

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Shades of complicity: archives of the ‘implicated subject’

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### Abstract

Knowledge of the *Arandora Star* is no longer limited to members of the UK’s historic Italian community but is shared by a much larger constituency thanks to the greater accessibility of historical documents relating to the sinking of the ship, and to the substantial volume of new creative work inspired by it. This article examines this expansion of historical memory by following two discrete but entangled strands. The first follows the construction of the *Arandora Star* archive, starting from the author’s chance personal encounter with a photograph. The second involves a close reading of Francine Stock’s *A Foreign Country* (1999) and Caterina Soffici’s *Nessuno può fermarmi* (2017), two novels that explore how people outside the historic Italian community recognise their implication in the sinking and its aftermath. Both foreground the intergenerational and transnational transmission of difficult memory and the ways in which the *Arandora Star* functions as an unstable point of historical knowledge and ethical judgement.

**Keywords:** *Arandora Star*; archive; Francine Stock; Caterina Soffici; Second World War; Cultural Memory

### Introduction

History, like trauma, is never simply one’s own ... history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas.  
(Caruth 1996, 18)

Taking its cue from Caruth’s suggestion about the structure of historical trauma, this article aims to explore the ways in which the trauma of the *Arandora Star* sinking, experienced unevenly in the UK Italian community itself (Colpi 2020), resonates now across a wide, varied constituency of people who recognise, with very different levels of intensity, some form of implication in, and affective attachment to, the event and its memory. Michael Rothberg’s concept of the ‘implicated subject’ offers the broad canvas necessary for apprehending the commonalities and divergences of affect and involvement experienced in relation to historically catastrophic occurrences over a long time-frame (2019). Rothberg moves away from the strongly articulated categories of victim, perpetrator and even bystander to open up understandings of the complex ways people come to be involved in, and touched

by, historical events and narratives at an intimate as well as public and political level.

While it is commonly accepted that for many years, there was little public acknowledgement of the *Arandora Star* (AS) sinking, general awareness is now at a much higher level in the UK, Italy, and elsewhere. The growth in interest has been achieved largely thanks to the strenuous determination of members of the UK's historic Italian community and affiliated organisations such as the London Arandora Star Memorial Trust, the Arandora Star Memorial Fund in Wales, and the Italian Garden Improvement Group in Scotland. In addition, more open and sympathetic media attention over the last 20 or so years has contributed to the production of a large, eclectic body of knowledge about the sinking in print and online. Historical documents including official records, press accounts, testimonies of survivors and their descendants, photographs and original footage, sit alongside a substantial volume of creative work in a range of media encompassing documentary film, exhibitions, music, drama, memoir, and fiction. Public memorials and commemorative ceremonies have also actively promoted knowledge about the AS and those people affected by it. A notable facet of this flourishing and diverse corpus is that a significant part has been produced by people with no established biographical connection to the community which has nurtured memory of the tragic event and its painful aftermath. What Terri Colpi (2020) has called the AS's 'mnemonic community' has become far wider and less directly connected to the event. A recent, evocative example is the work done by the Girvan and District Great War Project to identify Francesco D'Inverno as the hitherto unnamed AS victim buried in their local cemetery in Doune on Scotland's west coast. Media coverage of their discovery attracted enormous interest, leading to a successful crowdfunding campaign to mount a new headstone to his memory and the tracing of some of his family members (Rinaldi 2023).

While a number of commentators have drawn attention to this growth of cultural production around the AS as well as to the emergence of new and more accurate factual information about it (Chezzi 2014, Colpi 2020, 2023, D'Amore 2023, Foot 2009, Fortier 2000, Ugolini 2011, 2015), little analysis has been done on the contents of what has become a diverse, multilingual archive and on the knowledge of the AS that it generates and stores. In this article, I want to delve into and read in parallel some of the archive's disparate contents following two discrete but entangled strands relating to its structure as well as to what it yields. My investigation of the archive's spatial dimensions starts from a chance discovery online of a photograph from the 1930s. The photo is of a woman and her son sitting in their garden in Edinburgh. A passing reference to the AS in the accompanying caption drew me into a multi-medial exploration of identity and connectedness across communities, offering a glimpse into the complex networks of an archive in the making. The second strand draws on the still-growing corpus of fictional work about the AS that has been published in English, Italian, and German over the last two decades. In general, these works are historically well-researched and make a meaningful contribution to the dissemination of knowledge about the ship and the circumstances of its sinking. The two novels I discuss at some length are self-consciously archival fictions deeply concerned with how narratives of the AS are recorded, forgotten, created, and recovered. Francine Stock's *A Foreign Country* (1999) and Caterina Soffici's *Nessuno può fermarmi* (2017), speculatively of course, fill in gaps or breaches in the official records and also deal with the haphazard and injurious nature of their construction.<sup>1</sup> Their shared focus on the emotional and pragmatic difficulties of thinking back to the time of the sinking illuminates the ways in which the memory of the AS functions as a trope of intergenerational, transnational implication, and as an unstable point of historical knowledge and ethical judgement.

### Arandora Star archive: re-reading the historical record

It is well known that official records relating to the AS and those on board were flawed and inaccurate from the start (Colpi 2020; Gillman and Gillman 1980; Sponza 2000; Ugolini, 2011). This history of cruel incompetence and contemptuous disregard informs the need for other forms of knowledge and for a different understanding of the archive ‘by no means limited to official spaces or state repositories’ (Burton 2005, 3). Recent thinking about the archive as an alternative site of knowledge production invites consideration of how non-hegemonic thinking might be created, curated, and mined.<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall’s comments on the interrogative function of archives is important here:

Archives are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogic, relation to the questions which the present puts to the past; and the present always puts its questions differently from one generation to another (2001, 92).

The archive is not simply an ‘inert’ repository in which knowledge is accumulated, but a space in which archivists, researchers, and community activists exert agency to store, recover, and re-calibrate what counts as knowledge in ways responsive to their specific emplacement and positionality. What follows is the brief account of one incursion into the meandering depths of the AS archive as an instance of how it offers itself up to investigation and interpretation, yet frustrates the wish for a fixed, definitive outcome. It draws on Burton’s critical intuition that archival work is ‘nor merely a project of fact-retrieval’ but

also a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention – processes set in motion by, among other things, one’s personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one’s reading of what is to be found there (2005, 8).

I present parts of my own exploration of the records to chart a story that is non-linear and incomplete, the result of chance and of acts of agency that could not be predicted, or relied on, in advance. The ‘archive’ that I work with here acknowledges the value of vernacular sources that supplement and revise stark matters of fact to tell stories that official records silence or fail to imagine.

### Backgrounds

The story of the sinking of the AS does not have a clear beginning. There will be multiple possible points of origin or departure, but I will start with the founding of the Edinburgh branch of the Italian Fascist Party almost exactly one hundred years ago. On 4 February 1924, the *Scotsman* newspaper printed a short article about an event that had taken place the previous day (*The Scotsman* 1924). At the Queen’s Hotel in Leith, the Right Rev. H.G. Graham, Bishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, had blessed the flag of the city’s branch of ‘Italian Fascismo’. Donald Mackintosh, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow, was also present and addressed the gathering. A native Gaelic speaker, Mackintosh had been Rector of the Scots College in Rome before returning to Scotland in 1922. *The Scotsman* reported that around 200 members of the Italian community, including 70 members of the ‘Fascisti movement’ itself as well the Consul General and a range of Italophile members of Edinburgh’s professional classes, had taken part. The event was conducted with some ceremony with speeches in Italian and in English celebrating Italy’s new leader. This lunch is narrated at greater length in Mary Contini’s semi-

fictionalised, family memoir *Dear Olivia* (2007), a text whose simultaneous engagement with historical fact and imaginative recreation characterises the form of the wider AS archive. In the crowd are Alfonso and Maria Crolla, her husband's grandparents, two of the main protagonists in her story of hard-working, enterprising Italian migrants to Scotland. While Maria remains sceptical of Italy's new leader, Alfonso, who saw service in the First World War and who will drown on board the AS, is convinced by Mussolini's message of national renewal and mutual support, already alert to anti-Italian hostility at a popular and institutional level (Ugolini 2011). A daughter born the following month will be named Olivia Benita.

Contini writes that Alfonso's enthusiasm for Fascism had been ignited the previous year at a meeting of the Scoto-Italian Society at which Carlo Lupo, a charismatic speaker from Turin, had enthused the mixed Scottish and Italian audience with Mussolini's inspirational and redemptive programme of national rebirth. In her history of Italians in Scotland in the Second World War, Wendy Ugolini repeats Contini's suggestion about Lupo's role and populates further the afterlife of 4 February 1924 (2011, 61). Alfonso would become Secretary of the Edinburgh *Fascio* as early as 1926 and along with Nicol Bruce, a lawyer and keen member of the Scoto-Italian society as well as Italian Vice Consul in the city, promoted a range of cultural activities in the *Fascio's* own premises at 20 Picardy Place. In her account of the setting up of the Edinburgh branch in 1923, Ugolini mentions a number of the key players including Giovanni Cimorelli, born in Italy in 1875 and who, like Crolla, was establishing himself as a successful shopkeeper. Both were members of the Italian community that had generously contributed a collective total of £76 15s to the National Relief Fund in 1915 (*The Scotsman* 1915). Ugolini's inclusion of his name resonates contrapuntally with *The Scotsman's* piece on the blessing of the flag. Signorina Lena Cimorelli, as the flag's godmother, is mentioned as having presented Bishop Graham with a bouquet of flowers. The Scottish Statutory Register of Births records that Lina Olanta Maria Cimorelli was born in Edinburgh in 1910, the first child of Giovanni Cimorelli and his wife, Christina (nee Urquhart) whom he had married the previous year. Their son, Edwardo, was born in 1913. Christina would die in 1936, and Giovanni some four years later when the AS was torpedoed.<sup>3</sup>

My own interest in the Cimorelli family had however first been sparked by the chance discovery on the Edinburgh Collected community website of a photograph taken around 1930.<sup>4</sup> Ostensibly showing an Edinburgh mother and son, the anonymous contributor to the site adds a note that contextualises their personal memory in relation to a barely perceptible detail in the photograph's 'left background':

Edith Garden (née Gordon) with her son Robin.

In the left background is Cimorelli serving ice cream to children from his cart. Penny and ha'penny cones could be bought. Just out of picture would have been his donkey. He had a shop at Meadowbank.

When Mussolini declared war on Britain on 10th June 1940 a group of hooligans from the new housing at Smokey Brae wrecked the shop despite a policeman and sailor attempting to stop them.

Cimorelli was sent to Canada as an internee – the ship (the *Arandora Star*?) he was on was torpedoed and sunk. After the war Cimorelli came back to Edinburgh to start up the business again.

The photograph's gloss gives ethnographic insight into the interaction between Italian and Scottish communities but opens out, albeit briefly, onto the anti-Italian violence that broke out after Italy declared war on 10 June 1940 and onto the sinking of the

*Arandora Star* on 2 July in the wake of the hasty internment of Italian-born adult men resident in the UK (Sponza 2000, 75–93).

The *Guida generale degli Italiani in Gran Bretagna* (1939) listed the separate business addresses of both Giovanni Cimorelli and his brother Feliciano. The Edinburgh and Leith Post Office Directory (1940) recorded the personal and business addresses of John and Felice Cimorelli. Given its location, the Cimorelli in the photo is probably the younger Feliciano (b. 1890) who was also on the AS, but who survived and was taken to Mearns Kirk Hospital outside Glasgow with the rest of the injured. In 1925, Feliciano, identified in the press as Felice, had led the parade of Italian Fascisti on Armistice Day to commemorate the Italian and Allied soldiers who had lost their lives in the First World War (*The Scotsman* 1925). He was interned on the Isle of Man after his discharge from Mearns Kirk on 11 July 1940. On 15 September 1947, Edward, his nephew, gave notice in *The Scotsman* that on the third of that month he had ‘renounced and abandoned the use of [his] said surname of Cimorelli and assumed in lieu thereof the surname of Morell’ (*The Scotsman* 1947). Underneath his acquired name, he signs himself ‘Late Edward Cimorelli’. This announcement confirmed an earlier declaration made in the same newspaper in June the previous year. Edward had married Odette Conrad in 1938. Aged 29, Lina married Antonio Capaldi in April 1940. Edward died in 1982, Lina sometime later in 1996, a year before Antonio. In 2003 Odette passed away, like the others, in Edinburgh. I know nothing about the details of how the Cimorelli family learned of Giovanni’s death and Feliciano’s survival. Some idea of it may be gleaned through a reading of Contini’s memoir that recreates the emotional turbulence of attempts to secure accurate information about which family members drowned or survived. The anxiety was exacerbated by the untrustworthiness of lists issued, in the absence of any official Italian consular presence, via the Brazilian Consulate in Glasgow. This traumatic experience is mentioned also briefly by Ugolini (2011, 225). Uncertainties about the completeness and accuracy of lists resonate across the AS archive (Pacitti this issue). Lists matter. Leora Auslander’s discussion of the violence that inaccurate and incomplete lists did to both Holocaust victims and survivors and the absolute necessity of getting them right in the present resonates strongly here (2021).

It was the relatively late discovery of Edith Garden’s photograph and the website contributor’s gloss that provided my entrance to this singular itinerary through the AS archive. For Marianne Hirsch, images that return from the past

have a memory of their own that they bring to us from the past: that that memory tells us something about ourselves, about what/how we and those who preceded us once were; that they carry not only information about the past but enable us to reach its emotional register (2012, 52).

I had scarcely noticed Ugolini’s fleeting mention of Giovanni Cimorelli when I first read her monograph. I came across Contini’s memoir sometime later and although the foundation of Edinburgh’s *Fascio* is described, the presence of the Cimorelli family is not recalled. They are invisible at the scene. It was only later when searching the online *Scotsman* archive, initially for reports of the anti-Italian rioting in 1940,<sup>5</sup> that I found the short piece from 1924 that mentions Lena/Lina and the bouquet of flowers that allows the archive to capture her. I noticed her father’s name in the lists of those lost on the AS and Feliciano’s name on the list of survivors (Figure 1). It was then that I began to piece these fragments together, always intending to hold firmly onto a sense of that fragmentation which I see as integral to the still burgeoning archive of the AS. My work is not, and never aimed to be, exhaustive. It is shaped by an aspiration to respect the very imperfections, inaccuracies, omissions, preferences, and oversights of the documents found and





**Figure 1.** Detail from the central plaque of the *Arandora Star* memorial in the Italian Cloister Garden, St Andrews Cathedral, Glasgow (author's photograph)

consulted: the ostensible limitations of my sources need to be held onto as in themselves matters of historical record. It echoes the position of the editors of the ground-breaking collection, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy* who note the 'messiness' of attempting to apprehend unrecorded experience through official records and narratives (Arthurs, Ebner and Ferris 2017, 9). In this vein, the sources I consulted point towards imprecisions of identity, belonging and allegiance, the difficulties of managing narratives that cannot be made linear and whose details do not always align, and to the uncertain and chance ways we assemble the past's remnants and imagine the lost contents of its interstices that include histories of intermarriage and allegiance. These entangled lineages show that *Arandora Star* never was simply a story about Italians, but about people implicated in a network of transnational connections.

### Reading in the archive: the archive as an approach to reading

My place in this midst of this archival network was primarily as a reader but one, in Rita Felski's terms, for whom reading 'is a matter of attaching, collecting, negotiating, assembling – of forging links between things that were previously unconnected' (2015, 173). Narrative fiction offers another way of exploring the past and communicating what official records haven't recorded. Rachel Pistol affirms the particular effectiveness of its contribution to public memory and understandings of wartime internment through its emphasis on 'emotional effects' yet suggests that writers have to date avoided dealing with 'unresolved' elements of wartime experience 'particularly with regard to the sinking of the *Arandora Star*' (2019, 43, 44). If that had indeed at one point been the case, it is important to state that the corpus of fiction featuring the AS is now quite large, varied, and still growing. The opening chapter of Natalie Dye's *Arandora Star* (2014), for instance, is set on board the submarine from which the torpedo is fired, and the German commander Günther Prien is the first character whom the reader meets. The bulk of the narrative deals with the relationship between a young Englishwoman in an abusive marriage and a gentle Italian widower who will die on board the AS. Andrew O'Hagan's *Personality* (2003) uses a counterfactual account of the sinking to explore embodied legacies and memories of trauma across generations (Duncan 2022). Norbert Gstrein's *Die englischen*

*Jahre* (2008) is a multi-perspectival investigation of opacities of identity through the prism of an Austrian Jewish internee. While the sinking of the AS as an historical event remains the fulcrum of each text, what resonates throughout this diverse body of work are urgent questions of identity, citizenship, belonging, and attachment that stretch beyond 1940 and the emergency of the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

Written in the shadow of what Hirsch refers to as the 'ethics and aesthetics of remembrance in the aftermath of catastrophe' (2012, 2), the two self-consciously archival texts I have chosen to focus on are motivated by the need to find forms adequate to the expression of traumatic histories and to understanding their tentacular networks of entanglement. Both Francine Stock's *A Foreign Country* (2000) and Caterina Soffici's *Nessuno può fermarmi* (2017) are about the making of the official wartime AS archive and about its contemporary undoing. In each novel, the past returns unbidden to the two elderly women through whom the narrative is filtered, and who are called on to return to the events of 1940 and account for their part in their unfolding. Both texts are self-consciously structured as archaeological investigations into a past that is difficult to access, interpret, and judge. They play with the vagaries of memory, weakened by the passing of time yet overlaid by suppressed and painful emotions that inhibit recall yet never allow events to be consigned definitively to the past. Multiple narrative perspectives and the incomplete and scattered documentation of events escalate feelings of uncertainty. These novels are about the archive and its habitation and about what Ann Cvetkovich refers to as 'a sense of trauma connected to the textures of everyday experience' (2003, 3–4). Like the misdirection in the gloss on Edith Garden's photograph, they are also about the intimate ways in which British and Italian people lived side by side in the period immediately preceding Italy's entry to the Second World War. The forms of involvement are romantic and familial, bureaucratic and politicized, but their entanglement reveals a dense network of competing attachments retrospectively uncovered in the texts. The structure of these networks anticipates Rothberg's warning about hasty imputations of guilt and innocence. These novels are not simply condemnations nor exculpations. They do not provide "'evidence" of implication' in contested historical scenarios, but rather their inquiries and speculative investigations constitute 'theoretical acts that help us advance thinking about political responsibility and solidarity' (2019, 23). In particular, their ethical questioning forms the critical, dialogic substance of the AS's archive and of its long afterlife.

In *A Foreign Country*, Daphne, an efficient, yet quite junior, clerical officer at the War Office, responsible for compiling lists of Italian men resident in the UK in the run-up to the War and then for conducting interviews to judge who posed risks to national security, is decades later forced to return to that short period and account for decisions made.<sup>7</sup> Anonymous packages sent from Melbourne containing photographs and documents relating to that time are unsettling, prompting her to revisit the place where her own memories are stored:

In the drawer of the card-table was another sheet of white paper. Sitting askew in the middle was another fuzzy photograph, a newspaper story this time, a column four inches or so long. A dismal little headline – Hundreds Presumed Lost. Things done and things not done (Stock 2000, 31).

The drawer's contents are enigmatic, 'askew'. And like the figure of Cimorelli in the 'left background' of the old photograph of Edith Garden, they risk going unnoticed but may also disturb vision. Daphne is upset by this uncanny encounter with the past, compounded by a coincidental request to take part in a TV programme called *Old Scores* that brings together people on either side of a 'divided memory' to set out their separate accounts of what happened.<sup>8</sup> The programme's concept anticipates Rothberg's question

that grounds his work on multidirectional memory: ‘What happens when different memories confront each other in the public sphere?’ (2009, 2). Its ambitious presenter, Rachel, happens to be the partner of Daphne’s younger son, Oliver, an investigative journalist working on a story about political unrest in the Soviet Union. Just as Ugolini’s Italian Scots interviewees in the late 1990s filtered their memories of the War through contemporary events in the Balkans (2011, 7–8), the uncertain political landscape explored by Oliver casts a shadow over the multidirectional intersection of Daphne’s attempts to recognise how she was implicated in what happened.

Rachel’s initial knowledge of the circumstances around the identification and arrest of Italians in the UK is imprecise but pointed. The issue is, she states ‘That British intelligence fucked up, that all sorts of people were interned who shouldn’t have been, that Nazis, Communists, Fascists, anti-Fascists, they were all lumped together. That there were mistakes’ (28). Early contact with AS survivors taken to Australia on the *Dunera* indicates their reluctance to revisit the past. Daphne too is guarded. Rachel’s unanswered question draws her back to 1940: ‘Just one last thing ... and you might like to think about this. Do you think now, with hindsight, that is – the detention, the deportations – that all this was fair, that it was right?’ (58). The question is about implication. Hindsight may recalibrate judgement, but it doesn’t erase decisions made and actions taken. The dual temporality of ethical judgement and action structures the rest of the novel. A series of chapters dated through June and July 1940 and told in the first person from the perspective of Daphne’s younger self recount her work at the War Office, culminating in the sinking of the *Olympia* (the name used in the novel for the AS). Undated chapters set in the present follow the unfolding of Daphne’s backward glance on what she did and the circumstances in which it was done.

At the War Office, Daphne’s card index contained information on London’s 7,000 Italians, the ‘extent of our knowledge of the Italian Community’ (62) and, despite her junior position, she takes part in the interrogations to assess the extent of the detainees’ allegiance to fascism. Different forms of connection are regarded as ‘clues’ (68). The index had been based largely on the *Guida generale degli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*, an archival register of Italian presence across the UK.<sup>9</sup> Under pressure to complete the list, she has no idea how to identify the ‘most dangerous individuals’ (76): ‘I know all these names on the cards so well and yet I have never met them’ (76–77). The interview process fleshes out the names. Yet Daphne realises her card index fails to accomplish its purpose:

I’ve been sitting here, compiling and listing, and putting together ... My job is to list, but somehow I’ve run out of things to list. I really can’t be sure any longer quite what it is I’ve been doing. I am so tired and I have been staring for weeks now at the same slips of paper (90).

The chapter dated 5 July 1940 recalls the ‘accident’ as the torpedoing of the *Olympia* is referred to. The imprecision of documentation compiled exacerbates confusion over the identity of those on board. The pressure to categorise translates into a hallucinatory vision of the sinking.

Then somehow all that got jumbled up with thinking about the water, cold and black and greasy. There were so many of them ... so many all trying to get out. I bet none of them could swim. I think of the young, frightened ones and the old ones, too ... I know this sounds daft, I keep seeing myself pushing them back down (94).

Daphne insists on her active implication or responsibility, but ends on a misleadingly lapidary note – ‘And that was that’ (95).



The archive as a restless process of memorialisation is more difficult to close. After the War, Daphne catches the chance notification of the Madonna del Carmine procession at the Italian church in Clerkenwell.<sup>10</sup> For the first time she is drawn into a community on whose life she exercised a determining influence and is overwhelmed by the foreignness of this new linguistic, cultural, and religious encounter. A gnawing anxiety about being recognised by a member of the congregation, and presumably called to account, adds to the discomfort. Memory of the details in her card index return with the priest's recitation of the long list of names of those who died on board the ship. 'Sympathy was not enough', she reflects, 'What surrounded me now was the leaden sorrow of lives disrupted or cut short. It was amputation'. Daphne has no comparable 'wound' nor 'scar' (105). Historical memory here moves into a different register. The congregation is the bearer of another archive, what Hirsch calls 'the bodily, psychic, and affective impact of trauma and its aftermath' and as such their corporeal presence 'exceed the bounds of traditional historical archives and methodologies' (2012, 2; Bond 2018).

Many of *A Foreign Country's* themes as well as its temporal structure are shared by Soffici's later novel (2017). Both texts work with an understanding of memory and trauma as something not invested solely in words and narrative, but in bodies and in material artefacts. In *Nessuno può fermarmi*, Florence Willis, an elderly woman living in Milan, is disturbed by a phone call from a young man who introduces himself as Bartolomeo Berni, the name of a man she had once known very well. The caller turns out to be his grandson. The initial confusion of identities, mistaken or misrecognised, foreshadows the novel's archaeological investigation into the events of 1940, bereavement, and its long aftermath. The younger Bartolomeo had found out how his grandfather died through the chance discovery of an official letter dated February 1946 stating that he had been on board a ship sunk on 2 July 1940 and was 'Missing, presumed drowned' (40). The letter confirmed London as his place of birth and his Italian nationality. Tucked away at the back of a drawer, it shows itself to have been a frequently held, and never forgotten, object: '*piegata in quattro ed era consumata ai bordi e lungo le piegature, segno di una rilettura frequente*' ('it was folded in four and worn at the edges and along the folds, showing how often it had been read') (40). In the same envelope, an article from *The Times* gives him more detailed information about the sinking and the ship's name. Bart researches the vast digital AS archive (Colpi 2023), but this repository leaves private questions unanswered: '*Che cosa ci faceva mio nonno su quella nave? Era un fascista?*' ('What was my grandfather doing on that ship? Was he a fascist?') (43). Material memory spaces yield contrasting results. His grandmother's house contains almost no memorabilia. There are two photos of the time she lived in London: the first of her husband and his parents taken in Clerkenwell in 1934, the second taken on the day of her engagement in 1938 with the names Florence and Michele written on the back. Bart recognises Florence's name in the visitors' book in the memorial chapel in Bardi, the small village near Parma, where 48 of those who died on the AS came from.<sup>11</sup> This list, containing names of people and their addresses in the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand as well as Italy, gives him what he needs to contact her.

Florence is a reluctant collaborator, but like Bart, an instinctive archivist. Bart pursues the past relentlessly and admits his own life-long '*mania classificatoria*' ('mania for classification') (52). Florence prided herself on her efficiency as a trusted secretary at the Home Office and kept documents of the day in 1940 when '*il mondo ci è crollato addosso*' ('the world collapsed around us'). Stored neatly in her own folder, they represent '*La memoria e l'oblio, insieme*' ('both remembering and forgetting') (90), the constitutive pairing of trauma itself (Caruth 1996, 17). In old age, Florence struggles to remember recent events, but those of 1940 remain 'unforgettable' in their detail, emotional charge, and pained legacy. The novel's narrative form emphasises an intergenerational difference in perspective. Each

protagonist speaks in the first person and while Bart's story is firmly trained on the search for the past in the present, Florence's revisitation of the past through memory offers the reader both a detailed historical ethnography of the time and a tentative ethical reflection on her own implication. Their collaboration recalls Hall's idea of the living archive as an 'ongoing, never completed project' (2001, 89).

Like Daphne, Florence's first direct contact with the life of London's Italian community was at the sensorially disorienting Madonna del Carmine procession: '*Io, inglese, straniera nella mia stessa città*' ('There I was, an Englishwoman, and a stranger in my own city') (25). Her feeling of estrangement is exhilarating as she becomes part of Michele's circle of Italian family and friends and her memories of that period give the reader a rich and full account of the life of London's Italian community at that time through the eyes of a young, middle-class Englishwoman. The effort towards cultural re-assemblage is apparent in most of the novels in the AS archive, echoing Hirsch's point about Holocaust archival projects that do not aim solely 'to document the destruction, but to collect and reassemble any possible aspect of the world that was lost' (2012, 228). Florence's account is filled with details of the community's daily life, its strong work ethic, and aspirations, as well as the tensions and uncertainties around the presence of the *Fascio* to which Michele is strongly opposed. His work at the Ivy restaurant brings him into contact with London's pre-eminent antifascists through the proprietor Abele Giandolini. Political figures such as the Rosselli brothers, Pietro Nenni, Sylvia Pankhurst and Silvio Corio populate Florence's narrative, along with the anarchist Decio Anzani, who would also die on the AS (Bernabei 1997, Rampello 2015). She gives an extensive description of the grandeur of the Casa del Littorio in Charing Cross Road where she attends a dance with Michele's friends Bart and Lina. As an Italian businessman, Bart's father had been given a party membership card, and as a child Bart was a member of the *Balilla*, took part in the *Befana fascista*, sang 'Giovinezza' and saw Edda Mussolini when she visited London. The *Fascio* paid for him to spend holidays in Italy. References to Matteotti and the invasion of Abyssinia punctuate descriptions of uneasily experienced social interactions. Florence recounts from a personal perspective the effects of Italy's declaration of War, the arrests and the destruction wreaked on Italian businesses and her own entangled proximity to it all. At work, she falls under suspicion in the paranoia over the so-called Fifth Column: she is aware of the profusion of lists compiled but denied access to them: '*Tutto, in quel periodo, pareva dipendere dalle liste*' ('At that time, everything seemed to depend on lists') (129). Bartolomeo, his elderly father, and Michele are arrested on 10 June, after which Florence's memory is of the anxiety of not knowing what happened. Other narrative perspectives later allow the composition of an incomplete mosaic, a spatial assemblage of fragmented narratives.

Both novels depend on other first-person accounts to supplement what the principal characters are able to know amidst the hearsay, rumour, silence, and misinformation in the aftermath of the sinking. In *A Foreign Country*, Alessandro Delle Rose, a now distinguished Australian-based scholar and one of Daphne's more memorable interviewees, is scheduled to be her antagonist on *Old Scores*. Like Daphne, he is reluctant to go over the past. Conversely, Anthony, his grandson, the sender of Daphne's anonymous packages, insists that the truth in all its detail come out. The television programme is never made, but Delle Rose does visit Daphne's home, where he describes very fully the lived experience of arrest, internment, the sinking and his rescue. In effect, he adds graphic substance to Daphne's own haunted vision of the drowning in the 'cold and black and greasy' water and to the 'brutal facts' (165), the generalities allowed to be made public. Anthony is combative about the process of detention and its injustice. Daphne defends the priority of what was seen at that time as the national interest. With some defiance, she acknowledges that she was a link in the chain of decision making. Anthony contends that his grandfather was also part of 'a chain that led at one end to Mussolini and the death squads

in Libya and Abyssinia, and at the other to decent British citizens of Italian origin who were loyal to the Queen and the Union Jack' (200). He also knows his grandfather 'no longer cares' (201) about what happened in 1940. In both texts later generations carry the affective burden – in Hirsch's terms, they are the carriers of postmemory (2012).

Daphne's self-protective strategy of assembling lists and making dutiful decisions according to protocol were disturbed by the disarray of 1940 when 'nothing was in its place' (21), the time when Florence's world caved in. The novel's final two pages consist of the younger Daphne's insomniac terrors: 'Sometimes I wake in the night and I can sense my lists, my card indexes and files turning over. The names wash over me; like waves, they can't be stopped' (217). The reflections in these chapters are undated, unmoored from chronological time and the invocation of the power of the sea offers an uncanny anticipation of what will come, and what the reader knows has happened.

The indispensability of narrative supplement is also a structural feature of Soffici's text, underlining the always incomplete nature of the archive. It begins with a short anonymous italicised first-person preface that gives a graphic and, at that point, wholly unexplained description of the horror on board a sinking ship. A fleeting reference to the Dunkirk evacuation suggests it might be the account of a British soldier, but no other details anchor the text. The rest of the novel's first half is written more or less equally in the identifiable first-person voices of Florence and Bartolomeo. The narrative voice of the sixth chapter belongs to a British serviceman, not immediately identified, who recounts the sailing of the AS and the chaos he witnesses when the ship is torpedoed and goes down. The chapter ends with the disappearance of the ship at 7.40 am. When the interrupted account is resumed, Bart recognises his grandfather in the description of the Italian internee who learned about the birth of his son shortly before leaving Liverpool. The narrator, the elderly British AS survivor whom Michele met in Bardi, supplements Bart and Florence's archive with this piece of incredible knowledge that allows the past, for those still living at least, to be reconfigured. Like Daphne, the soldier is tormented by memory: '*Ho rivissuto quella scena migliaia di volte. E ogni volta rivivo ogni istante come se fosse ancora qui. Rivedo quell'uomo. Vedo i suoi occhi e sento le sue parole: Ti salverai*' ('I've relived that scene thousands of times. And every time, I relive each moment as though I were still there. I see that man again. I see his eyes and hear his words: You'll be saved') (182). The soldier will indeed, as the reader knows, be saved and the story he tells amplifies and transforms the past and participates in future memory.

*Nessuno può fermarmi* concludes with Florence and Bart's trip to the small Scottish island of Colonsay, identified as an AS '*luogo della memoria*' (50), to visit the graves of the AS victims buried there (Colpi 2020). Florence reconciles herself with the painful past while Bart exuberantly looks to the future. His response to his own incursion riffs on Appadurai's suggestion that the archive is 'the product of the anticipation of collective memory ... an aspiration rather than a recollection' (2003, 16). Like so much of the energy expended on and for the AS archive, it points towards 'a search for memories that count' (2003, 23). Tracing and mending broken bonds of family and friendship in the AS archive constitutes what Heather Love in a different context calls an 'affective historiography' whose gaze onto the past expresses the longing for new forms of future community (2009, 37). In Love's cautious examination of retrospective versions of the past that appear to redeem it through commemoration and mourning, she is anxious not to overlook its potentially discomfiting elements and 'the shame of having a dark past' (32) that such reparative gestures may nevertheless ignite. Bart's concern (albeit disabused) that his grandfather may have been a fascist is a bold acknowledgement of this shame and the possible implication of his family in 'the

uncanny life of the past inside our present' (45). Edward Morrell's name carries the same kinetic charge.

## Conclusion

Rothberg's suggestion that 'modes of implication – entanglement in historical and present injustices – are complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory' (2019, 2) recognises the many positions that actors in the AS archive may occupy. He is alert to the 'entanglement of the diachronic and synchronic' (17) and to the multiplicity of perspectives that such entanglements allow. After his rescue, Feliciano Cimorelli was, as I noted, taken to Mearnskirk Hospital in Renfrewshire to recover from his injuries. Another AS survivor, the Jewish antifascist Uberto Limentani, quite recently arrived in the UK from Italy, was there at the same time. He had been working in London for the BBC when war was declared and the BBC's intervention later secured his release from internment in the summer of 1940. Later, he would go on to become Professor of Italian at Cambridge (Lo Biundo 2022, 60–62) and his own lengthy autobiographical account of the sinking, a cardinal point of AS archival memory, has appeared in various Italian and English language versions.<sup>12</sup> A defining figure in AS memory, he makes multiple appearances in the work of novelists and historians, muddying clear-cut boundaries between fiction and fact. *Nessuno può fermarmi's* soldier narrator makes a point of singling out Limentani for special mention from the many Italians he befriends in Mearnskirk Hospital. He remembers in particular his recitation of Manzoni's 'Il cinque maggio', an ode composed on the death of Napoleon that contains a verse evoking, metaphorically, the crushing weight of waves bearing down on the head of a shipwrecked man. After the War ended, the soldier learned some Italian and memorised Manzoni's poem by heart. His own recitation of it to Bart relays the importance of transmission as a multi-directional vector of the archive's work. In Maria Serena Balestracci's history of the AS, the voice of Limentani is mediated through his son Rupert (2008, 96 and 98) who frames the narrative of his father's survival, vividly dramatised with dialogue and the imagined recitation of Manzoni's poem (218–222). This detail occurs again in Stella's much wider history of the tragedy of Italian emigration (2003, 146). In Limentani's own published



**Figure 2.** The *Arandora Star* in Venice (photograph courtesy of Dr Terri Colpi)

account, the regular rhythm of the waves brings the poem to mind. Able to recall only the fragment about the shipwreck itself, he notes almost casually that he will need to re-read the whole poem once he gets home.

Limentani's memory of having seen the AS docked in Venice in the mid-1930s when it was still renowned as a luxury cruise liner has also had a significant intertextual afterlife (Figure 2).<sup>13</sup> It appears in both Soffici's novel and in the historian Alfio Bernabei's dense, descriptive account of the sinking. Soffici amplifies the detail, imagining '*facoltosi passeggeri di sola prima classe che scendevano dalle lance per la visita a San Marco*' ('wealthy passengers, exclusively from the first class, who were getting off the boats for the visit to San Marco'). Her English soldier has the impression that Limentani '*descrisse una scena reale che aveva davanti agli occhi in quel momento*' ('described a real scene that he could see before his eyes at that moment') (199), while Alfio Bernabei reports that Limentani '*stenta a credere ai propri occhi*' ('finds it hard to believe his own eyes') (1997, 214). In each account the repetition of this memory is hallucinatory. In these spaces of creative invention and intervention, Limentani's memorial fragments function as crystallised and portable citations. Just as his memory of Venice displaces, albeit momentarily, the ship from the north Atlantic, its detachable iterability illustrates the layered temporalities of the AS archive in formation, a work in progress. Limentani's position as historical figure but also malleable trope implicates him in the archive in ways he could not have anticipated.

Factually accurate historical documentation and their creative re-elaboration are not antithetical but interact to generate counter-histories of unrecorded, unacknowledged, and unimagined experience. The subsequent circulations of these counter-histories are acts of public pedagogy that prompt more open forms of inquiry and more democratic forms of stewardship. The complex dimensions of what is a nascent body of knowledge and its centrifugal impulse are part of a complex calculus. To enter and dwell in the AS archive inevitably risks at least a possible encounter with a 'dark past' and its 'scars'. Cvetkovich reflects that her own book on traumatic memory is 'an archive of feelings, an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the context of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception' (2003, 7). As the AS's 'mnemonic community' grows and diversifies, archival practice of the event, its afterlife, and its pre-life necessarily change. What Rothberg calls a 'relational methodology' (2019, 22) helps grasp the modes of implication that bind the new community's membership and give form to its contribution. The emergent AS archive is multi-dimensional, not least as a space of creative intervention. It is indeed composed of lists and their varied histories, but equally is an affective space of discrepancy, discord, transversal affiliation and intergenerational transmission.

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## Notes

1. In his thorough and insightful study of Italian literature of the Axis War, Bartolini makes a similar point about the contribution that works of fiction may make to understandings of a nation's past (2021, 5).
2. In their introduction to a collection of essays on current archival practice, James Lowry and Heather MacNeil re-affirm Foucault's argument on the constitutive power of the 'conceptual archive [that] determines, among other things, what may be spoken of in discourse, what statements will survive and disappear, what statements will be recognized as valid and invalid, and what individuals, groups and classes will have access to particular discourses' (2021, 2). The tension Foucault notes between dominant and subjugated forms of knowledge are exemplified by the competing voices in the AS archive.



3. The records of births, marriages and deaths referenced in this article are accessible on the Scottish government's Scotland's People website administered by the National Records of Scotland <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/> (accessed 7 October 2023).
4. The image and text can be accessed at [https://www.edinburghcollected.org/picture\\_memories/mother-and-son-sitting-in-deckchair-in-their-garden-at-northfield-crescent-c-1930/](https://www.edinburghcollected.org/picture_memories/mother-and-son-sitting-in-deckchair-in-their-garden-at-northfield-crescent-c-1930/) (accessed 3 March 2024). They also appear on the Facebook page of the Living Memory Association [https://www.facebook.com/profile/100070195680051/search/?q=Cimorelli&locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/profile/100070195680051/search/?q=Cimorelli&locale=en_GB) (accessed 3 March 2024). Posts on that page record memories of the AS and ethnographic reflections on the Scots Italian community.
5. It has to be acknowledged that on occasions well-intentioned historical empathy distorts rather than meaningfully conjoins events: 'In shameful scenes that echoed Nazi Germany's *Kristallnacht* attacks on Jewish-owned properties, large mobs of up to 2,000 people targeted Italian communities all over Edinburgh, looting and smashing up scores of shops to the point where, in some cases, not a single pane of glass remained, and verbally and physically attacking innumerable Italo-Scots' (Maclean 2020).
6. Ugolini argues that the contours of AS memorialisation have tended to 'perpetuate the dominance of a one-dimensional discourse of Italian-Scottish wartime experience, silencing the memories of others' (2011, 243). Colpi (2020) offers a detailed critique of Ugolini's stance. My own position is that the emerging archive both diversifies the range of what has been remembered and creates transcultural points of connection that add new and unexpected textures to that memory.
7. I am indebted to Terri Colpi for pointing out the historical imprecision in the suggestion that Italians were interviewed prior to their deportation. Rather than seeing this as an oversight or error, I interpret its inclusion as serving to intensify the sense of Daphne's 'implication' in events.
8. John Foot excludes controversy and disagreement about the AS sinking from postwar Italy's unresolved recollections of Fascism and the War (2009, 79–82).
9. It is worth noting that the 1939 edition of the *Guida* had a more emphatically Fascist emphasis than earlier versions. For instance, the opening page, unusually all in English, boasts advertisements for an enlarged edition of Mussolini's autobiography and an unexpurgated edition of *Mein Kampf*.
10. For insight into the defining nature of the procession in terms of Italian community aggregation see Besagni (2011, 2016) and Burns (2020).
11. The occurrence of 48 victims from Bardi was first documented by Colpi (1993, 179). Bart finds a photograph of the memorial inscription online and the text is included in the novel. This example of remediation is typical of how material circulates in and moves centrifugally out of the archive. The website of MIGRER (Museo dell'emigrazione emiliano-romagnola nel mondo) offers an impressive wealth of archival documentation in itself <https://www.migrer.org/storie/arandora-star/> (accessed 3 March 2024). Exploring the town that has a street named Via Martiri Arandora Star, Bart has a clear sense of the urban space as a 'luogo della memoria' (Soffici 2017, 50).
12. An easily accessible version published in Cambridge University's *Magdalene College Magazine and Record* dated 1980–1981 is available to download at <http://www.pacitti.biz/aran-uberto-limentani.html> (accessed 3 March 2024). An early version was sent by Limentani to the Labour Party politician William Gillies who forwarded it to the Foreign Office. It is held at The National Archives, Kew in Foreign Office FO 371/25210/17–20. A version translated into Italian by Lucio Sponza with an interesting comment by Limentani's son Rupert can be found at <https://storiamestre.it/2014/01/rapportogiugno40/> (accessed 3 March 2024). Yet another version is included in an autobiographical essay by the Austrian-born scientist Max Perutz (2003) who had just completed his doctorate at Cambridge before being arrested and sent to Canada on the SS *Ettrick*, the third ship to leave Liverpool taking 'enemy aliens' to Canada.
13. For more on the history of the AS as a luxury liner see Eliseo and Miller (2004) and Collard (2015). See also the Blue Star Line's informative webpage: <https://www.bluestarline.org/arandora.html> (accessed 3 March 2024).

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### Italian summary

Una conoscenza dell'affondamento dell'*Arandora Star* non si limita più a membri della comunità italiana storica del Regno Unito ma è condivisa da un gruppo molto più consistente grazie alla maggior accessibilità di documenti storici pertinenti al tragico evento e alla quantità importante di lavoro creativo che ne ha preso ispirazione. Questo articolo si interroga su questa diffusione di memoria storica seguendo due filoni discreti ma aggrovigliati. Il primo indaga la costruzione dell'archivio dell'AS a partire da una fotografia scoperta casualmente dal ricercatore. Il secondo comprende una disamina di due romanzi recenti che si soffermano su chi, fuori della comunità storica italiana, si trova implicato nel naufragio e nelle sue conseguenze. *A Foreign Country* di Francine Stock, (2000) e *Nessuno può fermarmi* di Caterina Soffici (2017) mettono in primo piano la trasmissione intergenerazionale e transnazionale di una memoria difficile e il modo in cui la AS funge da punto instabile di conoscenza storica e di giudizio etico.