

Decentering Italian Colonial Heritage (Milan/online, 12 Jul–9 Nov 24)

Base Milano / online, Jul 12–Nov 9, 2024

Deadline: Jun 23, 2024

Vera-Simone Schulz

Decentering Italian Colonial Heritage across the Horn of Africa and Beyond, Chapters I-III.

July 12, 2024 - hybrid (Base Milano / online), September 28 (online), November 9 (online).

Concept and organization: Jermay Michael Gabriel and Vera-Simone Schulz.

The restitution of objects from Western museums and the establishment of “new relational ethics” (Sarr/Savoy 2018) are among the most pressing and key topics of our times. Equally important, however, is the need to pay more attention to the built environment, considering the roles, lives, and afterlives of buildings, urban contexts, landscapes and infrastructure. By examining their perception and the local narratives connected to them, we can overcome the weight of colonial and Eurocentric discourses and envision possible futures for these sites and buildings. “Decentering Italian Colonial Heritage” will serve as a series of start-up workshops of the project “Epistemologies of Conviviality: Temporalities and Aesthetics of the Built Environment across the Horn of Africa and Beyond”. The first three chapters will be the first in a series of events aimed at investigating these issues in depth.

While much scholarly attention has been devoted to European, particularly Italian architects in the Horn of Africa and the architecture under colonial regimes, the embeddedness of these structures in local contexts and their roles over time has not been adequately examined. Iconic buildings like the Fiat Tagliero building in Asmara have been often analyzed from Eurocentric perspectives, neglecting local perceptions and narratives. This workshop series will address these gaps by focusing on selected case studies across various Horn of Africa countries. It will challenge dominant scholarly discourses by introducing counter-narratives and approaches from local, regional, and transregional perspectives, examining the micro, meso, and macro dynamics at each location, as well as mobility within and beyond the region.

“Epistemologies of Conviviality” and its sub-series “Decentering Italian Colonial Heritage” are a collaboration among historians of art and architecture, archaeologists, literary scholars, anthropologists, curators, experts in critical heritage studies and critical museology, contemporary artists, architects, writers, and cultural practitioners. This multidisciplinary group is aimed to uncover the various layers, superimpositions, and stratifications of the built environment, investigating the lives and afterlives of buildings and the people who inhabit(ed) them, and the construction of new structures. Through a novel approach to well-researched iconic buildings, the workshop series

and project will focus on their afterlives, local appropriations, and the role of local actors in maintaining and inhabiting these structures. It will delve into the interrelation of these buildings with their surroundings and the narratives they inspire, from storytelling and topologies to toponyms and literary urban ecologies. Additionally, the series and project will bring to light lesser-known buildings and elements of the built environment, fostering a collaborative and comprehensive study.

The workshop series will address issues of labor and the role of local architects, highlighting their networks and collaborations across the Horn of Africa and beyond. It will shed light on the participation of Horn of Africa architects in conferences, joint events, and exhibitions, especially focusing on older generations. This research will involve new archival studies, including private and family archives and oral histories, revealing transregional connections. The series and project aim to address issues of memorialization, counteract asymmetries of knowledge production, and integrate diverse findings and interpretations. By doing so, they will contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the built environment in the Horn of Africa, honoring local perspectives, histories and storytelling, and sounding out possible alliances between academic and artistic research. The workshop series will think buildings together with people, objects, visual and material culture (e.g. photographs and postcards featuring architecture, the role of film, or that of (im-)mobile artifacts housed in built structures), their urban and environmental settings.

We invite doctoral students and postdocs up to two years after receiving their PhD as well as artists, curators, and cultural practitioners to send us statements of interest to participate in the chapters of "Decentering Italian Colonial Heritage across the Horn of Africa and Beyond". Please send us by June 23, 2024:

- A CV
- A description of the PhD, postdoc, or artistic research project (1 page plus a bibliography)
- The names of two referees and their contact details (no letters required)

to: decenteritaliancolonialherit@gmail.com

Please also address questions to the same email address.

"Decentering Italian Colonial Heritage across the Horn of Africa and Beyond: Chapters I-III" is the first one of a chain of workshops and events in the framework of the international collaborative research project "Epistemologies of Conviviality: Temporalities and Aesthetics of the Built Environment across the Horn of Africa and Beyond", funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and directed by Elyas Abdulahi, Akram Elkhaila and Vera-Simone Schulz in collaboration with Jermy Michael Gabriel. Selected candidates will be invited to present parts of their work in one or several of the project events. "Epistemologies of Conviviality: Temporalities and Aesthetics of the Built Environment across the Horn of Africa and Beyond" will also consist in the organization of in-person summer schools in Eritrea and Ethiopia, in a virtual summer school in Somalia and Somaliland, and in further online, hybrid and in-person events in Italy, Germany and beyond.

Reference:

CFP: Decentering Italian Colonial Heritage (Milan/online, 12 Jul-9 Nov 24). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 9, 2024 (accessed Apr 29, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42076>>.