

Fascist traces

Remnants of Mussolini's Fascist regime can be found everywhere across Rome. The Fascist period left a major imprint on the city in forms of major buildings, monuments, and urban projects – a remarkable amount of which survives in the present day. As the trademark of the regime, the fasces (which essentially is a bundle of rods with an axe) can be spotted on the facades of public buildings, on lampposts and on drain covers in Rome as in other Italian cities. Since the fall of Fascism at the end of the Second World War, Italians have struggled with the question of whether to keep, destroy, or alter the physical traces of Fascism within their cities. Today those traces are still a source of controversy. For instance, a recent polemic erupted in response to a proposal to demolish the obelisk engraved with Mussolini's name, which stands at the entrance to Rome's Foro Italico sports stadium (originally known as the Foro Mussolini) – a proposal opposed by Italians from across the political spectrum.

In my capacity as NWIB Visiting Professor to the KNIR in the spring of 2023, I had the pleasure to research this issue on the ground. In walking the streets of Rome with my camera, I came across multiple examples of how Romans have integrated or excised Fascist heritage from the spaces of daily life. The fasces symbol has been hacked off the *fontana dei fasci*, a water fountain at the Colle Oppio Park that overlooks the Colosseum. The Palace of Italian Civilisation in the Roman suburb of EUR, which was originally created to represent the primacy of the Italian race, has been converted into the headquarters of the luxury fashion label Fendi. The headquarters of the Fascist Youth Group (GIL) in Trastevere has recently been rebranded as We-GIL, a name which oddly maintains an indication of the building's

original usage, despite its current function as the site of art exhibitions and pilates classes.

Since the instalment of Giorgia Meloni as Italian Prime Minister in October 2022, Italy has a far-Right government for the first time since 1945. In Italy and abroad, this has given rise to questions about the lingering effects of Fascism in present-day Italy. At the same time, debates are now erupting across the world around the preservation of monuments that are associated with racism, colonialism, and slavery. On one side, activists in Italy are now calling for Fascist-era buildings and monuments to be demolished or shorn of their Fascist symbols. On the other side, a strange alliance is emerging between historians and architects who advocate for the protection of Fascist-era architecture for its value as art and heritage, and far-right or neofascist politicians who campaign of its protection as a source of Italian pride. How to handle Italy's Fascist heritage remains very much an open question. There are no easy answers, but what is certain is that the question can no longer be ignored.

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