Like every country struggling for recognition among the self-reliant nations of the world, Brazil has to contend with the prejudiced reports of a floating foreign population, indifferent to the welfare of the land they temporarily inhabit, and whose appreciations are mainly influenced by private interest. It is much to be regretted that the Government has not thought it worthwhile to take decided measures to correct the erroneous impressions currently abroad concerning its administration; and that its diplomatic agents do so little to circulate truthful and authoritative statements of their domestic concerns.

A century and a half ago, when British explorer and diplomat Richard Francis Burton inserted the above remark by Elizabeth and Louis Agassiz into the narrative of his 1867 journey through the São Francisco River, Brazil was already a large country in terms of area and natural resources. However, it was peripheral, sparsely populated, economically dependent on slave labor, in a war with one of its neighbors, and still facing the challenge of building a proper national identity. In spite of being unique in Latin America as a relatively stable monarchy and former Portuguese colony that kept its territorial integrity, the shortcomings and limitations of Brazil in the mid-nineteenth century were such that practicing “public diplomacy” or “nation branding” avant la lettre was certainly a herculean task for the government agents of the time. They were nevertheless trying to do their bit, as Elizabeth and Louis Agassiz concluded their comment with the information that the recent World’s Fair at Paris (1867 International Exposition) was the first occasion when an attempt was made to present a comprehensive report of the resources of the Empire [of Brazil], and the prizes awarded to the Brazilians testify to their success.

To a scholar like Richard Francis Burton, then British consul in Santos and a renowned humanist and universalist, it was not difficult to understand the potential of Brazil and identify the seeds of a country that would become, as later formulated by sociologist Gilberto Freyre, a “new and modern type of civilization in the tropics,” a unique blend of Indigenous Americans, Africans, Europeans, and, since the early twentieth century, Middle Easterners and Asians. In the realm of the arts, this idea was provocatively translated by the avant-garde modernist movement of the “Anthropophagic Manifesto,” an interpretation of Brazilian culture and national
identity as an outcome of the symbolic digestion of local and foreign influences. It was, above all, a call to embrace the power and the originality arising from that mix. “Tupi or not tupi, that is the question,” wrote poet Oswald de Andrade, tropicalizing Shakespeare in a pun with the indigenous Tupi language, a lingua franca in Brazil until at least the eighteenth century.\

That national identity, culture, values, ideas, and lifestyle resulting from an extraordinary ability to integrate and mingle peoples from all over the planet offer a strong and resilient foundation for much of the Brazilian soft power and global appeal in the twenty-first century. Capoeira, bossa nova, churrasco or Brazilian jiu-jitsu are just a few examples of the seductive offerings by such diverse social and cultural matrix, a powerful source that has been available to policy makers, of course, long before Joseph Nye would coin the expression “soft power.” Those examples are not of appropriations or simple adaptations, but innovative intellectual products arising from the creativity and plurality of the Brazilian society, far more complex than portrayed by stereotypes—although benign—like samba, carnival, or soccer.

It could also be said that this “new civilizational model” described by Freyre—aggregative as well as prone to compromise and cross-cultural understanding—helps to explain at the least part of Brazil’s long-established stance in international relations, favoring dialogue, cooperation, regional integration, multilateralism, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The last South American war involving Brazil was precisely the conflict in 1864–1870, witnessed by Burton and the Agassiz couple, between the Triple Alliance (Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay) and Paraguay. Those exact four countries would become incidentally the founding members in 1991 of Mercosul (Southern Common Market), a regional integration experiment comparable only to the European Union (EU). Apart from dozens of multilaterally mandated peacekeeping operations since 1948, the last deployment of Brazilian military abroad was in the Allied campaign in Italy during World War II. That consistency in advocating the force of the example over the example of force could be considered yet another element in the appeal of the “Brazilian model” among foreign audiences.

In the present, as an emerging nation of over 210 million people, a free and vibrant democracy built on the rule of law, the world’s fifth largest country and one of its top ten economies, and number one in biodiversity thanks greatly to the Amazon region, Brazil has an inherently high profile in the international scene. It cannot neither be easily ignored nor afford itself to ignore any of its resources and potentialities, including, of course, the deployment of its soft power. As appropriately said, albeit in a rather jingoistic fashion, by Foreign Minister Azeredo da Silveira in the 1970s,

Due to objective factors, Brazil has a destiny of greatness—still relative in our days—that it cannot refrain from pursuing, and this comes with the duty to face its role in the world in fundamentally ambitious prospective terms … ambition in the sense of vastness of interests and scope of action, not in the desire for hegemony or preponderance.\

Converting Brazil’s global attractiveness to leverage multilateral agenda setting, effective development opportunities, and more mutually advantageous international partnerships—both long-standing objectives of the Brazilian foreign policy—could arguably be described as a national consensus, even though the approaches, emphases, and willingness to fund the necessary means may vary in the time. It is never too much to reiterate and underline the fact that Brazil, despite its economic and social achievements in the last decades, is still a developing country with lingering inequalities and significant challenges in infrastructure and core public services—a reality well illustrated by the 2013 street protests throughout the country in the lead-up to the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
The more the Brazilian people understand and perceive the positive effects of having a country influential and present in world affairs, the stronger the support for foreign policy goals and initiatives to tap into and nourish its soft-power reservoir. The importance of this self-reinforcing process could be applied almost anywhere, but is particularly significant in a developing country, where resources can become quickly scarce. This leads to a key element for public diplomacy in Brazil. At least in the practice of recent governments, the term *diplomacia pública* is broadly used as an umbrella for information and engagement actions aimed at both foreign and domestic audiences—perhaps even more so for the latter, as the average Brazilian citizen still tends to see foreign policy and diplomatic agents as opaque and secretive. Two good examples of this inward-looking bias are in the basically Portuguese-only website of the Foreign Ministry until 2016 and in the introduction of a new and comprehensive system of strategic planning in 2018, hailed also as a valuable instrument of public diplomacy and transparency that “will no doubt show clearly the importance of diplomacy to the whole of [Brazilian] society and its key contribution for stronger, more prosperous and influential country.”

To Nye, the information age we live in—characterized by the “paradox of plenty” and a competition of narratives—demands a new public diplomacy, with government policies increasingly aimed at facilitating, rather than controlling, cross-border networks between civil-society actors. Theoretically, this would be a more efficient method to employ soft power due to greater credibility and interaction possibilities. The Brazilian experience in public diplomacy is still of the more “traditional” kind, being mostly an endeavor led and implemented by federal public actors, in spite of an ever-growing participation of subnational and nongovernmental ones; hence, our focus here will be on the profiles and activities of the two main state entities working to win foreign “minds and hearts” in order to advance Brazil’s national interests. First, we will discuss the practice of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or Itamaraty (a name that, as will be seen, is charged with symbolism and, in itself, an interesting case of a “branding”), as well as its associated agencies that have been practicing public diplomacy in one way or another for more than a century. Then we will present a relative newcomer, the Secretariat of Media and Public Affairs at the Executive Office of the President (Secom), which coordinates the communication of all federal government agencies and is responsible at arm’s length for public broadcasting. The role of Secom was particularly relevant in the context of the sports mega-events that put Brazil at the center of global public opinion, for good or bad, in 2014 and 2016.

**The Itamaraty (Foreign Ministry) Hub**

The name by which the Ministério das Relações Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) is best known to Brazilians and most foreign diplomats, especially in Latin America and Africa, is at first sight a common example of metonymy in which the designation for a place or location stands for an institution (like 10 Downing Street for the UK prime minister’s office or the Quai d’Orsay and Farnesina for the French and Italian Foreign Ministries, respectively). Itamaraty is the name of the historic headquarters of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry in Rio de Janeiro. The connection to the place would become so ingrained among diplomats and to the entire Brazilian society that, even after the transfer of the capital to Brasília in 1960, the traditional “brand” was kept as designation of the new headquarters, a modernist architectural masterwork by Oscar Niemeyer, and, in a sense, a “temple” of public diplomacy—inving, transparent, and filled with cultural tokens of Brazil’s cultural soft power. In 2009, even the Ministry’s website domain and all corporate email addresses were changed from mre.gov.br (its acronym in Portuguese) to itamaraty.gov.br, the pattern also applied in its social media profiles.

If the notion of branding for a nation is considered questionable by some, its use for a government agency, especially a Foreign Ministry, would seem totally out of place. However,
in the case of Itamaraty, the name is actually more than a simple metonymy, standing not only for the Foreign Ministry or the Foreign Service officer corps but also, as described by Gilberto Freyre, for a model of “organization and definition of the superior values of the nation.” This unique case of a “brand of diplomacy” is strongly linked to the legacy of one career diplomat in Brazil has been consistently pointed out and more than 50 (and its historical vocation to recruit talents and co-author of \textit{Revista Americana}, a magazine (with texts in Portuguese, Spanish, and, occasionally, French and English) to foster the exchange of literature and ideas between Latin-American intellectuals, as well as to improve confidence and understanding between Brazil and its neighboring countries. The prestige commanded to this day by the historical figure of Rio Branco in Brazil is well deserved, but, amid the laudatory tone of most works written about his life and work, one aspect that is somewhat downplayed is his understanding of the importance of direct communication with foreign civil societies, particularly in South America. A former journalist, Rio Branco, perceived in what we could now call public diplomacy a key element for his foreign policy strategies, targeting internal and external audiences through media (from monitoring to op-eds and pitching), or making the most out of international events hosted in Rio de Janeiro (for instance, the 1905 Latin American Scientific Congress and the 1906 Pan–American Conference). In 1909, already in charge of Itamaraty, he would sponsor the first experiment of Brazilian cultural diplomacy, the \textit{Revista Americana}, an extraordinary example of a success story in the Brazilian musical genre that seduced the world. Going back to the point of Itamaraty’s “brand” (and its historical vocation to recruit talents within Brazil), it is worth recalling that Vinicius de Moraes, one of the “founding fathers” of \textit{bossa nova} and co-author of “Girl from Ipanema,” was a career diplomat.

Today, the cultural unit of Itamaraty “promotes the dissemination of Brazilian culture and arts in its multiple dimensions, seeking to stimulate cooperation and the teaching of the Portuguese language.” One of the main platforms for those initiatives is the Rede Brasil Cultural (Brazilian Cultural Network), composed by 24 cultural centers—in cities like Barcelona, Beirut, Buenos Aires, Luanda, Mexico City, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Roma, and Tel Aviv—and more than 50 Brazilian studies groups and lectureships in foreign academic institutions. This network further promotes Portuguese as a heritage language for the more than 3 million Brazilians currently living abroad, and applies the Brazilian Portuguese-language proficiency examination (CELPE-Bras).

Another paradigmatic instrument for Brazilian public diplomacy is the international cooperation program carried out by Agência Brasileira de Cooperação (ABC, the Brazilian Cooperation Agency), created in 1987 and linked to Itamaraty. As an emerging nation committed to sustainable development in its economic, social, and environmental pillars, Brazil has been consistently sharing the lessons of its public policies in agriculture, health, education, social inclusion, renewable energies, or sports with at least 100 developing countries. The portfolio of technical cooperation covers more than 7,000 projects not only in Africa and in Latin America/Caribbean, but...
also in the Asia/Pacific (especially in Portuguese-speaking East Timor). While stressing the significance of soft power for emerging countries, Mexican diplomat Arturo Sarukhan recognizes that “Brazil has developed the most impactful Latin American international cooperation program, helping it develop and leverage a successful diplomatic footprint, particularly in Africa.”

Besides ABC, two other Itamaraty-affiliated institutions contribute, directly or indirectly, to Brazilian public diplomacy efforts. The Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation maintains a think tank that promotes international seminars on foreign policy topics and is the leading Brazilian publishing institution of works on international relations and diplomatic history. Its digital bookstore (offering books and articles in Portuguese, English, and Spanish) is a very useful research tool for domestic and foreign audiences alike, and includes two recent publications on different aspects of Brazil’s experience in public diplomacy. In its turn, the Instituto Rio Branco (Brazilian Diplomatic Academy) offers scholarships to foreign diplomats, particularly from developing countries, since 1976. More than 250 Foreign Service officers from 54 countries have graduated from the program.

A mention should be made as well to the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (Apex-Brasil), an autonomous entity created in 2003 and, since 2016, under the direct coordination of Itamaraty. The agency mission comprises “selected activities designed to strengthen the country’s branding abroad.” During the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games, it launched its second nation-branding campaign, “Be Brasil,” vaguely inspired by the British example of “Great.” As stated by Apex, the main idea of the campaign is to promote the image of the country as an attractive and reliable country in the world of business, as well as the quality, innovation, and sustainability of Brazilian products and services. In spite of the positive results shown so far by “Be Brasil,” there is still much to be done in order to improve coordination and explore synergies between public diplomacy and branding initiatives such as the “Brasil, Sensational!” campaign carried out since 2009 by the Brazilian Tourism Board (Embratur).

The absolute centrality of Itamaraty in all endeavors dealing with the promotion of Brazil’s image abroad is, among other aspects, a natural consequence of the robust network of embassies, consulates, and offices created in the last two decades. According to the “2017 Global Diplomacy Index” of the Sydney-based Lowy Institute, Brazilian diplomatic network ranks number eight in terms of number of embassies. Besides maintaining a direct presence in 140 nations as of 2018, Brazil became in 2011 one of the few countries in the world to establish diplomatic relationships with all UN member states. Itamaraty’s network of 227 postings in total has been particularly relevant in operating social media channels, following the general guidelines provided by the central press office in Brasília, but with a considerable degree of autonomy in order to engage foreign publics with locally adapted approaches. The sports mega-events in 2014 and 2016 helped to boost traffic in most regions, offering an important contribution to counteract the predominantly negative coverage of traditional media before both the World Cup and the Olympics.

A recent and very promising trend in the initiatives led by Brazilian embassies, suited not only to local preferences but also to the optimal use of their public spaces, is the organization of high-profile and low-cost (usually with the support of private sponsors) public diplomacy exhibitions. In late 2017, the Embassy in Japan conceived and produced an exhibition to celebrate the 50 years of the first trip of Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko to Brazil, and to convey messages about the importance of cultural diversity and long-term partnerships. The event had considerable repercussions among the Japanese media and public, essentially because the imperial couple decided to visit it in person—in a rare gesture of public appreciation for an individual diplomatic mission. In the first half of 2018, it was up to the Embassy in London to rescue the fascinating story of an art exhibition promoted in 1944 by Brazil in order to raise funds for Britain’s war efforts. The re-creation of the original exhibition celebrated Brazilian painters like Cândido Portinari and Lasar Segall, paying at the same time a tribute to the British and Brazilian troops that fought for the Allies during World War II.
For good reason, the brand name Itamaraty is still strong in Brazil and both the institution and the corporation it stands for are well positioned to take the outward-looking dimension of Brazilian public diplomacy to the next level. In the Tupi language, the word “Itamaraty” could be roughly translated as a waterway that flows from or through stones. It is a brand of diplomacy that carries both the musicality of Brazilian Portuguese and the fundamentals of Brazilian attractiveness—and is, in its etymological sense, an eloquent image of the challenges and pitfalls of hard power, soft power, confluences, and influences that characterize our present times.

Secom (Media and Public Affairs at the Executive Office of the President)

In the Brazilian tradition throughout most of the twentieth century, the media and public affairs officers working directly for the president used to focus on domestic publics and occasionally, in collaboration with Itamaraty’s press office, on foreign correspondents. The emergence of Brazil on the world stage, amplified by international events such as the 2012 Rio+20 UN Sustainable Development Conference, the 2014 World Cup, and the 2016 Olympics/Paralympics, justified the creation in 2008 of a new international unit within the Secretariat of Media and Public Affairs (better known as Secom, the acronym in Portuguese for Secretaria de Comunicação Social). As part of the Executive Office of the President, this unit ensured a positive contribution to the strengthening of the coordination between Itamaraty and other federal agencies with global agendas, such as the ministries of agriculture, environment, energy, finance, social development, sports, and tourism.

Since its inception, the international unit of Secom and the two PR agencies it hired, one Brazilian and one American, focused mainly on foreign media (reaching beyond the correspondents based in Brazil) and opinion makers. It supplies the federal government with international media and social media monitoring and analysis reports, as well as surveys and polls on pressing issues. Besides generating content for outlets such as the Brazilian official Internet portal in English (BrazilGovNews), it conducts media pitches and promotes press trips, among other classic public relations actions. Those undertakings may sound trivial, but it must be said that Secom’s experience was the first systematic and comprehensive approach of Brazil’s government to international PR, offering a useful complement to the activities of Itamaraty in public diplomacy or Apex-Brasil and Embratur in country branding.

Secom is also responsible for the Brazilian public communication corporation, the Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC), launched in 2007 as an attempt to emulate the BBC’s model. EBC operates a national TV and radio network, a news agency and, in theory, an international channel (actually, a Web TV that rebroadcasts the national channel). Affected by severe budget constraints, EBC’s offer for non-Portuguese-speaking foreign audiences is currently limited to the English and Spanish content of its news agency (Agência Brasil). It is clearly a good example of an area where Brazil is still far away from the best international practices.

Having in mind the special context of the mega-events hosted by Brazil in this decade, it is no exaggeration to say that the World Cup and the Rio Games served as a litmus test for Secom’s international unit—with mixed reviews in Brazil. To a senior journalist like Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva, former correspondent of Folha de S.Paulo in Washington, the Olympics were a “complete public relations catastrophe,” aggravated by the poor economic performance of the country in 2015–2016 and the political instabilities that led to a presidential impeachment process during the event. On the other hand, writing for Japan’s Nikkei, Brazilian diplomat André Corrêa do Lago stressed that, despite the unfavorable circumstances, the Rio 2016 Games proved skeptics wrong—and the opening ceremony alone allowed an audience of more than 1 billion to witness, even if for a few hours, the foundations of Brazil’s soft power and ingenuity.
At least from the long-term perspectives of public diplomacy, it is difficult to say if the investments made in the 2014–2016 mega-events paid off. They served as a sparkle for a certain malaise in the Brazilian society, directly linked to problems of political representation and the quality of public services. To make things worse, they coincided with the Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato), a nationwide judicial investigation into corruption inspired by the Italian Mani Pulite. It is obvious that many opportunities were missed due to the “perfect storm” that hit Brazil in recent years, but most of its underlying causes are far from being a Brazilian monopoly and, if anything, the alleged PR “catastrophe” seen by Lins da Silva served to demonstrate the resilience of the country and, above all, the importance of solid and well-prepared public institutions.

Conclusion

For the time being, the mission of listening to and engaging neighbors and partners in literally every country and region of the globe will be primarily up to Itamaraty and Secom, conveying the messages of Brazil and contributing to reveal the vitality of its 210 million inhabitants, beyond the positive and negative stereotypes. Yes, it is a nation of people that excels in samba, carnival, and soccer, or cheerfully enjoys life on paradisiac beaches, makes friends instantaneously, throw parties like no other, and is behind the fusion of Amerindian, African, Portuguese, Italian, German, Arab, and Japanese elements. However, it is also the people behind the rise of Brazil as a global agribusiness powerhouse, the leading regional aircraft maker in the world, or the one-of-a-kind electronic voting system designed for hundreds of millions. Their country is a “good global citizen” that aspires to assume greater responsibilities in order to improve life on this planet, leaving no one behind, and that is already sharing with other developing nations its success stories and its mistakes.

Perhaps the greatest and most pressing challenge to the practitioners of public diplomacy is tackling—in a credible and persuasive way—the “information deficit” and distortions that still affects Brazil’s international image. Today, just as 150 years ago, it is essential to “take decided measures to correct the erroneous impressions current abroad … and to circulate truthful and authoritative statements of their domestic concerns.” More than ever, this requires long-term planning, policy consistency, and a robust communication effort capable of engaging audiences in a complex and technologically changing environment. Intercultural and algorithm-savvy personnel need to be trained, pooling the creative information and communications technology (ICT) talents of Brazil’s younger generations. Having in mind the information age of abundant and competing narratives, not to mention “fake news,” more attention should be given to the natural aptitude of the Brazilian society for candor and the creation of strong partnerships and networks. A practical and reliable framework in that direction—minimally aligned with domestic and foreign policy goals—remains to be conceived though.

All those tasks are indeed herculean, and the circumstances (especially budget constraints) are far from ideal, but Brazilians have already shown the world that they know how to be resilient, creative, and persistent. After all, public diplomacy, be it of the “old” or the “new” kind, is a long-term endeavor and a key instrument lest Brazil squanders the precious soft power it has engendered—an invaluable opportunity for its development.

Notes

1 The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any agency of the Brazilian government.
2 Richard Francis Burton, Explorations of the Highlands of the Brazil (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1869), n.p. Interestingly, Burton was quoting in a very positive context the Swiss-American Louis Agassiz, whose legacy as a naturalist would be compromised by his infamous defense of “scientific racism.”
3 Elizabeth Cabot Agassiz and Louis Agassiz, A Journey in Brazil (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1868). The authors are listed as “Professor and Mrs. Louis Agassiz.”
4 Gilberto Freyre, *New World in the Tropics: The Culture of Modern Brazil* (Brasília: Ministry of Sports, 2012) Originally published in the 1920s. In his prolific work, which includes the classic *Masters and Slaves*, Freyre also launched the idea of Brazil as a unique “racial democracy”—now subject of internal criticism, since social inequalities and discrimination based on skin color are still part of the country’s reality. His legacy as a key interpreter of the formation of Brazilian society, emphasizing the roots of its exceptionalism, remains nevertheless intact.


7 Benoni Belli, “Strategic Planning in the 21st Century,” *Geopolitics*, May 3, 2018, https://thegeopolitics.com/strategic-planning-in-the-21st-century. In this article, Belli, chief policy planner of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, points out the limits of transparency in public diplomacy as “at times, a diplomatic triumph … may also be expressed in the avoidance of a conflict that never actually started, but the mere publicization of the behind-the-scenes good offices might cause enormous damage.”


9 The old Itamaraty Palace in Rio was originally the private residence of a merchant family ennobled with that title by the Brazilian monarchy. In 1889, a few years after the Republic was proclaimed in Brazil, the house would be adapted to receive first the Executive Office of the President and, from 1899, the Foreign Ministry.

10 This public diplomacy dimension of the new Itamaraty Palace in Brasília was the cover story of the British magazine *Monocle* in May 2010 (issue 33, volume 4). “The ascent of Brasília: sharpening Brazil’s foreign policy. One of the “seven steps to diplomatic success” was to “show off your sexy Foreign Ministry.”


12 Rio Branco is a rare case in the world of a diplomat turned into “national hero.” His effigy, for instance, has been a regular appearance on banknotes and coins since 1913. Following the introduction of the real as national currency in the 1990s, he is presently on the 50-cent coin.


16 Brazil hosted the Rio 92 and the Rio+20 Conferences, landmarks in the UN sustainable development agenda.


18 *Diplomacia pública e imagem do Brasil no século XXI*, by Carlos Villanova, and *Exposições Universais e Diplomacia Pública*, by Flavio Goldman. Both authors are career diplomats with a long experience in public diplomacy, and their books are available (in Portuguese) at www.funag.gov.br/loja.


21 Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva, *Diplomacia pública e imagem do Brasil no século XX*. Introduction by Carlos Villanova.
