

# The Cultural Policy of Fascist Italy in Brazil: The Soft Power Of A Medium-Sized Nation On Brazilian Grounds (1922-1940)

João Fábio Bertonha

## Introduction

Since the late 19th Century, when circa 1.5 million Italians emigrated to Brazil, the two countries have maintained relatively close relations. This propinquity certainly did not prevent the occasional cooling or even moments of tension, such as the various disputes over the tutelage of the Italian immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries. Nevertheless, the relationship between Brazil and Italy is generally positive and the only time the two nations have found themselves on opposing sides was during the World War II.

In order to understand the dynamics of the Brazil/Italy relationship, it is essential to look at that crucial interwar period, more specifically the fascist period, when the Italian government went to great lengths to bring Brazil into its orbit of influence.

This article seeks to do just that, presenting an overview of Brazil/Italy relations during the interwar years, the range of instruments the Mussolini regime used to broaden its influence over the South-American giant and the results this yielded. Without wanting to labor topics and themes about which I have already published on various occasions in other spaces<sup>1</sup>, the aim here is to paint a panorama of Italy's objectives in Brazil, the effort it made to achieve them and the results it obtained. More specifically, this article will focus at length on Italian cultural policy and propaganda in Brazil during that period and how these fit within Rome's wider efforts to acquire influence in a context in which its military and economic clout was too limited to be taken into consideration.

---

1 For greater depth and detail on the many topics dealt with in this article, and for a more complete bibliography, see (to cite books only): BERTONHA, João Fábio. *Sob a Sombra de Mussolini: Os italianos de São Paulo e a luta contra o Fascismo, 1919-1945*. São Paulo: Annablume, 1999; *O fascismo e os imigrantes italianos no Brasil*. Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2001; *Sobre a Direita - estudos sobre o fascismo, o nazismo e o integralismo*. Maringá: Eduem, 2008.

## The Issue Of Fascist Imperialism And Brazil

I have dealt with the theme of Italian imperialism in various other texts<sup>2</sup>, and deepened my discussion of it in some recent publications<sup>3</sup>. However, for our present purposes, suffice it to recall that fascist imperialism was a gradual departure from Italian diplomatic traditions, ushering the nation toward a far more aggressive and ambitious imperialist bent that would ultimately align its destiny with that of Hitler's Germany<sup>4</sup>.

Italy's traditional, military imperialism was buttressed by a "parallel diplomacy" of an expressively subversive and ideological order. This "parallel diplomacy" was sometimes used to supplement the nation's traditional imperialist activities, and in other cases, where Italy did not have sufficient military or economic means to achieve its ends, it was employed as a substitute. This subtler parallel diplomacy was therefore a supplement or a substitute depending on where and when it was employed.

So where military or economic resources came up short, Italy could scramble less material resources to compensate. The mobilization and control of Italian communities worldwide, ties with fascist movements or likeminded governments in other countries, the creation of cultural propaganda steeped in ideology, and destabilizing infiltrations in target nations were all key elements in this "subversive diplomacy" that shadowed the official diplomatic line.

Much of this parallel diplomacy was part of the Italian diplomatic reality even before fascism (such as cultural propaganda and the mobilization of immigrant communities), just as many other countries - democratic or otherwise - then as now, availed of the same strategies to extend their international influence. However, Italian fascism re-worked those elements, associated them with traditional imperialist thought and tied them in with a very particular notion of Empire, essentially traditional, but with some aspects that were entirely new.

One idea of great interest to our discussion here is that of "concentric imperialisms", according to which the Italian diplomatic elites and the Fascist Party gradually came to envision an Italian Empire that rippled concentrically outwards from its Roman core, spanning the globe with its ever-widening rings.

The topic is too broad to go into here, but the basic idea is that the closer you were to the center, the more traditional fascist imperialism would be, i.e., its power gained and retained by force. The further away, however, the more reliant the Empire became on less direct forms of power, even if all manners of dominion were employed to some degree.

---

2 BERTONHA, João Fábio. *Os Italianos*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2005; "Um imperialismo dos pobres: O Império italiano da era liberal ao fascismo" in SILVA, Francisco Carlos Teixeira Da. *Impérios na História*. Rio de Janeiro: Campus, 2009, pp. 259-269.

3 BERTONHA, João Fábio. "La "diplomacia paralela" de Mussolini en Brasil: vínculos culturales, emigratorios y políticos en un proyecto de poder (1922-1943)", *Pasado y Memoria. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 11, 2012, pp. 71-92.

4 For more on Italian imperialism, see: LABANCA, Nicola. *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002.

Latin America, and therefore Brazil, definitely lay at the outer limits of Italy's imperial ambitions, which would explain their modesty and, in comparison with elsewhere<sup>5</sup>, the generally indirect nature of the methods employed to achieve them.

It seems clear that Fascist Italy's interest in exercising political influence over Brazil was highly theoretical and conditioned by Italian priorities and resources, but it was real nonetheless, and the Italians had three avenues it could explore in order to secure it: cultural propaganda and/or policy; Italian communities with ties to Brazilian fascist organizations (Integralism); and, on a lesser scale, Getúlio Vargas' *Estado Novo* regime.

The first instrument was the mobilization of the Italian communities in Brazil, which were to play an important role in furthering Italian interests, albeit with realistic and concrete objectives and directives.

Given the Brazilian political structure, the Italian government knew that the local immigrant community held very little sway over Brazilian governmental policy and could not be expected to serve as a pressure group (as occurs in the USA), much less as anything resembling a "fifth column" or supporting force in the event of invasion. It was clear that little could be asked of the Italian colony in Brazil, so no demands were made.

Realistic in this regard, the regime turned its attention to the second tool at its disposal: its strong relationship with Brazilian fascism—the Integralists—and with the Vargas government. Given the limitations of the Italian colony and the fascist propaganda machine in Brazil, which we will address in a moment, Rome saw "parallel diplomacy" as the best way to steer Brazil in the desired direction.

Numerous researchers, the author included<sup>6</sup>, have explored the tight bonds between Italian Fascism and the *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (in terms of institutional relations, grassroots support, top brass and ideological influences, etc.), so there is no need for us to re-examine them here. The affinities were more than evident, and it should come as no surprise that Rome relied on Integralism to increase its influence in Brazil. The fact that Integralism failed to deliver on these hopes was a heavy blow to Italy's Brazilian intentions.

Having outlined Italy's designs toward Brazil in the latter half of the 1930s and the tools it had at its disposal - ideological diffusion, the Italian colony and, especially, the power-play between the Integralists and the *Estado Novo* -, we will now turn to the third string in the Italian bow, namely propaganda and cultural policy, particularly during the period 1936-40, when it reached its height.

---

5 BERTONHA, João Fábio. "¿Un imperio italiano en América Latina? Inmigrantes, fascistas y la política externa "paralela" de Mussolini", in SAVARINO, Franco e GONZÁLEZ, José Luis, *México. Escenario de confrontaciones*. México: ENAH, 2010, pp. 161-188.

6 In addition to my own works, see: TRENTO, Ângelo. "Relações entre fascismo e integralismo: o ponto de vista do Ministério dos negócios estrangeiros italiano.", *Ciência e Cultura* 34, 12 (1982), pp. 1601-13 and SEITENFUS, Ricardo, "Ideology and Diplomacy: Italian Fascism and Brazil (1935-1938)", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 64, 3, 1984, pp. 503-534 and *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a formação dos blocos, 1930-1942 (O Processo de envolvimento brasileiro na II Guerra Mundial)*, São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1985.

## Propaganda and cultural policy <sup>7</sup>

During the first ten years of the fascist regime, Italy's relative lack of interest in Brazil and the general ineffectiveness of its propaganda machine resulted in a weak propagandist effort in the country, largely confined to cultural themes, with the distribution of books about Italy, the holding of conferences and sponsored trips for the odd Brazilian journalist. Other initiatives were the founding of the Istituto Italo Brasiliano di Alta Cultura in Brazil and of the Istituto Colombo in Rome, an organ created to support Italy's cultural, economic and commercial expansion in Latin America. However, this general disinterest changed radically in the 1930s, as the Italian system for ideological and cultural diffusion grew in efficiency.

In the 1920s, fascist propaganda abroad basically targeted Italian immigrants and their descendants. This changed substantially in the 1930s, as the fascist propaganda machine broadened its scope reaching many countries. There was also a growing use of radio at this time, which was an effective means of reaching foreign populations and of making the switch from a defensive cultural policy (preserving and promoting Italian values worldwide) to a more pro-active approach (as an instrument of foreign policy and geopolitics).

This scaling-up required major changes to the architecture of the Italian government, with constant refinements being made to the system up until 1937, when the regime unveiled what was to be the pinnacle of its fascist culture and propaganda apparatus both at home and abroad, the Ministero della Cultura Popolare or MinCulPop.

These structural modifications to the Italian state would hardly have had any effect on Brazil had the fascist aims and policies for the country remained the same as they had been in the 1920s. However, not only did Italy's Brazilian interests grow in the 1930s, but the ideological card took on a whole new importance in bringing those interests to fruition. Not surprisingly, the result was that the Italian propaganda structure for Brazil became more sophisticated in the second half of the 1930s.

This sophistication could be felt in a number of different fields. In addition to stepping up the familiar methods of holding conferences and distributing books and other literature, the Italian government started sending a vast amount of articles, photos and other items of propaganda to be distributed to newspapers throughout Brazil, and there were even some timid attempts to put Italian films (*Camicia Nera* for example) on Brazilian release.

The fascist propaganda machine was constantly tweaked throughout the first half of the 1930s, though the height of this fine-tuning would come a little later, during the Italo-Abyssinian War, when a propaganda offensive was launched to defend the Italian cause. By that point, the Italian propaganda structure had matured enough

---

<sup>7</sup> To facilitate the reading, I have removed references to sources and most of the secondary bibliography from this article. For access to this information, and a deeper analysis of Italian cultural policy in Brazil, see: BERTONHA, João Fábio. "Divulgando o Duce e o fascismo em terra brasileira: a propaganda italiana no Brasil, 1922-1943", *Revista de História Regional*, 5, 2, 2000, pp. 83-110.

to envisage obtaining greater influence over Brazilian public opinion.

### **The Embassy War, 1936-1940<sup>8</sup>**

Italy's propaganda drive targeted what they saw to be two different publics: the general population and the intellectual/intellectualized milieu. The distinction was somewhat artificial (as there were obviously constant intersections between them), but it does help us better understand the approaches Italian propaganda took during this period.

The regime's prime concern was the Brazilian press, and the battle to get as many vehicles on-side as possible took up a great deal of the fascists' time and energy.

There were certainly sympathizers among the Brazilian press corps who, out of affinity alone, used their journalistic space to paint fascism in a positive light. However, often journalists had to be slowly wooed, often with commendations or free trips to Italy. The distribution of financial subsidies and telegraphic franchises to Brazilian newspapers was another common way of currying favor.

However, the most widely used technique for getting Brazilian newspapers to adopt a pro-Italy, pro-fascist agenda was to ply them with articles and photographs. The Italian archives are full of records of this distribution of propaganda to dozens (if not hundreds) of Brazilian newspapers between 1934 and 1940, and this was not done on-speak, but was carefully weighed and timed for maximum effect.

Still in relation to the written word, another fascist technique was to inundate the country with publications about Italy and fascism. These publications were mostly pamphlets and fliers for the common man. Written in Portuguese, Italian and Spanish, they showcased the regime's major achievements, its corporative doctrine, the African war, and aspects of fascist life and ideology. Set up for that express purpose by MinCulPop, the office NUPIE was in charge of producing anti-communist propaganda, and it sent paneloads of its pamphlets to Brazil.

However, fascist propaganda was not limited to the written word. As one would expect of a movement that pioneered the use of modern mass media, fascism did not ignore the innovative new methods honed and perfected during the interwar period: radio and cinema.

In relation to radio, there are references to direct broadcasts from Italy to Brazil, including Il Duce's speeches and content in Portuguese, though this seems to have been a limited effort. Brazilian radio was used more liberally as a vehicle for pro-Italian content, through such shows as *Hora italiana* (for which records and other materials arrived directly from Italy in bulk), broad-

---

<sup>8</sup> For details, see: BERTONHA, João Fábio. "A Guerra das Embaixadas: as grandes potências e a propaganda estrangeira no Brasil do entre guerras (review of a work by Antônio Pedro Tota)", *LOCUS - Revista de História*, 12, 7, 2001, pp. 159-164.

cast on various stations in São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, etc. Other documents speak of Italian efforts to re-transmit Stefani News broadcasts on Brazilian airwaves.

As for cinema, the films the regime sent to Brazil struggled under American competition and reach the public. Between 1936 and the outbreak of World War II, the Italian government did its best to turn this around, with some success, as Brazilian movie theaters began to screen Italian films, especially in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais.

The fascist propaganda machine did not limit itself to the use of print or audiovisual media. Other, more classical approaches were taken too, such as exhibitions and pompous air force and naval visits were used to impress the Brazilian public.

Regarding the exhibitions, such as the Italian participation in the *Exposição do Estado Novo* of 1939, and that held two years earlier to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of Italian immigrants in São Paulo. The commemorative show included model representations of the Italian victory in the Abyssinian War and illustrations of fascist works, plus a showroom full of FIAT tanks and tractors. The exhibition also received a special radio address from Count Ciano in Rome.

Italian air shows were also a major crowd-pleaser, with the Brazilian public enthusiastically applauding the aerial acrobatics of De Pinedo, Ferrarin, Del Prete, Bruno Mussolini, and company. Visits to Brazilian ports by Italian battleships had a similar effect, in terms of parading the power and efficiency of the New Italy.

We can see that the Italian government made a reasonable effort to reach the wider Brazilian public with its propaganda, but there was one other front that warrants special attention: cultural propaganda.

One of the regime's first concerns in getting a foothold in Brazilian culture was to captivate the intellectuals. In order to do this, they conferred awards and distributed vast amounts of fascist literature, which was not only more sophisticated than the pamphlets handed out to the general populace, but was specially tailored to the intellectual milieu. The distribution of books to universities and schools is abundantly documented in the MinCulPop archives, as are plans to finance the translation of Italian fascist and anti-communist literature.

However, the granting of accolades and distribution of books were not the only forms the regime used to coopt intellectuals. Paid visits to Italy were also common, ostensibly to parade the wonders of fascism and the cultural wealth of Italy. Those most frequently treated to these Italian tours were journalists (as mentioned earlier), university lecturers and students, and government top brass.

Cultural relations were also deepened and strengthened through more intense exchange between Brazilian and Italian educators and intellectuals. In fact, conferences on art and Italian culture, as well as of ideological aspects of

fascism administered by Italian intellectuals became relatively common here.

Another highly efficient means of fostering cultural exchange between Brazil and Italy was the transfer of Italian professors to Brazilian universities. Most of these came to São Paulo, where they taught at USP, but others moved up to Rio de Janeiro or even farther afield, such as Porto Alegre in the south. These Italian professors began to show up in records from 1934 and 35 and, by 1940, eight Italian academics held chairs at Brazilian universities.

Among the best-known of these intellectuals were De Falco (Italian literature), Albanese (geometry), De Fiore (geology), Piccolo (Italian literature), Fantappiè (mathematics), Galvani (statistics), Onorato (mineralogy), Wataghin (physics), Ochialini (physics) and Ungaretti (Italian literature)<sup>9</sup>, all of whom made considerable contributions to promoting Italian culture and science in Brazil and to enriching Brazilian intellectual life.

It is worth pointing out that not only did most of these intellectuals share political convictions compatible with fascism, they actually included fascist themes in their academic work, and while this drew intense criticism from other sectors of Brazilian public opinion, it nonetheless served to garner prestige for the regime.

The formation of Cultural Institutions directed toward Italo-Brazilian cultural interchange was another novelty during this period. As one would expect of institutions of a binational character, these had chapters in both Brazil and Italy.

Italy already had the Instituto Colombo, set up some years beforehand in a bid to improve Italy's cultural ties with Latin America. However, in 1936, the regime created the Amici del Brasile association, specifically devoted to Italo-Brazilian relations. This association was the Italian counterpart to the Amigos da Itália (set up in 1936 by Brazilian Italophiles with fascist sympathies) and its membership included some of the foremost names in Italian political, diplomatic and intellectual circles, including many who had spent time in Brazil (Fermi, Piacentini, Marconi and others). In 1938, the Association, which promoted conferences, trade fairs and functions throughout Italy, came under the jurisdiction of the successor to Instituto Colombo, namely the Centro Studi Americani in Rome.

In Brazil, besides the above-mentioned *Amigos da Itália*, created by Brazilians, the Italian government maintained a number of local institutions set up to promote Italian culture, such as the Centro Cultural Ítalo Mineiro (state of Minas Gerais), the Centro Cultural Ítalo Rio grandense (state of Rio Grande do Sul), and others. The year 1938 also saw the foundation of the Associazione brasiliana di studi italiani, which offered courses on the Italian language, music and art, and held conferences featuring renowned Brazilian intellectuals (Aloísio de Castro, Tristão de Ataíde, Pedro Calmon, Oliveira Vianna). The directors of these associations were all individuals the Embassy considered "easily controlled", which leaves little doubt as to the instrumental purpose the fascists ascribed to these institutions.

---

9 TRENTO, Ângelo. *Do Outro lado do Atlântico – Um século de imigração italiana no Brasil*. São Paulo: Nobel/ Instituto Italiano de Cultura, 1989, pp. 300-301.

Without doubt, however, the most important of these were the Italo-Brazilian Institutes of High Culture. As mentioned earlier, one such organ was established in 1926, but it closed down after only three years. The idea was taken up again later, and, in 1933, a new institute was created under the same name in Rio de Janeiro. The Institute was jointly funded by the Brazilian and Italian governments<sup>10</sup> and co-directed by Aloísio de Castro and Vincenzo Spinelli. Other Italo-Brazilian cultural institutes opened up around the country, particularly in São Paulo, pursuing a considerable range of activities, including courses in the Italian language and literature and the histories of art and law, the translation into Italian of books by Brazilian intellectuals and the promotion of lectures by Italian personalities, such as Guglielmo Marconi. However, their influence was limited to the major centers, chiefly Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Finally, completing the regime's cultural policy actions in Brazil between 1936 and 1940, it is important to note that the activities of the *Dopolavoro*, the *Casas d'Italia*, the local branches of Dante Alighieri and associations like *Muse Italiche* became less exclusively directed toward the Italian community (as they had largely been in the 1920s), but began to target the wider Brazilian population as well. As a result, there was some overlap between the propaganda initiatives for Italian descendants and Brazilians in general throughout the second half of the 1930s.

On the cultural activities of the regime in Brazil at this time it is important to make some observations about the nature of the cultural propaganda offensive the fascist government launched here amongst the Brazilian public opinion.

The first observation concerns the nature of the cultural side to it. As we have seen, it was far from neutral, but actively sought to promote the fascist ideology through exhibitions, concerts, lectures and other cultural and artistic events.

It should also be noted that the fascist propaganda and cultural diffusion drive in Brazil had to compete with the propaganda machines of other countries with similar interests in the country. In fact, the period 1936 to 1942 was a unique time in Brazilian history, with the country transformed into an ideological battleground for the major powers. The biggest tussle, of course, was between the United States and Germany, with the United Kingdom and Italy as second players.

Here is definitely not the place to embark on a detailed reconstruction of the projects pursued by the different embassies in their attempt to win over Brazilian public opinion. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to note that their methods were similar, with the USA, for example, heavily promoting English in Brazil, setting up channels for intellectual exchange, expanding the range of its radio broadcasts, and financing newspapers and magazines, etc.

However, the busiest period in terms of foreign propaganda networks in Brazil and, consequently, the time of greatest conflict between them was yet to come: the World War II. The war itself does not fall within the scope of the

---

10 CERVO, Amado. *As relações históricas entre o Brasil e a Itália – O papel da diplomacia*. São Paulo/Brasília: Instituto Italiano de Cultura/Editora da UnB, 1992, p. 141.



present article, as it represented a return to a much more direct propaganda modus, less connected with culture. If there was indeed any Italian attempt at establishing a cultural policy in Brazil that went beyond mere propaganda, it lost momentum once war broke out and propaganda reverted to type.

### **The Shortcomings Of The Italian Propaganda Structure In Brazil**

The representatives of the Italian government and the Partito Nazionale Fascista in Brazil were always the first to recognize the defects and limitations of the propaganda system. Problems with radio broadcasting and book distribution are a constant in the Italian records, which continually refer to the difficulties encountered by these pillars of the Italian propaganda machine in Brazil: control over the newspapers and the film circuit. Both of these deserve further attention.

In relation to photographs and articles, there are numerous cases of consulates complaining that most of the pictures and articles sent to the newspapers here ended up either unpublished or only partially so, and that the US, British and German agencies were infinitely more successful in foisting their content than the Italians were. The same could be said of the films.

In fact, the fight for space on the silver screen reveals the same shortcomings. Take, for example, the number of films released in Brazil in 1937, as shown in the table below:

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>FILMS</b>	<b>REEL METERAGE</b>
<i>United States</i>	<i>1,324</i>	<i>1,179,932</i>
<i>Germany</i>	<i>138</i>	<i>107,435</i>
<i>France</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>70,330</i>
<i>Italy</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>24,552</i>
<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>27,531</i>
<i>Portugal</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>13,365</i>
<i>Japan</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>9,692</i>
<i>Brazil</i>	<i>?</i>	<i>120,941<sup>11</sup></i>

The same Italian inferiority is apparent in relation to radio, as can be seen from the following table, which lists the number of hours of Portuguese-language radio content broadcast to Brazil from abroad in 1939:

<i>United States</i>	<i>63 hours</i>
<i>Germany</i>	<i>56 hours</i>
<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>20 hours</i>
<i>Italy</i>	<i>10 hours</i>
<i>Japan</i>	<i>7 hours<sup>12</sup></i>

This gives us a clearer view of the Italian effort to sway Brazilian public

11 Public Record Office, Foreign Office, PRO, FO 930/34, "Report on Latin America" de 9/8/1939, p. 16.

12 PRO, FO 930/34, "Report on Latin America" de 9/8/1939, p. 13-14.

opinion in its favor between the 1920s and the golden age of Italian propaganda in the late 1930s. While it was a substantial effort, it paled in comparison with that of its direct competitors—the US and Germany—and reveals the various problems that bedeviled it, especially those of a financial nature.

In fact, the main problem hampering Italy's propaganda structure in Brazil was a shortage of means and funds. There was a chronic lack of resources from the Italian government, which reflected the low priority Rome placed on its propaganda activities in Brazil. The country was certainly viewed as strategic, but not on the same level as European countries, for example, hence the limited budget. After all, Brazil lay on "the outer rim" of Italy's imperial system, so it was not a "subversive diplomacy" priority, at least not in comparison with Europe.

We must therefore agree with the analyses of Mario Toscano<sup>13</sup>, who examined the immense difficulties experienced by fascist propaganda in Brazil and concluded that it was done on a shoestring budget, with limited content, in a context that was not particularly favorable and where there were only narrow prospects of actually influencing the Brazilian conjuncture.

Even so, Toscano's conclusion needs to be qualified somewhat. He is definitely correct when he says that these shortcomings in Italian propaganda helped bankrupt a project based on the exportation of an ideology and of Italy's standing as its main ideologue. However, the Italian propaganda machine was not wholly ineffective and did succeed in getting its fascist message across—less robustly than it would have liked—to significant circles of Brazilian society. It therefore collaborated with other local and foreign propaganda sources (the Integralists and Nazi propaganda) to foster the fascist ideal in Brazil during the period, which ended up benefitting the Integralists and adepts of Vargas' Estado Novo.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

Some years ago, American political scientists, with Joseph Nye<sup>15</sup> at the forefront, developed and popularized the concepts of "hard power" and "soft power". The former is a country's ability to get what it wants through brute force, punishment and reward. The main instruments here would be military might and economic pressure. The latter, however, encompasses the range of instruments through which a country can bend others to its will by persuasion rather than coercion. Soft power relies on cultural appeal and the attractiveness of the political and/or ideological values at play; it functions through subscription rather than imposition.

Historical experience shows that a foreign policy predominantly based on "soft power" tends to be the option when a nation lacks the economic and mili-

---

13 TOSCANO, Mário. "Il fascismo e l'Estado Novo". In DE FELICE, Renzo, *L'emigrazione italiana in Brasile, 1800-1978*. Torino: Fondazione Agnelli, 1980, pp. 235-270, especially pp. 248-250.

14 For a discussion on the results obtained, see: BERTONHA, João Fábio. "Observando o litorrio do outro lado do Atlântico: a opinião pública brasileira e o fascismo italiano, 1922-1943", *Tempo - Revista do Departamento de História da UFF*, 9, 2000, p. 155-177.

15 NYE, Joseph. *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

tary might to take a more direct approach and so has to seek alternative means of extending its influence beyond its borders. That was exactly the case with fascist Italy in Latin America and Brazil.

Effectively, in the absence of a large Italian-speaking population, Mussolini appealed to a more generic concept - of "Latinity" - and the idea that it was up to Rome to lead the Latin nations of the world. In order to achieve this, he set up a propaganda machine to promote fascist ideas and Italian culture. The ideological ties formed with the countless fascist movements and authoritarian regimes in Latin America in the 1930s and the strong presence of Italian communities on the continent were to be key facilitators of enhanced Italian influence in the region.

These policies bore little fruit. Partly because they were based on certain false precepts. Most Italian immigrants communities in Latin America were not open to manipulation from Rome, even those who sympathized with the Regime, although the vast majority was openly hostile to Mussolini, especially the Platines and those in Central America. Other Latin-Americans were interested in maintaining close cultural bonds with Italy and with fascism, but without this constituting a geopolitical alignment with Italy. In short, the components in Italy's equation did not always behave as they were expected to, and so failed to yield the desired result.

The main problem, however, was a lack of "hard power" to back up the "soft" approach. Faced with the economic advantages and the military pressure emanating from the future Allies, the USA in particular, cultural and other links with the fascists lost much of their appeal.

Brazil was the country for which fascism had the highest hopes of influence in Latin America, and indeed the intention to bring Brazil into its imperial system, albeit without any aspirations toward direct or hegemonic rule. It seems indisputable that Italy had real ambitions to exercise influence over the South-American giant.

The results were a huge disappointment. The investment in propaganda, the appeals to the Italian communities here and the forging of bonds with the Vargas regime and with Integralism bore few practical results.

The Italian policy was undoubtedly ambitious, but also incoherent and somewhat ramshackle. That said, it was never completely random or illogical either, and did have some important effects on Brazilian political life, especially in the promotion of far-right ideas here. In fact, the study of Italy's interests in Brazil and the instruments of its endeavors helps us to understand better the mechanisms by which fascist ideas were inculcated in Brazilian society in the interwar period and the role the fascist powers and their interests played in that process. And this can only help us understand the political developments in Brazil during the period.