ABSTRACT

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Title: Can Asmara be Preserved? Questions and Challenges Facing the Future of Modern Italian Colonial Architecture in the Capital of Eritrea

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This thesis explores the questions and challenges surrounding the preservation of the city of Asmara, the capital of the country of Eritrea. Asmara grew as a result of the Italian occupation of Eritrea that began in the 1830s and lasted until 1941, one component of Italy’s larger colonial enterprise in Africa. Newly independent after a decades-long war with Ethiopia, Eritrea is currently facing many serious challenges with regards to its future including the question of whether and how to preserve the extant Italian colonial architecture in its capital city. Whether or not Asmara can be preserved given Eritrea’s political, socio-economic, and financial challenges is a pressing issue, notwithstanding the moral issues that would shroud such efforts given the city’s colonial past. The conclusions of this thesis are drawn after a thorough exploration of the history of Italian colonialism in Africa, the development of the city of Asmara, perspectives on Asmara’s colonial heritage, the history of the movement to preserve the city, and the challenges facing that effort. Four case studies are presented as a way of exploring preservation practice that has already taken place in Asmara which might serve as effective models for the future.