

Editorial: Environmental Histories of Mediterranean Fascisms

Guest Editors

Marco Armiero

Roberta Biasillo

Paulo Guimarães



1 Fascism and nature in historiography

THIS special issue aims to explore the environmental dimension and engagement of Mediterranean fascist regimes inclusive of their colonial possessions. Methodologically, this implies to go beyond the narrow understanding of environmental history as a discipline putting at the centre of its analysis natural or ecological elements and to bridge environmental history with political and social history, and other historical subfields. Among the many themes touched in this volume, we would like to stress three more significant and overarching issues: reclamation as a material and ideological regeneration of people and places; modernity as the ideology through which fascist regimes employed science and technology to create socio-ecologies at the service of their goals; and colonization (internal and external) as the concrete laboratory where reclamation and modernity were experimented as forms of control, regime-building, and oppression.

Blending fascist studies and environmental history sounds like an unconventional scholarly enterprise. Seemingly, this is because the former addresses complex and contradictory mixtures of traditionalism, racial and scientific positivism, anti-liberalism, corporatism, authoritarianism, but also modernist ideologies and innovative forms of mass communication and mobiliza-

tion. Whereas the latter is an academic discipline attentive to processes of natural depletion and conservation, and, we might argue, also considered quite progressive. Even more than that, fascist studies and environmental history form an odd couple because the first line of enquiry is actually one of the most well-established areas of interest for historians of modern times, while the latter is often seen as a rather marginal or emerging field of studies, especially in the Mediterranean countries. Finally, fascist and environmental histories form an unusual combination because according to traditional sub-disciplinary boundaries, environmental historians should not be concerned about themes like fascism. Quite the opposite, they should dedicate themselves to the confined niche of "the environment" (Armiero 2016). In this sense, our special issue questions the narrow understanding of "the environment" and propose a vision of our discipline not in terms of themes but rather of perspectives.

The articles hosted in this special issue help clarify our vision. Not all of the authors would in fact define themselves environmental historians and, rather than checking disciplinary IDs at the borders of this special issue, we have opted for welcoming and learning from colleagues interested in reflecting on the role of environment while telling stories from their own perspectives. For us the challenge has never been to speak within

our networks yet we have tried instead reaching out to the broader history community. We aim at proving that environmental history is not about an obvious set of "natural" objects but it entails the socio-ecological relationships embedded into the stories we tell about the past. Therefore, with this special issue we contribute answering the fundamental question John McNeill has posed almost ten years ago:

Sometimes environmental history seems too tangential to the main concerns of other historians. What can it tell them about the big issues that have preoccupied historians for generations? What can it say about empire, war, revolution? What can it say about issues that have preoccupied the last generation, such as gender, identity, or slavery? (McNeill 2010, 357)

2 Beyond nation and politics: new approaches to the history of fascism

Fascist regimes have represented crucial themes for generations of historians of different backgrounds who have explored almost every aspect of those historical phenomena. A large portion of such research has been conducted on the national scale. Hundreds of publications have explored different aspects - from gender to corruption, from science to education - of Italian, Portuguese and Spanish fascisms, for instance. Domestic policies concerning social, demographic, economic and cultural realms reinforced the vision of fascism as a work-in-progress, often a contradictory political movement. Since the 1960s, fascism has also been addressed as a European phenomenon, *The European Right* to echo the title of the volume edited by Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber (1966). A comparative approach allowed historians to outline a single framework encompassing several national regimes. Along with numerous recent studies describing European fascism as an ongoing formation rather than a static object (Riley 2010; Lewis 2003), Robert Paxton proposed five stages characterizing the evolution of any fascist regime: the creation of the movements; their embedding in the political system; the seizure of power; the exercise of power; and "finally, the long

duration, during which the fascist regime chooses either radicalisation or entropy" (Paxton 2004, 32). Conversely, the value of comparative history has been undeniable in stressing national variables and divergences (Roberts 2002). In relation to Mussolini's regime, historian Emilio Gentile has defined fascism as an experiment in political domination (Gentile 2002). Undeniably, among national fascisms, the Italian dictatorship plays a key role in this historiographical realm (Bosworth 1998; Pollard 1998; Dahl 1999; De Grand 2000; Elazar 2001) Measuring how much a certain regime looked like the Italian one became the ultimate test to establish its level of fascistization.

Overcoming national boundaries and comparative approaches, recent research are examining the international connections among diverse national experiences and the circulation of ideas, practices, and sets of knowledge. As explained by Ángel Alcalde,

After the transnational turn, historians instead see fascism as a single transnational and global phenomenon that violently expanded throughout Europe and beyond by processes of transfer, mutual inspiration, hybridisation, interaction, entanglement and cross-border exchange (Alcade 2020, 243-44)

This transnational interpretation of fascism transcends the classic dichotomy between Italian fascism and German national-socialism and shows how internationalism coexisted with the fundamental ultra-nationalist character of the numerous fascist movements and regimes in interwar Europe (Bauerkämper and Rossoliski-Liebe 2017; Dagnino, Feldman, and Stocker 2019; Law 2019). From the United Kingdom to the Balkans and from the Iberian Peninsula to Ukraine, ultra-nationalists and conservatives primarily looked towards Rome and Berlin for ideological inspiration. Yet transfers did not come without alteration. In an essay published in 2017, Aristotle Kallis, who in the past theorised useful analytical concepts such as "fascistization" and "hybridization", proposed the notion of "recontextualization": a reframing of an object or idea into a new context through active adaptation, filtering, selection and addition (Kallis 2017, 51).

The extent to which fascist ideologies and movements reached out beyond Europe to become global phenomena is generating an extensive debate (Jacoby 2016). Power politics, world order and territorial expansion added the category of expansionism to the generic attributes of fascist ideology and practices (Hofmann and Hedlinger 2017). As the articles in this special issue will show, the long-held assumption that fascism was essentially a European phenomenon would no longer resist critical scrutiny and the inclusion of colonies in historical reconstructions of fascisms is unsettling Eurocentrism and decentering their geographies.

Together with the emerging interest in transnational and global entanglements of fascism, over the last decade, historians started to explore fascism through the entry point of the environment (Staudenmaier 2004, Armiero 2014). Since the 1980s Anna Bramwell's controversial thesis about an alleged green wing of the Nazi party (Bramwell 1985), there has been a growing interest on the topic, generally quite critical of Bramwell's argument. While most of the scholarship has focused on the German case (Brügge-meier, Cioc, and Zeller 2005; Blackbourn 2006; Uekoetter 2006) - and the same Bramwell was sceptical of the green attitude of other radical right regimes - , new research on other fascist regimes started to emerge (Swyngedouw 2015; Saraiva 2017; Gorostiza 2017; Valencia-García 2019; Hardenberg 2021; Armiero, Biasillo, and Hardenberg Forthcoming). Those studies have clearly shown that the beautification, master musealisation, valorization, engineering, racialization of nature, together with the war over nature were recurring rhetoric and material tools of fascist regimes.

Fascist environments - where environments mean place-based combinations of cultural and physical elements - have been explored at national and transnational scales. Historians of science and technology have shed new light over fascist modernity by investigating histories of water infrastructures (Swyngedouw 2015) and modified animals and plants (Saraiva and Norton Wise 2010; Saraiva 2017). A well-established cultural approach has focussed on rhetoric and representations of environmental transformation (Caprotti

and Kaïka 2008; Armiero and Hardenberg 2013) and seemingly well-researched are histories of landscape production (Saraiva 2016), agricultural reclamations (Fernando Oliveira 1993), and autarchic policies (Gorostiza and Ortega Cerdà 2016). More recently environmental historians highlighted the role and relevance of environmental conflicts in societies that had self-portrayed themselves as non-conflictual (De Luigi, Meyer, and Saba 1995; Hamilton 2017; Guimarães 2020), the pitfall of fascist agriculture (del Arco Blanco 2021), the militarization of all societal aspects inclusive of the landscape (Gorostiza 2018), and colonialism (Biasillo 2021; Biasillo and da Silva 2021; Sollai 2021).

3 Six cases of fascist environmental transformations across and beyond the Mediterranean space

This special issue has six contributions that put the environment at the centre of the analysis of authoritarian regimes in Mediterranean Europe, coastal Balkans and colonised African territories.

The colonial matrix of fascism - within and outside Europe - emerges in all essays as severe exploitation of natural resources and human workforce, fostering the adoption of the categories of ecocide and genocide to interpret the fascist experience. All the authors of this special issue stress the centralization of decision-making processes and decentralization of environmental and social costs through the imposition of technological fixes originated from the complete disregard of local ecologies and knowledges. Disasters - or at least massive failures - generated by such fascist policies were always concealed by the strict censorship imposing a certain regime of memories; what could be remembered was, of course, a political matter. As the Spanish and Portuguese cases demonstrate, some sorts of dissent voices and narratives alternative to propagandistic ones managed to emerge in the post-war period when fascisms embedded in European processes of democratization and decolonization. For most of the time and in most cases, propaganda machines did not simply cover conflicts, but also prevented conflicts to emerge and anti-fascist groups to connect.

In the context of regimes built on coloniality and official national narratives, all the following essays demonstrate that nature not only embedded in fascist policies and agenda - as this can be in any political regime -, but that fascist ideology cannot be separate from the creation of a "new" nature as much as the creation of the "new man". Actually, one of the distinctive aspect of fascism appeared the improvement of nature through, and for, the improvement of society. The following essays show that valorization and reclamation as quintessential forms of improvement sound sinister and rhetorical words when put in relation with consequent experiences of famine, burst dams, genocide, and industrial contamination.

The contributors to this special issue look at the making of fascist socio-ecologies from diverse perspectives. David Henderson and Enriketa Pandelejmoni focus on one of the pillars of any fascist socioecology, that is, reclamation. Henderson introduces an emblematic project of fascist reclamation in the Spanish province of Badajoz. His essay discusses continuities and ruptures with pre-Franco reclamation projects and clearly shows how land transformation, irrigation and settlement acted as measures to avoid a progressive land reform and to control rural population. Despite the announced social goal behind this inner colonization project, the Plan Badajoz contributed to "a massive emigration to Spanish and European cities beginning in the 1950s that has continued since". Pandelejmoni analyses the fascist occupation of Albania through the reclamation project in the district of Kavaja. That project reveals the existence of divergent proposals within the fascist administration on how to valorise the area. Many Albanian landowners refused to obey to the programme and suffered its implementation and only a limited number of Italian settlers actually moved to Albania.

As many scholars of fascist regimes have argued, reclamation was not only a matter of landscape transformation; it embodied a broader fascist project. As the case illustrated by Pandelejmoni proves, reclamation was often an occasion for erasing socio-environmental conflicts. Pablo Corral-Broto and Antonio Ortega Santos go deep into the histories of socio-environmental conflicts during the late Franco's regime in Spain. They

show the connections between violence towards the environment stemming from developmentalist theories and the emergence of environmental and social struggles in peripheral areas of Spain in the 1970s. Adopting a decolonial approach, Corral-Broto and Ortega Santos demonstrate that the fascist transformation of nature was often a colonial project of extraction and othering, both in the colonies and in the margins within the national borders. One might argue that also the well-diffused implementation of a self-sufficiency agenda, the fascist autarkic policies, was an expression of the reclamation/colonization nexus. Every inch, every resource had to be put at work in order to achieve the self-sufficiency fascism was looking for. Dimitris Douros and Dimitris Angelis-Dimakis analyse the implementation of the autarkic policies in the Metaxas regime in Greece. Its neo-physiocratic ideals aimed at increasing agriculture outputs through the mobilization of land and agrarian modernization (credit, machinery and chemicals). According to Douros and Angelis-Dimakis those elements, which were also characteristic of other Mediterranean fascist regimes, should be understood in the broader context of the "intensive environmental management (...) at the core of fascist modernist experiments". The intertwining of the colonial and fascist projects is at the core of Roberta Pergher's and Paulo Guimarães' articles. Pergher offers a condensed account of fascist actions in Libya combining the "hidden colonial history" (Ahmida 2021) - to echo Ali Abdullatif Ahmida words - of the Italian internment camps and the well-explored history of the settlement programme adopting the pivotal elements of the Libyan environment and its Italian perceptions. She reflects on the mass imprisonment and genocide of the civil population of Cyrenaica and their animals under Mussolini's regime. The building of concentration camps in the desert for nomadic and semi-nomadic populations became a central feature. This was a precondition for the second stage: the "conquest of Nature" and the agricultural reclamation of the highlands of Cyrenaica for Italian settlers. Guimarães explores the role of daily physical violence and of the development of science in the success of the cotton exports to the metropolitan textiles industries during the fascist era, after

one century of failed attempts in the Portuguese colonies. The mobilization of African peasants created new landscapes and social relationships, ending in the building of concentration camps and of insurgency in northern Mozambique.

4 Fascism and nature: a research agenda

This special issue avoids the usual question about the rate of "environmentalism" characterizing each fascist regime. For a long time this has been the main question environmental historians have tried to answer. There has been an almost arithmetic approach to the issue, an attempt to quantify the level of environmentalism those regimes had showed, building on the assumption that environmentalism is a quite fixed set of ideas and practices against which people or regimes can be measured. Instead, with this special issue, we aim to explore the dialectic relationships between fascist regimes and nature. An environmental history of fascism is not only about how much conservation was developed under those regimes; actually, it is not even only the chronicle of the (many) ecological disasters those regimes caused.

We hope this special issue will foster research on the political ecologies of the fascist regimes, rather than on the allegedly ecological contents of fascist policies. By fascist political ecologies we mean the embodiment of fascist discourses and practices into the environment. The geographer David Harvey has argued that every socio-political project is also an ecological project. Therefore, the point is not to research the effects of fascist regimes on nature - proposing once again a dichotomist vision of society/nature relationships - but to inquire into the ways in which diverse fascist regimes have produced their own ecologies, that are assemblages of practices and narratives of nature.

We believe that colonial ecologies are crucial grounds where the fascist ecological project materialized. In the colonies, fascist regimes operationalized both the naturalization of social relationships and the politicization of ecologies. The othering project, inherent to any colonial gaze and practice, transformed people and places into something to be domesticated and shaped to

reassemble the racial and ecological matrix. Making coloniality the core of the fascist experience of nature is also changing the usual Eurocentric histories of fascism. How would fascist political ecologies look like from Mozambique, Albania, or Libya? While we have tried to address this issue, it is still open the question about the divergences and similarities between fascist and liberal political ecologies in the colonies.

As historians of fascist regimes know well, colonization was a label - and a practice - used by those governments not only in the traditional sense of colonial expansion abroad, but also as internal colonization, that is, expansion of economic activities - mostly agriculture - within the national borders. Following the Italian fascist rhetoric, this internal colonialism was often called reclamation, meaning the idea and practice of remaking the ecologies of places and people. An environmental history research agenda on fascism should revisit this internal colonialism/reclamation exploring the metabolic and narrative connections between nature and race, ecologies and bodies.

Those connections were often meant to produce fascist (environmental and human) bodies; reclaimed lands for reclaimed people. More frequently, they produced instead messed up ecologies, spaces of contamination and harm. Corral-Broto and Ortega Santos explore the political possibilities coming from these messed up ecologies in Francoist Spain. Instead of looking for the allegedly fascist roots of environmentalism, these two authors have followed the opposite lead, searching for the convergences between anti-fascist movements and environmentalist concerns. A similar combination, worthy of further consideration, of resistance and socioecological unbalance recurred in fascist Mozambique. Guimarães reconstructs the fascist environmental roots of the anti-colonial insurgency against the Portuguese occupation.

Finally, although this special issue has not touched upon this, we do see the relevance of researching the emergence of what has been labelled as "eco-fascism". While we do not support the idea of a fascist root of environmentalism, we do see in contemporary society the convergence of far-right discourse and environmentalism. This

is not a majority line, evidently, nonetheless, it is theoretically worth to be explored. Perhaps, rather than thinking of "eco-fascism" it would be more productive to research environmentalist authoritarianism - this more widely spread - and the continuities and fractures between it and the historical fascism.

An environmental history research agenda on fascism can be, obviously, much longer; it should include science and technology studies, reproductive policies, arts and cultural representations of nature, international and diplomatic efforts in the environmental fields. More broadly, that research agenda implies to question the vision of environmental history as a set of green themes. We wish, instead, to propose a point of view which can contribute reframing the main historical narratives. The point is not that environmental history explains everything, perhaps recurring to some quite scary environmental determinism; rather, we argue that whatever we are studying is deeply and messily intertwined with what we call nature. Social and political history can help understand the environmental history of fascism as much as environmental history can explore social and political topics. We do not need a disciplinary passepartout opening every door, but a well-furnished backpack which will allow us to move around and employ multiple tools.

The editorial team.

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Marco Armiero is Research Director at the Institute for Studies on the Mediterranean, CNR Italy. He has worked on the nationalization of nature, migrations and environment, and environmental justice. With his research, he has contributed to bridging environmental humanities and political ecology. Armiero is the current president of the European Society for Environmental History. *E-mail:*

marco.armiero@abe.kth.se



Roberta Biasillo is an environmental historian and holds a Ph.D. in Modern European History from the University of Bari (Italy). She is Assistant Professor in Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute. Her main areas of expertise are territorial and forest issues in Modern Italy and colonial environmental history with a focus on North and East Africa. She has co-

authored, with Marco Armiero and Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, the forthcoming book *Mussolini's Nature. An Environmental History of Fascism* (MIT Press, 2022). *E-mail:* *roberta.biasillo@eui.eu*



Paulo Guimarães is a Senior Lecturer of Late Modern and Contemporary History at the Department of History, University of Évora (Portugal) and member of CICIP Research Center in Political Science at the University of Minho (Portugal). Paulo Guimarães is a social and environmental historian and he is a member of the Portuguese Network of Environmental History. Currently,

his main research interests cover environmental conflicts, labour environmentalism and utopian landscapes. He has published several papers and he edited a volume on environmental conflicts in mining, quarrying and metallurgical industries in the Iberian Peninsula. He is the author of "Elites and Industry in Alentejo (1890-1960): a study on economic behaviour of elite groups in regional context (Lisbon, 2005)" and of "Industry and Conflict in the Rural Milieu: The Miners of Alentejo (1858-1938)". His former works embraces a wide range of topics in social, political and economic history: from anarcho-syndicalism to credit and financial systems, from political violence to cultural institutions.

E-mail: *peg@uevora.pt*