



# *Voices of Occupiers/Liberators: the BBC's radio propaganda in Italy between 1942 and 1945*

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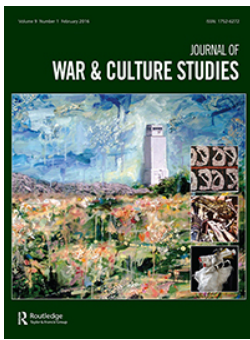
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Ester Lo Biundo

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# Voices of Occupiers/Liberators: The BBC's Radio Propaganda in Italy between 1942 and 1945

ESTER LO BIUNDO

*University of Reading, Berkshire, UK*

The ambiguity of the role played by British propaganda in Italy during the Second World War is clearly reflected in the phenomenon of Radio London. While Radio London raised the morale of the Italian civilians living under the Fascist regime and provided them with alternative information on the conflict, the microphones of the BBC were also used by the British government to address a country they were planning to occupy. In this article, I will analyse the occupation/liberation operations that were run at the BBC Italian Service from two separate angles. On the one hand, the analysis of the programmes broadcast between the months preceding the Allies' landing in Sicily and the actual occupation shows how the Allies built their image as liberators and guarantors of better living conditions. On the other, the analysis of the relationships between the Foreign Office and the anti-Fascist exiles reveals that the Italian BBC broadcasters were not always allowed to freely express their political opinion or to dispose of their own lives.

**KEYWORDS** The Second World War, BBC Italian Service, Radio London, Allied occupation/liberation of Italy, Civilians' living conditions, Italian anti-Fascist exiles, Italian internees, British Foreign Office

In September 1938, the Munich agreement between France, Germany, Italy, and UK revealed the failure of the appeasement policy adopted by Neville Chamberlain towards Germany. The Second World War would break out the following year. In the same month, Churchill's speech on the Munich crisis was translated and broadcast by the BBC in France, Germany and Italy (Briggs, 1970; Limentani, 1973; Piccialuti Caprioli, 1976). This first broadcast to Italy would be followed by regular news bulletins in Italian. However, 'Radio Londra' would only be properly established in 1940, when an Italian entrance into the war was likely to happen (Piccialuti Caprioli, 1976: xiv).

The gradual increase in numbers of staff and of programmes broadcast daily indicates that the BBC European Service as a whole, as well as the Italian branch, became more specialized year by year (BBC, 1945: 3–4; Piccialuti Caprioli, 1976: xiv–xv). A number of Italian anti-Fascists emigrated to the UK began working for the Italian Service. Among them Paolo and Treves, sons of the socialist Claudio Treves, the literary critic Limentani, the university professor Calosso, the lawyer and journalist Elio Nissim, the historian Arnaldo Momigliano, and Ruggero Orlando. After the war Orlando would become a famous correspondent from New York for RAI, the Italian national television.

Informative materials for soldiers on Italian politics, economy, and society such as the *Sicily Zone Handbook*, as well as directives on how to behave towards Italian civilians (Mangiamele, 1994; Williams, 2013), demonstrate that the Allies' landing in Italy was more than a simple military operation. In order to be successful, the Anglo-Americans needed to know the country they were occupying. As for propaganda, the 'psychological war' waged by the Allies in Italy (Mercuri, 1983), needed to rely on a solid and in-depth knowledge of the Italians. To make the most of radio broadcasts, it was therefore crucial to mobilize the cultural arguments that would find a soft spot in the vast and varied Italian population. In this context, the knowledge and experience of the Italian exiles was extremely valuable.

Making quantitative estimations on the Italian Service audience size was not easy for several reasons. Fascist Italy forbade foreign radios: heavy fines, arrests, or confinement would be used against those who contravened regulations (Piccialuti Caprioli, 1976: lxi–lxxx). Only a few Italians could afford to purchase a radio transmitter and gatherings of people secretly listening to Radio London were very common. The number of wireless owners therefore did not reflect the number of actual listeners (Natale, 1990). Despite this difficulty, the efforts made by the BBC to attract the interest of the Italians proved to be successful. The letters sent by listeners of the Italian Service to Colonel Stevens, the most popular broadcaster in Italy, contained expressions of gratitude for the work undertaken by the BBC's team. Stevens was seen as *uno di famiglia* [one of the family]. In more than one letter the Colonel's admirers wished he would visit them in Italy at the end of the war. In other cases the writers requested an autographed picture of him (Lo Biundo, 2014: 51–58).

The success of Radio London's broadcasts is further confirmed by the accounts of people who survived the war. It is not rare to hear elderly people referring to Radio London as the voice of freedom. These accounts on the favourable reception of the British broadcasts do not enable us to draw reliable conclusions about the percentage of listeners. However, they provide an insight into both the feelings and emotions of many Italians in wartime and the role of the BBC in Fascist Italy.

While a positive portrait of Radio London has prevailed in the Italian heritage of the Second World War for over seventy years, the ambiguity of the British propaganda to Italy is clearly reflected in the radio broadcasts of the Italian Service.

The double role of Allied Forces as both occupiers and liberators of Italy has been extensively analysed by the Second World War historiography (Mercuri, 1973; Ellwood, 1985; Piffer, 2010; Williams, 2013; Patti, 2013). In this article, this dual nature is studied from the perspective of the BBC propaganda towards Italy in the months preceding the Allied landing in Sicily and the Italian campaign (1942–45). Two different but complementary aspects are at the centre of these investigations. Initially, a selection of radio broadcasts will be analysed in order to discover how the BBC contributed to the portrait of the Anglo-Americans as guarantors of both freedom and better living conditions for the Italians.<sup>1</sup> In the final section, the occupation/liberation will be analysed from the angle of the relationships between British authorities (the occupiers/liberators) and the Italian anti-Fascist employees at the BBC (the ‘occupied’). Here the article will explore in greater depth the degree of freedom of the BBC’s Italian broadcasters and their political role in the UK.

### Self-portrait of the Allies: Civilian Safety and the Food Issue

The Allies’ victories in North Africa at the end of 1942 would be followed by the Casablanca conference of January 1943. At the conference was established that the Allies would continue to pursue a Mediterranean strategy by landing in Sicily the following Summer. The Husky Operation, as the military operations in the island were secretly named, started the 10 July 1943 and opened the Italian campaign (Pack, 1977; Hinsley, 1993).

The new season of Anglo-American military successes would be supported by the ‘fourth front’ (Cruickshank, 1977; Mercuri, 1998; Lanotte, 2012) as well. In particular, the BBC Italian Service would begin the so-called ‘war of nerves’, as one directive of the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) to the radio attests. The PWE was established in 1940 to unify all the British institutions in charge of propaganda. This organization sent weekly directives to the Italian Service. During the Allies’ occupation an important role would be also played by the Psychological Warfare Branch, a joint Anglo-American institution.<sup>2</sup> The ‘war of nerves’ strategy consisted of repeating the message that ‘the end of the Tunisian campaign would be followed by further blows at the Axis’ underbelly without predicting where the blows would fall’ (NA FO, 18 March 1943). The aim, in accordance with the broader Allied objective of undermining civilian morale (Mercuri, 1983), was to create a feeling of uncertainty and danger.

In the same months the PWE concurrently repeated that the BBC should take a friendly approach in order to appeal to Italians (NA FO, 14 January 1943). In other words, the Allies needed to guarantee the collaboration of civilians, or at

<sup>1</sup>While this article focuses on the programmes broadcast in 1942–45, the actual political and economical reconstruction of the country in the same years will be neglected, since this topic would deserve a separate treatment. Publications on the theme include Ellwood (1985), Piffer (2010), Williams (2013), and Patti (2013).

<sup>2</sup>On the history of PWE see Lockhart (1947) and Garnett (2002). When the Allied landed in Italy an important role would be also played by the Anglo-American Psychological Warfare Branch. On the role of the PWB in Italy see Footitt and Tobia (2013: 69–91).

least the non-obstruction of their military operations. It was crucial to stress that the British were not fighting against Italy as a country; they were instead combatting the dictatorship of Mussolini. The Italians and the Fascist regime, as the radio reiterated until the Allies' landing in Sicily, had to be considered as two separate entities. Furthermore, if the Italians rejected the Fascist regime, they would not receive poor treatment at the hand of the occupying troops.

The second step was to convince the population that the British could improve their living conditions by taking care of their safety and provide food supplies. Regardless of their Italian origins, civilians would be treated as if they were British citizens. In this regard, the bombings of Italian cities as well as the food issue were the object of discussions in many programmes that were broadcast around the time of the El Alamein victory and the Allies' landing in Sicily. The responsibility for the deaths of many civilians killed by bombs was usually attributed to Mussolini's regime for not planning any security measures to protect the Italian population

In just one raid on Genoa, more people were killed, in proportion to the population of the town, than in two years of bombing of Great Britain. It happened in a single shelter, in the course of one brief hour, and the casualties were not caused by the British bombs, but by the Fascist misgovernment- as irresponsible as it is inefficient. (BBC WAC IS, 19 November 1942).<sup>3</sup>

The bombings of Genoa mentioned in the programmes had taken place in June 1940, only a few days after the Italian declaration of war.<sup>4</sup>

Programmes describing the situation in the UK were also very frequent. Their aim was to point out the extreme differences between the Fascist mismanagement and the care of the British government for its civilians. British authorities, as these programmes often repeated, would supply their citizens with air-raid shelters and gas masks and would evacuate the children prior to the outbreak of the war

Do you want to know how England went into the war? First of all, by distributing 46 million gas masks. Second, by ordering the evacuation of all children and all administrative institutions. Then in every square and in every park they built underground air raid shelters for those left behind, and shelters made out of reinforced concrete in every street. Then England went on to organise its air defence; and finally it built enough fighter planes to make the Luftwaffe's air raids more and more difficult and dangerous. Then, and only then, did England build its big bombers and all the other weapons which now dominate the skies and the battlefields. (BBC WAC IS, 24 November 1942)

<sup>3</sup>With a few exceptions, for which I found the original text in English, the English translations of the Italian Service radio transcripts are mine. In this case the text in English is original.

<sup>4</sup>On the bombings of Italy and France during the Second World War see Baldoli and Knapp (2012).

The evident proof of the effectiveness of such advanced defensive measures, suggested another programme in November 1942, was the stoic attitude of the British civilians towards the unforeseen tragic circumstances brought about by the war. The programme describes the typical day of Mr Smith, the protagonist, during war time. After hearing the air-raid siren, Mr Smith goes to his allocated air shelter as usual, but unfortunately the conclusion of that particular day is not so ordinary because his house is destroyed by a bomb. In spite of this disastrous event the self-control of the British man is worthy of admiration

His house, furniture, personal belongings, twenty years' worth of honest and honourable work all gone up in smoke. What was he to do? Despair? Cry? Certainly not! Mr Smith, at a brisk pace, went to the Citizens' Advice Bureau. There were about 20 people queuing, all homeless like him, all victims of the bombs like him, no clothes, no money. In less than half an hour the queue disappeared. Mr Smith received 20 pounds for instant aid [...]. He received a voucher for a suit, an overcoat, linen and shoes, which were delivered to him a few hours later. And, most importantly, he received a paper upon which it was stated that 'Mr Smith is allowed to occupy a real flat on a real street immediately (BBC WAC IS, 1 December 1942).

Before July 1943 the food question was another highly debated issue in the Italian Service programmes. In this case too, comparisons between Italy and Great Britain were made to reinforce the image of the British administration as both reliable and responsible. The food situation in Great Britain, as BBC broadcasters often said, was proof of the substantial efforts the British government would make to satisfy the essential needs of its population. Nevertheless, Fascist propaganda was trying to discredit the British government by misinforming Italians on the distribution of food in the UK.

Why is Fascist propaganda trying to show that the food situation in England is disastrous? An article, which will be read to you shortly, claims this. Why does it? For many reasons: first of all, for the oldest and proverbial principle that 'trouble shared is a trouble halved'. It is a theme that let [the Fascist regime] hope that the English are as tired of the war as the Italians. An attempt to show that there is a shortage of food in England is the same as saying that the marine campaign is going gloriously well.' (BBC WAC IS, 5 May 1943).

At the end of the programme, an extract from an article published by the Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero* on the 'precarious British food situation' is quoted.

The practice of reading quotes from Italian press or speeches of Fascist politicians was very common at the BBC. In 1939, the BBC Monitoring Service had been established with the aim of monitoring and transcribing the content of foreign press and radios. All these collected materials would be then used for propaganda purposes, together with information obtained through other sources such as British informants in Italian territories and Italian prisoners in the UK.



In particular, the Italian prisoners of war were often mentioned in the BBC programmes as witnesses of the dignified treatment they were receiving in the British POW camps. Broadcasts about the food supplies provided the perfect pretext to introduce the theme of the prisoners' diet.

I do not want to mention everything they found, since to boast about a sumptuously decked table is as unpleasant as it is rude, but they found that bread was not rationed, that there were plenty of potatoes and vegetables, and that pasta was not rationed. They found that in the restaurants people can order all the food they want without coupons. Meat was on the menu everyday. [...] But what about the Italians? (BBC WAC IS, 1 May 1943).

Whilst the texts examined so far extol the responsible and careful British administration in July 1943 Radio London alluded explicitly to the better life conditions, which the Allies promised to bring. A programme dated 17 July 1943 tells the account of a French woman about the Allies' arrival in Tunis

Days ago, I happened to hear a French woman on the radio who said that, when the Allied troops arrived in Tunis, they brought large quantities of canned milk for the children. The same happened some months before in Tripoli, where condensed and powdered milk was distributed to Italian and Arab children after the occupation. If you want to find an explanation for this kindness of heart, you will only have to observe what England does for its children and particularly for their nutrition. (BBC WAC IS, 17 July 1943)

After a detailed description of the food rations for children in the UK, the broadcaster concluded that what happened in Tunis occurred in Sicily as well. The Allied troops would provide food and health for all children. Italian mothers – that was the implied message – could rest assured that their children would receive good care.

### **Self-portrait of the Allies: Italian Cultural Heritage and Reconstruction**

After the Allies' landing in Sicily, it certainly became easier for the BBC to talk about the Anglo-American successes. Many programmes dated July 1943, refer to the joy of North-Africans and Sicilians and to the warm welcome received in the conquered territories. What became more difficult was handling topics such as the safety and wellbeing of the population, since the Italian campaign proved to be more difficult and slow than initially expected. While the Allies were now liberating Italy as promised, 'the new invaders soon discovered that between the abstract [...] and the physical realities of Southern Italy in late 1943, there lay a world and more of difference' (Ellwood, 1985: 49).

The Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories was now the Anglo-American institution in charge of administering the conquered territories.

As such, it was central to emphasize what the Control Commission was doing to support the reconstruction of Italy. The Italian Service started claiming that the Allies were doing their best to distribute food provisions. However, the war was difficult and there were many obstacles to overcome before Italy could remedy its shortage of supplies (Ellwood, 1985; Williams, 2013). The importation and distribution of food were mainly obstructed by military operations and the German attacks on the main communication routes (BBC WAC IS, 25 August 1944). Also, it would take some time before Italian factories could access all the raw materials, machinery, transportation, power, and fuel needed to start working properly again. Nevertheless, as claimed by Colonel Stevens in November 1944, the Allied Forces were gradually rehabilitating the Italian industries, as the increased production of essential goods in liberated Italy showed (BBC WAC IS, 20 November 1944).

It may not be a coincidence that the number of broadcasts mentioning bombings decreased in 1944–45. Information about bombings would still be aired, but it received less prominence in BBC coverage. Whenever bombs were the theme of programmes, the approach adopted by the BBC was moderate; references to human victims in Italy were almost absent. When discussing the damage caused by the air raids, Radio London began by mentioning all the measures taken by the Allies to protect and restore historical monuments instead, as several programmes show

The war has its toll, but, as far as possible the Allied forces are aware of the importance of artwork and historical buildings. With regard to European civilisation, they are trying to spare everyone from the horrors of war, or at least to limit the damage. This was declared yesterday in the House of Commons by the Minister of War Sir James Grigg, who also provided detailed information on the measures taken by the Allies to safeguard the artistic heritage in the operational zones. (BBC WAC IS, 1 January 1944)

Under the supervision of expert archaeologists, the text continues, special divisions were already working in the liberated territories, restoring the most damaged buildings and protecting items of cultural value, which had been passed down through thirty centuries of history.<sup>5</sup>

A month later, Radio London said that the British authorities had started to collaborate with the *Sovrintendenza alle Belle Arti Italiana* to rescue numerous monuments from certain destruction (BBC WA IS, 7 February 1944). The theme of cultural preservation arose several other times in the BBC's Italian programmes during 1944, especially in those cases where the Allies were operating close to cities of great historical and artistic interest. The day before the liberation of Rome, just to provide one example, the Italian Service transmitted the declaration of General Maitland Wilson, the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean theatre, on the cultural prominence of the city

<sup>5</sup>On the defence of artworks in Italy see Baldoli *et al.* (2011: 101–20).

Allied authorities know very well that ROME is the Pope's residence and that the City includes the neutral State of VATICAN City. It is, therefore, the firm intention of the Allies and their military authorities to take all measures possible to safeguard the population of Rome as well as the historical and religious monuments in the city. (BBC WA IS, 3 June 1944)

But the role of the Allied forces, as stated in another programme, also included helping the country to reconstruct its political life. The Anglo-Americans were collaborating with local authorities, since they aimed to see an independent and free Italy as soon as possible. However, Radio London claimed, there was still a substantial obstacle to Italian democracy: German forces. The programme once again opened with premise of the 'hard and difficult war'. Only by destroying Nazism could the Allies finally rebuild 'a world where the governors keep the governors in check, a world where authority, work and money are shared as equally as possible' (BBC WAC IS, 4 April 1944).

## Behind the Microphones: the British Foreign Office and the Italian exiles

As we have seen thus far, before the Anglo-American landing in Sicily and during the actual occupation, BBC programmes described the Allied occupiers as liberators and guarantors of better living conditions. British propaganda was trying to persuade the Italians that the military actions against their country were a necessary evil in the interests of victory. Moreover, all political and administrative choices were made for the sake of civilians and a democratic future.

Nevertheless, if we concentrate on the political relationships between the British Foreign Office and the Italian broadcasters, it is evident that neither the destiny of Italy, nor the anti-Fascist cause, was a British priority. Certain political questions were more delicate than others and caused misgivings and concern among the Italian exiles. This was the case of the Italian unconditional surrender.<sup>6</sup>

The programmes broadcast before 8 September, the day of Italy's surrender do not present any form of dissent against the idea of an Italian unconditional surrender (Lo Biundo, 2014: 116–29). However, some documents of the Foreign Office reveal that the issue was in fact heavily debated.

In August 1943, Colonel Stevens wrote to Bruce Lockhart, head of the PWE, to inform him about a conversation he had had with some Italian collaborators

It came as a great surprise to me a few days ago when I discovered through a chance conversation with an Italian colleague, his reaction to the recent developments. I have since discussed the question with several other Italians who have not much in common except their anti-Fascism and a distinctly pro-English attitude. On one essential I find general agreement: it is roughly

<sup>6</sup>On the unconditional surrender of Italy see Rossi (1993); Di Nolfo & Serra (2010).

this: 'British propaganda has for years differentiated between Fascists and Italian people. It has conveyed to the Italians, especially during the last few months, the message that if they got rid of Fascism they would receive a different treatment. The Italians now find that, though they have got rid of Fascism, so far from being treated differently they are faced, as uncompromisingly as ever, with unconditional surrender. This they feel is a fraudulent trick, which is only aggravated by speaking in the same breath of honourable peace and unconditional surrender' (NA FO, 7 August, 1943).

In a letter to a third person whose name is not specified, Lockhart wrote that the Colonel's request that he should deal with the issue should be ignored, given his well-known pro-Italian attitude (NA FO, 9 August 1943).

The circumstances experienced by some Italian exiles working for Radio London further confirm the complexity of their relationships with the Foreign Office. When Italy entered the war many Italians living in the UK were interned as enemy aliens. Several anti-Fascists were interned in the British Prisoner of War Camps too, despite their well-known political opposition to the regime (Bernabei, 1997; Sponza, 2000). Among these internees there were some of the anti-Fascists who were already working for the BBC. These included Limentani, and Treves. Witnesses of their period of internment revealed that there was no difference in terms of the treatment received by refugees who were in the UK because of their political opposition to the regime, and Fascist prisoners.

After surviving the sinking of the *Arandora Star*, in June 1940, Limentani sent a report on the episode to the Foreign Office. The *Arandora Star* had been hit by a torpedo at beginning of July 1940, while transporting internees and PoWs to Canada. Around 446 victims lost their lives (Bernabei, 1997: 178–190; Sponza, 2000: 105–112). In the introduction to this document he mentions his internment. He was interned on 13<sup>th</sup> June and in his camp 'no distinction whatsoever was made either at that time or after between refugees and other people' (NA FO n.d. a, b, most likely July-August 1940).<sup>7</sup> Later in the same report, Limentani denounced the inhumane conditions in which the prisoners were forced to live by referring to very inadequate hygiene facilities and food shortages. He also referred to his job at BBC:

As I thought there was the possibility that I should be parted from the group of Italian refugees with which I was staying, I informed on the same evening the Commandant Braybrook of the camp and some other officers about my position as a refugee and as an official of the BBC, and I asked them not to split the group of refugees. I was told that, if I was a refugee, my position was certainly being considered. I was therefore very surprised, on the following morning, when I heard that my name was included in the list of those who

<sup>7</sup>The document is mentioned in Sponza (2002: 109)

were going to leave, and that I had to part from all other refugees. (NA FO n.d. a, b, most likely July–August 1940).

Evidently, in the eye of the British authorities, Limentani's contribution to the radio propaganda against the Fascist regime did not constitute a good enough reason to allow him better treatment.

In an article published anonymously in the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1940 issue of the weekly magazine *The Tribune* (FFT, FPT, 9 August 1940), Treves expressed very similar opinions on his experience as an internee.<sup>8</sup> The article starts with his account of what happened on the morning 'two gentlemen' knocked on his door. 'Suddenly flashes of old remembrances' of his past life in Italy, wrote Treves, came back to him. Treves moved to England in 1938, after being arrested twice in Italy. Only now this was happening in England and this time he was destined to internment as an enemy alien. In Treves' article there are also references to the 'filthy and unhealthy' environment and to the poor hygiene of the camps in which he had been interned for over a month. A detail about his transfer to another camp is particularly interesting. If he had been arrested only an hour before, he could have boarded the *Arandora Star*, as time of the arrest was the criterion that determined who was sent to the ship. The sources on Treves' internment are contradictory. Ruggero Orlando, interviewed by Maura Piccialuti Caprioli (1979: V–XIII), declared that Paolo and Treves had not been interned at all during the war. However, some documents of the Foreign Office on the internments of Italian anti-Fascists (NA FO Statement by Mr Gillies), as well as Treves' article analysed in this essay, prove the contrary.

Another analogy between Limentani's report and Treves' article relates to the political refugees status – both wrote that protection from the Fascist prisoners was not guaranteed in the camps.

We discovered that there were some 70 anti-Fascist refugees in that camp. We tried to keep together to avoid incidents and threats from the Fascists. Fascist songs, threats and anti-British talk were the normal amusement of an overwhelming majority of the internees. I tried to point this out and to explain our intolerable position to the officers in charge, but the only reply was: '*We don't care a damn about politics. Here everyone is the same*' (FFT, FPT, 9 August 1940).

Referring to another camp, Treves commented on the difficult moments he had been through, declaring that he felt as if he was back in Italy, the country he had escaped from.

The internment of Treves, Limentani and other Italian anti-Fascist exiles took place when Italy entered the war. However, even in 1944, when the Italian broadcasters were free citizens who had been working for the BBC for years, the Foreign

<sup>8</sup>The article was found among Treves' personal papers in a box containing a copy of his publications. This is the reason why he is most likely to be the author (FFT, FPT, box 4, *Scritti*).

Office still had an influence on their lives. At the end of 1943, after the defeat of Mussolini's dictatorship and the Allied landing in Italy, some Italian broadcasters, including Treves, Calosso, and Petrone, wrote to the Foreign Office authorities. They expressed their desire to return to their country, where they felt they were needed for the cause of liberation and political reconstruction. The British Foreign Office initially refused them permission to leave England. It took many months before they were able to reach Italy.

What connects these letters is the disappointment and inability to understand why an answer from the Foreign Office was taking so long to arrive. Churchill and Eden had promised that 'the British government would then facilitate the repatriation of all Italians of prominence' (NA FO, 30 November 1943). Moreover, 'after the Moscow conference, the Allied authorities in Italy declared that they were looking for anti-Fascists to help in the reconstruction of the country' (NA FO Letter by Umberto Calosso, n.d a, b). Calosso is here referring to the Conference of Moscow of October–November 1943, between the foreign ministers of the UK, the USA, the Republic of China, and the Soviet Union. Identifying anti-Fascists to repatriate should not be that difficult, Calosso argued, since there were very few Italian political refugees in England who met the Allies' requirements (NA FO letter by Umberto Calosso n.d a, b).

One possible explanation for the British authorities' reticence is found in Philip Noel Baker's answer to a letter from Treves. In the letter Baker, who was the Ministry of War Transport at the time, reported an extract of a message from the Foreign Office

We have consulted the British Broadcasting Corporation, who have strongly expressed that there is little to gain in facilitating the return of Paolo Treves to Italy at present. The same goes for his brother, mother and fiancée. On the contrary, we would lose two capable and almost irreplaceable members of the British Broadcasting Corporation's Italian team. The British Broadcasting Corporation are strongly of the opinion that the Treves brothers are certainly of better use to the war effort in England than they are likely to ever be in Italy. (IISH PTP, 21 April 1944)

The comments made by the Foreign Office on the Treves brothers are certainly flattering. Yet, despite the praiseworthy and useful work undertaken for the British propaganda, the two exiles were not free to follow their will and continue their anti-Fascist activity in Italy. Treves obtained the authorization to return home only at the end of 1944, more than a year after his first request to the Foreign Office.

## Conclusion

When the war ended, Treves (1945) and Limentani (1973) wrote about their experience at the BBC. Their texts show that they were extremely proud to work at Radio

London for the anti-Fascist cause, and to serve their country from abroad. Some of the broadcasters would write that in the majority of cases they felt free to express their own opinions from the BBC's microphones and to give proper information rather than propaganda. However, the documents analysed show that, during the years of the war, the relationships between the BBC's Italian broadcasters and the British authorities were not always easy. The case of the unconditional surrender of Italy clearly demonstrates that there were moments in which the Italian exiles contested the content of the programmes. The obvious incongruity between what the anti-Fascist exiles declared at the end of the war and what the documents of the Foreign Office disclose, show British radio's difficult role as both the voice of the occupier and of moral support for the Italian population. The Italian Service was both a radio praised and thanked in the listeners' letters and the instrument used by the Foreign Office to address an enemy.

A more systematic analysis of the PWE and PWB directives as well as a more comprehensive examination of the Allies' occupation of Italy might provide further evidence of this contrast. Yet a simple comparison between the programmes and what happened behind the BBC microphones, already reveals many contradictions in the Radio London phenomenon. While the radio was reassuring the Italians that the Allies would start a new season of democracy for Italy, the head of the PWE declared that Colonel Stevens' attempts to address the Italian employees' concerns about the future of their country had to be ignored. Despite the Italian Service constantly repeating that food rations in England were decent for both British citizens and Italian war prisoners, Limentani and Treves exposed the inhumane conditions of their internment, as well as the absence of protection from Fascist prisoners. Lastly, while the BBC was transmitting programmes on the political and economic reconstruction of Italy, the Italian broadcasters at the BBC were not allowed to return to Italy, which they had been forced to leave by the Fascist regime.

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## Notes on contributor

**Ester Lo Biundo** is PhD candidate and a sessional lecturer at the University of Reading. She is researching the BBC's radio broadcasts in Italy during the Anglo-American occupation of Italy and partisan Resistance to Nazi Germany (1943–45). Her publications include: "London Calling Italy. La propaganda di Radio Londra nel 1943" (Edizioni Unicopli, 2014) and "The war of nerves". *Le trasmissioni di Radio Londra da El Alamein all'operazione Husky* (Meridiana. Rivista di Storia e Scienze Sociali, 2015, n. 82. pp. 13–35).

Correspondence to: Ester Lo Biundo, University of Reading, Reading, Berkshire, UK. Email: ester.lobiundo@reading.ac.uk