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# Wales Breaks its Silence: from Memory to Memorial and beyond. The Italians in Wales during the Second World War

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On 10 June 1940, Mussolini's declaration of war on Britain had a traumatic impact on the Italian communities across the UK. On 2 July 1940, the ex-cruise liner SS *Arandora Star* was transformed and used by the British Government to deport enemy aliens to internment camps in Canada, but intercepted by a German submarine off the Irish coast. It sank leaving a sad legacy. In September 2008, twelve voluntary members of the Welsh-Italian community formed the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales (ASMFW) to raise money for the creation of the first National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales to remember the fifty-three Italians from Wales who perished in the tragedy. After decades of silence, the initiatives promoted by the ASMFW were able to generate new oral and written testimonies showing the true impact of the Arandora Star tragedy on the Italian community in Wales. This article aims to introduce some of these narratives, and to explore how the relatives of the victims have contributed, or not, to the creation of a collective memory. It argues that the creation of the memorial in Wales and the process of memorialization were not so much an attempt to create politicized discourses of victimization, but rather an attempt to create a platform for the generation of memories after nearly seven decades of silence.

**KEYWORDS** Arandora Star memorial, Welsh-Italians, cultural representation of wartime experiences, generational transmission of memory, cultural memory, oral and written testimonies

With the threat of an imminent attack on Britain, and the presence of potential fifth columnists amongst enemy aliens, Churchill ordered an indiscriminate round-up of enemy aliens/internees throughout the country, and the War Cabinet decided to deport them to Canada and Australia. These decisions were traumatic 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 interned Italian males.<sup>1</sup> In the early hours of the following day, it was intercepted by a German U-boat seventy-five miles off the north-west Irish coast, and torpedoed. 805 people lost their lives in this tragedy, whilst the Italian loss of life was greatest, with 470 Italians dying, compared with 175 Germans.<sup>2</sup> The impact of this unexpected tragic event was unprecedented, particularly on the Italian community in Wales, as fifty-three of those Italians who perished were from Wales, and belonged to families who migrated to this area nearly a century before. Italians had achieved a significant degree of economic and social progress, and many considered themselves well-integrated into the local community. That is why people generally respected them.<sup>3</sup> The extremely good relationship between the locals and the Italians was based on the popularity and social utility of their coffee shops together with the Miners' Institute, chapels and rugby clubs, especially during the years of the Depression between the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>4</sup> When Mussolini declared war on Britain, however, from hard-working people fully integrated into the host communities, Italians became potentially dangerous characters and a threat for the country. On 11 June, 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>5</sup> Local newspapers reported several rounds-up and incidents which took place less than twenty-four hours after Mussolini's declaration of war. The most violent reactions against the Italians were 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>6</sup>

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 Nelson, in the valleys.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The ship had been designed for a maximum of 500 people, so the fact that it carried 1,673 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 1,673, 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 are the result of extensive research conducted by Alan Davis using National Archive resources. 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 embark in order to be with their loved ones. This makes it even more difficult to know exactly the names of the people who were on board. More figures can be found on the following website created by local historian Alan Davis: <http://www.bluestarline.org/arandora.html> [Accessed on 20 May 2012].

<sup>2</sup> Maria Serena Balestracci, *Arandora Star: Dall'oblio alla memoria. From Oblivion to Memory*, (Parma: MUP, 2008), pp. 367–81.

<sup>3</sup> Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor. The Italian Community in Great Britain* (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream, 1991), p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Phil Carradice, *Wales at War* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2003), pp. 123–4.

<sup>5</sup> 'Comb-out of Italians in Britain: Crowds Raid and Smash Shops', *South Wales Evening Post*, 11 June 1940, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> 'Big round-up of South Wales Italians', *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 11 June 1940, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> 'Big round-up of South Wales Italians', *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 11 June 1940, p. 3.

Nevertheless, only in the last decade have historians started to investigate and unveil the outcomes and consequences of those events on a personal level, particularly in relation to the *Arandora Star*. Maria Serena Balestracci's two books, *Arandora Star: una tragedia dimenticata* (2002) and *Arandora Star: Dall'oblio alla memoria. From Oblivion to Memory* (2008) are of paramount importance, as they bring to light documents, and interviews conducted in Italy and the UK by the author herself, focussing on the human consequences of the tragedy.<sup>8</sup>

Inspired by Balestracci's work, and also by an event that took place in Liverpool on 2 July 2008, to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the sinking of the *Arandora Star*, twelve voluntary members of the Welsh-Italian community decided to get together in Cardiff and create the *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales* (ASMFW). The aim was to raise money for the creation of the first National Memorial of the *Arandora Star* in Wales to remember the fifty-three Italians from Wales who perished in the tragedy. Members of the Committee included the former Italian Honorary Vice-Consul (Comm. Domenico Casetta), the President of the *Amici Val Ceno Galles Association* (Romeo Basini), and myself. My personal involvement was partially dictated by the fact I was doing research on the Italian community in Wales for a PhD, and this project had the potential to generate new material I could use to study the impact of the Second World War on the Welsh-Italian community, as part of my thesis. On a more personal level, I also strongly sympathised with my Welsh-Italians friends who had lost family members on the ill-fated ship, and I wanted to help raise awareness of those events and their significance for posterity. I hope that, in spite of my personal involvement, I have managed to retain a certain level of objectivity.

The ASMFW project was sponsored by the National Heritage Lottery Wales and other organizations in Italy and Wales, and it was able to promote initiatives to raise awareness of the tragedy, including the creation of a commemorative booklet with twenty personal stories and a DVD of the unveiling ceremony, a website with an online archive of written testimonies collected since 2008, and a small oral history project that was accompanied by a road show exhibition called 'Wales Breaks its Silence: From Memory to Memorial'.<sup>9</sup> The campaign of awareness generated new oral and written testimonies showing the full impact of the *Arandora Star* tragedy on the Italian community in Wales. This article aims, in particular, to explore how second and third generations of Italians in Wales have contributed, or not, to the creation of a collective memory. The selection of testimonies presented in this article is exemplary of those collected in the period between September 2008 and January 2012 by the ASMFW.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Serena Balestracci, *Arandora Star: Una tragedia dimenticata* (Pontremoli: I quaderni del Corriere Apuano, 2002); *Arandora Star: Dall'oblio alla memoria* (2008).

<sup>9</sup> For the commemorative booklet, I refer to: Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, eds., *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet* (Llanelli: Mike Clarke Printing, 2010). For the DVD I refer to: *Celebration Mass and Unveiling Ceremony for the Welsh National Memorial Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the Sinking of the Arandora Star*, Metropolitan, (Gower Video, 2011). The ASMFW website is: [www.arandorastarwales.us](http://www.arandorastarwales.us) [Accessed 24 January 2014]. As for the small oral history project, the plan was to interview ten or twelve survivors and relatives of the *Arandora Star*. The interviews were conducted by three members of the ASMFW Committee, including the author of this article. The interviews were conducted in English and had a semi-structured format. Interviews were also translated into Welsh and Italian. In 2011, all the audio interviews, the written testimonies for the booklet, and the exhibition panels were donated to the National History Museum at St. Fagans, in Cardiff.

In his monumental study on the internment of enemy aliens during the Second World War, François Lafitte pointed out that the cultural damage in some cases was such that it is difficult to assess. For example, amongst the German community in the UK, he mentions that there were ‘cases of research interrupted or ruined, of half-finished books that may never be completed, of painstaking intellectual or artistic endeavour that may never come to fruition’.<sup>10</sup> Amongst the British-Italian community, Terri Colpi highlights that ‘the loss of life with the sinking of the *Arandora Star*, affected the psyche and identity of the “old” Italian Community in a deep a fundamental way’.<sup>11</sup> Wendy Ugolini, who studied the effects of the Second World War on the Scottish-Italian community, identifies a different type of cultural loss, consisting in the ‘relative invisibility’ of ethnic women amongst cultural representations of wartime experiences.<sup>12</sup> In her view, Italian women who were children and young adults during the war tend to ‘utilise the public discourse of male experience, internment and the *Arandora Star*, as a starting point for telling their own stories and, in some cases, to delay addressing more personal and painful events’.<sup>13</sup> In Ugolini’s view, memorialization of internment and the *Arandora Star* amongst Italian communities has constantly and almost exclusively ‘draw[n] upon a symbolism of victimhood’ which ‘functions essentially to distract attention away from the diversity of Italian experience’.<sup>14</sup> In particular, Ugolini is concerned with the fact that, in her view, the memorialization of the *Arandora Star* across the UK is an attempt to detach the tragedy ‘from its historical and political context’, and, therefore, not to acknowledge that a small proportion of British Italians were supporters of Fascism. In this sense, Ugolini asserts that by ‘suppressing debate about the role and function of the inter-war Italian Fasci clubs’, *Arandora Star* internees are portrayed as innocent victims, using the emotive imagery of fathers and sons to represent those who were on board the ship.<sup>15</sup>

Ugolini also points out that wartime memories within the Scottish-Italian community tend to focus around a very distinct set of memories, which are strongly male gendered, and therefore deny ‘gender, class and generational difference amongst the Italians in Scotland’.<sup>16</sup> If a discourse of victimhood was used in previous memorial projects to promote apologies — such as the one by local MP Sir Stuart Bell after the unveiling of the memorial in Middlesbrough, in July 2009, or the *Arandora Star* Campaign promoted by the Scottish-Italian community on the internet — in Wales, the non-political and peaceful intentions behind the creation of the memorial were clearly stated in the Constitution of the ASMF: ‘Our main objectives are to promote peace, reconciliation, solidarity and humanity’ between nations.<sup>17</sup> In the same Constitution, it is also stated that:

<sup>10</sup> François Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (London: Libris, 1988), p. 153.

<sup>11</sup> Terri Colpi, ‘The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community’, in David Cesarani (ed.), *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 167–87.

<sup>12</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), 137–58 (p. 140).

<sup>13</sup> Ugolini, ‘The Internal Enemy “Other”’, p. 156.

<sup>14</sup> Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the ‘Enemy Other’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2011), p. 235.

<sup>15</sup> Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the ‘Enemy Other’*, p. 224.

<sup>16</sup> Ugolini, ‘The Internal Enemy “Other”’, pp. 142–3.

<sup>17</sup> *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Constitution*, (Cardiff, November 2008). [Private document held by the author of this article].

The people who would benefit from this appeal will be the citizens of Wales and Italy, particularly the relatives of those who perished on the Arandora Star [. . .]. In addition to the Italian community of Wales, the people of Wales in general will also benefit from the appeal because it will be a reminder of the suffering that war brings. [. . .] by remembering the victims of the Arandora Star, we will in fact be creating a permanent memorial for the furtherance of peace and reconciliation among nations.<sup>18</sup>

Inevitably, as we shall see in the course of this article, discourses of victimhood are present in the memories of second and third generations who participated in the oral history project, and/or donated their memories for the commemorative booklet. However, I will argue that this discourse is not politicized and that the majority of the participants would agree that internment and the Arandora Star sinking were a direct consequence of war. A potentially more fruitful way of looking at the memorialization of the Arandora Star in Wales, therefore, is to focus on the creation of the memorial as an attempt, after decades of silence, to empower a cultural minority ‘recovering the life stories of those who have been hidden from history’.<sup>19</sup>

In Wales, both the memorial and the campaign of awareness have contributed to the unpacking of a diversity of experiences that otherwise would have been ignored, forgotten, and lost. The wording on the memorial itself, states that ‘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).<sup>20</sup> The wording symbolized the intention of the founder members to commemorate not only the fifty-three Welsh-Italians but also all those who were affected by the Arandora Star, regardless of their nationality or affiliation, and to use the platform of the Arandora Star story as a starting point for telling other stories that may have been repressed or delayed. Significant is the fact that Mr John Roberts and Mr Evan Morgan Jones, two guards in the British Army who survived the tragedy and were still alive at the time of the ASMFV project, were officially invited to the unveiling ceremony and subsequently interviewed.

The long period of silence within the Welsh-Italian community suggests that the internment and especially the Arandora Star represented a discontinuity in family dynamics and communication that can be described as ‘indirect, consisting of silences and obliquities’,<sup>21</sup> and a ‘break in transmission resulting from traumatic historical events’.<sup>22</sup> Hirsch points out that the break in transmission ‘necessitates forms of remembrance that reconnect and re-embody an intergenerational memorial fabric that has been severed by catastrophe’.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Hirsch recognizes the

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority. Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. xxi.

<sup>20</sup> The only two survivors, still alive at the time of the ASMFV project, were Mr John Roberts of Llanelli and Mr Ieuan Jones from Merthyr Tydfil. They both died within two years of the unveiling of the memorial in Cardiff, 2 July 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Ernst van Alphen, ‘Second Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and Postmemory’, *Poetics Today*, 27 (Summer 2006), 473–88 (p. 477).

<sup>22</sup> Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, *Poetics Today*, 29 (Spring 2008), 103–28 (p. 110).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

importance of collective memory, and forms of remembrance, such as memorials, exhibitions and oral history projects, in re-establishing confidence in the transmission of memory from generation to generation.

In Wales, the written and oral testimonies produced by the relatives (mainly children and grandchildren of those who perished on, or survived, the *Arandora Star*) constitute essentially a memory mediated by the authors' ancestors who were, nevertheless 'determinative'.<sup>24</sup> 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, trans-generational traumatic experience, an experience whose memory has been delayed and enriched by the eloquent discourse of 'silence and obliquities'.

### The Written and Oral Testimonies: The Extent of Anti-Italian Demonstrations

The participants in the ASMFW oral history project 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, in the early 1900s, 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, a 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>25</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>26</sup>

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

<sup>24</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Pelosi and Evans, p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> Pelosi and Evans, p. 41.

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 mid-day 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>27</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>28</sup>

Another testimony from the Minoli sisters reveals that their Welsh mother was also the target of the police's harsh and abusive behaviour, simply because she was married to an Italian:

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 nonetheless unnecessarily savage.<sup>29</sup>

The language used in this passage to describe the unsympathetic attitude of the police contrasts significantly with the language used by the local newspapers of the time to describe the attitude of the British Forces immediately after the sinking of the *Arandora Star*.<sup>30</sup> For example, *The South Wales Echo and Evening Express* published the official report issued by The Air Ministry News Service after a Sunderland flying boat of the R.A.F. Coastal Command arrived on the scene. The language in this report emphasises the promptness, efficiency, and generosity of the British Forces:

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

<sup>27</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14934, Andrew Rossi, 31 May 2011. This interview, like subsequent interviews referred to in this article, have been donated by the ASMF to the St. Fagan's National History Museum (SFNHM) in Wales.

<sup>28</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14934, Andrew Rossi, 31 May 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Pelosi and Evans, p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Bruna Chezzi, *Cultural Representations of Italians in Wales (1920s-2010s)*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cardiff University, 2013), pp. 48–57.



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>31</sup>

Only a few testimonies provided examples of the 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, apologized to her, and asked her to pack something in a small suitcase because he was going to take him to Swansea police station.<sup>32</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>33</sup>

Overall, the accounts and testimonies provided by the participants 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.<sup>34</sup> Their testimonies clearly present a victim’s narrative; showing how shops were vandalized 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’. It would seem that some of the details in these testimonies were suppressed in the newspapers in order to give more emphasis to the negative portrayal of Italians. This can be seen as a way to further support and justify 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 the Family Bond

What emerges from the stories highlighted so far is an overt sense of uneasiness in recalling the night of the arrest of Italians, caused by the disruption of the family ménage and dynamics. This next section 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. They attempt to make sense of what happened, and to 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 forming cultural memory.

These texts show that the events and circumstances that determined the treatment of Italians reinforced a specific sense of Italianness within the Italian immigrant community. In accordance with Ugolini, these events equally reinforced a sense of

<sup>31</sup> ‘Flying Boat Found Them’, *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 4 July 1940, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14933: Royston Miller, 23 September 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Pelosi and Evans, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Italy’s Cowardly Policy of Plunder’, *Western Mail*, 11 June 1940, p. 1.

'otherness' and not 'belonging'.<sup>35</sup> Paradoxically, though, they also reveal a fractured identity coinciding with a sense of cultural loss and a consequent need to recover 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 was synonymous with 'fascist' and therefore potentially subversive. At the same time, cultural loss was equally represented by an enforced disruption and fracture within the families, which in many cases led to the absence of 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>36</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>37</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 '[t]he family were not separated and stayed together during throughout the war'.<sup>38</sup> Mr Basini's statement, which would seem to challenge the idea of the enforced disruption within the family, is symptomatic of the extent to which war in general, internment, and the *Arandora Star* in particular, impacted on the Italian community in Wales, and the extent to which these events created a sense of uneasiness, and fear of being judged or discriminated that persists seventy years on. At the beginning of the ASMFw project, for example, Mr Basini objected to the decision not to include the names of the Welsh Guards on the *Arandora Star* memorial, fearing a political reaction. In his interview, he himself admitted that originally he did not want to participate in the ASMFw project, 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.<sup>39</sup>

For Italian immigrants, family 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 exemplified by an emphasis on the sudden deprivation of a family bond, security, and affection caused by the arrest of the husbands/fathers. Emphasis is also given to 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, George Hill expresses his resentment on behalf of the women and children, who were also victims of what he calls 'this atrocity', when policemen came to arrest his grandfather:

<sup>35</sup> Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other'*, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Pelosi and Evans, p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14938: Romeo Basini, 13 December 2011.

<sup>38</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14938: Romeo Basini, 13 December 2011.

<sup>39</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14938: Romeo Basini, 13 December 2011.

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. [. . .] What strong women those left behind became . . . having to be mother and father to their children.<sup>40</sup>

While expressing great admiration for the role that women played, Hill 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, urging the reader’s engagement. 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 a sense of estrangement and vulnerability, of being ‘unwanted’ enemy aliens, and of not knowing what would become of their loved 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 interrupted and juxtaposed to 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>41</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 the war changed and interrupted the natural flow of relationships 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. In times of confusion, disorientation, and uncertainty about the future, family represented the immediate environment providing reassurance. Psychiatrists who have studied the

<sup>40</sup> Pelosi and Evans, p. 32.

<sup>41</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].

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>42</sup> Displacement caused by internment and the Arandora Star represented a 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 expressing a sense of nostalgia for those happy memories.

### Arandora Star: the Silence of an ‘Unmentionable Incident’

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>43</sup> In Wales, too, the Arandora Star was for many families the unmentionable incident. After 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 in that it caused a rupture in the natural flow of family and community bonds.<sup>44</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 the two communities. 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 even now cannot forgive what Churchill did. He highlights how 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?

<sup>42</sup> Mindy Thompson Fullilove, ‘Psychiatric Implications of Displacement: Contributions from the Psychology of Place’, *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 153 (December 1996), 1516–23, (p. 1518).

<sup>43</sup> Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the ‘Enemy Other’*, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> By ‘community bonds’, I mean not only the bond within the Italian community, but also the bond between the Italian community and the host community.

*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>45</sup>

Various factors have to be taken into consideration that have equally determined the discomfort of both the British authorities and the Italian community, and a sense of humiliation, resentment, and voluntary repression of events within the Italian immigrant community throughout the UK. Relatives of the Italians who were drowned 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 passengers were 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 apologized to the victims of the *Arandora Star*.<sup>46</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 loved 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>47</sup>

The Welsh-Italians who were interviewed by the ASMFw committee members, and those who wrote their stories for the ASMFw booklet and website, could not fully understand why there was silence about the wartime, and had different views on this. Romeo Basini became aware of the *Arandora Star* after the war, in the late 1940s or early 1950s. After the war, nobody mentioned the tragedy in his family, except in what Basini describes as 'sound bites' between the senior members of the family. Mr

<sup>45</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14934: Andrew Rossi 31 May 2011.

<sup>46</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). On the internment of enemy aliens during the Second World War, see particularly Francois Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, especially pages 123–43, which deals with the controversy surrounding the way aliens were interned, and the *Arandora Star*; Peter and Leni Gilman, *Collar the Lot! How Britain interned and expelled its Wartime Refugees* (London: Quartet Books, 1980); 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>47</sup> Pelosi and Evans, *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Booklet*, p. 29.

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 just carried on without talking about it.<sup>48</sup> George Hill became aware at the age of eight at his grandmother's funeral. When he asked 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>49</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>50</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 his 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 over 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>51</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>52</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, Italians took advantage of the memory of internment to reinforce their link with Welsh people'.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14938: Romeo Basini, 13 December 2011.

<sup>49</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14936: George Hill, 3 May 2011.

<sup>50</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14933: Royston Miller, 23 September 2011.

<sup>51</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14934: Andrew Rossi, 31 May 2011.

<sup>52</sup> SFNHM, Audio Recording 14933: Royston Miller, 23 September 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Marco Giudici, *Migration, Memory and Identity: Italians and Nation-Building in Wales, 1940–2010*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bangor, 2012), p. 132.

The most striking thing in all these stories is the difference between the silence and discontinuity and the effect of memorials, such as the Arandora Star Memorial in Wales, prompting articulation of cultural loss, and the creation of a different cultural memory. Wren-Owens stated that, without denying the traumatic impact of the Second World War on the Italian community in Wales, it is overly simplistic to think that it prompted a cultural silencing of Welsh-Italian voices. While she recognizes that one of the factors that determined the lack of written testimonies was the high level of illiteracy and the agency of some migrants, she also seems to base her argument on the fact that ‘individuals, even within the same family often reacted in different ways’, and on the fact that there were, undeniably, examples of solidarity towards the Italians who were arrested and interned. But this alone does not explain the lack of poignant testimonies amongst the Italian community in Wales and across the UK for nearly seventy years. The analysis of the oral and written testimonies provided in this article shows, however, the importance of the Arandora Star History and Memorial Project in generating unprecedented and unpublished accounts of the War. In particular, the different accounts demonstrate how the Second World War not only generated long term silence within the Welsh-Italian community, but also affected it in different ways and at various levels.<sup>54</sup> The silence and the delayed emergence of written and oral testimonies show how memory can be partial, idealized, fragmented, and distorted. The memories of the children/grandchildren of the victims and the survivors offer different ways to work through the past via the recent commemorative events.

## Conclusions

This article focussed on the written and oral testimonies that were instigated by the creation of the First National Memorial of the Arandora Star in Wales. It showed that, although the discourse of victimhood is predominant, this was not intended to engage in any controversial political discourse and seek an apology from the British Government. 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:

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>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Liz Wren-Owens, ‘The Delayed Emergence of Italian-Welsh Narratives of Class and the Commodification of Ethnicity?’, *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture*, 3:1 (2012), 119–34.

<sup>55</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 article] 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.

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>56</sup>

One of the main purposes of the memorial, like other memorials dedicated to the Arandora Star throughout the UK, — for example in Colonsay (2005), Liverpool (2008), Middlesbrough (2009), Glasgow (2011), and London (2012) — was to create a healing environment to restore a sense of place and cultural identity to 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 Arandora Star, regarded by survivors as a 'floating prison camp').<sup>57</sup> Of these memorials, perhaps the most impressive and poignant is the Italian Cloister Garden at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Glasgow, opened on 16 May 2011, where a 200 year old olive tree, that was donated by the people of Tuscany as a sign of peace and reconciliation, lies in the centre of a fountain which symbolizes hope, and inscriptions from the Gospel and from Italian poets inspire comfort, consolation and hope.<sup>58</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>59</sup> The study shows how the memorial design has a psychological impact on the veterans. A sense of attachment is created by going back repeatedly to visit the memorial which proves healing to the mourning process. Rando Bertoia, for example, the last Italian survivor of the Arandora Star, resident 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 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>60</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

<sup>56</sup> This quote is also from a letter of support which is part of the above mentioned Heritage Lottery Fund Application.

<sup>57</sup> 'Survivor of World War Two Arandora Star disaster relives ordeals' *Daily Record*, 22 May 2010, <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].

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.italiancloister.org.uk/> [Accessed on 22 June 2014].

<sup>59</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), 351–75.

<sup>60</sup> 'Survivor of World War Two Arandora Star disaster relives ordeals' *Daily Record*, 22 May 2010, <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].



tribute that restores a 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>61</sup> Inevitably, though, the creation of the memorial in Wales presented issues particularly with regard to the location (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 was dictated mainly by practical reasons, as permission to host the memorial was offered cost-free, and the cathedral offered a central location in the heart of the capital city for the memorial. However, this decision was initially contested by some members of the ASMFW Committee. The discussion focused on the fact that the religious location may restrict the influx of a public with no religious affiliation and prevent the memorial from garnering the attention and importance usually associated with national memorials situated in open public spaces. Alternative suggestions for its location were the Garden of Peace or the Cenotaph, also in Cardiff. The other 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 Guards who were on board the *Arandora Star*, and who suffered the same destiny. This was the most controversial aspect. The suggestion to include these names was dictated by the fear of creating embarrassment in a political or diplomatic way, nearly seventy years after events. This fear spread beyond the Committee with unjustified rumours that a memorial to the Italian fascists was being created. Alfio Bernabei, a playwright and journalist, questioned and generally misunderstood the wording on the memorial. On 28 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 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 disregarded 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>62</sup> Therefore, they cannot be accepted as a valid justification, and the letter was not followed up by any reaction from the public and the media. On the contrary, 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

<sup>61</sup> Pelosi and Evans, p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> *Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales Constitution*, (Cardiff, November 2008).

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 uneasiness vis-à-vis the potential reactions to Bernabei's letter, which clearly echoes the bigger anxiety experienced by Italians in Wales during the period following Mussolini's declaration of war on Britain.

Finally, it is clear that the creation of the memorial was as problematic as the act of remembering for subsequent generations who deliberately or involuntarily remained silent for decades after the sinking of the Arandora Star. The analysis of the written and oral testimonies has demonstrated how the generational transmission of memories of the Second World War relates to notions of continuity and discontinuity in the self-perception of Italians. Elements of continuity coincide with the importance assigned to family as a means of maintaining and transmitting heritage culture through subsequent generations. Elements of discontinuity are evident in the involuntary detachment not only from family, and symbolically from their own Italianness, but also, eventually, from Wales. The unresolved nature of the Arandora Star memory resulted in the production of tales dictated by an interpretative urge of a number 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, fear and prejudice still remain, and ultimately the personal accounts reveal the difficulty of telling that story from a peripheral position (Welsh-Italian). 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 impact upon the Italian community in Wales today.

More work should now be done to compare these experiences with the cultural memories of Italians during the war in Anglo-Welsh literature, particularly in the light of recent publications. In 2012, for example, Alan Lambert published his second book for children called *Friends at War* a follow-up of his first book *Roberto's War* (2009).<sup>63</sup> Also, more work could be done to relate the memories of the relatives of the Arandora Star victims to 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 Second World War narratives by Scottish-Italian women. 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* and Matthew Sweet's *West End Front*, seems to allow for more discussions of the Second World War that take into consideration how war has affected immigrants across the world.<sup>64</sup> The period of silence within the Welsh-Italian community on one hand, and the romanticized portrayal of Italians in Anglo-Welsh literature on the other, have produced a muted representation that only recent commemorative events and oral history projects have managed to challenge and debate. How does the experience of Italians in Wales during the Second World

<sup>63</sup> Alan Lambert, *Roberto's War* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2009); *Friends at War* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2012).

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Smith, *Edith's War* (Toronto: Axiom, 2010); Matthew Sweet, *West End Front: the wartime secrets of London's grand hotels* (London: faber and faber, 2011).

War compare with that of other minority groups in Wales and in other countries? Have memories been generated by other commemorative events?

Finally, the theatre company Theatr Na N'Og took a play about the *Arandora Star* on tour with its last performance 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>65</sup> Both Lambert's books and Theatr Na N'Og's play suggest 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 visibility of the Italian community in Wales, in January 2013, former members of the now dissolved ASMFV 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, and in 2013, the website had 14,000 visits and 143,000 hits. The popularity of the website demonstrates how Welsh-Italian identity is gradually 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.<sup>66</sup> 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, hence the need to give them a specific location and context that fully embraces them as part of Welsh historical and cultural heritage.

<sup>65</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 24 January 2014].

<sup>66</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125–33.