

Cultural activity and intellectual networks: Lisbon's Italian Cultural Institute from Fascism to the Second World War (1928–45)

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From the late 1920s onwards, Italian cultural diplomacy in Portugal was responsible for an increasing number of activities and initiatives directed at the Portuguese intellectual public. From Mussolini's perspective, the ideological ground shared by the Salazar regime and Italian Fascism meant that it was important for Italy to nourish links and exchanges with Portugal. This article examines cultural diplomacy in Lisbon, using one particular centre as the focus of analysis: the Italian Cultural Institute and its networking activities with intellectuals in the Portuguese regime. Within these transnational intellectual networks, a prominent role was taken by the Institute's successive directors between 1928 and 1945. These figures varied substantially in their biographical trajectories and seem to have exemplified the idiosyncrasies and contradictions of Fascist cultural policy in Portugal, which was one of a range of attempts, never fully realised, to export the idea of Italian Fascism.

Keywords: transnational Fascism; Italian Cultural Institute; '*latinità*'; Salazar regime; cultural diplomacy.

Introduction

The cultural diplomacy of Italian Fascism has recently become an object of significant historiographical interest. The first monographs examined Fascist cultural propaganda abroad in general, illustrating the range of tools, practices and projects deployed in the Mussolinian approach to international power politics (Garzarelli 2004; Cavarocchi 2010); these have now been complemented by various studies analysing its exercise in a range of specific geographical locations (Fotia 2018). Latterly, moreover, increasing attention has been given to transnational intellectual and political networks and relationships (Galimi and Gori 2020).

The dissemination of Fascism beyond Italy's borders had been a peripheral issue for the Fascist movement prior to its assumption of power in 1922. However, despite Mussolini's initially limited interest in the external expansion of the movement, Fascist associations, with a few dozen members each, had spontaneously sprung up as early as 1921 at the initiative of Italian emigrants in Britain, France, Switzerland and the United States (de Caprariis 2003).

In the period immediately after the March on Rome and Mussolini's ascent to power, the number of Fasci and Fascist activists abroad was constantly growing (de Caprariis 2000, 157). In a climate of open conflict with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which was only finally resolved in 1928 in favour of the latter, the Fasci put themselves forward to support and 'Fascistise' the

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expatriate Italian community, and to promote political developments in Italy abroad (Amicucci 1927; Mussolini 1928). However, there was no cultural aspect to their endeavours. It was only after 1926 that the Fascist government took steps to complement the Fasci with bodies modelled on the well-known cultural institutes of other countries, in the process appropriating and centralising the activities of the Dante Alighieri Society, the lectureships in Italian within foreign universities, courses for adults run by Italian schools abroad, and Italian cultural associations originally set up by private individuals (Garzarelli 2004; Cavarocchi 2016).

The Italian Cultural Institutes were established in 1926, by Law No. 2179 of 19 December, which set out their role: to promote Italian language and culture abroad and to develop relationships with foreign authorities, institutions of high culture, academies and intellectuals by means of language courses, lectures, conferences, and publications on Italian culture (Medici 2009, 1–73).

The specific history of the Italian Cultural Institute in Portugal is particularly interesting. Various studies have observed that the Portuguese nationalist right was drawing inspiration from Italy's Fascist movement from the March on Rome onwards; in the wake of Portugal's military coup d'état of 18 May 1926, moreover, Mussolini commended the country as one of the most successful destinations for export of the Fascist idea (Ivani 2008; Albanese 2016; Gori and Carvalho 2020).

By examining published literature, documentation generated by Italy's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and various private archives, including the personal correspondence of one of the protagonists, this article reconstructs the successive phases within the trajectory of Lisbon's Italian Cultural Institute between its foundation and the collapse of the Fascist regime, highlighting the idiosyncrasies and contradictions of Fascist political culture in Portugal.

Foundation of the Institute and the early 1930s

In response to the legislation of 1926, the Regio Istituto Luso-Italiano ('Royal Portuguese-Italian Institute', as the Italian Cultural Institute was first known) opened in the summer of 1928, at Largo do Carmo 18, Lisbon, in rooms within the Casa d'Italia (*Corriere della Sera* 1928), which had itself been founded two years earlier and already hosted the Italian consulate and the Lisbon 'Fulcieri Paolucci de Calboli' Fascio. The ceremony, presided over by the Secretary of the Italian Legation Antonio Bucevich, was attended by various figures from nationalist and conservative circles within the Portuguese government: the army's Commander-in-Chief Aires da Sousa, Minister for the Navy Anibal de Mesquita Guimarães, Minister for Education Duarte Pacheco, and Foreign Minister Antonio Maria de Bettencourt Rodrigues.¹

The first director of the Institute was Guido Vitaletti, a university professor and prolifically productive Dante scholar, who had been appointed as a cultural attaché to the Italian Legation in Lisbon in 1926. The author of various works on Portuguese literature, including a study of the influence of Dante on Luís de Camões (Vitaletti 1925), he became one of the key figures in the Italo-Portuguese intellectual network of the late 1920s. After his arrival Vitaletti quickly started, on his own initiative, to seek appropriate avenues for cultural penetration. In 1927, he asked the director of the University of Coimbra's Faculty of Letters for suitable space in which to establish a centre for Italian studies. Rooms were granted, and at Vitaletti's suggestion all the relevant volumes were transferred from the faculty library to the new 'Sala Italiana' (Pais de Sousa 2007, 17). This was formally opened on 26 July 1928 (*Gazeta de Coimbra* 1928) and was to become an outlying section of Lisbon's Portuguese-Italian Institute, which itself had opened just a few weeks earlier. Bucevich, from the Italian Legation, presided over this ceremony too, using his speech to emphasise the 'strong ties of blood, languages and culture' between the two

peoples. Vitaletti delivered the inaugural lecture, in which he discussed the Italian contribution to the development of Portuguese studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Vitaletti 1928).

The new Institute started to operate along the lines of the legislation of 1926. Its principal activities under the management of Vitaletti, who was also the Professor of Italian in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Lisbon, were language courses and seminars on Italian literature.

The Institute's single event aimed at a wider public was an exhibition on 'Portuguese memories in Italy' staged in the headquarters of Lisbon's Naval League, featuring photographs of works of art with links to Portugal (Vitaletti 1929). This event generated considerable interest in Portuguese circles: its opening was attended by both the Portuguese president António Óscar Carmona and head of the government António de Oliveira Salazar, as well as various ministers, members of the diplomatic corps, and senior officers in the armed forces (*Corriere della Sera* 1929).

From early on, constraints were apparent in terms of finance and resources; right up until the fall of Italy's Fascist regime, these limitations were to compromise the effectiveness and extent of attempts to export the idea of Italian Fascism to Portugal. According to Mario Ivani, 'the cultural diplomacy that Fascism attempted to exercise in Portugal with an extreme frugality of means was at risk of having the opposite effect from that desired by the bureaucrats in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs; this issue ... was all but a constant in relation to Fascism's strategy for cultural penetration' (2008, 159).

Propaganda and attention to political events were more or less absent in the first five years, perhaps because of Vitaletti's limited ambitions in this respect. His lack of interest was in fact lamented by Piero Parini, head of the General Office for Italians Abroad. Writing from Rome to the Italian Legation in Lisbon, he ordered them to exercise greater control over Vitaletti and 'in this regard, to refer to his valour and his incisive cultural and political effectiveness'.²

In any case, Vitaletti requested and obtained a transfer to São Paulo, Brazil, and when he left before completing his anticipated five-year term the Institute found itself without a director. The role was briefly covered by Ippolito Galante, a cultural attaché at the Legation and a university lecturer, and the reins were then taken by Giuseppe Valentini, who had initially been drafted in to replace Vitaletti as Professor of Italian at the University of Lisbon. Valentini first ran the Institute on behalf of Galante, who was taken up with teaching university courses in Coimbra, before being actually appointed director because of Galante's transfer to Sweden, first, and then to Peru (Durstun 2014).

From 1933 onwards, thanks to Valentini as the new director, there was a greater commitment to the organisation of seasons of conferences on literary and political themes, which drew in some of Lisbon's prominent academic and intellectual figures either as speakers or as guests.³

What brought about this change? The Italian delegation in Portugal clearly now found themselves in a political and cultural environment that seemed more amenable.⁴ It had finally been acknowledged that it was impossible to make an impact on Portuguese public opinion by starting with the insubstantial Italian community.⁵ It was therefore necessary to interact more directly with the capital's intellectuals and its press, aiming for a synergy that would lead the Institute towards greater visibility and status in Lisbon's cultural world. The main drive was towards creating and fostering a discussion about Italian Fascism and its shared ground with Portugal's conservative and nationalist *Estado Novo*. The 1930s were a period of institutional consolidation for the Salazar regime, which took a more authoritarian direction. Portugal's new constitution and its National Labour Statute were enacted in 1933, both with a strong corporatist framework (Costa Pinto and Palomanes Martinho 2008, 2016; Pasetti 2017). A political police force was created, as was the National Propaganda Bureau, and the web of control was tightened up by the systematic use of censorship and political repression (Rosas 1996; Adinolfi 2007, 2012).

With the Portuguese environment now more receptive to Italian propaganda, Italy's diplomatic corps and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs decided that the space occupied by the Royal Portuguese-Italian Institute was inadequate for its intended aims. In 1934, the Casa d'Italia and, within it, the Institute moved from the central Largo do Carmo to Avenida da Liberdade 189, on the major arterial road, modelled on the Champs-Élysées in Paris, running down the city's central valley. In this new location, the Institute's conferences had an increasingly marked political content. They were organised within a network of Italy's cultural presence in Lisbon that included an Italian room in the Instituto Superior de Ciências Económicas e Financeiras, set aside for this purpose in 1933 on the initiative of the economist and academic Moses Amzalak, the leader of Lisbon's Jewish community and a regular attendee of events at the Royal Portuguese-Italian Institute (Pignatelli 2000, 2008).

The time was now ripe for constructing a definitive and detailed plan for political propaganda, but this process had to reckon with an unexpected hiatus. The approach of the Ethiopian War (1935–6) marked a sudden freeze in Fascist propaganda operations abroad, with Portugal no exception (Ivani 2008, 173); the actual outbreak of conflict triggered heated international debate, with questions asked anew about how the colonial system had been consolidated in the wake of the First World War. Salazar, as various studies have illustrated, was afraid of new arrangements in Africa and had little faith in the political capabilities of the League of Nations to extinguish any fresh conflict (Salazar 1937, 114–18; Collotti 2000, 275–78; Labanca 2015; Rochat 2005, 15–31).

Although the Portuguese press was initially critical of Italy's venture, during 1936 it became more favourable towards the conclusion of the conflict and proclamation of the Italian Empire (Serapiglia 2016). There was no shortage in Lisbon of pro-Italian expression, whose intention was to emphasise the increasing closeness of the two regimes, not least through the colonial question: while the Portuguese Foreign Minister Armindo Monteiro was congratulating the First Secretary of the Italian Legation Pietro de Paolis (Del Boca 2010, 47), a large group of nationalist students was celebrating the declaration of Italy's Fascist Empire in the halls of the University of Lisbon (*Diário de Notícias* 1936).

The Italian Cultural Institute in the late 1930s

The second half of 1936 was an important period of transition in the history of the Institute. It was decided that it should be relaunched, in line with similar developments recently under way in other Italian cultural institutions operating abroad (Cavarocchi 2016, 250). First of all, the name was changed, in uniformity with similar institutes elsewhere: the 'Regio Istituto Luso-Italiano' became the 'Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Lisbona'. Subsequently, arrangements were made for transfer to a more spacious base: the Avenida da Liberdade was abandoned for the Rua do Salitre, 600 metres to the east, where an Art Nouveau building was to be purchased. Here, all the Italian institutions and delegations could be brought together. As well as the Institute, there was the Casa d'Italia; the Lisbon Fascio; the Chamber of Commerce and the offices of the commercial attaché's delegation; the Consulate; and the only Italian elementary state school in Portugal (Ministero degli affari esteri 1928, 177).

Count Mario di Carrobio, the secretary of the Fascio, wrote to the Secretary for Fasci Abroad about the implementation of 'a financial plan that permits the immediate purchase of a plot of about 1,300 square metres of land, 1,000 of which are garden'. The funders included the Italian Church in Lisbon, which had agreed to make a loan of 175,000 escudos. A further 155,000 escudos were made available by Carrobio in person, thereby avoiding the involvement of a Portuguese bank and the resulting mortgage on the property. In the same letter, Carrobio was careful to specify

'most explicitly, that, far from any ostentatious intention, the only reason that I have taken the place of the Portuguese Bank in personally making the loan, which is essential for purchase of the building, has been to fulfil, within the limits of my capacity, ... my obligations as an Italian and a Fascist'.⁶

The new premises demanded an opening ceremony that reflected the investment made. The Institute's director Giuseppe Valentini, who had temporarily left the post to enlist as a volunteer in Ethiopia, returned in time for the start of the activities planned for the 1936–7 season. In December 1936, the president of the Fascist Confederation of Artists Alessandro Pavolini, certainly the most important guest in the Institute's eight years of activity up to that point, was invited for the ceremony launching the new courses (*Corriere della Sera* 1936).

Between the end of the Ethiopian War and Italy's entry into the Second World War, the Institute engaged in massive propaganda efforts. Alongside the themes that related directly to cultural promotion, such as the Renaissance, classical literature and Dante, Fascism and the Fascist regime were the subjects of increasing amounts of promotional material and events, in line with the government directives arriving from Rome. A circular of 1937 from the General Office for Italians Abroad, directed at the Cultural Institutes and university lecturers, set out the expectations:

As well as the literary and artistic themes intended to illustrate our heritage of culture, science and beauty, there must be consideration of topics and themes relating to present-day Italy, the achievements of Fascism, and the legislative provisions of the Fascist regime: everything, in brief, that represents the great social and universal construction that we owe to the spirit of Mussolini.⁷

The reports periodically sent to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs reveal the increase in the Italian Cultural Institute's activities during 1937. An Italo-Portuguese cultural agreement was drawn up for the exchange and loan of books selected by the Institute, and there was a marked increase in the number of people registering for courses.⁸ However, the longstanding problem of the scarcity of financial resources available remained a limiting factor, highlighting the imbalance between the politics of power promoted by the Mussolini government and the operational capacity for penetrating Portugal by propaganda. This capacity was also meagre when compared with the cultural diplomacy practised by other powers: in 1936–7, the financial resources allocated to the French Cultural Institute were about twenty times greater than the Italian budget (Ivani 2008, 189). However, there were some important changes in the management of the Institute and its staff: the lectureships at the three Portuguese universities were allocated to different academics, and a new director, Aldo Bizzarri, was appointed. Professor in the History of Political Thought at the University of Rome, Bizzarri had been an energetic figure in Italy's literary world of the early twentieth century. In 1928 he and Gian Gaspare Napolitano had founded *I Lupi*, a journal of 'novecentismo fascista' ('Fascist twentieth-centuryism'), whose contributors had included Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (Vander 2001, 87). He had then had extensive experience leading different Italian Cultural Institutes, first in South America (Santiago, Chile) and then in France (Rennes) (Ronconi 1973, 133). Under Bizzarri's management the Institute increased the number of conferences on political themes, in an attempt to align itself with the political and cultural circles that recognised a 'spiritual continuity' between Italian Fascism and the Salazar regime (Gori and Carvalho 2015).

The bolder approach taken by Italian cultural diplomacy led the Institute to move once again, detaching itself from the Casa d'Italia and the headquarters of the Fascio in the quest for more space. In the autumn of 1939, its base was relocated to a building just a stone's throw away, at Rua de Salitre 136, while the Casa d'Italia remained in the premises acquired only three years earlier, at Rua de Salitre 145.⁹ At much the same time, Bizzarri decided to consolidate the Italian presence in Lisbon's intellectual panorama by publishing the Institute's own journal, *Estudos Italianos em Portugal*, which would appear twice a year.

The genesis and aims of the new journal were set out in Bizzarri's opening note:

This publication by the Italian Cultural Institute in Portugal is not intended to be a news bulletin ... but a serious collection of studies The need for a six-monthly publication actually emerged from Portuguese circles; to be more exact, it became apparent from an initiative last year that started with the collaboration of Portuguese scholars in a series of conferences at the Institute on topics of Italian culture. ... As a cultural review, it will have no restrictions on the positions taken: all critical perspectives can be accepted, on condition that they are not in conflict with the objectivity of research, nor, naturally, with the national spirit of the two countries. (Bizzarri 1939, 5)

It was clear from the Director's brief introduction that the intentions of the journal were to capture on paper the papers presented at the conferences and, especially, to disseminate them to a wider public than the immediate audience.

For the first issue of the Institute's new publication, Bizzarri drew on the university circles in Lisbon in which Italian culture in Portugal had had its maximum impact, penetration and success during the 1930s. The 'contents' page featured intellectuals who had been a regular presence at the Institute in Rua de Salitre: Paulo Cunha, a lecturer in public law at the University of Lisbon (later, from 1962 to 1965, its chancellor) and future foreign minister, from 1950 to 1956; Viera de Almeida and Hernani Cidade, lecturers in literature at the same university; Vicente Ferreira, a lecturer in engineering at the Technical University of Lisbon, formerly a minister during the First Portuguese Republic and subsequently the holder of prominent posts in Salazar's colonial government; and Júlio Dantas, a poet and writer, also a minister under the Republic and then a diplomat, who was one of the major figures enlivening the Portuguese intellectual landscape and longstanding president of the Academy of Sciences. Last but not least, there was Augusto de Castro, a figure of great importance within the Estado Novo: editor for several stretches of the *Diário de Notícias*, Portugal's most important newspaper, he also served as a diplomat in various European cities, especially in Fascist Italy, both as head of the diplomatic mission to the Vatican (1924–9) and as the Portuguese Ambassador to Italy (1931–5).

The presidency of Luigi Federzoni and his visit to Portugal in 1940

The arrival of the 1940s marked a downward shift in gear, for reasons that can be related to changes in the international context and the Second World War.

In January 1940, Italy's foreign minister Galeazzo Ciano offered the presidency of the Cultural Institute, a figurehead position hitherto vacant, to Luigi Federzoni. In the letter setting out his request, Ciano described the situation: As you will surely know, for many years there has been an Italian Cultural Institute in Lisbon, which has recently widened and developed its activities in support of the dissemination of our language and our culture. In view of the fact that figures from Italy's cultural and scientific world are appointed to the presidency of these institutes, and in Portugal this role has remained vacant until now, because first I wanted to resolve various internal organisational problems that have in fact recently been overcome, I would be grateful if you would be willing to take on the presidency in question.¹⁰

Federzoni was president of the Royal Academy of Italy, editor of *Nuova antologia*, president of the Fascist Institute of Italian Africa, and president of the Institute of the *Enciclopedia italiana* (Vittoria 1995); his many responsibilities gave him the ideal profile to heighten the Institute's prestige in Portugal's governmental circles. The second issue of *Estudos Italianos em Portugal* published Federzoni's greeting message to the world of Portuguese high culture:

I wish to note here a fact of great significance. It was perhaps no coincidence that relations between our two cultures, although they were maintained, suffered a weakening during the last century, and especially towards its end (a century that overran its strict chronological limits, as we know), in

correspondence with a certain decline in the internal life of our two nations. ... It is not by chance that these relations are regaining their 'ancient vigour', rising up again to a new more intense and fertile existence, in an era that is now *our* era, ... with the formidable renewal of our two states and two national souls. (Federzoni 1940; emphasis in the original Italian)

Federzoni's approach to Portugal's ruling elites was further strengthened by, not least, his visit to the country in late February and early March 1940. The Portuguese press, and the *Diário de Lisboa* in particular, gave ample coverage to his crowded timetable of official engagements; the most eagerly awaited event was a speech of greeting to be delivered at a formal session of Lisbon's Academy of Sciences (*Diário de Lisboa* 1940a, 1940b). Two years earlier, Federzoni (1938) had despatched a message to this important Portuguese cultural institution ahead of the dual celebrations marking 800 years since the country's foundation and 300 years since the restoration of its independence from Spain, culminating in the Portuguese World Exhibition opened in June 1940; the chief organiser was Augusto de Castro, mentioned earlier as a contributor to the first issue of the Institute's journal (Gori 2018). Directing his missive to the Academy's president Júlio Dantas (another of the journal's future contributors), Federzoni had extolled the 'heroic deeds of Portuguese nationalism' and the nation's virtues:

[The Portuguese people] have had no hesitation in venturing onto the most dangerous routes in the world ... in order to propagate our civilisation and our faith, and then to strenuously defend these; over the centuries, they have continued to fulfil the arduous mission that Mother Rome had entrusted to them, at Europe's extreme west. (Federzoni 1938)

This sort of rhetoric clearly found validation in the growing approval that Italian Fascism was experiencing in Portugal's cultural circles, in the wake of the proclamation of the Italian Empire after the Ethiopian War. The 'Portuguese people faithful to the tradition of Rome' could thus look at the example offered by 'Mussolini's providential genius'. The Portuguese, Federzoni had observed, 'have already essayed, and now happily realised, in such a brief passage of years, a profound reconstruction of the state and national society, which places Portugal among the most politically evolved nations' (1938). However, this message had also been responsible for a degree of tension. Implicit in the rhetoric that traced Portuguese origins back to *romanità* was the spiritual supremacy of Rome over Portugal, which could be related both to the historical explanations of 'civilisation' and to the primacy of the Mussolinian model when compared with the Estado Novo. It is hardly surprising that Federzoni's discourse about the centrality of Rome in 'Latin civilisation', which he referred to several times during his visit in early 1940, met with a lukewarm reception among Portugal's intellectual and political circles, whose members were scarcely inclined to regard themselves as Italy's ideological subordinates (Colaço 1940).

Federzoni's formal and private appointments concluded on 7 March, a week after his arrival. In the two years that followed, he seems not to have undertaken any further activity on behalf of the Institute.

War and defascistisation (1940–5)

The outbreak of the Second World War signalled the beginning of a decline in Italian propaganda activity and cultural diplomacy in Portugal. Italy's attention was directed more towards the areas judged to be of greater strategic importance to its war effort, such as eastern Europe and the Balkans (Santoro 2005, 318–35). In 1941 Aldo Bizzarri, who as director of the Institute in Lisbon had been inventive, enterprising and capable, was transferred to Budapest and at the same time Gino Saviotti was appointed in his stead. A theatre critic, novelist and playwright, Saviotti had been responsible for the first publication in Italy, in the 1920s, of works by Ezra

Pound (Redman 1991; Bacigalupo 2010). In 1920, he had founded the literary review *Pagine Critiche*, published quarterly, whose contributors included Luigi Salvatorelli, Massimo Mila, Luigi Russo and Gaetano Salvemini (Strulato 1987). Saviotti had left Italy in 1937 due to personal difficulties, going first to Budapest; in response to the first rumblings of a forthcoming war in Europe, he then opted for 'calm and outlying' Portugal, arriving in 1939.¹¹ Having worked with the Italian Cultural Institute as a teacher for the outlying Porto branch, he was hastily appointed as Bizzarri's replacement to manage the organisation as a whole.¹²

As a representative organ of a country at war, the Institute was forbidden to engage in any activity involving political propaganda. The only viable course of action was a compromise: continuing to operate while renouncing any direct reference to the war, in a city that was taking on a central role in the 'shadow war' of propaganda and espionage between the countries involved in the conflict (Telo 1990; Rosas 1990; Lochery 2011).

Regular publication of *Estudos Italianos em Portugal* continued during the war years, although without strict adherence to its intended schedule of appearances every six months. Between 1941 and 1943, six issues came out: three in 1941, one in 1942, and the last two in 1943. Saviotti's professional training in the world of literary reviews, like that of Bizzarri before him, must surely have assisted in confirming the Institute's journal as the principal vehicle for Italian cultural diplomacy in Portugal. Writing in 1941 to Giulio Bertoni, an important philologist and member of the Italian Academy, Saviotti described the attempt to keep faith with the programme disseminating Italian language and culture, 'despite the current international difficulties, and thanks especially to the sympathy and moral support of those in this country who take an interest in the historical and spiritual relationships between Italy and Portugal'.¹³

From the third issue of 1941 onwards, the journal's critical essays were accompanied by a weighty section of book reviews and arts coverage. The contributing authors continued to include, first and foremost, figures from Lisbon's academic world and the holders of Italian lectureships in Portugal (Brustoloni 1986). The final issue of the journal under the aegis of Fascism came out in January 1943. The preparation of articles for future numbers may well have already started, but editorial work was indefinitely postponed in response to events in Italy in the period between 25 July and 8 September.¹⁴

With the production of political propaganda banned, conferences at the Italian Cultural Institute in the early 1940s focused on artistic and literary themes, which were actually more in harmony with Saviotti's own intellectual interests. Important contributors continued to arrive from Italy; among these, Camillo Pellizzi, the president of the National Institute for Fascist Culture, stands out as the most significant visitor from the regime's hierarchy.¹⁵ Otherwise, activities were largely limited to language courses both at the Institute's headquarters and in secondary schools.

Paradoxically, the Fascist regime collapsed at the point when the Italian Cultural Institute and its branches had extended their reach further than at any time since the year it was founded. Gradual depoliticisation of the activities overseen by Saviotti, more from necessity than choice, had meant that a substantial part of the Institute's resources could be dedicated to schools and language teaching, with a marked increase in the number of teachers it employed in Portugal. By the spring of 1943, Italian classes were being held in 57 venues spread out over 17 different Portuguese cities, with total student numbers topping three thousand (Ivani 2008, 266).

Inevitably, the fall of Fascism and the dramatic reduction in funds available gave rise to a contraction. The outlying bases were closed, the Porto and Coimbra branches were decommissioned, and responsibility for their activities was returned to, respectively, the Casa d'Italia in Porto and the Institute for Italian Studies within the University of Coimbra's Faculty of Letters.

A difficult transition period ensued. The Italian Cultural Institute, as a body within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, now found itself under the control of the Badoglio government. The issue becomes more complex when we look at the biographical trajectories of the staff employed and other contributors. Both the Italian Legation and the Institute had to reckon with those who remained faithful to Fascism, which had now found reincarnation in the Italian Social Republic (RSI) of Salò (Grassi Orsini 1995). In Portugal there were a number of these people, who were only dismissed by the Ministry in 1944 and then sought remuneration as part of the RSI's patchy foreign network.¹⁶

The activities of the Institute in Lisbon – cut back to the bone – were jointly subsidised by the British and American embassies until mid 1944.¹⁷ For the Allies, the fear that its complete dismantling might encourage the creation of similar institutions by the Republic of Salò prevailed over the analysis that saw it as a body created by Fascism for propaganda purposes, and as such destined to cease operation once the regime had collapsed.

For the 1943–4 season, the Institute's more formal events in Lisbon ceased but language and culture courses went ahead. The focus of the programmes returned to literary topics, particularly concentrating on the classics: Dante, Manzoni, Petrarch and the Renaissance. At the beginning of 1945, with no funding, the Institute left the premises that had separated it from the Casa d'Italia and returned to the building that the Legation had purchased in 1936, where the Casa d'Italia and the Fascio had meanwhile been broken up.

Conclusion

An overall analysis of the Italian Cultural Institute's fifteen-year existence under Fascism allows various characteristic features to be identified. First of all, it is apparent that the nature of the Institute's agenda and activities was substantially reliant on the profile of the particular director in office. While the reigns of Giuseppe Valentini (1933–6) and Aldo Bizzarri (1936–41) matched the periods of greatest endeavour towards export of the 'Fascist idea', the emphasis was different in the phase after the Institute's foundation under Guido Vitaletti (1928–31) and during the later period with Gino Saviotti as director (1941–50). Valentini and Bizzarri, who were both personally committed to the regime, understood cultural promotion and exchange with Portugal's world of high culture as the means for delivering messages of Fascist propaganda. It was somewhat different with the other two directors. The initial period with Vitaletti, prior to 1931, was characterised by a more purely cultural and apolitical programme, not dissimilar to that organised by Saviotti in the early 1940s, although in the latter case the regime of restrictions on propaganda, imposed by Salazar, was the determining factor. However, it was also the case that Saviotti was less enthusiastic about the direct involvement of politics; in a report of March 1945, he stated that 'it was not necessary to force the Institute to make any abrupt change in orientation after the events of July 1943, because [I] had always kept it within the purely cultural field, clearly excluding all references to politics and the war'.¹⁸ Saviotti showed considerable skill in his manoeuvres under Fascism, which left the Institute scarcely compromised; he then brought it safely through the immediate postwar period, only relinquishing the post of director in 1950.

In conclusion, the plan to deliver political propaganda and cultural penetration by means of the Institute proved to be somewhat unsuccessful, for various reasons. The politicisation of cultural propaganda came into conflict with the nature of a Portuguese regime whose ideological cornerstone was an 'exaggerated nationalism' that was little inclined to tolerate foreign inference (Adinolfi 2007, 226). Although it is well known that Italian Fascism provided an influential model for the *Estado Novo*, the Portuguese avoided showing any favouritism towards Italian cultural diplomacy in relation to that of other powers.

The Portuguese historian Luis Torgal has described the Salazar regime as '*fascismo à portuguesa*', emphasising that while, on the one hand, the pro-Fascists were 'the regime's most significant wing in terms of domestic political ideology', on the other hand the coexistence of other political, ideological and cultural currents within the Estado Novo decisively toned down the Portuguese position in regard to Italian Fascism (Torgal 2009: 347–67).

It is important to remember that the functionaries of Italian cultural diplomacy constantly had to reckon with deficits in resources and funding. The means they had available were insufficient not only in relation to their ambitions and the imprecise directives received from Rome, but also when compared to the endeavours of other powers such as France, Britain and Germany. Moreover, there are no indications of any important collaborative ventures involving the Fascist regime's cultural diplomacy and Italy's German ally between 1938 and 1943. It was only subsequently, after the armistice announced on 8 September 1943 and the establishment of the RSI, that Fascist cultural propaganda in Portugal placed itself under the aegis of the German Legation in Lisbon, in response to the 'official' cultural diplomacy of the Italian Legation, which remained faithful to the monarchy and the Badoglio government.

The verdict appears to be different when we turn to the intellectual networks and political links that developed between figures in the Italian and Portuguese political and cultural worlds. While the impact of cultural diplomacy on the Portuguese general public was minimal, the conferences presented in the 1930s at the Institute's headquarters and the synergy that was developed with the university and the centres of Portugal's high culture turned the Institute into a crucial node in the transnational network of intellectuals who aligned themselves, in varying degrees, with Fascism as a political phenomenon. This is demonstrated by the status of the writers who published in the Institute's journal. Further investigation of these networks will generate a better understanding of the circulation of ideas within transnational fascism.

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Note on contributor

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Notes

1. Arquivo Nacional Torre to Tombo, Empresa Pública Jornal O Século, Serviço de Fotografia 1880/1977 (hereafter ANTT, EPJS, SF), Album Gerais n.10 1927–1928.
2. Archivio storico Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Scuole (hereafter ASMAE, AS) 1925–1945, p. 74, f. 'Istituto Luso-Italiano in Lisbona 1928–1934'. Letter dated 31 October 1930.
3. ASMAE, AS 1925–1945, p. 74, f. 'Istituto Luso-Italiano in Lisbona 1928–1934'.

4. ASMAE, AS 1925–1945, p. 74, f. ‘Istituto Luso-Italiano in Lisbona 1928–1934’, note dated 27 January 1934.
5. In a note dated 9 February 1933, Alberto Tuozzi, the Legate, stated that the activities of the Institute should be focused on Portuguese circles, describing the Italian colony as ‘scant and negligible’; see ASMAE, AS 1925–1945, p. 74, f. ‘conferenze 1935–1936’. At the end of 1924 there were only 406 Italians resident in Portugal, most of them in Lisbon; by contrast, there were 3,904 Italians resident in Spain (Commissariato generale dell’emigrazione 1926, 1538).
6. Letter from Mario di Carrobio to the Secretary General of the Italian Fasci Abroad, no. 1360 of 17 February 1936, reproduced in Rocchi 2007.
7. See the circular ‘Istituti di Cultura – Cattedre e Lettorati Universitari – Istituto Interuniversitario Italiano’ (DIE 12/1/1937, no. 1) in Toscani 1938.
8. ASMAE, AS 1925–1945, p. 76, f. ‘Istituto di cultura italiana in Portogallo. Sede centrale in Lisbona. Relazioni periodiche 1937–1938’. For the cultural agreement, see ANTT, Inspeção Superior das Bibliotecas e Arquivos, f. Instituto para cultura: acordo cultural luso-italiano (PT/TT/ISBA/05780).
9. ASMAE, AS 1925–1945, p. 77, f. Istituto di Cultura italiana in Portogallo Sede centrale in Lisbona. Relazioni periodiche. 1939–1940, ‘Relazione sull’attività svolta dal 1 ottobre’.
10. ASMAE, AS 1925–1945, p. 77, f. Istituto di Cultura italiana in Portogallo Sede centrale in Lisbona, letter from Ciano to Federzoni dated 16 January 1940.
11. Personal archive of Aureliana Strulato, undated letter from Gino Saviotti to Aureliana Strulato.
12. Archivio Luigi Russo, Corrispondenza, f. Gino Saviotti, letter from Gino Saviotti to Luigi Russo, 21 November 1941.
13. Biblioteca Estense, Fondo Bertoni, B. Corrispondenza, f. Saviotti. Letter from Saviotti to Giulio Bertoni, 21 September 1941.
14. Personal archive of Aureliana Strulato, undated letter from Gino Saviotti to Aureliana Strulato.
15. ASMAE, AS 1925–1945, p. 171, f. Portogallo Parte generale, final report for the academic year 1942–3, 20 July 1943.
16. ASMAE, AS 1925–1945, p.74, f. ‘Istituti di cultura. Portogallo’. Report on the arrangements for representation of the Italian Social Republic in Portugal, 19 May 1944.
17. ASMAE, AS 1936–1945, p.171, f. Istituto italiano di cultura. Portogallo. ‘Relazioni iniziali e finali, Costituzione e attività dell’Istituto dal settembre 1943’, dated 15 March 1945.
18. ASMAE, AS 1936–1945, p.171, f. Istituto italiano di cultura. Portogallo. ‘Relazioni iniziali e finali, Costituzione e attività dell’Istituto dal settembre 1943’, dated 15 March 1945.

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Italian summary

A partire dalla fine degli anni Venti l'attività della diplomazia culturale italiana in Portogallo vide l'intensificarsi del numero di attività e di proposte indirizzate al pubblico intellettuale portoghese. La comunanza ideologica in essere tra il regime salazarista e il regime fascista, rendeva il Portogallo, agli occhi di Mussolini, una nazione verso la quale era necessario uno sforzo teso ad alimentare legami e scambi. L'articolo analizza la diplomazia culturale in a Lisbona, attraverso una prospettiva di analisi che privilegia un centro: l'Istituto Italiano di Cultura e le sue attività di rete con gli intellettuali del regime portoghese. In queste reti intellettuali trans-nazionali rivestono un ruolo non secondario i direttori dell'Istituto che si avvicendano tra il 1928 e il 1943. Con traiettorie biografiche differenti, queste figure appaiono esemplificative delle idiosincrasie e delle contraddizioni della politica culturale fascista in Portogallo, che si inserisce in un quadro di tentativi mai pienamente realizzati dell'esportazione 'dell'idea' fascista all'estero.