

Re-Interpreting and Re-Assessing Difficult Heritage

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A Study of Dissonances

Edited by

Francesca Leonardi, Ginevra Ludovici
and Linda Bertelli

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To all the oppressed people fighting for their land, their futures,
and their existence.

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INTRODUCTION

FRANCESCA LEONARDI,
GINEVRA LUDOVICI,
LINDA BERTELLI

The concept of heritage and difficult heritage is currently expanding toward the inclusion of new social challenges (i.e. climate change, AI, colonial wars, the rise of new forms of nationalism) which are questioning contemporary notions of the commons, public values, civic rights, and creativity. Indeed, within the horizon of the Anthropocene, new political values, paradigm shifts, and disruptive technology are impacting the identification of what is valued as cultural heritage, going well beyond a focus on materiality and territorial boundaries. For example, the incursions of climate activists in globally known museums directly address this issue: can we continue ignoring our responsibilities in climate change, or shall we start addressing climate as a common heritage to be preserved? In this expanding field, difficult heritage arises when dissonant values conflict with each other, generating an uneasiness to deal with a certain past, which always entails a present-future orientation.

However, in general, but specifically in Italy, it seems that difficult heritage is not perceived as unsettling anymore (Macdonald, 2015). Colonial and fascist legacies are hidden in plain sight in every city of the national territory, as well as in museums' collections. For this reason, confronting the difficult heritage of Italy's colonial and fascist legacies, both in terms of material heritage and academic discourse, has become an increasingly urgent issue (Albanese, Ceci, 2022; Lucaroni, 2022; Guermandi, 2021; Grechi, 2021; Cippitelli, Frangi, 2021; Christillin, Greco, 2021; Montanari, 2024; Jones, Pilat, 2020; Leonardi, 2025, Ludovici, 2023). Following global social movements such as Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall, and the many decolonising movements, also in Italy, the debate around the preservation of fascist heritage, the colonial collections of museums, colonial legacies in cities and Euro-centric knowledge production is finally taking ground. So, acknowledging the changing and expanding concept of

difficult heritage, this publication investigates its very grounding in cultural heritage, museum collections, curatorial and artistic practices, and cities, including case studies covering many geographical areas and institutional actors.

The volume critically addresses two main concepts and intertwined research areas: difficult heritage and decolonisation of cultural heritage.

Traditionally, the notion of difficult heritage (Macdonald 2009) is used to describe a past that sits uncomfortably alongside society's present values, including the material and immaterial heritage of totalitarian regimes, wars, genocides, and tragic events. As said, difficult heritage generates dissonances in the people inhabiting, using, or passing by it. Indeed, the term dissonance was taken from psychology to address a cultural heritage that, for different motives (political, social, economic), contains opposite and conflicting values. Dissonant heritage (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) also includes marketing and communicating heritage through touristisation of locations and sites, broadening the concept of difficult heritage from a strictly material aspect to the inclusion of immaterial, imaginative, and economic dimensions. At its core, "difficult heritage" denotes sites, objects or narratives that embody painful, contested or undesirable histories that communities may prefer to ignore or reinterpret. Retaining such histories does not necessarily imply critique: it can support critical re-narration and responsibility, but it can also organise memory around commemorative practices that risk to reaffirm oppressive ideological frameworks. The challenge, then, is to navigate the tension between preservation and critique: deciding which relics to safeguard, determining how – and for whom – to interpret them, and ensuring that encounters with the past provoke reflection rather than passive spectacle.

Decolonisation, as framed by Walter Dignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018), offers a vital lens for this work. Far from merely securing political independence, decolonisation is an epistemic and ontological project of "delinking" from Western hegemonic frameworks. It requires epistemic disobedience – the active refusal to accept Euro-centric categories, narratives and hierarchies as universal truths – alongside a commitment to pluriversality, or the coexistence of multiple knowledge systems, and border thinking, which centres perspectives from the subaltern rather than the imperial core. In heritage practice, these imperatives translate into approaches that foreground community agency, intangible practices and alternative memorial forms – often in direct dialogue or tension with institutional authority. In practical terms, this means reconfiguring not only

what is displayed or preserved, but also the relational settings through which meanings are negotiated – settings that are pedagogical insofar as they reshape how knowledge and authority are produced and shared. Here, two principles matter in particular. First, horizontality, drawing on Paulo Freire’s dialogic model, insists on egalitarian relationships between scholars, practitioners and community members: everyone learns and teaches, co-creating narratives and interpretive frameworks (Freire, 1970). Second, addressing the coloniality of knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2014) demands that we interrogate the taxonomies and methodologies inherited from Western modernity – categories such as “art” versus “artefact,” or the privileging of written archives – and instead embrace methodological pluralism. This means integrating oral history, performance, digital storytelling and other embodied forms of evidence, recognising academic discourse as only one among many languages of memory.

Together, these intertwined frameworks – difficult heritage, decolonial praxis and decolonial pedagogy – recast heritage sites and collections as dynamic spaces of negotiation, learning and transformation. They compel us to attend not only to what we preserve, but how we engage with it, and whom we empower to speak in the ongoing conversation about the past – a past that is still very much present.

As Italian scholars engaged with these debates, we saw the need for a focused forum where interdisciplinary perspectives and methods could be discussed together; in July 2023, we organised a summer school on these themes at IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca, integrating decolonial approaches in the structure of the educational program, and inviting different actors from the activist and artistic spheres as well as from academia. In the effort to offer a different learning methodology based on co-learning and horizontality, attempting to embody decolonising instances, the seasonal school was organised with keynote speeches and discussion circles, where scholars could present and discuss their research in small groups thematically focused. In addition, a roundtable was organised with activists, professionals, and artists working on decolonisation instances and difficult heritage, as described by Mariana Califano in Section 2. Finally, the school also organised a decolonising trekking in Lucca, together with *Resistenze in Cirenaiica* (see Section 2), to learn about the colonial legacies of the city and address the debated issues also from an affective perspective. The initiative resonated with the school’s broader thematic focus, which encompassed critical, post-colonial, and decolonial approaches to cultural heritage – museums, archives, and archaeological sites – both in Italy and internationally. It also addressed the reuse and reinterpretation of public

space, including toponymic and monumental interventions, as well as the role of artistic and curatorial practices in community-making and education around contested or difficult heritage.

Indeed, the school aimed to bring together actors working through different languages (artistic, activist, academic, professional) in order to reflect on the different knowledge(s) produced and possible interrelations. Rather than opposing “academic” rationality to “artistic” affect, the school approached these languages as heterogeneous practices that distribute visibility, authority, and participation in different ways. Artistic and activist interventions often matter here because they can displace the default conditions under which colonial legacies are recognised: they can change the scale of address, reconfigure the position of the spectator, and activate forms of witnessing and public engagement that are difficult to obtain through academic genres alone. Within this framework, “affect” names not a generic emotional register but a collective capacity to organise attachments and antagonisms (Mouffe, 2018), enabling critique to operate not only at the level of concepts but also at the level of perception, habit, and public attention.

This kind of knowledge and approach is fundamental in dealing with problematic instances, and in conjunction, these different approaches and knowledge can effectively operate a decolonisation process.

This book emerges from the shared experience of the summer school, reflecting a dual and mutual commitment: on the one hand, to integrate the voices and methodologies of cultural practitioners into academic settings; on the other, to encourage professionals from the arts and activist fields to engage critically with institutional and disciplinary discourses around heritage, memory, and decolonisation.

The volume is structured into three thematic sections, each addressing a distinct cluster of issues: the politics of memory and monumental discourse, decolonising strategies and practices, and the reinterpretation of museum collections with colonial legacies.

The first part focuses on the political use of heritage and the complex role monuments play in shaping collective memory across national contexts. Paolo Villa investigates how fascist monumental architecture in post-WWII Italy was reframed in non-fiction cinema, showing how newsreels and documentaries recontextualised fascist sites – such as EUR and Foro Italico in Rome – by associating them with new democratic narratives while preserving symbolic continuities with their authoritarian past. Giulia

Avanza explores the Museum of Secret Surveillance ‘House of Leaves’ in Tirana, Albania, examining how its museological strategies reflect and shape the country’s conflicted memory politics in the aftermath of dictatorship. Rami Issa examines the case of the archaeological site of Dura-Europos in Syria and its systematic absence from national narratives under the Assad regime. Andrea Masala analyses border monuments across different geographies – the US-Mexico border and the island of Lampedusa – arguing that these sites materialise political ideologies while raising ethical questions about the production of public memory and the nature of monumentality in post-national contexts.

The second section centres on strategies of decolonisation, with particular attention to artistic, curatorial, and activist practices. Alessandro Petti offers a theoretical reflection grounded in his long-standing engagement with decolonial pedagogy and spatial practices, advancing frameworks for unlearning colonial epistemologies through architecture and education. Mariana E. Califano presents a detailed account of a roundtable held during the summer school, which brought together activist groups, scholars, and artists committed to confronting Italy’s colonial legacy. Her chapter explores the methodologies of initiatives such as *Resistenze in Cirenaica*, *Griot*, *AMIR*, *Aterraterra*, and *The Recovery Plan*, examining how their practices – ranging from toponym guerrilla actions to art-based community engagement – intervene in public space, challenge dominant narratives, and generate situated knowledge. Giorgia Ravaioli examines the work of Congolese artist Sammy Baloji, analysing how his photo-collages, installations, and archival interventions reactivate colonial visual archives. She reads Baloji’s practice as a form of “epistemic disobedience,” producing layered counter-narratives that disrupt conventional historiographies and complicate linear temporality.

The third part investigates the challenges posed by colonial-era collections in European museums and the strategies these institutions adopt to confront their legacies. Silvia Iannelli reconstructs the history of the Ethiopian collections housed in the former Colonial Museum in Rome, now part of the Museo delle Civiltà, focusing on how these objects were violently appropriated and subsequently decontextualised through fascist museology. Marco Foravalle examines a little-known episode of object exchange between the Royal Armoury in Turin and the Pigorini Museum in Rome, using this case to critically assess the invisibilized colonial provenance of ethnographic artefacts and the ethics of their musealization. Alessandro Masetti analyses the Museo Egizio in Turin’s bicentenary initiatives and its recent embrace of contemporary art as a means of institutional remediation.

Focusing on the 2024 artist-in-residence programme featuring Ali Cherri and Sara Sallam, he shows how these artistic interventions challenge the museum's historical narratives, expose its colonial entanglements, and reframe its public engagement strategies. Finally, Mari Viita-aho and Johanna Turunen present a study of the Gallen-Kallela Museum in Espoo, Finland, examining how the institution has gradually acknowledged the colonial dimensions of its "Africa collection" and highlighting the importance of sustained, processual institutional reflexivity in the broader context of decolonizing the museum sector.

Altogether, the volume offers a transdisciplinary inquiry into how difficult and colonial heritage is produced, interpreted, and challenged across different contexts, from monuments and urban memory to museum collections and artistic practice. It aims to provide scholars, practitioners, and institutions with tools and reflections to engage critically with inherited narratives and to foster accountability in the ways cultural heritage is interpreted, displayed, and transmitted.

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SECTION 1:
**DEBATING POLITICS OF MEMORY
AND MONUMENTAL DISCOURSES**

FASCIST ARCHITECTURE IN ITALIAN POST-WW2 NONFICTION CINEMA: WHITE CITIES, BLACK MEMORIES

PAOLO VILLA

Introduction

An episode of the 1972 Rai television programme *Io e...* features Federico Fellini¹. The rather simple format of *Io e...* calls for an artist or cultural personality to give a short interview about a work of art that fascinates or inspires them. In his episode, directed by an equally relevant postwar filmmaker, Luciano Emmer, Fellini chooses to talk about Eur: an entire district of Rome, designed in the last years of the fascist regime, where he has shot several scenes of his movies. Portrayed on the terraces of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, Fellini praises Eur, calling it ‘an accomplished work of art’, permeated by ‘a sense of the metaphysical’ that evokes Giorgio De Chirico's painting, so much so that the neighborhood ‘seems to give the impression of living in a painting’, or to stand in a huge studio theatre. Through an aestheticizing gaze – Emmer's direction plastically highlights the Palazzo, Saint Peter and Paul's Basilica, wide squares, and monumental avenues – Fellini recalls only fleetingly Eur's origins as a fascist model district. He mentions Mussolini only once, remembering how the site was left unfinished because of World War II, thus acquiring ‘the charm of an interrupted dream’. He claims that the reason for his attraction to the place is probably the ‘feeling of availability of the district, which is without history’. These statements can surely be framed within Fellini's authorial poetics, rooted in the oneiric and the fantastic, in the constant contamination between cinema, art, and life, yet his comments that almost totally deny Eur's historicity are also symptoms of a broader collective attitude towards places and monuments of fascist origin in republican Italy: a sort of collective and selective amnesia that began in the early postwar years, functioning to re-signify the regime architecture in the new political and social system. By ignoring its historical and ideological aspects and insisting on a purely aesthetic evaluation, architecture is apparently tamed

and brought into a new social and cultural acceptability. However, the historic and political dimensions ingrained in regime buildings prove difficult to defuse as they emerge from the images. As Fellini states in a meaningful passage, ‘the buildings seem created for ghosts’, and the main ghost hovering in the frames is certainly that of fascism.

The research on the current roles and meanings of fascist architecture, a ‘difficult heritage’ that carries symbols and messages from a century ago into the present, has widely developed in the last years (Belmonte 2024; Albanese, Ceci 2022; Bae Jones, Pilat 2020). However, the relationship between cinema and fascist architecture in the postwar period requires further investigation. The traces and continuities of fascism within landscapes and spatial conformations in fiction films, from neorealism to genre production in the 1950s, have been examined (Minghelli, 2014; Steimatsky, 2008), whereas nonfiction cinema has not received the same attention. The appearance in postwar newsreels and documentaries of fascism-related monuments and sites proves highly significant for understanding the strategies and modes of re-semanticising fascist legacies through the media. This essay is based on the examination of film sources, through their in-depth visual analysis and cultural contextualisation in the early post-war years, to show how the image of the regime’s projects and architectures was modified and redirected by nonfiction cinema. The examined films date the first decade after World War II, a crucial historical transition that associated the need for confrontation with the recent past with a desire to obliterate the fascist period and its responsibilities.

Current studies that discuss the legacy of fascist architecture in republican Italy have seldomly taken into consideration the role of cinema and audiovisual media in general in this process of re-semanticization. Documentaries and newsreels are considered for two main reasons: on the one hand, their intent to re-signify architecture is often more explicit than in fictional cinema, as places are presented explicitly, not transfigured by fictional narratives or used as mere decor to signify other spaces. Secondly, the diffusion of short documentary films and above all newsreels, whose screening was mandatory in movie theatres, guarantees they were seen by a considerable audience, and therefore can be considered active elements in re-signifying Fascist architecture within postwar Italian public opinion. Specifically, I will focus on some short films concerning the Eur neighborhood in Rome and Fertilia in Sardinia, a small village near Alghero: a new metropolitan district on one side, a rural foundation village on the other side, so to examine how the re-signifying process operated in different contexts, yet with the same goals and similar discursive and

representative strategies. The architectural remnants of the regime are recontextualised in various ways, including connecting them to the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus. Finally, I will reflect on how not only the content but also the cinematic form of the newsreel itself had to be renegotiated in postwar Italy, as it was a ‘difficult legacy’ received from the Ventennio.

Fascist architecture and postwar nonfiction cinema

Architecture was one of the most exploited propaganda tools of the fascist regime. The extensive programme of urban transformations, new public buildings, foundation towns, and villages developed in the 1930s was based on the regime's (and Mussolini's) full awareness of the fascinating power of architecture, which irradiates towards both contemporaries and posterity, eternalising fascist values in stone, and giving material and spatial form to its ideology (Lucaroni, 2022; see also Gentile, 2007; Painter, 2005). Architecture was considered not only a means of governing and gaining consensus but also an instrument for the ideological education of the masses, of present and future generations (Nicoloso, 2008). As the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre argued in his seminal writings (Lefebvre, 1991), urban space is always culturally shaped: every historical and political system reflects itself in the conformations and connotations it assigns to the city, which is seen as a collective creation. The fascist Ventennio perfectly represents how a totalitarian ideology was translated into architectural and urban achievements and how these continued to transmit their symbolic implications well beyond the end of the dictatorship, up to the present day.

Similarly to what has happened in other nations that have undertaken profound processes of cultural recoding of their ‘difficult heritages’ (Macdonald, 2008), a new awareness of the problematic issue of fascist architectural legacies has gone beyond specialised studies to become the subject of – at times vehement – debate in the Italian public sphere², yet the issue is not new and dates back to the immediate postwar period. Immediately after the fall of fascism on 25 July 1943 and the liberation of the country on 25 April 1945, many spontaneous episodes of iconoclastic fury swept over statues, effigies, and signs of the regime on display on monuments and façades; a later systematic programme of reconversion of fascist places in the new republican Italy never actually happened.

The devastated post-war nation, unable to manage without the many buildings constructed by the regime – often for public utility, such as stations, schools, hospitals, universities, and power plants – conducted only

a partial operation to remove or cover up the most striking fascist symbols. As contemporary historian Giulia Albanese explained in a lecture at the 2023 Lynx Summer School at IMT in Lucca, postwar Italy operated a long process of de-Mussolinisation that took decades and might not even be considered finished today, erasing almost all signs directly hinting at the dictator, but it has not yet gone through a thorough de-fascistisation process of its public places, monuments and memories. The belief that eliminating any references to the leader was sufficient to cleanse urban projects and spaces was instrumental in allowing their immediate reuse in view of quick and effective reconstruction. However, this ignores the fact that fascism cannot be limited to the historical figure of Mussolini. This de-Mussolinisation passed off as de-fascistisation problematically left intact many architectural elements of the regime and did not address the crucial question of the ideological values inscribed in these architectures. Seen retrospectively, it was part of a more general postwar cultural and political strategy that identified fascism with Mussolini and aimed to present Italians as victims of a tyrant and his fellow men rather than to acknowledge the vast support that the fascist political ideology enjoyed in the 1930s. This strategy of ‘victimisation’ was instrumental to reduce and reconfigure Italy’s war responsibilities and to gain the trust of the winning powers, primarily the United States.

The representations of fascist architecture in nonfiction cinema constitute a revealing prism for understanding the nation's thorny relationship with its fascist legacy in the postwar decade. Between silences, omissions, and sugar-coated narratives, these films stress the buildings’ aesthetic beauty, emphasising their sheer modernity while presenting them as counterparts of ancient Roman ruins. In several cases, newsreels and documentaries highlight the buildings’ new function as homes for the Istrian-Dalmatian refugees (Pupo, 2005; Orlić, 2023). In doing so, they aim to erase any association with the recent past and tie them to an event where Italians were victims – and not perpetrators – of war crimes and injustices, daringly re-semanticising architecture through cinema.

‘From the belly of the whale’: Eur in postwar newsreels and documentaries

Few architectural endeavours of the fascist regime have enjoyed as much media attention as E42, the model district built between Rome and the sea to host the 1942 World's Fair. The war prevented both the event and the completion of the district, which lay unfinished until the early 1950s, being

simultaneously a construction site and abandoned ruins (Di Majo, Insolera, 1986; Scaglione, 2000; Quilici, 2015). In Mussolini's view, E42 was envisioned as the fulfilment of the urban revision that the regime was imposing on the capital and as the summa of the fascist urban vision.

Coordinated by Marcello Piacentini and initiated in 1937, the E42 project marked a crucial step in the architectural policy of the Ventennio. After the foundation of the Empire in 1936, the intention was to build magniloquent architecture inspired by Roman antiquity, revisited in a totalitarian key, which placed the celebration of fascism rather than public utility as the focus of design (Nicoloso, 2008). E42, envisioned as a satellite city but also as a world stage for the achievements of the Italian regime, became the main project where this political system took architectural form. The propaganda service of the autonomous E42 authority, which is responsible for district development, entrusted Luce with the task of documenting the construction process with films and photographs.

The newsreel reports show the laying of the first stones of the buildings in the presence of the Duce, the king or the Savoia princes, the opening of Via del Mare that will cut through E42, the workers' village, the gradual emergence of the buildings from the scaffolding, and the inauguration of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (popularly called the 'Square Coliseum'). Two short documentaries, *Come nasce l'E42* (How E42 is born, 1939) and *Milizie della civiltà (Una giornata con gli operai dell'E42; Soldiers of civilisation; A day with the E42 construction workers, 1941)*, were made from the footage, further contributing to propagandising the architectural enterprise as a prominent element of the renewal of the capital and, by extension, of the entire nation. As architecture historian Gaia Pettena writes, 'Luce's extensive documentation of the E42 is particularly significant for the analysis of the architecture-propaganda relationship, because in this case the quality of the architecture, both in terms of the grandeur of the work and the maturity of the new formal language of the Fascist state, allows to emphasize other themes dear to the regime, such as the mystique of labour and the concreteness of the achievements' (Pettena, 2004: 85).

During the war, work on E42 slowed down drastically until it came to a complete halt after the fall of the regime. When, in the early 1950s, the city of Rome and the Italian government decided to complete the district, its cultural re-semantisation took place through the media, involving nonfiction cinema. A 1952 newsreel by *La Settimana Incom* (Weekly Incom, Italy's most important newsreel) states that the district will have a 'new destination' and connects the redevelopment of the site to the future

Olympics in 1960³. It never mentions the origins of the neighborhood, which simply ‘awakens from inertia and neglect’, and promises that Eur will embody ‘a model of urban planning and modern culture’, becoming a district ‘that will anticipate the year 2000’. By projecting it onto the future, the newsreel glosses over the place's recent past. It makes some references to the ancient Roman monuments that inspired the buildings, but the newsreel completely omits that it is a Romanity filtered through fascist aesthetics.

Several events mark the redevelopment of Eur (as the district was called after the war) between 1952 and 1953 and were captured in film reports, starting with the inauguration of the subway that connects it to the city centre. While Mayor Salvatore Rebecchini leads the first train from Porta San Paolo to Eur, Demo-Christian Minister Pietro Campilli inaugurates the *Mostra dell'Agricoltura* (Agricultural Exhibition) at the new Fiera di Roma (Rome Fair), hosted in one of the Eur palaces: the district, says the report's voiceover, ‘was almost becoming a jumble of early ruins. Today, as in its second birth, it has emerged from the belly of the whale and from the darkness of difficult years’⁴. This only reference to Eur's past is intentionally left vague, accompanied by the image of a grotesque whale-shaped puppet floating in a fountain, as if to downsize and ridicule those ‘difficult years’. On the visual side, Incom newsreels usually insist on the presence of people, gardens, and fountains and on the events that animate the buildings in an attempt to enliven and soften the overpowering grandeur of the architecture, conceived as the mirror of a strictly vertical hierarchy between people and power.

Mondo Libero (Free World) newsreel also devotes a report to the inauguration of the underground to Eur on 21 April 1952⁵ (the traditional day of the foundation of Rome). Again, no direct mention of E42's role as fascism's model district is present, but only of its original destination as the site of the ‘peaceful exposition’ of 1942, ‘adorned with harmonious columns and precious marbles’. The newsreel mentions the inauguration of the *Mostra della romanità* (Romanity Exhibition), ‘celebrating Rome's mission, an ideal link that unites a glorious past with a hope-filled tomorrow’. This is a comment that would not have been out of place in a Luce newsreel from a few years earlier and that testifies to how the myth of Romanity as a pillar of national identity knew no crisis in the transition from regime to republic. The discursive strategy glosses over the recent past in order to ‘liberate’ Roman antiquity from the propagandistic use and ideological connotations of the regime and so making it available again as an element of identity cohesion. The problematic historicity of the district

is concealed from the viewer by positioning it between two equally distant poles – remote antiquity and an indefinite future.

This redefinition of timeframes to redefine Eur's image and free it – at least in the cinematographic rhetoric – from its fascist imprint is fully evident in a 1952 documentary made by the Istituto Luce, *La città bianca* (The white city)⁶. Shot in Ferraniacolor, the short film proposes an aestheticizing vision of the district, focusing on the structural and decorative qualities of architecture without ever naming its origin, thus validating the possibility of a separation between its formal and ideological dimensions, which are instead inevitably intertwined. A lexicon that revolves around the concepts of beauty, art, and whiteness – assigning to white an implicit connection to purity and antiquity, in opposition to the favoured black of the fascist regime – permeates the film's spoken commentary, for which 'war, men and time had no respect for so much beauty', causing 'the inevitable ruin, the unstoppable decay of a heritage of incalculable value': it is everyone's task to save and complete, since 'so much beauty cannot be dispersed, or die'.

The film insists on the identification of Eur as a sort of archaeological site, deeply linked to an 'ancient' dimension, exploiting the usual discursive and visual strategy of obliterating the recent past behind the reference to a more remote or even mythical one: colonnades, sequences of arcades, pediments, and façades aim to recall the classical, while statues and fragments of sculptures present legendary figures like the Dioscuri (the mythical twins Castor and Pollux) that adorn the Palace of Civilisation. This connection to the ancient is counterbalanced by the district's projection towards a positive future, in which Eur will regain the exemplary value that fascism already attributed to it: 'It will be the modern district in modern Rome, a building entity of high urban value, a testimony to the capacity of our people, the best proof of their will for resurrection in a climate of freedom and work'. A careful analysis, therefore, reveals how the connotations assigned to the place in the postwar period (innovation, link to the future, architectural magniloquence, inspiration from Romanity through a dialogue with antiquity) do not deviate significantly from those proposed in the prewar period: in fact, they are the same features, re-proposed by expunging any reference to the interwar propaganda.

An operation of further re-semantisation of Eur takes place in the newsreels that associate it with the Julian-Dalmatian exodus. Some reports from *La Settimana Incom* present the houses assigned to Istrian refugees in Eur by the government and significantly intermingle a fascist legacy with one of the most tragic and direct consequences of the conflict. The architecture

appears as a simple background, yet its image is imposing for the viewer. In one of these Incom reports, the Undersecretary Giulio Andreotti, Francesca Romani De Gasperi, wife of the Prime Minister, and U.S. Ambassador James Clement Dunn personally hand over the keys of some houses to the Julian refugees⁷, for whom a fundraiser at the Quirinetta Cinema is also organised during the same time, as another report informs the audience⁸. While presenting political power – both Italian and international – as eager to take care of the exiles' fate, the newsreels politically connote the space of Eur as democratic, inscribing it within the perimeter of republican Italy.

Several of these reports leverage the viewers' patriotism through the testimony of child refugees. In a report devoted to a colony of little Julian girls in Eur, the interpellation to the audience is direct⁹. After some of the girls express their wishes (a doll, a toy, to see their mother again), the last one, turning to the camera with a sombre attitude, manifests her desire to return to Istria. A slow-tracking shot of the girls' choir singing an Istrian traditional song in front of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana follows, until the service ends on the image of two intertwined Istrian and Italian flags. The girl's call to the camera, the melancholic singing, and the emphasis on the flags create an emotional crescendo in the newsreel, which opens and closes with the towering presence of the Palazzo visually dominating the young refugees. Paradoxically, an icon of the regime that had dragged the nation into the war acts as the backdrop for presenting one of its most tragic consequences.

It is a visual testimony or even a symptom, one might say, of the broader cultural process of victimisation that Italy undertook in the postwar time, presenting itself to both domestic and international public opinion not as one of the belligerent and defeated nations but, rather, insisting on its status as a victim of the conflict. In this strategy, responsibility for the war is attributed exclusively to the regime, seen as an alien entity that Italians had endured rather than supported in the Ventennio. From this perspective, the detachment of a symbolic building of fascism from its original ideology and its bold repositioning on the side of war victims has to be read as an attempt to influence the social perception of the recent past.

An Istrian Odyssey: *Fertilia dei Giuliani*

The connection between the architectural legacies of fascism and the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus connotes the history of Fertilia, a Sardinian village founded in the late 1930s during the reclamation of the Nurra marshlands around Alghero. Prewar newsreels show the usual ceremonies for the

foundation of new towns and for the reclamation of marshlands, two pillars of fascist propaganda¹⁰. Despite their origins, these newsreels were reused in the postwar period: a censorship visa dated 19 July 1946 authorised the screening of a Luce report that ‘after describing the devolution of the Nurra plains near Alghero, illustrates the reclamation that made the land fertile and was able to accommodate numerous colonial families’. Permission of screening is granted, however, ‘on the condition that all references to the fascist government in speech and the word “duce” are removed¹¹’: as with the architecture, a superficial deletion of the most explicit elements referring to the recent past is considered necessary but also fully sufficient.

The regime's foundation cities – starting with the best-known cases of Latina and Sabaudia – constituted an ongoing, problematic issue in the postwar period (Fuller, 2022). Based on an exploitation ideal, the foundation of new towns highlighted the close relationship between fascism, architecture, and colonialism, which is particularly evident in the many fascist buildings left in former Italian colonies such as Libya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Albania, and the Dodecanese (see Fuller, 2007).

After the war, Fertilia was assigned to Istrian exiles¹², a choice that, aiming to emancipate the place from its ties to fascism, nevertheless maintained an aura of colonising imposition on the territory since the displacement of Julians to Sardinia was less spontaneous than the film we are going to analyse lets us believe. The village of Fertilia, like the E42 left unfinished due to war, became ‘a unique attempt to build a new Pula’ at the proposal of the Undersecretary of the Marine Angelo Corsi, a native of Iglesias (Sardinia), with the support of the De Gasperi government and of the former bishop of the Istrian towns of Pula and Parenzo. The first group of exiles arrived in 1947; two years later, the population already numbered 3,500, originating what is still today an Istrian enclave on Sardinian soil (Miletto, 2007).

The exiles’ arrival is transfigured into an epic adventure in the short film *Fertilia dei Giuliani*, directed by Enrico Moretti and produced by the Istituto Luce¹³: through a mythical atmosphere, it tells the story of a new foundation, eliding the recent past by establishing a link with older historical and legendary dimensions. The Istrian exiles – described as ‘modern Ulysses’ – are presented as they approach the coast led by a priest, while the commentary explicitly recalls Homeric tales (‘they lived an odyssey’) and the enterprise of the Argonauts: ‘It seems like a story of ancient times, far away – and yet it is a story of our days’. The men land on the island, which is ‘harsh and strong’ and ‘over which breathes the legend of the