

Made by Italo-Scots. The Italian Factor in Scotland Today
Scottish Parliament 16 April 2013

Keynote address by Dr Terri Colpi

Thank you, Linda. Your Grace, Console Generale, distinguished panel members, Members of the Scottish Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

It is an honour to be here: such an important occasion in the history of the Italian connection with Scotland. I would like to thank Professor Pedriali for her commitment to the *Italian factor*¹ and Linda Fabiani for hosting us here at the Scottish Parliament. Tonight is a real milestone; the first time so many distinguished Scots Italians, from diverse backgrounds, have come together in such a forum to bear testimony to the past, present and future. I am delighted to support and celebrate such a gathering.

In the course of the evening, perspectives and insights will emerge on what it means to be Scots Italian? Is a Scots Italian different from an Italian Scot, an Italo Scot? Which is the core identity?² Do we acknowledge a community or, is the Italian *collettività* - collectivity – a better word? What drives and defines us today and how has that changed over time?

Our history spans in excess of 150 years, and like all diaspora presents a complex picture. There is fluidity and dynamism in the relationships between us as individuals, between us and Italy, between us and Scotland, all of which have moulded identity both at the individual and the community level. But rather like Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle at the molecular level, and Einstein's macro Relativity equation, it is difficult to determine a multi disciplinary Unified Field Theory which satisfactorily accounts for the whole, not only past but present as well. Almost

¹Colpi, T. 1991. *The Italian Factor: The Italian Community in Great Britain*. Mainstream, Edinburgh. Combining research on the Italian communities of Scotland, England and Wales, the title has become a byword for the Italian element in British society.

² In Britain, when speaking in English, most people of Italian origin tend to think of and describe themselves as Italians first, using their British location almost as an adjective, as secondary: for example as, Scots Italian/s or Scottish Italian/s; Glasgow Italian/s; English or Anglo Italian/s; London Italian/s; Bedford Italian/s; Welsh Italian/s etc. The core identity from this point of view, is Italian. This contrasts with the United States where people are not American Italians but Italian Americans, where the core identity becomes American. In Italian language however, we become Italian Scots - italo-scozzesi or italo-inglesi, italo-gallesi, and italo-americani; here the identity balance is more equal with the use of the hyphen. Some people do describe themselves as Italo Scot or Italian Scot, however, and this reflects perhaps a stronger overall Scottish identity but with an Italian aspect.

every individual has a story to tell and often that personal or family narrative will contradict the pattern, and any conclusions depend very much on the viewpoint of the researcher as to what is important or relevant. As we will no doubt hear this evening, no one size fits all and I look forward to sharing our various views and experiences.

As a student of the Italian connection throughout Britain, I have long been aware of unique aspects to the Scottish *Italian factor*. Geographical origins in Italy were relatively few in the ‘old’ community³. Barga (Lu) and Picinisco (Fr) have become household names, and not just amongst Italians. Historically, this ensured some distinct characteristics, with strong loyalty to roots, still relevant today amongst tight-knit extended families and village groups. Also, the economic structure of the Italians, built on the family businesses innovating with ice cream, fish and chips and cafés, became a more prominent feature in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain⁴.

The main phase of immigration was from the 1880s to 1920. The Italian population grew rapidly, and at that time Scotland held 20 per cent of the UK total⁵. By the 1920s and 30s, although concentrated in the cities, there was hardly a small town which did not host at least one Italian family, often where there were no other immigrants. The Italians were highly visible, trading on their ethnicity, with economic self-sufficiency, but also a separateness. The road to the stability of the inter-war years was not without obstacles and in an excellent book by Nicoletta Franchi⁶, here tonight from Italy, we learn in detail the difficulty encountered in establishing that niche. In the early 1900s, there was what she calls “*una battaglia*”, a battle, between the Italians and the local civil and religious authorities over opening hours and, in particular, Sunday trading.

The 1920s and 30s were ‘golden era’ for many Italians⁷, but there was a duality to life – economic firmness yet marginalisation and discrimination, often combined with anti-catholic prejudice⁸, while the rise of fascism became an enveloping trend, giving a national identity for the first time⁹.

³ Colpi, T. 1985. The Italian Migration to Scotland: Fact, Fiction and the Future. In (ed) Dutto, M. The Italians in Scotland: their Language and their Culture. Italian Consulate General, Edinburgh. pp 27-46.

⁴ Colpi, T. 1991. pp 57-62.

⁵ Colpi, T. 1991. p 48, p72.

⁶ Franchi, N. 2012. La Via della Scozia. L’Emigrazione Barghigiana e Lucchese a Glasgow tra Ottocento e Novecento. Fondazione Paolo Cresci per la Storia dell’Emigrazione Italiana, Lucca.

⁷ Colpi, T. 1991. Italians Forward. A Visual History of the Italian Community in Great Britain. Mainstream, Edinburgh. pp 50-89.

⁸ Colpi, T. 1993. The Scottish Italian Community: Senza un Campanile. The Innes Review. XLIV. n.2. pp 153-167.

⁹ Sponza, L. 2000. Divided Loyalties. Italians in Britain During the Second World War. Lang, Bern. pp 14-15, pp 35-40.

The Second World War formed a watershed in our history and in our relationship with Scotland¹⁰. It divided the period of immigration, settlement and stability from the post war period of economic re-structuring and cultural rebuilding. The experience of the War years defined the ethnic memory of the old generations, virtually all of whom are gone now. When I published my books in 1991, it was the first time that aspects of the Italian account had appeared in print and I had the privilege of interviewing all 23 of the living survivors of the *Arandora Star*¹¹, as well as many families who had lost members and scores of men and women of the interned generations. The effect of the War on the psyche of the old community became deeply internalised; most people who had experienced the War as adults or had grown up during those years as children, found it difficult to talk about¹². I believe it was my awareness as I grew up, of concealed secrets, of hidden pain and of something unspoken, that both fuelled my curiosity and inspired my mission to research the history of the Italians not only in Scotland but in the rest of Britain too. A recent book, *Arandora Star*, by Maria Serena Balastracci¹³ published in 2008, has given an insightful documentation of wartime experiences and events and together with the book by Lucio Sponza, *Divided Loyalties*¹⁴, we now have factual accounts presented from the Italian point of view. These chronicles, and in particular, the *Arandora Star* Monument in Glasgow, have helped soothe the collective memory of the *Arandora* tragedy and given it historical recognition¹⁵. I believe it is fair to say that many of these generations, including those of Italian parentage who served in the British forces, never fully recovered an Italian identity outside the family and tight-knit Scottish Italian sphere and that many people remained displaced between two cultures. After the war it took at least a decade to repair the economic structure of the Italian community and perhaps two or more to shake off 'enemy alien' status allowing an outward-facing, confident sense of self to re-emerge again¹⁶.

¹⁰ Colpi, T. 1993. The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community. In (eds) Ceserani, D and Kushner, T. *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*. Frank Cass & Co., London. pp 167-187.

¹¹ I also interviewed *Arandora Star* survivors in Italy, several of whom were still alive in 1990. At the time of writing this paper, Rando Bertoia, now aged 93, is the only living survivor of the *Arandora Star*. Born in Montereale (Pn) Rando Bertoia lives with his wife, also from Montereale, in Glasgow. His personal account of the *Arandora Star* and internment can be read in Ceserani, D and Kushner T. 1993. pp 229-235.

¹² Colpi, T. 1991. p 99-100.

¹³ Balastracci, MS. 2008. *Arandora Star*. Monte Università Parma Editore, Parma.

¹⁴ Sponza, L. 2000.

¹⁵ Interest has steadily grown in the *Arandora Star* over the last twenty years and conference papers and meetings on the subject have been numerous, both in Britain and in Italy. In 2010 a documentary film, *SOS Arandora Star*, by Canadian Italian Anna Chiappa and James Blondeau was released showing, for the first time, footage of survivors being rescued by the Canadian destroyer, the *St. Laurent*. KeyHart Productions.

¹⁶ No research has been conducted on anti-Italian sentiment in Scotland after the war, but Garigue, P. and Firth, R. found evidence of discrimination against Italians in London in the 1950s. Garigue, P. and Firth, P. 1956. *Two Studies in Kinship in London*. Athlone Press, London.

Scotland did not receive significant numbers of Italian immigrants in the post war era, and by the 1970s her proportion of the national total of people born in Italy had dropped to five per cent¹⁷. Those who did arrive were again mostly recruited through ‘chain migration’ coming from the old origins to work in the traditional sector. These immigrants, plus Italian Prisoners of War who decided to remain in Scotland after the War, did, however, inject new blood and new ideas from Italy. The dawn of the *pizzeria*, the *trattoria* and the coffee bar at this time strengthened the catering link. This trend contrasts with England and Wales where a new type of migrant, predominantly from the deep south of Italy, became industrial workers, created entirely ‘new’ communities in towns like Bedford and Peterborough where no Italians had previously settled¹⁸. It also contrasts with the other ‘old’ established Italian communities – London and Manchester – which also absorbed the new type of immigrants¹⁹. In Scotland then, there was a more organic growth, the catering connection evolved without internal competition, and importantly, the younger Italian generations more readily integrated into Scottish society entering the professions and public life.

Britain joined the EU in 1973 and began to identify more with Europe and her European minorities. It was in the late 1970s that the first studies of the Italian communities in England and Scotland began to emerge²⁰. The ‘new’ Italian communities in England were highly visible; in Bedford, for example, Italians formed ten per cent of the population. My own sense of growing up in Scotland at this time was that being of Italian origin was not entirely positive; this was not yet the moment to be outwardly proud of Italianness again. There was, however, still the spirit of being part of an Italian community and there were many activities, if one chose to attend²¹. Almost all Italians of my generation received a university education, many studying Italian language. Some then entered family businesses, but the movement into mainstream life became the norm and numerous individuals have now reached distinguished positions. Pursuing professional careers did not necessarily mean losing touch with Italian heritage and I hope we will

¹⁷ Colpi, T. 1991. p135. No figure is available to include second and third generation Italians for this time, but by the 1980s, the overall size of Scottish Italian community, including British born people, was around ten per cent of the national total. M.A.E. 1984. *Aspetti e Problemi dell’Emigrazione Italiana all’Estero*.

¹⁸ Colpi, T. 1993. *Origins and Campanilismo in Bedford’s Italian Community*. In (eds) Sponza, L. and Tosi, A. *A Century of Italian Emigration to Britain*. *The Italianist*. n.13. pp 59-77.

¹⁹ Colpi, T. 1991. pp 134-137, pp 158-161.

²⁰ Marin, U. 1975. *Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. Centro Studi Emigrazione, Roma. Colpi, T. 1979. *The Italian Community in Glasgow with Special Reference to Spatial Development*. *Association of Teachers of Italian*. n.29. pp 62-75. Wilkin, A. 1979. *Origins and Destinations of the early Italo-Scots*. *Association of Teachers of Italian*. n.29. pp 52-61. King, R. 1978. *Work and Residence Patterns of Italian Immigration in Great Britain*. *International Migration*. 16 (2). pp 74-82. Palmer, R. 1978. *The Italians: Patterns of Migration to London*. In: Watson, J. (ed) *Between Two Cultures. Migration and Minorities in Britain*. Blackwell, Oxford. pp 242-268.

²¹ The Casa d’Italia in Glasgow did not close until 1989, and events such as the annual *scampagnata*, picnic, to Alva in Fife were still popular.

hear more of this later. Nevertheless, inter-marriage with native Scots and Irish people was growing, and inevitably the boundaries of what it meant to be Italian, were changing.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s Italian political philosophy was also changing with regard to her ex-patriots. They were no longer called *emigranti*, emigrants, but *italiani all'estero*, Italians abroad. From 1984 Italians abroad in Europe have been able to vote for Italian delegates to the European parliament. Also, in 1986 elections were organised globally via the consular network for Italians abroad to elect local committees²². This gave legitimacy to leaders along with funding to carry out works for community building initiatives. Diplomatic and consular presence in Britain grew at this time and became more committed, for example, to Italian language teaching, the Italian authorities recognising that retention and knowledge of language and culture are essential to maintenance of ethnic identity²³. Here in Edinburgh the Italian Institute of Culture was expanded and gained autonomy from London. Associative life, largely based on the old regional loyalties, but not exclusively, was encouraged and grew stronger again as more people stepped outside the family circle to identify themselves as collectively 'Italian'. Italian communities across Britain, including Scotland, were again connected to Italy and *italianità*, italianness, was revitalising.

It became easier to embrace an Italian identity, leaping psychologically beyond origins and history, although by no means abandoning them, to connect with modern Italy; the Italy of design, of fashion, of the arts and of high culture. This was however a transition that many of the older generations, less educated, burdened with wartime memories, more tied to the old ways, were often unable to make. But for those 3rd generation members born and educated in Scotland, a new identity was emerging, influenced not only by roots but also by modern Italy and by Scotland.

A dual identity crystallised, particularly evident in Scotland, perhaps due to the *Scottish factor*? The Scots Italian or Italian Scot became recognisable as a fully-fledged persona – proudly a hybrid - successfully encompassing characteristics of both cultures. Some would say the best of both. Neither Italian nor Scottish, perhaps not totally at home in either culture, they became a self-proclaimed and outward-looking entity. Enough time had elapsed to encapsulate a duality, tolerated and approved by both Italy and Scotland. For this generation then, the transition from emigrant and from immigrant status to a new type of Italian and a new type of Scot became possible.

²² *Co.Em.It.* and later *Com.It.Es.* – Committees of Italians Abroad.

²³ Tosi, A. 1991. *L'Italiano d'Oltremare*. La Lingua delle Comunità Italiane nei Paesi Anglofoni. Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, Firenze. Tassello, G. 1996. *Il Convegno sull'Insegnamento e Diffusione della Lingua e Cultura Italiana nel Mondo*. *Altrel'Italia*. n. 14. Pp 61-68.

Scots Italians have become especially well represented in the arts, visual, performing and literary, gaining recognition nationally and some internationally. Their contribution has been outstanding²⁴. It has been the language of art, which perhaps more than any other, has had the ability to transcend the complexities of life and communicate directly, bridging gaps between the Italian community, Italy, past and present, and the Scottish people. Artists have often made reference to their origins, for example, Ann Marie Di Mambro's acclaimed play *Tally's Blood*²⁵. I think the importance of this group to collective identity is significant, and I look forward to hearing more from our panel. The Italian community is proud of these successes and realise this exposure strengthens not only our contribution to Scottish society but also our identity as Scots Italians. I believe the Scottish people too are proud of these successes, fully aware of the enrichment. It may be Art in a cold climate, as I have heard it described²⁶, but it is Scotland that has enabled Italian creativity to flourish.

The 1990s witnessed the final ideological step by the Italian government. From 1995 Italians resident abroad have had postal votes to elect their own delegates within the Italian national electoral system. But not only Italians born in Italy, descendants too. My daughter for example, who is 4th generation, received her voting papers in February 2013. With this more flexible definition of what it is to be Italian, we are being encouraged to nurture not only a feeling of belonging to Italy, but to be active participants. And Italy has been kind to us. Some of us here tonight have received honours from the Italian government²⁷. Today, as Italy struggles to absorb some 3-4 million non-European immigrants, the powerful message to Italians is that assimilation abroad is not desirable since we would then be lost to the greater Italy and unable to spread and diffuse Italian culture. The notion of *altreitalie*, other Italys, is something now well recognised in Italy and is a font of much academic research.²⁸

Alongside all this, collaborations and mutual recognition between Scotland and the Italian community have never been greater. In 1991 "The Italian Scots" exhibition at the National Library in Edinburgh, the first of its kind by a major Scottish institution, acknowledged our

²⁴To name just a few: Edoardo Paolozzi, sculptor; Alberto Morrocco, artist; Peter Capaldi, actor; Tom Conti, actor; Nicola Benedetti, violinist; Paolo Nutini, pop music artist; Armando Iannucci, satirical writer; Ann Marie Di Mambro, playwright.

²⁵ Di Mambro, Ann Marie. 1989. Play for stage commissioned by the Traverse Theatre. Edinburgh.

²⁶ Richard Demarco. Co-founder of the Traverse Theatre, with over 50 years of contributions to the Edinburgh Festival.

²⁷ The Italian government has been diligent through its consular system in recognising and conferring civil honours on those who have made contributions to Italian cultural life abroad.

²⁸ The work of Torino based Centro Altreitalie, Portale di Studi sulle Migrazioni Italiane, has been significant in this regard collating and promoting studies on aspects of Italian communities from around the world.

achievements and strengths and addressed the wartime experience²⁹. Cultural exchanges and official visits, both ways, are now frequent and bilateral engagements have become common. To cite just a few examples: the twinning of Glasgow and Torino in 2003; the attendance at the 150th anniversary celebrations of Italy in 2011 by Glasgow's Lord Provost; the people of the Hebridean Isle of Colonsay, who recovered and buried bodies from the Arandora Star, being made free citizens of Borgotaro (Pr); the summer visits of Scottish pipe bands to Barga.

These initiatives reached a highpoint in 2011 when Archbishop Mario Conti's vision, the beautiful Italian Garden and Arandora Star Monument in Glasgow at St Andrew's Cathedral was realised, thanks to substantial support from the Scottish Italian community. His initiative was not only well received but whole-heartedly endorsed by Scotland. Alec Salmond, First Minister, who opened the garden, said

“.....this is a magnificent tribute to those who tragically lost their lives aboard the Arandora Star and to the part the Scots Italian community plays in the rich tartan fabric of our nation”³⁰.

That day was an historic and symbolic moment on both sides, for Italians and Scots alike.

There are 12,400 registered Italians in Scotland today³¹, with perhaps 30,000 or more of Italian origin. There is an awareness that the Italian collectivity has changed; that it continues to change. For example, more recent days have seen a small but active immigration of Italian academics and other professionals as well as young people seeking jobs which the Italian economy cannot offer. It is difficult to say how much interaction there is between all the different segments, but they are certainly aware of each other and the very fact representatives of all elements of the Italian community are here tonight, suggests there is an *Italian factor* that binds us.

I believe it is a deep-rooted attachment to Italy blended together with a love of Scotland which unites us. I also believe that the *Scottish factor* is a powerful force; it is stronger than the English or the Welsh component parts of the British *Italian factor*. Scots Italians have a bigger identity and a higher profile.

²⁹ The Italian Scots: A Century of the Italian Community in Scotland, was organised by the late Alison Harvey Wood, Librarian at the National Library of Scotland and ran from July to the end of October in 1991.

³⁰ BBC News Glasgow and West Scotland, 16 May 2011.

³¹ People registered on A.I.R.E. – Anagrafe degli Italiani Residenti all'Estero, Register of Italians Resident Abroad. 2013. Italian Consulate General, Edinburgh.

Tonight's meeting represents an intellectual summit of engagement. There is a powerful and positive current at work linking Italian activity, and this is accompanied by full recognition and support of Scottish authorities and institutions. Our very presence here this evening in the Scottish Parliament testifies to this. By preserving and making relevant our history and connecting with the young generations in a dynamic way, we have a way forward that will endure. The future is bright for the *Italian factor* in Scotland - and for Scotland!

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