The coloniality of Italian fascist architecture

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This article traces the modern history of the Piazza di Porta Capena in Rome. It begins with the design of a modernist building for the square by the architects Ridolfi and Cafiero in 1938 created to celebrate the empire of fascist Italy. The building was intended to host the Ministry of the Colonies and to be flanked by an ancient stele looted from Aksum in Ethiopia. With the shift to a new world order after 1945, the building was completed to serve as the headquarters of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. As part of Italy's belated commitment to reparations for colonial crimes, the stele was dismantled and reinstalled in Aksum in 2008. The void thus created in the piazza was filled by a new monument, this time a memorial to the victims of the 9/11 attack in New York in 2001. Through the lens of the 'coloniality of architecture', this article explores the changing aesthetics of the square, uncovering a history of shared rationalities between Italian fascist colonialism and its afterlife, as forms of government of 'others'. By investigating the pìazza's architectural configurations, it assists the re-orientation of narratives around the history of Italian fascist architecture.

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Introduction

In the 1930s, Mussolini designated Rome's Piazza di Porta Capena as the stage for celebrating Italy's fascist empire. There, the ancient vestiges of the Roman imperial past would unite with the new symbols of Italy's colonial power: a stele (an ancient funerary monument) looted from Aksum at the time of the fascist occupation of Ethiopia was to be flanked by the headquarters of Italy's Ministry of the Colonies (also known as the Ministry of Italian Africa). Designed by modernist architects Mario Ridolfi and Vittorio Cafiero, construction began in 1938, only to be suspended once the Second World War brokeout. After Italy's defeat and the end of fascism, Italy lost control of its colonies in Libya, the Horn of Africa, and the Mediterranean (Albania and Greece). However, these events did not impede the construction of the building. Work resumed in 1950–1951, but instead of housing the Ministry of the Colonies it became
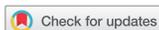
the home of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), thus symbolising the rise of the United Nations and a newly established world order under American hegemony. Today, what is left of the fascist imperial cityscape is a clear space, with the FAO headquarters facing a memorial to the victims of the 9/11 attacks in New York. The stele is not to be seen, having been returned in stages to Ethiopia between 2003 and 2005 (and finally reinstalled in situ in 2008) as part of reparations for colonial crimes.

This article illustrates how, since the fall of Italian fascism and the end of empire, the square has become a symbol of shifting world orders, under the influence of global multilateralism. From the FAO architecture to the 9/11 iconography, the square represents the conversion of fascist colonial relations of power into contemporary multi-scalar apparatuses of world governance.

The article explains the ways in which the shifts from colonial practices of government to post-colonial modes of development, humanitarianism, and pre-emptive military operations, which have been aesthetically and architecturally played out. Today, while the issue of governing and control over the former colonial world remains, it revolves around the creation of new topical 'emergencies' within the ex-colonised hemisphere. These include the ongoing global War on Terror and the protection of 'human security' and 'food security'. The changing aesthetics of the square offers a symbolic representation of today's world governance, one in which military and civilian powers converge and are used interchangeably to justify current interventions. These transformations, however, do not simply bear witness to geopolitical shifts and historical (dis)continuities. For the spatial transformation of the square symbolises the general process of cultural forgetfulness and Italy's weak historical consciousness around its colonial and fascist past.

In this article I read these entangled histories through the lens of the 'coloniality of architecture'. This refers to a method of inquiry that addresses the *afterlife* of colonialism by investigating its material configurations to uncover the rationalities of colonial rule that have survived in the absence of formal colonialism. It builds on Anibal Qujiano's theorisation of coloniality which addresses European modernity as a construct and a blueprint of differentiations from other cultures, as a system that relies on the structures of colonial domination over the rest of the world.[1] This relation has been shown by Walter Mignolo to be the specific core of the modernity complex that makes coloniality the darker side of modernity and modernity an unfinished project that ripples across global inequalities and injustices to this very day.[2] As a way to avoid 'the myth of the "postcolonial" as the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonisation of the world',[3] such continuity can, indeed, be read through the notion of 'coloniality'. Nelson Maldonado-Torres has argued that coloniality, unlike colonialism,

> refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations.[4]

By discussing the case of the square, I intend to stretch further this argument and extend it to architectural knowledge and heritage. Architecture — before and beyond design, practice, and construction — is a dynamic epistemic field, a mode of interpretation of reality, and a documentary form. Hence, this article understands the built environment and architecture as a *medium* for the establishment of power relations across different temporalities, as a mode of registering and containing the effect of historical transformations into material and spatial configurations. In the debates around architectural histories and theories, Samia Henni has correctly pointed out that acknowledging such relations 'is to expose the coloniality of history-writing and policy-making and simultaneously urge for an intersectional analysis of architecture and the political'.[5] Critical discussion of this precise tension and intersection in the space of Piazza di Porta Capena is the core theme of this intervention.

To do so, the article is divided into four sections. I first introduce the debate around the afterlife of fascist architecture in relation to the question of decolonisation and defascistisation in Italy. Then I situate the loot and return of the stele of Aksum to Ethiopia within the Italian postcolonial and postfascist context, and how this event has stirred a growing debate around the unsolved question of fascist colonial legacies. I then move to the story of the square to unfold it in two ways: firstly, by situating the work of Ridolfi and Cafiero, who as modern architects retained their role as public servants in post-fascist Italy, at the intersection of changing world orders; and secondly, I consider the square as the stage on which the symbolic transfer of power from fascist colonialism to postwar global multilateralism has been enacted. The conclusion reiterates the need to imagine possible ways of re-thinking the presence of the past by fostering critical approaches to re-orient narratives around fascist colonial architectural heritage.

The question of the afterlife of Italian fascist architecture

By 1943 Italy had 'lost' all its colonies as the result of a series of military defeats in the Second World War. In the immediate aftermath of the war the 1946 general amnesty for fascist crimes (in Italy and abroad) saved from prosecution many war criminals and perpetrators of massacres in Libya and Ethiopia. Although the 1947 Paris Peace Treaties forced Italy to fully renounce claims to its colonies, decolonisation was not a closed chapter. While the Ministry of the Colonies was formally abolished in 1950, the UN partition of the Somali territories gave Italy a ten-year mandate of trusteeship in Somalia, commonly known as AFIS (*Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana* or 'Italian Trusteeship') to 'lead' the country to independence and support development. This kept the old fascist colonial administration in power until 1960. Meanwhile, in Libya, Italian settlers were finally expelled only after Muammar al-Qaddafi overthrew the monarchy in 1969. Overall, despite Italy's obligation to commit to reparations for its crimes, it took more than seventy years for Italy to meet its obligations towards Libya and Ethiopia, marked by the controversial

Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation with Qaddafi in 2009 and a reparations process built around the restitution of the Aksum stele to Ethiopia.[6]

As many scholars, journalists, and writers have discussed, since the end of Second World War, the Italian debate around decolonisation has too often been reduced to questions of a geopolitical transition which has relegated colonialism to a historical footnote, as merely a minor event in Italian history. Simultaneously, Italy's disenchantment with the past could be presented alongside the idea that fascism had to be understood as a mere caesura in the national history, a pause which, as famously theorised by the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, was simply a 'parenthesis' within liberalism and a linear path of European civilisation and progress.

Alongside this dual metabolisation of the past, architectural and urban heritage has stood still as a silent background. Since 1945, architecture built under the fascist regime has often kept a functional role and has been re-used by post-fascist republican governments to host new national and global institutions. In this regard, historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat reopened a long-lasting debate on the issue that in Italy it is very common to find fascist buildings, monuments, and memorials that have been left untouched or normalised. Why, unlike Germany, she asks, have Italian urban spaces been permitted to preserve so many traces of the fascist past?[7] The lack of a real historicisation of this heritage and the a-critical celebration of its aesthetic 'beauty', argues Ben-Ghiat, have failed to clearly recognise that these remnants are — after all — living monuments glorifying violence and nationalism. Not surprisingly, her intervention has stirred a fierce opposition in the Italian public, as well as from architectural historians and critics.[8] The argument of functionality has been commonly waived to explain that the continued use of many buildings is because this architecture does not reflect fascist ideology and is not anymore connected to ethnonational mythologies. Among many critics, architect and theorist Paolo Portoghesi has strongly claimed that Ben-Ghiat's 'simplistic polarizations between good and evil' risks to deliberately erase the 'cultural depth' of the architecture built under the regime and of its interpreters, and the influence that this had in making Italy a modern country.[9]

What becomes clear from these exchanges is that the contestations have proven the sensitivity of this topic in the Italian public debate over its colonial and fascist past as well as the pertinence of posing difficult questions. Since then, critical scholarship on fascist architecture has grown and has taken on the challenge seriously by asking more questions: is this architecture retaining the essence of fascism? Can the immanent presence of fascist colonial architectural and monumental remnants make the case for 'continuities' between colonial/fascist and postcolonial/postfascist histories? Is there such a thing like a perpetual design?[10]

As an attempt to formulate answers to these questions, my contribution looks at the story, vicissitudes, aesthetics, and today's lay-out of the architecture of Piazza di Porta Capena to make the argument for political-historic convergences between colonialism, fascism, and their afterlives. It reiterates the warning and denunciation made — already in 1936 — by W. E. B. Dubois

and C. L. R. James in the immediate aftermath of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia: Italian fascism was not to be considered as a deviation from the European march of progress. On the contrary it was the logical development of Western civilisation, the consequence of slavery and imperialism, and the drive of a capitalist economy and racist ideology, alll of which constitute the very premises of European and Western modernity and civilisational ethos.[11] In his essay 'Discourse on Colonialism' (1950), Aimé Césaire also claimed that fascism could not be detached from other Western ideological traditions, such as liberalism, and their significance in the expansion of Europe's modern project. In line with this tradition, I seek to show that the entire space of Piazza di Porta Capena with its architecture, design, and aesthetics, rather than visualising a radical political divorce between Italian colonial fascism and its aftermath, offers the possibility to trace a history of shared rationalities between different forms of government of the 'others' and civilising missions that are intimately connected to each other.[12]

Therefore, I argue that architectural heritage can serve as a tool not only to understand the historic territorial and expansionist dimensions of Italy's colonial project but also the ways in which certain systems of world governance had ramified after colonialism and fascism ended.

The looting and restitution of the stele of Aksum

By 1936, after Italy had occupied Ethiopia, fascism had reached the peak of popularity and consensus in Italy. Slogans such as the 'civilising mission' and the wish for a 'place in the sun' fostered the idea that, with the conquest of Ethiopia, Italy could now reach the maximum expression of its power. In 1937, Italy announced the creation of the *Africa Italiana Orientale* [Italian East Africa] through the unification of Ethiopia with its previously occupied colonies, Eritrea and Somalia, and further expanded the Italian settler colonial project in the Horn of Africa. David Rifkind points out that the fascist desire to emulate the Roman Empire inspired Mussolini to deploy state power for the realisation of communication infrastructure and, most importantly of all, looting of antiquities.[13] Once Italy completed the military occupation of Ethiopia, a large stele from the city of Aksum was plundered by Italian colonial troops and transported to Rome. In antiquity, the Kingdom of Aksum (100 BC – 700 AD) represented the earliest form of Ethiopian civilisation.[14] The city hosted (and still does so in its role as a UNESCO heritage site) an impressive number of stelae originally carved and erected to mark the location of underground burial chambers. The theft of the stele and its re-erection in Rome in 1937 allowed the fascist regime to proclaim itself as the successor of Ancient Roman conquerors.[15] The placement of the stele at the ancient heart of the city was meant to create vistas and axes that would connect the Circus Maximus to the Colosseum and the pyramid of Cestius, as well as creating an artery that would link the city to the newly built EUR42 imperial quarter and the nearby port of Ostia, permitting access to the Mediterranean Sea.[16] The construction, facing the Aksum stele, of a new building to host the Ministry

of Italian Africa, was therefore meant to celebrate Italy's imperial geography. After two rounds of architectural competition, Mussolini assigned the commission to a team of architects led by Mario Ridolfi and Vittorio Cafiero. The works were inaugurated in 1938, but the war caused their suspension in 1943. When the fascist government collapsed the four buildings (A, B, C, and D) that had been designed to compose the Ministry's complex were far from being complete. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, part of the complex was firstly occupied by Rome's central post office. In the early 1950s, the works were re-started and the site was co-shared with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Construction of buildings C and D was completed in the 1960s, and by 1980, FAO became the only institution occupying the site.

As the building took shape, the 1947 Paris Peace Treaties set the terms for the return of the stele to Ethiopia. Article 37 stipulated the restitution of looted works of art, objects of religious, and historical value to their legitimate owners. But, despite these obligations, Italy kept the restitution on hold until 2002.[17] By then new bilateral agreements were signed between Italy and Ethiopia, focussing around business, infrastructural projects, and development aid. These agreements, and through UNESCO mediation, eventually led to the complete restitution of the stele in Aksum in 2008, thus leaving the square empty and the FAO headquarters in Rome standing alone.

However, after the removal, the apparent sense of emptiness led to a new mutation. On 11 September 2009, the Mayor of Rome, the right-winger Gianni Alemanno, inaugurated a memorial to the victims of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York eight years earlier. The memorial, placed nearby the original location of the stele, consists of a plaque placed between two columns taken from the fountain of Curia Innocenziana in the Piazza di Montecitorio in Rome. This new spatial intervention clearly reproduces the profile of New York's Twin Towers. Paradoxically, on the plaque are carved the words of the philosopher George Santayana: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'.[18]

In recent decades, scholarly work in the fields of Italian studies and postcolonial and memory studies has focused on the case of Piazza di Porta Capena and the restitution of the stele as a way to draw new lines for mapping the geography of 'amnesia' of postcolonial Italy.[19] While, as many scholars have claimed, the return of the stele has provided an important precedent in the current process of deriving new principles of international law in the field of cultural heritage and restitution, the erasure of the traces and symbols of colonial violence from public spaces has also reinforced Italy's 'postcolonial politics of disappearance'.[20] In the postwar era, the piazza has progressively seen the imperial aura fading away. The area where the stele stood vertically became a small pedestrian passage while FAO was under construction. Surrounded by busy traffic of cars and public transport, the stele was swiftly anonymised and enstranged from its recent history. Rather than an imperial marker, for years it mostly served the everyday needs of Rome's oblivious dwellers and commuters as a recognisable point of reference. After the restitution of the

stele in the 2000s, additional public works changed the whole ecology of Piazza di Porta Capena. Today's 'piazza' — while nominally keeping the title of a 'square' — does not hold any effective public function. As if it was a total 'outsider', as a forcibly exiled space from Italy's imperial, colonial, and fascist history, it functions as a huge junction for vehicles in between the Terme di Caracalla and Circus Maximus. What was originally designed as a large space between the Via d'Africa (what is now the Viale Aventino) and the nearby Roman ruins is now a constellation of noisy traffic islands, scattered in between multi-lane service roads, that seems spatially (and conceptually) detached from the FAO headquarters.

However, beyond the scholarly debate about such 'urban voids' as the embodiment of Italy's amnesia around its colonial and fascist past, people's everyday lived experiences have also offered new lenses of interpretation. In this direction, the most significant work has come from the novelist and academic Igiaba Scego with her *Roma Negata. Percorsi postcoloniali nella città* (2014). Offering an alternative sightseeing experience of Rome, narrating and displaying 'forgotten' fascist and colonial spaces, monuments, squares and buildings, Scego starts her tour from Piazza Capena, exactly where, instead of the Aksum stele, the 9/11 memorial is laid; it is a place where everything can be present and represented — from FAO to the victims of global terror — now seemingly separate from being associated with Africa and the victims of Italian colonialism.[21] This work importantly brings into an Italian context some of the key questions raised by the postcolonial critique, which are around the sense and stigma of 'disappearance'. Striking back against such absence, Scego produces a visual storytelling that juxtaposes Italy's space of oblivion with the images and portraits of the heirs of colonialism: the migrants and refugees now inhabiting the city. By illustrating a city (and a country) with a weak memory and responsibility towards the victims of colonial violence and brutality, readers are taken on a visual journey where the spaces designed by fascism become animated, marked, and re-claimed by those migrants, refugees, second-generation Italians and postcolonial diasporas that have been stigmatised as the 'invisible others'.[22]

But, while most of the critique has focussed on the departure and restitution of the stele as a way to discuss the Italian postcolonial condition of 'absence', 'oblivion', and 'amnesia', this article argues that the presence of the fascist colonial building still standing in the Piazza, under the guise of a supranational and global modernising ethos, continues to shape how we understand international relations and politics in the present. In that sense, the building cannot simply be considered as a trace and a remnant of the past. Instead, it functions as an 'optical device' through which it is possible to observe the manifold ways in which power structures and relations of power evolve, change, and (re)consolidate across time. Beyond the scholarly debate around Italian Rationalism and the architectural styles that differentiated modernist architecture under fascism,[23] my analysis reveals the 'piazza' with its architecture and spatial lay-out as a mediator and generator of power relations at the interchange of world orders. To do so, the next sections will first explore the
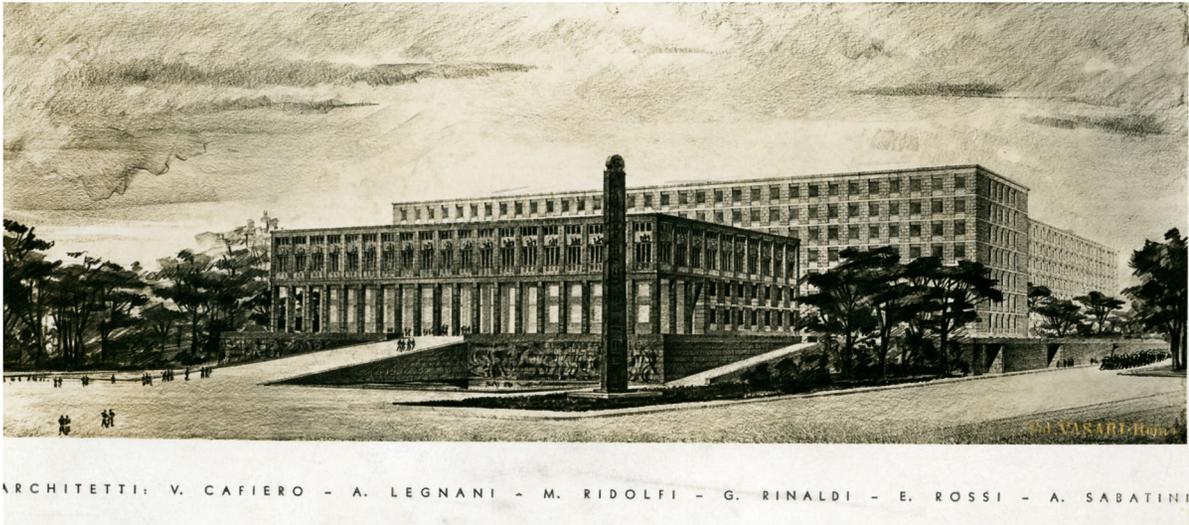
ARCHITETTI: V. CAFIERO – A. LEGNANI – M. RIDOLFI – G. RINALDI – E. ROSSI – A. SABATINI

Figure 1.
Perspective view of final project, Ministry of Italian East Africa (today FAO headquarters), Rome, 1937–1939, then 1947–1951, designed by Mario Ridolfi, with Vittorio Cafiero, Giulio Rinaldi, Ettore Rossi (first and second degree competition), Volfango Frankl, Alberto Legnani, and Armando Sabatini, courtesy of Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Archivio contemporaneo, Fondo Ridolfi-Frankl-Malagricci, Roma <www.fondoridolfi.org>.

ways in which the two modern architects Ridolfi and Cafiero interpreted architecture during and after fascism, then the institutions they gave a home to in Piazza di Porta Capena (Figs. 1 and 2).

From fascism to democracy: architects across world orders

The architecture of Mario Ridolfi and Vittorio Cafiero — as with many other architects who served under the fascist regime — survived in different ways the end of fascism and lived on into a new epoch. Under the regime, Ridolfi was a representative of Rationalism, the Italian modernist avant-garde, while Cafiero came to fame as an envoy to Eritrea, supervising the enlargement of the city plan of Asmara after Mussolini announced the creation of the empire in 1938.

Under the leadership and guidance of such prominent representatives of Rationalism as Adalberto Libera, Ridolfi believed in functional architecture and in the correspondence between structure and the purpose of a building. He combined this with scenic effects, curvilinear aesthetics, and an emphasis on the nationalist heroic ethos and monumentality.[24] In 1934, Ridolfi started his collaboration with Cafiero, submitting a project to the architectural competition for the *Palazzo del Littorio* of the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* in Rome.[25] One year later, he successfully completed the construction of a post office in Nomentana in Rome — until today perceived as an iconic symbol of Italian rationalist architecture.

In the postwar years, Ridolfi took on the new roles as a public architect and an innovator in architectural pedagogy. Together with Pier Luigi Nervi, Luigi Piccinato, Aldo della Rocca, and Bruno Zevi (upon his return to Italy from the US after escaping the fascist racial laws), he was a founding member of the *Scuola*

Figure 2.
Details of the frame between the
offices and the corridor, 1942,
Ministry of Italian East Africa (today

di Architettura Organica [School of Organic Architecture] (1945–1947). Against
the monumental aesthetic of fascism, the Scuola offered a training laboratory
to new generations of architects to learn new methods, technique, standardis-
ations, and materials for the urban renewal of post-war Italy. For many archi-

FAO headquarters), Rome, 1937–1939, then 1947–1951, designed by Mario Ridolfi, with Vittorio Cafiero, Giulio Rinaldi, Ettore Rossi (first and second degree competition), Volfango Frankl, Alberto Legnani, and Armando Sabatini, courtesy of Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Archivio contemporaneo, Fondo Ridolfi-Frankl-Malagricci, Roma <www.fondoridolfi.org>.

tects who previously served under the regime, the years of the reconstruction were an occasion to claim their disassociation (both cultural and architectural) from fascism, and lend theirs skills to find solutions to the social, industrial, and environmental destruction brought by the war. At a time when American hegemony played an important role in the reconstruction of Italy, Ridolfi was commissioned in 1946 by the American Information Service Institute (the overseas arm of the Office of War Information during the Second World War) to head a research team and write the *Manuale dell'architetto*.[26] This *Manuale* was written to teach architects how to deploy 'a systematic approach, through modular dimensional systems and prefabricated elements, to the urgent need for housing and other civic structures'.[27] Most importantly, it represented a political need to dis-enfranchise modern and modular building technique from a totalitarian logic.[28] In this spirit, Ridolfi designed new social housing projects in 1949 in Nomentana in Rome. Known as the Tiburtino houses, these projects resembled traditional rural construction to promote the relocation to urban areas of those fleeing poverty in rural areas.[29] This urban model was the neighbourhood unit experimentally developed first by the Tennessee Valley Authority during the American New Deal, which became a model for other social housing projects inaugurating the so called 'neorealist' architecture of post-war Italy.[30] This urbanism, which reflected a distortion of the previous monumentalism and rationalism, represented the new tendency among architects to break the ties with the past and align themselves and their designs to the new democratic governance.

However, unlike Ridolfi who in fact abandoned the monumental project of the FAO building, for his part, Vittorio Cafiero never gave up on monumentality during and after fascism. He started his career as a young architect working as a scenographer for the regime's cinema industry. In 1926, he set up *Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompei*, a propaganda movie that aimed at creating a fascist aesthetics grounded on the myth of a continuum between the glory days of the Roman empire and the fascist present.[31] Under this influence, his architecture developed and grew as an attempt to merge classicism with modernist styles, combining baroque decorations with futurist traits. In addition to the collaborations with Ridolfi, Cafiero retained his monumentalist style after fascism, typified by his design of the Olympic Village in Rome.

Cafiero played a key role delivering the last master plan of Asmara, capital of occupied Eritrea. In 1936 and 1937, after the chief architect of the regime, Marcello Piacentini, developed the general plan for the empire, fascist modern architecture wanted to experiment in the colonies with the method of zoning promoted by the CIAM [*Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne*] and implement urban segregations similar to those undertaken by the French architect Henri Prost in colonised Morocco.[32] In 1937, an architectural and planning competition was announced to update Odoardo Cavagnari's old plan of Asmara (1914–1918). Cafiero arrived in Eritrea in 1938 on a mission to modernise, to make Asmara 'look more fascist', to test modern functionalism and zoning, and to implement stricter racial separation of Eritreans from Italians and other Europeans.[33] To do so, the master plan

focused on racialised allocations of private and public spaces in accordance with Italy's Racial Laws (1938) and the Penal sanctions for the Defence of Racial Prestige against the Natives of Italian Africa (1939).[34] Cafiero was a *demolition* architect, charged with expanding segregation and developing public spaces accessible only to white settlers. He intended to completely remove the native quarters in the northeast of Asmara, build perimeter walls and barracks around the 'White City', and transform the hilly area of Abba Shawl into a green barrier to serve as a buffer zone to prevent rebellions.[35] This plan was eventually ditched by the then Governor Diodace, fearing it would further antagonise the colonised population.

From 1937 to 1939, Cafiero and Ridolfi worked on finalising the design of the Ministry of Italian Africa. The works started in 1938, but were suspended in 1943. The building site was re-opened in 1947 as the war ended, then was completed in the early 1950s, with a fifteen-year delay. This time, because of Ridolfi's move away from the project, the building became real under the sole supervision of Cafiero and his team. Still under the aegis of a modernist monumentality (with minimal changes from the original drawings), but with an inverted world order, the completion of the FAO building can be read as part of a novel architectural trajectory. In the immediate decade following the end of the war, a new liaison between power and architecture took shape: Oscar Niemeyer (with Le Corbusier) completed the United Nations building in New York in 1950. The design of Mario Ridolfi and Vittorio Cafiero followed in 1952, giving a 'home' to the FAO. Marcel Breuer, Bernard Zehrfuss, and Pier Luigi Nervi made the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 1958. New claims and values were invoked to legitimise an historic geopolitical transition. Architects themselves played a key role in celebrating and popularising the symbols of democracy, the end of nationalisms, and the rise of multilateralism. Indeed, Niemeyer in 1947 stated that it was the duty of an architect to make 'something representing the true spirit of our age, of comprehension and solidarity' to reflect an organisation that 'set the nations of the world in a common direction and gives to the world security'.[36] Similarly, the project of the UNESCO headquarters in Paris envisioned a larger Y-shaped structure that could host important and universal art collections as a way 'to evoke the peace that the institution has sought to establish and preserve throughout the world'.[37] These projects bear evidence of the new challenges that modernists had to face in a post-fascist world. As Lucia Allais explains, these consisted of keeping modernism as an international style, protecting the monumental aesthetics, and making sure that the UN headquarters would keep tight the analogy between design and diplomacy.[38]

Against this model, the case of the FAO headquarters represents an anomaly. With the realisation in a post-fascist world of a design that was originally imagined for the celebration of fascist supremacy, the dilemma stays un-answered: what values this building stands for and what image of society it aims to be representing? Assuming that we should think of any architectural project in its broader physical framework and not exclusively

by its design and its material form,[39] I will elaborate an answer to the previous question by discussing the building as a secular cathedral under which different powers constantly flow and shift. To do so, we now explore the interrelations of these powers in the wider space of Piazza di Porta Capena (Figs. 3, 4, and 5).

Genealogies of power in the square of the empire

The specific case of the square and its chameleonic architecture offers an interesting spatial configuration of Italy's political and cultural 'repression' of this heritage. By raising the question of 'repression', I do not intend to reiterate the debate on Italy's psycho-social amnesia around its colonial and fascist past. Instead, I refer to the theorisation offered by Giorgio Agamben in opposition to the notion of 'profanation'. Agamben borrows the term 'profanation' from the lexicon of theology and transforms it into a political operation that 'deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized'. As the counterpart of profanation, Agamben introduces 'secularisation' as a form of repression which traces some linearity between relations of power in transition:

It leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another. Thus, the political secularisation of theological concepts (the transcen-

Figure 4.
The 9/11 memorial in Piazza di Porta Capena, photographed by the author, 2021.

Figure 5.
The FAO building, photographed by the author, 2021.

dence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact.[40]

In that sense, the coloniality of architecture is traceable by the ways the building itself and its surroundings embody an 'earthly' transition of power structures.

After the war, the aura of the vertical power of the Ministry gave way to the new power of the UN, in particular FAO, embodying the transition from fascist and colonial verticality to the multi-scalar developmental technologies of world governance. Since the San Francisco conference in 1945, the UN has symbolised the foundation of a new order grounded on the end of nationalism, promotion of economic growth and capitalism, the spread of liberal-democracy, and creation of new institutions and norms. FAO was established between 1943 and 1946 to tackle hunger, food crises, and poverty on a global scale, and it became central at the dawn of the Cold War in the fight against communism. With the end of empires, the FAO embarked on missions around the globe training 'Third World counterparts in American expertise', contributing to creating solid foundations for the contemporary development industry, at the core of which are an elite of supposedly 'apolitical technical experts'.[41] In the 1960s, FAO and the UN General Assembly established the World Food Programme, combining the fight against world hunger with the reality that food is part of foreign policy and diplomacy. Since then, it has progressively grown as the symbol of a sort of liberal internationalism that merges humanitarian principles with development. From the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (1948) to the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (2015), the right to food and the elimination of hunger stands at the foreground of FAO's agenda. Since the 1980s, the concept of 'food security' has become hegemonic in global liberal discourse. Additionally, in 1994, FAO adopted the concept of 'human security' as a way to complete its set of technologies of security and containment. According to Mark Duffield, human security depends on the optimisation, calculation, and pre-emption of those potential dangers brought about by the uncontrolled circulatory effects of crisis and emergencies, whether humanitarian disasters, famines, poverty, or mass migration.[42] Hence, the invention of 'human security' was moving the value of 'security' from its traditional reference point represented by nation states to one of populations. This shift sought to address issues such as the prevention of potential risks that could transform human societies into ones in distress. Duffield continues to argue that human security brought to completion the theorisation of development as a biopolitical practice of government.[43] The invention of statistical expertise, professions, and sciences, together with studies on human reproduction, health care, epidemics, and nutritional status of a population, became the core around which political rule and government were coalescing to promote the goal of protecting human life as the *conditio sine qua non* for the safety of the sovereign.[44] In this way, human security expands our understanding of Foucault's biopolitics through a series of practices that work against the proliferation of international security threats for a system of governance that has FAO as one of its significant icons.

By epitomising a move from a fascist colonialism to liberal world governance, I argue that we can look at the establishment of the FAO headquarters as an important step in the transition from historic colonialism to a coloniality of power. Angelo Del Boca and Giorgio Rochat, among many other scholars of Italian colonialism, have documented how Italy is accountable for many atroci-

ties: including mass deportation from Eritrea, Libya, and Ethiopia; internment in concentration camps in Cyrenaica in Libya as well as in Somalia; the use of chemical weapons and poison gas to exterminate Ethiopian resistance fighters between 1935 and 1936, and the indiscriminate killing of civilians as a form of retaliation used by the army and armed settlers.[45] These 'warfare practices' inscribe Italian colonialism within the sphere of a modern necropower. Achilles Mbembe, in his critique of Foucault's notion of biopolitics, argues that, unlike in Europe where the government of people operates through sets of technologies which protect and foster 'life' for the creation of spaces of security, the example of the colonised world is emblematic of the creation of 'lawless' spaces as a way to justify the fabrication of death.[46] At this intersection, the building keeps a functional role, mustering evidence of the historical and political transitions and — with Agamben — the 'secularisation' between two forms of rule: from the necropolitical 'right over life and death' to postcolonial expressions of biopower that meet and converge in the modernist shape of today's FAO headquarters.

Furthermore, the substitution in the late 2000s of the Aksum stele with a 9/11 memorial has reinforced the coloniality of power, making room for other memorialisations and new civilisational messages. This latest intervention has triggered the attempted making of new global historical memories that are not necessarily bound to the sense of belonging to the nation or an ethnos, but, on the contrary, they inform the identity of those communities who did not directly experience specific traumatic historical events.[47] The experience of catastrophe following the Holocaust and the Second World War came to create a global political and moral space where collective trauma is held hostage by an exclusive Western interpretation, providing inspiration and justification for military and non-military interventions to prevent outbreaks of major threats to the global hegemonic order. Within this context, 9/11 acted as a historical turning point for the West out of which a transnational sense of 'vulnerability' started spreading. This has generated, and continues to generate, justifications of military aggression and war on a global scales a way to protect Western interests and concerns.

Through the FAO headquarters and the new memorial, the 'coloniality of architecture' materialises through an enduring civilisational aesthetics that marks a convergence between colonial and the postcolonial forms of government of non-European others. Under a new guise, I have shown how the modernity-coloniality complex survives the end of fascist colonialism by perpetuating slogans such as the 'civilising mission'. In Italy, the civilising mission originally relied on the fascist equation made between civilisation, architecture, and archaeology, the supposed line of separation between 'moderns and barbarians'. As Mia Fuller explains, the civilisation and architecture equation of the Italian nationalist discourse in the 1930s aimed to trace a continuous line through Italian history, tying Roman ruins to the great expectations of a future fascist empire. The ancient Roman architecture and vestiges were mobilised by fascist propaganda to symbolise a modern outpost in the African colonies.[48] So, while the looting of the ancient funerary stele gave to

the fascist regime the illusion of following in the footsteps of Ancient Roman civilisation, the replacement of the stele epitomises a new Western civilisational spirit, one that has garnered international consent to launch transnational acts of violent retribution most notably in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Levant and the Horn of Africa to justify the War onTerror as a global crusade 'against barbarity'.

In so doing, I argue that the square bear witness to the coloniality of architecture in the ways it weds fascist-colonial spatial transformations to postcolonial architecture and monumantality, connecting historic colonialism to postcolonial government of Western extraterritorial crises and emergencies. This introduces ideological substance to new relations of power, representing the nexus between the War on Terror and the right to food as evidence of post 9/11 global security concerns, the call for international intervention along the axis of security and development, and the connection between military and developmental and humanitarian concerns. This has given the international public a pragmatic interpretation of poverty as dangerous, as the perilous path leading to invisible threats, risks, and fear; victims can turn into enemies and today's victims can morph into tomorrow's perpetrators, becoming the object of concern and the potential target of both civilian and military technologies. The square, despite the transition from fascism to global liberalism, preserves traces of 'convergences' among Western civilisational narratives.

Conclusion

The case of the Piazza di Porta Capena has produced many narrative threads, which showed importantly the possibility to read more than a single history of heritage. On the one hand, it gives us the tools to critically engage with the issue of Italy's flattering self-representation as a nation guilty of a less evil form of colonialism. On the other hand, the FAO headquarters bears testimony to the links between past and present, embodied by an architecture and designs that 'perpetuate' across different epochs, complementing civilisational narratives and practices.

As I have shown, spatial analysis and interpretations are combined with biographical evidence to reinterpret the histories of Italian fascist colonial architecture. Too often this architecture and heritage have been deemed superfluous and redundant to understanding the political complexities of the (post)colonial present. The case of the FAO building and its surrounding demonstrates the exact opposite. Despite Ridolfi and Cafiero's limited collaborations, the FAO headquarters in Rome inscribe them in the exclusive elite of modern architects that, within the same historical period, designed and built the new centres of global power of the United Nations and UNESCO, respectively in New York and Paris. By flagging the secularisation process overtaking their architecture, this article points to the need to develop the terms, concepts, as well as the content of the conversations around Italian colonial and fascist architecture — beyond debates on formalism and architectural styles. It argues for an epistemic shift that enables

this architecture to be understood as the basis of developing entangled analysis around modernity, colonialism, fascism, and their aftermaths. By using architecture as both the object and the method of inquiry, I develop the concept of the 'coloniality of architecture' as a way to discuss through architecture and heritage the long-lasting legacies of colonialism, especially 'after' its formal end. In this way, the space of Piazza di Porta Capena offers multiple ways to read the inextricable combination of the civilisational rhetoric of modernity (civilisation and development) and the logic of fascism and colonialism.

Disclosure statement

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