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The Impact of the Ethiopian War on Italian Immigrants in Scotland

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Abstract

While Fascist Italy was fighting its colonial war in Ethiopia in 1935–6, a ‘parallel war’ was fought by Italian fascist branches abroad to retain the allegiance of the Italian immigrant communities and win their support. Drawing extensively on original Italian archival documents and the contemporary press, this article analyses how the invasion of Ethiopia affected the small Italian diaspora in Scotland. The propaganda used by Fascist Italy to justify the war and counteract British diplomatic hostility, as well as the central role of Italian fascists in Scotland, contributed to consolidating the national identity of a large number of Italian immigrants and links with their country of origin. This article will also explore how the Abyssinian war paved the way for the portrayal of the members of local fascist branches (and those who were not) as ‘enemies within’ by the British government and many sectors of the host society.

Keywords

Ethiopian war, fasci all'estero, fascism, Italians in scotland, propaganda

Fascist Italy's campaign in Ethiopia (or Abyssinia as it was also previously known) in October 1935 marked a watershed both in international politics and Italian domestic matters. Historians have long debated the reasons behind the Italian aggression, but they agree that despite this and Italy's subsequent international isolation Mussolini reached the apex of his popularity among the Italian population at

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this time.¹ Likewise, support for the ‘national cause’ was strong and widespread, especially after the ‘siege’ by the League of Nations. In addition to the Fascists, with their imperialist and nationalist aspirations, even non-Fascist elements in Italy such as the royal family, the Catholic Church (which officially remained neutral) and many anti-Fascists, such as Benedetto Croce, Nicola Bombacci and others, endorsed the regime and the patriotic campaign it launched following the application of economic sanctions (18 November 1935). On 18 December 1935, irrespective of Fascists’ and non-Fascists’ ideological and profit motivations (promises of land, new markets and the opportunity for a modern religious crusade), Italians rallied to the nation en masse. That day, the *Giornata della Fede* – which could be translated both as the Day of Faith and Day of the Wedding Ring – was celebrated in city squares throughout Italy, where thousands of Italians donated their wedding rings and gold to support the Fatherland, and represented the ‘highest unity of sentiments, almost a mystic fusion, between the regime and the Italians’, as Emilio Gentile noted.²

Similarly, Italian emigrants soon mobilised for their country of origin by providing financial contributions or enlisting in the legion of Italian volunteers abroad created for the occasion.³ However, with the war, many foreign governments began to suspect that members of the Italian Fascist branches abroad (*fasci*), one of the main instruments used by the totalitarian regime to retain the allegiance of the Italian masses overseas, could act as ‘fifth columns’ if the Ethiopian crisis erupted into a larger conflict. As a result, the secret services of some countries, such as Britain and the United States, began to scrutinise and document Italian Fascist members. Furthermore, the strong opposition to Italy’s invasion and calls for sanctions by media, political, and religious circles contributed to generating and consolidating anti-Italian sentiments across many sectors of the host societies. These events also occurred in Scotland. This article will analyse how the Ethiopian war affected the small Italian diaspora in that country through the use of unpublished Italian and British archival material and the contemporary press. It will also investigate the roles of the conflict and the *fasci* as vectors of community-building and Italian national identity.

Italian immigrants arrived in large numbers in Scotland in the decade 1891–1901 when their presence increased from 749 people to 4051 (4594 in 1911). These newcomers came mainly from Barga (Tuscany) and Picinisco (nowadays in Lazio) and mostly settled in Glasgow (around 2000) and Edinburgh (600). By the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, they had achieved economic independence: the majority of them were shopkeepers involved in family-run businesses in the food and catering industry (fish and chip shops, confectioners, restaurants) while others were still self-employed

1. See, for instance: R. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso 1929–1936* (Turin 1974), 626; P. Terhoeven, *Oro alla patria. Donne, guerra e propaganda nella giornata della Fede fascista* (Bologna 2006), 27; R. J. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London 2010), 256–7; M. Palmieri, *L’ora solenne. Gli italiani e la guerra d’Etiopia* (Milan 2015), 42–7.

2. E. Gentile, *Il culto del littorio* (Rome 1993), 174.

3. See, for instance: M. Pretelli, *Il fascismo e gli italiani all’estero* (Bologna 2010), 69–70; P. Pinna, *Migranti italiani tra fascismo e antifascismo* (Bologna 2012), 205; J. F. Bertonha, *La legione Parini. Gli italiani all’estero e la Guerra d’Etiopia (1935–1936)* (Milan 2018).

but as barbers and craftsmen.⁴ However, this financial stability was not accompanied by a reinforcement of community links and national identity as these immigrants were highly individualistic and *campanilisti* (parochialist). This is evidenced by the fact that, in perhaps the only case among Italian immigrant minorities, they did not have any ethnic lay or religious associations or an Italian school until 1922, and the two Italian newspapers published in Glasgow had a very short life.⁵ The weak sense of community and national sentiments were also caused by the lack of Italian diplomats (the first Consul of Italian origin arrived in Scotland only in 1909), ethnic priests and ‘Little Italy’ neighbourhoods.

In the interwar years, the Italian diaspora grew both numerically – 6000 Italians (around 2600 Italian born and the rest second generation Italians) by the 1930s of whom approximately 300 had arrived after 1918 – and economically: Terri Colpi refer to the period as a ‘golden era’ for the Italian shopkeepers who dominated the food sector.⁶ Furthermore, unlike before, parallel to this development came a forging of social and national cohesion thanks to the recreational and political activities carried out by the *fasci* as well as by the Italian schools they founded.⁷ The *Casa d’Italia* (House of Italy), promoted by the Italian Consul Ferruccio Luppis and the Glasgow *fascio* and opened in May 1935 in Glasgow as a result of financial contributions by hundreds of Italians,⁸ is indeed key evidence of the creation of a shared community feeling. But another significant boost for the reduction of *campanilismo* and the growth of national belonging arrived a few months later with the Ethiopian war. During the second half of 1935 and 1936, the *fasci* in Scotland fought their ‘parallel war’ by circulating and distributing propaganda material, arranging film screenings, organising meetings to counter British pro-Ethiopian stances and rallying the Italian diaspora to Italy and Mussolini. In that period (and the following years), the *fasci* increased their membership, even if not only, as will be seen, for ideological reasons, and Italians throughout the country demonstrated their national consciousness by collecting money and gold. For the Fascist regime, these results were indeed successful considering the widespread weak sense of belonging in the pre-Fascist era.

Nevertheless, the Ethiopian war also brought some repercussions: it hardened Italophobia among locals and, as already noted, contributed to the construction of the image of *fasci* members, as well as non-members, as ‘enemies within’ by the British secret services (MI5). Even before 1935, Italians were victims of some prejudices in Scotland. For instance, the continuous reports to the authorities (mainly in the 1900s) of ‘offensive odours’ coming from fish and chip shops fuelled the cliché of the ‘dirty’

4. T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor: The Italian Community in Great Britain* (Edinburgh 1991), 47–84.

5. The ethnic newspapers were *La Scozia* and *La Riscossa Latina*. The former was published between January and December 1908 while the latter circulated intermittently from January 1909 until September of the same year.

6. T. Colpi, *Italians’ Count in Scotland: The 1933 Census, Recording History* (London 2015), 127.

7. R. Petrocelli, ‘Citadels of Spiritual Resistance’: the Italian schools in Scotland, 1924–1940’, *Modern Italy*, 27, 3 (2022), 11.

8. Booklet ‘La Casa d’Italia a Glasgow’, Archivio Storico Ministero Affari Esteri [thereafter ASMAE], Ambasciata Londra (1861–1950) [thereafter AL], b. 1015, f. 2.

Italians, common in nineteenth-century Britain, among some Scots.⁹ Italian schoolchildren were ridiculed and insulted by their Scottish counterparts due to their Italian origin or their skin and hair colour.¹⁰ However, this mistreatment was counterbalanced by public praise of Italian immigrants by the Scottish authorities and the positive opinions many Scots had about Fascism and Mussolini.¹¹ These positive views changed after October 1935. Scottish dignitaries and municipal leaders, who had often attended activities and ceremonies organised by the *fasci*, began to ostracise them and the Italian shopkeepers began to face recurring and sometimes violent disturbances which paved the way to the traumatic experience many endured after June 1940. This article will also shed light on this new challenging milieu that originated from the Italian invasion.

The response of Italian immigrants in Scotland to the Ethiopian war, as well as its impact on the community and national identities and the rupture it caused in relations between Italians and the host society, have been largely neglected by both British and Italian historiography. Only recently, the studies by Claudia Baldoli and Wendy Ugolini have shed some light on British officials' different perceptions of the *fasci* and Italian immigrants in Britain due to the Italian colonial war.¹² By analysing the British/Scottish and Italian sides during the war preparation in the summer of 1935 and its following phases, this article aims to fill this knowledge gap in the social history of the second largest ethnic minority in Scotland. More generally, it will also contribute to the history of Fascism and its totalitarian project to incorporate the Italians abroad into the nation-building process and use them as instruments of foreign policy.

In January 1935, Mussolini and French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval met to discuss the rising German threat in central Europe and colonial matters. Mussolini received assurances that 'France would seek no advantage for herself in Ethiopia, other than the economic interests related to the Djibuti-Addis Ababa railway'.¹³ Accordingly, military preparations were stepped up. Similarly, the propaganda machinery that had to justify the future war started its work. Articles highlighting the supposed Ethiopian backwardness, the alleged acts of violence perpetrated in the Italian colonies and 'New Italy's civilising mission' in Africa mushroomed throughout 1935.¹⁴ In addition, the regime also

9. J. K. Walton, *Fish & Chips & the British Working Class, 1870–1940* (London 2000), 38

10. W. Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other': Italian Scottish Experience in World War II* (Manchester 2011), 33–8.

11. The friendly statements by Scottish authorities towards the 'admirable, hardworking and sober' Italians have been many since their settlement in large numbers. See for instance: R. Richardson, 'Italian Emigration to Scotland', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 11 (1913), 580–85; 'Italian Delegation to Edinburgh: Cementing Ties of Friendship', *The Scotsman* (28 June 1922); 'Notiziario del Fascio di Glasgow', 30 November 1934, ASMAE, AL, b. 841, f. 2.

12. C. Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford 2003), 67–128; Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 70–2.

13. De Felice, *Mussolini*, 530.

14. See, for instance: 'Etiopia 1935', *Gerarchia* (2 February 1935); 'La politica coloniale italiana illustrata da S. E. Lessona all'Università', *Il Popolo d'Italia* (17 March 1935); 'Una serie ininterrotta di violenze ai danni dell'Italia', *Il Popolo d'Italia* (18 June 1935); Carlo Giglio, 'Le possibilità economiche della Somalia', *Gerarchia* (8 August 1935); A. V. Pellegrineschi, 'L'opera civilizzatrice del Fascismo: Le nuove strade della Libia', *Gerarchia* (10 October 1935).

played the card of retaliation since the humiliating defeat that the Italian army suffered at Adwa in 1896 had not been forgotten.

In Britain, Italian claims over Ethiopia split the government into two factions. One of these was led by Secretary of Foreign Affairs Samuel Hoare and Permanent Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs Robert Vansittart, who did not firmly oppose Italian interests in Ethiopia. Until September 1935, they assiduously examined options to buy Mussolini off, offering him a protectorate, territorial adjustments, and greater Italian economic penetration into the African country. Anthony Eden, Minister for League of Nations Affairs, obstructed this pro-Italian appeasement strategy which, if passed, would have not only dismembered Ethiopia but would have also proved a disastrous failure for the League of Nations.¹⁵ For Eden, a committed advocate of the intergovernmental organisation, this was to be avoided at all costs.

In July 1935, it became clear that Italy was waiting for the end of the rainy season to invade Ethiopia so some British institutions began to mobilise the popular masses against the planned Italian attack. The Royal Institute of International Affairs and the pacifist association League of Nations Union were among the first to make people aware of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. Between July and August 1935, they produced and circulated pamphlets, such as *Abyssinia and Italy*, *On Sanctions* and *The Abyssinian Dispute*, which opposed the war.¹⁶ Heads of British Churches of various denomination, such as the Anglican Church, the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Christian Union, appealed to the 'wise guide of the statesmen of the world' to secure a peaceful solution to the dispute.¹⁷ While these bodies initially remained relatively neutral in their positions, the same did not apply to some press and politicians. *The Times* acknowledged that 'if the chance of averting hostilities is even now but faint, the reason is to be found in the obstinacy of Signor Mussolini' and 'Rome gives the appearance of simply wanting to seize Abyssinia'.¹⁸ *The Scotsman* reported the appeals of socialist John Downie and Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Angell to apply economic sanctions as early as August 1935 to stop the 'mad dog of Rome [Mussolini]'.¹⁹ The National Executive of the Labour Party, condemning 'in the strongest terms the provocative and defiant attitude of the Italian government towards the League of Nations', appealed directly to the Italian people to avert war and finally urged the British government 'to use all the necessary measures provided by the Covenant'.²⁰

Many British people, who only a few months earlier (end of 1934–May 1935) had expressed their support for the League of Nations and collective security in the Peace

15. J. C. Robertson, 'The Hoare-Laval Plan', *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, 3 (July 1975) 435–6.

16. R. Pankhurst, 'Pro- and Anti-Ethiopian Pamphleteering in Britain during the Italian Fascist Invasion and Occupation (1935–41)', *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 1, 1 (2003), 153–5.

17. See, for instance: 'Joint Appeal to League: Archbishops and War Omens', *The Scotsman* (25 July 1935); 'Italo-Abyssinian Dispute: Prayers for a Peaceful Settlement', *The Scotsman* (14 August 1935); 'League and the Italian-Abyssinian Dispute: Scottish Christian Social Union's tribute to Government', *The Scotsman* (19 September 1935).

18. 'Italy, Abyssinia, and the League', *The Times* (15 July 1935).

19. 'Force to Enforce League Policy: Sir. N. Angell on Italo-Abyssinian Dispute', *The Scotsman* (7 August 1935); 'Italo-Abyssinian Dispute: Mr. Downie Declares for Sanctions', *The Scotsman* (31 August 1935).

20. 'Socialist Policy: Joint Declaration on Abyssinian Problems', *The Scotsman* (5 September 1935).

Ballot,²¹ shared the same opinions. There were concerns about Mussolini's 'brutal bullying' and the 'iniquity of Mussolini's declared intentions of his attempt to make it appear that he is only imitating the action of England'.²² In a letter sent to *The Scotsman*, Lieutenant-Colonel Oswald from Edinburgh expressed his disbelief in Italy's political and humanitarian reasons used to justify the possible conquest. He wrote harshly of the need to 'stop this foolish talk of legitimate aspirations and need for expansion'.²³ In another contribution to the same newspaper, J. Redmayne, from the small village of Glenelg, despite not being against colonialism, noted a contradiction in Mussolini's words: he was contending that the Ethiopians were backward and barbarous, but he had never offered them, 'in contrast to Great Britain and France', access to the sea which 'would greatly help their civilising process'.²⁴

The continuous coverage of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis and the hostility of some British government members to recognising Italian 'rights' to Ethiopia led the London Fascist weekly *L'Italia Nostra* to adopt, from July 1935, an aggressive anti-Ethiopian and anti-British attitude. Its columns entitled *La Questione Abissina* followed the rhetoric used in Italy which depicted the Ethiopian Empire as 'the largest slave-market in the world', populated by 'savages'.²⁵ Meanwhile, 'hypocritical' Britain, possessor of the largest Empire in the world, was described as a 'ruthless country' that was able to determine 'Egypt's life or death' through the Aswan dam and that had attempted 'to install an international dictatorship' with French cooperation.²⁶ In mid-August, the possibility of an imminent invasion drew closer and Piero Parini, Secretary of the General Directorate of Italians Abroad (DGIE, the state body which managed the *fasci* overseas), dispatched a circular to the *fasci* with these instructions: Fascists abroad had to 'shape the mood' of the diasporas by checking on community members and stigmatising those of 'weak personality' misled by local public opinion; hold regular meetings where the reasons for Italian expansionism in Africa were to be exalted; and finally 'false news' about Italy had to be countered.²⁷

As a result of Parini's directives, meetings in the Glasgow and Edinburgh *fasci* headquarters were held between August and September 1935. The Italian Consul Luppis and Fascist leaders insisted on the rhetoric of Italy's 'huge contribution' to civilisation in its African colonies and on the rights that Mussolini 'intends to claim for Italy's grandeur and its children's future prosperity'.²⁸ In the circulars reporting these meetings to the DGIE and Italian Embassy in London, Luppis remained vague on how many people attended. But, perhaps exaggerating, he noted that in Glasgow, on 30 August, 'the

21. D. P. Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War, 1935-36* (London 1975), 20.

22. E. H. Bethell, 'Points from Letters: The Abyssinian Dispute', *The Times* (30 July 1935); M. Perham, 'To the Editor of The Times', *The Times* (30 August 1935).

23. F. Oswald, 'Points of View: Letters from Readers', *The Scotsman* (23 September 1935).

24. J. S. Redmayne, 'Points of View: Letters from Readers', *The Scotsman* (4 October 1935).

25. 'La Questione Abissina: Il Bubbone', *L'Italia Nostra* (19 July 1935).

26. A. Sculati, 'In margine alla questione abissina: La "guerra del cotone"', *L'Italia Nostra* (26 July 1935); 'La Questione Abissina: La polvere negli occhi', *L'Italia Nostra* (2 August 1935).

27. 'Circolare N. 05', 12 August 1935, ASMAE, AL thereafter, b. 934, f. 2.

28. See: 'Adunata del Fascio di Glasgow', 30 August 1935, *Ibid.*; 'Propaganda', 9 September 1935, *Ibid.*; 'A29/A.O.', 16 September 1935, *Ibid.*

biggest meeting since the foundation of the *fascio* took place and, a few days later in Edinburgh, a 'really impressive' rally was held to show support for Fascist Italy.

Similarly, the 'fake news' and opposition expressed in the local newspapers were counteracted by *L'Italia Nostra* and Luigi Villari, the son of renowned historian Pasquale Villari and English political activist Linda Mary White. Thanks to his connections within some British circles and proficiency in English, the regime sent him to Britain many times throughout the 1920s and early 1930s to spread Fascist propaganda. The Fascist government took advantage of Villari's authority once again during the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. In his propagandist tour in August 1935, he explained Italy's point of view to the British people. In an interview with *The Scotsman*, for instance, he insisted that territorial acquisition in East Africa was necessary because Italy needed land and raw materials for its population, and it could 'civilise backward coloured races'. In addition, he also justified Italy's potential control over Ethiopia by playing the card of British colonial interests. According to Villari, British Sudan was safer in its southern-eastern border with an 'Italian Ethiopia' rather than with an independent country.²⁹ However, these reasons did not persuade the British government and public when Italy launched its military campaign.

On 2 October 1935, Mussolini announced the invasion of Ethiopia. Italian Fascists in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, who had been waiting for the 'solemn event' for days by preparing their local headquarters with radios and speakers, welcomed Mussolini's announcement with 'enthusiastic' demonstrations of 'sincere devotion' and 'blind obedience'.³⁰ Nevertheless, the supposed enthusiasm following the invasion, for some, might have lasted only for a few days, as indignation, anti-war and anti-Italian sentiments grew considerably among many sectors of the British establishment and public opinion.

At a political level, the aggression meant the deterioration of diplomatic relations between Britain and Italy, especially when the former led a faction of League members to approve economic sanctions against the invader. The 'iniquitous sanctions', as Fascist propaganda called them, which included an embargo on arms and loans and the boycotting of Italian goods, were eventually ratified on 18 November 1935. But perhaps more importantly for the Italian diaspora in Britain, following the adventure in East Africa, MI5 began surveillance of the *fasci* in the country. Due to the prominence of the regime's militaristic aspect and compromised bilateral relations with Britain, MI5 raised the spectre that Italian immigrants and British-born Italians, whose allegiance might have been retained by Fascist Italy, could engage in sabotage against Britain if war between the two countries broke out. In addition, the holiday camps organised in Italy for second-generation Italians overseas which had remained under the radar until the summer of 1935, 1936 were considered a channel 'to train up a nucleus of youth who will resist absorption into their environment, [...] and grow into Italian citizens upon whose services Rome can call for any purpose and at any time'.³¹ As a result,

29. 'Italy's Case: Desire for Co-operation with Britain', *The Scotsman* (28 August 1935).

30. 'Adunate dei fasci', 8 October 1935, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 2.

31. 'Ingram to Eden', 5 October 1936, HO 144/21079.

despite MI5 recognising that ‘these children may not be a serious matter in the immediate future’, the police began compiling lists of children who attended the holiday camps to prevent ‘the matter becoming dangerous when the boys reach military age’.³² The same occurred for many Italian adults whose names and addresses, which appeared in *L’Italia Nostra* and the two editions of the *Guida Generale*,³³ were recorded by the British services. By January 1939, the British files contained more than 1000 names of Italian Fascist members ‘to be immediately arrested in the event of hostilities’.³⁴ These lists would eventually be used to round up Italians (and British-Italians) after Fascist Italy joined Nazi Germany in the Second World War. The British reaction was not an isolated case in the international context. After the Ethiopian war and the closeness of the Fascist and Nazi regimes in the second half of the 1930s, Italophobia and the ‘fifth column’ spectre also emerged in British dominions such as Canada, Australia, and Malta, as well as the United States, France and some South American countries.³⁵

Another repercussion caused by the invasion of Ethiopia, which was more important in the short-term, was the social and economic marginalisation suffered more generally by many Italians in Scotland and Britain. The profound indignation generated by the attack hardened pro-Ethiopian stances. Indeed, the English and Scottish Churches contributed to that. Unlike in the months preceding the Italian aggression, where they had pushed for diplomatic solutions to the international dispute, now they were among the prominent opponents of Fascist Italy. The Archbishop of Canterbury branded the invasion a ‘senseless slaughter’ where Ethiopians were ‘being mowed down by a great and carefully prepared machine of slaughter’.³⁶ The Archbishop of Winchester accused Italy of pursuing a policy of ‘smash and grab’,³⁷ but perhaps the harshest condemnation arrived during the meeting of the Diocesan Synod of Aberdeen and Orkney Episcopal Church in late October 1935. There, the Bishop of Aberdeen Deane thundered:

With a cynical contempt almost unprecedented in history, Italy has torn to tatters her most solemn obligations under the League. Rejecting the most earnest efforts for arbitration and conciliation with an insolent disdain [Italy] was now engaged in waging a war of ruthless conquest upon a League’s fellow-member. History surely could furnish no more striking instance of unprovoked and brutal aggression, long prepared for with cold and careful deliberation. This was a dispute between the gangster and his victim, the tiger and its prey.³⁸

32. ‘Secret File Addressed to Newsam’, 20 August 1936, *ibid*.

33. *Guida Generale degli Italiani in Gran Bretagna* was a guide published in two editions (1936 and 1939) that outlined the history of the *fasci* and Italians in Britain. Both volumes included indexes with thousands of names and addresses of the Italians living in the country.

34. ‘Kell to Chief Constable’, 25 January 1939, KV 4/292/92a.

35. Pretelli, *Il fascismo*, 144–5.

36. ‘The Primate on Italy’, *The Times* (7 October 1935); ‘Italy in the Pillory: Church Leaders’ Attacks’, *The Courier and Advertiser* (9 October 1935).

37. ‘Bishop Condemns Italy’, *The Evening Telegraph* (8 October 1935).

38. ‘Italy Condemned: Bishop Deane on ‘the Tiger and its Prey’, *The Scotsman* (25 October 1935).

The British Churches' leaders also mobilised by raising funds for the Ethiopian Red Cross, meeting politicians to express their views and lobbying them.³⁹ But perhaps behind this religious activism lay more pragmatic motives than solidarity with, and sympathy for, the Ethiopian people. Arguably, the Archbishop of Canterbury tried to take advantage of the international situation to carry out an anti-Catholic campaign and stand as the leader of the various European Christian confessions. This seems to be confirmed by his appeal of 30 December 1930, agreed by authorities of other Christian communions except for the Pope, to awaken the responsibilities of Christian citizens in order to bring the world to the 'Way of Christ'.⁴⁰

Along with the press and religion, cinema was another channel that played a fundamental role in arousing the British people in favour of Ethiopia. In this period of record attendances – it was estimated that around 16 million people per week went to the cinema in the 1930s in Britain – this popular medium was used to make a large audience aware of Italy's aggression. Newsreels showed the Emperor of Ethiopia taking part in celebrations among his people or, with his wife, taking care of the injured.⁴¹ To demarcate the difference in strength between Italy and Ethiopia and to impress spectators emotively, the warfare scenes lingered on the Italian Army using modern aircraft and tanks, contrasting this with Ethiopians intending to 'fight to the last drop of our blood' despite relying only on spears.⁴² The boos against Mussolini when he appeared on screen in some cinemas and Dino Grandi's request (at that time he was the Italian Ambassador in London) to Italians to attend screenings and counteract this with applause or hissing according to the circumstances,⁴³ indicate the importance of this 'weapon' in influencing the general public.

The mobilisation of the Churches and the coverage of the war in British media channelled sympathies toward the attacked country among the general public but anti-Fascist and anti-Italian feelings emerged even among those who had been attracted by the Fascist phenomenon in the previous years. This is confirmed by several episodes, the most emblematic of which were, first, the fact that the Scottish authorities who, before 1935, often attended Fascist activities, such as the annual commemoration of the Italian victory on 4 November 1918 in the First World War, did not do so after that year; second, the local press stopped reporting news about the *fasci* and refused to publish propaganda material sent by the Consulate. In July 1938, Italian Consul Serra showed his frustration complaining to the Ministry of Propaganda in Rome that, since his arrival in Scotland (January 1938), the propaganda material he was distributing to

39. 'Red Cross Funds: Moderator's Appeal for Abyssinian Unit', *The Scotsman* (10 October 1935); 'Churches and the Crisis: Deputation to Sir S. Hoare', *The Times* (12 October 1935).

40. 'Church and Peace: Primates' International Christian Appeal', *The Scotsman* (10 January 1936).

41. See: Reuters – Gaumont British Newsreel, (1935) *Ethiopians in Addis Abbaba demonstrate for Emperor*. Available at: <<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVAN11RJ728XBBE85DA5D4ZMJBY-ETHIOPIANS-IN-ADDIS-ABBABA-DEMONSTRATE-FOR-EMPORER/query/Abyssinia>>; Pathe newsreels, (1935) *Medical Aid for Ethiopia*. Available at: <<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/medical-aid-for-ethiopia/query/Abyssinia>> (both accessed 30 April 2022).

42. 'The War on the Screen: Scenes of Actual Fighting in Gaumont-British Newsreel', *The Scotsman* (11 October 1935).

43. 'Atteggimento pubblico inglese nei locali cinematografici', 10 October 1935, ASMAE, AL, b. 877, f. 1.

the local newspapers had not been published apart from a couple of photographs of ‘no political value’.⁴⁴ Moreover, the two branches of the Scoto-Italian Society, an association of Scottish Italophiles created in 1918 that became very close to the *fasci* in the 1920s by organising monthly meetings on Fascist topics and contributing money to the Italian Fascist schools, either stopped these activities after the invasion (Edinburgh branch) or ceased scheduling Fascist political and propaganda meetings (Glasgow branch).

While the episodes just mentioned demonstrating the ostracism the *fasci* underwent were relatively harmless, Italian immigrants more generally experienced hostility from locals to an extent they had never known before October 1935. In London, 2000 British people working in the hospitality sector marched with placards reading ‘War against Soho’ (the London Italian neighbourhood) and ‘Hire British waiters’.⁴⁵ They petitioned the Minister of Labour to replace Italians employed in the catering and hospitality industry. Italian restaurants were boycotted, and their shop-windows were damaged.⁴⁶ The situation was similar in some Scottish cities, starting with hostility towards Consul Luppis. In his autobiography, Luppis remembers receiving night phone calls ‘to listen to every kind of insult’ from anonymous Scots.⁴⁷ As he recalls in his memoir, Italian-Scot Joe Pieri received ‘frequent and forceful’ insults from drunken and belligerent customers of his family fish and chip shop (in Glasgow) from 1935 onwards.⁴⁸ In Edinburgh, Italian-Scots recalled similar verbal attacks: some shopkeepers were forced to sell their businesses due to the boycott, while Italian-Scottish children faced increasing hostility from their Scottish classmates and teachers.⁴⁹

As a perusal of Scottish newspapers reveals, episodes of racism against Italians also occurred in Scottish cities and towns where the Italian presence was smaller. For example, on 7 October 1935, a Scottish miner, declaring his ‘animus against the Italians’, threw two stones at the shop of Primo Pellegrini in Fife.⁵⁰ A similar disturbance took place in Port Glasgow, where a Scot tried to ‘jump over the counter to get at the Italian’ while making remarks on the Italo-Ethiopian situation.⁵¹ In Aberdeen, in 1939, in a letter sent to the *Evening Express*, a person signed as ‘Law and Order’ reported forbidding any family member to buy ‘even a pennyworth of ice-cream from an Italian shop’ since the Italian invasion of 1935, and urged ‘anyone who hates Italian brutalities’ to do the same.⁵² Perhaps the Aberdonian writer was emboldened by Bishop Dean’s words quoted earlier. Others who acted against Italians might also have done so because

44. ‘Propaganda fotografica’, 12 July 1938, Archivio Centrale dello Stato [thereafter ACS], Minculpop, Direzione Generale Servizi della Propaganda [thereafter DGSP], b. 124, f. Gran Bretagna 1938, sf. Gran Bretagna, Articoli-Fotografie Giornali. For this reason, Serra suggested the Ministry of Propaganda ‘suppress any further delivery’ of propaganda material until further notice.

45. ‘Grandi to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, 15 October 1935, *ibid.*

46. ‘Violenze contro Italiani’, *L’Italia Nostra* (11 October 1935).

47. F. Luppis, *La Diga. Pettegolezzi umani e politici: Memorie 1880–1959* (Ferrara 1990), 171.

48. J. Pieri, *Isle of Displaced: An Italian-Scot’s Memoirs of Internment during the Second World War* (Glasgow 1997), 8.

49. Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 38–9.

50. ‘Prison for Smashing Italian’s Shop Window’, *The Scotsman* (7 October 1935).

51. ‘Disturbance in Italian Shop’, *The Port Glasgow Express* (18 October 1935).

52. ‘Not Wanted’, *Evening Express* (17 April 1939).

Scots perceived (to some extent rightly, as speculated earlier) the mobilisation of the British and Scottish Churches as an anti-Catholic crusade.

In the months of the Ethiopian war, sectarianism in Scotland, also fuelled by Protestant militants, increased, with episodes that resulted in true acts of violence, such as when Protestant activists interrupted various Catholic events in Edinburgh in June 1935.⁵³ In November 1938, Italians themselves were involved in one of these acts. After the annual Fascist commemoration of 4 November, Scottish militant John Cormack stood outside St. Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh roaring his encouragement to ostracise Italians and 'force them to return to their beloved Italy and *Duce*'.⁵⁴ The increased political visibility of Italians, due to the combination of the aggressive Fascist stance and the sectarian crusade, exposed the Italian minority to acts of marginalisation and attacks. It can be argued that these factors massively contributed to the eruption of violence experienced by Italians across Scotland (and Britain as a whole) after Italy declared war on Britain in June 1940, which scholars such as Colpi and Lucio Sponza have analysed well.⁵⁵

The Ethiopian war and the Italophobia described above seem to have led to contrasting results for Fascist Italy in the second half of the 1930s. As many as 1199 Italians (in all of Britain) became British subjects between 1936 and 1940. Of these, 517, the highest number registered in that period, were naturalised in 1936.⁵⁶ Some of them had probably applied because of their opposition to the aggression of the Fascist regime, but, as one of Italian Consul Luppis' circulars reveals, other 'deserters' – Fascist members among them – applied for naturalisation 'in the naïve hope that, once they were British, the local hostility would stop'.⁵⁷ Thereby, they hoped to regain their pre-war social and economic positions. However, the war seems to have brought more positive outcomes for the Fascists than those negative ones just mentioned. An increase in the membership of the *fasci* was reported by MI5 in the period 1935–6.⁵⁸ For the Glasgow and Edinburgh *fasci*, the growth continued in the following years. From around 1000 members (adults and children) in 1936, the membership of the Glasgow *fascio* increased to 1200 in 1939. In Edinburgh, those affiliated with the local *fascio* and its youth group grew from 260 in 1936 to 416 three years later.⁵⁹

Patriotism and national pride were perhaps the prominent factors that contributed to the *fasci*'s growth and community and national cohesion in the second half of the 1930s. According to Renzo De Felice, 'for the Italian emigrant, Fascism meant a type

53. T. Gallagher, 'Protestant Extremism in Urban Scotland 1930–1939: Its Growth and Contraction', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 64, 178 (1985), 158–9.

54. T. Gallagher, *Edinburgh Divided: John Cormack and No Popery in the 1930s* (Edinburgh 1987), 152.

55. T. Colpi, 'The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 11, 3 (1992), 167–87; L. Sponza, 'The Anti-Italian Riots, June 1940', in P. Panayi (ed.) *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester 1996), 131–49.

56. L. Sponza, *Divided Loyalties. Italians in Britain during the Second World War* (Bern 2000), 55.

57. 'Propaganda', 9 September 1935, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 2.

58. 4 January 1936, KV 3/219/16a.

59. These data are taken from: *Guida Generale degli Italiani in Gran Bretagna* (London 1939), 436, 445; 'Additional Notes', HO 144/21079: 'Forza G.I.L.E. dall'anno 1935 all'anno 1939', 29 February 1940, KV 3/220/50.

of revenge, a psychological revenge and an element of self-qualification towards the society in which they lived and within which they were placed on the lowest rung'.⁶⁰ This assumption can also apply to the conquest of Ethiopia. For some, the proclamation of the Empire in May 1936 meant political and military revenge against the hostile local environment and 'hypocritical' Britain, which became the leading opponent of Italy's colonial war, or 'redemption' from stereotypes they suffered at school or elsewhere. Several respondents to Richard Wright seem to have perceived the British role as denying Italy its Empire and stressed their pride in the Italian military victories in Ethiopia.⁶¹ However, it can also be argued that many Italians and their children found in the *fasci* a means of challenging the new adverse local context. They perhaps thought to find 'protection' in the *fasci* headquarters by establishing new social relations and participating in the recreational activities that the *fasci* offered, with the result that community-building was indeed consolidated.

In addition, the decision to join the *fasci* or their auxiliary sections (leisure and women's groups) from late 1935 onwards can also be explained from an economic perspective. While some Italians gave up their nationality in order to recover their previous socio-economic status, others could have seen the *fasci* as the reference point to establish new commercial relations or find common solutions to overcome the burden of the economic sanctions. The president of the London Italian Chamber of Commerce reported to the Italian Embassy that Italian shopkeepers were struggling because of the sanctions,⁶² which the Fascist regime fought by incessantly fuelling nationalistic feelings and counter-acting British media through an intense propaganda network.

The occasion to oppose the 'deleterious [British] propaganda and hostile environment' with a pervasive work of propaganda arrived when the *Ufficio Centrale di Distribuzione* (Central Distribution Office) was set up in London at the end of October 1935. This new agency was in charge of distributing propaganda material sent from Rome (mostly by Villari) or published directly in Britain. The Office relied on British Italophiles such as writers, journalists and politicians and the *fasci* in the biggest cities – Cardiff, Dublin, Glasgow and Liverpool – to disseminate its propagandist paraphernalia. Thus, the material was delivered to political and academic circles, trade unions, professionals and the press, but Italians were also urged to collect it and hand it out to acquaintances to 'enlighten minds on the real situation'.⁶³

The British-Italian Bulletin, published as a British appendix of *L'Italia Nostra* from November 1935 until late 1936, was one of the propaganda tools created and distributed by the new agency. Many Italophile intellectuals wrote for the *Bulletin*: American poet Ezra Pound was one of the most active contributors. In his articles, he demarcated the difference between the 'degraded' Western countries and Fascist Italy, a 'beacon of

60. R. Wright, 'Italian Fascism and the British-Italian Community, 1928–1943: Experience and Memory', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester (2005), 63.

61. *Ibid.*, 177.

62. 'Ripercussioni delle sanzioni economiche sulla collettività italiana', 23 March 1936, ASMAE, AL, b. 927, f. 3.

63. 'Atti Propaganda', 1 January 1936, ASMAE, AL, b. 927, f. 2.

civilisation'. In his view, the 'New Italy', compared to the 'iniquitous' Britain and the United States, was characterised by high moral values, with its government 'really concerned with national welfare'. Moreover, he saw the invasion as an act of self-determination. With this, Pound noted, Fascist Italy did not become a 'vassal state in London's hands' like France.⁶⁴

The alleged Italian civilising mission in East Africa was, of course, another often recurring theme. Walter Starkie witnessed the activities in Ethiopia and wrote that he could finally 'understand why the ancient Romans called their priests bridge-makers':

As a result of the heroic work of the road-workers, there are now roads capable of bringing civilisation and progress to a people sunk in squalor and misery. In the deserted country, we came across colonies of road-workers. [...] Before I visited Abyssinia, I believed the reports which said that the roads would collapse when the rains came. But now I have seen for myself that the long road from Massawa to Mekelle is as permanent as the roads in North Italy.⁶⁵

During the war, *L'Italia Nostra* (and consequently *The British-Italian Bulletin*) significantly increased its circulation from 5000 copies to 15,000–20,000 per week, but the propaganda activity was not limited to this. To pick a few examples among many, pamphlets such as *A Short History of the Abyssinian Question* and *Italy as a Buyer from the British Empire* had print runs of 100,000 copies each which were then distributed among political and women's clubs, journalists and professionals (doctors, engineers, insurance and financial companies). Three hundred thousand copies of various interviews by Mussolini in English newspapers were reprinted, and 50,000 copies of anti-League booklets, such as *Sanctions Without Sanction* and *The Policy of Sanctions and the Failure of the League of Nations* by Charles Sarolea were published.⁶⁶

A few letters found among Ambassador Grandi's documents suggest that the intense propaganda was influencing, to some extent, the opinions of locals. For instance, thanks to the booklet *Abyssinia* and *The British-Italian Bulletin*, readers could understand the Italian views, and some, impressed by 'the interesting reading' and the 'unbiased topics', asked for more copies to forward 'to influential men'.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the themes of supposed Ethiopian savagery and Italian 'civilising mission' also left a mark on some Italians who considered people in the African country to be 'cannibals' and the Italian invasion a 'humanitarian' operation that was bringing progress.⁶⁸

The publications mentioned were only a small part of the material circulated.⁶⁹ By the end of the war, according to Grandi's estimates, propaganda paraphernalia was reaching

64. E. Pound, 'The Fascist Ideal', *The British-Italian Bulletin* (18 April 1936).

65. W. Starkie, 'An Army of Colonists', *ibid.*

66. 'Propaganda svolta in Gran Bretagna dall'Ottobre 1935 al Giugno 1936', 2 July 1936, ASMAE, Archivio De Felice [thereafter DeF], Carte Grandi [thereafter CG], b. 46, f. 108, sf. 8.

67. 'Lettere dirette da cittadini britannici ai nostri Centri "P"', ASMAE, DeF, CG, b. 46, f. 108, sf. 8.

68. Wright, *Italian Fascism*, 178.

69. For a detailed account of the pro-Italian material, see: L. Goglia, 'La propaganda italiana a sostegno della guerra contro l'Etiopia svolta in Gran Bretagna nel 1935–36', *Storia contemporanea* 15, 5 (1984), 845–906.

around 1,400,000 British people at an overall cost of about £13,500.⁷⁰ Talks and meetings were also organised to persuade the British people of the rightness of Italy's cause. British and Italian speakers lectured in favour of Fascist Italy in Rotary Clubs, universities, combatant associations and other institutions. The Scottish Catholic Youth, the Royal Technical College of Glasgow, the Glasgow University Geographical Society and local circles of the League of Nations Union were among the associations where those emissaries and local Fascist leaders carried out propaganda in Scotland.⁷¹

Along with the channels just explored, the parallel propaganda war was fought in British cinemas too. However, Fascist Italy's cinematographic 'weapon' initially struggled to oppose the pro-Ethiopian newsreels as the first films delivered to Britain were 'scratched, stained or defective' or poor in their content. This led Grandi to complain strongly to the Ministry of Propaganda in Rome urging them not to send only newsreels showing military operations, such as *La Marina Italiana in Africa Orientale*, *Da Dessiè ad Addis Abeba*, or patriotic but anachronistic films (this was the case with *1860*, a film on the Unification of Italy). Grandi reckoned that public opinion might change if the films showed 'the release of enslaved people, children's treatment, and newly built constructions'.⁷² Those that directly showed war scenes could continue to have negative effects on locals and, in addition, could bear outcomes different from those expected, even among Italians themselves. Italian-Scot Richard Demarco recalled being 'ill at ease' while watching one of them due to some crude scenes.⁷³ Unfortunately, among the sources consulted, Demarco's testimony is the only account found on the screening of these films initially sent by Rome, but perhaps he was not the only Italian-Scot feeling that way, since it was reported that even some Nazis felt 'uncomfortable' watching one of those 'naïve and tactless' films in Berlin.⁷⁴

From February 1936, the situation seemed to improve. Films began to arrive more regularly and were of better quality. *Camicie Nere in Africa Orientale*, *Strade Romane*, *Con la Colonna Starace nel Gondar e nel lago Tana*, and *I Nostri Pionieri* were only a few of the films received and screened in Edinburgh and Glasgow.⁷⁵ Some reports on these screenings by Italian Consul Luppis reveal that Italian adults and children attended en masse in both Scottish cities, along with some representatives of local authorities. According to Luppis, moreover, this kind of propaganda seemed to have some effects on the latter. Those who had watched the films expressed 'the sympathy of the Scots for the regime's huge effort carried out for Italy's grandeur and its contribution to civilisation in the black continent'.⁷⁶

70. 'Propaganda svolta in Gran Bretagna dall'Ottobre 1935 al Giugno 1936', 2 July 1936, ASMAE, DeF, CG, b. 46, f. 108, sf. 8.

71. These lectures are reported in various issues of *L'Italia Nostra* between December 1935 and April 1936.

72. 'Propaganda in Inghilterra', 14 December 1935, ASMAE, DeF, CG, b. 46, f. 108, sf. 8.

73. Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 69.

74. 'German Officers Not Impressed: Italian Film of War Shown in Berlin', *The Scotsman* (4 January 1936).

75. See the complete list of films in: ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 1.

76. 'Films Luce di propaganda', 4 February 1936, ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, b. 121, f. Gran Bretagna 1936, sf. Invio pellicole di propaganda in Inghilterra.

Nevertheless, Luppis' words (if genuine) did not alleviate the general disappointment that Grandi felt regarding the propaganda carried out on the screens. At the end of the war, he bitterly stated:

The cinema might have represented one of the most effective propaganda instruments. It is beyond doubt that the LUCE's cinematographic activity has not contributed in the right way to the propagandistic work carried out for more than eight months by this Embassy.⁷⁷

Despite Grandi's dissatisfaction, the flaws of the cinematographic 'weapon' did not generally affect the Italian community in Scotland (and Britain) as indicated by the significant mobilisation to hand over gold for Italy.

The application of the 'iniquitous sanctions' on 18 November 1935 definitively marked Italy's international isolation from many countries. Nevertheless, sanctions proved to be a double-edged sword because, instead of weakening Fascist Italy and its military operations, they were artfully used by the regime to rally the population around the Fatherland and *Duce* and, accordingly, support the war effort. As said earlier, the propaganda apparatus intensified its work in Italy and overseas. From being the aggressor, Italy became the 'victim' of the League of Nations' 'siege' and its attempt 'to economically choke Italians and stop them from realising their ideals and defending their vital interests'.⁷⁸ These themes were reiterated when the regime decided to launch the patriotic campaign *Oro alla Patria* (Gold for the Fatherland) in which Italians were asked to hand over their gold – especially, but not exclusively, wedding rings for their symbolic meaning – to sustain public finances. The collection of gold became official under the pressure of the sanctions, but the phenomenon arose as a spontaneous initiative in mid-October 1935 by women who sent their wedding rings to Mussolini and other Fascist officials to fund the war effort. On 18 December 1935, the campaign reached its climax with the *Giornata della Fede* when people mobilised in every part of Italy to donate their precious objects. In Rome, this solemn event saw the involvement of Fascists and non-Fascists alike. Along with Mussolini's family and ordinary people, the Queen of Italy handed over her gold and made her first public statement ever to the nation, while the echelons of the Vatican blessed the donations and encouraged worshippers to participate. Even prominent opponents of Fascism such as Benedetto Croce and Luigi Albertini although not taking part in the rally gave their senators' medals for patriotic duty. The regime experienced the same mobilisation and support among the Italian diaspora all over the world.

The *fasci* in Scotland were among the first to demonstrate their support. The archival sources reveal that they even anticipated the few women in Italy who handed over their rings to Mussolini in October 1935 since the Fascist branches in Scotland collected 1 kg of gold and almost 2 kg of silver between August and the end of October 1935. Only the *fascio* of Alexandria (Egypt) had mobilised before Glasgow to collect and hand over gold

77. 'Propaganda attraverso il cinematografo', ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 1.

78. 'La fiera risposta all'iniquo assedio', *L'Italia Nostra* (22 November 1935).

for the Fatherland.⁷⁹ From mid-November 1935, when the campaign for supporting Italy with economic contributions also developed beyond the Italian borders, the response of the Italian immigrants in Scotland and Britain, more generally, was immediate. In London, the ethnic newspaper *L'Italia Nostra* reported queues of Italians displaying their 'indomitable faith' by giving money and valuable personal belongings at the local *fascio*. In the following weeks, the Fascist weekly began to publish lists of thousands of contributors across Britain, proving that the 'totalitarian pace' with which contributions proceeded and the 'plebiscite' for Italy within the Italian communities were not mere propaganda slogans.⁸⁰ As a result of this mobilisation, the London *fascio* organised the *Giornata della Fede* for 29 December 1935 at the Hippodrome Theatre in London for Italians in the city and some *fasci* representatives from other parts of Britain. However, the event never took place. Concerned about possible hostile and violent demonstrations against the rally (and Grandi himself), which could worsen British–Italian relations even more, the British government successfully lobbied Grandi to cancel the event.⁸¹

The Italian community in Scotland demonstrated the same enthusiasm and national cohesion as those in London and other British cities. This is proved by the lists of contributors found among the archival documents. By 15 January 1936, more than 1500 names of Italian-Scots, both men and women, from different areas of Scotland with their individual donations were forwarded to the Italian Embassy in London and the Foreign Ministry in Rome. At that time, their contributions yielded £708, 12,193 Italian *lire*, 14 kg of gold, 13 kg of silver and several kilograms of other metals (copper and bronze).⁸² Children also participated in the collection and were asked by Piero Parini to be 'true sentinels' of Italian identity in that challenging time for Italy.⁸³ At the end of March 1936, the amounts increased to £780, 18,973 Italian *lire*, and 16 and 15 kg of gold and silver objects, respectively,⁸⁴ while in June, Luppis went again to the Embassy in London to hand over further donations which involved at least two-thirds of the community's adult members. Overall, these amounts were only a small part of the equivalent of one and a half million Italian *lire* collected across Britain up to July 1936.

From the numbers of the Glasgow and Edinburgh *fasci* given earlier, it can easily be argued that not only Fascist members and their families responded to the patriotic call. The broad mobilisation of Italians in Scotland (and Britain) to support Italy was no exception to that organised in other diasporas investigated by scholars. In Australia, Gianfranco Cresciani noted that 'Italy's African campaign had the effect of uniting the overwhelming majority of Italians', including anti-Fascists.⁸⁵ In the United States, Italian-Americans

79. 'Raccolta Oro', 15 January 1936, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 3; E. P., 'Da Glasgow', *L'Italia Nostra* (1 November 1935).

80. For the lists of Italians and their offers, see issues of *L'Italia Nostra* from 29 November 1935.

81. 'Meeting arranged by Italian Fascist Party of Great Britain', 17 December 1935, HO 144/21079, 699617/1/6.

82. For the lists of names, the offers of the Italian-Scots and their summary, see: 'Raccolta Oro', 15 January 1936, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 3.

83. R. Petrocelli, 'Citadels of Spiritual Resistance', 233.

84. 'Le offerte alla Patria delle collettività della Scozia', *L'Italia Nostra* (10 April 1936).

85. G. Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922–1945* (Canberra 1980), 73–6.

lobbied the Roosevelt administration not to apply an embargo against Italy and collected donations worth many millions of Italian *lire*, with many of the regime's opponents among the contributors.⁸⁶ In South America, Italian immigrants enthusiastically backed the Italian cause by sending tonnes of foodstuff – coffee, flour, sugar, tobacco – cultivated by Italian farmers, gold and millions of *lire*.⁸⁷

Of course, the donations varied according to the size of the communities and their economic background, as well as the presence of Italian notables. These factors explain the modest contribution of the Italians in Scotland who, apart from a handful, were largely lower-middle-class shopkeepers. To some extent, the relatively small Italian-Scottish contribution was also affected by other factors: the expenses incurred in purchasing the building used as the *Casa d'Italia* in May 1935; the boycotting of Italian shopkeepers, resulting in the loss of profits; and finally the ongoing economic self-reliance for the costs of the *fasci*'s functioning. For these reasons, the national cohesion demonstrated by Italian-Scots can be considered remarkable in both moral and material terms. This is highlighted by looking in detail at the contributions.

Wedding rings, perhaps the items with the highest sentimental significance at the time, were among the most common objects offered to the Fatherland, especially by women. The sources consulted do not reveal the exact number of rings from Scotland that reached Italian state finances. However, some consular documents dated between January and April 1936 indicate that at least 650 wedding rings had been donated.⁸⁸ A few more dozen rings should likely be added to that number because collections were carried out until July 1936. Luppis asked the Italian Embassy in London for the same amount of steel rings with which people could replace their 'original ones'.⁸⁹ Gold watches were another object with a high symbolic value that many, such as Lorenzo Marcantonio, Giuseppe Tedeschi and Emilio Palombo, decided to hand over. As Alfio Bernabei argues, for the generation of Italians of that time, a gold watch represented 'the point of arrival in the immigrants' status regarding monetary achievements and self-esteem'.⁹⁰ Others, such as Carlo Tronchetti, footballer Giovanni Moscardini, and the war-veterans Amerigo Cima and Vincenzo Di Mascio, donated different objects that also had significant emotional importance to them. Tronchetti contributed a 22-carat gold medal gifted by the Italian diaspora in the 1920s when he was covering the post of Italian Consul; Moscardini offered the medals awarded during his career in Italy; while Cima and Di Mascio handed over the decorations received for their service during the First World War.⁹¹

86. S. Luconi, 'The Impact of Twentieth-Century Italy's Wars on Italian Americans' Ethnic Identity', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 13, 3 (2007), 477–9.

87. Bertanha, *La legione Parini*, 134–56.

88. 'Raccolta Oro', 15 January 1936, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 3; 'Fedi d'acciaio', 9 April 1936, *ibid*.

89. Terhoeven, *Oro*, 47. The idea of the steel rings was conceived by some women in Italy certain that spouses (especially women) would be more inclined to hand over their gold rings, the symbol of their marriage, in exchange for a replacement.

90. A. Bernabei, 'A Gold Watch is Missing', in Italian Cultural Institute (ed.) *Italian Scottish Identities and Connections with a Case Study on Trentino: Atti del Convegno 15 Settembre 2000 Queen Margaret University College* (Edinburgh 2000), 55.

91. 'Raccolta Oro', 15 January 1936, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 3.

Overall, the donations occurred in different ways. People usually went to the Glasgow *Casa d'Italia* or the Edinburgh *fascio*, but there were even cases of Italians who travelled from Scotland to London to hand over their gold. For instance, noblewoman Valeria Morton Robertson, resident in Eddleston and British by marriage, mindful of her Italian origins, went to the Embassy in February 1936 to place in Grandi's hands £25, her wedding ring and some gold and silver objects. This contribution followed a visit to the Glasgow *Casa d'Italia* which she decided to fund with an annual donation of £10.⁹² Letters were another way – usually used by British Italophiles – to offer money and personal support for Italy and the *Duce*. A former British officer of the First World War, 'disgusted by the insults against Italy', sent a missive to the Italian Consulate in Glasgow expressing 'his sincere sympathy' for the Italian cause and offering £1.⁹³ The Earl of Mar sent a letter to Mussolini, along with £5 for the Italian Red Cross, expressing his sympathy for the *Duce* and assuring him that 'not the entire press and people are anti-Italian'.⁹⁴ A Mrs. Irving and her brother, Major Piercy, who had hosted Villari during one of his propaganda tours in Scotland, showed their support to Grandi and sent £72 to the Embassy in London. The Italian Ambassador thanked them for their 'precious and tireless activity' for Italy.⁹⁵

Another method of contributing to the *Oro alla Patria* campaign was through delegates who were in charge of collecting the objects door-to-door (or shop-to-shop), as two of Ugolini's respondents seem to confirm.⁹⁶ With this procedure, donations increased for two reasons: first, representatives reached those people who, despite wanting to give something, could not go to the *fascio* headquarters due to distance or work commitments; second, a doorstep collection may have been a form of psychological intimidation, which people might not have been prepared to challenge. This kind of moral harassment might have also resulted in verbal (or worse, physical) threats of being ostracised by the community if a potential contributor hesitated to hand over something. The door-to-door collection and the eventual stigmatisation of Italians reluctant to donate their gold raise questions about the validity of the argument that the overwhelming majority of emigrants supported Italy during the Ethiopian war purely through patriotism. In Scotland, the majority of Italians – *fascio* and non-*fascio* members – were indeed moved by spontaneous and sincere sentiments of pride, nationalism and devotion to Mussolini. In addition, even if it is difficult to assess to what extent, the skilful use of propaganda further tipped the balance of the diaspora towards supporting the regime in its colonial war. For many, however, that national consciousness had already been cultivated for the years in the *fascio*. The Fascist regime simply harvested what it had previously sown. It can be claimed that a minority of those who contributed to the campaign *Oro alla Patria* were induced by wholehearted Fascists and not by genuine patriotic feelings. But

92. 'Grandi to Mrs. Morton Robertson', 2 March 1936, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 4.

93. 'Offerta pro-Croce Rossa Italiana da parte di un Ufficiale britannico', 14 October 1935, ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, b. 120, f. Gran Bretagna 1935, sf. Offerta pro-Croce Rossa Italiana da parte di un Ufficiale britannico.

94. 'Lettera del Conte di Mar al Duce', 23 January 1936, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 4.

95. 'Grandi to Mrs. Irving and Major Piercy', 11 February 1936, *ibid.*

96. Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 75.

‘fervent patriot’ Maria Antonia Colletta Biello resident in Whiteinch, Glasgow, who in May 1937 gave to the Fatherland two gold earrings, one gold bracelet, eight gold rings, nine fragments of gold, five gold necklaces and one gold brooch, was certainly not part of that minority.⁹⁷


The Ethiopian war marked a watershed for Italians in Italy and overseas. This article has confirmed that this was also the case in the Italian-Scottish context, as the war led to two contrasting results for the immigrant Italian diaspora in Scotland. On the one hand, the mobilisation of the British media, Churches, political and cultural circles, which condemned Fascist Italy and hardened public opinion in favour of Ethiopia, created a hostile milieu for many Italians living in the country. In addition, MI5, concerned about the Fascist regime’s policies aimed at forging their Italian identity and retaining their allegiance began to see the spectre of ‘fifth columns’. All these factors forged the challenging local environment endured, as never before, by the Italians between late 1935 and 1940. This contributed to the naturalisation of a tiny part of the diaspora and, more importantly, caused the traumatic experience of anti-Italian violence that erupted in June 1940.

By contrast, by shedding light on the intense propaganda – books, pamphlets, films, talks – carried out to justify the invasion, counteract pro-Ethiopian opinions and elicit nationalistic feelings and enthusiasm for the work of the *fasci*, this article has also demonstrated how the Ethiopian war consolidated the ethnic identity of Italian immigrants in Scotland. They were among the first in the world to mobilise for their Fatherland. Later, when the political campaign to support Italy was launched, the mobilisation involved almost all Italians. Like many other communities abroad, and perhaps even more significantly given their general socio-economic condition, Italians in Scotland handed over their money and gold in considerable amounts, despite the door-to-door collections having arisen doubts that not all the contributions were the fruit of political ideology or patriotism as scholars usually argue. In a parallel development, the *fasci* in Scotland increased their membership arguably to deal with increasing local hostility, as well as building new social and commercial relations in the second half of the 1930s. As a result, even community-building was eventually boosted as a consequence of the conflict. However, many would pay dearly in 1940 for their patriotic or convenient Fascist affiliations.

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97. ‘Offerta d’oro alla Patria’, 28 May 1937, ASMAE, AL, b. 934, f. 3.

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