

FOOD

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# Visions for Architectural Demodernization

(15 min read)

Asmara and Aba Shawl  
15.3229° N, 38.9251° E

Sicily  
37.2303° N, 15.0227° E

Emilio Distretti and Alessandro Petti  
Photographs by Luca Capuano

In the short docufilm *The Form of the City* (1974) Pier Paolo Pasolini is seen walking the sandy coastline of the Agro Pontino (Pontine Marshes) near Rome. He offers a critical reflection on the state of postwar society in the age of consumerism, mass media, and television. Against what he sees as the specter of looming decadence, Pasolini praises the lifeworld of Sabaudia, a rural town that only a few decades earlier had been sanctified by Mussolini as the symbol of *bonifica integrale* (integral reclamation) and the so-called “internal colonization” of Italy’s southern lands.

As if a guide escorting a tourist, Pasolini confesses his genuine fascination with the rationalist and metaphysic forms of Sabaudia. It is, he tells us, a place in which, “you can feel that this city was built to live in; you can find ordinary families inside it, human beings, living creatures who are complete, entire and fulfilled in their humble circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> Sabaudia had to be admired, Pasolini claims, because it was built “on a human scale” where—despite the form and history of its architecture—“there was nothing fascist in it.” In other words, these colonial settlements have no roots in the regime that produced them, at least in the mind of Pasolini. They are instead “the expression of those same realities that fascism had tyrannically dominated, namely Italy’s provincial, rustic, and preindustrial worlds.”<sup>2</sup>

Pasolini was not alone in his fascination with the “beauty” of these cities; many other cinematographers, artists, and intellectuals have influenced the ways in which western societies have sought to rationalize the forms of modernist buildings designed and built under fascism, to the point of celebrating them as innocent urban stages for perpetuating self-indulgent, rose-colored narratives about violent pasts. These are cities whose forms are “disconnected” from the social and political

context that produced them—a series of cinematic urban realities that could inspire a new meme of “fascist architecture without fascism,” whereby the architecture that once served as the vehicle for fascism’s segregationist and imperialist ethos is disembodied from its purpose. Such an attitude was instrumental during Italy’s modernization and the racialized nature of the imperial project as it has played out in contexts not only including Libya and the Horn of Africa, but also the Italian peninsula, where the south of Italy was considered an internal frontier to be tamed and colonized.

Few places illustrate this condition better than the two areas that represent the beginning and end of Italy’s imperial modernist project. The first example, Aba Shawl, the first Indigenous Eritrean urban settlement, was swallowed up when the Italians started to colonize the newly occupied territory and founded the city of Asmara (today’s capital of Eritrea). As a result, Asmara became a site for European design projects, including many examples of fascist architecture (in the 1930s the city was known as Piccola Roma, or Little Rome). Aba Shawl, which before the Italian invasion was part of a cluster of four villages also known in Tigrinya as Arbate Asmare, was referred to by its colonizers as the city’s “native quarter,” where the Indigenous population was confined. The second example is located within Italy itself and takes the form of a series of rural settlements built by Mussolini’s government to “modernize” Sicily’s “backward” countryside. This so-called “internal colonization” was part of a capital-driven campaign for reclaiming arable land that mainly affected Italy’s rural South. Through a synthesis of monumentalism, technological development, and industrial planning, the fascist regime planned designs for urban and non-urban reclamation in order to celebrate a fascist style of living. This program was launched in continuation of Italy’s settler colonial ventures in Africa.

These sites—in Eritrea and Sicily’s rural settlements—represent Italy’s first colony

(1889) and the last outpost of its fascist regime (1941). While symbolizing opposite architectural and spatial worlds, with Aba Shawl considered a “native quarter” and Sicily a “rural colony,” both spaces reflect forms of modern violence. This essay is therefore a patchwork of tales, insights, and visions for spatial and epistemic twists that suggest a different vision for historical narratives, architectural preservation, and heritage creation. From Asmara to Sicily, we collected stories and testimonies and put forward alternative modes of representation and storytelling that vouch neither for the erasure of their fascist architectural traces and colonization nor for the celebration of their presumed absolute and universal aesthetic values but, rather, for the deactivation of their founding principles in order to narrate their histories in an anti-colonial and anti-fascist spirit.

<sup>1</sup> Laurent Matthey and Nicola Cantoreggi, “‘The Form of a City’: Pasolini and the Poetic Ecology of the Sign,” *Space and Culture* 20, no. 4 (2017): 399–414.

<sup>2</sup> *Pasolini and ... the form of a city*, directed by Paolo Brunatto (1974).



Scene 1  
In the “buffer zone” of Aba Shawl, Asmara



























We visited Aba Shawl in January 2019, having spent several days touring the city of Asmara.<sup>3</sup> Two years earlier, in 2017, UNESCO nominated Asmara a World Heritage Site, citing the city as “an exceptional example of early modernist urbanism from the beginning of the twentieth century and its adaptation to an African context.” The area that UNESCO demarcated in its World Heritage list follows the perimeter of the original colonial master plan<sup>4</sup>—that is, the modernist-designed, segregated “whites-only” area of the colonized city. The Indigenous settlement of Aba Shawl is instead relegated to an outer “buffer zone.”<sup>5</sup> Sticking to controversial principles in preservation of “authenticity” and “originality,” the nominated preservation area includes the ancient villages pre-dating the colonial city while excluding the expansion and informal sprawl of Aba Shawl that followed the Italian occupation.

In the language of architectural and cultural conservation, a buffer zone refers to a belt of protection, a landscape that surrounds the nominated space and facilitates (bureaucratically, technically, and strategically) its preservation. The term is also suggestive of warfare and the separate areas between combatants. It is a concept solidly anchored in the tradition of western architectural knowledge, dating back to the Roman architect Vitruvius, who related the “demarcation of an abaton as an inaccessible space by the people of Rhodes around the statue of Artemesia”<sup>6</sup>—in a word, delineating the sacred from the profane. According to the 2008 International

Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) protocol, a buffer zone is a tool that disconnects the object of protection from external dangers. Aba Shawl’s role and function is thus to serve as a no man’s land to preserve the colonial city. The urban settlement of Aba Shawl is what remains of the quarter of the Piano Cafiero,<sup>7</sup> the cadastral master plan drawn and implemented by the Italian government in 1936,<sup>8</sup> which aimed to extend the demolition of Asmara’s already segregated Indigenous quarters to give more “breathing space” to the city center where all the government buildings and National Fascist Party headquarters were located. The native population was thus relocated beyond the northern hills.

If the colonial city was built using a scale design and comprised open space, cinemas, factories, shops, bars, hotels, residences, and government headquarters all standing proudly as symbols of white dominance and fascist power, Aba Shawl featured none of these elements. The only thinking that went into the transformation of the area was that it had to be separated from the center of Asmara. In the eyes of the colonizers, Aba Shawl was viewed as everything Asmara was not: a “backwards” and “underdeveloped” “native quarter” full of danger.

Today Aba Shawl is a densely populated neighborhood, a maze of low, clustered homes, unpaved alleys, and narrow sandy and pebbled passageways that stand in contrast with the geometric and ventilated layout of the

<sup>3</sup> The trip to Asmara saw the participation of artists, architects, researchers, and students of the Decolonizing Architecture Advanced Studies program at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm.  
<sup>4</sup> Edward Denison, Medhanie Teklemariam, and Dawit Abraha, “Asmara: Africa’s Modernist City (UNESCO World Heritage Nomination),” *The Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 1 (2017): 11–53.  
<sup>5</sup> Asmara Heritage Project, “Asmara Proposed World Heritage Site: Integrated Management Plan 2016–2021” (Asmara-Eritrea 2016).  
<sup>6</sup> Michael Turner, “Introduction,” in *World Heritage and Buffer Zones Patrimoine mondial et zones tampons, International Expert Meeting on World Heritage and Buffer Zones*, ed. Oliver Martin and Giovanna Piatti (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2008), 17.  
<sup>7</sup> Salvatore Cafiero was the chief architect sent by the regime to Asmara to complete the master plan originally drawn up by the then Italian city-chief engineer and head of public works, Odoardo Cavignari. Between 1913 and 1916 Cavignari “modernized the city” and set the basis for racial segregation. This segregation was implemented following the principles of modernist zoning inspired both by the Western Garden City movement—a method of urban planning in which self-contained communities are surrounded by greenbelts—and European models of class division, but this time manifestly based on race. The city was divided and segregated into three parts. The south and west of the city was designated for residential housing exclusively for Italians. The center of town was open to other Europeans and to Indigenous traders. This included a market hall and a mosque that were placed at the boundaries with a third district into which the Indigenous population was confined and segregated.  
<sup>8</sup> Sean Anderson (2017); Giuliano Gresleri, “Un progetto perduto e una capitale ritrovata. Asmara da Cesare Spighi a Vittorio Cafiero,” in *Asmara: Architettura e pianificazione urbana nei fondi dell’IsIAO*, ed. Giulia Barrera, Alessandro Triulzi, and Gabriel Tzeggal (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 2008): 42–48; Anna Nuzzaci, “Architecture and Town Planning in Italian East Africa During the Years of the Empire (1936–1941),” in *Urban Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa. Colonial and Postcolonial Planning Cultures*, ed. Carlos Nunes Silva (New York: Routledge, 2015): 129–44; Ferruccio Canali, “Asmara, lo sviluppo urbano della Milano ‘Bianca’ degli altipiani, dopo il nuovo piano regolatore di Vittorio Cafiero (e Attilio Teruzzi con la consulenza Alberto Calza Bini) (1937–1939),” in *Per Amor di Classicismo*, ed. Ferruccio Canali (Florence: Bollettino della Società di Studi Fiorentini, 2015–2016): 281–327.



modernist city. Although Aba Shawl is considered by many Eritreans to be the pulse of Asmara’s identity, it still bears the stigma of an underserviced and unsafe ghetto. Many residents of Asmara do not want to live in or spend time there, and Eritreans are well aware that the ongoing divisions and social stigmas through which Aba Shawl is framed are issues that their communities still have to tackle: it is the need to fight “the colony within,” whereby segregations and demonizations of the past still influence those of the present.

Since the UNESCO nomination, any restoration work must follow strict protocols to preserve the “original” architecture of Asmara, even down to the colors used to paint the exteriors of the city’s buildings—in a bitter twist, color lines continue to be the organizing principle of life in Asmara. Today, walking into Aba Shawl and crossing the color line drawn by the Italian occupiers, one can feel how the nomination controversially reflects UNESCO’s universalistic and Eurocentric values.

However, the exclusion by UNESCO did not provoke strong outrage, because—surprisingly—by placing Aba Shawl in the buffer zone, the Asmara nomination creates a new paradox. Instead of enforcing a protracted sense of exclusion and segregation, the inhabitants of Aba Shawl have developed an upside-down narrative whereby the current former colonial city, in order to exist as a heritage site, needs the shield of the Indigenous city. This challenges the conservationist logic that traditionally relegates a buffer zone to just another sanitary barrier. Walking through the alleys of Aba Shawl, you forget about the art deco and the theatricality of the former colonial city, and instead encounter life at a genuine human scale. Aba Shawl was born and has evolved organically without any master plan. Every religion and regional ethnic group constitute its urban fabric. This cultural openness grew in reaction to—and in spite of—the harsh conditions of racial segregation. The exclusion prompted

by colonialism ignited a sense of solidarity among the residents of Aba Shawl: conviviality, as well as shared public and private spaces and properties (internal courts, rooms and dwellings), resources, and spirituality developed into respect and a sense of ownership.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the technocratic label of buffer zone can open a door for the inhabitants of Aba Shawl to reject the inherited dichotomies of their colonized past: white versus black, inside versus outside, public versus private.

Many of the congested and clustered dwellings are built around internal communal courtyards shared by different families, where people gather and guests are welcomed. This system of internal courts produces a series of communal spaces shaped and inhabited by extended families and bound together by neighborliness. On the one hand, the houses have relatively small rooms and are typically cluttered and crowded. On the other hand, the internal courtyards created by these houses echo the traits of Islamic architecture, offering important “breathing space” and multiple functions, a balance between respect for traditional architecture and its use. Aba Shawl’s culture of communal living is well represented by this system of internal courtyards, which offers a material configuration of the ways in which residents interpret, experience, and practice care, reciprocity, and hospitality.

Many residents, after welcoming us into their courtyard, engage with our questions: how do they feel about preserving the colonial city and the symbols of their oppression? “Well, we built it and we own it,” they reply sardonically. There is a big truth to this response: generations of Aba Shawl’s residents hold memories of the city’s realization. Construction was carried out by laborers from Aba Shawl who dug trenches for water and sewage pipes, installed telegraph cables, laid railway track, and paved streets. Many Aba Shawl women provided Italian families with domestic labor, working as maids and carrying

out daily housework.<sup>10</sup> Retrieving memories and reappropriating the narrative of exploited Eritrean labor is an act of reclaiming heritage. The reiteration of a collective narrative of the production of the city, rooted in the experiences of unfree labor, allows the residents of Aba Shawl to imagine an epistemic twist of the divisions and compartmentalization projected by fascist Italy’s colonialist optics and the modern architecture built to stand as its symbol. In this narrative recasting they are not segregated from the city, but integral to its creation. Without them, there might have never been a city for UNESCO to hope to preserve. By proclaiming themselves as the guardians of this heritage, they break the exclusion previously imposed on them.

<sup>9</sup> For a more comprehensive history of the quarter, see “A short note on Aba Shawl” by Alemseghed Tesfay.

<sup>10</sup> Denison et al, “Asmara: Africa’s Modernist City.”

Scene 2  
Rural colonies in Sicily























In June 2021, with *Aba Shawl* still vivid in our minds, we visited the internal rural lands of Sicily, first stop Borgo Gallea, a rural settlement in the province of Agrigento. There is no one else around: as we walk towards the only open cafe, the square and the buildings appear empty and the facades show traces of fresh plaster and recent renovation. When we order espressos at the counter, the young barman cannot help but ask: “You know who built all this, don’t you?”

In 1940, the Italian fascist regime founded its last agency in Sicily, the Ente di Colonizzazione del Latifondo Siciliano (ECLS).<sup>11</sup> Between 1940 and 1943, ECLS built more than 2,000 homesteads and completed eight new towns in Sicily. They were built as replicas of the same structures and planimetries that had already appeared on African soil. All had the buildings of the Ente, piazzas, schools, fascist party headquarters, churches, pharmacies, artisan workshops, and restaurants.<sup>12</sup> To celebrate the fictitious unity between the colonies in Africa and the south of Italy, many of the Sicilian villages took the names of fascist martyrs, soldiers, and settlers who died in Ethiopia during the colonial war of occupation.

While on the one hand, the construction of settlements in the Sicilian countryside were supposed to tackle the needs of agrarian change, the fascist reform of the *latifondo* did not lead to the redistribution of land to peasants and farmers. On top of that, the internal colonization of the South, as well as Italy’s settler colonial projects in Africa, were short-lived: the end of the Second World War also brought the formal end of fascism. Italy “lost”<sup>13</sup> its colonies while the many Ente scattered across the south of the peninsula

were progressively shut down or reformed.<sup>14</sup> The word “colonization” was then “secularized” and replaced by “development.” The *new* Ente was re-invented to again tackle the unsolved problem of land restitution, and despite the echoes of fascist rhetoric, it was celebrated by Italy’s newly formed democratic institutions. However, southern *latifondista* were not defeated and managed to get parts of the expropriated land “re-assigned.” Thanks to local mobsters who took back control of large portions of the area, most infrastructural projects, such as irrigation, drainage, aqueducts, roads, and railroads were kept under the same coercive control of wealthy landowners. In this scenario, most of Sicily’s rural settlements were abandoned to a slow decay, and the surrounding areas were depopulated by new waves of outward migration.

After decades of neglect, the rural towns designed by the regime attracted the attention of local, regional, and central governments. Since 2007, a project entitled “La via dei Borghi” has sought public funding to restore these fascist settlements. The program has been promoted particularly by right-wing (but not only) regional governments as a nostalgic celebration of fascist ideals and the “uncontested beauty” of modernist architecture—all done to boost Sicily’s rural tourism. Over the past decade some municipalities have secured funding for an architectural restoration of “clean” and “authentic” buildings, following a traditional preservationist approach that looks at modern architecture as an isolated object, an aestheticized icon to be admired for its formalist features.

The renovation of Borgo Bonsignore has become the flagship of that project. The town

<sup>11</sup> The entity was created to reform the *latifondo*, for centuries the predominant agricultural system of production in southern Italy. These consisted of large estates of arable land owned by local noble landlords. Living far from their possessions, these landowners used local middlemen and hired thugs to sublet their land to local peasants and farmers who needed land for self-sustenance. Fascism sought to transform this very unproductive, outdated (and exploitative) system, forcing a wave of modernization. The Fascist Minister of Agriculture Giuseppe Tassinari made clear that the colonization was both a state and private initiative: the state would invest important sums to build and maintain roads, aqueducts, wells, and farmhouses, while settler families would gain full ownership over the new-built private properties. See Giuseppe Tassinari, “La colonizzazione del latifondo siciliano,” *Conferenza tenuta in Palazzo Vecchio*, 7 January 1940.

<sup>12</sup> See Emilio Distretti and Alessandro Petti, “The Afterlife of Fascist Colonial Architecture: A Critical Manifesto,” *Future Anterior* 16, no. 2 (Winter 2019): 46–58.

<sup>13</sup> Due to a series of military defeats during the Second World War, Italy was forced out of Libya and the Horn of Africa by the Allies supported by Indigenous movements of liberation.

<sup>14</sup> While the Ente in Libya was formally abolished only in 1961 (ten years after Libya’s independence) the ECLS was reformed in 1950 and renamed the Ente per la Riforma Agraria in Sicilia. This led to the creation of a new institution, the Ente di Sviluppo Agricolo (ESA) in 1965.

was originally built in 1940 and named after a *carabinieri* officer who died in the Battle of Gunu Gadu in 1936 during the imperial war that Italy fought against Ethiopia. As we walk around the empty square, the whole settlement is literally wrapped in scaffolding. Despite the many tarpaulins covering its facades and arches, it is impossible to ignore the recently installed plaque commemorating the settler-martyr, as well as the heavy coat of stucco on the facade of the former *casa del fascio*. Here, restoration work is anchored to reviving the cinematic and metaphysical city, to the point that only a few years ago even global corporations such as Google rented the Borgo and transformed it into a stage for celebrities and business leaders.

But like in any theatrical performance, there is always an element of smoke and mirrors, and the stage of the Borgo is indeed designed for multiple illusions and deception. The undergoing restoration of the settlement's facades is again perpetuating an image of preservation where "alterations" are banned and forbidden. But what happens behind the curtain? Behind the attempts to protect the outward appearances of fascist architecture?

Over the years, with the failures of the agrarian reform and the closure of the new Ente of Development, the school and other buildings in the Borgo have gradually been reappropriated by local families. And behind the facades, informal changes to the interior design have organically followed: while outside, the original plaster of the buildings has slowly crumbled, on the inside, kitchens have been moved, walls knocked down, and new bedrooms added. Against a destiny of decay, these so-called illegal residents have maintained the buildings and the settlement, preserving without preservationists.

Conflicts among squatters and local municipalities always arise as questions of preservation resurface. Similarly, in the settlement of Borgo Cascino, near Enna in the

center of Sicily, we hear of fraught relations between the few remaining residents and public officials around issues of care and maintenance. An old couple who has squatted in the Borgo for more than fifty years faced eviction when the local government planned restoration works. By keeping the settlement livable they eventually negotiated their indefinite right to stay. The result is another blow to an already weakened rhetoric around a type of conservation that cares for facades but ignores the lives that exist behind them and refuses to recognize the marginal communities performing *unruly* preservation—unofficially and with no public status, with no predetermined expertise or set of specific skills.

What is most striking about the fascist rural settlements of the Sicilian countryside is that despite their differences (some are abandoned and in ruins, some are homes to squatters or only half-populated) there is a common denominator: in those places the modern distinction between public and private spheres repeatedly blurs—or better, it collapses. While this could be explained as an outcome of the widespread lack of trust among the local population in its public institutions and governing bodies, the erosion between private and public life in the Borghi can—like at Aba Shawl—offer the opportunity to reverse conventional ideas about preservation, heritage-making, and design.

In the summer of 2021 we inaugurated a summer school in the former fascist settlement of Borgo Rizza. Working with the courageous municipality and residents of the nearby town of Carlentini, the school aims to produce, discuss, and imagine practices and strategies of (non)preservation, reappropriation, *profanation*, and decolonization of what we call a "difficult heritage."<sup>15</sup> We start with simple questions in order to re-frame the historical narrative around colonial and fascist architectural heritage: is it possible to subvert the original function of these settlements? How to

transform these sites into antidotes to fascism? Can we imagine heritage-making as a relational praxis that manifests beyond and despite experts in preservation/conservation?

Working and operating at the threshold between public and private spheres, participants of the school (residents, local and international students, artists, curators, immigrants, and refugees) collaborate to create communal, safe, and intimate spaces of learning and exchange that challenge the monumentality and rigid formalism of the surrounding fascist architecture. In an inaugural meeting participants set the pace of a coproduction of multiple spaces of learning. A series of *hassira* carpets (from the Al Khalil market in the West Bank Palestine) were laid down on the square to mark the space of our conversations. (In Palestine, and in the Arab Muslim world in general, a *hassira* is a decorated carpet that can be used for prayer or to establish comfortable outdoor seating areas, especially under the shade of olive trees when it is time for harvest.) Around the rugs a series of second-hand armchairs, sofas, and dining chairs donated by Carlentini residents were placed to form outdoor living rooms where people could gather, meet, and share.

The school seeks to return the Borgo to a common use—where the spheres of privacy, vulnerability, intimacy, and domesticity blur into the public realm as collective rituals. The former post office has been converted into a dormitory, and a mobile external kitchen<sup>16</sup> provides space for cooking sessions and opportunities for shared domesticity. Sleeping, cooking, and communal living become ordinary practices that somehow contribute to the gradual erosion of the divisions embodied by fascist architecture that relegated domesticity away from the public and banned intimacies and vulnerability from public life.

Through this we want to recognize and understand how the discursive (cultural and social) legacies of fascism survived architectural monumentality, and went further beyond

it. Against a dehumanizing architecture, and cultures of masculinity and patriarchy that survived the end of fascist monumentalism, the school celebrates the town as a new space for the continuing heritage constituted by its participants. That heritage is now playing out in the application to rename the municipality Borgo EX. Through this collaborative process, we can ensure that the memory of an irredeemable and violent past is never forgotten while honoring the Borgo's present reality, in which it is already being used for something else and in continual transformation.

### Epilogue: On Architectural Demodernization

The entangled histories of the irreverent gazes and counter-discourses on heritage-making and preservation from Asmara to Borgo EX show how fascist architecture must be understood as a branch of the European colonial/modern project of civilization, exploitation, and dispossession. Although there is widespread agreement around the fact that modern architecture (and its spatial reordering) was instrumental in the formation of colonialist domination, architectural modernism continues to be celebrated as a universal instrument of liberation for its progressive social agenda. While the terms modernity, modernization, and modernism are used interchangeably to celebrate and describe processes of social and infrastructural development, progress, democratization, and individual emancipations, whatever exists outside this perimeter is still stigmatized as anti-modern and traditional. Shaped around such universalizing norms and regulations, architectural modernism was meant to "save" society from political and social illness embodied by tradition.

We wish instead to embrace other ways of heritage-making that do not have modernism as a point of reference. Contrary to interpretations that want to reduce the world to binary oppositions (nature vs culture, public vs private, developed vs underdeveloped, the city vs the countryside), we suggest

<sup>15</sup> See Emilio Distretti and Alessandro Petti "Architectural Demodernization as Critical Pedagogy: Pathways for Undoing Colonial Fascist Architectural Legacies in Sicily," in *Architectural Dissonance*, edited by L'Internationale online and daas: [https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising\\_practices/208\\_architectural\\_demodernization\\_as\\_critical\\_pedagogy\\_pathways\\_for\\_undoing\\_colonial\\_fascist\\_architectural\\_legacies\\_in\\_sicily/](https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/208_architectural_demodernization_as_critical_pedagogy_pathways_for_undoing_colonial_fascist_architectural_legacies_in_sicily/) internationale.

<sup>16</sup> The mobile kitchen is designed and built by Marginal Studio, Palermo, 2022.



“demodernization” as a practice that rejects the modernist dichotomy. “Demodernizing” does not relate to any anti-modernism. On the contrary, a “demodern option” acknowledges other ways of seeing and being conscious of the world, where modernity is simply not considered an unavoidable destiny, and modernist architecture a sacred space whose original use and design cannot be reversed. Instead, it calls for the profanation of those separations, disconnections, and isolations that are embodied and reflected by architectural modernism. By opposing an aggressive universalism, we have witnessed—and also practiced—demodernization as a method of epistemic desegregation. We see its application as both *discourse* and *praxis*, to invent forms of the reappropriation and reuse of modern (colonial and fascist) architecture.

Posing the question of demodernization means, first and foremost, understanding it in synchrony with the question of decolonization and recognizing that decolonization cannot exist without questioning the myriad other segregations that rippled (and still do) across geographical hemispheres. In so doing we suggest foregrounding “decolonization” in relation to “demodernization” beyond, and despite, colonially imposed geographical divides. Demodernization is also an epistemic reorganization of these divides, spaces, and architectures, and a call for the desegregation of colonial fascist heritage from its history. And it is, above all, a shift of consciousness, one that intends to undo the rationality of zoning and compartmentalization enforced by colonial modern architecture and urbanism. It addresses different ways in which people

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Alessandro Petti is Professor of Architecture and Social Justice at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm and co-director of DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency), an architectural studio and residency program centered around the relation of politics and architecture. His recent books include *Refugee Heritage* (Art and Theory, Stockholm 2021) and *Permanent Temporariness* (Art and Theory, Stockholm 2019).

Luca Capuano is a photographer and educator. UNESCO, the Italian Ministry of Cultural Assets and Activities, and the Bangkok Embassy are just a handful of the well-known institutions he has worked with. His projects range from photo essays documenting Italian cultural heritage to shoots and ad campaigns for designer brands. His photos have been exhibited at the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism, Abu Dhabi Nyuad Art Gallery, and Berlin Institut für Architektur, among others. He teaches photography at the Isia Institute of Urbino.

can potentially engage critically with their legacy and heritage, and heal a fracture between worlds deliberately set apart. It is about imagining how we can empower ourselves to reorient the narratives over the fascist colonial heritage, and reunite disconnected histories and experiences across the North/South divide.









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