

Book Review: Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism by Tiago Saraiva

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Saraiva, Tiago. *Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism*. Boston: MIT Press, 2016. xiv + 330 pages. Hardcover, \$40.00.

There is little wonder why cultural research concerning food has enjoyed substantial attention in the past two decades. The study of food intersects many fields including science and technology, economics, cultural anthropology, and environmental history. For that reason, historian Tiago Saraiva's recent work, *Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism*, should catch the eye of academics in many diverse disciplines. Those drawn to this work will be rewarded with a well-researched study of the ways that food, and more generally biopolitics, was integral to the formation of fascist states.

In this work, Saraiva argues that through design and engineering, objects such as wheat, pork, lamb, rubber, and cotton were the embodiment of fascist ideology in that they were designed and standardized for the nationalistic strategy of autarkic food security. Such strategies were rooted in ideological connections between blood and land. Following Bruno Latour's work, Saraiva analyzes these objects more broadly in their political and cultural contexts transforming these organisms into technoscientific 'thick things' which contain multiple meanings simultaneously. In this way, this work helps to bring an ontological turn to the history of science and technology.

Saraiva's central arguments contribute to scholarship in three interrelated ways. First, his approach corrects the overemphasis on efficacy and utility present in studies of fascist agrarian and food policy by treating these initiatives as more than a propaganda tool, instead emphasizing the vision and intent of scientists and policy makers. Saraiva successfully demonstrates how the bureaucratic organizations and research institutions that grew around food policy helped form the fascist states.

Saraiva's second contribution addresses the viability of studying fascism broadly. He argues that common food and biopolitical concerns and programs reveal shared aspects of various fascist regimes, such as Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Salazar's Portugal; thus, it is fair to treat fascism comprehensively despite some unique features. In addition, he views biopolitics as a more comprehensive category of analysis than race which typically set the Nazis apart from other fascist regimes.

Finally, fitting in with an important trend in scholarship on fascism in the last decade, Saraiva argues against the notion that fascism was predominately backwards-oriented. In fact, he asserts that the common features of biopolitics demonstrate the ways that fascism fashioned itself as an alternative modernity. Saraiva defends his position by cataloging the ways that fascist agrarianism relied on the scientific development of technoscientific organisms. For example, such food autarky depended upon standardizing strains of mold resistant wheat and

breeding pigs that could live on domestic potatoes rather than imported grain. Such experimentation, he attests, was a quintessentially utopian and modernist project.

By placing technoscientific organisms at the center, Saraiva is able to offer a narrative that unites politicians, researchers, bureaucrats, farmers, and fascist ideologues. The book is organized into two parts with part one focusing on wheat and potatoes, as well as pigs. These embodied the mobilization and bureaucratization efforts of the fascist states and their connection to the ideology of rootedness in national soil. Part two shifts to the ideological issue of expansion or *Lebensraum* through an examination of fascist colonialism in East Europe and Africa from the interwar period through the 1940s. These final chapters concentrate on plantation cash crops—coffee, rubber, and cotton—and the importance of sheep for settlement colonies.

Saraiva excels not only in establishing continuity among the fascist regimes, but also in highlighting their unique features in contrast to the biopolitics of liberal capitalist countries. Saraiva's work consolidates and innovates recent trends in a variety of fields. However, I wonder how the key ideological component of the first section—the importance of being physically and metaphysically rooted in the national soil—might have impacted the ideology of external expansion. If there was a clear connection here, this may help separate the unique features of fascist colonialism from the colonialism of the previous century. Also, after exploring so many historiographical issues, Saraiva's conclusion centers on how academics engage with objects, arguing for the value of treating objects as 'thick things.' While this discussion offers some insights into the possibilities for future research, it might be better served in the book's introduction since it contains important clues as to how the author understands his objects of study.

These minor issues do not detract from Saraiva's excellent study which serves as an example of the ways that cultural history has remained innovative and viable in recent years. *Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism* will be of interest to scholars working in the area of fascism and food policy, and would be an excellent addition to a graduate seminar focusing on the history of science and technology in fascist states, fascism and food, and twentieth century environmental history.

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