

Fascist Imaginaries of Self-Sufficiency.

Historical Political Ecology of Early Francoism in Spain

(1939 – 1959)



Santiago Gorostiza Langa – Centro de Estudos Sociais • Universidade de Coimbra – sgorostiza@ces.uc.pt



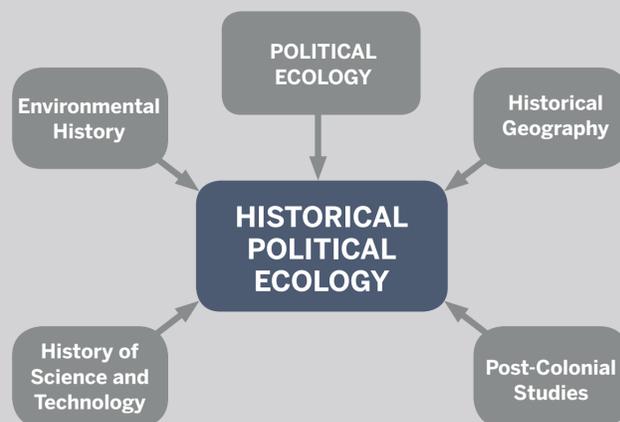
This project aims to address the consequences of the early Francoist autarchic political economy (1939 – 1959) from the point of view of historical political ecology. During the first thirty years of the 20th century, Spain had begun to develop its industrial and services sector. But the Spanish Civil War and the autarchic policies implemented by the Francoist dictatorship that emerged from

the conflict took a heavy toll on the economy, which did not return to its pre-war level until well into the 1950s. While 1959, the year in which the Economic Stabilization Plan was approved and liberal economic measures introduced, has been chosen as a final boundary of the study period, this project aims at following the thread of historical case studies to connect them to present-day conflicts.

Gaps in the literature

Several scholars have highlighted the importance of environmental history in vitalising political ecology (Watts & Peet, 2004) and the relevance that historical research on the environment can have for political ecologists (Robbins, 2004), but the meeting ground between the two disciplines has received relatively little attention (Davies, 2009). Karl Offen has suggested that a historical political ecology approach could be defined “as a field-informed interpretation of society-nature relations in the past (...), how and why those relations have changed (or not changed) over time and space, and the significance of those interpretations for improving social justice and nature conservation today” (emphasis is mine, Offen, 2004:21). Diana K. Davies considers that this emphasis on present-day issues is one of the differences between historical political ecology and the subdisciplines of environmental history and historical geography. Another of its features is the attention devoted to the political and ideological implications of science and technology and to post-colonial studies (Davies, 2009).

This research project aims at applying the political ecology lens to the field of environmental history, and more precisely to the study of the impact of war and of autarchic policies on the environment. In doing so, I intend to adopt a conflict-based approach to unveil nature – society relations (Armiero, 2008). Literature on the environmental consequences and disruptions caused by armed conflicts has been growing during the last decade (Coates et al., 2011; Dudley et al., 2002; Hupy, 2008; McNeill 2004; Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011). Early examples of this literature already showed an acute interest in exploring the historical influence of technology and science to mobilize nature, and its political uses (Russell, 2001). This project will also pay attention to other cases of fascist and authoritarian regimes and their relation to nature.



Research questions and subquestions

- How did the autarchic Francoist political economy policies disrupt/shape environmental resource management, conflicts and landscapes? Why is it relevant for present-day environmental conflicts and policies?

Aims and objectives

- To analyse the intertwined environmental, social, and economic impacts of the post-war economic depression in urban and rural areas
- To scrutinize how war resulted in new institutional arrangements within the new Francoist state, in relation to water and energy

- To examine how the economic and political support of Fascist states and the circulation of knowledge and expertise among them contributed to shape Francoist policies towards nature
- To study strategies or repression / resistance regarding use / access to nature

Methodology

- Review of secondary sources and gray literature
- Archival primary sources in order to challenge secondary historical accounts
- Ancillary sources: Newspaper collections (and its censorship) and public administration official diaries
- Oral sources: Semi-structured interviews
- Geographic Information Systems
- Official newsreels

Case study description

Environmental Disruptions on Extractive Activities

War caused a protracted detention of several economic activities, and in many cases, autarchic economic guidelines hampered the recovery or focused new efforts in previously unexplored undertakings. Under certain circumstances, this represents window of opportunity to explore how the temporal withdrawal of the economic activity affected the environment. Present-day mining extraction activities that started functioning in the 1920s configure interesting cases to examine. Potash extraction, in particular, has been in the last years subject to a significant expansion in Catalonia, and has spawned a parallel environmental protest. Such environmental activism, however, can be traced back to the 1930s, when social actors complained about the effects of potash extraction in the quality of Llobregat River. After the war protests were silenced by the dictatorship, and mining production recovered slowly. This case study will devote special attention to analyse the continuities and discontinuities of this historical episode with present-day protests

Militarized Landscapes

Spanish isolation after the defeat of the Axis forces with the end of the Second World War became inscribed in the landscape of the country borders. After the Spanish Civil War, the Francoist regime launched an extensive program of fortification in the Pyrenees, carried out by the army, which exerted a strict social and economic control in the region until the late 1950s. This case study will examine the socio-ecological implications associated with the erection of a militarized landscape in the border with France, and explore how it has conditioned the mid-term development of the region.

Additional case studies

The attention put by historical political ecology on post-colonial studies and history of science suggests that the Francoist policy towards its colonies might be a fertile ground to explore. Agriculture and forestry in Equatorial Guinea (Guinea Española until 1968) and mining in the Moroccan Protectorate (with Spanish presence until 1956) could be relevant topics to work on. In addition, specific cases of environmental disasters such as floods or dam failures will be analysed.

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