

Immigration and Colonialism: Italian Fascism on Display at the 1937 Great Exhibition of São Paulo (Brazil)

Abstract

This article examines the circulation and reception of Italian Fascist propaganda in Brazil during the Great Exhibition of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Official Immigration, held in São Paulo in 1937. The first section analyses the photomontage *Fede Volontà Vittoria*, signed by the architect Mario Romano, and focuses on the visual strategies through which Fascism manipulated historical narratives and projected its imperial ambitions within the Brazilian context. Particular attention is given to the role of architecture as a symbolic language associated with urban expansion and economic development – two narratives frequently mobilized to celebrate the presence of Italians in São Paulo. The second section turns to the representation of Italian immigrants within the “civilizing mission” discourse promoted by Mussolini’s regime. The photomontage *Collaborazione Italo-Brasiliana*, signed by Virgilio Retrosi, serves as a key case study for examining how narratives of labour, urban growth, and immigration were employed to legitimize both the Italian presence in Brazil and the broader ideological claims of Fascism. Together, these analyses demonstrate how the Fascist binary between “civilization” and “barbarism” was exported to – and reproduced within – the Brazilian context, particularly through derogatory portrayals of Ethiopia during the Italian invasion that led Mussolini to proclaim the Fascist Empire. The article argues that Fascist propaganda encountered little resistance in Brazil because it resonated with pre-existing social and political conditions, including the country’s colonial legacies, its immigration policies, and the marginalization of Afro-Brazilian cultural presence.