‘The mark of subversion’: an analysis of Italian anti-fascism in inter-war Scotland

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This article describes the history of Italian anti-fascism in Scotland between the two world wars. Drawing extensively on unique archival sources such as files of emigrants registered in the Central Political Register, consular reports, British naturalisation records and contemporary press, it highlights the peculiarity of the Italian Scottish case. Unlike other cases examined by historians, this one is characterised by a ‘silent’ anti-fascism. Accordingly, the article analyses the reasons for the absence of overt opposition to the Fascist regime and its local branches in Scotland. The article thus contributes to broadening the horizon and the debate on anti-fascism in Great Britain, which has so far focused on London and prominent anti-fascists and exiles residing in the metropolis. Furthermore, by shedding light on the experiences of ordinary ‘subversives’ in Scotland, it reveals internal community dynamics and the relationship between the centre and the periphery, reflecting the contradictions of the Fascist totalitarian system.
Key words: anti-fascism, Fascism, *fasci* of Scotland, Italian Scottish community, emigration

Historians agree that Italian emigration to Great Britain was driven by social and economic reasons rather than political ones.[1] This trend remained virtually unchanged even during the Fascist dictatorship in Italy. Unlike other European and transoceanic countries, which experienced a significant influx of political exiles, very few anti-fascists travelled across the Channel. This explains why Italian anti-fascism in Great Britain has only recently gained scholarly attention. Alfio Bernabei paved the way for this historiographical strand with his

Received: 18/11/2024. Accepted for publication: 05/02/2025.

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[1] Colin Holmes, *John Bull’s Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871–1971*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1988; Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor: The Italian Community in Great Britain*, Edinburgh, Mainstream Publishing, 1991; Lucio Sponza, *Gli italiani in Gran Bretagna: profilo storico*, “Altreitalie”, January–June 2005, n. 30, pp. 4–22; Patrizia Audenino and Antonio Bechelloni, *L’esilio politico tra Otto e Novecento*, in Paola Corti and Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Storia D’Italia. Annali 24. Migrazioni*, Turin, Einaudi, 2009, pp. 343–369.

 ISSNe 2036-4555, DOI 10.3280/icYearbook2024-2025-oa002

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Esuli ed Emigrati nel Regno Unito, 1920-1940 (1997), which reconstructs the dramatic story of Decio Anzani, secretary of the London branch of the Italian League for Human Rights, who was interned in June 1940 and died after the sinking of the *Arandora Star*.[2] Bernabei analysed the anti-fascist unrest in London, placing it in the context of Italian-British relations at the time.[3]

In more recent times, scholars have approached the theme of Italian anti-fascism in Great Britain from new perspectives. For example, some have explored the activities of prominent figures such as Luigi Sturzo, Gaetano Salvemini and Paolo Treves, who emigrated to London at different stages of Mussolini’s dictatorship.[4] Others have focused on the diverse group of anarchists and socialists who founded the weekly newspaper *Il Comento* to combat the influence of the London *fascio*. Still others have analysed the theories promoted by Sylvia Pankhurst, as well as her anti-fascist, anti-colonial and pacifist activities in the associative and editorial realm. Together with her partner, Silvio Corio, the former suffragette was the perfect link between British Labourites, exiles and international political circles.[5] Although this research has undoubtedly broadened our knowledge of anti-fascism in Great Britain, the current historiography has developed along a ‘vertical axis’, as Leonardo Rapone puts it, with very few studies aimed at expanding it ‘horizontally’. In other words, the analysis of the efforts of the main anti-fascists to

[2] The ocean liner *Arandora Star* was carrying around fifteen hundred Italian, German and Austrian prisoners of war to Canada when it was hit by a German submarine on 2 July 1940. Some two hundred and fifty of the approximately seven hundred Italian passengers survived. For background information on the event, the policies adopted by the British government against enemy aliens and the memorialisation of the tragedy in Italian-British communities, see, among others: Maria Serena Balestracci, *Arandora Star. Dall’oblio alla memoria-From Oblivion to Memory*, Parma, Monte Università Parma, 2008; Terri Colpi (ed.), *Raising the Arandora Star: History and Afterlife of the Second World War Sinking*, “Modern Italy”, 2024, n. 3.

[3] Alfio Bernabei, *Esuli ed emigrati italiani nel Regno Unito, 1920-1940*, Milan, Mursia, 1997.

[4] Giovanna Farrell-Vinay, *The London Exile of Don Luigi Sturzo (1924-1940)*, “The Heythrop Journal”, March 2004, n. 2, pp. 158–177; Alice Gussoni, *Gaetano Salvemini a Londra: Un antifascista in esilio (1925-1934)*, Rome, Donzelli, 2020; Andrea Ricciardi, *Paolo Treves: biografia di un socialista dissidente*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2018; Francesca Fiorani, *Paolo Treves: tra esilio e impegno repubblicano (1908-1958)*, Rome, Donzelli, 2020.

[5] Stefania Rampello, *Italian anti-Fascism in London, 1922-1940*, “Modern Italy”, 2015, n. 4, pp. 351–363; Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 147–193; Anna Rita Gabellone, *Il pensiero e l’attività antifascista tra Italia e Gran Bretagna,* “Itinerari Storici”, 2019, n. 33, pp. 201–210; Alfio Bernabei, *1922: Fascism and anti-Fascism in London’s Little Italy*, in Tamara Colacicco (ed.), *Fascism and Anti-fascism in Great Britain*, Ospedaletto, Pacini Editore, 2020, pp. 41–66; Anna Rita Gabellone, *The Women International Matteotti Committee during the 1930s*, in Tamara Colacicco (ed.), *Fascism and Anti-fascism in Great Britain*, Ospedaletto, Pacini Editore, 2020, pp. 173–190; Anna Rita Gabellone, *Giacomo Matteotti in Gran Bretagna (1924-1939)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2022.

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forge links with certain sectors of the host society and with previously politicised immigrant groups has not addressed the changes brought about by the conflict between Fascism and anti-fascism in the lives of immigrants in Britain. In fact, although 280 individuals residing across the Channel were registered in the so-called Casellario politico centrale (Central Political Register) between 1922 and 1940, only a very small number of files relating to the abovementioned political elite have been examined.

This article aims to advance our understanding of the lives of anti-fascists in Great Britain by analysing files from the Central Political Register on 'subversives' residing in Scotland, as well as a rich body of both Italian and British sources, including diplomatic correspondence, secret service reports, British naturalisation records and contemporary newspapers and anti-fascist press. An examination of the records of Italian emigrants who settled in Scotland will demonstrate that the Italian Scottish case is unique on the international stage, given the almost complete absence of overt hostility towards Fascism and its local branches, the *fasci*. However, by placing the human and personal stories of 'ordinary' actors back at the heart of the anti-fascist struggle, the article will highlight the wider social, power and control dynamics — typical of all communities and the centre–periphery relationship — that, as mentioned, have been neglected in favour of the major political opponents. Furthermore, it provides a wide range of reasons for the prevalence of 'silent anti-fascism' in Scotland (and partly in Britain), which is linked not only to the particular characteristics of Italian emigration to the island. Hence, this investigation not only approaches the geographical scope of anti-fascism in Great Britain from a new perspective, but it also provides new insights into the political and social history of Italian emigration and the relationship between Fascism, anti-fascism and migration. In doing so, it contributes to the extensive literature that has focused on the many Italian communities abroad, stimulating continuous historiographical reflection.[6]

[6] See, for example: Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascismo, antifascismo e gli italiani in Australia (1922-1945)*, Rome, Bonacci, 1979; Anne Morelli, *Fascismo e antifascismo nell'emigrazione italiana in Belgio, 1922-1940*, Rome, Bonacci, 1987; Ronald C. Newton, *Ducini, Prominenti, Antifascisti. Italian Fascism and the Italo-Argentine Collectivity, 1922-1945*, "The Americas", 1994, n. 1, pp. 41–66; João Fábio Bertonha, *Sob a sombra de Mussolini. Os italianos de São Paulo e a luta contra o fascismo, 1919-1945*, São Paulo, Annablume, 1999; João Fabio Bertonha, *Fascismo, antifascismo y las comunidades italianas en Brasil, Argentina y Uruguay: una perspectiva comparada*, "Estudios migratórios latinoamericanos", 1999, n. 42, pp. 111–133; Pietro Pinna, *Migranti italiani tra fascismo e antifascismo. La scoperta della politica in due regioni francesi*, Bologna, Clueb, 2012.

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Fascism and the Italian community in Scotland

In 1931, as totalitarianism intensified, the Fascist regime entrusted Corrado Gini — founder of the Central Institute of Statistics (later ISTAT) — with the task of conducting a census of Italians abroad. Currently, the only census to have emerged from the Italian diplomatic archives scattered around the world is the one carried out by the consulate in Glasgow in the 1930s, which aimed to identify Italian emigrants who had settled in Scotland. Thanks to this document and Terri Colpi’s study, we now have a near-to-accurate picture of the Italian Scottish population in the inter-war period. The community numbered 5,991 individuals, of whom 2,637 were adults (1,396 men and 1,241 women) and 3,354 were children. The majority — about four thousand people — were scattered across Glasgow and the surrounding area, while approximately seven hundred lived in Edinburgh. The rest were mostly located in eastern coastal cities (Aberdeen, Dundee, Fife) and western coastal cities (Ayr, Greenock). Sixty per cent came from the province of Lucca, particularly from the small town of Barga, and from the area between Isernia, Caserta and Valle del Liri, now part of the province of Frosinone.[7] Unlike other ethnic minorities, who were employed mainly in the agricultural and industrial sectors, Italians were self-employed. The vast majority owned one or more family-run businesses in the catering sector (e.g. cafés and restaurants, fish and chip shops, sweet shops) or traded Italian products, and around two hundred people worked as barbers or craftsmen. The intellectual backbone of the Italian Scottish community consisted of a dozen teachers (including two university professors), a doctor, a priest, an architect and a banker.[8]

The demographic, territorial and socio-economic characteristics described above were the result of the growth of the Italian population in the 20 years preceding the First World War. Between 1891 and 1901, the Italian presence increased from 749 to 4,051 individuals. This leap was mainly due to the professional progress of the few dozen immigrants who went from being street vendors and musicians to opening small ice cream parlours and fish and chip shops. The opening of a promising market and the resulting economic stability of the first small entrepreneurs encouraged family reunification and created a demand for new labour, which was usually found among relatives and acquaintances from the home region in Italy.[9] The nature of the immi-

[7] Terri Colpi, *Italians’ Count in Scotland: The 1933 Census, Recording History*, London, The St James Press, 2015.

[8] Report on the Italian colony in Scotland by Consul Spanò, July 1932, in Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (hereafter ASMAE), Ambasciata Londra (1861-1950), envelope 794, folder 1.

[9] Nicoletta Franchi, *La Via della Scozia: L’emigrazione barghigiana e lucchese a Glasgow tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Lucca, Fondazione Paolo Cresci per la storia dell’emigrazione italiana, 2012, p. 47.

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grants' employment, who worked up to 18 hours a day, combined with factors such as parochialism and individualism, urban dispersion and the lack of religious and diplomatic figures of reference who could strengthen the community, led Italians to neglect the associative and cultural commitment promoted by a minority. For the same reasons, they did not assimilate into the host society.[10]

In the first half of the 1920s, Fascism began to fill this social, cultural and political void. Two months after the March on Rome, Carlo Tronchetti, the director of a small Italian import and distribution company, co-founded the Glasgow *fascio* alongside Giuseppe and Luigi Renucci (from Barga), who owned the company he managed. Despite being disliked by many Italian traders for his unorthodox business practices, which included sabotaging competitors through threats and gossip, Tronchetti dominated the diplomatic and community scene for a decade. In fact, he promoted the foundation of all the other *fasci* in Scotland: Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee, Greenock and Stirling, although the latter two existed only nominally. He also held various consular posts — most notably as regent of the consulate in Glasgow (1924–29) — and party positions until his expulsion in 1932 due to a conviction for illicit trafficking of alcohol.[11]

Tronchetti launched activities that began to dismantle the barrier of parochialism and associative apathy that characterised Italian immigrants in Scotland. Thus, in 1924, the 'father of the Scottish *fasci*' established the first weekly recreation centre in Glasgow, completing an educational project that had been discussed within the community since the early twentieth century. Considered by the regime to be an essential vehicle for maintaining Italian identity and forming a Fascist consciousness among the younger generations of Italians abroad, the initiative was consolidated thanks to the contribution of some women and the financial efforts of the community. In the 1930s, around three hundred boys and girls attended the Italian school in Glasgow every year. At the same time, weekly schools were also set up in Motherwell, Greenock and Edinburgh, with dozens of pupils of Italian origin enrolled.[12] Another activity conceived by Tronchetti, which the Fascist regime took advantage of, was the intercolonial gathering. From 1926 to 1938, various local *fasci* held this event every year on 15 August (in conjunction with the Feast of the Assumption) in an easily accessible Scottish park, making it one of the most eagerly awaited events for Italians: on average, between 2,000 and 3,000 people from across Scotland took part. By combining sport, religion and politics (with the secre-

[10] Tom M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: A Modern History*, London, Penguin, 2012, pp. 512–518; Remigio Petrocelli, *«Un anno che resterà memorabile»: l'esperienza de «La Scozia» e la comunità italiana*, "Altreitalie", January–June 2024, n. 68, pp. 5–23.

[11] Remigio Petrocelli, *Importing Fascism: The Italian Community's Fascist Experience in Interwar Scotland*, New York, Routledge, 2025, pp. 39–40.

[12] Remigio Petrocelli, *'Citadels of spiritual resistance': the Italian schools in Scotland, 1924-1940*, "Modern Italy", 2022, n. 3, pp. 225–238.

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taries of the *fasci* and the consul reminding the audience of the ‘new Italy’ that had emerged and of the achievements of Fascism), the gathering became a symbol of how Fascism and Mussolini had revived traditions and strengthened community and national ties.[13] Given its ideological and propaganda potential, it was no coincidence that the initiative was replicated by other *fasci* in Great Britain.[14]

As Italy increasingly shifted towards totalitarianism from the end of the 1920s onwards, Tronchetti’s weekly schools and intercolonial gatherings were just some of the strategies employed by the regime, as part of its widespread welfare, recreation, propaganda and political network. Piero Parini was appointed secretary of the Fasci all’estero, a key instrument in the fascistisation of Italian communities abroad. By subordinating this organisation to state action (and subsequently incorporating it into the General Directorate of Italians Abroad), he not only aligned it with the ‘normalisation’ policy ordered by Mussolini and Dino Grandi, which was facilitated by the *ventottisti* diplomats, but also conferred uniformity and incisiveness on Fascist action abroad.[15] In reality, no ‘normalisation’ intervention was necessary in Scotland, as there were no radical Fascists who opposed consular authority or damaged the image of Fascism.

Nevertheless, the change initiated in Rome brought clear directives and intensified Fascist propaganda and mobilisation, strengthening the regime’s appeal among emigrants. By the end of the 1930s, about half of the Italians in Glasgow and almost all of those in Edinburgh were registered with the local *fascio* or with related organisations, such as the women’s *fascio*, the *dopolavoro* club or Fascist youth groups.[16] Fascism thus managed to penetrate the classic family and working microcosm of Italians in Scotland, thanks not only to the above-mentioned activities, but also to the many initiatives exported from Rome to the communities abroad. The most important and popular of these were the screening of films and documentaries sent by the General Directorate for Propaganda, the visits of Fascist emissaries and the organisation of ‘pilgrimages’ and summer camps in Italy for emigrants and their families. These activities continuously promoted the cult of Mussolini and Italy’s new-found international prestige and progress in various economic, urban, social and political fields — of which Italians abroad were also considered, or

[13] *Italian invasion of Stirling — Scottish Fascisti hold gathering in King’s Park*, “The Bridge of Allan Gazette”, 24 August 1929.

[14] Colin Hughes, *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla: The Italian Community in South Wales 1881-1945*, Bridgend, Seren, 1991, p. 66.

[15] Emilio Gentile, *La politica estera del partito fascista. Ideologia e organizzazione dei fasci italiani all’estero (1920-1930)*, “Storia Contemporanea”, 1995, n. 6, pp. 897–956, here pp. 939–953.

[16] *Guida Generale degli italiani in Gran Bretagna*, London, Ercoli & Sons, 1939, pp. 435–436, 445. The *dopolavoro* was a Fascist federation for leisure pursuits.

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called upon to be, champions.[17] As Matteo Pretelli pointed out, this rhetoric aimed to foster national pride by overturning stereotypes of Italy as a 'good-for-nothing' country and of Italians as belonging to an 'inferior race', and by demonstrating that Fascist Italy cared for its children abroad, making them feel part of it.[18] This manipulation and Fascist effort found particularly favourable conditions in Scotland, even monopolising the public life of a large section of the community and influencing the private lives of many, especially those who felt a tangible connection with the 'new Italy'.

The Italian 'subversives' of Scotland

Another reason why the *fasci* and the Casa d'Italia opened in Glasgow in May 1935 — following a subscription among Italian Scots launched by Consul Ferruccio Luppis — and came to dominate the local political and social scene was the unchallenged freedom of action they enjoyed. In various European and transatlantic contexts, anti-fascist agitation denounced the anti-democratic nature of Fascism and the violence perpetrated by the blackshirts, opposing the actions of the Fascist groups that had emerged outside Italy's borders physically, in the press and in associations.[19] In London, the handful of anarchists and socialists who rallied to support Errico Malatesta in the early twentieth century, including prominent figures such as Francesco Galasso, Silvio Corio, Pietro Gualducci and Emidio Recchioni,[20] opposed the *fascio* from the first signs of its Fascist ambition to monopolise existing institutions. Camillo Pellizzi, founder of the London Fascist branch in 1921, repeatedly promoted a structural reform of local Italian institutions — such as the Dante Alighieri Society and the Italian Hospital — in the Italian weekly *La Cronaca*, with the aim of improving their coordination and management. Unsurprisingly, Pellizzi

[17] Claudia Baldoli, *Le Navi. Fascismo e vacanze in una colonia estiva per i figli degli italiani all'estero*, "Memoria e Ricerca", July–December 2000, n. 6, pp. 163–176; Benedetta Garzarelli, *«Parleremo al mondo intero». La propaganda del fascismo all'estero*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004; Matteo Pretelli, *Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero*, Bologna, Clueb, 2010; Matteo Pretelli, *Mussolini's Mobilities: Transnational Movements between Fascist Italy and Italian Communities Abroad,* "Journal of Migration History", 2015, n. 1, pp. 100–120.

[18] Matteo Pretelli, *La risposta del fascismo agli stereotipi degli italiani all'estero*, "Altreitalie", January–June 2004, n. 28, pp. 48–65.

[19] In addition to the historiography cited in note 6, see also: Angelo Principe, *The Italo-Canadian Anti-Fascist Press in Toronto, 1922–40*, "Polyphony", 1985, n. 2, pp. 43–51; Gianfranco Cresciani, *Refractory Migrants. Fascist Surveillance on Italians in Australia, 1922–1943*, "Altreitalie", January–June 2004, n. 28, pp. 6–47; Carmela Maltone, *Exil et identité. Les antifascistes italiens dans le Sud-Ouest 1924-1940*, Pessac, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2006.

[20] Pietro Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880-1917)*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013.

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pointed to 'our *Fascio* of Combat' as the 'driving force' that should govern and control these efforts.[21] To counter the dictatorial climate that threatened the Italian community in London and to inform it about Fascist violence in Italy, the above-mentioned group of Italians founded *Il Comento* in July 1922. For about two years, the weekly magazine acted as an arena for verbal battles.[22]

However, there was no open conflict in Scotland, despite the presence of 16 'subversives' registered in the Central Political Register (see Table 1).

Table 1 - List of Italians residing in Scotland, as documented in the Central Political Register

Name (Year of birth)	*Profession*	*'Political colour' (Arrival in Scotland)*	*Place of birth*	*City of residence (suburb)*
Annovazzi Alfredo (1873)	Shopkeeper	Socialist (1898)	Casaleggio	Glasgow
Basile Vincenzo (1877)	Shopkeeper	Unknown (1890s)	Venafro	Glasgow (Rutherglen)
Buonaccorsi Guido (1904)	Baker	Communist	Glasgow	Glasgow (Rutherglen)
Cammelli Ovidio (1889)	Shopkeeper	Communist (1900s)	Pistoia	Glasgow
Cardillo Benedetto (1873)	Unknown	Anarchist (1890s)	Unknown	Glasgow
Ceragioli Emilio (1878)	Barber	Anarchist (1908)	Laterina	Glasgow
Coia Agostino (1886)	Shopkeeper	Anarchist (1903)	Filignano	Glasgow (Bellshill)
Cova Cesare (1855)	Tailor	Anarchist (1920s)	Mantua	Glasgow
Gagliardi Pietro (1895)	Barber	Anti-fascist (1910s)	SS. Cosma e Damiano	Glasgow (Bellshill)
Giglio David (1874)	Shopkeeper	Socialist (1890s)	Ivrea	Glasgow — Balloch
Jaconelli Ernesto (1893)	Shopkeeper	Socialist (1908)	Saint Petersburg	Glasgow
Janniello Giuseppe (1883)	Barber	Anarchist (1900)	SS. Cosma e Damiano	Glasgow — Caserta
Lungo Attilio (1890)	Barber	Anarchist (1910)	SS. Cosma e Damiano	Glasgow (Bellshill)
Pacitti Michele (1885)	Shopkeeper	Unknown (1911)	Filignano	Glasgow (Mossend)
Pacitti Vincenzo (1899)	Railway worker	Communist	Glasgow	Glasgow
Renucci Giovanni (1878)	Shopkeeper	Anti-fascist (1900)	Barga	Glasgow

[21] *La coordinazione delle società*, "La Cronaca", 13 January 1923.
[22] S. Rampello, *Italian anti-Fascism in London*, cit., p. 352.

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Some general considerations can be derived from Table 1, beginning with the issue of gender, given the complete absence of women on the list. This is perhaps unsurprising if we consider the strong patriarchal nature of the Italian Scottish community, as evidenced by several women. They were usually devoted to the home, weekly mass and, when necessary, the family business.[23] In the 1920s and 1930s, the *fasci* were also one of the very few social spaces available to women and girls (alongside churches and schools), although the latter were still subject to considerable parental control, particularly regarding intimate matters.[24]

Table 1 also offers an insight into the subjects' professional and migratory characteristics, which are again unsurprising if we consider the structure of the Italian enclave in Scotland. As we will see, these characteristics are useful for understanding some of the main reasons for the lack of anti-fascist mobilisation. No Italians worked in politicised working-class environments (i.e. mining, shipbuilding and steel industries), where it would have been easy to establish connections with local and transnational radical circles. Furthermore, the vast majority of the 'subversives' listed in the Central Political Register were economic emigrants who had moved to Scotland before the First World War, with the exception of Cesare Cova and Vincenzo Pacitti. The former settled in Glasgow in the early 1920s after arriving in London in 1893 and joining the group of anarchists led by Malatesta.[25] Pacitti, on the other hand, was born in Glasgow in 1899. However, in 1913, his family became entangled in a scandal, which was followed by a tragedy. In Falkirk, where the Pacittis ran a restaurant, rumours circulated about Vincenzo's mother having an affair with a certain Joseph Ventura, a former business partner of her husband, Antonio, who shot and killed Ventura.[26] After a brief stay in a psychiatric hospital, Antonio was deported to Italy with the rest of his family. Pacitti returned to Falkirk in 1928.

Moving on to a detailed examination of the personal files, the 16 individuals were divided into four groups, based not on their 'political colour' — to be taken with a pinch of salt, as the authorities could attribute a political belief that differed from the person's actual ideological inclinations — but on the common traits that emerged from the various files. As a result, the following groups can be identified: dissidents from the liberal period, non-anti-fascists, subscribers to the anarchist press and devoted anti-fascists.

[23] Teresa Arcari Capocci, *Alle Serre di Picinisco. Memorie di emigrazione, guerra, liberazione*, Sora, Centro di studi sorani «Vincenzo Patriarca», 2006, pp. 26–39; Mary Contini, *Dear Olivia: An Italian journey of love and courage*, Edinburgh, Canongate, 2008, p. 156; Anne Pia, *Language of My Choosing. The candid life-memoir of an Italian Scot*, Edinburgh, Luath Press Limited, 2018, p. 28.

[24] R. Petrocelli, *Importing Fascism*, cit., pp. 61–62.

[25] www.bfscollezionidigitali.org/entita/13942-cova-cesare (last accessed 31 October 2024).

[26] *The Grahamstone shooting outrage*, "The Falkirk Herald", 10 May 1913.

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Dissidents from the liberal period

Alfredo Annovazzi, Cesare Cova and David Giglio were registered and included in the Central Political Register before the rise of Fascism. However, it seems that Cova was the only one involved in 'subversive' activities. Born in Mantua, the tailor moved to London in 1893 after spending about ten years in Paris. There, he had moved in anarchist circles, which led him to join the radical Italian cell in England, composed of Malatesta, Recchioni and other anarchists. At the outbreak of the First World War, the group split into interventionists and neutralists. Cova sided with the latter, playing an active role in spreading anti-war propaganda in the British capital.[27] As a result of this activity, Cova was forced to leave Britain, which caused him considerable trouble. This was probably also because the 1917 Italian-British military agreement provided for cooperation in mobilising Italian and British immigrants.[28] After a period of exile in the United States, he settled in Glasgow in the early 1920s, but the Italian authorities did not detect any anti-fascist activity — perhaps because at that point he was almost 70 years old.[29]

While it is easy to draw a rough picture of Cova's life, the same cannot be said for Annovazzi and Giglio. Their files do not mention the reasons for their inclusion in the Central Political Register, nor do they indicate any membership of political groups or relevant actions carried out in Italy, either during the liberal period or under Fascism. Instead, reports sent by the consulate in Glasgow in response to requests from the General Directorate of Public Security (Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza, DGPS) for updates to the files in the 1930s reveal that Giglio and, in particular, Annovazzi had by then fully assimilated into Scottish society. In fact, Annovazzi — described as a 'person with little patriotic feeling' — never returned to Italy after emigrating; he married a Scottish woman in 1908 and obtained British citizenship in 1931, and his son even fought in the British Army during the Second World War.[30] Despite the socialist ideas that Giglio and Annovazzi may have had at some stage in their lives, their assimilation led to a detachment from Italy and the Italian political situation.

[27] P. Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy*, cit., p. 199.

[28] Anglo-Italian military agreement, in The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Home Office 45/10783/281476.

[29] Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereafter ACS), Casellario Politico Centrale (hereafter CPC), envelope 1519, folder Cova Cesare.

[30] ACS, CPC, envelope 145, folder Annovazzi Alfredo; ACS, CPC, envelope 2413, folder Giglio Davide.

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The non-anti-fascists

The members of the second group — Guido Buonaccorsi, Ernesto Jaconelli, Giovanni Renucci, Vincenzo Basile, Pietro Gagliardi and Giuseppe Janniello — were included in the Central Political Register for reasons unrelated to political factors and 'subversive' actions or ideas. Their experiences varied, from the accusations levelled against them to the investigations into their activities, which in some cases continued after 10 June 1940. Jaconelli and Basile were the only ones to emerge unscathed from the background checks that were triggered by anonymous reports from their hometowns in Italy. Basile was accused in 1927 of receiving 'subversive newspapers written in English' at his Italian home in Venafro. Once it was established that these newspapers simply contained news about the Scottish suburb where Basile lived and that, according to the consul, he 'had never mingled with indigenous subversive elements and had never expressed defeatist ideas', his name was removed from the Central Political Register within a few months.[31] The same happened to Jaconelli, who was denounced by an anonymous fellow villager from Filignano, who described him as a socialist sympathiser. However, when the DGPS asked the consul in Glasgow, Ludovico Gavotti, for 'political and moral' information about Jaconelli, he reported several things that cleared the alleged socialist of all charges: he enjoyed 'excellent political and moral conduct', he was a member of the Glasgow *fascio* and, finally, he was one of the first to complete the census forms for Italians demanded by the regime.[32]

As Mimmo Franzinelli observed, denouncing someone to discredit them was a common practice in Fascist Italy, adopted not only by party officials interested in climbing the ladder of power or eliminating political opponents, but also by 'ordinary' Italians: family members, fellow citizens, shopkeepers and so on. They did so to gain economic, sentimental or commercial advantages or out of a desire for personal revenge.[33] It is unclear why Basile and Jaconelli, who had lived in Scotland for many years, had to pay the price for this harmful custom, but they were not the only ones to suffer this fate. Guido Buonaccorsi and Giovanni Renucci found themselves in an even more difficult situation. Despite being the 'father of the Scottish *fasci*', Tronchetti himself used anti-fascism against them. The reasons behind his false accusations can be deduced from archival sources.

Buonaccorsi was already a member of the Coreglia Antelminelli *fascio* in 1923, and then a member of the Glasgow *fascio* when he returned to Scotland. He was employed in the small business run by Tronchetti until, at the end of

[31] ACS, CPC, envelope 324, folder Basile Vincenzo.

[32] ACS, CPC, envelope 2609, folder Jaconelli Ernesto.

[33] Mimmo Franzinelli, *Delatori. Spie e confidenti anonimi: l'arma segreta del regime fascista*, Milan, Mondadori, 2001.

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1931, he was ‘abruptly dismissed’ during a period of illness. The dismissal caused a long period of ‘misery for him and his family’, leaving Buonaccorsi deeply disappointed with Tronchetti, and it is likely that he insulted him publicly. The Fascist leader did not take long to react. In May 1932, Tronchetti informed the administrative office of the Fasci all’estero that he had expelled Buonaccorsi for unworthiness. He included a letter emphasising the baker’s ‘unbalanced character’ and ‘disorderly life’, stating that he had ‘allowed himself to be led astray and lured by elements belonging to local communist circles’. Furthermore, Tronchetti warned of the ‘dangerousness’ of his former employee, who was capable of ‘reckless actions’.[34] Nevertheless, reports requested from the consular authorities in the following years revealed no affiliation of the alleged communist with local political circles or ‘dangerous’ activities. On the contrary, when Tronchetti was stripped of all his positions and powers, Buonaccorsi rejoined the *fascio* and became a member of the *dopolavoro* club, as he was unable to obtain a party card owing to his previous expulsion. His son, described by the consul as a ‘brave avant-gardist’, was enrolled in the *fascio* school and the Fascist youth organisation GIL in 1939. Even after Tronchetti’s falsehoods were exposed, the police did not remove Buonaccorsi’s name from the list of ‘subversives’ — despite his renewed Fascist spirit.

While Tronchetti used communism as an excuse to punish Buonaccorsi for his ‘lese-majesty’, he used anonymous letters — a family tradition, as we have seen — to accuse Giovanni Renucci of anti-fascism. In addition to being a cousin of the Renucci family, who owned the company for which Tronchetti worked, Giovanni was also a business competitor with a solid import and sales business for Italian products. His trouble began in August 1932, when he went to the consulate to renew his passport for a trip to Barga. According to a memorandum written the following year by Consul Gavotti to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tronchetti was also at the consulate that same day and had apparently understood that it was time to eliminate the ‘enemy for commercial interests’. In fact, after Renucci’s visit to the consulate, the following anonymous letter was sent to the then Consul Pietro Spanò:

> You have issued a passport to a nasty subversive who spat in the face of the Duce and has been spewing against fascism for years This certain Giovanni Renucci who has boasted that he can go to Italy without anyone being able to do anything to him if this disgrace occurs, we will write to Mussolini that you and Cavagliere Tronchetti are in league with the enemies of Italy.[35]

[34] Telespresso form and letter from Tronchetti to the General Directorate for Public Security, 24 June 1932, in ACS, CPC, envelope 894, folder Buonaccorsi Guido.

[35] Telespresso form from Consul Gavotti to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 July 1933, in ACS, CPC, envelope 4278, folder Renucci Giovanni Celestino (original punctuation maintained).

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Alarmed and unaware of community dynamics, Spanò forwarded the letter to the Ministry of the Interior, thus setting in motion the investigation against Renucci. Tronchetti was secretary of the Glasgow *fascio* at the time, and he was one of the first to be interrogated by the DGPS about his fellow countryman. Unsurprisingly, he did not shy away from providing details about Renucci's 'political and moral' conduct:

> Renucci has been campaigning against Fascism for years, particularly against the local Fascist organisation. He denigrates Italy and his wife also shows, and has always shown, a particular hatred for all the work of the Fascist organisation. During his campaigns, he has always boasted that no one could stop him because he would never return to Italy. It is not clear why he has suddenly decided to return, unless he is hiding some subversive purpose. If this individual is allowed to return, he will certainly intensify his campaign of denigration and subversion, supporting his assertions by saying that he has seen things with his own eyes. I am sure that You will take the measures deemed useful and necessary with the necessary severity, because it is unfair and harmful that these more or less disguised enemies should conduct their anti-fascist campaign abroad, come to Italy to breathe the purified air of Fascism and then return abroad to spew the most absurd calumnies. […] Two comrades from the early days of this Fascio, currently residing in Barga, may also attest to Renucci's anti-fascism: Rigali Amedeo [for whom Tronchetti acted as best man] and Renucci Luigi [competitor of his cousin Giovanni and Tronchetti's boss].[36]

Tronchetti may not have wanted to send a dangerous anti-fascist to prison, but he took advantage of the opportunity to add insult to injury and ruin his commercial competitor's position, knowing very well that once Renucci crossed the Italian border, he would face searches, surveillance and possible arrest. This would have allowed Tronchetti's company to take over Renucci's market share. However, the plan failed. Renucci decided to cancel his trip to Italy after being warned by a family member in Barga about the police investigation. Subsequent correspondence between the police and the consulate confirmed that Tronchetti had made false accusations for personal gain, and he was recognised as 'the main cause of disagreement and unrest' within the Glasgow *fascio* — a situation due perhaps also to his character and the estrangement from his political creation.[37] In light of this and Gavotti's observations, who noted that Renucci 'cannot in any way be accused of anti-fascism and is universally esteemed',[38] the state authorities should have removed his

[36] Telespresso form from Tronchetti to the Ministry of the Interior, 13 September 1932, loc. cit. note 35.

[37] It was Consul Luppis who described Tronchetti in this way after yet another anonymous letter accusing Giovanni Guidi and Lorenzo Rocchicchioli (relatives of Giovanni Renucci) of anti-fascism reached the consulate. Unlike Spanò, Luppis did some preliminary investigations and discovered that Luigi Renucci had sent the letter, pushed by Tronchetti. Report by Luppis to the General Secretariat of the Fasci all'estero, 28 November 1934, in ASMAE, Ambasciata Londra (1861-1950), envelope 841, folder 2.

[38] Telespresso form from Consul Gavotti to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 July 1933, loc. cit. note 35.

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name from the Central Political Register. Unfortunately for the small businessman, this did not happen, probably because of simple negligence on the part of the prefecture of Lucca. Unlike in the cases of Basile and Jaconelli, where the prefecture of Campobasso acted swiftly to verify the false accusations and remove them from the register, the inefficiency of the police in Lucca seriously affected the lives of Renucci and Buonaccorsi, preventing them from returning to Italy in the 1930s.

The remaining cases of non-anti-fascists, Pietro Gagliardi and Giuseppe Janniello, demonstrate that simply being related to someone branded as 'subversive' was enough to attract the attention of the zealous Fascist police machinery. In September 1931, Gagliardi was planning a trip to Italy with his cousin Attilio Lungo, who had been reported as an anarchist by the DGPS in 1927 for reasons that will become clear later. The Italian police wanted to find out who Gagliardi was and what the two intended to do once they arrived in Italy and thus began investigating him. However, they found nothing 'of political significance', except for his refusal to enlist in the army in 1915. The regime punished Gagliardi retroactively by adding him to the Central Political Register and the border register in November 1931, under a law targeting emigrants who did not report to their consulates after Italy's entry into the First World War. This law prevented many from returning home or participating in the 'pilgrimages' to Italy organised by the *fasci*.[39] In 1935, Gagliardi tried to resolve the situation by applying to join the legion of volunteers heading for Abyssinia at the consulate in Glasgow, although it is unclear whether he did so for ideological or patriotic reasons or simply to be removed from the two registers. His request was denied, but he managed to regularise his military status the following year by serving in Italy.[40]

Janniello was Lungo's other cousin (on his wife's side). He was reported in March 1931 by the Ministry of the Interior as a subscriber to *Lotta Anarchica*, which the police believed he received in Glasgow.[41] After requesting further information from the consulate in Glasgow, the authorities found out that Janniello had returned with his family to Italy in 1928, to the province of Caserta. Although the subscription was in his name, the newspaper was probably sent to his old Scottish home on behalf of someone else (perhaps Lungo). However, the consulate, in the person of Tronchetti, reported that Janniello 'is in correspondence with Italian anti-fascist elements and mainly with the anarchist Lungo Attilio residing in Bellshill'.[42] Following this news, Janniello was

[39] Parini to Minister of War Pietro Gazzera, 22 March 1930, in ASMAE, Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale 1923-1943, envelope 818.

[40] ACS, CPC, envelope 2223, folder Gagliardi Pietro.

[41] Note for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 March 1931, in ACS, CPC, envelope 2617, folder Janniello Giuseppe.

[42] Letter from Tronchetti to the General Secretariat of the Fasci all'estero, 5 December 1931, loc. cit. note 41.

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placed under close surveillance and subjected to several searches and interrogations, but none of this produced any results.

The thorough investigations that took place between 1931 and 1932 had a strong impact on Janniello, who decided to appeal directly to the Minister of the Interior (i.e. Mussolini) to testify to the patriotism that ran in his family's veins, in the hope of being removed from the Central Political Register. He thus wrote a long letter in which he explained that three of his brothers had served their country against the Austrians: two left as volunteers from Glasgow, one of whom fell in battle and another followed D'Annunzio to Fiume. He also observed that his children were 'trained' according to principles of 'loyalty and love for the motherland and blind obedience to its laws and its representatives'.[43] Janniello thus employed a common practice described by Richard Bosworth: exploiting family members and their experiences to manipulate political decision-makers, defend himself against accusations or turn the situation around.[44] However, he did not explain why he had not returned to Italy to fight alongside his brothers, or why he had never joined the Glasgow *fascio*. At the end of his letter, he only stated that his was 'all faith; a love for his homeland; a heartfelt and genuine adherence to the Fascist Idea, since its inception'. These omissions may have resulted in his request being ignored and surveillance continuing, with the police noting his involvement in local Fascist circles and his 'good public reputation'. When Italy entered the Second World War, the prefect of Naples urged the police to continue their surveillance of Janniello because he was considered a potential British 'fifth column', given the 28 years he had spent in Glasgow.[45]

Subscribers to the anarchist press

The name of the group derives from the fact that its members — Benedetto Cardillo, Ovidio Cammelli, Emilio Ceragioli, Agostino Coia, Attilio Lungo and Michele Pacitti — subscribed to various 'subversive' publications, including *Pensiero e Volontà*, *La Lotta Umana* and *Lotta Anarchica*. The first newspaper was published in Italy between 1924 and 1926 under the direction of Malatesta, while the other two were part of a range of periodicals produced by radical circles based in Paris.

Although the subtitle of *Lotta Anarchica* called for armed struggle ('For armed insurrection against Fascism'), the Italian subscribers in Scotland —

[43] Letter from Janniello to Mussolini, 26 February 1932, loc. cit. note 41.

[44] Richard J. B. Bosworth, *Everyday Mussolinism: Friends, Family, Locality and Violence in Fascist Italy*, "Contemporary European History", 2005, n. 1, pp. 23–43, here p. 41.

[45] Communication from the Prefect of Naples to the Ministry of the Interior, 13 November 1942, loc. cit. note 41.

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except Lungo — were not involved in any openly anti-fascist activity. For the most part, their daily lives revolved around work and family. Their political ideas were not always well-defined or they were kept private, only being discussed within a very small circle of acquaintances. Ovidio Cammelli, for example, was not well known among his compatriots in Glasgow, and was described as a 'minor player, mild-mannered and incapable of violence'.[46] With regard to Michele Pacitti, Consul GianBattista Serra reported that he was 'very taken up with his business affairs and certainly not hostile to the regime', while Benedetto Cardillo died before the authorities could ascertain his 'dangerousness', although it is difficult to believe that he could have carried out significant political actions against the regime in the Italian Scottish context described above.[47] Emilio Ceragioli, who was included in the Central Political Register during the liberal era, was described as a 'frequent visitor to anarchists' in Italy, where he exercised 'considerable influence' over the workers of Terni. However, he had given up his activism after emigrating to Glasgow in 1908. The usual perseverance of the authorities in keeping personal files up to date confirmed his political disengagement in the 1920s and 1930s, with the only blemish being his subscription to *Pensiero e Volontà*.[48] The social and political apathy of the community had clearly diluted Ceragioli's capacity for action, but without changing his convictions; he was among the first to subscribe to the newspaper directed by Malatesta in May 1924, together with Pacitti and Lungo.[49]

Lungo is undoubtedly the most intriguing member of the Italian 'subversives' in Scotland. Not only was he the only one to publicly oppose the regime (if only to some extent and for a short period), but his personal history — as emerges from Italian and British archival sources — is also interesting. Originally from Santi Cosma e Damiano, the barber settled in Bellshill, a few kilometres from Glasgow, in 1910, after spending about six years with his sister in Cardiff.[50] We do not know when or how his political convictions took shape, but Bellshill was a hub for Lithuanian communist and socialist militants at the time,[51] and it is likely that this political fervour inspired Lungo to develop an interest in 'materialistic conceptions of history and the basis of

[46] Telespresso form from the ambassador in London to the Ministry of the Interior, 30 March 1931, in ACS, CPC, envelope 972, folder Cammelli Ovidio.

[47] Telespresso form from Consul Serra to the Ministry of the Interior, 9 June 1938, in ASMAE, Ambasciata Londra (1861-1950), envelope 1015, folder 1; ACS, CPC, envelope 1073, folder Cardillo Benedetto.

[48] ACS, CPC, envelope 1245, folder Ceragioli Emilio.

[49] *Abbonamenti*, "Pensiero e Volontà", 1 May 1924.

[50] British citizenship application by Lungo, 28 December 1948, in TNA, Home Office 405/33815.

[51] Murdoch Rodgers, *Political Developments in the Lithuanian Community in Scotland, c. 1890-1923*, "Immigrants & Minorities", 1983, n. 2, pp. 140–156.

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economics', fuelling his curiosity by reading Marx and other theorists.[52] He became a staunch supporter of *Pensiero e Volontà*, to which he may have been introduced by the long-time anarchist Ceragioli, and he managed to subscribe a small group of local friends and relatives to the newspaper, including Cammelli, Coia and another cousin, Silvestro Tipaldi. Furthermore, in April 1925, Lungo organised a small fundraising campaign to support Malatesta when the newspaper began to suffer increasingly heavy Fascist censorship. The Bellshill unit collected about 255 lire: Coia contributed ten shillings, Lungo and Ceragioli five each.[53] Other contributors (and subscribers) included Lungo's cousin Tipaldi and three people who, surprisingly, were never investigated or included in the Central Political Register. While the police showed great obstinacy in verifying the 'moral and political' conduct of suspects and those under investigation, digging deeply into their lives and cross-checking information with different authorities, they had serious shortcomings (at least in the Scottish case) that spared Tipaldi and a few others various woes.

Lungo began to express anti-fascist opinions in public and in the Scottish press, perhaps galvanised by his ability to attract a small following or inspired by the anarchist press (after the suppression of *Pensiero e Volontà* in 1926, he received the other two aforementioned newspapers, as did Ceragioli, Coia, Cammelli and Cardillo). Although archival and contemporary press sources do not directly document Lungo's actions or statements, his son and Tronchetti seem to confirm his editorial commitment. The former sent a letter to the British Alien Department, seeking his father's release from the internment camp on the Isle of Man in 1940, in which he wrote that Lungo 'was foolish enough to express his opinion against them [the Fascists] in the course of a correspondence in the Glasgow Evening papers'.[54] The latter, in a 1927 note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, justified the refusal to issue a passport to Lungo on the grounds of his anarchist ideas, which were 'markedly opposed to the regime', and his 'collaboration with the local press in writing articles against Italy'. This communication led to Lungo's inclusion in the Central Political Register and the border register.[55] In response to this affront, Lungo applied for British citizenship in 1930, but his application was rejected. The Scottish police were well aware of his 'revolutionary tendencies' and that 'till recently he was a frequent visitor at the Communist Rooms', providing assistance during the city elections.[56]

Unable to obtain British citizenship, Lungo again requested the renewal of his Italian passport for the aforementioned trip with his cousin Pietro Gagliardi

[52] Minutes of the British Committee's interrogation of Lungo, 18 October 1940, loc. cit. note 50.

[53] *Oblazioni*, "Pensiero e Volontà", 1 April 1925.

[54] Letter from Leo Lungo to the Home Office (Aliens Department), 19 July 1940, loc. cit. note 50.

[55] Telespresso form from Tronchetti to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 August 1927, in ACS, CPC, envelope 2881, folder Lungo Attilio.

[56] Report by the Airdrie Procurator Fiscal, 24 December 1930, loc. cit. note 50.

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in September 1931. This time, the consulate provided him with the document so that he would take the bait and the Italian police could arrest him upon his entry in Italy. Lungo sensed the danger and cancelled his trip. Concerned about being ostracised from his homeland for an extended period, he renounced his ideological positions several years later, reinventing himself as an admirer of Mussolini. In January 1937, the former anarchist expressed to Consul Serra 'his loyalty to Fascism and the Duce', obtaining 'liberation from the label of subversive' also thanks to the fact that — as the diplomat noted — removal from the Central Political Register could have allowed Lungo's children to enter 'the orbit of our militant youth'.[57] Contrary to the consul's hopes, Attilio was the only member of the Lungo family to gravitate towards the *fascio*, joining the *dopolavoro* club rather than the *fascio* itself, which suggests that his change of heart was mainly a strategy to return to Italy (in 1938 and 1939). He suffered the consequences of his (forced) volte-face after 10 June 1940, as his name appeared on lists obtained by the British secret services from the Glasgow *fascio*, leading to his arrest and internment. He was one of the few lucky ones to survive the sinking of the *Arandora Star*.

The mutual Machiavellianism between Lungo and Serra was just one example of the clash between 'subversives' and diplomatic representatives. Tronchetti was, once again, complicit in Coia's strategic change of political allegiance when it was discovered that he was a subscriber to *La Lotta Umana* in 1927. Initial investigations led the prefect of Campobasso to report in January 1928 that the merchant 'had always expressed Masonic ideas, to the extent that neither of his two children had been baptised or confirmed'.[58] The investigation was passed on to the consulate in Glasgow, with Tronchetti initially reporting Coia as a member of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, but then stating that 'he immediately joined the Fascist Trade Union of Italian Merchants, which I founded here in recent months'.[59] A second report from the prefect of Campobasso highlighted the fundraising for Malatesta in 1925, which further complicated Coia's position. He was described as being 'capable of deceiving people's good faith in order to achieve his goals'.[60] However, the prefect did not realise that Tronchetti was the same. In the ensuing exchange of information, the 'father of the Scottish *fasci*' contradicted both his previous statements and those of the Italian territorial authorities, emphatically stating that Coia 'had never belonged to Freemasonry and that the collection in aid of the anarchist Malatesta was completely unfounded'. Tronchetti concluded

[57] Telespresso form from Consul Serra to the Ministry of the Interior, 5 January 1937, loc. cit. note 55.

[58] Report by the Prefect of Campobasso to the Ministry of the Interior, 5 January 1928, in ACS, CPC, envelope 1396, folder Coia Agostino.

[59] Communication from Tronchetti to the Ministry of the Interior, 3 July 1928, loc. cit. note 58.

[60] Report by the Prefect of Campobasso to the Ministry of the Interior, 2 August 1928, loc. cit. note 58.

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that 'it is only right that he be removed from the register of subversives', especially since Coia had, in the meantime, been elected secretary of the Fascist Trade Union of Italian Merchants.[61] In October 1928, the prefect approved Coia's removal from the Central Political Register after accepting the evidence provided by the consular regent in Glasgow. Although Coia was still receiving anarchist publications by 1931, the authorities took an unusually lax approach and did not reopen the investigation.

Coia's case may be explained by a potential commercial compromise with Tronchetti, who allegedly guaranteed his immediate removal from the list of 'subversives'. In turn, Coia would either have taken over the leadership of the union on Tronchetti's behalf or bought supplies from the company run by Tronchetti, as many other Italian Scottish merchants were already doing.[62] Although there is no clear evidence of a similar agreement, it seems that their relationship was indeed driven by economic interests, given the men's character, the consular regent's contradictions and zeal, and Coia's appointment as head of the union — a role which, from a Fascist perspective, would perhaps have been better entrusted to a member of the *fascio* or, at the very least, to someone with an impeccable reputation. After all, Coia was the only subscriber to the anarchist press suited to this type of negotiation; the others were either barbers or relatively unknown figures in the community.

Devoted anti-fascists

Of all the Italians listed in Table 1, Vincenzo Pacitti was the only devoted anti-fascist. He never abandoned the cause, nor did he renounce it or recycle himself — in Italy or Scotland — as a supporter of Fascism. He paid a high price for this consistency, suffering the consequences of his political conviction in both countries. Born in Glasgow and raised between Scotland and Cassino, Pacitti was hired in 1919 as a brakesman for the Italian state railways. Between 1920 and 1922, he took part in 'all class strikes' and was almost inevitably dismissed in 1923, when the parliamentary guard changed after the March on Rome. In those same years, his wife Filomena gave birth to Lenin and Liliana Alba Rivoluzionaria ('revolutionary dawn'), names that attest to Vincenzo's clear political commitment. In 1924, Antonio was born, who would later become a renowned Italian Scottish artist. When Pacitti threatened a customs officer with a weapon in August 1928, he was arrested.[63] Although the offence

[61] Communication from Tronchetti to the Ministry of the Interior, 10 September 1928, loc. cit. note 58.

[62] Telespresso form from Consul Gavotti to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 August 1933, in ASMAE, Ambasciata Londra (1861-1950), envelope 805, folder 2.

[63] Report by the Prefect of Frosinone to the Ministry of the Interior, 23 March 1933, in ACS, CPC, envelope 3640, folder Pacitti Vincenzo.

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was pardoned, the political and social climate in Cassino worsened, forcing Vincenzo to retrace the journey he had made almost thirty years earlier. In an interview, his son later recalled that some local Fascists gave his father 24 hours to leave the city in the province of Frosinone.[64]

When he arrived in Glasgow in January 1929, Vincenzo immediately became involved in incidents that drew the attention of the Scottish police. He thus helped a certain Francesco Cavaliere to enter Britain illegally (a crime for which he spent 40 days in prison) and became a ‘fervent follower’ of a small local radical group, the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation. Following this turbulent start, the Pacitti family faced a long period of poverty and unemployment. Perhaps these precarious conditions and internal conflicts within the subversive group to which he belonged may explain why Vincenzo’s political activism seemed to wane in the first half of the 1930s. In a note sent to the consulate in Glasgow, the Scottish police chief emphasised that the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation ‘is now in a decaying condition and Pacitti was too timorous to expound his views openly’. He concluded by saying that, after his conviction, Pacitti had not been involved in any noteworthy actions.[65] However, as the ideological clash between Nazi-Fascism and communism intensified in the second half of the 1930s, Pacitti’s idealism was rekindled. During the Spanish Civil War, he helped political refugees and, at the outbreak of the Second World War, he volunteered as a firefighter in Glasgow. Antonio followed in his father’s footsteps and enlisted in the British Army.[66]

The causes of ‘silent anti-fascism’ in Scotland

An analysis of Italians in Scotland registered in the Central Political Register confirms a statement made by Consul Spanò. In 1932, he concluded a report on the Italian Scottish community and the activities of the *fasci* with the following words: ‘[T]he phenomenon of *fuoruscitismo* is absent here, and the danger of pathetic reprisals against Fascist action is therefore eliminated.’[67] However, this does not mean that immigrants did not dissent from Fascism and the regime. In her book *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice*, Kate Ferris discusses the dichotomy between consensus and dissensus, arguing that these two categories represent the extreme poles of the attitudinal and character spectrum of Italians under the dictatorship, which also includes forms of resistance such as indifference,

[64] www.antoniopacitti.co.uk/OtherPDFs/2015%20Antonio%20Pacitti.pdf (last accessed 31 October 2024).

[65] Letter from the Assistant Chief Constable to the Italian Consulate in Glasgow, loc. cit. note 63.

[66] *Antonio Pacitti obituary*, www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/sep/23/antonio-pacitti-obituary (last accessed 31 October 2024).

[67] Report on the Italian colony in Scotland by Consul Spanò, July 1932, loc. cit. note 8.

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distance and non-conformity.[68] With the exception of Lungo and Pacitti (and perhaps a few others who escaped the police and consular network and left no traces in the sources), these categories seem to apply to a minority of Italians in Glasgow and Edinburgh, cities where the *fasci* were active for almost twenty years. The testimonies of some Italian Scots, collected and analysed by Richard Wright and Wendy Ugolini, reveal that anti-fascist sentiment — driven by ideology, assimilation and concern — was primarily expressed within the family unit.[69] However, it probably also emerged among acquaintances and trusted relatives at the back of shops, perhaps during card games, as may have been the case with the subscribers to the anarchist press in Bellshill.

Dissent subsequently manifested itself outside the private sphere, through non-involvement in the activities of the *fasci* — both by adults and their offspring — and de-Italianisation, which involved acquiring British citizenship or anglicising one's name. We do not know how many engaged in these acts of passive resistance for ideological and political reasons. For example, the fact that some community members did not gravitate towards the *fasci* and the Casa d'Italia can also be explained by geographical and economic considerations, which were in fact the main causes of the weakness of the *fasci* in Aberdeen and Dundee. But even when quantitative data is available, as in the case of British naturalisations (albeit only from 1936 onwards, when the so-called blue books were introduced), the lack of diaries, memoirs or biographies makes it difficult to discern personal motivations. Thus, Alfredo Annovazzi, a dissident from the liberal period who obtained British citizenship in 1931, may have applied for it because he felt completely integrated into Scottish society or because of his socialist ideas (if he had any) in contrast to the Italian regime, or for both reasons. Others were driven by psychological and opportunistic reasons, particularly following the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. This provoked a series of hostile actions, including boycotts, riots and violence, against Italians by the Scottish population. As Consul Luppis pointed out, several 'deserters' — including members of the *fasci* — attempted to de-Italianise themselves in the hope that local hostility would cease.[70]

In view of all this, an important question arises: why did opposition to the regime and the *fasci* in Scotland not become organised? Why did it remain silent? Several factors may explain this unique case in the history of Italian anti-fascism abroad. As we can see in Table 1, the two main explanations are

[68] Kate Ferris, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929–40*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 9–10.

[69] Richard Wright, *Italian Fascism and the British-Italian Community, 1928-1943: Experience and Memory,* Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 2005, pp. 153–160; Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other': Italian Scottish Experience in World War II*, Manchester, Manchester United Press, 2011, pp. 76–79.

[70] Remigio Petrocelli, *The Impact of the Ethiopian War on Italian Immigrants in Scotland*, "Journal of Contemporary History", 2023, n. 3, pp. 468–487, here p. 478.

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based on the characteristics of the Italian Scottish population and Italian political migration to Great Britain. Regarding the first aspect, we must consider the same causes that negatively influenced the appeal of the *fasci* opened in various Scottish cities, with the exception of Glasgow and Edinburgh: urban dispersion, apathy and individualism, and employment patterns. The latter, in particular, prevented the emergence of those elements that became a breeding ground and glue for anti-fascist mobilisation in countries such as France and Belgium, where Italians were employed in politicised sectors: class struggles, exchange of ideas and connections. Furthermore, unlike the countries mentioned above, which saw a huge influx of exiles, only about three hundred Italians crossed Hadrian's Wall in the 1920s,[71] with Pacitti being the only documented case of political exile.

At the same time, the anti-fascist movement in Glasgow struggled to gain momentum partly because of the fragility of the London anti-fascist group that founded *Il Comento*, as well as their lack of activism — along with that of other prominent anti-fascists — in inciting and expanding the struggle against the regime among Italians outside the British capital. On 30 December 1922, just a few days after the opening of the Glasgow *fascio*, an anonymous correspondent of *Il Comento* published an article warning that the coercive methods employed by the Fascists in Italy would soon become apparent in the Scottish city. With regard to Tronchetti, the anonymous correspondent noted that 'it will be very easy for him to include new items in his imports: black shirts, clubs and castor oil'. They added that 'if it is not possible to administer purges and beatings with impunity to Italianise all those suspected of not being Italian enough, this could be achieved by mixing the tasty mixture into bread' — a reference to the company for which Tronchetti worked, which had started out as a bakery.[72] Over the following weeks, *Il Comento* published two more anonymous articles. This time, they were written by First World War veterans living in Glasgow, who claimed that not everyone in the community was ready to accept 'the infallible word and virtues of the Duce'. Moreover, they highlighted the hypocrisy of the central party in Rome, which entrusted the Glasgow branch to people who monopolised 'patriotic sentiment' despite not having fought in the war, and that they did so for personal gain. The 'proud display of Italian identity' served to obtain political and socio-economic advantages.[73]

In addition to suggesting a clear and strong opposition to Fascism in the early 1920s, the three articles show that *Il Comento* was also read by some Italians in Scotland, and that they had established contacts with the 'radical' group in London. However, this transnational network was not consolidated.

[71] T. Colpi, *Italians' Count in Scotland*, cit., p. 44.

[72] *Una novità per la colonia italiana di Glasgow*, "Il Comento", 30 December 1922.

[73] *Una novità anche in Scozia*, "Il Comento", 24 February 1923; *Lettere dalla Scozia*, "Il Comento", 10 March 1923.

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From the publication of the third article in March 1923 until *Il Comento* ceased circulation the following year, no other signs of verbal opposition to Fascism came from Scotland. It is unclear whether the anonymous contributors had been 'struck down' on the road towards Rome or whether other articles, sent but never published, were ignored because the London group preferred to focus on what was happening in the British capital — a logical choice given the greater number of Italians who could be won over to the cause — and in Italy. Whatever the reason, the 'subversives' in London, who could have led the anti-fascist struggle in Great Britain thanks to their greater cultural and intellectual preparation and experience of associative and radical mobilisation, failed to develop the spontaneous dissent of their compatriots living in Glasgow.

The weak ties between the few Italian opponents living in England and Scotland left no margin for manoeuvre for the Italian Scots, who could have organised themselves if encouraged by more significant support. A similar failure would have occurred even if the anti-fascist immigrants had sought support among the Scottish population or among politically active local circles. This was not only because the ideological ties and processes of politicisation that typically define working-class environments and shared socio-economic conditions were absent. Looking at the social fabric, until the Italian imperial war in Africa, large sections of Scottish society sympathised with Fascism, its leader and the local *fasci*, and therefore also with the Italian community. Between 1923 and 1935, religious and civil authorities — including Archbishop Donald Mackintosh and the mayors of Glasgow and Edinburgh — actively participated in many 'institutional' events organised by the *fasci*. These included the blessing of the pennants, the annual celebrations of the March on Rome with street parades and the inauguration of the Casa d'Italia.[74] These initiatives, as well as educational and markedly propagandistic ones, were also attended by elites of entrepreneurs and intellectuals from the Scoto-Italian Society. Born out of the ashes of the First World War, the latter was founded by a number of academics to promote knowledge of 'the Italian ally', and the *fasci* used it as a channel for Italian and Fascist cultural penetration in the two main Scottish cities.[75] The attitude of state, cultural and religious representatives in Scotland was thus in line with the general consensus with which much of the British public, press and politicians welcomed and accompanied Mussolini and Fascism for several years.[76]

[74] See, for example: *Il movimento fascista in Iscozia*, "L'Eco d'Italia", 6 February 1924; *Solenne Messa di Requiem*, "L'Eco d'Italia", 13 November 1926; *L'On. Fani in Iscozia*, "Notiziario del Fascio di Glasgow", November 1934; *City mansion as club*, "The Evening News", 16 May 1935.

[75] R. Petrocelli, *Importing Fascism*, cit., pp. 62–66.

[76] Richard J. B. Bosworth, *The British Press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini, 1920-34*, "Journal of Contemporary History", 1970, n. 2, pp. 163–182; Aldo Berselli, *L'opinione pubblica inglese e l'avvento del Fascismo (1919-1925)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 1971; Claudia Baldoli,

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As for the Scottish radical parties and groups, which were very active in terms of trade unionism and class struggle in the country’s major industrial centres, especially after the Bolshevik Revolution,[77] they remained indifferent to Italian Fascism — or, rather, to the local *fasci*. Italian Fascists in Scotland did not get involved in local political issues, and the *fasci* were essentially invisible, apart from a few public ceremonies characterised by Fascist rituals and symbols (e.g. parades, uniforms, flags, Roman salutes, etc.), carrying out their activities almost secretly. For these reasons, local socialist and communist groups did not perceive the Italian blackshirts as a threat. Perhaps they considered them ‘an eccentric and amateurish pressure group whose public activities were largely innocuous’, much like the British Fascists, a small group of British citizens inspired by Mussolini’s party.[78] The ‘occult Fascism’ of the Italians was probably a crucial factor in the absence of hostility from anti-fascists and indigenous radical groups. This seems to be confirmed by the different treatment they gave to Oswald Mosley’s much more conspicuous British Union of Fascists (BUF) in the 1930s. The rise of the BUF, which grew from a few thousand members to around fifty thousand in less than two years, and its vehement ultra-nationalist and anti-Semitic campaigns — coupled with the growing Nazi threat in Europe — triggered anti-fascist mobilisations across Britain. In Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and other smaller cities, demonstrations by British Fascists often ended in riots, protests and physical clashes.[79]

It is no surprise that the only explicit criticism of Italian Fascists since the days of *Il Comento* and Lungo was made amid this heated climate. In May 1934, a certain ‘Glasgovian’ complained about the blackshirts gathered in Glasgow’s central square to mark the anniversary of Italy’s entry into the First World War.

> Apart from the fact that they should make those militaristic demonstrations in their own country where Mussolini is a dictator, why should the British public witness apathetically those political demonstrations intended to subvert our people’s orderly mentality? Is it not enough for the Italian Fascisti to live in this country undisturbed, making money, and going back someday to Italy with their pockets filled?[80]

This suggests that public demonstrations by Italian Fascists attracted more attention than before, when there was a general indifference among the Scottish public. This is because of changes in the British and European polit-

Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain’s Italians in the 1930s, Oxford, Berg, 2003, pp. 97–119.

[77] William Kenefick, *Red Scotland!: The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left, C. 1872-1932*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

[78] Nigel Copsey, *Anti-fascism in Britain*, London, Macmillan Press, 2000, p. 7.

[79] Gavin Bowd, *Fascist Scotland: Caledonia and the Far Right*, Edinburgh, Birlinn, 2013, pp. 11–80.

[80] *Italian political propaganda*, “The Evening Times”, 17 May 1934.

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ical context. The war in Ethiopia highlighted the aggressive militarism of Fascist Italy, inadvertently making the Italian minority more visible and exposing its members, as mentioned, to boycotts and violence. Possibly intimidated by the prospect of becoming the target of local anti-fascist protests, as had happened with members of the BUF, the Italian Fascists shifted their focus from 'occult Fascism' to 'isolationism'. Hence, from 1935 onwards, they avoided all public political events, such as the rally criticised by the 'Glasgovian' or the usual annual parades to celebrate the March on Rome. When events such as memorial services for the fallen of the First World War could not be avoided, they switched to 'incognito Fascism', with uniforms and party symbols being banned from the BUF.[81]

Although the Scottish anti-fascists achieved — albeit indirectly — a small success, this did not strengthen opposition to Fascism within the Italian enclave. The most opportune moment to voice their opposition to Mussolini, the regime and the Fascists did not turn out to be as significant as it could have been. If we leave aside the 'deserters', the pride generated by the war and conquest of Ethiopia, as well as concerns about the hostile climate surrounding the Italian ethnic minority, played a decisive role in persuading many to join the *fasci* and frequent the Casa d'Italia.[82] Opponents in the community, who had developed only passive resistance measures, were therefore forced to remain silent observers.

Conclusion

Before Mussolini came to power in 1922, Fascism and its local branches strongly benefited from the peculiarities of the Italian population in Scotland, that is, the disintegration of the social and community fabric and the lack of a politicised core. With the initial support of both Carlo Tronchetti and the scrupulous organisational machine directed from Rome, the regime established and controlled the cultural, political, religious and recreational aspects of Italian immigrants' community life. This process resulted in even higher levels of participation in Glasgow and Edinburgh than in London, where the *fascio* could count on hierarchical and representative figures such as Dino Grandi and Guglielmo Marconi, and on the financial contribution of important Italian companies. Furthermore, Fascism penetrated the private lives of many Italian Scottish families. For example, over a hundred children were given names evoking the Fascist 'new Italy' (e.g. Benito, Italia, Romano,

[81] Circular from the secretary of the Glasgow *fascio*, 3 November 1937, in ASMAE, Ambasciata Londra (1861-1950), envelope 1001, folder 1.

[82] Report by the British secret services to the Home Office, 28 June 1937, in TNA, Home Office 144/21079.

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Adua, etc). Even small business owners, who had previously been very prudent with their capital, were so captivated by the 'new Italy' propaganda that they deposited (and subsequently lost) the 'fruits of a lifetime' in the Italian Bank founded in Glasgow in the late 1920s by Mario Olivieri,[83] a war veteran who had arrived there from London in 1925 and immediately rose to become one of the leaders of the *fasci*. Hence, the regime not only dominated the public life of the community, but also partially realised one of the cornerstones of the totalitarian project, aimed at merging and controlling the public and private spheres of Italians in Italy and abroad.

While there were many internal and external convergent factors that contributed to the Fascist monopoly in Scotland, even breaking down the barriers of parochialism, individualism and urban dispersion to some degree, the same cannot be said for the anti-fascist cause. The analysis of the files in the Central Political Register and the lack of overt anti-fascist opposition demonstrates that Italian Scottish dissent was of a 'silent' nature. Few Italians resorted to exile or mobilised local anti-fascists and transnational opposition networks, which could have helped to cultivate and openly express anti-fascist ideals; when they did act, it was in a disorganised manner. Additionally, they risked being investigated and marginalised by Italy or by the Italian Scottish community itself. The cases of Buonaccorsi, Lungo and Renucci, for example, did not go unnoticed and may have dissuaded some from publicly opposing the regime and the *fasci*, while pushing others to embrace Fascist conformism. As a result, there was a significant imbalance of forces in the field: on the one hand, a Fascist majority that was unopposed and largely accepted by the host society, at least until 1935; on the other, a minority of political opponents who failed to overcome the apathy and passivity they had inherited from the pre-Fascist period or were sucked back into it, as in the case of Ceragioli and Vincenzo Pacitti.

This in-depth study of 16 'subversives' living in Scotland has shed light — in a unique and innovative way — on a neglected aspect of the dualism between Fascism and anti-fascism in Britain and its impact on one of the country's most important Italian communities. Specifically, it has highlighted the peculiarity of Italian anti-fascism in Scotland, as well as some typical aspects of the anti-fascist movement abroad and in Italy: the modus operandi of the authorities; denunciation for revenge and opportunism; the use of expedients to overturn political decisions; the transition to the opposite camp; and registration in the Central Political Register and the border register as a result of simply receiving newspapers opposed to the regime and engaging with people already known to the police. At the same time, analysis of the files on the lowest strata of emigrants (anti-fascist and non-anti-fascist) has revealed specific social and power dynamics, exposing the limitations of the Fascist

[83] Joe Pieri, *The Scots-Italians: Recollections of an Immigrant*, Edinburgh, Mercat Press, 2005, pp. 84–85.

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totalitarian system and its investigative apparatus. Even minor acts of negligence or the personal motivations of those involved in the chain of events linking the centre to the periphery were enough to result in Italian immigrants being improperly (and sometimes permanently) labelled as ‘subversive’. In other cases, this allowed the guilty — from a Fascist perspective — to be absolved or, in some cases, prevented from being caught by the police in the first place.

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