezzi:* Did you know any Italians before?

*Mr Roberts:* I knew them all, Graziani, Cecco and all. They used to go to the Catholic School and I used to live by there.

*Bruna Chezzi:* You grew up with them? And did you know any Italians on board the Arandora Star?

*Mr Roberts:* None of them...The unfortunate thing for the Arandora Star was that the sub met her by chance. The sub was on its way to Germany and had one torpedo left, saw the Arandora Star through the periscope, she was not painted white, she did not have a red cross, they assumed she was a merchantman and fired the one torpedo that they had left. In peace time ships like that were painted blue. They painted her grey in wartime.<sup>57</sup>

On the subject of the internees and their behaviour when the ship was torpedoed, Mr Roberts simply points out the fact that they were elderly people ('They looked like my grandparents'), and that 'people were running everywhere'. Here is his account:

*Bruna Chezzi:* Did the people on the Arandora Star realise what was happening, that they were torpedoed?

*Mr Roberts:* We knew it was a torpedo. It was terrible. People were running everywhere ... I could see the nearest lifeboat, but I'd never get there and someone told me, "your best chance is in the water", and I eventually jumped in. We had these 'rubbish' lifeboats, jump in them and you'd break your neck with them. Then I heard a terrible noise, the ship went down after 20 minutes. I was in the water a long time. Someone picked me up and put me in a lifeboat and there was an old man there, a very old man. He had his coat on and his suit and he looked as though he'd saved his personal belongings. He put his hand on my head. "How old are you boy?", "I'm 19". Then about 6 o'clock in the night this Canadian destroyer came, St Laurent, and we got picked up then and they had a basket of rum and plenty of baccy [?]. Then we landed in Greenock in Scotland.<sup>58</sup>

Mr Roberts' memory appeared very lucid and brought to light many images of those tragic hours. Similarly, Mr Evan Morgan Jones recalls how just before the torpedo struck, he and his friend Jackie had made friends with one of the stewards on board the

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<sup>57</sup> John Roberts, interview with Brunna Chezzi, 17 September 2009, courtesy of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid..

ship. When the ship was sinking, he recalls his attempt to save his life and that of his friend Jackie:

*Mr Jones:* We were all different regiments. Didn't know where we were going. Well, we went up to Liverpool. Nobody said anything, in those days, they couldn't. We went out on the Arandora Star and we were on our way. We had set sail by the morning. I was talking to Jackie and one of the stewards and he said it was very quiet on that route 2 yards in and boom. A shell had hit the side of the ship and the next thing was "ABANDON SHIP"! So Jackie came on drag and had to run and he said I can't swim and I said there was plenty of water out there and I had to push him over and he was terrified. What we did was we had two planks one under each arm. I was in the front, he was in the back and paddling as we went along. There was a ship/lifeboat trying to get in but couldn't because the ship was going down.

*Bruna Chezzi:* How long did you stay in the water? Quite a few hours I suppose. Were you rescued then by the Canadian destroyer St Laurent?

*Mr Jones:* What it was I pushed Jackie over and I went over after him and we had two planks under each arm and we could see there was a boat with some of the boys on it outside the circle of the ship and we wanted to get out of there because the suction of the ship would take us down with it. So it was better then to get out of that and eventually we could see this lifeboat and we got to that. Jackie? I left? He was "so so" to his own. I couldn't say exactly how long and came back then to the destroyer but I lost sight of Jackie, and the captain came on to me and said, "you are looking pretty tidy". And it was the last I heard of him.

*Bruna Chezzi:* Do you remember anything about those people on the lifeboat? Any idea of who they were?

*Mr Jones:* No, it was all mixed up there.<sup>59</sup>

Besides the accounts of the two survivors, a more radically different version of the facts is provided ultimately by the 'Memorandum Relating the Disaster of the SS Arandora Star', a document held at the Manx National Heritage Library at Camp Douglas, on the Isle of Man. The document was written as a joint effort by a group of internees, representatives of the different groups of enemy aliens who survived the Arandora Star disaster.<sup>60</sup> It is a collective testimony for posterity which contrasts significantly with the fragmented picture provided by newspapers. At the beginning of the detailed report, for example, there is a list of the provenance of the enemy aliens who were on board, and it is interesting to note that enemy aliens are categorised by nationality; but the narrative of the document as a whole emphasises commonality of experience, as does the use of the word 'disaster'. 'Disaster' also connotes the beginning of a narrative of victimhood; and the use of the formal word 'memorandum' shows how from the outset, just a day or so after the events, there is a realisation and fear that the events may be forgotten or misrepresented. The document was actually significantly retyped by Mr B.

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<sup>59</sup> Evan Morgan Jones, interview with Bruna Chezzi, 19 February 2010, courtesy of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales.

<sup>60</sup> 'Memorandum Relating the Disaster of the 'SS Arandora Star', Manx National Heritage Library, 10 July 1940, (MS 09647). The document was signed by B. Fehle for the Swanwick camp group, C. Kroning for the Seaton camp group, Kreuzer for the Paignton camp group, and R. Vicki- Borghese for the Italian group, mainly from the Bury camp.

Fehle on 10 July 1940, a gesture symbolic of this fear and the intention to salvage the memory of the disaster. Interestingly, in the document we read that after the ship was torpedoed,

Many people, especially sick and older ones, and those from the lower part of the ship could not reach the open decks or could not make up their mind to jump overboard. The majority of these stayed on board and finally went down with the ship, clinging to the railings, and in this way many lives were lost. There were many Italians between them, as they were mostly of middle age or older.<sup>61</sup>

The last paragraph of the document also presents a statement from the representatives of each group of internees who are keen to demystify the reports on the animosity between the Italians and the Germans, and between the internees and the crew members of the ship:

We wish to put on record that all reports about unpleasant incidents of fighting between the shipwrecked during the period of rescue are untrue and lack basis of foundation. The ship's crew and the internees assisted each other in a most friendly and helpful spirit, and when taking people into the boats from rafts, wreckage, or those who were swimming, no differentiation whatsoever was made.<sup>62</sup>

In sum, the articles presented in this section reflect the predominant interest about the fate of the British on board rather than the fate of the aliens, and about the chivalry of the British Armed Forces. Overall, they are highly politicised in the sense that they are using the propaganda machine against enemy aliens, who are portrayed (especially the Germans) within a communal discourse. The evidence shows that the media tended to generalise and exaggerate the irrational behaviour of the aliens. They ignored, for example, the fact that there was insufficient provision of lifeboats on board; and no mention was made about the fact that many of the passengers could not swim, especially the Italians, coming as they did from mountainous areas in Italy.

## **Written and oral testimonies**

### **The extent of the anti-Italian demonstrations**

This section provides a thematic approach to the analysis of written and oral testimonies produced by the relatives of the victims and of the survivors of the Arandora Star, mainly second and third generations. Some of the people who donated stories for the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales booklet and exhibition also agreed to be interviewed by members of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Committee. As a sort of preliminary consideration, it is worth mentioning the fact that all written and

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<sup>61</sup> 'Memorandum Relating the Disaster of the 'SS Arandora Star', Manx National Heritage Library, 10 July 1940, (MS 09647).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

oral testimonies gathered are in English. The reasons behind this choice are mainly practical, as the majority of the interviewees are not fluent in Italian or cannot speak Italian at all. However, an effort was made to translate some of the stories published in the booklet into Italian and Welsh for the exhibition *Wales Breaks Its Silence*, including the two interviews with the Welsh Guards. This was also a requirement of the Heritage Lottery who sponsored both initiatives (booklet and exhibition), in order to promote diversification and inclusion. Moreover, it has to be pointed out that the interviews do not exist in written form, but have been transcribed by myself, with the exception of the two interviews with the Welsh Guards which were transcribed by Ms Margo Giovannone, former member of the same Committee (now deceased). Finally, the oral testimonies are now entrusted to the St. Fagans National History Museum in Cardiff.

In the already mentioned commemorative booklet, the participants recall the difficulties at different levels faced during the war when the news broke that Italy was at war with Britain. George Hill, for example, tells the story of how his grandfather Michele Di Marco came from Picinisco, Italy, to Swansea for economic reasons. At the time Mussolini declared war on Britain, the family had a shop in Plasmarl, Swansea, and lived in Swansea. The night he was taken away, policemen were very aggressive: ‘officers were rifling through personal possessions removing items and any money they could find’. In the meantime, the crowd of neighbours had gathered outside the premises ‘watching and shouting obscenities to your family like you are petty criminals ... yet no crime had been committed?’. Hill also points out how circumstances dramatically and suddenly changed the perception and attitude towards his family: ‘People who once ate and drank in your café now turning on you for no apparent reason, smashing windows and looting your home.’<sup>63</sup>

A similar scene is described by Maria Jones, née Tambini, in her memories of the night her father, Giovanni Tambini, was arrested in Newport:

The windows of the café had all been smashed; the noise now was from hundreds of people outside shouting. [...] The shouting was getting louder. Angelo and I hid in the curtains and looked out, the café was on a junction of four roads so it was a big area. Hundreds were shouting “Bring them out, we will kill them”.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, eds., *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet* (Llanelli: Mike Clarke Printing, 2010), p. 32.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Significantly, Mrs Jones points out the strategic location of the café ‘on a junction of four roads’ which in those circumstances turned out to be a particularly vulnerable one, transforming the premises into an easy target for the angry demonstrators.

In another testimony, Andrew Rossi of Swansea tells how his grandfather, Giovanni Cavalli, had a premonition that something was going to happen, and sent his wife to the Moruzzis in Neath who were good family friends. Mr Rossi recounts that when the policemen came into the shop, they arrested his grandfather in front of Andrew Rossi’s mother, who was sixteen at the time. They went through the shop taking anything that could be of help in spying for the enemy:

My mother stayed in the shop and sometimes [interruption] again, as I was told, in midday two police officers came down to arrest my grandfather. As well as arresting my grandfather in front of his sixteen year old daughter, they went through the shop like basically like men possessed turning out drawers, taking binoculars, [break, phone rings], taking out letters, binoculars, even the radio, took everything which they thought could help Italians and Germans during wartime.<sup>65</sup>

Mr Cavalli was taken to Neath Police Station, transferred to Cardiff, and later to Old Mill, Greenock. He was not the only one who had this experience in the family: his uncles Giuseppe Rossi (about thirty years old) and Luigi Rossi (thirty-two years old) were also taken, while their mother was asked to leave the shop and go and live somewhere seven miles away from Swansea. Andrew Rossi’s father was spared as, unlike the others, he was born in Wales. The three men were then transferred to Liverpool, on 1 July 1940, and were put on the *Arandora Star*: Giovanni Cavalli survived the sinking of the ship, while Luigi Rossi and Giuseppe Rossi perished.<sup>66</sup>

Another testimony from the Minoli sisters focuses on the harshness and abusive behaviour of the police towards their mother, who was refused permission to travel outside the radius in order to buy stock for the shop business:

Our mother also suffered – she had a young child to care for alone, but anti-Italian prejudice also extended to her and she was not allowed to travel beyond a five mile radius. On one occasion, an appeal for a permit to allow my mother to travel further to acquire stock to keep the business going was met with refusal and her being told by an unsympathetic police sergeant that she was lucky that her husband hadn’t been shot. These were tense and uncertain times, but the comment was none-the-less unnecessarily savage.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Andrew Rossi, interview with George Hill, 31 May 2011, courtesy of the *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales*.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, eds., *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet*, p. 32.

The language used in this passage contrasts significantly with the language used in the newspapers to portray the good conduct of the self-sacrificing British Forces. Only a few testimonies provided examples of a more friendly and sympathetic attitude of the police and the locals, who, in some cases, tried to support the families who had been deprived of their men. For example, Royston Miller of Swansea points out that on the night his grandfather was arrested and interned, the policeman, who knew his mother, apologised to her, and asked her to pack something in a small suitcase because he would take him to Swansea police station.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Mary Strinati, whose father had a coffee shop in Treherbert, tells that when her father returned from the internment camp on the Isle of Man, ‘his friends and customers had missed him and could not believe how he had been treated. After all, he was only a hard working café owner.’<sup>69</sup>

These testimonies clearly present a victim’s narrative; showing how shops were vandalised beyond recognition – premises being looted and stock destroyed – and how attacks were carried out by customers, neighbours and friends rather than by ‘a faceless mob’. These accounts contrast with the reports of the round-up of Italians and of the anti-Italian demonstrations in Welsh newspapers, where the narrative portrays Italians as criminals and perpetrators. It would seem that some of the details confessed in these testimonies were conveniently suppressed in the newspapers, to give more emphasis to the negative portrayal of Italians. This can be seen as a way to further support and justify the righteousness of the anti-Italian propaganda of the time. In this sense, the added details provided in the memories of the children and grandchildren of the victims attach a further dimension (a more humane one) to the dramatic turn of events of that period.

### **Estrangement and deprivation of family bond.**

What emerges even from the stories highlighted so far is an overt sense of uneasiness in recalling the night of the arrest of Italians, caused by the sudden irruption and enforced disruption of the family ménage and dynamics. This section, in particular, focuses on the enforced bodily and emotional detachment from the actual space of the household and the virtual space of the family. As memories unfold, the narrators disclose a kind of nostalgia experienced after geographical and physical displacement, as they attempt to

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<sup>68</sup> Royston Miller, interview with George Hill, 23 September 2011, courtesy of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales.

<sup>69</sup> Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, eds., *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet*, p. 33.

make sense of what happened, and regain a sense of identity continuity through the recognition and redefining of a shared past. This confirms the role and utility of memorials such as the Arandora Star Memorial in Wales in the process of formation of cultural memory.

What these texts reveal is that the events and circumstances that determined the treatment of Italians reinforce an embedded sense of Italianness within the Italian immigrant community. In accordance with Ugolini, they equally reinforce a sense of ‘otherness’ and not belonging. Paradoxically, though, they also reveal a “fractured identity” coinciding with a sense of cultural loss and a consequent need to recuperate and reaffirm a sense of belonging. Within the Italian community in Wales, cultural loss is represented not only by an enforced cultural division between Wales and Italy, but also by the difficulty of being Italian during that time; Italian being synonymous with ‘Fascist’ and therefore potentially subversive. At the same time, cultural loss was equally represented by an enforced disruption and fracture within the family, which in many cases was deprived of their men. For example, Mary Basini and her twin brother were only eight months old, and never really knew their father Bartolomeo: ‘How we missed the father we knew. I have his photographs, but they are a poor substitute for not having had him with us’.<sup>70</sup> Bartolomeo lived in Treherbert, was arrested, and eventually perished on the Arandora Star. In his interview, Romeo Basini, Mary’s cousin, confesses that at the time Mussolini declared war on Britain, while his uncle remained in Wales, he was in Italy, where his father had sent his family because ‘he thought that it would be safer there than here, in Wales’.<sup>71</sup> Strangely, in spite of the fact that Mr Basini was in Italy while the rest of his extended family was in Wales, and the fact that his uncle Bartolomeo died on the ship while his three brothers survived, he felt the need to point out that ‘The family were not separated and stayed together during throughout the war’.<sup>72</sup> Mr Basini’s statement, which would seem to challenge the idea of the enforced disruption within the family, is better to be understood in the light of his controversial role within the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Committee.<sup>73</sup> The statement is symptomatic of the extent to which war in general, and internment and the Arandora Star in particular, impacted on the Italian community in Wales. These events

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<sup>70</sup> Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, eds., *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet*, p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> Romeo Basini, interview with Domenico Casetta, 13 December 2011, courtesy of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> See explanation in note 11.

created an embedded sense of uneasiness and fear of being judged and a discrimination that remains to the present day.

For Italian immigrants, family, like religion, is one of the major signifiers of Italian cultural identity, representing continuity in the dialectical interchange of movement and attachment typical of the migration process. The way in which the displaced defend their culture and identity in the accounts of the war years is maintained by the emphasis on the sudden deprivation of family bond, security and affection caused by the arrest of the husbands/fathers. Emphasis is also given on the role of women and children in continuing to offer a sense of place and support for the family and the business. In the following passage, for example, George Hill expresses his resentment for women and children, who were also victims of what he calls ‘this atrocity’, when policemen came to arrest his grandfather:

Can you imagine ... being woken up in the middle of the night [...] children sound asleep woken up by the noise of banging and raised hostile voices. [...] Still sleepy, my grandmother opening the door to aggressive policemen who force their way in to your home, telling you they were to arrest your husband; purely for being Italian? [...] Can you imagine the chaos, trying to console hysterical children, yet yourself feeling vulnerable, scared, confused and distressed. [...] my grandmother was not told where they were taking my grandfather. The next thing she heard of her husband, after that fateful night, was that he had been drowned on the Arandora Star.<sup>74</sup>

While expressing great admiration for the role that women played ‘having to be mother and father to their children’<sup>75</sup>, he lets out his feelings calling insistently for the sympathetic understanding of the reader. This is revealed in the repeated use of the question ‘can you imagine?’ throughout the story stimulating engagement with the reader. Hill’s story conveys a strong sense of despair and uncertainty in his grandfather’s family, having to depend on the authorities and the unfolding of events. At the same time, it conveys the sense of estrangement and vulnerability of being ‘unwanted’ enemy aliens and not knowing what will become of their beloved ones.

In another story, Margo Giovannone from Miskin recounts the story of her grandfather Francesco Giovannone, a survivor of the Arandora Star. Her account takes the form of a semi-bucolic scene of traditional Italian family life in which she presents herself as a happy little girl in the company of her grandparents, spoilt by her grandmother’s culinary delights and her grandfather’s attentions. These happy memories are suddenly

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<sup>74</sup> Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, eds., *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet*, p. 32.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.



interrupted and juxtaposed by the memory of emptiness, fear and confusion when her grandfather was taken away:

A strong, proud and clean man, calling me to dance, his little princess. The kitchen, no coins allowed on this snow-white cloth. Myself crying if Nonna hadn't made this little girl's favourite pasta dish that Sunday evening. Apples, ice-cream and chocolate if good. Could always get around my Nonno. The day came, taken away from his chosen home to a far-off island without explanations, taken from his family and Ton-Pentre by old 'friends' who had happily accepted cigarettes and boxes of chocolates for their wives, in the good old days. The crying, the listening to the radio, fear in their eyes ... a family broken.<sup>76</sup>

Giovannone's story, like other similar stories, highlights the sudden change in the nature of the relationship with neighbours, once customers and good friends, who now took on the role of perpetrators of injustices. Her testimony is above all a good example of how events during WWII changed and interrupted the natural flow of relationship dynamics within the family.

In the hostile climate surrounding the Italians in the UK during the Second World War, family seemed to incarnate the psycho-social milieu par excellence as in times of confusion, disorientation and uncertainty about the future, family represented the immediate environment providing reassurance. Psychiatrists who have studied the psychology of place and displacement have highlighted that 'intimate knowledge of the immediate environment is essential to survival' as it constitutes a secure sense of belonging.<sup>77</sup> Displacement caused by internment and the Arandora Star represented disruption of this security and of the emotional connections between familiarity, attachment and identity embodied in the family. In their accounts, Hill and Giovannone, especially, have interpreted this rupture alternating happy and peaceful family memories with memories of enforced division and alienation, and implying a sense of nostalgia for those happy memories.

### **Arandora Star: the silence of an 'unmentionable incident'.**

In her book, Ugolini frequently highlights how the Arandora Star, as well as the arrest and the internment of Italians, were traumatic events that many members of the Scottish-Italian community still find uncomfortable to talk about, seventy years on.<sup>78</sup> In Wales, too, the Arandora Star was for many families 'the unmentionable incident'.

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<sup>76</sup> The story can be found on the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales website: [http://www.arandorastarwales.us/Arandora\\_Star\\_Memorial\\_Fund\\_in\\_Wales/More\\_Stories....html](http://www.arandorastarwales.us/Arandora_Star_Memorial_Fund_in_Wales/More_Stories....html) [Accessed on 20 May 2012].

<sup>77</sup> Mindy Thompson Fullilove, 'Psychiatric Implications of Displacement: Contributions from the Psychology of Place', *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 153 (December 1996), 1516-1523, (p.1518).

<sup>78</sup> Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other'*, p. 10.

After the displacement caused by the internment of the men, and the relocation of women away from the coast, the silence that descended upon wartime and the Arandora Star became the symbol of another post-war displacement (displacement=disarticulation) in that it caused a rupture of the natural flow of family and community bonds.<sup>79</sup> Ironically, precisely the silence on events that caused the enforced division between two communities (the Italian immigrant community and the host community) became, especially after the wartime period, a bonding factor, a mutual but unofficial silent agreement that reconciled offenders and offended. In this respect, Andrew Rossi explains that his mother, now eighty-seven, was very angry when she became aware through the Red Cross about what happened, and cannot forgive even now what Churchill did. He highlights how the families were separated during the war, and how, after the war even when things appeared to return to normality, they did not talk about the tragedy:

*Mr Hill:* How did they feel then when this happened?

*Mr Rossi:* My mother, eighty-seven, when she found out through the Red Cross, and to her age now, she is angry, and will never forgive Churchill, and I think if Churchill was alive, and my mother got older you can image what's going to happen.

*Mr Hill:* Were they separated?

*Mr Rossi:* Yes! [Mr Rossi became sad and paused]

*Mr Hill:* How were they during the war? What happened after it ended?

*Mr Rossi:* I think after it ended, I think things went more or less back to normal, back behind the counter, but once again, according to what my mother said, she'll carry hate for Churchill until the day she dies and she will never forget what happened but life would go on.

*Mr Hill:* Did anyone talk about the tragedy of the Arandora Star?

*Mr Rossi:* Not in the family, they said, in the beginning, I think whether they were ashamed, or hurt, or really bitter, or dismissed loss of their family, I don't know, but they first I heard about it fully I probably was in my late forties, and I think it locked [?] a lot for my generation.<sup>80</sup>

Various factors have to be taken into consideration that have equally determined embarrassment on both the British authorities and the Italian community, and humiliation, resentment and voluntary repression of events within the Italian immigrant community throughout the UK. Relatives of Italian enemy aliens who were interned and destined on the fatal ship suffered in some cases the loss of two or more family members. There are many arguments surrounding the controversial way in which enemy aliens were crammed on the Arandora Star. In spite of the fact that the ship was carrying civilians, it was painted in battleship grey, covered with barbed wired, armed, and did not display the Red Cross sign, thus breaking the Geneva Convention. Moreover, some

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<sup>79</sup> By 'community bonds', I mean not only the bond with the Italian community, but also the bond between the Italian community and the host community.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Rossi, interview with George Hill.

aliens were inexplicably locked in the lower deck of the ship. Various sources also report the maltreatment of the survivors who were temporarily housed in a disused factory in Greenock before resuming their journey to the Tatura Camp in Australia on the SS Dunera. Once again they were crammed on the ship, and once again en-route they suffered torpedo incidents and maltreatment from some of the guards. The incident of the Arandora Star caused an immediate investigation and, in September 1940, the Home Advisory Committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Sir Percy Loraine with the intention of discussing the release of some Italian internees. The British Government eventually considered reversing their decision to transfer prisoners in this manner. However, they never officially apologised to the victims of the Arandora Star.<sup>81</sup>

Shame and silence descended upon the circumstances of this tragedy. Relatives of the internees were not advised of what became of their husbands, brothers, uncles or fathers after their arrest on 10 June, 1940. Decades after the tragedy, a few relatives of the victims still do not know what happened to their beloved ones, as neither the British nor the Italian authorities ever informed them. In his written testimony, Andrew Rossi wrote: 'My Grandfather was one of those that were lost to the sea we will never know what happened to him. He was just fifty-three years old at the time'.<sup>82</sup>

The Welsh-Italians who were interviewed, and those who wrote their stories for the *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet*, could not fully understand why there was silence about the wartime, and shared different opinions. Romeo Basini, for example, became aware of the Arandora Star after the war, in the late 40s–early 50s. After the war, nobody mentioned about the tragedy in his family, except in what Basini describes as 'sound bites' between the senior members of the family. Mr Basini thinks that the cause of the silence was that the family considered the tragedy to be an act of war, and were sad to be on the wrong side; that was the way it was accepted and they

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<sup>81</sup> An insightful description of the conditions of the survivors of the Arandora Star being neglected and maltreated is offered in the last pages of the *Memorandum Relating the Disaster of the 'SS Arandora Star'* (pp. 3-4). Also, I would refer to a number of books on the internment of enemy aliens during the Second World War, particularly Francois Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (London: Libris, 1988), especially pages 123-143, which deal with the controversy surrounding the way aliens were interned, and the controversy of the Arandora Star. Another paramount book on the subject is Peter and Leni Gilman, *Collar the Lot! How Britain interned and Expelled its Wartime Refugees* (London: Quartet Books, 1980). Finally I would also refer to Connery Chappell, *Island of the Barbed Wire: The Remarkable Story of World War Two Internment on the Isle of Man* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1984).

<sup>82</sup> Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, eds., *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet*, p. 29.

just carried on without talking about it.<sup>83</sup> George Hill became aware at the age of eight at his grandmother's funeral. When he asked his grandmother if his grandfather drowned the curt reply was 'Yes, he did'. It was at the age of twenty-two or twenty-three that Mr Hill started researching the tragedy and discovered that the ship was torpedoed. Mr Hill explains that his uncle, who survived the tragedy, never spoke about it after the war. He thinks that the silence was due to feelings of shame, 'shame of being Italian?', and confesses that he does not understand this.<sup>84</sup> In a similar way, Royston Miller does not understand why the family did not talk about the tragedy:

I just don't understand it really, whether they were afraid to talk about it, afraid to mention about Italy bringing the war against Great Britain, whether that was at the back of their mind, but they were innocent party, they were innocent party.<sup>85</sup>

The same people, when asked how they felt about the creation of the Arandora Star Memorial in Cardiff, reacted in slightly different ways. Andrew Rossi said that her mother would not attend because she felt very angry, and there were too many bad memories. In his view, although the memorial would not bring closure to what happened, it would pay respect to those people who perished and whose bodies were never found:

My mother, she would not attend it because I think there had been so many bad memories. People say they'll bring things to closure. I don't think we'll bring a closure. It is nice to have a memorial with the names on, because nobody knows where they are in the sea. Are they buried in the sea, washed up, buried with no names? But this you can take ... speaking for myself, I can take my grandchildren and show this is your great-great grandfather and uncle, and here are their names on this plaque forever more.<sup>86</sup>

In a similar way to Andrew Rossi, Royston Miller felt that the proposed erection of a Memorial to the victims of the Arandora Star sinking was

a wonderful gesture to know that people were thinking of their loved ones, because I never knew my grandfather. We never knew. His body was never found. We didn't know whether it had been buried anywhere. And it was wonderful that you could turn around and have something that you could look up to and see something in Cardiff.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike Andrew's Rossi's family, Mr Miller did not overtly express any bitter resentment. As Marco Giudici recently pointed out, overall

the 2010 Arandora Star commemoration illustrates that, instead of using the memorialisation of the tragedy to express resentment toward their former persecutors,

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<sup>83</sup> Romeo Basini, interview with Domenico Casetta.

<sup>84</sup> George Hill, interview with Domenico Casetta, 3 May 2011, courtesy of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales.

<sup>85</sup> Royston Miller, interview with George Hill.

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Rossi, interview with George Hill.

<sup>87</sup> Royston Miller, interview with George Hill.

Italians took advantage of the memory of internment to reinforce their link with Welsh people.<sup>88</sup>

The most striking thing in all these stories is the difference between the silence that produced a discontinuity in the family dynamics and communication, and the effect of the creation of memorials, such as the Arandora Star Memorial in Wales, that prompted articulation of the cultural loss, and contributed towards the creation of cultural memory.<sup>89</sup> The silence and the delayed emergence of written and oral testimonies show how almost paradoxically, memory ‘is more like an unmediated return of the event that has an indexical, hence mediated account of it’.<sup>90</sup> The three thematic sections of the textual analysis presented in this chapter have revealed that memory can be partial, idealized, fragmented or distorted: the memories of the children/grandchildren of the victims and the survivors have been ‘worked through’ via the recent commemorative events.

## Conclusion

This chapter looked at the problematic position of Italian immigrants in the UK, and focussed on the consequences for the Italian community in Wales of Mussolini’s declaration of war on Britain. The central argument was constructed around the generational transmission of memory of the Second World War based on the recent generation of written and oral testimonies that were instigated by the creation of the First National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales, in 2010. In particular, the chapter challenged Ugolini’s idea that the increasing number of memorials of the Arandora Star aimed at creating ‘communal myths’ by showing how, particularly in Wales, the Italian and the Welsh communities alike felt the necessity to have a memorial to raise awareness and to generate memory. A representative of the Welsh-Italian community, for example, wrote a letter in support of the Heritage Lottery Fund Application for the Arandora Star History and Memorial Project:

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<sup>88</sup> Marco, Giudici, *Migratioin, Memory and Identity: Italians and Nation-Building in Wales, 1940-2010*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bangor, 2012), p. 132.

<sup>89</sup> Recently, Liz Wren-Owens stated that without denying the traumatic impact of WWII on the Italian community in Wales it is over simplistic to think that it prompted a cultural silencing of Welsh-Italian voices. There is, however, little evidence in her article to support this argument. Clearly, the analysis of the oral and written testimonies provided in this chapter shows the importance of the Arandora Star History and Memorial Project in generating unprecedented and unedited accounts of WWII. In particular, the different accounts demonstrated how WWII not only did produce a large scale and long term silence within the Welsh-Italian community, but also affected it in different ways and at various levels. See Liz Wren-Owens, ‘The Delayed Emergence of Italian-Welsh Narratives or Class and the Commodification of Ethnicity?’, *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture*, 3: 1 (2012), pp. 119-134.

<sup>90</sup> Ernst van Alphen, ‘Second Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and Postmemory’, p. 485.

I wholeheartedly give my support to the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales, and I am filled with great optimism that at last a Welsh memorial, exhibition, literature and awareness-raising will be able to give a fuller, and truer, picture of part of our war time history.<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, BBC Wales' broadcaster Roy Noble OBE. DL. OStJ, who was also a Patron of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales, wrote:

The aim is to re-instate and preserve an important part of the Welsh/Italian cultural heritage. This historical project is part of our story. This tale of war, of social upheaval, of community split, of enforced cultural division and of extreme sadness had to be told again. Now is its time.<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, the campaign of awareness and the commemorative events generated material for this thesis and for future research, contributing to create the kind of 'readily identifiable framework' that Ugolini wished for, and through which the Italian community in Wales, but also the Welsh community, can articulate their memories.<sup>93</sup>

Some considerations on the importance of the memorial would seem appropriate here, in the light of the necessity to restore cultural identity and sense of place. First of all, the purpose of the memorial, like other memorials dedicated to the Arandora Star throughout the UK, is to create a 'healing environment' to restore a sense of place identity against the psychological effects of disruption and displacement caused by the circumstances of war (the internment of enemy aliens, the deportation to Canada and Australia, and the embarking on the Arandora Star, regarded by survivors as a 'floating prison camp').<sup>94</sup> For example, Rando Bertoia, the last Italian survivor of the Arandora Star, residing in Glasgow, highlights how the creation of a memorial can facilitate the mourning process:

When I came to Glasgow, I became aware of the deep pain that was still felt among many in the Scots Italian community and beyond about what happened to the Arandora Star. It was for that reason that we decided to create a fitting memorial monument to the

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<sup>91</sup> This quote is from a support letter attached to the *Heritage Lottery Fund Application for the Arandora Star History and Memorial Project*. (Cardiff, 2010). [Private document held by the author of this thesis] The application was submitted to the Heritage Lottery by Cav. Raimondo Zavaglia MBE BA AIL, former Treasurer for the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales, on 2 February 2010. The application was successful, and the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales was granted £10,000 for the creation of the memorial and history project.

<sup>92</sup> This quote is also from a support letter which is part of the above mentioned Heritage Lottery Fund Application.

<sup>93</sup> Wendy Ugolini, 'The Internal Enemy 'Other'', p.140.

<sup>94</sup> The term 'floating camp' is used in an article published in the Scottish newspaper *Daily Record*, 22 May 2010 and available on the following website: <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/real-life/2010/05/22/survivor-of-world-war-two-arandora-star-disaster-relives-ordeals-86908-22276860/> [Accessed on 30 December 2012].

victims in the new cloister garden. The aim is not to dredge up old hurts, but rather to heal memories and to create an oasis of peace.<sup>95</sup>

In Wales, the Minoli sisters, while recounting how their father was spared because of his ill health, remember all his close friends who unlike their father lost their lives on the Arandora Star. For them, the creation of the memorial in Wales is clearly a tribute that restores sense of place and testifies where these people belong:

It is fitting that Wales will soon have a memorial to those Italians who chose to make their homes here and who lost their lives in the terrible disaster that was the Arandora Star.<sup>96</sup>

Some evidence of memorials acting as ‘healing environments’ is provided by an American study conducted on a group of Vietnam War Combat Veterans affected by post-traumatic stress.<sup>97</sup> The study shows how the memorial design’s feature of Vietnam memorials has a psychological impact on the veterans, especially as a sense of attachment is created by going back repeatedly to visit the memorial which proves to be healing in the mourning process.

Significantly, the creation of the First National Arandora Star Memorial in Wales presented issues with regard to the location (i.e. the choice of a public neutral space versus an enclosed religious site), and the ‘nationality’ represented by the memorial itself. First of all, the decision to locate the memorial in the Roman Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral of St. David in Cardiff, which was mainly dictated by practical reasons, was initially contested by some members of the Committee for the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales. The discussion focussed on the fact that the religious location may restrict the influx of public with no religious affiliation and prevent the memorial from giving the attention and importance usually associated with national memorials that are situated in open public spaces. Alternative suggestions for its location were the Gardens of Peace or the Cenotaph in Cardiff, but it was eventually the ‘universal’ credo of the Catholic Church that was taken into consideration, and eased all concerns.<sup>98</sup> Another issue was whether the memorial should present the names of the Italians from Wales who perished in the sinking, or include the names of the Welsh

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/real-life/survivor-world-war-two-arandora-1059639> [ Accessed on 20 May 2012]

<sup>96</sup> Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, eds., *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet*, p. 37.

<sup>97</sup> Nick Watkins, Frances Cole and Sue Weidemann, ‘The War Memorial as Healing Environment: The Psychological Effect of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Vietnam War Combat Veterans’ Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms’, *Environment and Behaviour*, 42, (2010), 351-375.

<sup>98</sup> According to the Catholic Catechism, universality is a gift given by God to all men, and lies in the fact that all men are called to join Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God and in the unity of his Spirit.

Guards who were on board the Arandora Star, and who suffered the same destiny. As this chapter has amply illustrated, this was the most controversial aspect even within the Committee members of the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales. The suggestion to include these names was dictated by the fear of somehow offending the Welsh nation with the potential of creating embarrassment in a political or diplomatic way, even nearly seventy years after the tragic event. The threat expanded outside the Committee with unjustified rumors that a memorial to the Italian Fascists was being created. In particular Alfio Bernabei, a playwright and journalist, questioned and generally misunderstood the general wording on the memorial, before the names of the fifty-two Italians from Wales. On 28<sup>th</sup> November 2009, Bernabei articulated his concerns in an article to the *Western Mail*:

But ‘all’, means all. The current wording means that the memorial extends the sympathy of the Welsh people to the German PoWs who had been in Hitler’s army, as well as to some Italians on Mussolini’s side, who would have welcomed the arrival of both dictators into the UK. In Cardiff itself there was an active branch of the Italian Fascist Party. The extension of sympathy to “all” the families of those who perished begs more questions. How do we know that some relatives of the Germans PoWs or of the Italian fascists on board the ship were not working in German or Italian prison or concentration camps? The memorial should be welcomed if intended to commemorate the innocent victims of the tragedy, but should be firmly resisted in any form that may appear to extend sympathy to Nazi fascists.

Bernabei’s concerns were expressed ignoring and disregarding the aims and objectives behind the creation of the memorial, that is to say in furtherance of ‘peace, reconciliation, solidarity and humanity’ between nations.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, they did not present a valid justification. Luckily, the letter was not followed up by any reaction from the public and the media, and the memorial was positively welcomed by hundreds of Welsh people and representatives from other nations, including dignitaries such as the Italian Ambassador, Alain Giorgio Maria Economides, the former First Minister of Wales Rhodri Morgan, the Mayor of Cardiff, Councilor Keith Hyde, and the Canadian High Commissioner for Canada, Mr James R. Wright. However, within the Committee for the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales, it was still interesting to observe the sense of fear and uneasiness vis-à-vis the potential reactions to this letter, which clearly echoes the bigger frustration and threat experienced by Italians in Wales during the period following Mussolini’s declaration of war on Britain.

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<sup>99</sup> *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Constitution*, (Cardiff, November 2008). [Private document held by the author of this thesis]



This chapter also looked at the precarious situation of Italians in Wales and the rest of the UK during WWII and how this was reflected and conveyed in the late 1930s–1940s’ portrayal of Italians in Welsh national newspapers. The analysis of the articles showed how events were highly politicised, echoing the anti-Italian/anti-Fascist propaganda of the time. The articles, therefore, ultimately failed to provide an objective and comprehensive picture. By contrast, in particular, the unresolved nature of the Arandora Star memory resulted in production of tales dictated by an ‘interpretative urge’ of the ‘children and grandchildren’ of the victims and survivors, who felt the need to build a bridge between their parents and grandparents. However, even after this major effort, fear and prejudice still remain, and ultimately the personal accounts reveal the difficulty of telling that story from a peripheral position (Welsh-Italian).

The analysis of the written and oral testimonies has amply demonstrated how the generational transmission of WWII memories envisages elements of continuity and discontinuity in the self-perception of Italian identity. Elements of continuity coincide, for example, with the importance assigned to family as a means of maintaining and transmitting the heritage culture through subsequent generations; while elements of discontinuity coincide with the involuntary detachment not only from family, and symbolically from their own ‘Italianness’, but also eventually from Wales. Books such as Balestracci’s and the commemorative booklet also used photographs to create a visual and emotional impact, which symbolises the condition of marginalisation of Italians in Wales during WWII. The images of happy family gatherings that refer to the interwar period contrast with the portraits of individual men who were separated from their family and friend during the war, such as these:



**Figure 11.**<sup>100</sup>



**Figure 12.**<sup>101</sup>



**Figure 13.**<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> ‘Giovanni Cavalli’ in Paulette L. Pelosi & David Evans (eds.) *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Commemorative Booklet* (Llanelli: MCP, 2010), p. 29.

The solitude of these individual portraits, representing respectively Giovanni Cavalli, Michele di Marco and Giuseppe Minoli, becomes a metaphor for the solitude and sufferance of their families who never saw these men again. If family represents the psychosocial *milieu* giving a sense of belonging thanks to the processes of familiarity, attachment and identity, alienation from family caused and symbolised by the break-in of the policeman representing the British authority, and the violent attitude/reaction of society members, created in the accounts a sense of nostalgia for the loss of emotional connections. Moreover, if being an immigrant already implies discourses around space, home land and host land, attachment and displacement, the internment of Italian enemy aliens and the tragedy of the Arandora Star certainly complicated the mechanisms of formation, conservation and negotiation of identity. The enrichment that is gained by the encounter with the host community and by the assimilation of the local culture was somewhat questioned and problematised; hence the long silence within the Italian migrant community.

Finally, this chapter has demonstrated how memory can take the role of highlighting discontinuity and identity fractures, in an attempt to make sense of what happened, and restore a sense of place. In this sense, seventy years on, the creation in Wales of the First National Memorial of the Arandora Star was the ultimate attempt to recreate a sense of place. Moreover, the change from a narrative that saw Italians as criminals and perpetrators to a narrative of victimhood shows how the present determines what memories are remembered –i.e. now it is a propitious time to remember victims and martyrs, not heroes. Even if the reasons behind the creation of the memorial were not to advance narratives of victimhood specifically, the memorial acted as the platform for reinstating a collective memory of tragic events that highly impacted the Italian community in Wales.

In a similar way, Chapter Three will look at how the increasing interest and participation in initiatives concerning ethnic minorities in Wales also resulted in the emergence of other Welsh-Italian narratives that provide a broader picture of the Italian migrant experience in Wales. The recent emergence of these texts shows the importance

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<sup>101</sup> 'Michele di Marco', in Paulette L. Pelosi & David Evans (eds.) *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Commemorative Booklet* (Llanelli: MCP, 2010), p. 32.

<sup>102</sup> 'Giuseppe Minoli', in Paulette L. Pelosi & David Evans (eds.) *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Commemorative Booklet* (Llanelli: MCP, 2010), p. 36.

of social frameworks in instigating the retrieval of cultural memories. The analysis of these texts, written by second and third generation Italian immigrants, will help to fill the gap in our knowledge and understanding of how Welsh-Italians today place themselves in relation to the migrant experience of their ancestors, and within the socio-historical and cultural context of Wales.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Cultural Memories of Italians in Wales

### in Second and Third Generation Migrant Texts

*To be born in one world and to grow to manhood there, to be thrust then into the midst of another with all one's racial heritage, with one's likes and dislikes, aspirations and prejudices, and to be abandoned to the task of adjusting within one's own being the clash of opposed systems of cultures, traditions, and social conventions – if that is not a tragedy, I should like to be told what is.<sup>1</sup>*

#### Introduction

Chapter Two focussed on the representation of Italians in Wales during the Second World War in accounts provided by second and third generation Italian immigrants that were instigated and inspired by the initiatives related to the recent creation of the First National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales. The chapter highlighted the importance of these initiatives in generating cultural memory. On the one hand, the new accounts were set against the images of Italians portrayed in the newspapers, while on the other, they revealed a variety of experiences that had remained silent for nearly seventy years. Chapter Three stems from considerations drawn in Chapter Two about the trans-generational transmission of memory. In particular, it will highlight how recent commemorative events about the Second World War, and an increasing interest in ethnic minorities in Wales, have awakened the necessity for subsequent generations of Italian immigrants in Wales to (re)-define their identity and sense of belonging.

The late emergence of a Welsh-Italian narrative is comparable with the late emergence of a Scottish Italian narrative, with perhaps the most evident difference being that the Scottish Italian writers write more overtly about events during the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it would be useful to reflect on the reasons for such a delay, and to provide

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Ravage, quoted in William Boelhower, *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States: Four Versions of the Italian American Self* (Verona: Essedue, 1982), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Amongst the best known Scottish Italian writers are: Joe Pieri, author of several books such as: *Isle of the Displaced: Italian-Scot's Memoirs of Internment During the Second World War* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson Publishing, 1997), *Tales of the Savoy: Memoirs of Glasgow Café Society* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson Publishing, 1999), *The Big Men: Personal Memories of Glasgow's Police* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson Publishing, 2003), *River of Memory: Memories of a Scots-Italian* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 2006), *The Scots-Italians: Recollections of an Immigrant* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 2005); and Mary Contini, author of *Dear Olivia: An Italian Journey of Love and Courage* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007). A comprehensive list of books by Scottish-Italians can be found on the website of the Scottish-Italian community: <http://www.scotsitalian.com/books.htm> [Accessed on 24 April 2012].

some contextualisation. At least three factors are worthwhile considering as having an impact on the production of new narratives of belonging within the Welsh-Italian community. Firstly, there is a sense of the passing of generations and the importance of cultural memory as a means of preserving a sense of belonging to a culture. In a similar way to Anderson's belief that the creation and maintenance of nationalist movements and the idea of ethnicity are initiated by mass communications and mass migrations,<sup>3</sup> Jan Assmann suggests that the sense of belonging to a society and culture 'is not seen to maintain itself for generations as a result of phylogenetic evolution, but rather as a result of socialisation and customs', and that the survival of a cultural type is a function of cultural memory.<sup>4</sup> If this is true, the emergence of Welsh-Italian narratives can be considered to be the result of the ultimate realisation that the sense of belonging to a culture is not naturally transmitted from generation to generation but cultural memory plays an important role as the first generation of migrants dies out.

Secondly, a number of noteworthy initiatives concerning ethnic minorities have been organised by local and regional institutions, such as museums, cultural associations and volunteering groups. These initiatives span from exhibitions to oral history projects, community projects and commemorations that bring together communities by promoting awareness of different stories and realities. So, for example, the Butetown History and Art Museum in Cardiff staged a multimedia exhibition called *Butetown Remembers the Home front* (8 October 2005–29 January 2006) showing 'how people from the multi-ethnic community of Butetown (Tiger Bay and the Docks) were recruited into the war effort at home.'<sup>5</sup> The Old Library, also in Cardiff, hosts the *Cardiff Story*, a permanent project that in the words of the curators is 'an inclusive, exciting and inspirational resource bringing people together to help them learn about the making of Cardiff, its diverse narratives and the multi-cultural communities which created the capital of Wales'.<sup>6</sup> The *Glamorgan Gates: Adult Education Project* has done a photographic project involving Polish people living in Merthyr Tydfil. Other associations, such as the Welsh Refugee Council and the BVSNW (The Black Voluntary Sector Network Wales) in collaboration with BEST (Black Ethnic Support

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Memory', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125-133, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bhac.org/exh.html> [Accessed on 25 April 2012]

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.cardiffstory.com/content.asp?nav=178,258&parent\\_directory\\_id=2](http://www.cardiffstory.com/content.asp?nav=178,258&parent_directory_id=2) [Accessed on 25 April 2012]

Team) and VALREC (Valleys Race Equality Council), operate at social level, respectively, by offering support and inclusion to newly arrived asylum seekers, via the implementation of innovative and artistic events, and by the promotion of diversity education.

More relevant to this chapter are those initiatives concerning the Italian community in Wales. The Heritage Lottery Fund, for example, has sponsored two separate oral history projects linked respectively to two photographic exhibitions: *Italian Memories in Wales* (2 February 2009– 4 January 2010), curated by Acli-Enaip, and *Wales Breaks its Silence*, curated by the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales (started on 1 July 2010). *Italian Memories in Wales* is a travelling exhibition sharing photographs and personal accounts of Italians who moved to Wales after the Second World War, and second generation Italians living in Wales. It focuses on their memories of Italy, their experience of settling in Wales, their achievements and links with their Italian heritage, exploring questions of national identity, and promoting understanding of Italian migration to Wales to the wider community.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the exhibition *Wales Breaks its Silence* gave thousands the opportunity to learn about the important contribution made by Italians to Welsh life, and how the tragedy of the Arandora Star during the Second World War affected Italians and Welsh people alike.<sup>8</sup> But not only that: the creation of the memorial and the oral history project (including the exhibition *Wales Breaks its Silence*) suggests that one possible reason for the delayed emergence of Welsh-Italian narrative can also be identified in the adverse historical circumstances of the Second World War which generated nearly seventy years of silence and oblivion – aside from Les Servi's memoir of 1994. The memoir is, in fact, the first published autobiographical account and indeed the first written work published by any member of the Welsh-Italian community. The book also contains personal recollections of the Second World War and the Arandora Star which makes it the first written testimony of the tragedy from within the Welsh-Italian community.

The third factor to consider comes from an increasing activity in the broader field of cultural studies and migration studies within the Welsh education sector, and

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<sup>7</sup> The interviews carried out for this project constitute an insightful resource for historians and academics who wish to develop their understanding of Italian migrant identity. However, they will not be analysed in this chapter, the main focus being the representation of identity and sense of belonging in life-writing. For more information visit the website of the initiative at <http://www.enaip.org.uk/index.php?page=italian-memories-in-wales> [Accessed on 15 July 2012]

<sup>8</sup> For more information on this exhibition, visit the following website: [www.arandorastarwales.us](http://www.arandorastarwales.us) [Accessed on 20 May 2012]

particularly in higher education. Certainly the publication of Benedict Anderson's seminal text *Imagined Communities* in 1983 has forged a new path in the study of nationalism providing an essential tool for the exploration of concepts of community, identity and belonging across the world. In Wales, the resonance of Anderson's book is perhaps to be noted in a number of research projects carried out by scholars and University Institutions. At Cardiff University, the Cardiff School of European Languages, Translation and Politics hosts a cross-disciplinary research network called *Representing Migration and Mobility in European Cultures*, co-ordinated by Dr Rachael Langford and Dr Liz Wren-Owens; while the School of English, Communication and Philosophy is working on a project called *Migrant Memories Recalling the Indian Partition* lead by Dr Radhika Mohanram. At Glamorgan University, a group of historians lead by Prof. Sharif Gemies founded a research project called *Outcast Europe* on refugees during the Spanish Civil War and the German Nazi regime, focussing on aspects such as the decision-making process, the gendered dimension of their experience, the women's welfare activities, the conflicting representations of Jews and the displacement of non-repatriable Jews. Other academics have published extensively on ethnic minorities in Wales; for example Paul O'Leary on Irish migrants in Wales<sup>9</sup>, and Charlotte Williams on social inclusion and race equality in Wales.<sup>10</sup>

Such a vibrant cultural environment is justified by the fact that in Wales there has been a new wave of migrants since the EU border controls were relaxed. According to official data publicised on the Welsh Local Government Association website, for example, 'Two thirds of applications to the Workers Registration Scheme in Wales have been from Poland and a further 15 per cent from Slovakia'.<sup>11</sup> Poland and Slovakia are two of the eight countries that entered the European Union in 2004. The advent of a new wave of incomers has led to a reflection on the old wave of migrants, as the new migrants take the roles, to some extent, of the old ones. As the old migrants become

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Paul O'Leary's *Irish Migrants in Modern Wales*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Charlotte Williams, *The Melting Pot and the British Meltdown. In Breaking Up Britain: Four Nations after a Union* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2009), and also Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans, Paul O'Leary, eds. *A Tolerant Nation?: Exploring Ethnic Diversities in Wales* (Cardiff, University Of Wales Press, 2003). Charlotte Williams was awarded the OBE in 2007 for services to ethnic minority groups and to equal opportunities.

<sup>11</sup> More on migrant workers in Wales can be found at <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/english/migrant-workers-in-wales> [Accessed on 25 April 2012].

more and more absorbed, ‘invisible presences’, the necessity to (re)-define a sense of belonging and identity materializes with urgency, particularly in the light of issues of social exclusion and access to services which have affected more recent waves of immigration.

The emergence of Welsh-Italian narratives is born within, and as a result of, these socio-cultural contexts, and echoes the emergence of Italian migration from the realm of communicative memory into the realm of cultural memory. The texts analysed in this chapter reflect the experience of Italians in Wales told from a personal (if semi-fictional) point of view. The way in which authors question and represent their identity echoes the tension between ‘likes and dislikes, aspirations and prejudices’ and the sense of abandonment ‘to the task of adjusting within one’s own being the clash of opposed systems of cultures, traditions, and social convention’.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, the recognition of migrant narrative as a scholarly field is important for the opportunity it offers to apply and exploit already established theoretical frameworks and approaches in relation for example to the concepts of displacement and trauma, identity and belonging, and memory and nostalgia.

In the case of Italian immigrants in Wales, in spite of their long established presence in the country for more than a century, Welsh-Italian narrative is still a ‘young phenomenon’, likely to grow and stimulate academics with new interesting perspectives. The impact of exhibitions such as *Italian Memories in Wales* and *Wales Breaks its Silence*, and the positive responses to the creation of the First Welsh National Memorial of the Arandora Star have already stimulated the generation of new Welsh-Italian narratives. As we have seen in Chapter Two, in relation to the memories of the Second World War alone, many members of the Welsh-Italian community have come forward with personal accounts that have been collected and purposely used by the Committee for the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales. In addition, Anita Arcari published her first semi-fictional novel *The Hokey Pokey Man* in 2010, the timing of its publication closely and deliberately linked to the unveiling of the memorial and the launch of the aforementioned exhibition *Wales Breaks its Silence*. In this sense, Arcari symbolically entered the realm of cultural memory. Similarly, Hector Emanuelli published his first autobiography *A Sense of Belonging: From the Rhondda to the*

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<sup>12</sup> Marcus E. Ravage quoted in Williams Boelhower, *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States*, p. 48.



*Potteries: Memories of a Welsh Italian Englishman* a few months later. Therefore, there is scope to think that members of the Welsh-Italian community are beginning to appreciate the importance of writing, inspired by the urge to tell about their immigrant background and their experience of living between two cultures. Finally, following the extensive publicity campaign for the creation of the Arandora Star Memorial, Alan Lambert published a short novel entitled *Roberto's War* (2009) about the friendship between a Welsh boy and an Italian family just before the Second World War broke out.<sup>13</sup> These examples clearly demonstrate that the combination of the passing of generations, the advent of new waves of immigrants, and the impact of events and commemorations has not only contributed to the generation of a new wave of interest in the Welsh-Italian community, but has also revived a sense of 'awareness' amongst the Welsh-Italians that is manifesting itself in the production of new narratives.

### **Memory and Commemoration**

From a theoretical point of view, Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann and Stuart Hall have established the existence of a link between memory and identity. Maurice Halbwachs, for example, believes that no memory takes place in a vacuum, but that social frameworks determine and structure the retrieval and recollection of memories.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Jan Assmann highlights the role of cultural memory in maintaining fateful events in the past through the exploitation of what he calls 'figures of memory', a combination of cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance).<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the communicative function of memory creates 'islands of time', which 'expand into memory spaces of 'retrospective contemplativeness''.<sup>16</sup> The Arandora Star commemorative event alone, for example, generated many personal accounts that retrospectively looked at the period of WWII reflecting on the widespread impact of internment and the Arandora Star and the need for a collective identity through the creation of cultural memory. In this sense, it is a good example to show how 'the objectivation or crystallisation of communicated meaning and collectively shared knowledge is a prerequisite of its transmission in the culturally institutionalized heritage of a society'.<sup>17</sup> If on the one hand, however, Halbwachs and Assmann assert that social frameworks can equally instigate and

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Lambert, *Roberto's War* (Llandysul, Gomer Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Memory', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

influence the recollection of memories and identities, on the other, Halbwachs also points out that memories are continually reproduced and reconfigured as ‘they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had’.<sup>18</sup> Agreeing with Halbwachs in this respect, Stuart Hall reinforces the idea that identity is not an accomplished fact but rather a ‘production’ which is always in process, never complete and always constituted within representation.<sup>19</sup> He argues that one way of thinking about cultural identities is in terms of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’<sup>20</sup>, which would seem to contrast, for example, with the condition of nomadism and the inability to belong anywhere envisaged by Graziella Parati. Drawing from her own experience, Parati’s rejection of one homogenous and coherent identity results in her inability to belong fully anywhere ‘because only a partial belonging is possible’<sup>21</sup>. Parati, however, considers her nomadism to be a privilege in what it gives her the opportunity to embrace an identity that interweaves cultural borders.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, Hall uses the phrase ‘play of difference within identity’ where the word ‘play’ suggests an inherent instability, the permanent unsettlement within identity.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, writing expresses an intention, a desire, and perhaps the necessity to settle between two cultures, but as Hall says, ‘there is no final resolution’.<sup>24</sup> The complexities of Hall’s cultural play exceed the binary structure of representation in terms of ‘past/present, ‘them/us’: ‘At different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries are re-sited’.<sup>25</sup> Hall’s use of Derrida’s term ‘differance’ is particularly useful here. The word ‘differance’ suggests a combination of the verbs ‘differ’ and ‘defer’ (postpone) thus implying that the idea that meaning is always deferred by the play of signification: ‘Meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings’.<sup>26</sup> If memories are influenced

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<sup>18</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* ed. by Williams, Patrick & Laura Chrisman (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf), 1993, p. 222.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>21</sup> Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, p. 228.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 229. Hall quotes Norris in relation to Derrida’s use of the word ‘differance’ and its implications.

by space, time, people, and age, then it is legitimate to think that they also modify our perception of identity. Stuart Hall in fact said that cultural identities do not transcend place, time, history and culture, but undergo constant transformation. This idea is perfectly in tune with Halbwachs' and Assmann's analyses. Cultural identities are therefore constantly subject to a play of history, culture and power, and for this reason, they are not grounded in the mere recovery of the past, but they are the names we give to our position in the narratives of the past.<sup>27</sup> For Hall, identity is constituted and therefore perceived within, not outside, representation 'by allowing us to see and recognise the different parts and histories of ourselves, to construct those points of identification, those positionalities we can call in retrospect our 'cultural identities'.<sup>28</sup>

As for the recent emergence of Welsh-Italian narratives, generally speaking, the texts can be better described as 'generational memories or testimonies' written by authors who were either born in Wales as offspring of Italian migrants (one or both), or by authors who migrated to Wales when they were children. The texts are a collection of personal reconstructions of the past containing different appropriations, criticism, preservations and transformations. If we consider for a moment the age and immigrant background of the writers in question, we can distinguish between two waves of migrants. The first wave is made up of what we shall call symbolically the 'patriarchs', that is to say authors like Servini, Spinetti and Emanuelli who tend to be authoritative thanks to their status and successful careers. The second wave is made up of what we shall call the 'daughter-writers', authors like Pelosi and Arcari, who are using the platform of the first wave.<sup>29</sup> Servini was born in Bardi, Italy, in 1914, to Italian parents, and came to Wales as a boy of eight. He was eighty-one at the time that he wrote his memoir. Emanuelli was born in Abercarn, South Wales, in 1920 also to Italian parents. He wrote his autobiography at the age of ninety-one. Spinetti was born in Monmouthshire, in 1933 to an Italian father and a Welsh mother. He was seventy-seven when he wrote his celebrity autobiography. As for Arcari and Pelosi, they are more secretive about their age, although various indications suggest that they are in their fifties. Both were born in Wales to an Italian father and a Welsh mother, and their

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<sup>27</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', pp. 225-6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>29</sup> Technically, the terms 'patriarchs' and 'daughters-writers' is not entirely correct, as the following paragraph will show, these authors all belonged to the second and third generation Italian immigrants. Besides, some were born in Italy and migrated to Wales as young children following their parents, others were born in Wales.

grandparents came to Wales at the turn of the twentieth century and in 1907 respectively. Both their age and the extent of their affiliation with Italy will have had an influence on their approach to memory and writing. Servini and Emanuelli wrote from the perspective of accomplished men who reflect on their equally important cultural legacies. Interestingly enough, in Servini's *A Boy from Bardi: My Life and Times* (1994), the author confesses that 'I have been urged by several Italian friends to add my little contribution'.<sup>30</sup> Spinetti, by contrast, writes from the point of view of a celebrity who is proud of his Italianness but whose fame is forever associated with his connection with John Lennon and the Beatles. As for Arcari, her semi-fictional novel *The Hokey Pokey Man* (2011) was dictated by the necessity to express the love for two countries in spite of the prejudices she experienced as a young girl with an Italian surname after the Second World War.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Pelosi's short story is perhaps the most interesting text in spite of its length (only six pages). In 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper' (2005), it is the death of her father, and with him her strongest link with Italy, which triggers the necessity to write to reinstate and reinforce her Italian heritage legacy.

A look at the age and background of these writers makes it possible to identify a fundamental difference in writing determined by the passage from communicative memory to cultural memory. Communicative memory implies that authors write within the life span of the preceding generation, and therefore are working with 'living memory'. By contrast, cultural memory implies that events and people have passed away into the distant past, and authors rely on artefacts such as written texts and visual representations to make their connection to the past. These two different ways of relating to the past will have inevitable consequences on the perception and construction of identity. In addition to this, another factor linking Arcari with Pelosi is enriching the concept of cultural memory. Considering their southern Italian origins (both of their fathers were from Picinisco in the Abruzzi region), their drive to write may arguably be the result of an understated sense of partial exclusion from the popular awareness and representation of the Italians in Wales, who are generally assumed to come entirely or primarily from Bardi, in the north of Italy.<sup>32</sup> This remark would prove that cultural

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<sup>30</sup> Les Servini, *A Boy from Bardi: My Life and Times* (Cardiff: Hazeltree Press, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Anita Arcari, 'A Foot in Both Countries: Anita Arcari's Wales and Italy', public lecture at Cardiff University, 12 May, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Media and local historians have contributed in shaping this cultural and popular awareness. For example, Jack Parker's *The Adventurers*, a series of articles tracing the history of the Italians in South Wales, published in the *South Wales Echo*; the already mentioned work of local historian Colin Hughes,

memory can also be interpreted as expanding the boundaries of what is remembered and how, diversifying and varying, it is not a 'monologue' about Bardi, but also about Picinisco.

The generational difference and the circumstances here highlighted can be better understood in the light of the distinction that Halbwachs, inspired by Bergson, makes between two types of memory: the memory of the elderly, detached from present life and offering a relaxed, and more distanced recollection/portrayal of the past; and the memory of the adult, for whom remembering is a distraction allowing the adult to escape from the constraints of the present (profession, family, role in society).<sup>33</sup> However, Halbwachs admits that all people, including the elderly, tend to adopt what he calls 'a retrospective mirage' by which the past (in particular childhood and youth) is seen as some sort of 'golden age'. Essentially, these texts confirm two things: firstly, that cultural memory is essential to the transmission of a sense of belonging from generation to generation; secondly, that there is a sense amongst these writers that their narratives are dictated by the ultimate realisation of the role of memory in reconstructing the past. This builds upon the contemporary social framework of Wales in the twentieth century in order to perpetuate a sense of belonging.

Based on the arguments presented in this introduction, the analysis of the proposed texts will focus firstly on how the texts construct family memories of migration, with particular attention on issues such as the representation of home and exile, belonging and otherness. This section will also focus on the role of the father as cultural mediator. Secondly, the analysis will be looking at how authors represent Italy and how they compare it with Wales, inspired by Hall's use of Edward Said's concept of 'imaginative geography'. Finally, the analysis will concentrate on how the authors represent their childhood: how the memories of the narrators and main protagonists are presented; and whether they imagine themselves as the children of migrants or as child migrants. In

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*Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla: The Italian Community in South Wales, 1881-1945*(1991), which is a celebration of the Italians from Bardi who were the pioneers of the coffee shop industry in the Welsh valleys, rather than an objective history of the Italians in Wales. Colin Hughes justifies his account by reporting that 80% of the Italians in South Wales were originally from Bardi, and the remaining 20% from the South of Italy. Finally, television has also had an impact with the broadcast of the documentary called *Ciao Charlie Rossi*, BBC 2, 25 August 1986 (prod. Paul Pierrot, 1978, approx 42 mins, colour) which was once again about the Italians from Bardi who migrated to Wales.

<sup>33</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 47.

this section, particular attention will be paid to how the use of any fictional devices such as metaphors, images and themes, can demonstrate a sense of cultural identity.

### **Family memories of migration and the role of the father as cultural mediator**

This section highlights how family memories are a common feature of virtually all texts analysed in this chapter, and how the emphasis on family and such memories expresses the necessity of different generations of migrant authors to look back at their progenitors to understand their cultural origins and negotiate a sense of identity and role in society.

In *Victor Spinetti Up Front* (2006), Spinetti traces the history of his Italian family. The structure and role of the patriarchal family is immediately evident, the men in the family being the ones taking responsibility for the family, having ambition and entrepreneurial skills, and making important decisions. Spinetti initially recalls how his grandfather Giorgio, driven by poverty and by the successful stories of people in the nearby villages, travelled all the way from Italy to Wales in search for a better living:

Raw materials could be sold around the world with no import tariffs and people could move about to find work, no questions asked, no favour given. One such person was my grandfather, Giorgio, a farmer in northern Italy. He needed a plough but he had no money. Villagers round about had gone to Wales because they'd heard there was work there, so he went too. [...] So off went Giorgio – no passport, no permit – he didn't need those, just a sturdy pair of legs to carry him from his home town, Ronchi, across northern Italy and up through France.<sup>34</sup>

Spinetti portrays the image of a poor and humble man whose circumstances forced him to leave everything behind to go and live somewhere else. The fact that he travelled with 'no passport and no permit', can be read symbolically as a sign of a loss of identity, and the search for a better living, as the sign of a search for a new identity. Identity and social status are therefore interwoven. The image suggested by this paragraph has also a dramatic effect, contrasting with the image of Spinetti's own successful and acclaimed career of actor and comedian.

In the following paragraphs, we learn that Giorgio's two sons, Francesco and Giuseppe, also followed their father's steps tempted by the opportunities that Wales was offering to 'younger members of the family'.<sup>35</sup> Giuseppe, Spinetti's father, was an ambitious

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<sup>34</sup> Victor Spinetti, *Victor Spinetti Up Front*, with Peter Rankin (London: Robson Books, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

man ('He knew that he was making a beginning but what he really wanted was a business of his own')<sup>36</sup> and eventually opened his own business, the Marine Supper Bar, in the village of Cwm:

He didn't stay Giuseppe for long. In no time it was Joe and so, for that matter, was the Marine Supper Bar. It was always known as Joe's. While we're on names, I should tell you, I was christened Vittorio Georgio Andrea, not that I was ever called that. It was just that my father wasn't familiar with the English versions. For anyone else it was Victor George Andrew. Victor, after Victor Emmanuel, the Italian king, George after my grandfather, Andrew after Lily's father, a Scot. Put that together and you have an Italian Welshman who's entitled to wear a kilt – the Buchanan tartan, to be precise.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, Spinetti stresses the fact that Welsh people used to anglicise his father's name and his shop ('It was always known as Joe's'), and in the same way they used to call Spinetti himself 'Victor George Andrew' instead of 'Vittorio Georgio Andrea'.<sup>38</sup> We shall discuss this point more in detail in the section about childhood memories, but what is perhaps interesting to note at this stage is the fact that the Anglicisation of Italian names was a common practice in the nineteenth and twentieth century. This gesture can be seen either as a welcoming practice, a symbol of the will to create sameness and inclusiveness, or, on the contrary, as the sign of the impossibility of accepting *the other*, and a way to construct the ethnic 'othering' by denying their identity. Besides, it should be noted that just before the outbreak of the Second World War, many Italians deliberately anglicised their names and the names of their shops and restaurants for fear of being the target of anti-fascist/Italian repercussions.

Not surprisingly, in another paragraph, Spinetti points out his father's determination and effort to adapt and assimilate the new culture:

Joe, you can see, was adapting himself to his new life. What he didn't like about Italy, he dropped. What he liked about Wales, he took on. It wasn't an intellectual thing, more a question of making himself comfortable. For a start, his Italian accent faded. 'Mamma Mia! Bella Italia!' Forget it, and I never called him 'Poppa', it was always 'Dad'. In the house, he made no attempt to keep up a home-from-home look. Some Italians in the area sent away to Italy for their furniture – heavy baronial stuff, not the elegant tables and chairs of today – Joe didn't. If anything, his favourite chair was at the British Legion, where he sat in a flat cap, sipping pints of 'flat, warm, thin, Welsh bitter beer' as Dylan Thomas called it.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Victor Spinetti, *Victor Spinetti Up Front*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

Spinetti's father constructed his new identity by mixing the old with the new, the familiar with the convenient, taking the best of the two worlds ('What he didn't like about Italy, he dropped. What he liked about Wales, he took on'). He progressively embraced Welsh culture with enthusiasm and little regret ('his Italian accent faded', 'in the house he made no attempt to keep up a home-from-home look', 'his favourite chair was at the British Legion', 'sipping pints of 'flat, warm, thin, Welsh beer)'). His ambition and resolution resemble the characteristics of Tino, the main character in Arcari's novel, *The Hokey Pokey Man* (2011):

His thoughts were focused somewhere in the not too distant future, where he was the owner of a shop just like Antonio's [...]. There was one thing he wanted to do though, as soon as he could. This was his new home now, his new country. Although he still loved his homeland with all his heart, the people here had been good to him. What better way to show his appreciation and loyalty to the country and its people than to become a true citizen of Wales and Great Britain, with a piece of paper to prove it.<sup>40</sup>

Like Spinetti's father, Tino had come to Wales to earn a living, made his home in Wales, and dreamt of eventually opening his own coffee shop. His ambition is accompanied by the desire to become a naturalised subject, showing the extent of his assimilation and his 'appreciation and loyalty to the country', as well as a degree of coherence. On the contrary, in the case of Spinetti's father, when the news of the war against Italy was imminent, and his brother Frank (Francesco) strongly advised him to get naturalised, Giuseppe surprisingly refused ("Come on," said Dad, 'I was born an Italian. I will die an Italian')<sup>41</sup> and, therefore, revealed an inherent contradiction with the previous statement.

The attitude of Spinetti's father is rather different from that of Pelosi's father, who, she remembers, used to recount 'a million vivid stories about his lovingly-remembered boyhood – a childhood spent in Italy'<sup>42</sup>. Pelosi's text, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper' is interspersed with family and childhood memories where the paternal figure occupies a central role in defining her cultural identity. In Pelosi's own words, her father was in fact her 'strongest personal link with Italy'<sup>43</sup>, and, significantly enough, her entire account is a continuous effort to illustrate and justify her Italian affiliation through the

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<sup>40</sup> Anita Arcari, *The Hokey Pokey Man* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2010), p. 297.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper', in *Even the Rain is Different*, ed. by Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, (Dinas Powys: Honno Autobiography, 2005), p. 225.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 228.



recollection of her father's memories of Italy and through their shared memories of the journeys they made together to Italy. The key point is to be found at the end of the account, where the writer confesses: 'I have lost a special relationship which is rare between parent and child, and my mourning has no limit of time'<sup>44</sup>. This statement put the six intense pages of her account into perspective. The death of her father is the driving force behind the account. Writing becomes not only a form of healing, but a means of perpetuating the memory of her father, as the following passage suggests:

For as long as I could recall, my father had told a million vivid stories about his lovingly-remembered boyhood – a childhood spent in Italy. In recent years he remarked that I had had the grace to listen and retain what he had said. But why wouldn't I? Who could refuse to be interested in his incredibly detailed visual and aromatic memories?<sup>45</sup>

Pelosi certainly treasured these 'visual and aromatic memories', transposing them into her account. Each time Pelosi describes Italy, the images she conjures up are a revalidation of her father's memories of it. This suggests her desire and necessity to revive them, as these memories are sadly all that is left of her affiliation with her father and with Italy. It is only through these memories and images of Italy that she can 'keep her father alive' and continue to justify her Italian cultural heritage, and to satisfy her 'appetite' for Italy.

But let's take a look at this other passage where Pelosi recalls the time when she accompanied her father on his first visit to Picinisco in sixty years. Later in the text, she writes:

As my father and I went through Arrivals at Fiumicino Airport in Rome, the crowds of Italians waiting at the barriers for their returning families seemed to hold eye-contact immediately ... brown eyes to brown eyes. I felt we were at home together. This feeling got stronger throughout the holiday. Up in the beautiful Comino Valley of Lazio I remembered the words said in Wales: "It will all have changed". Things had mostly remained fundamentally the same, thank God – the same as my father had described them.<sup>46</sup>

In this passage, phrases like 'brown eyes to brown eyes' and 'I felt we were at home together' suggest the attempt to create a perfect symbiosis between herself, the people in the Comino Valley and above all her father, almost in an attempt to personify with him and with them, to 'sample and taste' their Italianness. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, we learn that after sixty years, the Comino Valley 'had remained fundamentally the

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<sup>44</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper', p. 228.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 225.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

same, thank God', this latest exclamation also suggesting her fear that any change could have upset her father, and also spoil her own feeling of 'coming home'. One can understand even more why the death of her father is particularly traumatic, as for Pelosi he is the epitome of Italianness. The loss of the paternal figure finally becomes the fundamental missing term that spoils the balance of her implied 'equation' about hyphenated identity. Suddenly, the contemplation of living in Italy, a country imagined and constructed through the eyes of her father and their shared experiences, becomes a utopian aspiration. Pelosi concludes: 'Will I stay in Wales or Italy? Only time will decide'.<sup>47</sup>

Both Pelosi and Spinetti concentrate their texts on the importance of patriarchal figures in their family, with Pelosi's account taking almost the form of an interior dialogue with her father, and Spinetti concentrating the first few chapters of his 'strictly confidential autobiography'<sup>48</sup> on tracing the history of his grandfather's, father's and uncle's settlement in Wales. By contrast, in Les Servini's and Hector Emanuelli's accounts the notion of 'family' is extended even further to show success, integration and on-going traffic between Italy and Wales. Not surprisingly, Servini and Emanuelli were born of Italian parents, unlike Spinetti and Pelosi, and their strong affiliation to Italy is demonstrated in their recollection of family memories.

In *A Boy from Bardi* (1994), Servini is continuously updating the reader about the marriages, births, deaths, and departures in his family. The necessity to inform the reader about the vicissitudes and developments within his family gives the sense of the structure of the family, and the sense that family is a network. The following passage is an example:

To bring you up to date with the family. Lina and Teresa worked with their mother in the shop which was prosperous. Of my mother's family, Caterina, who had married Santo Buzzani, now lives with her daughter Angela and her children. Angela, a lovely girl, was married to a very good chap, Elwyn Watkins, a bus driver. They lost a boy in the Aberfan tragedy. [...] Mum's younger sister Angela married John Bracchi, they had a shop in Troedyrhiw, but moved to Llanelli. Uncle died years ago, auntie has retired now and lives at Neville Street.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper', p. 221.

<sup>48</sup> This wording appears on the front cover of the book *Spinetti Up Front*.

<sup>49</sup> Les Servini, *A Boy from Bardi*, p. 39.

To a certain extent, Emanuelli's *A Sense of Belonging* (2011), echoes Servini's account in the way the family is introduced, with the usual update on births, deaths, departures, etc. Emanuelli, though, emphasises the role of the family in the development and reputation of the father's business:

Since the Eisteddfod of 1928 my mother had been constantly on the look-out for more opportunities to generate additional turnover to supplement the meagre intake from the day-to-day business at the cafés. She landed one of her greatest coups by negotiating the 'franchise' to supply confectionery and ices to no less than the prestigious Treherbert Opera House in Station Street. This must have infuriated the Conti's, who had a refreshment house in the same street.<sup>50</sup>

Surprisingly, the mother is portrayed as 'the driving force behind the business'<sup>51</sup>, thus projecting her role outside the walls of the domestic sphere and of cultural tradition, from 'domestic goddess' to a cunning and ambitious woman full of resources and with entrepreneurial skills. The following passage is another example:

In 1937 England celebrated the coronation of King George VI. This was a great boost to business, with crowds and parades filing past our shop in the high Street. [...] My mother, who loved everything royal, was very enthusiastic about the coronation celebrations. "Boys, we gotta do something special," she said. "What do you suggest Ma?" asked Louis. "Well on the day, you are going to distribute ice creams to the crowds in the streets – FOR FREE!" Louis and I looked at her in disbelief. My mother never missed the opportunity to make an extra penny. She'd break up bars of chocolate into bits and sell it in the café at a hefty premium as 'Broken Chocolate'.<sup>52</sup>

This passage reveals not only her ability to exploit propitious circumstances such as the coronation of King George VI to make money and attract more customers, but also her position of power within the family and above all within the local community. In her, one can read the drive to gain respect and social status, and the necessity not to be a subordinate and marginalised character. Perhaps, this emphasis on the mother should be read in the light of Emanuelli's account of the Second World War, a time when 'Italian families in South Wales were mourning for the fathers, sons and brothers they had lost on the *Arandora Star*'.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, the entrepreneurial and independent characteristics of Emanuelli's mother anticipate the role of women within the Italian community during the Second World War, having to sustain both family and business on their own. Luckily, the author's father 'was spared because he had been resident in

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<sup>50</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense of Belonging: From the Rhondda to the Potteries: Memories of a Welsh Italian Englishman* (Langenfeld: Six Towns Books, 2010), p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

the United Kingdom for more than twenty years' (this sentence is curiously repeated twice within the space of ten lines).<sup>54</sup> Emanuelli, on the other hand, was arrested and confined for over two years on suspicion of disloyalty to the British Empire, purely because, during one of his visits to Italy, he had spent a month in what he thought was a holiday camp ('Camp Mussolini' in Monte Sacro, Rome, to be precise). Luckily, thanks to the pledge of Reverend P. J. Ryan, a catholic priest from his parish in Tunstall, his case was reviewed and Emanuelli became the subject of a Directed Labour Order.

To sum up, this section has highlighted the role of communicative memory in the importance given to family memories and the role of the father and/or the patriarchs. The analysis of the texts has revealed how the authors construct their family memories of migration, and how parents and grandparents, for example, represent home and exile, belonging and otherness, highlighting the difficulties experienced such as prejudice and racism, as well as strategies of assimilation/integration.

### **Where is home? The link between space and memory.**

In *Even the Rain is Different: Women Writing on the Highs and Lows of Living Abroad* (2005), the editor Gwyneth Tyson Roberts introduces the section called 'Where do I belong?' containing Pelosi's account by pointing out how writers, women with a migrant background, 'have strong roots in their part of Wales and great affection for the cities they grew up in, and at the same time feel strong ties to the countries from which they derive their ancestry and religion'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed this is the case with Pelosi and the other Welsh-Italian writers studied in this chapter. The current section, therefore, looks at how authors analyse both their relationship with Italy, the country they often visited, and Wales, the country they return to, with particular attention to how they construct a sense of identity and belonging in relation to these two countries.

In the foreword to his book, Emanuelli writes:

I must confess that there have often been times during the many years of my now long life when I felt like an outsider. I spent my childhood in South Wales as the son of Italian immigrants. [...] I remember feeling very much like an Italian among the Welsh. Then, when I visited my parents' hometown in northern Italy at the tender age of seven with my OXO cup and Welsh accent, I felt like a little Welshman – un piccolo gallese – among Italians. Later still, as a teenager in the 1930s when the family moved to England

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<sup>54</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense of Belonging*, pp. 70-1.

<sup>55</sup> Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, ed., *Even the Rain is Different: Women Writing on the Highs and Lows of Living Abroad* (Dinas Powys: Honno Press, 2005), p. 221.

my schoolmates made me feel like a Welshman among the English. The war years were the worst: branded as being of ‘hostile association’ and detained in an internment camp on the Isle of Man, I had never felt so isolated in my life. But now, after many years and among my many English friends, I am happy to see myself as what I am: a Welsh Italian Englishman – ed è buono così<sup>56</sup>.

For Emanuelli, the people he met, and the places he visited or in which he lived, have helped to define his perception of identity. As part of the title of his book suggests (‘Memories of a Welsh-Italian Englishman’), Emanuelli embodies three identities. As for his Italianness, the fact that he was the ‘son of Italian parents’ makes him automatically Italian, suggesting a typically traditional Italian upbringing (‘I remember feeling very much like an Italian among the Welsh’). Emanuelli boasts of this Italianness with pride throughout the course of his account. His Welshness comes through during his visits to Bardi as he becomes or, perhaps was made to become, aware of being ‘different’ (‘with my Oxo cup and Welsh accent, I felt like a little Welshman’). Equally, his Welshness is perceived and highlighted by his English friends (‘my schoolmates made me feel like a Welshman among the English’). His Englishness, however, is understated and simply implied due to his relocation to England. This shows how identity, location and society are interrelated and the fact that, in Woodward’s words, “identity gives us the location in the world and presents the link between us and society”.<sup>57</sup>

Emanuelli proposes two different images of Italy in the course of his book: one that is profuse with sketches of happy family life, beautiful landscapes and excellent food; and one that refers to his experience at ‘Camp Mussolini’, which offers a different perspective in relation to the more lovingly, affectionate and bucolic image of Italy. The first example refers to one of Emanuelli’s Summer holiday in Bardi, surrounded by the love and affection of his family:

There were of course hugs, tears and kisses as my mother said her sad farewells, and I too was very melancholy to realise I would soon be leaving this enchanting place where I had experienced so much love, affection and such glorious fun with my Italian uncles and cousins. I was not looking forward to it at all. The final visit over, we slowly made our way back to the farm for the last time. It was a lovely evening, a rosy glow in the sky. In the distance the bell from the parish church tolled its call for evening benediction. From across the valley came the sound of a group of contadini singing one of those haunting mountain songs.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hector Emanuelli, ‘Foreword’ in *A Sense Of Belonging*.

<sup>57</sup> Kathryn Woodward, ed., *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense Of Belonging*, p. 25.

The passage presents a romantic and bucolic scene with the colours of the sunset, the image of the *contadini*<sup>59</sup> returning to their families, and singing happily to celebrate the end of a hard-working day, and the sound of the church bells rewarding the farmers, and infusing a sense of spirituality and religiosity to the scene.

By contrast, the following passage describes the author's experience at Camp Mussolini in 1939, when at the age of eighteen, having 'an interest in Italy and things Italian' he was informed that the Italian government was organising 'an exceptionally seductive, with "no strings attached"' Summer camp at Rome and Pescara.<sup>60</sup> On his arrival, as part of a British Italian contingent, he joined a group of young Hungarians, French, Greeks and Poles, and, to his great surprise, discovered the pseudo-military reality of the camp:

The very name of the camp – Campo Mussolini – augured ill. Large billboards proclaimed slogans coined by the Duce; 'In Africa c'è posto e Gloria per tutti – In Africa there's room and glory for all!', 'Guerra – una parola che non ci fa paura – War – a word that does not frighten us,' 'Abbiamo dei conti vecchi e nuovi da regolare – we have some old and new accounts to settle' and of course 'Credere, Obbedire, Combattere – Believe, Obey, Fight!'. To my horror, we were promptly herded into tents and it began to dawn on me that this was not a holiday venue, but a pseudo-military training camp run accordingly to fascist principles. We were issued with a uniform of the so called 'avanguardisti.' [...] Miserable in my scratchy and bedraggled uniform, I felt that I had been completely duped by signor Floriani. Days were long and arduous and we were made to march up and down, slope and present arms with antiquated rifles – without ammunition of course. [...] We must have looked a rather pathetic sight, a juvenile version of Dad's Army, perhaps. During our stay in Monte Sacro, we saw nothing of the city of Rome although it was only a short bus-ride away.<sup>61</sup>

The description of the camp offers a 'disturbing' image of Italy. In the choice of words 'to my horror', 'miserable', 'scratchy and bedraggled', 'completely duped' suggests that the author is feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed. Set against the previous image of Italy, it also suggests a subtle judgment as if the author was not only against Fascist policies but also regretted the fact that the memories of his experience at Camp Mussolini and Mussolini himself spoilt his happy, serene and idyllic image of Italy ('The very name of the camp, – Campo Mussolini – augured ill'). It is significant that this image is presented as an isolated experience, which nevertheless had great impact; a confined portrayal of Italy, as suggested both by the word 'camp' itself and also by the phrase 'we saw nothing of the city of Rome although it was only a short bus-ride away'.

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<sup>59</sup> 'Contadini' is the Italian word for 'farmers'.

<sup>60</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense Of Belonging*, p. 61.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-2.

Interestingly, much later in his life, in 2007, during a visit to Italy in which he took a group of English friends on a walking holiday, the author feels almost redeemed and freed, giving away where his heart belongs:

From there I took them over the hills to Bardi, where a welcome committee headed by signora Ester Zanelli, the President of the local magazine 'Famiglia Bardigiana', spent the whole day showing us around. We had lunch in the Bue Rosso, where my mother had worked as a waitress all those years ago. The Bue Rosso has a wonderful dining room with panorama windows overlooking the valley. As I chatted with my English friends and let my gaze wander down the river Ceno to the bluish horizon I felt completely at home.<sup>62</sup>

The previous spoilt image of Italy has disappeared, the view presents no obstacles, as suggested in the 'panorama windows overlooking the valley', the view of the river Ceno flowing down the valley and the 'bluish horizon'. Considering that Emanuelli was in his late eighties when he travelled to Bardi with his friends, the description assumes the tones of a sentimental journey to his roots and to his country of origins. To a certain extent, this description has similarities with Pelosi's account.

'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper' is a sentimental travelogue in which the author describes the 'highs and lows of living abroad', especially as Pelosi engages in a series of cultural comparisons between Italy and Wales. First of all, being a catholic, her religious identity gives Pelosi the opportunity to mark the difference in the way that religious festivities are observed in the two countries:

The fundamentals of living in a Catholic country go through every aspect of life and culture like wording through a stick of rock, but the way I was brought up within Catholicism in Wales was very different from being a Catholic in Italy. A feast-day in Italy is an opportunity to have fun, but the religious theme of the celebration is expected and enjoyed by both locals and tourists. A Bank Holiday in the U.K. is completely different. Sadly, it is common to read or hear that the day was not a success because of bad weather or traffic jams. The comforting reliability of celebrations focusing on a beloved saint are missing.<sup>63</sup>

The paragraph highlights the spiritual and embracing characteristics ('through every aspect of life and culture', comforting reliability') of Italian festivities contrasting with the gloominess ('bad weather') and the disruption ('traffic jams') of Welsh celebrations. Clearly, through this contrast, Pelosi expresses her strong attachment to Italy and a sense of Italianness. This attachment is also reflected in the description of the simple

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<sup>62</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense Of Belonging*, p. 178. The words 'panorama windows' appear in the original quote.

<sup>63</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper', p. 227.

things of everyday life, such as drinking and eating. In this passage, for example, she compares the way of drinking in Italy and Wales, and her comparison acquires the tone of a critique of Welsh society:

The drinking of wine (and water) with meals in our part of Italy is relaxing for drinkers and those with them who may choose to have just a coffee. [...] In Wales the attitude to alcohol is much more problematic, and these days I am increasingly fearful of the bad behaviour of people who have drunk too much.<sup>64</sup>

Once again the contrast is between a sense of balance given by the combination of wine and water, and the relaxing attitude in the reference to Italy (which can be read as symbolising the facility of assimilation of Italianness) with the more problematic association alcohol/ bad behaviour, in the reference to Wales (symbolising a tension and a more problematic attitude towards her Welshness).

In the following passage, the writer continues her evaluation and critique of the two countries and their culture, now aiming to point out the diversity in the quality of life:

Of all the contrasts I notice between Wales and Italy, the greatest is in attitudes to food. In Italy food is everything and one can always find freshly-cooked ‘natural’ meals. In parts of Wales where fast-food outlets and pubs serve processed ‘instant’ meals, standards are very low.<sup>65</sup>

The association of Italy with good food is almost expected, but here the contrast between the ‘freshly cooked “natural” meals’ and the ‘processed “instant meals”’ can be read as the freshness and natural attitude towards Italy and her Italian cultural heritage contrasting with the more elaborate process of assimilation/integration into Welsh culture.

In the last of this series of comparisons between Italy and Wales, Pelosi finally reflects on the different ways in which people interact with one another:

There are also big differences on an emotional level. I’m a spontaneous person who shows my feelings, and in Italy that’s no problem. Here I often have to modify my reactions to avoid being misinterpreted; I have to stop and think before I touch.<sup>66</sup>

So far, in all these examples, Pelosi’s desire to affirm her Italianness is most evident in the way she counterbalances positive and idyllic images of Italy with negative or more problematic images of Wales. Even on an emotional level, Pelosi identifies herself with the spontaneity of Italian people, and clearly expresses uneasiness in relating to the

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<sup>64</sup> Paulette Pelosi, ‘Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper’, p. 227.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, pp. 227- 8.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 228.



Welsh and their habits ('I often have to modify my reactions to avoid being misunderstood'). In reality, these comparisons become the symbols of her debated identity in an attempt to (re)-define it.

Pelosi's short story stands out for her particular attention to detail in conveying a romanticised and nostalgic portrayal of Italy. In another text, a poem entitled 'The Water in My Blood', which draws on the same nostalgic theme of her father and their shared memories of Picinisco, she writes:

I wrote the poem in 1999. It expresses my exhilaration at discovering, for myself, the magic of this river. My first visit was indeed with my father, on his return journey to that area of Italy, after an absence of sixty years. His magical memories and the reality matched perfectly.<sup>67</sup>

In her poem, once again her desire to revive her father's experience is clear not just in order to rediscover the magic of some idyllic places, but also to attempt to revive and embody her father's Italianness. Later in the text, she continues:

I wore a simple cotton dress, I found a fallen branch to use as a stick to support me, I walked to that river, water levels much lower in the summer ... and I experienced ... BLISS. Each year that we were able to return [...] I felt the same...like years and any strain had been lifted off my shoulder... I felt the same feeling of BLISS!<sup>68</sup>

The repetition of the word 'bliss' suggests the portrayal of 'that part of Italy' as an idyllic place, nevertheless admittedly 'magic', in other words surreal. This idealisation is particularly evident in the series of comparisons between Italy/Picinisco and Wales/Swansea, where Italy is imagined, experienced and described as an ideal place.

Stuart Hall conceives this idealisation as a sort of 'displaced 'homeward' journey' according to Edward Said's theory of an 'imaginative geography and history', which helps 'the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatising the difference between what is close to the mind and what is far way'.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in Pelosi's case, especially after the death of her father her evocative journey to Italy symbolises the displacement of living in Wales without her strongest link with Italy, and therefore it symbolises her intention to 'go home' to the land of her fathers. Similarly, Maurice Halbwachs talks of 'retrospective mirage' by which many people consider the past (in

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<sup>67</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'The Water in My Blood', in *Blessings: Stories, Songs, Poems and Prayers on Life in Swansea*, ed. by Ruth Jenkins (Swansea: Cartersford Publications Wales, 2006), p. 70.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>69</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 232.

particular childhood and youth) as a golden age.<sup>70</sup> Pelosi's idyllic descriptions of an idyllic Italy particularly can be seen in a nostalgic key after the death of her father. Halbwachs, in fact, makes the point that nostalgia for the past can actually reflect a sufferance experienced in the past. Sufferance, in his view, can exercise 'an incomprehensible attraction on the person who has survived it and who seems to think he has left there the best part of himself, which he tries to recapture'.<sup>71</sup> For Pelosi, the continuous revival of those memories, which materialises any time she undertakes the same journey to her father's birthplace, reveals the intensity of her desire to recapture her 'best part' to affirm her Italian identity. On the other hand, considering Pelosi's attachment to the paternal figure, writing about these memories and shared experiences also represents a desperate attempt to replace the physical absence of her father and the vacuum left by his death with memories and abundant colourful images. In exploring her poem, Pelosi finally writes: 'My Papa died here, in Swansea, in 2001 – four months from diagnosis to death with prostate cancer. The poem stands as a memorial to his strong spirit'.<sup>72</sup> The same bond that links father, daughter and Italy will be consolidated and magnified in 'Schoolbook in Spaghetti Paper' five years later.

Les Serviini addresses the question of belonging in a slightly different way to Pelosi. The 'anxiety' caused by the death of Pelosi's father which problematised the issue of belonging is missing in Serviini's. For him, in fact, the question is not 'will I stay in Wales or will I return to Italy?'. The account is pervaded by a tone of resignation, or rather mature acceptance, after looking back at his family and friends and reflecting on the circumstances that brought them to Wales:

I realise, too, that had life been easier or better we would not have come here. Whatever the 'pros and cons' we are here and have found a welcome in the hillsides, but Bardi is still the land of our fathers. There is a saying, – 'Ad ogni uccello il suo nido è bello'<sup>73</sup>. We have "flown the nest" but it's still there and occasionally we return to it.<sup>74</sup>

And indeed, from the very beginning of his account, Serviini confesses that in spite of having lived in Wales for seventy years, he still feels at home when he returns to Grezzo, a fragment of Bardi in Italy:

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<sup>70</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 48.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>72</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'The Water in My Blood', p. 70.

<sup>73</sup> Literally, this translates as 'To every bird, his own nest is beautiful', which idiomatically means 'There's no place like home'.

<sup>74</sup> Les Serviini, *A Boy from Bardi*, p. 9.

Can you believe that after 70 years in Wales I get this “gut” feeling whenever I return to my roots? Yet Bardi Castle comes into sight, when I walked up the little hill to Cogno, the blood sings, the heart beats faster, I am home! Only my cousin Maria remains of our clan in Grezzo. My birth place, just a few miles north of Bardi, is much changed, spanking new houses, only one or two families working the land, roads, water on tap, a bath, a toilet! What would my grandfather have said! The church is still the same as when I was baptised, but is now served from Bardi, my dear ones lie asleep in the churchyard, the Cappella has been refurbished, largely with money from Wales and elsewhere, otherwise the place is barely recognisable.<sup>75</sup>

The architectural and geographical landmarks of the village instigate in Servini a sense of belonging, and yet, he admits, so many things have changed through the decades. Unlike the description of Picinisco in Pelosi’s text, ‘the place is barely recognisable’. Strangely enough, Servini associates this place, deprived of all the visible and tangible signs of familiarity with the notion of ‘home’. The absence of these signs symbolises his absence from the village, his departure, implying a sense of displacement; but unlike Pelosi’s text, it prevents Servini from engaging in a ‘unique’ sentimental affiliation with Italy. In Servini’s account, a sense of nostalgia and homesickness are quite often associated not only with Bardi, but also with places in Wales where he spent an important part of his life. In the following description, he recalls the years spent in Aberavon, near Port Talbot, on the South Wales coast, when he was a child and his parents left Italy for Wales:

I still feel, after over 40 years, a great affection for Aberavon. This is only natural. It is the place where I came to as a child. It’s where I went to school, where I met my friends. My family were in business there for 50 years, through the ice-cream round I knew every street. [...] the town is much changed, [...] despite very hard times, the strike, the unemployment etc., I feel people were different. You could leave your doors open, old folks and children were safe, [...]. The Italian community did keep an identity. We had social events, outings, rare dances. We had little part in these, come to think of it we never had time [...] we never closed! I did have Welsh friends; Will, Cyril, Eric, Stan, George, Arthur and Jim. [...] A few pints, fish-and-chips, then home. To think that I am the only survivor of that happy group.<sup>76</sup>

Servini reflects on his youth spent in Aberavon, and recounts the happy memories in the company of both his Italian and Welsh friends, showing an attachment to his Italian roots and also a sense of commitment to the culture and society he has embraced. The kind of nostalgia that emerges in this passage is essentially nostalgia for a genuine sense of community and a simpler way of life, both of which have disappeared with the

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<sup>75</sup> Les Servini, *A Boy from Bardi*, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

evolution of society, with changes in the economy, and as a result of political and historical circumstances.

However, it is not his nostalgia for distant places and people, nor a desire or necessity to articulate a sense of belonging which drives Servini to write. In the forward to his account, Servini confesses that his writing satisfies his friends' request to leave a contribution on the subject of Italians in Wales to posterity:

I have been urged by several Italian friends to add my little contribution. I have not done any research, I write from actual, factual experience. If this little tale has an edge over other, probably better, craftsmen, it is that it is real life as I have lived it. Inevitably, personal views and thoughts have crept in, I make no apology for them, the reader must accept it as a natural consequence of the passing of years.<sup>77</sup>

The last statement in this passage reinforces the idea that 'the passing of years' and generations has prompted the necessity to reflect on belonging to two cultures by means of comparing Italy and Wales, Italian identity and Welsh identity.

This section, therefore, has highlighted how authors have proposed contrasting images of Italy and Wales, and showed how the process of formation of Welsh-Italian identity works by debating and shifting continually the position of the Welsh and the Italian identity. In some instances, a dramatisation of this 'inner debate' is represented by means of idealising the past through nostalgic memories of a simpler way of life, as Liz Wren-Owens has also pointed out recently.<sup>78</sup>

### **The metaphors of in-betweenness**

The task of rebuilding cultural memory is particularly evident in the way Welsh-Italian writers perceive themselves in relation to their ancestors. Often, when looking back at their childhood, they use metaphors, symbols and other devices to suggest the constant debate and negotiation of their identity.

In the prologue of Anita Arcari's novel, *The Hokey Pokey Man*, the author assists at a funeral procession, in which an old man suddenly turns his attention to a 'cappella', a chapel, that 'had suffered the ravages of time and war, roof open to the once

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<sup>77</sup> Les Servini, *A Boy from Bardi*, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> See Liz Wren-Owens, 'The Delayed Emergence of Italian-Welsh Narratives or Class and the Commodification of Ethnicity?', *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture*, 3: 1 (2012), pp. 119-134, (pp. 130-131).

cornflower-blue plaster now peeling and faded to a dingy, mottled grey'<sup>79</sup>. On the wall of this chapel, an old inscription reads:

Built for my dear son, Sabatino, in penance and atonement for  
all he was forced to give up for his family.  
May God and Our Lady grant me forgiveness.  
Built in this year AD 1900.<sup>80</sup>

The use of this chapel at the beginning of the novel is not fortuitous. In the section dedicated to acknowledgements, Arcari writes: 'It was in Immoglie, Italy, that I first discovered the family *cappella*, sowing the seeds of curiosity that became the very essence of this novel'.<sup>81</sup> The statement says it all, and the fact that the chapel really existed is used symbolically in the novel. A few lines above in the same section, in fact, the author confesses that 'As a child, I would listen, mesmerised, to the story of how my grandparents came to Wales as poor Italian immigrants at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century'.<sup>82</sup> The derelict chapel, therefore, symbolically encapsulates the history of Arcari's family, her cultural heritage. It then becomes the symbol for rebuilding faith in ancestry and in cultural identity, and can ultimately be read as a metaphor about the need to rebuilt cultural memory.

In a similar way to Arcari, Pelosi uses the powerful metaphor of the 'dipping duck' to suggest the same need to rebuild cultural memory. Interestingly the dipping duck is also a gadget which she shared with her father, and which eventually becomes a symbol for him, suggesting that Pelosi metaphorically relies on the symbolic meaning of this gadget to express her connection with the past:

I cross two cultures in my life on this earth. My father and I shared a weakness for gadgets, one of which was a daft dipping duck made of a thick plastic tube which could contain fluid; it would gradually fill up with each dip into water, finally dropping the duck's head down into the water and causing the duck to rise again to repeat the process. Like that daft duck, I continue to dip my beak into the water (and mountains) of Italy only to swing back to my pedestal base, Wales. This seemingly perpetual motion only works if each part of the equation stays the same: remove the water from the dipping duck, or the duck from the water, and he stops. One day part of my own equation may change or be removed, and I will stop. Will I stay in Wales or Italy? Only time will decide.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Anita Arcari, *The Hokey Pokey Man* (Talybont: y Lolfa, 2010), p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper', p. 228.

In the equation presented in this long statement, the duck represents the position of the writer in Wales and possibly her Welshness, whereas the water in which the duck dips represents her desire and need to absorb Italianness. The risk of removing ‘the water from the dipping duck, or the duck from the water’ can stop the mechanism of mutual exchange. The very fact that Pelosi questions whether she will remain in Wales or relocate to Italy clearly shows the possibility that one day part of this equation may be altered which will spoil the desired balance (‘one day part of my own equation may change or be removed, and I will stop’).<sup>84</sup>

The metaphors used by Arcari and Pelosi illustrate how the authors rely on the platform of their ancestors to establish their connection with the past, and how they clearly imagine themselves as children of migrants rather than child migrants. Often, authors use symbols and different strategies to express their position of in-betweenness. As we have seen, Pelosi quite often makes use of sensory memory highlighting her food tastes, and recalling her contact with objects from Italy or Wales, like the dipping duck gadget. The recurrent use of water in Pelosi’s account and poem, and even in Emanuelli’s book, is particularly relevant, as water symbolises fluidity and movement, and in reference to Italy, it suggests the flow of continuity of the Italian heritage culture. At the beginning of Pelosi’s poem ‘The Water in My Blood’, we read:

I didn’t need to tippie-toe a white  
Welsh-wintered digit into the warm water  
To know ...  
I already *knew*.<sup>85</sup>

The reference here is to the waters of La Rava river in the Comino valley. Pelosi uses a combination of alliterations and sensory memories (visual and bodily) to produce a contrast between Italy and Wales which suggests an embracing and permeating connotation attached to Italy and her Italianness, represented particularly by the warmth of the river flowing, and a cold and ‘superficial’ connotation in reference to Wales and Welshness (‘Welsh-wintered digit’). On the other hand, it is interesting to note how Wales and Welshness are referred to with the recurrent use of Oxo or Bisto gravy particularly by Emanuelli (‘when I visited my parents’ hometown in northern Italian at the tender age of seven with my OXO cup and Welsh accent, I felt like a little

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<sup>84</sup> Paulette Pelosi, ‘Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper’, p. 228.

<sup>85</sup> Paulette Pelosi, ‘The Water in My Blood’, lines 1-4.

Welshman'<sup>86</sup> 'Of course, I would produce my OXO cup, much to everyone's amazement'<sup>87</sup>, 'and for me water from the nearby spring, of course from my OXO cup, and we were well satisfied'<sup>88</sup>, 'I do hope Zia Anna has not forgotten to pack my OXO cup!'<sup>89</sup>). The dark appearance and porous consistency of Bisto/Oxo gravy, contrasted with the clearness and fluidity of water, suggest the pervading yet undefined characteristic of Welshness.

Unlike Arcari, Pelosi and Emanuelli, Victor Spinetti uses a different strategy, placing his emphasis on the use of language. As mentioned in the first section, he remembers how in spite of being christened with his Italian name Vittorio Georgio Andrea, he has always been anglicised to Victor George Andrew. To an attentive linguist or reader, there is, nevertheless, an intriguing spelling mistake of the name 'Georgio', which should read 'Giorgio' in Italian. 'Georgio', is clearly an Anglicisation of the Italian name (George in English). There is the possibility that this spelling mistake may be a typing mistake by the publisher, considering that the previous spelling of Spinetti's grandfather, Giorgio, is correct. However, another more obvious mistake, the spelling of 'Poppa' in lieu of 'Papa' (Italian for father)<sup>90</sup> would confirm the theory that Spinetti is not entirely familiar with Italian spelling, given the poor mastering of the Italian language, and due perhaps to a cultural upbringing essentially in an Anglo-Welsh environment ('for anyone else it was Victor George Andrew'). On the other hand, even in the case of a 'distraction', it could also potentially and arguably be interpreted as a somewhat relaxed attitude towards his Italian identity. This conclusion is not too outlandish if we consider the importance that other Welsh-Italian authors give to the spelling of their Italian name. So is Paulette Pelosi's case, who felt marginalised and ridiculed by her schoolmates who used to mispronounce her surname:

Everyone at school recognised that I was Italian – was 'different'. I had a funny surname, which although it seemed relatively short and easy to pronounce as 'foreign' names go seemed to be mainly mispronounced by others.<sup>91</sup>

Pelosi's statement contrasts with Spinetti's attitude, as Spinetti finally reflects on his multiple identities with a hint of irony: 'Put that together and you have an Italian

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<sup>86</sup> Hector Emanuelli, 'Forward', in *A Sense Of Belonging*.

<sup>87</sup> Hector Emanuelli, *A Sense of Belonging*, p. 18.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>90</sup> Victor Spinetti, *Victor Spinetti Up Front*, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper', p. 224.

Welshman who's entitled to wear a kilt'. The position of the word 'Welshman' in the middle of the phrase symbolises the centrality of his Welsh identity, leaving the Italian and Scottish identities as subordinate. On the other hand, as the editor of *Even the Rain is Different*, Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, affirms:

Balancing two competing allegiances is rarely easy or comfortable, but travelling from one country to another, very different, one and knowing that they are both home – if in different senses – can certainly concentrate the mind powerfully on exactly what the words 'home' and abroad' mean.<sup>92</sup>

So, for example, to return to Pelosi's text, at the very beginning of her account, she recalls the time when her Nonna Carmela (her paternal grandmother) used to treat her with her Italian cooking, indulging her senses, for a moment, in a bucolic portrayal of family life:

Food was always a top priority for us all. I loved the indescribably gorgeous aromas of roasted peppers, pasta, sauces and soups which would fill the air in my Nonna Carmela's house in Swansea. The delicious smells would burst out into the street when the front door was opened to admit Papa and me after Sunday Mass. I was a real Welsh-Italian Bisto Kid, my nostrils dilated to inhale all the marvellous smells and aromas of my Italian grandmother's culinary delights.<sup>93</sup>

The stereotypical association of family, food and religion to convey an almost sacred image of family are used here as clear signifiers of Pelosi's Italian cultural heritage. However, in spite of her boast of taste and appreciation for her 'Italian grandmother's culinary delights', she surprises the reader with an unexpected 'I was a real Welsh-Italian Bisto Kid'. The reference to 'Bisto', a Welsh grocery product, appears completely disconnected from the previous acclamation of Italian food. This 'trick' can be interpreted as the 'play' of two co-existing identities, and can be symbolic of a kind of 'instability' between two coexisting and 'playing' identities.

Pelosi has the rare gift of transforming the simple objects, portions of landscape and sketches of everyday life from an isolated fixed dimension to a progressively dense container of symbolical and allegorical meanings. She uses words in a symbolical way to create an atmosphere that suggests a sense of cultural loss or nostalgia and the power of memory in reinstating a cultural belonging. Objects and visual images become metaphors of a time gone-by, symbols and powerful signifiers of her religious faith, her cultural identity and her need to belong both to Italy and also to Wales. In both her poem and short story, these objects and images create almost a sort of 'domestic space',

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<sup>92</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper', p. 222.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 224-5.



a space that evokes memories of her childhood, Italy and her Italian origins. Pelosi's use of metaphorical objects and domestic space is vaguely reminiscent of Proust's *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913-1927), where landscapes, individuals and passionate feelings are unfolded and presented to the reader as the writer progressively recalls and discovers them. In a similar way to Proust, Pelosi's 'imaginative function' of memory translates her desire to capture the reality of her father's memories of Italy in its entirety.

This section has focused on the second generation migrants, and has highlighted how the authors have looked back at their childhood and have perceived themselves as children of migrants, using symbols, metaphors and other strategies to demonstrate their sense of cultural identity and in-betweenness.

## **Conclusion**

Inspired by Maurice Halbwachs's idea on the importance of social frameworks to instigate the retrieval of cultural memories, this chapter considered the recent emergence of Welsh-Italian narratives as a result of a number of initiatives concerning ethnic minorities in Wales. For example, it highlighted initiatives such as the *Italian Memories in Wales* project, the unveiling of the first National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales and the related exhibition *Wales Breaks its Silence* to suggest an increasing interest in the Welsh-Italian community. More importantly it highlighted an increasing urge to reinstate or re-negotiate the identity of the Italian community within the Welsh context. Through a thematic approach to textual analysis, it established that this 'identity' is not hyphenated and homogeneous in the sense of definite and stable, but rather hyphenating, and therefore constantly debated and renegotiated. Such postulation was founded on Jan Assmann's notion of the communicative function of memory, and on Stuart Hall's theory of the instability and fluctuation of cultural identity, as well as Hall's use of Said's idea of 'imaginative geography and history', in order to highlight a position of in-betweenness via attachment and distance, displacement and re-appropriation.

A look, in the first section of textual analysis, at how authors constructed family memories has revealed how their ancestors have been assimilated (accepted, integrated), and how they conform to the idea of integrated migrants, in spite of the difficulties experienced at their arrival and particularly during the Second World War. Essentially,

the progenitors are represented as Italians with a connotation of Welshness (as in the case of Spinetti's father who is striving to embrace the new culture), but also as a cultural mediator in symbolising continuity with the heritage culture (as in the case of Pelosi's father, through whom she can maintain and articulate her Italianness).

The second and third sections have highlighted the fact that while authors do not necessarily and explicitly resist one identity or the other, it is clear that there is an inherent tension derived by their in-betweenness rather than hybridity. The tension of their in-betweenness is expressed in various ways. Often the authors project contrasting images of Italy and Wales, and use metaphors and symbols to express the level of attachment and the sense of belonging to one country or the other (i.e. the water for Italy and the gravy for Wales). Pelosi, for example, engages in a series of comparisons between lifestyles in Italy and Wales which would suggest a preference towards her Italianness or even a necessity/desire to consolidate it. Besides, in the course of her short account she continues to change the terms of her equation, swapping from 'a young Latin-Celtic beauty'<sup>94</sup> to 'I was Italian, Welsh-Italian, to boot!'<sup>95</sup>, and finally 'Welsh-Italian Bisto Kid'<sup>96</sup>. Significant is the fact that even her perception of her childhood memories is characterised by an interior debate about the coexistence of two identities, thus reinforcing Hall's idea of the instability of cultural identity and the constant negotiation/redefinition.

The analysis of the texts has also pointed out the use of nostalgia particularly in the texts of Pelosi, who often presents a more idealised view of Italy, as opposed to Servini, Emanuelli and Spinetti whose memories are ambivalent. It would be worth exploring further, for example, the impact of nostalgia as an adjustment strategy, as proposed by Andrea Deciu Ritivoi, who studied the relationship between nostalgia and identity.<sup>97</sup> Ritivoi's theory, for example, is that adjustment contemplates both strategies of survival and strategies of change, such as resistance to adjustment; and therefore it must be

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<sup>94</sup> Paulette Pelosi, 'Schoolbooks in Spaghetti Paper', p. 223.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>97</sup> Andrea Deciu Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), p. 3.

evaluated within the frame of reconciliation between two ‘seemingly rival views of personal identity’: *idem* and *ipse*, that is to say sameness and difference.<sup>98</sup>

The narratives generated by the encounter between two cultures offer the possibility ‘of interpreting difference in a non-separatist framework’.<sup>99</sup> Firstly, the fact that both generations write in English is not simply dictated by the knowledge or non-knowledge of the Italian language, or by an inherent practicality, but serves as a means of introducing Italian traditions, cultures and customs to the host community. Secondly, the works produced by immigrant writers have a multicultural atmosphere which is enhanced by switching between the two languages (i.e. the use of Italian words or phrases to render a realistic local flavour, but which, nevertheless reveals, at times, a limited or inaccurate level of knowledge and mastery of Italian). Thirdly, the autobiographical style utilised by the authors enables these immigrants to write about their previous life and continually to compare it with their present life. An example for all is to be found in Pelosi’s account, where on one hand, Italian traditions and customs are set against the Welsh way of life, and on the other, the experiences she shared with her father in Italy are set against her life in Wales.

Arcari’s novel has proved to be a more problematic text, and therefore has been used only laterally in the course of this chapter. *The Hokey Pokey Man* is essentially a family saga inspired by Arcari’s family, and is a good example of how the autobiographical experience has inflected and has been absorbed in fiction. It shows how templates used in autobiographical accounts can be so engrained that they pervade fictional narratives. Many memories and anecdotes portrayed in this novel echo not only the same fears and hopes expressed in the memories of the other Welsh-Italian authors, but also, more importantly, the need to rebuild cultural memory.

Chapter Four, the last chapter of the thesis, will complete the journey of representation of Italian migrant identity amongst the Italian community in Wales by offering the perspective of Anglo-Welsh writers.

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<sup>98</sup> Ritivoi reminds us that there is a fundamental distinction between a strong and a soft identity which, however, should not be considered antithetical. According to the strong interpretation (from the Latin etymon *idem*, meaning *same*), personal identity requires immutability and therefore resistance to adjustment; whereas according to the soft interpretation (from the Latin etymon *ipse*, meaning *self*) personal identity is open to variation and transformation (p. 7).

<sup>99</sup> This is phrase from Julia Kristeva utilised by Graziella Parati in *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*, p. 37.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Representation of Italian Immigrants in Anglo-Welsh Literature.

*It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear from them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.*<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Chapter Three looked at the context in which Welsh-Italian narrative was generated. In particular, it focussed on the role of post-memory and the production of cultural memories. From the analysis of texts it emerged that for second and third generation Italians the question of their identity and sense of belonging depends on various factors, such as their social status or the way they consider themselves in relation to their ancestors. By comparison, this Chapter Four looks at the representation of Italian immigrants in Wales in Anglo-Welsh literature.

Benedict Anderson proposed the idea of ‘imagined community’ as a politically and culturally constructed community where people conveniently share the same beliefs, attitudes, opinions and sentiments without necessarily knowing each other. Anderson seems to use the term ‘imagined’ not in the sense of an arbitrary construction but rather as a collective one. Yet the fact that all members of a given community are very unlikely to have ever met, suggests that these people only theoretically and, to a certain degree, forcedly share the same beliefs, attitudes, opinions and sentiments. Anderson also argues that the creation and maintenance of nationalist movements and the idea of ethnicity are initiated by mass communications and mass migrations.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Johannes Fabian highlights how the construction of ‘othering expresses the insight that the ‘other’ is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but made’.<sup>3</sup>

A look at Raymond Williams’ novel *Border Country* (1960) offers a practical example of how Anderson’s idea works. On the one hand, Williams applies the idea of ‘imagined

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 6, (the quote is italicised in the Anderson’s book).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Work of Anthropology: Critical Essays 1971-1991* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 208.

community' to the working class community of miners on strike, while on the other, he represents the idea of 'in-between-ness' of Anglo-Welsh identity. Matthew Price, the protagonist of the novel, is the son of a Welsh railway signaller who has left his working class home to study at Cambridge, and to work as lecturer in economics and history at London University. Matthew however, is temporarily called away from his academic world to visit his father who has had a stroke. The novel is about Matthew's return to his native village of Glynmawr and his attempts to come to terms with both the impending death of his father and the values of the working class community that he has left behind. On the one hand, Matthew's decision to take up a university scholarship and pursue his academic career in England marks an irrevocable crossing of the 'border' between the working class world (represented by Glynmawr village) and the a wider world of educational opportunities ('Mam, it's a long time and a long way,' Matthew said. 'I feel so far outside. Don't you see it?'[...] 'It seems longer now I've come back.').<sup>4</sup> On the other, through a recollection of flashback memories, Matthew also realises that, in spite of his new life, there are affinities between him and his father, and therefore an undeniable continuity between the two ('Every value I have Morgan, and I mean this, comes from him. Comes only from him').<sup>5</sup> Significantly enough, Matthew Price is a university lecturer researching on population movements in the industrialised valleys of South Wales of the nineteenth century, and essentially an educated man who undertakes a personal journey back to 'the land of his father'. It is at the end of this 'revisiting the past' that he eventually reaches the conclusion that 'Not going back, but the feeling of exile ending. For distance is measured, and that is what matters. By measuring the distance, we come home'.<sup>6</sup> Quite rightly, in the forward to the novel, Dai Smith asserts that:

Raymond Williams fully understood that his country on the border was only different in its specific shapes, so that at someone else's border, in the changing particularities of other histories of migration and settlement and struggle, the narrative, personal and general, continued.<sup>7</sup>

The construction of 'imagined communities', as well as the concepts of inclusion and exclusion, especially with reference to immigrant groups, has been largely studied by sociologists. For example, in a study conducted on ethnic diversity and social inclusion in Wales, Charlotte Williams looks at the public policy agenda of the late 1990s, and

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *Border Country* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006), p. 348.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. Xiii.

illustrates how the construction of ethnic ‘othering’ is conveyed by marginalisation in certain areas such as housing, health, education, jobs.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, looking at behavioural and attitudinal practices such as harassment, stereotyping and the rejection on the basis of accent, name or the level of language proficiency, Williams shows how discrimination is not only a way of distancing incomers from a previously established ‘imagined community’, but also is a way of creating a new marginalised community. For example, she highlights that ‘Full participation in a society is not simply a matter of income level, health status and educational achievement’<sup>9</sup> implying that access and use of services should be made available to all groups without discrimination. Practically speaking, Williams shows, from a social perspective, the problematic issue of inclusion of ‘otherness’, and how ‘othering’ is created by means of performing exclusion at various levels, and creating an issue of inclusion. By creating an issue of inclusion/exclusion communities define themselves within certain parameters, as well as attaching *another image* to whoever is outside of that pre-existing community. (my emphasis)

Significantly, Williams’ study seems to refer for the majority to those ethnic groups resident in Wales who are considered ‘other other’ (black British, Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, etc), without taking into consideration white minorities also present in Wales, such as Irish, Italians and Poles. Interestingly, Williams also notices that in Wales immigrants are considerably under-represented in Welsh society as they do not occupy ‘positions of power’: ‘ethnic minorities are still shop owners, restaurant proprietors, taxi drivers and traders rather than civil servants, university professors, magistrates, chief executives and media personnel’.<sup>10</sup> The implication of this statement seems to be that either there are not enough opportunities for them to step up the social ladder or that some form of prejudice or discrimination is preventing them from progressing. Furthermore, by this statement, Williams presumably excludes fixed term or provisional immigrants (i.e. those immigrants who come to Wales on a short time basis to study at Welsh universities, for work experience or simply to learn English as foreign language).

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<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Williams, ‘Social Inclusion and Race Equality in Wales’ in *Is Wales a Tolerant Nation? Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Wales* ed. by Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans and Paul O’Leary (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 139-159.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

Unfortunately, not much research has been done on ‘white’ migration to ‘white’ societies. Also, in parallel with Williams’ sociological study, it would be interesting to look at the representation of ethnic minorities in Welsh media and Anglo-Welsh literature, not so much to see whether inclusion or exclusion exist at other levels than social (this is kind of implicit or expected), but more importantly to assess to what extent social inclusion or exclusion are reflected in the production of visual, written, collective and personal memory which may contribute to the creation of ‘imagined communities’.

This chapter focuses on literature to see how important representation by host communities can be to the integration of incoming communities. The fact that Italians in Wales between the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century were mainly shop owners and restaurant proprietors shows that they were not necessarily under-represented within Welsh society. The circumstances of their migration to Wales were related to the business opportunities given by the Industrial Revolution: they brought a new service to the mining villages. The analysis of the portrayal of Italians in Anglo-Welsh literature for example, allows us to understand not only how literature can communicate a vision of the social and economic history of Wales, but also to what extent the presence and the influence of some ethnic minorities can shape memory. Yet, academics have exploited to a little extent this invaluable resource which, considering the absence of any textual self-narrative until 2002 (with the exception of Les Servini’s memoir *A Boy from Bardi* published in 1994), makes the reality and experience of Italians in Wales a relatively unknown and understudied case in migration studies. This chapter is therefore an attempt to fill in a gap in academic research, by looking at how the presence of Italians has been represented in Anglo-Welsh literature, and to study the cross-cultural dynamics which shape concepts of ‘otherness’, the power relations between self and the other, the familiar and the foreign.

Between 1943 and 2002, Welsh writers such as Idris Davies, John Parker, Gwyn Thomas, Walter Hadyn Davies, Catrin Collier, Rhian Davies and others have portrayed the Italians in Wales highlighting the positive impact that they had on the Welsh way of life. They emphasised how and why they came over, established their presence in the mining villages as ice-cream vendors and coffee shop owners, and provided services to the miners and the local population, but also representing the tensions with Nonconformists during the Second World War. These portrayals partly reflect how

Italians were represented in the media, for example, in the BBC 2 documentary *Ciao Charlie Rossi*<sup>11</sup> and in *The Adventurers*, a series of articles published by Jack Parker in the newspaper *South Wales Echo* between 20 and 25 April 1959. Both the documentary and the articles trace the history of Italians in Wales from the time of their arrival and the establishment of their successful businesses (coinciding with Wales's industrial and economic growth) up to the Second World War.

Although historians agree that the Italians in Wales are well integrated and assimilated, a close look at these texts reveals the complexity of the encounter between two cultures and identities. To start with, it is significant that the texts analysed in this chapter are all short stories with the exception of one novel. Critics such as Clare Hanson, Frank O'Connor and Ian Reid have stressed that the short story seems to be the preferred style of individuals and groups who are marginalised in society.<sup>12</sup> For these critics the short story is a constructed form which deals with the 'ex-centric', that is to say those people who are "not part of official or 'high' cultural hegemony" – in other words marginal groups or individuals who are outside the main centres of power'.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, Brown analyses a number of collections of short stories in Anglo-Welsh literature, pointing out two main characteristics: firstly, the use of a first-person narrator; and secondly, the fact that often 'these narrators are portrayed as visitors to Wales, who relate stories they have supposedly heard from local characters'.<sup>14</sup> In his own words, these techniques are utilised to underline a detachment, a distance, 'culturally and in some cases geographically'.<sup>15</sup> Quite relevant, too, is his mention of the fact that in Jane Aaron's collection of short stories entitled *Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales, c. 1850-1950* (1999), amongst the several lonely outsiders and isolated figures, we find the figure of Mr Bracchi (see Rhian Roberts' short story 'The Pattern' (1947)), a man who 'is isolated by his own nationality as an Italian living in South Wales in the Second World War'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ciao Charlie Rossi*, BBC 2, first broadcast 25 August 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Clare Hanson, Frank O'Connor and Ian Reid cited in Tony Brown, 'The Ex-centric Voice: The English-Language Short Story in Wales', in *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 1: 1 (Winter 2001), 25-41, (p. 26).

<sup>13</sup> In this quote, Brown uses Clare Hanson's term 'ex-centric' in Clare Hanson, ed., *Re-Reading the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 2. Brown is also referring to the following texts by O'Connor and Reid: Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963), and Ian Reid, *The Short Story* (London: Methuen, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> Tony Brown, 'The Ex-centric Voice: The English-Language Short Story in Wales', p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



Based on the arguments presented in this introduction, the analysis of the proposed Anglo-Welsh texts will focus on how authors have interpreted the experience of Italians in Wales with particular attention to issues of inclusion and exclusion and on what images are used to represent the Italian immigrants. Also, considering the time span between one text and the other<sup>17</sup>, the analysis will look at whether these images evolve or stay the same over time.

### **The construction of ethnic ‘othering’**

Considering the impact and importance of coffee shops in virtually all towns and villages of South Wales, the fact that coffee shops are described in all texts considered is almost to be expected. Whereas the purpose of these descriptions is often to find comfort in the memory of a friendly and cosy place to go to and socialise, one notices, surprisingly, the recurrent attention to certain features that suggests an attempt to construct an ‘ethnic othering’. These features consist, for example, in the description of the colourfulness and exotic atmosphere of the shop and the emphasis on the physiognomy of the Italians.

An example is the poem ‘In the Little Italian Shop’ (1943)<sup>18</sup> where Idris Davies documents the social function of the Italian shop as being a welcoming place where the customers, mainly colliers, gather to discuss politics (the General Strike of 1926) and issues that matters to them. However, the writer limits himself to a succinct description of the Italian shop as a place ‘where they sell coloured gassy pop’<sup>19</sup>.

In another text by John Parker called *The Alien Land* <sup>20</sup>, we find a more detailed description of the interior of the shop:

There were glass shelves behind the counter and ranged upon the shelves were glasses and bottles of various colours and lines of china cups. Below the shelves were boxes containing multi-coloured sweets and alongside them other boxes placed upright to

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<sup>17</sup> In chronological order: the novel by John Parker, *The Alien Land* (London: George Ronald, 1961), the short story by Gwyn Thomas, ‘The Dark Philosophers’ in *The Sky of Our Lives*, (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1973), the short story by Walter Hadyn Davies, *Ups and Downs* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1975), the novel by Catrin Collier, *One Blue Moon* (London: Arrow Books, 1993), the short story by Rhian Davies, ‘The Pattern’ in *A View Across the Valleys: Short Stories by Women from Wales c. 1850-1950*, ed. by Jane Aaron, (Cardiff: Honno, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Idris Davies, ‘In the Little Italian Shop’, *The Angry Summer: A Poem of 1926*, (London: Faber And Faber, 1943), p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., line 2. Also the words ‘coloured gassy pop’ are repeated at line 16 of the same poem.

<sup>20</sup> John Parker’s novel focuses on the struggle of an Italian family to settle in a country which is constantly offering challenges to their identity and their sense of belonging. *The Alien Land* is perhaps the most interesting text given the fact it contains all three themes, and therefore I will treat this as my primary text for analysis.

display the packets of cigarettes inside them. Towards the middle of the counter was a glass case containing cakes, some iced and some filled with cream, presenting a mouth-watering display to Angelo, who was again conscious of his hunger. At the far end of the counter, as far away from the overheated stove as it was possible to get, was an ice-cream container, a highly-coloured cabinet with a lid like a French sailor's cap in the middle of it.<sup>21</sup>

In the passage, the emphasis on colour is particularly strong: 'bottles of various colours', 'multi-coloured sweets', a highly-coloured cabinet' which suggest that the Italian shop is seen as an exotic place. Curious is the comparison with the 'French sailor's cap', a reminder of those memorabilia that sailors were collecting during their voyages to distant lands, and clearly an allusion to the colonial heritage that Britain shared with France.

Another description in Catrin Collier's novel, *One Blue Moon*<sup>22</sup> highlights the exotic atmosphere of the shop:

Hot, steamy air, and mouthwatering warm aromas of freshly ground coffee and savoury frying, blasted welcomingly into Diana's face and she dropped her bags and closed the door. The interior of the café was dark, gloomy and blessedly, marvellously, familiar. A long mahogany counter dominated the left-hand side of the room, with matching shelves behind it, backed by an enormous mirror that reflected the rear of the huge mock-marble soda fountain, and stone lemon, lime and sarsaparilla cordial jars. A crammed conglomeration of glass sweet jars, open boxes of chocolate bars, carefully piled packets of cigarettes, cups, saucers and glass cases of iced and cream cakes filled every available inch of space on the wooden shelves.<sup>23</sup>

What is interesting in this description is the reference to imported materials and products such as ground coffee, lemon, lime, chocolate, cigarettes and mahogany, combined with the reference to heat ('hot', 'warm', 'steam') and crammed conditions ('crammed conglomeration', 'filled every available inch of space'), which not only suggests a taste for the exotic, but is also a metaphor for, or an association with, some tropical place full of colour, hot weather and people living in crammed conditions: again an indication of the colonial mentality.

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<sup>21</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Catrin Collier, *One Blue Moon*, (London: Arrow Books, 2001). *One Blue Moon* is the second in a series of eight books following the fortunes of a small community in Pontypridd, Wales, from before the Second World War to just after it. Each book focuses on the same characters but from a slightly different aspect. Significantly enough, amongst these characters are the Ronconis, a fictitious Italian family living in Wales, to recognise the large presence of Italians, particularly in the Welsh valleys, and their impact on collective memory.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

In Rhian Davies' short story 'The Pattern' (2002)<sup>24</sup>, the Italian shop is also represented as a 'pleasant' break from the hassle and boredom of daily routine, as this paragraph clearly suggests:

How he loved the fizzing and frothing of the pop, the way it bubbled and stung the throat and the cool fresh dairy smell of the shop. Yes, indeed, when he grew up he must he must have a place like this, for somehow here he was away from it all, the worrying nag-nag-nag, the boring daily routine, the practised lines that had now become automatic 'Speak when yore spoken to! Wash yore hands! Were you a good boy in school today?'<sup>25</sup>

Here, the informal atmosphere of the Italian shop is compared and contrasted with the rigour of Welsh society. Therefore, this passage suggests not only an element of escapism associated with the shop, but also an element of 'relaxation' of behaviour that contemporary society tends to allow to people outside certain boundaries (religious or societal).

As previously mentioned, the description of the shop is often complemented by portrayals of Italians where ethnicity is marked out by means of emphasising their exotic features. So, for example, in Walter Haydn Davies' short story *Ups and Downs*<sup>26</sup> we read: 'The proprietor of the Italian shop in our village was an engaging personality, typical of his countrymen with his swarthy complexion and long flowing moustache'<sup>27</sup>. Similarly, in *The Alien Land*, a whole paragraph is dedicated to the description of Angelo's and Lucia's new born baby:

She was [...] doubly glad that the child was so much an Italian baby, with round dark eyes, abundant black hair, and a skin that already seemed to have the bloom of the sun upon it. [...] The midwife showed the baby to Angelo with a pride that owed nothing to him or to the baby's mother. "Beautiful now, isn't it just," she said. "A beautiful baby, and with all that hair, too!"<sup>28</sup>

Ethnicity is expressed in the references to the abundant hair, the dark complexion and the dark eyes, combined with a feeling of excitement ('she was doubly glad', 'showed

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<sup>24</sup> Rhian Davies, 'The Pattern', in *A View Across the Valleys: Short Stories by Women from Wales c. 1850-1950*, ed. by Jane Aaron, (Cardiff: Honno, 1999). 'The Pattern' is a short story presenting a similar background to *Ups and Downs* but with an interesting focus on Mr Bracchi, a marginalised Italian living in Wales during the Second World War.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Haydn Davies, *Ups and Downs* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1975). *Ups and Downs* is a collection of reminiscences of the life in the valleys which offers an insight into the Nonconformist religious revival and the recriminations of the fervent evangelists who for example would sing outside the shops of Italians open on Sunday.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>28</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 101.

the baby with pride’) and appreciation (‘the child was so much an Italian boy’, ‘Beautiful now, isn’t it just’, ‘A beautiful baby’).

### **Social status**

Social status plays an important role in the quest for recognition, acceptance, and ultimately inclusion of Italians in Wales. Although it can be argued that Italians are primarily seen through their business rather than religious diversity or even ethnic diversity, tensions between Nonconformists and Catholics and examples of marginalisation (‘ethnic othering’) are nevertheless represented. The fact that Italians are portrayed as hard workers equates them to some extent to the hard working miners of South Wales, and for this reason Italians ‘fit’ well within the picture of industrial Wales in the background. In this respect, in *Ups and Downs* the author remembers:

What keen, hard-working businessmen these Italians were! Every possible device to make money was there in those shops and they were prepared to keep open all day and late into the night, indeed, they never seemed to close and even remained open all day on Sunday, to the annoyance and disgust of shopkeepers brought up in the hide-bound Welsh Nonconformist tradition of the puritanical Sabbath day.<sup>29</sup>

The question of social status is well exploited in *The Alien Land*. Therefore, this section will propose an in-depth analysis of several passages from this text. Significantly, Parker’s novel starts with a dramatic scene: an undefined crowd of enemy aliens and refugees is about to be embarked on the *Arandora Star*, destination Canada. In the foreword, the author specifies that ‘This is the story of one of those men who, by reason of events beyond their control and because of enmities in which they had no part, found themselves classified as traitors.’<sup>30</sup>

The picture of these men puts the rest of the novel, and indeed our analysis, into perspective. From the very first pages we learn that Angelo Fidelli, the main protagonist, is a man tired of life (‘in the tired fifties’), weak (‘his face was sallow’) and resigned (‘his general downcast appearance’), a man who has lost his individual identity and social status (‘merged him with the rest of the drab, amorphous company crowding the shed’).<sup>31</sup> The scene summarises and symbolises the ultimate condition of marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream society and the dramatic failure of Angelo’s struggle to be accepted. Another dramatic effect underlines the loss of his identity and status when Angelo hears a familiar yet mysterious voice repeatedly calling

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Haydn Davies, *Ups and Downs*, p. 153.

<sup>30</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

his name in the distance: ‘When he heard it calling his name, Angelo Fidelli looked around curiously, but all he could see was a mass of identified faces, resigned, patient, like his own’.<sup>32</sup> Angelo’s surprise and incredulity represents the last glimpse of that ‘fame’ and success he pursued all his life in order to escape his subordinate migrant condition. A few paragraphs later, we learn that this voice belongs to his old friend Andrea, with whom he used to go and sell ice cream on a cart. The two engage in a nostalgic catching up of memories:

“But all these years – what has become of you?” “I have a shop, a family. Business was good until this happened.” Angelo forced a smile. “But I must not be so sorry for myself. What happened to you, Andrea, after you left the old place?” “I did well. I never had a shop like you – do you remember, I said I would have one before you.” He laughed loudly. “I work for a big hotel in London, I am a chef – and a good chef. They pay me well. I have children, too, grown-up children and now they have children.”<sup>33</sup>

This passage underlines the importance of social status and family as driving forces towards the affirmation of the self in the private sphere (family) as well as in the public one (business and success). The passage therefore serves as a link with the body of the novel, where the author takes the reader back in time, and carefully stages the dramatic rise and fall of a man and his family, and his continuous need to adjust, compromise, renounce.

Angelo’s drive towards money and success is highlighted several times during the course of the novel. A clear example is when he falls in love with Ruth, a regular customer who turns out to be the daughter of a wealthy and well-respected gentleman. Angelo becomes aware of the difference in social status between himself and the girl, and his fear of not being accepted turns into a progressive feeling of inferiority:

he became morbidly concerned with his inadequacy – his adolescent ugliness, his menial station in life, even his race and his religion. Ruth, he discovered, was the daughter of a prosperous businessman, a man of substance, respected both for his position and his morality.<sup>34</sup>

Angelo’s inferiority and inadequacy is measured by birth and race (‘his adolescent ugliness’, ‘race’), as well as social status (‘his menial station in life’) and morality (‘his religion’). Angelo’s encounter with Ruth and with love coincides with and symbolises his encounter with the reality of his non-belonging in Wales:

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<sup>32</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

he would never be part of the outer world, the world of people who came to the counter and bought a packet of cigarettes or sweets and then went off to their pits or their homes, their chapels or their meetings, to their plays and their flirtations in dark lanes away from town. He would always be a foreigner to them, however much his English improved, and it was improving daily. [...] Welsh would never be his language and Wales, however long he lived there, could never be his country. This he knew, because Italy was in his blood, and he did not want it otherwise – until he fell in love.<sup>35</sup>

This passage suggests that Angelo is debating his position in society. Whereas it is clear that he does not belong to Ruth's world, and he has always lived in a comfort zone - 'Angelo's only release from work and the family colony of which he was now part was Mass on Sundays and holy days, and a monthly visit to confession'<sup>36</sup> – now the act of falling in love with a girl of the upper class instigates a new desire, to be part of her world. So the love he feels for her is not actually a profound love (Ruth after all is only an occasional customer and he has never spoken to her as a friend). His love is superficial and material, and his pursuit of richness and success in his business will likewise become superficial and material.

The following passage, in particular, can be seen as a turning point: Angelo realises that he is being mocked by Ruth and her friends:

He served the four ice-creams with shaking fingers, keeping his head down and his eyes on his chest, not wanting those girls to see him looking at her. When they had taken the ice-creams they walked away and when they were a few paces from the cart they all began to laugh, Ruth joining in their shrill, silly, mocking laughter.<sup>37</sup>

It is finally Mr Marti, the *padrone*, who puts Angelo out of his misery; but in doing so he once again emphasises the incompatibility between the two. They belong to two different cultures and two different worlds:

Maybe it is better for you not to think about this girl. You are different, she is different. You do not even speak her language and the people would make fun of both of you if they saw you together.<sup>38</sup>

Mr Marti's words have a humiliating effect on Angelo: 'He thought Ruth had been his secret. Instead it was a joke for people to laugh at.'<sup>39</sup> Success for him is a necessary social upgrade that would make him proud of his Italian identity, but at the same time

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<sup>35</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 53.

it would allow him to be accepted, appreciated, and comfortable in the new world. Mr Marti once again put things in perspective for him:

“I do not want you to go home, Angelo,” he said. “In a few months you will have forgotten that you ever saw this girl. And what is there for you in Italy? The farm! You have three brothers. The farm cannot support all of you. And if you stay here – who knows, one day you might have your own shop. And you will have money then for a wife. And you will know who you want for a wife. I know these things. Angelo.”<sup>40</sup>

Ironically, when Angelo returns to Italy because his father has passed away, he feels a stranger to his own family, and realises he does not belong to that world any longer. His dress and his look become the symbols of a new identity, a new social condition: ‘Emilio smiled shyly and Angelo again felt like a stranger. His good clothes, he realised, his shoes, his look of the town must be strange to the boy, making him feel a stranger’.<sup>41</sup>

As we have seen so far, the question of social status becomes undeniably intertwined with questions of belonging and identity; and the need to succeed in order to be accepted and included is challenged many times during the novel. When Angelo finally gets married to Lucia, an Italian girl with similar background to his, she becomes the epitome of the rebellious character who is fighting for her ideals and to maintain her roots. For the author, and the reader, she becomes the one ‘in charge’ of maintaining not only her own Italianness but also the Italianness of her new family. Lucia equally does not approve of Angelo’s obsession with work and money, and does not understand the drive behind Angelo’s obsession. As a result, Lucia repeatedly asks the following question: “Why is there so little time for you to make money? Money, money! Is there anything else?”, “You have money in the bank – two good suits, good food. What more is there you want?”<sup>42</sup> Lucia is simply not sharing the same material aspirations of her husband. She has remained the simple and naive peasant girl from Italy who will never belong to nor adjust to what she thinks is an alien land:

Sometimes they laughed at her and she would want to spit at them, feeling the anger a lump inside her throat. [...] she would laugh with them when they were good and she was happy, but there was a softness in her laughter, as if that, too, was private and not to be shared by the strangers who came into the shop. It was the lack of privacy she resented most, the need to think always of the people behind the thin partition separating the public premises from the living quarters, to modulate her voice so that they should not hear and to regulate her behaviour even among her own family so that

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

the customers might think that her house was a house of silence and shadows, where children neither laughed nor cried, played or stormed, or lived.<sup>43</sup>

Lucia does not think that customers should have priority over her family, and invade the private sphere with their voices and laughter. The use of space is interesting in this respect, the public sphere assuming the connotation of the private sphere so as to emphasise the inversion of the roles ‘dominators versus dominated’; the customers, usually protagonists of the shop, become the strangers, the invaders of the private. Lucia, as a result, does not want to speak to them, and does not feel the need or the urge to learn their language: she is master of her space and of her identity. The coffee shop is no more the exotic place perceived by the locals, and the symbol of ‘the other’, but a sort of status symbol, like Angelo’s two new suits, his new town look, and money. The shop is the symbol of the country where her husband chose to live and forced her to live, and Lucia profoundly hates the shop for what it represents. Not surprisingly, the sense of uneasiness of the migrant condition is epitomised by the difference between Steffano<sup>44</sup> and Domenico, Angelo and Lucia’s sons, in the way they relate to their identity. Steffano denies his Welshness (“I am not Welsh,” he screamed. “Italiano, Italiano, Italiano!”)<sup>45</sup>; Domenico would love to feel Italian but unlike his brother, it does not come naturally to him (‘He was unhappy and a little ashamed that he was unhappy; he wanted to love Italy, to be part of it, as Steffano seemed naturally to be part of it, but he could not’).<sup>46</sup> When their parents send them to Italy for six months to allow them to maintain their heritage culture, and to come to terms with their difficulty in belonging, the two brothers react in different ways. Steffano immediately feels at home:

Steffano made himself at home quickly. He picked up the dialect of the district and would speak no English, not even when Domenico, forgetting himself, lapsed into his second tongue. He enjoyed the farm and the stories his grandmother told in a mood of nostalgia when the nights lengthened, the same legends and folk tales she had told to Angelo when he was a boy and her own family was young.<sup>47</sup>

Domenico on the other hand simply cannot adapt and settle. In a way, he feels more comfortable and familiar with the people and way of life in Wales:

He was a stranger in Wales and a stranger in Italy and the boys at his old school at Maesyrhaf were more his friends than the boys at this new school, who seemed to find his accent funny and his ignorance of their local games a joke. He was not happy and he

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<sup>43</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 128.

<sup>44</sup> The Italian spelling of this name should be ‘Stefano’.

<sup>45</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, pp. 128-9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.



longed to be back with his father again, mixing the ice-cream in the yard on a drizzly morning and seeing the colliers come striding home [...].<sup>48</sup>

These two paragraphs highlight two opposed experiences and the tension between past and future, old culture and new culture, rural life and industrial life, tradition and memories, progression and assimilation of new ideals and a new way of life. Slightly different is Angelo's position in relation to his conception of identity. Angelo is always aware of his affiliation with Wales, the land in which he chose to establish his growing business and raise his family. He calls his new son 'Mio piccolo Gallese – my little Welshman'<sup>49</sup>; but significantly, after twenty years of living in Wales, Angelo is yet to become a naturalised British subject. It is Lucia who reminds him of his origins:

"Why have you not changed, then?" His wife asked. "You pretend to be British, or Welsh, but you still talk like an Italian. And why have you not taken out naturalisation papers, if you are so fond of the country? You have been here more than twenty years. It is time you changed."<sup>50</sup>

Parker's novel presents similarities to Raymond Williams' novel *Border Country*. Here, we find the same themes of social status, sense of community, migration, identity and belonging. The protagonist Matthew Price is a young boy from a rural community in South Wales, who decides to leave his country to study at Cambridge University and later pursues a career as a lecturer in London. The emphasis is on the dividing line between his identity in Wales – where returning to visit his ill father, people remind him of his origins, and continue to live with their entrenched opinions and historical perspectives – and his identity in England, where Matthew can escape this entrenched mentality to pursue his successful career. Like *The Alien Land*, the novel is not only about two identities but also about the tension between 'the working class and the struggle for social change', 'the past of childhood and an abstracted, static pastoral world'.<sup>51</sup>

### **Power relations within Welsh society: incomers and Welsh-identifying.**

The analysis of Parker's novel revealed that social status is strictly related to self-perception of identity, in the way that it highlights the tension between different strategies: maintenance, adjustment, assimilation, rebellion, etc. *The Alien Land* was the

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<sup>48</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 136.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 132-3.

<sup>51</sup> Jeremy Hooker, 'Natives and Strangers: A View of Anglo-Welsh Literature in Twentieth Century', in *Writing Region and Nation*, ed. by James A. Davies and others, (Swansea: University of Wales, 1994), p. 36.

perfect text to demonstrate how these strategies and processes work, bearing in mind that they are seen through the eyes of a 'native' author.

The examples provided in the previous section also showed how incomers perceive themselves in the host community. However, it poses the question of how incomers are actually perceived by the natives, and what other strategies are used to represent sameness and difference. Once again, Parker's novel offers a pertinent example. The following paragraph demonstrates how Italian immigrants are perceived as strangers, incomers, and therefore forced to be in a subordinate condition in relation to their hosts. In Chapter Two of the novel, Angelo arrives in Aberdare to work for Mr Marti. Angelo is only a little boy and Mr Marti's duty to the new arrival is to instruct him on the best code of conduct. Unexpectedly, these recommendations do not focus on how to serve customers, perform specific tasks or comply with duties, but rather on what to do or not to do in order not to upset or irritate the locals, regardless of whether they are customers or not:

When you are in the shop or out in the street you must serve them politely and say nothing unless they talk to you. If they ask you questions about somebody else then you say you know nothing. Do not talk of religion with them for they do not understand our religion and they think we worship idols. [...] Sometimes they get drunk and will call you names, but you must act as if you did not hear them. [...] Often you will hear them talk politics and other matters equally important to them. You can listen but you must say nothing, and sometimes you must pretend not to be listening, or they will grow suspicious and not come again. [...] That will be easy for you for a while, for you will not understand them. But when you know English, still you must remain silent. [...] you must respect the police; they are powerful and the miners do not like them. But you must not know this.<sup>52</sup>

The recommendations in this speech sound like imperatives in reality, and the tone of this passage is evocative of a colonial mentality in suggesting that the incomers should be subdued, and not take part in, or interfere with, the life and society they are joining. The phrase 'You can listen but you must say nothing, and sometimes you must pretend not to be listening' is particularly strong, indicating the extent of the warning and their position of 'servants' in the host community. The word 'servants' seems appropriate considering the main occupation of Italians in Wales being that of coffee shop owners and caterers, therefore serving the locals, the natives. Mr Marti's recommendations lock the newly arrived in a position of inferiority in relation to the host community. The strength of this passage suggests how intimidating and unwelcoming the new culture

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<sup>52</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, pp. 21-2.

must have been for the incomers. Failure to be strictly subservient and indifferent would result in trouble, as the following imperatives suggest: ‘they must be diligent and obedient and not get into trouble’<sup>53</sup>, ‘Do not speak of politics or religion in the shop. You can listen, but say nothing; otherwise – trouble’.<sup>54</sup> This sort of language and servile attitude anticipates of the future circumstances, which will harden and exacerbate existing fears and clashes between Italians and Welsh, for example during the Religious Revival or during the Second World War, and to which the author has already doomed his protagonists in the very first pages of the novel.

Even if Italians are generally portrayed as hard workers and subservient, at times there are inevitable clashes. A clear example is the anger of Nonconformists towards the Sunday opening of Italian shops which is also exploited to express resentment towards Catholics (although mitigated in relation to the anger towards Irish Catholicism)<sup>55</sup>, and which implies the necessity to behave and obey. This is a dialogue taken from ‘The Pattern’, about a mother and a father arguing because their child likes to spend his spare time at the Bracchi’s café on Sundays:

“Where have you been?” asked Mam, neat as a pin.

“Bracchi shop” he replied.

“Spendin’ yore money on ice-cream again?”

“Never mind!” said Dad, “He could be in worse places. Bracchi’s a good man, kind to the children.”

“All the same”, Mam retorted, “he keeps his shop open on Sundays; that isn’t decent.”

“That’s because he’s Italian!” Dad said.

“I doan care, I doan hoald with it and I doan think Gwil’d better goa there soa often. Why! The next thing we’ll noa, he’ll be going on Sundays, buying sweets and ice-cream on the Sabbath like common children. You noa, thoas William St. children who never

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<sup>53</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>55</sup> For an understanding of Irish immigrants in Wales and the spread of anti-Catholicism across the nineteenth and twentieth century, I refer to at least three articles: Tristan Owain Hughes, ‘Anti-Catholicism in Wales, 1900-1960’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53 (2002), 312-324; Paul O’Leary, ‘When Was Anti-Catholicism? The Case of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Wales’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56 (2005), 308-325; Tristan Owain Hughes, ‘When Was Anti-Catholicism? A Response’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56 (2005), 326-333. From a comparative perspective, it is interesting to note that like Paul O’Leary points out, the reasons which exacerbated anti-Irish and anti-Catholic feelings are to be traced in participation of the Catholic Irish to the political life of Country following the Act of Union (1800). This aspect of political participation differentiates substantially the Catholic Irish from the Italian Catholic in Wales, and therefore may be seen as having a mitigating effect on the perceptions of Italians as Catholics in Wales. Another book, edited by Paul O’Leary, *Irish Migrants in Modern Wales* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004) includes a comparative chapter providing an overview of the animosity or the anti-Semitic attitude towards Irish and other immigrant realities in modern Wales, such as the Chinese, the Jews, the Italians, the Spanish and the Poles.

goa to Chapel at all or Bible class as if they never been christened. I doan want our Gwil to be like tha.” [...] “[...] thoa Mr Bracchi is a good man and better than moast in the village, I can tell you, he’s a Catholic and thoas Catholics do awful things sometimes.”<sup>56</sup>

In ‘The Wrath of the Revival’, an article from the previously mentioned series of *The Adventurers*, Jack Parker reports that ‘like many pioneers, their way was hard and hostile. Chapel goers regarded the commonplace practice of selling cigarettes or sweets on Sunday as the work of the Devil’.<sup>57</sup> In the same article, he reports that some of the more narrow-minded of the Welsh people of the valleys were inclined to look on ‘Bracchi shops’ as something alien, a social evil like horse riding and drinking. The provocative statement that ‘their way was hard and hostile’ is rather to be read as the result of the Nonconformists’ resentful reaction towards Catholicism and Sunday opening, which were challenging the strictness of the sabbatarian life, than the voluntary hostile attitude towards Italians.

Even more interesting is the patronising attitude of the natives that appears in some texts. In spite of the fact that they were attracted by the novelty and inviting atmosphere of the coffee shop and the prospect of being offered and served something new, they demonstrate a narrow mindedness and a lack of any effort to try to meet and understand the new culture. This is reflected, once again, in *The Alien Land* when the police officer and the customers ask Angelo’s name, and decide to rename him ‘Joe’, a decision perceived as an imposition and as disrespectful, rather than a term of endearment:

So ‘Joe’ he became, Joe the Italian. [...] He got used to the name, although he never really liked it. Sometimes it would sting him, especially when the children used it, but he knew it meant business for him, so he mastered his feelings and only occasionally rebuked a child for not being polite. His submission was taken for granted by the grown-ups, and so his shop took shape, his business prospered and the day when he could return to Italy and bring his bride Lucia back with him drew nearer.<sup>58</sup>

The passage clearly shows the extent of the cultural compromise: Angelo has to master his feelings, and be subordinate to the humiliation and the ‘power’ of the dominant culture (‘his submission was taken for granted by the grow-ups’), for the sake of preserving a prosperous business.

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<sup>56</sup> Rhian Davies, ‘The Pattern’, pp. 196-7.

<sup>57</sup> ‘The Wrath of the Revival’, *South Wales Echo*, 22 April 1959, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 91.

At times, the dialectic of exclusion and inferiority is expressed in terms of suspicion towards the process of ice-cream making. Ice from a local pond was thought to be added in the ice-cream mixture, leading immediately to alarm amongst the local population who feared that a health issue had been created:

It was whispered that ice from the ponds was being used in the manufacture of the ice-cream and children were warned that they risked fever and disease if they ignored the advice of their parents to leave alone ‘that dirty old pond ice-cream’ of the Italians.<sup>59</sup>

The passage highlights how the primitivity, in a similar way to the exotic, is a marker of the colonial mentality (‘the primitive other’). The superiority of the natives is expressed in terms of presumed knowledge and once again in a patronising attitude. However, following an investigation, it was explained and verified that the ice from the pond was not actually put in the mixture but around the container to cool and preserve the ice-cream; thus was the fear of a possible contagion allayed. Ironically, the superiority and patronising attitude of the natives is transformed into a subtle form of inferiority and ignorance. The subtle irony perhaps is a device used by the author to mock a prejudiced and racist attitude towards the Italians at that time.

Elsewhere, the author uses strategies of sameness, such as the music played in the Italian shop, in ‘The Dark Philosophers’<sup>60</sup>. Music has the effect of forgetting about differences and bringing people and cultures together, as this passage illustrates:

Idomeneo had an old cabinet gramophone in the back room, and a large bundle of records containing such items as very sweet arias from operas, also duets, trios and choirs, and to these Willie and ourselves would sit and listen by the hour, with Willie bursting out with his own version sometimes if there was a tenor on, and Idomeneo giving him strong support in a baritone voice that seemed to us very deep for so small a man. [...] We feel warm and happy now and that is good. The music reaches us and we are willing to hear all the things it has to tell. But, hell, man, what about the people around us, most of the people in these Terraces for a start, whose lives are sad and ugly because they never understand what all this music means. [...] “True enough, Willie,” said my friend Walter. “You have a tender conscience, which is always a very nice thing to watch. You see the moment of your own happiness, full of those sweet melodies that Idomeneo allows us to hear, to appreciate the troubles of other voters whose way of life makes it impossible for them to share that happiness. That shows true humanity, [...]”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> John Parker, *The Alien Land*, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Gwyn Thomas, ‘The Dark Philosophers’ in *The Sky of Our Lives* (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1973). ‘The Dark Philosophers’, is by contrast a portrait of life in the Welsh valleys in the 1930s. Idomeneo, the proprietor of the Italian shop is only one of the characters encountered and seen through the eyes of the author. Extensive paragraphs are dedicated to the description of the shop, where an involuntary Fascist symbol on the cast-iron stove instigates an interesting debate on moral standards and identity.

<sup>61</sup> Gwyn Thomas, ‘The Dark Philosophers’, p. 91.

The following passage shows how the singing in the Italian shop brings back memories of singing in Wales, as music symbolises positive attitude and progress:

We thought of the music we had heard and of what Willie and Walter had been saying. We cursed within our own minds the sterile cold and loneliness we had lived in for so many years when misery and anger had killed the memory of all such loveliness as that music within us, and we thought sorrowfully of all those many voters lying around about us in the Terraces who had been made numb and stupid by poverty, dead even to the divine beauty created by man.<sup>62</sup>

Both paragraphs show the power of music in creating sameness, and its impact on the consciousness of the customers who reflect nostalgically on the changes in Welsh society. Symbolic is the association of the music with the Italians who bring music back into the life of the natives.

In 'The Dark Philosophers', the effort to represent sameness between natives and incomers is to be understood in the light of the historical setting chosen by the author: Wales during the Second World War, and the problematic position of Italians in the UK at that time. In the following passage, the customers see on the cast iron stove in Idomeneo's shop a Fascist symbol. They immediately question it, and reprimand Idomeneo for displaying such an inappropriate and potentially dangerous symbol:

The cistern had been made in Italy, and just above the name of the manufacturer, which was stamped on a chrome plate, there was engraved a bundle of rods and an axe. My friend Arthur pointed out to Idomeneo that these rods and so on were the trade mark and symbol of the Italian Blackshirts, and no very healthy sign to be showing in a place like the Terraces [...] Idomeneo [...] said he knew all about this symbol and that he liked it no better than we did. He added that even then he had two brothers in Italian jails because they had happened to be in Italy when they said they did not like this symbol either. As far as politics went, said Idomeneo in a whisper, he was with us to the end. [...] We saw very well what he meant. He meant that he was all for the common people, as we were, being of them. From the moment of that explanation onwards we were good friends with Idomeneo, particularly after he had told us of those two brothers who were in jail. We looked on him after that as being a splendid character by our standards [...].<sup>63</sup>

The paragraph shows how prejudices and differences are laid bare. Ironically, though, it is interesting to note that whilst they share the same ideals and aspirations, the dichotomy of dominator and dominated is implied in the fact that it is the natives who decide the moral conduct and the righteousness of these ideals and aspirations ('a

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<sup>62</sup> Gwyn Thomas, 'The Dark Philosophers', p. 92.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

splendid character by our standards’). This is particularly intriguing considering the fact that while these protagonists were debating, the country was under the risk of a potential attack and invasion by outsiders. Significantly, the customers come to know that the reasons why Idomeneo has not removed the fascist symbol from the cast iron stove is essentially because it would compromise his business. Idomeneo confesses:

Many times, he said, had the thought of removing the emblem come to him, of filing it right away, but two things had always made him pause. First, he was no great hand with tools of any description, and any attempt on his part to file away the emblem would probably have ended in his filing clean through the metal, which would have been bad for the tea-and-coffee-making side of his business, also the man who had loaned him the money to open up this business, an Italian living in London, was very partial to Italy and to the party behind the rods, so partial that the only reason he had for living so far away from them was that he did very well out of being in London, and in a position to lend money to poor Italians like Idomeneo [...].<sup>64</sup>

Two main reasons, his poor skills and his poverty, once again suggest the extent of the importance of social status, and how Italians are seen through their business. Whereas earlier on we have seen that social status, money and success are the strategies used to overcome the subordinate condition of the migrant who wants to be accepted and recognised as an equal, now the barriers between natives and outsiders are lowered. Idomeneo, and the other Italian immigrants are put on the same level as the common people who strive for better wages. They are against the outsiders, who become the ones with power, the rich people like the money lenders who exploit Idomeneo, and they share the need for justice and equality.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of texts in Anglo-Welsh literature where the experience of Italians in Wales is documented has revealed how discourses of inclusion and exclusion are articulated through three main themes. Firstly, there is an attempt to portray ‘ethnic othering’ of the Italians, as is evident for example in the emphasis on colour in both the description of the physiognomy and the description of the shop. The exotic features and the colourfulness of Italians and their coffee shops stand out against the gloominess of Welsh weather and the industrial landscape. This suggests an underlining metaphor by which the language of difference and the struggle to integrate are articulated. Secondly, the question of social status draws attention to issues of marginalisation, isolation and loneliness on one side, and the longing for acceptance through success and social upgrade on the other. Thirdly, there is a strategically staged position of power between

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<sup>64</sup> Gwyn Thomas, ‘The Dark Philosophers’, p. 90.

the Welsh and the incomers identified as masters and servants, dominators and dominated, being reminiscent of the relationship between colonizers and colonised, masters and slaves. This is also highlighted by descriptions in which the taste for exotic details is reminiscent of a colonial past. This position of power is at times mitigated by applying strategies of sameness, such as the association between miners, poor people and Italian migrants who become metaphorically united in the joint effort to earn a better living and fairer conditions of work. These three themes generally constitute a synergy amongst the texts in spite of the diversity in form and date of publication of the texts.

In spite of these synergies, from the point of view of the content, *The Alien Land* has proved to be the most interesting text in relation to the experience of Italians in Wales. Parker has concentrated on what can be considered to be a typical Italian family who migrated to Wales in the first decades of the twentieth century, and has talked about the interrelationships between ethnicity, social status, identity and belonging of the Italian community in Wales on the whole. Although the protagonists are entirely fictitious, the social and historical background provides the scope for a justified analysis. A further remark must be made in consideration of the author's Irish background. In the short author's profile provided on the back cover of the novel, we read that 'John Parker's interest in the social history of South Wales is rooted in his own experiences of life, for although of Irish descent, he has lived in South Wales since the age of four'. Writing about this novel, then, can be seen as a metaphor for writing about himself. Similarities in explicating the Italian experience are a metaphor for talking about other minorities such as the Irish. In the same profile, we also read that the author is well known to readers of the *Western Mail* and *South Wales Echo* through his feature writing over ten years. There is scope to think that John Parker is very likely to be the same author of the series of articles called *The Adventurers* published in the *South Wales Echo* under the name of Jack Parker (probably a pseudonym of John Parker). *The Alien Land* seems to be entirely inspired by those articles, which document the story of the first Italians in Wales up to the Second World War with unedited interviews and anecdotes.

The analysis of the other texts has revealed similarities but also differences in the way that Welsh-Italians have represented their experiences in Wales. In particular, there are similarities within the texts by Servini, Emmanuelli, Spinetti, and to some extent even Arcari's fictitious characters (the exception is Pelosi's autobiographical short story) in



giving importance to social status. For example, there is no doubt about the interplay between social status and ethnicity.

The representation of Italians in Anglo-Welsh literature, however, still poses the question of whether the authors are trying to promote inclusion by representing diversity, or whether their representation rather reflects the need to redefine a migrant community to confine it to an outside space. The fact that all of these texts, apart from the poem, are set in or refer to the period just before or during the Second World War is perhaps the key factor to consider. Quite significantly, in spite of the historical setting of these texts, and the fact that events such as internment and the sinking of the *Arandora Star* had an enormous impact on the Italian community, the reference to these events is by comparison almost hidden, disguised or only briefly and superficially hinted at. *The Alien Land* is perhaps the only exception taking into account the connection between the opening pages of the novel, where Angelo and Andrea reunite and reflect on their lifetime achievements, and the last pages, where we learn that Angelo has actually died on the *Arandora Star*. The tragic finale of this novel, anticipated from the beginning, establishes the parameters with which to read and interpret the experience of Italians in Wales in the period before the Second World War: the struggle to be accepted and recognised outside the cultural and ethnic boundaries of an imagined community, and outside the boundaries of social status.

Perhaps it is interesting to stress the fact that at the time Anglo-Welsh authors wrote about Italians in Wales, there was a prolonged absence of Welsh-Italian narratives that transformed second and third generation of Italian migrants into some kind of 'invisible immigrants'. This could reflect the intention to fully embrace Welsh identity. It is only with the publication of Catrin Collier's novel *Such Sweet Sorrow* (1996)<sup>65</sup> that we start to appreciate the impact of the Second World War on the Italian community from a Welsh perspective. Catrin Collier portrays Pontypridd in 1939, when blackouts and conscriptions were beginning to affect the local communities. Italian men were arrested and interned, leaving their wives and children alone to deal with family and business; examples of resentment and hatred towards Italians being equally represented with examples of sympathetic understanding and solidarity. Symbolically, the importance given to social status and social recognition was invalidated with the raise of Fascism,

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<sup>65</sup> Catrin Collier, *Such Sweet Sorrow* (London: Arrow Books: 2002).

the threat of German invasion and Mussolini, and the unfolding of tragic events such the Arandora Star. Significantly, after the war, the silence regarding what happened during the war coincided with a progressive decline in the number of Italian coffee shops spread across the Welsh valleys, and the progressive definite settlement and integration of Italians into the host community. So it was left to the memory and narrative of local historians and Anglo-Welsh writers to encapsulate the most visible signs of Italianness.

## CONCLUSION

In her book *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* Anne-Marie Fortier reflects on the complexity of émigré culture within the Italian community in Britain:

Emigration is the site of conflicting attempts to resolve the indeterminacy of the Italian presence in Britain. Elevated as an empowering experience in the constitution of a new, strong identity, emigration is also represented as the source of loss, alienation, and foreignness, which are resolved in written renditions of past and present Italian immigrant lives in Britain, narratives of transcendence, or displays of presence. The émigré culture includes multiple cultural forms configured around stories of migration; stories of beginnings (arrival and settlement); stories of alienation from and alliance with the British 'nation'; stories of continuity and stories of change. Hence the émigré culture is not homogenous and uniform.<sup>1</sup>

In this statement, Fortier highlights the multiplicity and hybrid nature of Italian migrant identity in the way it shifts between generations. Inevitably, the experience of Italians in Britain reveals that they are constantly divided between a sense of 'loss, alienation and foreignness' on the one hand, and continuity, change, and adaptation ('alliance with the British nation') on the other. Fortier highlights that writing about their experience is a means through which they attempt to resolve alienation. In revisiting the past and the experience of their ancestors, different circumstances and personal factors come into play and determine the degree to which they reconcile their dual identity. Fortier encapsulates the very essence of what this thesis is about. This thesis started from the fact that there is a gap of nearly seventy years in the transmission of memory and in the production of narratives, and illustrated how, in the last decade, new accounts were prompted by a number of commemorative and cultural events, which raised awareness of the Italian migrant experience in Wales. This thesis focussed predominantly on how second and third generation Italian migrants articulated their sense of belonging and identity in the attempt to resolve feelings of alienation and subordination associated with the Second World War.

The decision to undertake a research project on Italian immigrants in Wales has been dictated by the fact that in spite of their long-established presence in this area (they settled in Wales over a century ago), and their 'popularity' (due to their successful establishment of café culture in Welsh society), they are still a largely unexplored case study (one of the reasons being the long 'silencing' in the production of narratives). Most studies have been concerned with how minority groups adapt to their countries of

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<sup>1</sup> Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 157.

settlement, and how they also influenced them. This study took a different approach in exploring the cultural representations of Italians in Wales and the gradual construction of Welsh-Italian identity. This thesis emphasised the importance of initiatives, such as the creation of memorials, oral history projects and exhibitions about the Italian migrant experience in Wales in raising self-awareness, promoting inclusion whilst recognising diversity, and in generating new narratives of belonging. A number of primary sources were used in order to explore the transgenerational transmission of memory from the interwar period to the first decade of the twenty-first century: photographs, oral and written testimonies of the Second World War, and other Welsh-Italian narratives. These accounts were set against the representation of Italians in local newspapers and in Anglo-Welsh semi-fictional accounts. Some of these sources, such as the photographs and the oral and written testimonies of the Second World War, have been studied academically for the first time in the course of this thesis.

One of the objectives of this thesis was to study how Welsh-Italians authors perceive themselves in relation to their ancestors, to the heritage culture and to the host culture; how they articulate their sense of in-between-ness; and how, through the decades, they constantly negotiate their identity. The other main objective was to compare their self-perceptions with the cultural representations of Italians in Wales by Anglo-Welsh authors, in order to highlight issues of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the impact of the Italian presence on Welsh society and culture.

Chapter One proposed an analysis of photographs in which the experience of the first generation during the interwar period is seen through the lens of time and of subsequent generations of Italian migrants. The contexts in which these photographs were sourced (archives, commemorative and history books, and accounts of second and third generations) and their visual analysis revealed the importance of family as a unit in which men, women and children share the same responsibilities in both the private and the public sphere. If, on the one hand, family portraits were the expression of continuity with the heritage culture, on the other posing outside the shop was the expression of the importance of social status intended for the Italian community at home. In this chapter, photographs of Italian immigrants in Wales in the interwar period were used as a form of writing about the first generation. Tensions between the two cultures (the heritage culture and the host culture) were highlighted by the comparison with similar photographs of Welsh shops, family and social groupings. One of the main similarities

that emerged from this comparison was the fact that Italians followed a common practice of the time in posing outside their business premises to show respectability. This was clearly an expression of the desire to embrace the host culture. However, one of the main differences that emerged from the way people posed outside the shops was the contrast between the Welsh co-operative model and Italian model: the Italian business is owned and run by the family. The Italian shop and café was also a characteristically hybrid space where private and public mixed and co-existed; in comparison, many contemporary Welsh workplaces were, arguably, separated off far more from the sphere of family and private life.

Chapter Two showed how the images of family union, respectability and integration projected by the photographs of the interwar period were dramatically challenged by the Second World War. The analysis of the portrayals of Italians in the Welsh national newspapers of the 1930s and 1940s illustrated the anti-Fascist and anti-Italian propaganda of the period: events were highly politicised and one-sided. This contributed to further marginalisation and alienation amongst the Italian community in Wales. This chapter, therefore, illustrated how Italians had to renegotiate their identity and sense of belonging in the light of events that happened in this period, and which generated nearly seventy years of silence. Recent commemorative events around the *Arandora Star* sinking gave second and third generations the opportunity to rethink and redefine themselves. Chapter Two also showed that people reacted in different ways to the creation of the memorial and the oral history project, some showing full participation and a degree of enthusiasm, benevolence, others showing overt concern, reluctance, reticence, and even fear. It was particularly interesting to see how even these reactions formed a narrative of their own, in showing the extent of loss and alienation embedded within the Italian migrant community and conjured up by adverse historical circumstances in the past. The analysis of oral and written testimonies conducted in Chapter Two also showed a diversity of experiences that surpassed the usual gendered tale of the men who were arrested, interned and died on the *Arandora Star*. In accordance with Ugolini's wish 'to recover the complex and diverse experiences of those women who found themselves the internal enemy "other"', the accounts explore the question of what happened to the women and the children left behind. In doing so,

they fulfil the task of ‘address-*ing* the impact of the war on the construction of personal identity amongst this ethnic group’.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter Three started from Maurice Halbwachs’ concept of the importance of social frameworks in instigating the retrieval of cultural memories. This chapter, therefore, analysed how, in Wales, the increasing interest and participation in initiatives concerning ethnic minorities prompted the recent emergence of Welsh-Italian narratives. The analysis of these texts, written by second and third generation Italian migrants, explored how Welsh-Italians today articulate their position of in-betweenness. Their accounts clearly demonstrated how different factors influenced, to various degrees, their self-perception. The analysis, highlighted the role of the father as a cultural mediator in the way, for example, through him Welsh-Italian writers maintain and articulate their Italianness (clearly in Pelosi’s case); but also in the way the father symbolises the compromises and the efforts made to embrace the host culture. The question of their hybrid identity was particularly evident when authors engaged in a series of comparisons between Italy and Wales. For Servini, writing was prompted by a request from friends (Italian and Welsh) to leave a contribution on the subject of Italians in Wales for posterity. Interestingly, he had been awarded the title of Cavaliere della Repubblica by Italy in recognition of his services to the Italian language and the community. For Pelosi, it was the memory of her father’s happy journeys to Italy, and her own memory of her parents’ break up, the death of her father, and her own increasingly problematic illness (she was diagnosed with Lupus at an early age) that prompted a somewhat idealised vision of Italy. For Spinetti, it was his Welsh upbringing and successful international career as a comic actor. For Emanuelli, it was the people he met and the places that he visited that seem that have helped him to define his identity. All these examples show the extent of Fortier’s statement about the heterogeneity and hybridity of émigré culture within the Welsh-Italian community.

Finally, Chapter Four offered examples of the cultural representation of the Italian migrant experience from the perspective of Anglo-Welsh authors. This stems from the fact that Italians figure prominently in Welsh popular culture and collective memory. Generally speaking, these texts proposed a somewhat romanticised portrayal evident, for example, in extensive exoticised descriptions of the Italian shops as well as of the

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<sup>2</sup> Wendy Ugolini, The Internal Enemy ‘Other’: Recovering the World War Two Narratives of Italian Scottish Women’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 24: 2 (2004), 137–158, p. 137.

physiognomy of the Italian proprietors. This romanticisation testifies to the extent of the positive impact of Italian migration on Welsh life and culture (they introduced a new way of socialising). The importance of family and social status amongst the Italian community was also well represented and perceived as a catalyst for their desire to belong and, therefore, in gradually embracing the new identity (the Welsh). The strongest synergy between the two cultures was represented by the emphasis given to the role of women, also during the Second World War, which, as demonstrated, echoes the role of the Welsh ‘mam’.

Tensions between the two cultures were also represented in the reactions of the Nonconformists to the Sunday opening of Italian shops, and also in the reactions of the local population to Mussolini’s decision to bring Britain into the war. It is interesting to note that most Anglo-Welsh authors studied in Chapter Four, such as John Parker, Gwyn Thomas, Walter Hadyn Davies, Catrin Collier and more recently Alan Lambert, have chosen to set part or all of their accounts during the Second World War, projecting narratives of enforced division between two communities otherwise united by mutual respect, solidarity, and similar values. An example of this is Gwyn Thomas’ ‘The Dark Philosophers’, and also Collier’s *Such Sweet Sorrow*. However, even in this case, there is an attempt to minimise the impact war had on both communities, the exception being Parker’s novel *The Alien Land*, which summarises the experience of the first generation, their struggle to adapt and embrace the new culture, and the ultimate failure to be accepted and recognised outside the cultural and ethnic boundaries of an imagined community.

Focusing on a largely unexplored case study, this thesis has primarily aimed to contribute to cultural histories of Italian migration from an interdisciplinary approach. This thesis engaged with the broader academic debate on migration, ethnicity, identity, and focussed primarily on the transgenerational transmission of memory in second and third generation Italian migrants to Wales, as well as the creation of cultural memory. This thesis has been largely concerned with a substantially unexplored area of research due to nearly seventy years of silence. Having been directly and extensively involved in the recent commemorative events around the Arandora Star in Wales, the author of this thesis has drawn considerably on the material generated as a result of these initiatives. The unexpected impact and results of such initiatives concentrated within the span of the last decade has made it virtually impossible to cover all aspects of the topic. As a

result, this thesis has inevitably had to put some topics to the side and to exclude sources that will hopefully be the object of future investigations. The analysis of Welsh-Italian narratives has also its limitations due to at least three factors: the limited amount of Welsh-Italian texts, the heterogeneity of their forms, and, in some cases, their brevity (for example, in the case of Pelosi's text). More importantly, this thesis has demonstrated how oral history projects, exhibitions and memorials in the context of a multicultural and dynamic society can prompt fresh reactions within migrant communities; open new debates on migrant identity and a sense of belonging, and generate more accounts that will be hopefully investigated and compared with those recently produced.

In relation to Welsh-Italians' memories of The Second World War, more work has yet to be done to compare these experiences with the cultural memories of Italians during the war in Anglo-Welsh literature, particularly in the light of newly generated material. In 2012, for example, Alan Lambert published his second book for children called *Friends at War*, a follow-up to the afore mentioned *Roberto's War* (see Chapter Three). One interesting element of Lambert's books is that they are designed to fit in with the Welsh national curriculum which has a focus on the Second World War. Although they probably would not appeal to a wider British market due to the many dialect idioms and Welsh language terms used in the books, it is clear that they testify to a renewed interest in the Italians in Wales and in the tragedy of the *Arandora star*. Also, more work has to be done to collect the memories of the relatives of the *Arandora Star* victims within other Italian communities across the UK. In particular, there is a need to focus on the experience of women and children who were affected by war. Ugolini, for example, has already moved in this direction with research on The Second World War narratives of Scottish-Italian women.<sup>3</sup> Only in the last few years, the publication, within Wales, of Lambert's books, and, outside Wales, of books such as Andrew Smith's *Edith's War* (2010) and Matthew Sweet's *West End Front* (2011) seems to allow for more discussions of The Second World War that take into consideration how war also affected immigrants across the world. The decades of silence within the Welsh-Italian community on one hand, and the romanticised portrayal of Italians in Anglo-Welsh literature on the other, produced a muted representation that only recent commemorative

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to the afore mentioned article 'The Internal Enemy 'Other': Recovering the World War Two Narratives of Italian Scottish Women' (see footnote 2), but also to her book *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2011).



events and oral history projects have managed to challenge and debate. How does the experience of Italians in Wales during the Second World War compare with that of other minority groups in Wales and in other countries?

A few months ago, theatre company Theatr Na N'Og concluded the tour of the *Arandora Star* play (last performance was on 26 October 2012). It is reported that 'over 5,000 school children and hundreds of adults learned all about the Arandora Star tragedy and the contribution of Welsh-Italians to the rich cultural heritage of Wales!'<sup>4</sup> Both Lambert's books and Theatr Na N'Og's play confirm that the commemorative events around the Arandora Star have generated, and continue to generate, awareness of the tragedy and of the Italian presence in Wales. As a result of all this ferment around the Italian community in Wales, in January 2013, former members of the now dissolved Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales decided to run the Arandora Website for an additional two years, a testament to its popularity and the demand for more opportunities to remember. More than 11,000 people visited the website in 2012 alone, showing how Welsh-Italian identity is gradually and more fiercely affirming itself, and how, not only the Arandora Star, but also Welsh-Italian identity is gradually transferring from the realm of communicative memory and into the realm of cultural memory. It has also been decided that in January 2015 the material on the Arandora Star Website will be deposited at the National Library of Wales. All this is to demonstrate how the voices of those Italians who were affected by the war are now the subject of discussion but still absent, hence the need to give them a specific location and 'context' that fully embrace them as part of Welsh historical and cultural heritage. Not to be forgotten is the fact that all stories and the panels for the *Wales Breaks Its Silence* exhibition, as well as the interviews of the relatives of the victims of the Arandora Star, have been translated into Welsh. Representations of Italians in Wales in accounts written through the means of Welsh could also be explored by future researchers.<sup>5</sup> For example, a group of researcher from the Oxford Institute of Ageing, (University of Oxford) together with the School of Social Sciences at Bangor University are currently undertaking a comparative study of intergenerational heritage transmission within Welsh speaking and Italian migrant families. For this reason, I agree with Wren-Owens in suggesting that a fruitful means

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.arandorastarwales.us/Arandora\\_Star\\_Memorial\\_Fund\\_in\\_Wales/Arandora\\_Star\\_Play%21.html](http://www.arandorastarwales.us/Arandora_Star_Memorial_Fund_in_Wales/Arandora_Star_Play%21.html) [Accessed on 20 January 2013].

<sup>5</sup> I refer, for example, to Jon Meirion Jones' book called *Y Llyn Arian: Il Filo D'Argento* (Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 2007).

of developing work in this field would be by considering the Celtic factor, and how it interacts with Welsh-Italian identity.<sup>6</sup>

More recently again, David John Newbold, a Welsh lecturer at the Università Ca' Foscari of Venice, Italy, has started to investigate the Welsh-Italian connection within Britain.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, he pointed out that by the 1970s, for example, the:

essentially static vision of an Italian immigrant community, hard working, soft hearted, non-threatening and inclined to be scatter-brained, transmits a stereotype which was by then out of touch of reality.<sup>8</sup>

Newbold also asserts that this vision however, has to be seen 'against the backdrop of a small nation struggling to come to find an identity' especially after the failure of the Referendum on Devolution in 1979 and the economic crisis brought about by the closure of the coalmines during the Thatcher administration.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, he considers the recent commemorative events and research projects in Wales, including a website celebrating the relationship between Wales and Italy ([www.welshitalians.com](http://www.welshitalians.com)) and a course on Italians in Wales at Cardiff University<sup>10</sup> as the ultimate vectors of 'a partnership in recollection, or perhaps more accurately, a co-construction of natural identity'.<sup>11</sup> Newbold's observation seems to agree with the argument in Giudici's recent thesis that even a geographically dispersed migrant group (such as the Italians in Wales) can be incorporated into the process of nation-building, and how, in the case study of Italians in Wales, the process of memorialisation of the Italian migrant experience can be used to forge the image of a tolerant nation.<sup>12</sup> More work should now be done on how the experiences of the Italians in Wales compare with the experiences of other

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<sup>6</sup> Liz Wren-Owens, 'The Delayed Emergence of Italian-Welsh Narratives or Class and the Commodification of Ethnicity?', *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture*, 3: 1 (2012), p. 131.

<sup>7</sup> Newbold's concern is part of a wider project, together with the University of Turin, that focuses on perspectives on Italy from the ex-colonial world. His aim is to investigate the Welsh-Italian relationship, especially in the light of the well-known Italian migration to South Wales, but also, more recently, through the works of Welsh-Italian writers. He is also interested in reciprocity and the interest that Welsh writers have stimulated in Italy.

<sup>8</sup> David Jon Newbold, 'Wales, English, and the Bracchi Factor: The Co-Construction of National Identity in Devolutionary Wales' (forthcoming). I am grateful to the author of this article for allowing me to read his work before publication.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> Both website and course were run by the author of this thesis.

<sup>11</sup> David Jon Newbold, 'Wales, English, and the Bracchi Factor: The Co-Construction of National Identity in Devolutionary Wales', (forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> Marco, Giudici, *Migration, Memory and Identity: Italians and Nation-Building in Wales, 1940-2010*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bangor, 2012).

minority groups in Wales, and whether, and, in what ways, these groupings might also contribute to this co-construction of national identity.

This thesis started from Marin and Bottignolo's postulation that Italians in Britain have consciously resigned themselves to a condition of subordination in relation to British culture, as, it is evident, in their view, in their linguistic difficulty and a socio-cultural 'invisibility'. This thesis, therefore, aimed at challenging this point of view, by investigating whether and to what extent this notion of subordination could be evidenced amongst the Italians in Wales in the ways that they expressed their identity culturally. In particular, it answered research questions about how events affected the ways that Italians perceived themselves in Wales, from the interwar period to the present day. From the analysis of a variety of cultural forms that spanned photographs to local newspapers, and autobiographies to fictional works, it became clear that Italians were generally well integrated across south Wales from their first arrival until the Second World War. It also emerged that the Second World War marked a radical change in how Italians were perceived; while the sinking of the *Arandora Star*, as well as being a tragedy for contemporary Italians, came to work in memory as a kind of metaphor for the sudden negative shift in attitudes towards well integrated Italians. Finally, this research found that that these changes form the basis of a continuing memory which is structured around neither full exclusion nor full inclusion from Wales and Welsh culture.

This thesis ultimately agreed with Fortier in showing how the indeterminacy of the Italian presence in Britain is reflected in the heterogeneity of the Italian émigré culture within the Italians in Wales. Although in some cases the texts studied in this research are relatively slight, it is nonetheless possible to see significant patterns of self-representation emerging, where Italian Welsh identity negotiates a set of positions that are in dialogue with complex and hybrid histories of experiences of immigration. Perhaps the key finding of this thesis is that the continuous change of social frameworks of collective memory played, and continues to play today, from the 1920s up until the first decade of the twenty-first century, a crucially important role in the way that generations of Italians in Wales perceive themselves and are perceived.

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