How the Second World War and its Aftermath Shaped a Sense of Identity amongst Older Italians in the North East of England

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Abstract

Italian migrants' experiences of hostility in the UK have remained on the margins of history. However, several older members of Italian communities live with memories of trauma and injustice experienced during their youth or in the early years of migration. Through an ethnographic approach, this study explores the impact of the Second World War amongst members of the Italian community living in the North East of England: those who lived during the war, as well as those who migrated during the following decades (1950-1970). The interpretations of historical events transmitted both down and across generations of migrants reveal how this group of people forged a process of self-definition and everyday construction of identity and belonging. This paper sheds light on how the trope of 'enemy aliens' has been absorbed and reiterated over time, by bringing to view the historical and political nature of identification.

Keywords: discrimination; identification; Italians; migration; Second World War.

Introduction

Migrants' experiences of discrimination in Britain have remained on the margins of history due to state mythologies that portray the UK as a tolerant country.[1] However,

since the 1970s, in challenging cherished views of the British nation as a space of social harmony and ethnic solidarity, historians have sought to uncover a long embedded tradition of intolerance towards immigrants, refugees and related minorities.[2] In this respect, Kushner explains that the liminal status of British migration studies derived from the resistance that stops dialogue in the study of race and migration.[3] For example, it has been asserted that the experiences of white migrants within the UK - such as Jews and Irish, or other white Europeans - cannot be compared to those of black people.[4] Yet, stating that 'white immigrants did not experience the same discrimination leveled everyday at Black and Asian groups, [...] is not to say that they did not experience discriminations'.[5]

Exclusion of some groups of migrants within debates on Black British identity gave strength to public discourses about wider general desirability of different migrant groups, assumed more 'assimilable' than others, for example European migrants.[6] As part of post-war recruitment schemes, Britain's Foreign Labour Committee looked favourably upon Italians, considered to be 'more assimilable into British society and thus as ideal permanent settlers'.[7] Consequently, some groups of white migrants were perceived to have faced lesser challenges, less racism, both in society and from the state.[8]

In addition, historical representation of migrant communities in Britain fulfilled the function of the claim for recognition and special status by stressing their contribution to the host society.[9] As such, these narratives tended to privilege stories of sacrifice, success and integration, disregarding experiences of inequalities, discrimination and conflict. One example of this is the Italian presence, described as a successful 'model' minority,[10] so much so that it became an 'invisible' group and portrayed as 'immune' to the challenges

experienced by other migrants.[11] As Ugolini noted, the celebratory narrative that tended to portray Italians as well integrated in Britain might have contributed to the erasure of historical incidents of racism and hostility that they experienced, especially during the Second World War.[12]

Impact of the Second World War amongst Italians in the UK

The impact of the Second World War on Italian communities[13] has been described as 'devastating'[14] due to the 'suffering and alienation that distinguish[ed] British Italians from other Italians worldwide'.[15] The War had severe consequences for Italians for at least two decades afterwards.[16] Colpi asserts that 'people who experienced the War as adults or children, tended to turn-in on the family and their Italian networks, often never fully recovering on outward–facing Italian identity. Others reacted by masking their Italianness or even moving away from its association'.[17]

The suffering and alienation experienced by Italians during the War derived mainly from anti-Italian sentiments that erupted among British citizens after 10th June 1940, when the Italian Fascist Party led by Benito Mussolini declared war on Britain and France, preferring to ally with Germany.[18] This body of literature emphasises how the wartime rhetoric of the 'enemy within' became one of the most powerful motifs about the Italian presence in Britain: due to verbal and physical abuse, internment, forced relocation inland of Italian families, and the tragic sinking of the ship, Arandora Star.[19]

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to illustrate how the historical events of the Second World War are interpreted by members of the Italian migrant community in the

North East. Overall, the details of the historical events are not explored, but are here tackled from a different angle: how the War impacted the process of self-definition and everyday construction of identity and how these memories have been transmitted to further migrant generations.[20]

Previous studies have reported how the War undermined the sense of personal identity of British-born citizens with Italian origins. For example, it has been argued that discrimination experienced by Italians in London reinforced a sense of 'Italianness'.[21] Marin's study and Palmer's insightful chapter refer to the 'traumatic' experiences of the Italian community in London.[22] Colpi highlights how these events 'affected the psyche and identity of the old Italian Community in a deep and fundamental way'.[23] Sponza also illustrates how anti-Italian wartime rhetoric was responsible for fostering a sense of difference amongst British-born citizens of Italian origin.[24] The sense of dissimilarity emerges from autobiographies of second-generation Italians where the authors recall being subjected to verbal insults, ranging from conventional expressions to negative connotations of Italians.[25] Moreover, Fortier, in her London-based study of Italians, discusses the intense Italophobia, hatred and humiliation suffered during wartime.[26]

Ugolini interrogates the extent to which the events of the War eroded a sense of belonging for those living in Scotland.[27] This scholar discusses how the wartime rhetoric against 'aliens' encouraged anti-Italian feeling among the British public; how Italophobia disrupted the existing sense of integration and security and fostered a sense of not belonging.[28] The British government's 'construction' of some groups of migrants (Italians, Germans, and Austrians) as 'enemies within' influenced 'the notion of who is entitled to be part of a national community'.[29] Although acknowledging the painful

experiences of the Italians during the War, Ugolini stresses, however, that war-time Italophobia was not new, but in fact was rooted in a pre-existent antagonism that contributed to pervasive stereotypes of Italians as racially inferior or 'dirty foreigners'.[30] Hence, it would be misplaced to attribute the violence enacted against Italian communities to British nationalism bred solely in the War's eruption. Instead, as discussed by Cesarani and Lunn, anti-alienism discourses and practices experienced during this period should be understood within the broader socio-political backdrop of discrimination against 'outsiders' in both pre and post-war Britain.[31]

In considering identity, Chezzi illustrates the impact of the War on the lives of Italians in Wales and explores how relatives of victims of the Arandora Star contributed to the creation of a collective memory.[32] Haworth and Rorato's study explores memories of Italians of different generations in Hull, highlighting the process of identity construction.[33] Their study reveals the wartime hostility experienced by the Italian community, and how this had changed their attitudes towards expressions of identity.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, little research has considered either the way in which memories of the War have been transmitted across generations of Italians or the long-term effect of these experiences on the sense of identity and belonging in later life. This paper aims to help fill these knowledge gaps.

Transmission of Memories and Experiences

Exploring interpretations of the past is important for gaining an understanding of cultural memory, as this performs a central function in processes of identity formation.[34] Additionally, cultural memory provides clues to the nature of remembering and how it

binds individuals into subjectivities and collectivities. In fact, Halbwach's notion of an intimate connection between personal and collective memory refers to memory as a social activity, with two main strands.[35] Firstly, he suggests that the act of remembering is situated in the present, thus people consciously or unconsciously shape and reshape the past. Secondly, Halbwachs points to the importance of a shared past for the creation and reproduction of a collective identity. Through such memory processes, individuals develop a sense of group belonging, togetherness and identity. Thompson suggests that amongst the wide range of modes of cultural transmission, life stories are a way of handing down memories between generations.[36] These include the transmission of experiences amongst families and across migrant generations. In order to better understand how memories are transmitted both down and across migrant generations, this paper draws on memory and trauma research that point to the transmission of knowledge and experiences inter- and trans-generations. Amongst these, the concept of 'overwhelming inherited memory' as theorised by Hirsch explains how powerful and painful memories are passed down through generations.[37] Hirsch developed the concept of 'post-memory' to describe the relationship of the second generation to traumatic experiences of those who came before. Although the Holocaust is the historical frame of reference, she reflects on how past events still have effects in the present. Hence, Hirsch's concept of inherited memory is adopted here to describe how traumatic wartime memories have been passed on to the next generation of Italians.

In the context of this research, this had been the case between family members, and also between members of the Italian community, not necessarily linked through family bonds. As in the 1920s and 1930s, Italian migrants who entered the UK after the War required a

work permit. As well as the 'bulk recruitment' and other forms of industrial schemes operational elsewhere in the country, in the North East this normally implied that the migrants were coming to fill a vacant position offered by a family or business looking for a foreign worker.[38] It was imperative, therefore, that they developed close contacts with members of the long established Italian community, who provided a sort of 'induction' for newcomers. Consequently, it is argued that an important role in the transmission of experiences was also played by chain migration relationships.[39] As such, an intra- or cross-generational perspective is adopted, regardless of any family bonds between generations of migrants, due to the connection and communication between subsequent inflows of migrants. In this respect, this paper considers the way in which interpretation of the past is transmitted across the lives of third and second generation Italians to first generation incoming migrants. It focuses on how anti-Italian feeling experienced during the War merged and blended with the discrimination experienced in the following decades (1950-70) and impacted on identity construction amongst the group of people who agreed to participate in this research.

Methodology

This study originated in the author's PhD project, which explored affective bonds between older people and places.[40] The ethnographic fieldwork started in July 2015 and lasted one year, collecting forty-one in depth audio-recorded interviews conducted with twenty-seven participants. Participants comprised first, second and third generation Italians, men and women, aged between sixty and ninety-four years old.[41] Their Italian origins varied from the North to the South with several regions represented. Audio-recorded interviews were conducted after ethical consent was obtained, lasting an average

of three hours and taking place in participants' homes or at their businesses. Questions remained relatively open-ended and exploratory, employing an inductive approach.[42] The recordings were transcribed and a thematic approach to data analysis was adopted. The data used within this paper derives from interviews with nine participants.[43] Only a limited number of narratives were selected from the larger data set as relevant for the present scope. Personal details and any identifiable information have been anonymised; pseudonyms have been used, unless identification was specifically requested by the participants.

The research findings are discussed in three sections. The first describes the context of anti-Italianism and associated meanings during the War. The second illustrates how the wartime rhetoric of 'Italians as enemy aliens' influenced participants' expression of identity in their everyday lives, differently in the private or public spheres. These two sections focus on the perspective of the five British subjects who are third and second generation Italian. Finally, the third section indicates the impact of the 'enemy alien' and also 'alien' tropes during the decades following the conflict. The discussion derived from the narratives of the four participants, who migrated from Italy after the War. These first-generation migrants learned about 'anti-Italian feeling' not only through their own experiences but also from Italians who had always lived in the UK, indicating how such sentiment has been reiterated over time and absorbed as 'post-memory'.

Regarded as 'Enemy Alien'

Corresponding with accounts of Italians in the North East, the narratives presented here show how British-born citizens of Italian origin found themselves living as 'outsiders' in

the hostile wartime environment.[44] An example of this was Alfredo, a British-born, third generation Italian. A retired University teacher, he was 72 years old at the time of the interview. His grandfather, who migrated from Tuscany at the beginning of the twentieth century, had owned a coffee shop in a village near Newcastle. Alfredo said:

> When I was born, in 1944, the war was still on, and in the first years after the War, there was a lot of anti-Italian feeling. People were breaking your windows, shouting at you in the streets. It wasn't sensible to be Italian. Now I'm an old man, so I'm fine with my Italian side. But as a young boy, I was very shy, very frightened. So I kept my Italian side hidden, secret.

Alfredo emphasised how uncomfortable he had been made to feel because of his Italian background growing-up in the immediate post-war period. He confided that the anti-Italian feeling he experienced created a sense of pervasive unease, due to his fear of being discriminated against and picked upon. A similar perspective was revealed by Mrs G., a second generation Italian. Mrs G. was 86 years old and her family came from Tuscany at the beginning of the last century. They had always lived in a town near the coast of Newcastle and owned an ice-cream shop.

> When the Second World War broke out, we didn't know how things were going to go, whether Italy was going to be on the German side, or whether they were coming on the English side, as in the First World War. So, when Italy went with the German side, we were the only Italians here and some people didn't like us anymore. It was a very difficult time for us.
>
> In Ashington, there was a German butcher we used to buy pork sandwiches from.[45] He had all his windows broken. Never did that to us, mind. Because we had been here a lot of years and we had never been in trouble. The police were marvelous. The local bobby was very good. God rest him now. We were [law] abiding people, but a lot of people didn't come back into the shop. So the takings were going down, the sweets were sticking to the jars, the cigarettes [stayed] on the shelf. Nobody was coming in to buy.

Mrs G. referred to the War as a moment of rupture in the harmonious relationship between her family and the local community. Even though Mrs G.'s family did not

directly experience the localised incidents of vandalism, these events profoundly shaped her presence within her social context. Following the outbreak of War, she perceived that her family was being treated differently by those who were once customers and friends. To use a term coined by Rowles, Mrs G.'s 'social insideness', such as her sense of connection to her community, had been disrupted by the sudden transformation of a cherished place.[46] Thus, she interpreted the boycotting of her family's business as a way of ostracising the family within their own community. This example resonates with Chezzi's or Haworth and Rorato's works, which highlight how perceptions and attitudes towards Italian families changed dramatically during the War, in Wales and Hull respectively.[47] Moreover, by use of the expressions '*coming* on to the English side' and '*going* on to the German side', Mrs G. underlined the centrality of Britishness within the construction of her identity. However, the anti-Italian feeling experienced at a young age influenced the way she believed her family was regarded. Hence, the examples of Alfredo and Mrs G. illustrate the impact of xenophobia on their sense of belonging within their communities.

This argument is further supported by an interview with two sisters, Angela and Rosalinda, who are third generation Italian, from their mother side. Angela was around eighty years old, and Rosalinda in her seventies. Their grandparents moved to the UK in the early 1900s from Lazio, and they owned an ice-cream factory in Newcastle. They defined themselves as Anglo-Italian, given the fact that their Italian-born father had gone through the process of naturalisation.[48] Rosalinda said:

> When Italy went allies with the Germans, my mother had a shop, an ice-cream parlour, on the street further down, and the English broke all the windows in the shop. Even though my dad was in the British Army.

Rosalinda's memory suggests that her family's efforts to belong to a wider 'national community' through citizenship and service in the British Army was doomed to failure.[49] Rosalinda spoke of 'the English' who damaged the windows of their 'Italian' shop, ruminating over how this occurrence and the surrounding xenophobic ambiance might have forged and challenged categories of 'us' and 'them' regarding a sense of national identity.

In addition to the anti-Italian rioting in the North East, a sense of marginalisation amongst Italians became more explicit with the politics of internment and enforced relocation of families from the 'protected area' along the East coast of Britain.[50] Reminiscences of these events include those by Mrs G., who recalled when her father was arrested:

> The government said that all the Italians that weren't naturalised - my father wasn't - would all have to be collected and sent to a camp. So, all the Italians were sent away. We were all British-born.
>
> The sergeant and a policeman came into our house and they said to my mother, "I'm afraid we've had notification to say that Mr (*surname*) has to go to a camp."
>
> They said "Just come over [to the police station] when you're ready. There's no hurry." So, all the Italians were collected and they were taken to Newcastle. You had a choice, you could either go to Canada or the Isle of Man.[51]
>
> My mother was devastated, we were all crying. (*Participant starts to cry*). We had a good reputation, we were *brava gente* [good people][52] the only fault was that my father was born in Italy. Anyhow, my father had to go away; you can imagine how we cried. I was nine years old at the time.

As documented by previous scholars, Mrs G.'s narrative exemplifies how police officers were polite in conducting arrests.[53] However, it is important to note that Mrs G. broke down in tears when narrating the account of her father's arrest, conveying how a childhood experience of an injustice committed against her family remained still vivid in

later life. This illustrates how the grief of children or wives, who witnessed arrest of family members, should not be underestimated. Colpi states 'such intrusion into the domestic sanctum, rupturing family bonds was highly intimidating, shaping lasting traumatic memories of fathers "taken away", some "never seen again"'.[54] Likewise, Ugolini found that these memories, interpreted retrospectively, still remained a cause of psychological distress to witnesses sixty or more years later and might still generate anxiety and fear of being identified as 'enemy aliens'.[55]

Although Mrs G. does not dwell on her experience of being relocated, she expresses concern for her elder sister who remained in the family home-town to keep the family business operational:

> The police came back to our home and said, "We've had a call from the government again to say that all 'alien' women have got to go fifty miles away from the coast." Not in concentration camps. They had to go with other relations further inland.
>
> Because we were near the coast, and we didn't know whether we were going to get invaded, or whether we would want to help [the enemy] to do anything …. (*Participant laughs*). God forbid!
>
> We stayed in Carlisle, and I used to go to school in Carlisle. I wanted to go with my mum. But Rosie, my sister, was here by herself. She was about twenty-six years old. It was very hard for her because nobody was coming into the shop.

Often, as in Rosie's case, isolation from family was an outcome of the relocation policy. This was accompanied by severe economic hardship, a phase which not all Italian businesses survived. Moreover, even though Mrs G. identified herself and her sibling as British ('we were all British-born'), the memory of her father's arrest and, in his case, deportation, prompted and cultivated doubts about her own Britishness. Thus, this example conveys how the experience of internment potentially redefined the notion of

belonging.

A comparable experience emerged from the interview with Chris, a 63 year old woman, who was born in Jarrow, near Newcastle, and has lived there all her life. Chris' grandparents migrated from Lazio at the beginning of the twentieth century, and ran an ice-cream factory. Recalling the anti-Italian disturbances elsewhere and the xenophobic behaviours directly experienced by her parents, Chris commented:

> I don't think much happened in Jarrow. But, I have got a letter here, written in 1939. Me grandma and grandpa went to Italy during the War, accidentally, since me granddad wanted to see the feast of the Virgin Mary. So they went in August. But when they were in Italy the War broke out, and they were stuck there for five years. But some people here were a bit nasty to my mum; they said "Your parents were interned. They were not on holiday, they were being kept." My mum said "Oh no, definitely not".

This extract demonstrates how the absence of Chris' grandparents from Jarrow raised suspicions amongst the local community, who attributed their absence to having been arrested or interned. As did Chris herself during the interview, her mother might have used the letter sent from Italy as 'tangible proof', to avoid being labelled as 'enemy aliens' by the community. This scenario indicates how the discourse around Italians and the politics of internment governed ways of thinking, speaking and producing knowledge, highlighting shame and fear with exposing the connection to fascism. To explore this aspect further, the following section considers how anti-Italian feeling contributed to the sense of belonging to a shared Italian identity amongst British citizens of Italian origin.

Places and Identity: Indoor vs. Outdoor

Alfredo explained the significance of his name, passed to male family members over generations (father, grandfather and so on); a naming tradition partially interrupted during

the wartime. Growing up, his Italian name was problematic, revealing his cultural background, which could be associated with negative stereotypes.

> My name is Alfredo, and now people say "nice name", but after 1944-45 this was a very strange name and people were suspicious. My father fought for the British, and he was called Alfredo, but during the War, he called himself Alfie, changed to the English version. And no one ever called him Alfredo. I always called myself Alfredo, and I didn't like Alfie. I like my name. But it was difficult at that time.

Italian first names were anglicised, often casually and informally, in the course of everyday life. Yet, Alfredo had not wanted to lose or lessen his name and clung to it even in problematic times, perhaps typically representing third generation cultural renewal.[56] Likewise, the two sisters, Angela and Rosalinda, recalled that relatives' surnames as well as first names, had been changed from Italian to English versions to reduce the chances of experiencing discrimination:

> R: My grandfather was called Vincenzo Riale, but he changed his name to Jimmy Riley.
>
> A: To be like the English.
>
> R: My mother was called Assunta, but she used to get called Sadie.

Furthermore, with regard to the wartime in particular, they stated that their relatives avoided using Italian language in public places.

> R: You couldn't speak Italian. It was dangerous.
>
> A: No, that's why we don't speak Italian.
>
> R: They never spoke it to us at all. They didn't dare speak Italian. If they spoke Italian they were hated.

Rosalinda and Angela associated their grandparents' Italian identity with their names and mother tongue, commenting on how anti-Italian feeling contributed to the anglicisation of

names and the silencing of speaking Italian in public places. Use of the words 'dangerous' and 'didn't dare' indicates the fear that explicit exposure of their Italianness engendered at this time. They also associated the reason why their relatives never taught them Italian as linked to not being free to speak their native language openly. This example illustrates how some aspects of Italian cultural identity were adapted to the socio-political context and how 'anglicisation' was necessary to survive.

These findings accord with the literature that describes a process of 'de-Italianisation' amongst Italians.[57] As discussed in the Introduction, assuming a condition of 'invisibility', even prior to the War, was due to widespread xenophobia towards migrant groups, including Italians. Particularly with reference to wartime, Colpi suggested that it was in this historical context that 'a generation of British Italians learned it was not good to be Italian and how it was better to "assimilate" or de-Italianize themselves'.[58] Fortier concurs that the intense Italophobia during the War years 'compelled many to seek to hide their italianness: avoiding speaking Italian in public, anglicizing their names, or their trade'.[59] The need to disguise Italian accents and/or anglicise names appears to have been common practice also in Hull, where Italians did not feel accepted. This has been interpreted as a 'genuine desire to integrate and be part of the social fabric of the local community'.[60]

Reminiscing about their childhoods, Angela and Rosalinda recalled that they used to spend most afternoons after school in their grandparents' coffee shop, where they never heard their relatives speaking Italian. By contrast, whilst markers of Italian identity were avoided in public places, these were freely expressed within the private, domestic sphere. The sisters described what happened in their home when their mother interacted with her

father, their grandfather:

> R: When she used to speak to her dad, he always used to speak to her in Italian. But if she answered back in English, he would slap her across the face. She had to answer in Italian, not English.
>
> A: In the house.
>
> R: Only in the house.

A significant point of interest in the extract lies in the restriction of expression of cultural identity to the private domain ('only in the house'). Emphasising the role of language as a conveyor of cultural belonging, these participants confirm that, on the one hand, Italians were encouraged to hide their national belonging in outdoor environments while, on the other, the domestic sphere was deemed an expressive and safe site for the transmission and preservation of cultural identity, patterns extensively covered by Ugolini.[61] This behaviour was also verified by Mrs G. who, in the presence of her niece, M., a third generation Italian, in her sixties, said:

> Mrs G: In the house we spoke Italian all the time. Not outside. There, I was always English, but in the house with my parents we spoke all Italian.
>
> M: You only spoke Italian inside, but *fuori* [outdoors] was English.
>
> Mrs G: You couldn't. You were uncomfortable, because as long as they knew..
>
> M: It's not like today where you hear all nationalities on the train, not in them days.'

In further discussion, M. and Mrs G. agreed that Italians possessed a sort of dual identity, a dichotomy observed in migrant studies more generally.[62] Alfredo supported this argument by revealing the importance of the visibility/invisibility contradiction of his cultural identity. Remembering his childhood spent in his grandparents' house, he said:

> [My grandfather] used to say, we lived in our house, in grandfather's house, it

was an Italian house. We ate *pasta asciutta*, or Italian food, we drank wine with the meal, and my grandparents spoke Italian. So it was an Italian house. But he always used to say that this is our house and we are Italian, but when you leave here, when you go out the door, you are English. "You speak English. You don't act strangely, and you do what the English do. You eat English food, you take English tea, speak English! (*imitating voice*), and keep your nose down, right? Just keep quiet, don't cause any trouble". That was our motto. Inside the house we were Italian, outside not.

This extract exposes how Alfredo interpreted his sense of belonging to an Italian identity through everyday practices in the domestic sphere (language, food, drinks). He defines the 'Italian home' through habits that mark and reinforce a cultural belonging. Alfredo recalled that only when they were indoors did his family members adopt Italian customs. However, his grandfather advised him to quickly learn to behave like 'the natives' outside the home, to act as an English person, adapting his cultural preferences in terms of eating and drinking, and language in communicating with others. He reminisced about his grandfather encouraging him to assimilate into mainstream society, rendering invisible his cultural roots. The expression 'keep your nose down' is the most powerful statement, akin to Italians in Scotland who likewise 'kept their heads down'.[63] Alfredo explained how his grandfather advised him to occupy the margin, avoid drawing attention to himself, be humble, reserved and, to avoid getting into trouble. In other words, being and 'becoming' something different. From these interviews, it seems clear that the participants have internalised this gaze, monitored and regulated their own behaviour, and expressed different cultural identities according to circumstances and places, in the private or public sphere.[64]

To illustrate further the impact of anti-Italian feeling on the experiences of public places, I return to the narrative of Mrs G. who explained that her sister, Rosie, was on her own during the War, in the family hometown, to run the family business:

The police were good to her. I must say the police used to check on her all the time, to make sure she was alright. The local bobby, constable, said, "Rosie, don't you worry, I'm watching over you". And when the air raids were on, he used to say, "Rosie, are you awake? Come, go to the shelter."

This one night he said to Rosie, "Where were you Rosie? Why don't you come to the public shelter?" And she said, "I'm Italian, if I came to the shelter nobody would sit beside me." And he said, "I would sit beside you my darling." I always remember those words. Oh, the police were marvelous, they really were.

Here, Mrs G. has emphasised both the solidarity of the local population and the discrimination endured by her sister in the absence of both parents (her father interned and her mother relocated inland). Afraid that she would be further ostracised by her neighbours, Rosie relied on the sympathetic encouragement of the local policeman to use the public bomb shelter. On the one hand, Mrs G. recalls the humanity of the police officer, emblematic in this narration, since he represents the British government. This narrative adds to the literature discussing sympathetic police attitudes, who in some cases, tried to support Italian families during the War.[65] On the other hand, her sister perceived herself as unwelcome in the shelter, given her family's nationality, shedding light on the impact of the historical context on participants' relationship with public spaces. Hence, the public shelter is a powerful metaphorical tool to convey the precariousness of these human beings in times of conflict. The shelter is supposed to be a public space that provides protection, but Rosie perceived it as inaccessible, and potentially hostile, given her presumed difference. Mrs G. remembered how her sister, although born in England, did not seek the safety of an emergency shelter, but risked her own life, for fear that her Italian identity would invalidate her right to be there and cause her presence to be unfavourably remarked upon.

The public shelter had been located in front of the house where the interview took place,

the same house where Mrs G. was born in 1930 and, where her grandparents had lived since migrating to England in the early years of the twentieth century. The shelter was no longer visible, at the time of the interview, but Mrs G. pointed to where it had once been, revealing how this place and this narrative are still part of her memory some seven decades later. In a similar manner, the example of Rosalinda's family business, embedded in the locality ('my mother had a shop, on the street further down'), demonstrates the participants' deep connection to places. Thus, wartime experiences remain a part of everyday life discourses amongst these older adults, being so rooted in the childhood spaces that they still inhabit.

Anti-Italian Feeling after the War (1950s to 1970s)

Whilst the previous two sections illustrated the perspectives of second and third generation Italians who experienced Italophobia during the War, this section conveys how anti-Italian sentiment asserted its presence beyond the conflict years. These narratives represent the viewpoints of first generation migrants who moved to England after the War and articulate how anti-Italian rhetoric was passed on through further migrant generations and how this fused with their personal experiences of discrimination.

At the time of the interview, Lucia was eighty-four years old; she migrated from Lazio in 1950, when she was eighteen. Initially, she worked as a nanny for a Scottish Italian family, who originated from her village in Italy, before she moved to Newcastle.

> When we came over they didn't like Italians. It was not long then after the War had ended. There were lots of prejudices towards us. The people I worked for had been here for a long time. The lady told me that, when they finished working in their fish and chip shop, they used to carry a full hot pan [of oil] to go home. They needed it to defend themselves, because when they came out of the shop there

were Scottish people waiting for them to fight. If you could have seen the violence before, it was not like now.

They used to call us "Tally" or "Garlic Talian". We were called like this because of the smell of garlic we ate. You felt like a foreigner. Now, not anymore. Now it has changed because the generation has changed. People travel more. Maybe, it was due to ignorance then.

Lucia's reminiscences allude to how the perception of Italians changed over time, and has been shaped by oral histories, passed down by the 'old' (pre-war) to the 'new' (post-war) generation of migrants. Soon after arrival in Scotland, she learned of the Italians' wartime experiences, and the stories she heard shaped her feelings of 'otherness' as an Italian migrant. However, in discussing xenophobia, Lucia draws comparisons between the past (discrimination) and the present (tolerance). Other participants registered that they had learned the same version of history, for example, Armando, a sixty-nine year old man who originated from Lazio, and arrived in the UK in 1960s. He had been a mobile ice-cream seller for most of his life:

Before it was different. It's not like today. You were really an immigrant. Now, if you go downstairs,[66] and you say "I'm Italian". So what? Another will say, "I come from Colombia". Well, it's not a problem, you don't take any notice. While before, it was not so long after the War ended. There were a lot of people who suffered here. There was resentment among the population. How could you blame them?

Armando justifies the antipathy among the local population towards the Italians through the suffering they had endured as a result of the War. He understands and tolerates the different points of view and the reasons for discrimination. Yet, even in the 1970s, persistent anti-Italian feeling prevailed, obliging Armando to 'camouflage'[67] or employ a 'passing' strategy[68] to mask his national identity when choosing a name for his mobile ice-cream business:

When I decided to run my own activity, I needed a name for it. The first day I went out with my van and one little boy, maybe 8 years old, approached my van to buy an ice-cream. He asked me "What's your name?" I couldn't say my Italian name; at the time Italians here were not appreciated. If you were a foreigner, especially an Italian, the parents would never let a child buy ice cream from you. So I said, "What's your name?" He said: "My name is Elvis" I replied "Really? So is mine!" He was so happy; he screamed "His name is Elvis, like me!" From that day I called myself Mr Elvis, and it is still the name on my van.

Armando's extract references prejudice two decades after the War and illustrates how strategies to avoid discrimination were adopted from the post-war generations of Italians. He anglicised the name of his business to 'pretend' to be English, a necessary tactic to attract customers.

Disengagement and not Belonging

The following is an example of how the 'enemy alien' narrative shaped socialisation. Luigi was eighty-four years old and had migrated from Liguria to Newcastle in 1959. He stated that during his career owning a women's hair salon, his clients loved him, although the local men did not feel the same warmth towards him. He explained:

> The terrible experience of the War was still fresh in people's minds. Especially here in the North, they suffered a lot. Lots of people died. We were enemies on the field. I remember when I was twelve or thirteen, in Italy we had on the Fascist shirts with cloth labels stitched on the top which read "God curse the English". So there was some friction between the English and Italians. Especially among '*il populino*'.[69]

> When I came here, the men used to talk a lot about this political context, especially those who attended the pubs. I used to avoid these places, as they were full of angry people. I couldn't go there on my own.

> I avoided those places to avoid trouble. Like fighting, you know, drunk chaps. I didn't like drinking anyway. I prefered places where more educated people appreciated me for who I was, regardless of my national identity. With my job, I was introduced to a higher class of people.'

Luigi's choice of places to socialise was influenced by the people who frequented those

places. He identifies 'pubs' as places that could undermine his sense of security. His preference was for venues frequented by 'more educated people' who were less likely to be discriminatory towards him based simply on his Italian identity. Luigi's careful avoidance of certain social contexts reveals how Italophobia persisted in post-war Britain, and was contributory in shaping the new Italian migrants' process of adaptation. Proshansky and colleagues would define Luigi's behaviour as 'defensive withdrawal', whereby individuals evade certain places in order to preserve self-integrity.[70] As such, the perception of Luigi as a member of the Italian community influenced his engagement, participation, or lack of it, in the public sphere. The same anti-Italian wartime rhetoric, coupled with general anti-alienism as outlined in the Introduction, potentially constituted the basis for Luigi's careful withdrawal from certain elements of public life, his feelings of social exclusion, and his sense of not belonging to the place he would continue to inhabit in later life.

A further example of feelings of not belonging and social alienation is Domenico, from Abruzzo, aged eighty-two who emigrated from Italy when he was almost twenty, in the early 1950s. The interview took place in the presence of his English wife, Mrs Ma. and his grandson, P.[71] When asked to articulate his sense of identity Domenico replied:

> D: I feel Italian; of course. You don't lose your identity. I feel an immigrant here. Always. Because here, everybody has always seen me as the Italian.
>
> P: Granddad, still? Because, obviously you can't feel like a foreigner anymore. At what point did you become ... an English? I don't know how to word it...
>
> Mrs Ma: They know he's Italian, but he's lived here a long time. Everybody knows Dominic in this neighbourhood. I mean he goes to the Social Club on a Sunday, and all my family is there, my cousins. They all think the world of him. They say "You alright, Dominic? Do you want a drink?" And he enjoys the company. So he is part of the group.

D: Yes, *ma dovevo sempre avere il foglio di riconoscimento dalla polizia.*[72]

Domenico is clear about feeling Italian, yet his grandson appears surprised that he possibly still thinks of himself as a 'foreigner'. P. struggles with the concept of degree of acquired Englishness and tries to ask Domenico about this. Mrs Ma replies for her husband, using the anglicised form of his name, stressing the length of his residence. By then switching languages, Domenico used Italian strategically, to form an alliance of understanding with the 'Italian' researcher and to exclude his wife and grandson from the conversation. When asked to speak in English so the others would understand, Domenico brought out his Aliens Registration booklet and continued:

> D: Look at the passport. Look at the front. 'Alien!' Every time I changed address I had to report to the police, so they'd know where I was. That's the stamp. "You are an alien, get yourself away".
>
> P: Ah, right Granddad. One thing you have to see, Granddad was free [of restrictions] when he married Nana. Before that he had this little booklet, like a document. It's got a massive stamp on it and I always think it's weird, looking at it now, because it says 'Aliens Department'. So, that was the people who would monitor where Granddad was. They had to sign every so often to say he'd stayed in the area, and not moved around the country. This was in '61. I mean, not only during the War, but even later on. Now, a word like that is so politically incorrect. You couldn't refer to immigrants as aliens, could you? No! But, back then; they were trying to cause offence by using a word like that.[73]
>
> Mrs Ma: No, they weren't son. It's just the connotation of the word that is different. They were Italians, but they were aliens to England.

This dialogue reveals articulation of identity by a first generation migrant. Domenico was marked as an 'alien', and forced to carry documentation declaring himself as such during his early years in the UK, before marriage to a British citizen. His strong sense of 'otherness', appears to be connected to the way identity and belonging were attributed and controlled institutionally. The politics of immigration generated and reinforced a sense of difference, according to Domenico's perspective: he had been monitored and

was limited in his freedom of movement, both around the country and if he made trips home to Italy, or elsewhere.

The concept of 'autobiographical insideness' can be adopted to describe the way in which Domenico's wife articulated his belonging to the local neighbourhood and its social networks ('They say, You alright Dominic? Do you want a drink? So he is part of the group').[74] He, nevertheless, did not feel a sense of belonging to society, given the formal, politicised, practices of identity to which he had been subjected. Despite the experiences of social engagement, integration and apparent embeddedness within the local community, as his wife sought to remind him, the participant's narrative reveals the multifaceted implications of the politics of migration seen through the prism of later life. Hence, the powerfully exclusionary label of 'alien', and the meanings associated with it was still imprinted on Domenico's memory. Being labeled as an alien, had erected a barrier to any sense of identification with the society in which he made his home. Domenico spoke of his lifelong feelings of being a foreigner in the place where he had lived for over sixty years; his sense of not belonging possibly serves to explain why he had never lost attachment to his Italian identity.

Discussion

The main contributions of these findings are in documenting oral history of the Second World War and beyond, as relevant historical material for North East heritage, in enriching the literature on Italian migration to the UK and in adding to debates on place and identity. The novelty of this work is its exploration of the ways in which memories of the War have been transmitted both down and across generations of Italian migrants,

interviewed in later life. Participants' experiences of discrimination during wartime and its aftermath are significant not merely for the history these represent, but for their influence in shaping the migrants' sense of identity in older age.

Although there is no simple way to provide a clear explanation to questions that animate debates in relation to national identities in times of conflict, during the course of this research, it became increasingly apparent that daily discourses amongst these older members of the North East Italian community were shaped by reference to the historical events of the War. Contributing to knowledge on memory studies at the intersection with migration, these findings indicate how the traumatic events of the War have become embedded in collective memory.

The participants provide evidence of the durability of 'anti-Italian' wartime rhetoric, which remained pervasive in the decades after hostilities, and continue to affect the present reality through the generations. These unsettling memories form part of everyday life discourses associated with places inhabited by families who first settled in the North East over a century ago. The narratives thus constitute a terrain of belonging amongst the participants showing how they adapted to the socio-cultural context accordingly, accepting and reinforcing the same version of history.

Findings indicate that, on the one hand, the hostile environment shaped a sense of difference and marginalisation, on the other, discourses about Italians as 'enemy aliens' and 'aliens' heightened the sense of belonging to an Italian identity. This outcome is partly reflective of societal changes with tolerance and diversity more prevalent in recent years, but it also articulates individual attempt to recover Italian identity, particularly in

later life; by asserting the centrality of their 'Italianness' through claiming Italian roots, names, customs, and even by responding to this research call seeking 'Italians' in the North East.

These findings also contribute to debates over experiences of place and ageing, fostering place attachment in later life. In fact, oral histories about subjective interpretations of the wartime manifested the extent to which some participants perceive themselves as outsiders in the communities where they are growing older. These narratives might indicate barriers to identification with places, due to the socio-political context discussed and attitudes towards immigrants. Detachment in the earlier stages of migration might be the long-term consequence of withdrawal in later life. In this respect, it may be possible to identify some parallels with the experiences of some other migrant groups. One example of discrimination experienced by white migrants in the UK is highlighted by Winslow's research, which explores the long-term impact of the War amongst Polish émigrés.[75] This works detail the effect of these past experiences on the present, as 'many people live with memories of trauma and injustice'.[76] Winslow argues that the experience of discrimination had an effect on Polish émigrés' sense of belonging within British society, and a tendency to isolation after retirement, having a negative impact on the health and wellbeing in later life.[77] As it has been acknowledged, socialisation and engagement in communities provide subjective well-being later in life, forestalling the risk of loneliness and isolation.[78] In line with the on-going challenges of interdisciplinary scholarship engaged with places, older people and their quality of life,[79] these insights might contribute to intervention research on ageing in transnationalism,[80] aiming to firstly, challenge discrimination, and secondly, to enact and reinforce affective bonds

with places for older migrants.

One limitation of this study is the narrow number of life-stories drawn upon, as not statistically representative of a broader sample. However, the research aim was not to generalise findings to other groups or other places, but to focus on the meanings and implications of a few significant narratives. Given the situated nature of the research, it is not possible to consider this study representative of the perspective of all older members of the Italian community in the North East. In this respect, further studies might also consider it insightful to adopt a comparative lens to explore these parameters in relation to solely 'new,' post-war Italian communities who experienced being perceived only as 'enemy' and 'alien' rather than 'enemy alien' to reach a better understanding of identity in later life.[81] Furthermore, I am aware that several aspects might have contributed to individual memories in the interpretation of historical events, such as links with wider public discourses: in particular the extent to which the present-day context of telling might have shaped the ways in which participants narrated their wartime experiences. In this respect the work of Sprio (2013) highlights the role of cinema in shaping the post-war Italian first generation's sense of identity in Britain.[82] However, I have not explored cultural circuits or similar themes within this study. Therefore, this paper recognises the need for further research on these other aspects.

Conclusion

This paper is concerned with memories and interpretation of historical contexts during and after the Second World War, according to some older Italians living in the North East of England. These memories of past events, as articulated in the present – about eighty

years later - brought into view the processes of negotiation and construction of identity that developed during their life course and shifted over time. The ways in which participants' interpretations of the past are situated in places and are transmitted through migrant generations were considered. This illustrated how the participants interviewed believed to have been perceived at different historical moments, and how they challenged, resisted or managed a range of imposed identities. This informs on a shared set of cultural experiences, the legacy of which continue to shape ideas and expressions of identity amongst first, second and third generations of Italians in the North East.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Kushner, "Colin Holmes and Anti-Migrant Historiography," 22-32.

[2] See Walvin, "White Images of Black Life," 118-140; Holmes, *John Bull's Island*; Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers in Nineteenth-century Society*; Panayi, *An Immigration History of Britain*; and MacRaild and Mayall, "Historical Studies in Ethnicity," 1-8.

[3] Kushner, "Colin Holmes and Anti-Migrant Historiography," 22-32.

[4] Goulbourne, *Race Relations in Britain since 1945*.

[5] Schaffer and Saima, "The White Essential Subject," 159.

[6] Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat*; Perks, "'A Feeling of Not Belonging': Interviewing European Immigrants in Bradford," 64.

[7] Mavroudi and Nagel, *Global Migration: Patterns, Processes, and Politics, 44*.

[8] Schaffer and Saima, "The White Essential Subject: Race, Ethnicity, and the Irish in Post-war Britain," 154

[9] Hoffmann, "Class vs. Ethnicity: Concepts of Migrant Historiographies," 44-54.

[10] King, "Italian Migration to Great Britain," 176-186; and Giudici, "Immigrant Narratives and Nation-building,"1409-26.

[11] Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity*; Ugolini, "Weaving Italian Experience into the British Immigration Narrative," 117-27.

[12] Ugolini, "Weaving Italian Experience into the British Immigration Narrative," 117-27.

[13] The pre-war Italian community, including British-born generations, was estimated to number around 30,000 (Colpi, 1991; Sponza, 2000; 2005; Fortier, 2000), while the British census enumerated 24,000 Italian-born in 1931. Shankland (2014, p. 184, 327) puts numbers of Italians in the North East of England at 3,000 in 1935, the largest concentration of Italians outside London and the central Scotland belt.

[14] Colpi, "The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community," 167.

[15] Fortier, *Migrant Belongings, 91*.

[16] Colpi, *Italians' Count in Scotland.*

[17] Ibid. 147.

[18] Colpi, "The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community," 167-187; Colpi, "Chaff in the Winds of War?," 389-410; Sponza, "The British Government and the Internment of Italians," 125-144; Sponza, "The Anti-Italian Riots, June 1940,"131-149; Sponza, *Divided loyalties: Italians in Britain During the Second World War*; Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other';* Ugolini, "'Spaghetti Lengths in a Bowl?," 214-234; Chezzi, "Wales Breaks its Silence: From Memory to Memorial and Beyond," 376-393; and Pistol, "Enemy Alien and Refugee: Conflicting Identities in Great Britain during the Second World War," 37-52.

[19] Ship deporting Italian and other internees to Canada.

[20] The historical detail provided in the narratives relies on oral histories and personal testimonies, so that the accuracy of information has not been compared with 'official' history.

[21] Garigue and Raymond, *Two Studies of Kinship in London.*

[22] Marin, *Italiani in Gran Bretagna; Palmer*, "The Italians: Patterns of Migration to London," *242-268.*

[23] Colpi, "The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community," 168. 'Old' community Colpi (1992) refers to migrants and their descendants who had long been settled in Britain from the nineteenth century and until the nineteen-thirties, and argues that they were generally well-integrated into local society.

[24] Sponza, *Divided loyalties: Italians in Britain During the Second World War.*

[25] Tognini, *A Mind at War: An Autobiography.*

[26] Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity*

[27] Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other'*; Ugolini, "Spaghetti Lengths in a Bowl," 214-234.

[28] Ugolini, "Spaghetti Lengths in a Bowl," 214-234

[29] Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other,' 2.*

[30] Ugolini, "Spaghetti Lengths in a Bowl?,"214-234.

[31] Cesarani, "An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-Alienism in British Society before 1940," 24-52; Lunn, "Uncovering Traditions of Intolerance," 11-21.

[32] Chezzi, "Wales Breaks its Silence: From Memory to Memorial and Beyond," 376-393.

[33] Haworth and Rorato, "Memory, Identity and Migrant Generations," 1-19.

[34] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory.*

[35] Ibid.

[36] Thompson, "Family Models, Myths and Memories," 13-38.

[37] Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 103-128.

[38] Sponza, "Italians in War and Post-War Britain," 185-200; Colucci, *Emigrazione e Ricostruzione: Italiani in Gran Bretagna dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale*. The Post-war Ministry of Labour and other schemes brought large numbers of Italians to Britain. In combination with reactivation of pre-war 'chains of migration', by 1971 the Italian-born population in the UK numbered almost 109, 000 (King, 1977; Colpi, 1991).

[39] John and Leatrice Macdonald (1964, cited in Colpi 1992) define chain migration as a process by which first generation migrants incentivise the migration of their relatives, providing a job offer and assisting them on arrival.

[40] Palladino, "Older migrants reflecting on aging," 100788.

[41] Amongst the twenty-seven participants, five were third generation Italians, two were second generation, and twenty were first generation migrants who arrived after the War.

[42] Ormston et al. "The Foundations of Qualitative Research," 52-55.

[43] Amongst these, four participants are third generation Italians, one is second generation and four are first generation migrants.

[44] Shankland, *Out of Italy: The Story of Italians in North East England.*

[45] Ashington is a town in Northumberland, 15 miles north of Newcastle. Ashington is not the place of residence of this participant.

[46] Rowles, "Place and Personal Identity in Old Age," 299-313.

[47] Chezzi, "Wales Breaks its Silence: From Memory to Memorial and Beyond," 376-393; Haworth and Rorato, "Memory, Identity and Migrant Generations," 1-19.

[48] Naturalisation: the admittance of a foreigner to citizenship through formal practises of belonging, which necessitated giving up former nationality.

[49] As their father was an Italian-born, it is more likely that he served to the Pioneer Corp rather than to the British Army. This can be considered as a historical inaccuracy from the participants' perspective, so that in this case, clarification was needed.

[50] Shankland, *Out of Italy: The Story of Italians in North East England*, 196-200.

[51] The use of the term 'choice' is inaccurate here, as historical accounts on deportation of Italians during the War (see for example, Pistol, 2015) do not mention the opportunity to choose where to go. However, in agreement with subjective narratives in oral history traditions, this participant's statement should be kept as it is.

[52] For the political use of the expression '*Italiani brava gente*', see Fogu (2006).

[53] Colpi, "The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community," 167-187; Chezzi, "Wales Breaks its Silence: From Memory to Memorial and Beyond, 376-393.

[54] Colpi, "Chaff in the Winds of War? The Arandora Star," 391.

[55] Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other'.*

[56] Haworth and Rorato, "Memory, Identity and Migrant Generations," 1-19.

[57] Colpi, *The Italian Factor. The Italian Community in Great Britain*; Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other'.*

[58] Colpi, "The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community," 175.

[59] Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity, 23*.

[60] Haworth and Rorato, "Memory, Identity and Migrant Generations," 13.

[61] Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other'.*

[62] Marino, *Intergenerational Ethnic Identity Construction.*

[63] Colpi, *Italians' Count in Scotland, 147.*

[64] Foucault (1975) illustrated experience according to degree of visibility in a concentric prison. Peters (1997), drawing on this metaphor of place, explored the concept of the public sphere, arguing that inhabitants who think they are acting under public gaze, internalise the gaze and become guardians of their own behaviour.

[65] Chezzi, "Wales Breaks its Silence: From Memory to Memorial and Beyond," 376-393.

[66] The interview took place above the participant's restaurant in a private area.

[67] Colpi, "The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community," 185;

[68] Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity,* 23.

[69] This could be translated as working-class people

[70] Proshansky et al. "Place-identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self," 57-83.

[71] Despite Domenico's family members not being defined as participants, they both agreed to join in the interview, and signed informed consent

[72] Translation: Yes, but I always had to show my identity paperscard to the police.

[73] I add here an observation by a proofreader who wishes to remain anonymous: "It was still called the 'Aliens Office' in the 1990s. I worked with international students then and remember how bad it sounded." I believe this comment can be considered as further evidence of the social and historical context in which this project was conducted.

[74] Rowles, "Place and Personal Identity in Old Age," 299-313.

[75] Winslow, "Polish Migration to Britain: War, Exile and Mental Health," 57-64; Winslow, "Forget? no, I never...': Polish Reflections on the Impact of the Second World War," 33-44.

[76] Winslow, "Forget? no, I never...': Polish Reflections on the Impact of the Second World War," 33.

[77] Winslow, "Polish Migration to Britain: War, Exile and Mental Health," 57-64;

[78] Victor and Yang, "The Prevalence of Loneliness among Adults," 85-104.

[79] Walsh et al. "Social Exclusion of Older Persons," 81-98.

[80] see Zontini, "Growing Old in a Transnational Social Field," 326-341.

[81] in Bedford and Peterborough, see Perks, "'A Feeling of Not Belonging," 64-67; Colpi, "Origins and Campanilismo in Bedford's Italian Community," 59-77; Colucci, *Emigrazione e Ricostruzione: Italiani in*

Gran Bretagna dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale; and Guzzo, "Immigrazione Italiana nel Regno Unito,"127-140.
[82] Sprio, *Migrant Memories: Cultural History, Cinema and the Italian Post-War Diaspora in Britain.*

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