

## Seeing the nation for the trees: at the frontier of Italian nineteenth century modernity

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### Abstract

In this article we analyse the emergence and the transformation of three different socio-natural spaces in a particular historical context, that is, the establishment of a modern state.

We explore this issue researching the relationship between forests and modernization from Unification in 1861 to the 1890's. Over this period Italy experienced a radical change connected with the state-building process, and forests represented a material place where innovations in social and economic development were tested.

Based on three case studies, this article explores how modernity was articulated through urban parks, ironworks, and infrastructures. Those three cases speak of both depletion and conservation; they exemplify the patterns through which in the very making of modernity, Italian society articulated its relationship to nature in an attempt to overcome customary rights and the traditional rural organization of society.

Forests were constructed as socio-ecological spaces reflecting Italy's contested and heterogeneous modernization process upon which political tensions, social conflicts, and economic development theories were inscribed on transformed landscapes.

### Introduction

The idea that the forest is the “outside” of society has always been extremely powerful. From folk tales to legislation the forest has often been represented as a space beyond civilization demanding to be tamed or avoided. In his study on the cultural perceptions of forests, Robert Pogue Harrison showed the historical stratification of that discourse, reminding his readers that *forest* literally meant “outside”<sup>1</sup>. Although this dichotomist paradigm has its historical foundations, several scholars have been working in a different direction, attempting to explore the intricate intertwining between society and forests<sup>2</sup>. More specifically, those studies have focused mainly on the mutual constituency of forests and the modern nation-state, thereby challenging both the dichotomy society vs. forest as well the too-simplistic declensionist narrative conflating the interaction between nation-forest with an inexorable march towards deforestation<sup>3</sup>. Although in the Italian case the forest was seen as an anti-modern space,

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1 Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests. The Shadows of Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 201.

2 Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces 1860-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Nancy Lee Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People. Resource Control and Resistance in Java* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West* (Athens: University of Washington Press, 1995); S. Ravi Rajan, *Modernizing Nature: Forestry and Imperial Eco-Development 1800-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Marco Armiero, *A Rugged Nation: Mountains and the Making of Modern Italy* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 2011).

3 Tina Loo, 'High modernism, Conflict, and the Nature of Change in Canada: A Look at Seeing Like a State', *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 97, 1, 2016. This article reviews Scott's key concepts and arguments and challenges the declensionist narrative offered in the book. Another effort to counterbalance the declensionist in environmental history is offered by Mark Joseph McLaughlin, “As thick as molasses”: Water Pollution

reluctant to be incorporated into socio-economic modernity<sup>4</sup>, we have instead decided to explore the ways in which the newlyborn Italian state tried to integrate the forest into its economic and political modernization, as did many other emerging and developing nations<sup>5</sup>. We will explore the effects of Italian Unification in terms of administrative centralization, economic uses, requests for conservation, imposition of a new social and political order, and property disputes involving public, private and collective spheres. And conversely, we will see the communities' high expectations sometimes disappointed and sometimes met by the new institutional order.

Along with James C. Scott's theories on the agency of the state in the simplification of ecologies, in this paper we analyse three particular examples: the Fontana Forest in the north of Italy (Mantua province, Lombardy region), the Follonica Forest in the centre (Grosseto province, Tuscany region), and the Monticchio Forest in the south (Potenza province, Basilicata region) (Figure 1). Each of these three cases shows complex stories about the incorporation of nature into the making of a new and modern nation, including legal and illegal strategies through which different actors reshaped the contours of property rights and land use in relation to wooded areas. Moreover, the selected areas share a particular feature; they officially belonged to the state having entered the public domain at the time of Italian Unification in 1861. Ten years later, in 1871, the Fontana and Follonica forests gained legal protection against privatization and massive deforestation. Quite the opposite, until the early 1890s the Monticchio Forest struggled unsuccessfully to achieve the same legal covenants existing on the other two forests because the state, as owner, preferred to develop and exploit it rather than impose a strict conservation scheme. The implication of public ownership represents the common factor among the three cases we investigate in this article.

Through an analysis of these three cases we aim to explore a few approaches taken by the state in articulating its forestry policy, three chapters in the same state-nature building story. Environmental protection, economic overexploitation, infrastructure development, use of violence, gentrification, and land reclamation exemplified major (intertwined) tendencies of the forestry agenda of the Italian Kingdom. As in other circumstances, political changes made it possible for elites to redraw the borders of the legal and illegal in hybrid spaces such as forests and to erase any alternative way to access natural resources<sup>6</sup>.

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Regulation in New Brunswick, 1947-1975', in C. Briggs (ed.), *Modern Canada: 1945 to Present*, (Canada: Oxford University Press, 2014).

- 4 The most influential Italian agrarian economist between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, Ghino Valenti, defined the forest more as a hindrance than a useful resource. He hardly could find a better definition than the one he created: according to his economic point of view the forest was a "necessary disadvantage" (Ghino Valenti, 'L'Italia agricola nel cinquantennio 1862-1911', in G. Valenti [ed.], *Studi di politica agraria*, pp. 470-471 [Athenaeum: Roma, 1914]).
- 5 Ronald John Johnston, *Nature, State and Economy: A Political Economy of the Environment* (Wiley: Chichester, 1996); James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press: New Heaven – London, 1998); K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests. Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* (Stanford University Press, 1999); Tamara L. White, *Forests and Peasant Politics in Modern France* (Yale University Press: New Heaven – London, 2000); T. Cervera, R. Garrabou, E. Tello, 'Política forestal y evolución de los bosques en Cataluña desde el siglo XIX hasta la actualidad', *Investigaciones de Historia Económica*, 2 (2015).
- 6 Marco Armiero, 'Ambienti in bilico. Natura ed eventi rivoluzionari nel Mezzogiorno del 1860', in P. Macry (ed.), *Quando crolla lo Stato*, 229-258. (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 2003); Id., 'Seeing like a Protester: Nature, Power, and Environmental Struggles', *Left History*, 13.1 (2009).



*Figure 1: Maps from “L’Italia sotto l’aspetto fisico, storico, letterario, artistico e statistico con speciale riguardo all’industria ed al commercio. Vol. 3 Atlante corografico, orografico, idrografico e storico dell’Italia” - Milano : F. Vallardi, 1883. Biblioteca della Società Geografica Italiana in Roma*

We expect our analysis of the Italian case to contribute in enriching the debate about the relationships linking modernity, nature, and nation-state building. In the last few years a growing body of scholarly works has revealed the connection between nation-state building and the construction of a “national” nature incorporated into modernity rather than excluded from it<sup>7</sup>. In the decades following Unification in 1861, the modern Italian nation emerged from the regional agrarian states into which the peninsula had been divided. For the economic and political elites leading this dramatic socio-economic and environmental transformation between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, modernity was a hegemonic political project aimed at unifying a profoundly divided country<sup>8</sup>. Modernization – that is, the politics of modernity – implied putting people and nature to work by imposing a single official and standardized legal, economic, administrative, and knowledge system on the existing multiple systems which had been in place.

The expression of power in the landscape is a manifestation of law, prohibition, regulation, and control, and the landscape acts as a medium for the exchange of power<sup>9</sup>. In this vein, the anthropologist Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan links changes, specifically in forests, to the political processes of state-making<sup>10</sup>. This link proved particularly true in the case of late nineteenth century Italy, where the definition of a national nature was grounded in the presence of both consolidation and contestation and in the dialogue between domination and resistance. At that very time the connections between nature and nation assumed greater significance since nature worked as a tool to reinforce national identity and, at the same time, as a tool to challenge and contest state forms and ideologies<sup>11</sup>.

The performative power of state simplification and modernization narratives emerges clearly in the three case studies we have selected. James C. Scott's theory of state simplification is key in our approach.

The state simplifications, the basic givens of modern statecraft, were, I began to realize, rather like abridged maps. They did not successfully represent the actual activity of the society they depicted, nor were they intended to; they represented only that slice of it that interested the official observer. They were, moreover, not just maps. Rather, they were maps that, when allied with state power, would enable much of the reality they depicted to be remade<sup>12</sup>.

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- 7 The role of environment both in the modernization and the nation-building is visible in: Cole Harris, 'Power, modernity, and historical geography', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81, 4 (1991): 678; Tricia Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities. Space, Place, and Society*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2010; Stephen Brain, *Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalinist Environmentalism, 1905-1953*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2011; 'Environment and History. Special Issue: Nature and Nation' edited by M Armiero and W. Graf von Hardenberg, 20.1 (2014); Dorothy Zeisler-Vralsted, *Rivers, Memory, and Nation-Building: A History of the Volga and Mississippi Rivers*, Berghahn Books, New York – Oxford, 2015; S. Autio-Sarasmo, 'National Identity, Modernization, and the Environment', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 4 (Fall 2015).
- 8 Fulvio Cammarano, *Storia politica dell'Italia liberale (1861-1901)* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1999); Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento. State, society and national unification* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 9 William John Thomas Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power. Space, Place and Landscape* (Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. VII-4.
- 10 K. Sivaramakrishnan, 'Crafting the public sphere in the forest of West Bengal: democracy, development and political action', *American Ethnologist*, 27, 2 (2000): 433, 447.
- 11 Mark Whitehead, Rhys Jones, Martin Jones, *The Nature of the State. Excavating the Political Ecologies of Modern State* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 59.
- 12 Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 4.



In this article we explore the narratives of modernity, its ambiguity and performativity on nature. Understanding the relationships between nature and modernity as a declensionist narrative in which the space of nature is inversely related to the rate of “modernity” is too simplistic. Instead, we are interested in the hybrid systems – socio-ecological formations rather than social-technical formations alternative to “nature” – shaped by the dual presence of nature and modernity, and therefore by simplification. All three cases we present imply a significant transformation in the ways in which forests were accessed, seen, and were used in the state’s attempt to impose its coercive authority.

We examine those stories through grey literature, newspapers, Parliamentary acts, and archival documents produced by the Italian Ministries of Agriculture and Interior, and local officials, while both Italian and international scholarly studies provide the background and framework references.

### Setting the context

Since its foundation in 1861<sup>13</sup>, the unified Kingdom of Italy had been auctioning most of the properties inherited from the previous Italian States and, since 1867, expropriated from the Church. The value of those properties can be roughly estimated at about £1700 million, including £600 million from former Church estates<sup>14</sup>. In 1862, facing growing public debt, the Parliament passed the Alienation Act allowing sales and auctions of all government property and assets<sup>15</sup>. Everything was for sale: land, historic and religious buildings, and other properties of lesser cultural value, everything except a list of 21 forests judged as relevant by the 1871 Act.

Among those 21 forests appeared the woods of Fontana and Follonica but not the Monticchio one, even if a few members of the Parliament had highly recommended its inclusion. The 1871 Act established the Italian forest public domain in order to manage wooded areas worthy of being government-owned and to protect them from privatization. Nonetheless, while supporting forest-use efficiency, public control, and environmental protection, the public domain did not imply safeguarding common usage. Indeed, in 1875 the Parliament passed a draft bill abolishing common rights on public domain. On one hand, the law prescribed the cancellation of peasants' customs and, on the other, to achieve the application of the law and to avoid social turmoil, it provided communities with an exemption for purposes of subsistence<sup>16</sup>. While initially the state took an ambiguous stand on customary rights, it gradually implemented explicit or more subtle legislation which either undermined or outlawed any form of common rights<sup>17</sup>.

In this context of dramatic financial crisis, the creation of public domain did not occur without disputes and forests were likely to be required to yield profit and benefits to the nation in order to be included in the list of the untouchable state goods. The forests that met those criteria could guarantee adequate supplies of raw material for the navy and strategic economic sectors, or could support the educational program of forest rangers in charge of those

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13 The Kingdom of Italy was officially proclaimed on March 17, 1861; nonetheless, at that time large areas of the peninsula were still outside the social and bureaucratic control of the new nation and crucial areas were still outside the national borders. Social uprising characterized the Southern regions, the Austrian-controlled Venice entered the Kingdom in 1866, the capture of Rome occurred in 1870.

14 Author 2013.

15 Alienation Act, n. 793, 21 Aug 1862.

16 Abolition of Commons Rights on Public Domain Act, n. 794, 1 November 1875.

17 Footnote deleted to insure blind peer review.

resources<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless a few exceptions were made, such as the inclusion on the list of the national properties of the Fontana Forest for its aesthetic value and the exclusion of the Monticchio Forest for its relevant market profitability. In spite of controversy and re-examination of specific locations on the list, it remained unchanged: the Fontana and Follonica forests continued to be included, while Monticchio stayed excluded<sup>19</sup>.

Examining the inclusion/exclusion processes of those three forests reveals a powerful tendency towards privatisation and denationalisation. Those forests represented the only exceptions allowed within the broader statutory framework of privatization ratified by the 1862 Alienation Act. At that time the creation of a public domain including only 21 woodlands – most of them already protected by the regional states in place before the Italian Unification - represented an acceptable compromise which did not constrain private owners.

The enactment of the national forest system in 1871 marked an important step forward properly protecting public timberlands from waste, destruction, appropriation, and depredation. The 1871 Act originated from a nine year long debate on the first Italian comprehensive Forest Act<sup>20</sup>, which passed only in 1877 and provided protection only for mountain forests. During its first 16 years of life, since no proper forest code regulated the land use and old pre-unification measures were ineffective, entering the public domain ensured the only viable provision for conservation.

The need to control malaria transmission also played a crucial role in the preservation of the plain forests, as in the case of Mantua and Follonica. The 1877 Act provided for the protection of forests located in wetlands in Central and Northern Italy because people believed that forests were a physical barrier against “bad air” and acted as a natural hydraulic pump. At that time the fact that mosquitoes could act as transmitters of disease had not yet been established. The connection between malaria and forests received the attention of a commission appointed by the Minister of Agriculture in 1881 to address differences and discrepancies in scientific surveys and popular convictions. A final report asserted that only forests situated between an endemic zone and a residential area could affect the spread of the disease<sup>21</sup>.

In regards to the selected case studies, an 1899 national enquiry into the sanitary conditions of population and landscape described the province of Grosseto, including Follonica, as a vast malarious region mostly abandoned and uninvolved in land reclamation projects<sup>22</sup>. Also the immediate vicinity of Mantua was depicted as permanently affected by the malaria in summer and autumn<sup>23</sup> while periodic outbreaks occurred in the region surrounding Monticchio<sup>24</sup>.

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18 Forest Public Domain Act, n. 283, 20 June 1871.

19 Parliamentary Act (hereafter PA), Legislatura XIV, Sessione 1, Camera dei Deputati, Modificazione dell'elenco dei boschi inalienabili e riacquisto della foresta di Monticchio, 18 May 1882; PA, Legislatura XV Sessione 1, Camera dei Deputati, doc. n. 266.

20 PA, Legislatura XI, Sessione 1, Camera dei Deputati, doc. n. 37-A, 36-39.

21 *Della influenza dei boschi sulla malaria dominante nella regione marittima della provincia di Roma. Relazione a S. E. il signor Ministro dell'Agricoltura della commissione dal medesimo nominata il 6 aprile 1881*, (Roma: Tipografia Eredi Botta), p. 92.

22 Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereafter ACS), Ministero dell'interno (hereafter MI), Direzione Generale Sanità Pubblica, Atti Amministrativi 1867-1900, b. 310 bis.

23 ACS, MI, Direzione Generale Sanità Pubblica, Atti Amministrativi 1867-1900, b. 315 bis.

24 ACS, MI, Direzione Generale Sanità Pubblica, Atti Amministrativi 1867-1900, b. 345 bis.

## The forest and the city: the Fontana Forest

The institutional transition from the Lombardo Veneto Kingdom (the region comprising Milan and Venice) to the Kingdom of Italy entailed the growth of state control over the Fontana Forest and a new administrative ordering, which required the forest to be managed efficiently and profitably. In line with the national trend, the Fontana Forest had experienced a series of land reform attempts and other policy interventions which tended to disregard and erase common property resource management.

In 1861 the forest served several (tangible and intangible) functions and by the end of the nineteenth century it functioned as a defence against malaria<sup>25</sup>, a military depot, and a provision of timber for the navy<sup>26</sup>. Apart from those purposes requested by the state, the forest covered such a restricted area that, according to the Department of Agriculture, it did not play a major economic role and remained open to the public. City dwellers from Mantua enjoyed it in spring and summer, thereby demanding to transform it into a park, while people from the municipality of Marmirolo, a small rural community about ten kilometres from Mantua, used it as a wooded commons, despite being forbidden from doing so<sup>27</sup>. As in many other forests elsewhere in Italy, the competing uses of the Fontana Forest as a leisure and a working space clashed<sup>28</sup>. They referred not only to different ideas of nature but also to concrete and divergent interests represented by the urban bourgeoisie (from Mantua) and the peasantry (from Marmirolo).

A 1876 document addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture offers some insight into the ecological and silvicultural features of the forest which was part of the originally large wooded river bank of the Po, the most important watercourse in Italy. Coppices of poplars and oaks and the remains of an old-growth forest covered the area but the plants appeared stressed and stunted. Apart from a meagre amount of timber, the forest provided exclusively firewood, and therefore the lack of factories or other wood-related activities did not stimulate much interest in a proper silvicultural management<sup>29</sup>.

When the state took possession of the Fontana Forest, its mission partially met local elite's expectations. On one hand, they shared the tasks of protecting the ownership rights and criminalizing the common usage rights; on the other hand, the governmental intent to maximize the profit from its property created contrasts between local communities, central and peripheral authorities – both representing the state.

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25 The acknowledgement of the utility of the Fontana Forest in sanitation and health protection occurred in Antonio Manganotti, *Sul clima e sulle condizioni igieniche della città di Mantova* (Mantova: Mondovi 1878).

26 Gian Battista Intra, *Il Bosco della Fontana e le sue vicende storiche* (Mantova: Sartori, 1974), pp. 12-14.

27 Ministero dell'Agricoltura e delle foreste – gestione beni ex A.S.F.D. ROMA, *Il bosco della Fontana* (Calliano: Grafiche Manfrini, 1987), p. 7.

28 For a similar case of conflicts opposing the space of leisure vs. the space of common uses in a former hunting reserve see M. Armiero, 'Boschi di città. Gli Astroni dalla Corona all'Opera Nazionale Combattenti: XVIII-XX secolo', *Storia Urbana*, 86 (1999): 53-73.

29 ACS, Ministero di Agricoltura Industria e Commercio (hereafter MAIC), Direzione Generale Agricoltura, I Versamento, Busta 361, fasc. 935, s.fasc. 3.

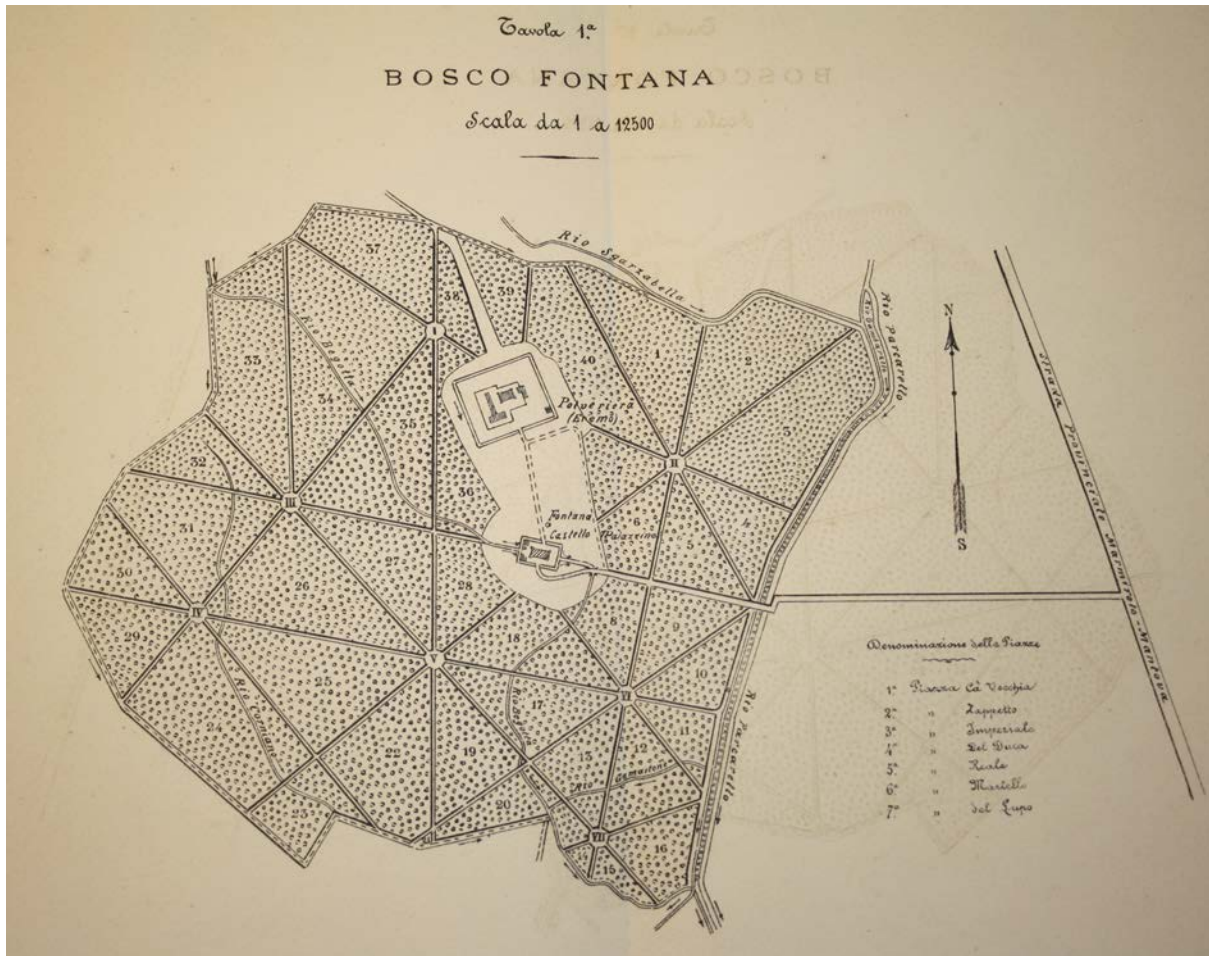


Figure 2: The Fontana Forest in 1893. From A. Capilupi, “Il Bosco Fontana nell’economia agraria” Mantova: Stab. Tip. Lit. G. Mondovì 1892

On the first point, the elites and the government cooperated but the imposition of state control did not occur without resistance. In the spring of 1869 “reputable persons” claimed that the forest was suffering from an everyday unorganized resistance of individuals still collecting wood in the area<sup>30</sup>. The local elites voiced their complaints against what they defined as the peasants’ misuse of the forest, even asking for a dedicated police station in order to stop the abuse practiced by the poor. However that proposal never materialised due to budget constraints<sup>31</sup> and due to the presence in the city of two divisions of the army<sup>32</sup>. The turmoil occurring in the forest were part of a wider social mobilization which from the late 1880s involved the rise of anarchist and socialist parties which questioned the well-established private ownership of land in the province through recurring property crime, such as theft, vandalism, and arson attacks. The state categorically opposed those anti establishment movements proceeding against their leaders and whoever appeared involved. Nonetheless,

30 Gazzetta di Mantova, 30 March 1869, 3.

31 ACS, MAIC, Direzione Generale Agricoltura, I Versamento, Busta 0721, fasc. 2875.

32 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, Rapporti dei Prefetti (1882-1894), Busta 13, fasc. 35, s.fasc. 6.



more than repression the late 1880s mass emigration to Brazil insured the imposition of social order in the region<sup>33</sup>.

The urban elites were forced to realize that the major obstacle to the making of an urban park was not the trespassing of peasants but the profitability issue. On 30 June 1869 the socialist newspaper *La Favilla* exposed an ongoing negotiation for the acquisition of the Fontana Forest between a private investor and central government officials. Local authorities complained that they were neither informed nor consulted on this negotiation, despite the widely recognized hygienic value of the forest in fighting malaria. According to *La Favilla*, had there been an open auction, the local elites would have fought to keep their forest; the newspaper even envisioned the possibility of a joint venture among private citizens and local institutions in order to raise the capital necessary to buy the Fontana Forest<sup>34</sup>. In the end, the privatization of the forest did not go through because the private offers proved inadequate, and in 1871 the Fontana Forest entered the inalienable land of the Public Domain.

15 years later, in 1886, a governmental report proposed to auction the Fontana Forest on the basis of its poor net income. Once again the protests of local elite prevented the sale of the forest, this time on historical and cultural grounds instead of economic ones<sup>35</sup>. While the forest was economically unproductive and comparatively small, consisting of 228 hectares of which only 185 were wooded<sup>36</sup>, it embodied the history of splendour and decay which associated the Gonzaga family and the city<sup>37</sup>. Reclaiming the forest had symbolic significance which went beyond the destiny of that specific area<sup>38</sup>. Employing what would subsequently become a key argument in the Italian conservation movement, that is, the peculiar combination of history and nature, the Fontana Forest was depicted as a cultural and environmental heritage, presented as one of the so-called natural monuments of the nation<sup>39</sup>. The forest was not a mere ornament, but an essential part of the Italian landscape. In a country like Italy “the inessential has always appeared essential”, therefore any other consideration regarding profitability and budgetary matters had to become secondary in relation to the priority to save what was perceived by the local elites as a basic need<sup>40</sup>.

Although included on the 1871 list, the Fontana forest remained under attack by developers and a 1893 plan proposed the transformation of the area into a farm<sup>41</sup>. The local elites were opposed but the matter under contention was not the preservation of the forest but rather the way in which it would be transformed.

As argued in a letter sent anonymously to a local newspaper, the forest needed restoration and it should have been freed by the peasants using it in order to be preserved as a park<sup>42</sup>. In the

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33 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, Rapporti dei Prefetti (1882-1894), Busta 1, fasc. 5, 6, 9; Busta 13, fasc. 35.

34 'Bosco della Fontana', *La Favilla*, 30 June 1869, 3.

35 On the connection between cultural and historical heritage and nature preservation in the first Italian environmental movement see Luigi Piccioni, *Il volto amato della patria. Il primo movimento per la protezione della natura in Italia. 1880-1934*, (Monza: TeMi, 2014).

36 ACS, MAIC, Direzione Generale Agricoltura, I Versamento, Busta 0721, fasc. 2869.

37 Maria Bozzini, *Il Bosco della Fontana e l'eremo dei Camaldolesi* (Mirandola: Campanini – Malagoli, 197?), pp. 9, 18.

38 Dario A. Franchini, Maria Giovanna Rossi, Bruno Agosti, *Bosco Virgiliano. Un parco giardino alla porta di casa* (Mantova: Comune di Mantova, 1983), pp. 19-26.

39 This kind of approach was diffused in most of the European countries. For the connections between the emerging Italian conservationism and the European experiences see Luigi Piccioni, 'Nature Preservation and Protection in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Italy (1880s-1950s)', in M. Armiero and M. Hall (eds.), *Nature and History in Modern Italy*, pp. 251-268 (Athens: Ohio University press, 2010).

40 PA, Legislatura XV, Sessione 1, Camera dei Deputati, Discussioni, 8 Feb. 1886, 16589.

41 Alfonso Capilupi, *Il Bosco Fontana nell'economia agraria* (Mantova: Stab. Tip. Lit. G. Mondovì, 1893).

42 Learco Zanardi, *La foresta bosco della fontana. Tra storia e leggenda* (Mantova: Editoriale Sommetti, 2010), p. 263.

end, this was the transformation imposed upon the Fontana Forest. By the end of the nineteenth century, a network of rail infrastructures and an urban tram system – stopping exactly at the entrance to the Fontana Forest – completed the modernization of the city<sup>43</sup>. In the midst of that urban modernization – admittedly rather gentle compared to what was occurring in other European cities at that time – the local elite decided to invest in creating a park and organized the space and time of the Fontana Forest through an intensive calendar of community events that made this peri-urban forest more and more popular<sup>44</sup>. The creation of an urban park was a different means towards the incorporation of nature into modernity and into the social framework of the new state: the forest had to become modern and adapt to new times and needs.

In the end, middle-class expectations were fulfilled through the realization of tramways and pathways, the (re)invention of festivities and sociability, and the abolition of communal rights. Unfortunately, World War One temporarily broke with this tradition and the forest was returned to its previous public service of supplying wood, this time for the construction of bridges over the Piave River<sup>45</sup>.

### **The forest in the furnace: the Follonica Forest**

Any visitor approaching Massa Marittima, the Tuscan town comprising the coastal forest of Follonica, from November to July during the entire nineteenth century would have quickly seen two constantly burning flames, visible from afar. Those never-ending bright streams emanated from the ironworks that dominated the landscape and defined the community. The vast surrounding territory looked rather hostile to settlements, covered with large tracts of forest and 20 hectares of marshlands, dotted with scattered villages<sup>46</sup>. It is rather hard to find any information about salient facts regarding this forest during the last decades of the nineteenth century<sup>47</sup>. However, we can rely on a report by the central Forestry Department on the forest conditions: the vast wooded areas occurred in a patchwork pattern with cleared fields; its vegetation was composed primarily of conifer and chestnut trees and included a few cork oaks; coppices persisted in very poor condition and old-growth trees were roughly on average 30 years old<sup>48</sup>.

The production of iron was deeply embedded within the socio-ecological organization of Follonica and its territory since the late Middle Ages and we will explore how modernization affected both. To paraphrase the critical geographer David Harvey, modernity did not just produce an ecology, but it was intrinsically an ecology<sup>49</sup>. Workers, trees, water, minerals, and even mosquitoes, were part of the factory ecology in Follonica.

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43 Giancarlo Ganzerla, *Binari sul Garda* (Desenzano: Associazione “Carlo Brusa”, 2004), pp. 275-276.

44 Zanardi, *La foresta bosco della fontana*, 211-217.

45 Armiero, *A Rugged Nation. Mountains and the Making of Modern Italy: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, p. 102. Along the Piave River between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1918 was fought a decisive battle for the Italian Army during the First World War leading Italy to the victory.

46 Archivio di Stato di Grosseto (hereafter ASG), Prefettura di Grosseto, Gabinetto, Busta 11, fasc. 30, sottof. 2.

47 The archives of the public local body responsible for the forest management – the Genio Civile – has not accessioned and inventoried records concerning this period yet. Moreover, the province in fact remained devoid of a Forest Committee, the local authority over forest affairs established by the 1877 Forest Act, until 1887 (See: ACS, MI, Rapporti dei Prefetti (1882-1894), Busta 11, fasc. 30, sottof. 3. Prefettura di Grosseto, Relazione semestrale 28 settembre 1887).

48 PA, Legislatura XIV, Sessione 1, Camera dei Deputati, doc. n. XVIII, *Intorno all'amministrazione dei boschi demaniali dichiarati inalienabili dalla legge 20 giugno 1871*, 69-76.

49 “Environmental conditions and processes do not operate separately from social, economic, and cultural processes and the actually existing conditions are always the result of intricate transformations combining

The ecology of the area dictated the organization of work, transforming the production of iron into a seasonal activity connected to the cycle of malaria transmission and the migration patterns of the factories' workers. During the seasonal peak of the mosquito infestation, the furnaces stopped and the workers returned to their homes. The need to adjust the timing of work production and workers' mobility to the mosquitoes' ecology made the landscape a strange blend of industrial modernity and rural backwardness. Although the furnaces inscribed the landscape with the mark of modernity, there was another, less visible landscape in which workers' bodies, parasites, mosquitoes, and stagnant waters blended.

We must question the very idea of a dichotomy between a modern landscape made of furnaces and industrial workers and a backward landscape made of mosquitoes and “nature”. After all, in the furnace-produced fires that illuminated the skies over Follonica there was more nature than one generally recognizes in a product of industrial modernity. The furnaces processed hematite deposits from the island of Elba, only 26 kilometres from the coastal town of Follonica, minerals which Ermenegildo Pini and Paolo Savi, two Italian naturalists, cheerfully described as “available in a prodigious amount and accessible”<sup>50</sup>. Without the rich water resources of the area the furnaces and the other machinery could not be operated. But first and foremost, the fires contained the “forest” which provided energy to the entire productive cycle in Follonica<sup>51</sup>. Its trees were part of both the industrial and the rural landscape. The forest was incorporated by modernity, even if the furnaces themselves were characterized by obsolete technologies demanding a massive and in many ways unnecessary expenditure of energy. In the open top shaft furnaces, most of the fuel located in the upper part burned away without any possibility of energy and heat recovery<sup>52</sup>. The forest was literally fuelling the industrial production.

Forests were the only available local energy source<sup>53</sup> and the Italian administration inherited precise conditions concerning its their exploitation and ensuring a regular timber supply. For this purpose, forests located at distance of eight-ten miles from the smelters were exclusively at the service of the factory regardless of whom they belonged to. However, such a strict regulatory system had paid very little concern to environmental protection and even if it had been ecologically sustainable to some extent, it had completely disregarded the social role of that natural resource<sup>54</sup>. As is so often in the case cases, a complex system of plants, soil, animals, and humans became reduced to a wood mine<sup>55</sup>. Some hunting rights were spared for local people, but all other consuetudinary uses were prohibited but not effectively erased. As a matter of fact, the forest had been at the centre of a heated quarrel between the Municipality and the factories since at least 1775. Despite several attempts at conciliation, in 1866 the City Council of Massa Marittima decided unsuccessfully to resolve the dispute through a legal proceeding<sup>56</sup>. In 1882 and again in 1884 the prefect<sup>57</sup> of the area tried to reach an agreement

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society and nature in infinite ways.” D. Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford, Blackwell 1996) pp. 186-187.

50 Alessandro Gelli, Giovanni Gaggioli, *Alti forni fusori di Follonica* (Massa Marittima: Minucci, 1884), p. 9.

51 Francesca Zagari, *Il metallo nel medioevo. Tecniche, strutture, manufatti* (Roma: Palombi, 2006), p. 184.

52 Emilio Cortese, *Gli alti forni fusori di Follonica nel 1898* (Torino: Tip. Cassone succ. Candeletti, 1899), pp. 6, 32.

53 M. Abrate, 'L'impiego del carbon fossile nella siderurgia italiana (1861-1913)', *Archivio Economico dell'Unificazione Italiana*, Serie I, Vol. XIII, Fascicolo I (1965): 11.

54 Angela Quattrucci, *La Magona del ferro. Gestione aziendale e provvidenze sociali nell'evoluzione delle fabbriche del Granducato di Toscana (XVIII-XIX secolo)* (Napoli; Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1994), p. 19.

55 Marco Armiero, 'The Tree and the Machine. Manufacture, Communities and Institutions in the Woods of Abruzzo (Southern Italy)', in M. Agnoletti and S. Anderson (eds.), *Forest History: International Studies on Socioeconomic and Forest*, (Wallingford: CABI Publishing, 2000), pp. 109-117.

56 ASG, Prefettura di Grosseto, Affari dei Comuni, Busta 194.

between the Municipality and the Public Domain officials abolishing those common rights which ensured timber, firewood, and chestnuts for the communities living in the mountains. The agreement contemplated dividing the forest into two halves: one portion was meant to remain a use-free property of the state and the other was supposed to be transferred to the Municipality for the benefit of the local population, but this proposal failed<sup>58</sup>.

In the end, the forest itself became a living factory. Among the trees smoke rose from the *carbonaie*, the conical piles of wood covered with leaves and ventilated by holes in their sides in which charcoal was produced. Poor migrants from the mountains around the cities of Bergamo and Pistoia managed those carbonaie, mediating through work their metabolic relationship between the industrial factory, the ironworks, and the natural factory, the forest. While two naturalists, Giorgio Santi and Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti, expressed early disapproval of this forest depletion, also criticizing the erosion of the multiple uses of forest resources<sup>59</sup>, local communities relied on the availability of trees and on the needs of the ironworks for their survival<sup>60</sup>. Indeed, in 1872 and in 1873 the Forestry Department of Follonica provided work for more than three hundred people in the coal making process alone<sup>61</sup>.

The production of the factory and the reproduction of the forest did not proceed at an equal rate. Our sources spoke of a “great misfortune” of fuel shortages in 1875. Facing a severe decrease in coal production, the local forest officer appealed to the Ministry of Agriculture to allow further cuts to the state domain in order to “avoid protests”, but the condition of the local forests seemed to be compromised<sup>62</sup>. During the 1890s most of the fuel that kept the plants running came from the nearby wooded areas of the Umbria region and from Sardinia<sup>63</sup>.

The ironworks were not solely responsible for the deplorable state of the local forests. Since the 1871 there had been a continuous erosion of the forested areas for agricultural purposes, with a peak in 1880 when clear-cutting reached a record level of 1453 hectares on the whole estate of 12400 hectares<sup>64</sup>. Following the post-1861 liberalization measures<sup>65</sup>, charcoal prices escalated due to the gradual reduction of the forested areas, the expansion of the national demand for steel, and the lack of proximity of suitable forests<sup>66</sup>. At the beginning of the twentieth century the old-fashioned wood-burning ironworks of Follonica was shut down and became a secondary fusion ironworks fully dependent on the integrated iron and steel plant

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57 In the Italian state the prefect is the representative of the central government in the district.

58 ACS, MI, Rapporti dei Prefetti (1882-1894), Busta 11, fasc. 30, sottoff. 1, 2. Prefettura di Grosseto, Relazione semestrale 30 giugno 1882; Relazione semestrale 9 febbraio 1884.

59 Tiziano Arrigoni, Claudio Saragosa, Angela Quattrucci, *Luoghi e vie del ferro nella Toscana Granducale* (Roccastrada: Tipo-lito Vieri, 1985), pp. 10, 20-21.

60 Municipio di Massa Marittima, *Conservazione dello stabilimento siderurgico di Follonica* (Massa Marittima: Pallini, 1889), p. 7.

61 ACS, MAIC, Direzione Generale Agricoltura, I Versamento, Busta 746, fasc. 2921 and Busta 748, fasc. 2920.

62 ACS, MAIC, Direzione Generale Agricoltura, I Versamento, Busta 749, fasc. 2923.

63 Cortese, *Gli alti forni fusori di Follonica*, 15.

64 *Ibidem*.

65 The main interventions of the state and the local authorities aimed at removing barriers and tariffs to help steel plants expand productivity and commercial exchange, increasing agricultural profits, and simplifying land use rights. See: ASG, Prefettura di Grosseto, Leggi, Busta 27; ASG, Prefettura di Grosseto, Affari Governativi, Busta 91.

66 Ivan Tognarini, *L'altoforno numero uno, monumento di archeologia industriale. Note di storia della siderurgia piombinese attraverso gli ultimi secoli* (Perugia: Crace, 2008), pp. 39-40.



located in the near harbour town of Piombino. This conversion implied the use of coal coke, severing the ecology of the industrial production from that of the forest<sup>67</sup>.

### **At the frontier of modernity: the Monticchio Forest**

The forest of Monticchio was located in the earthquake prone district of Melfi in the province of Basilicata, also called Lucania, on the slopes of the Vulture mountain, an inactive volcano. At the time of national unification, Monticchio, about 7000 hectares, was one of the most impressive forests in the Southern provinces. It included a large number of old beeches and oaks useless for wood production because of cracks and cavities in their trunks, countless young ashes, maples, and native fruit trees, constituting a crucial area for the regeneration of the forest, and an enormous range of shrubs. Monticchio also housed a vast array of wild animals, especially boars<sup>68</sup>. The new liberal regime was initially expected to bring a more effective management plan concerning the forest. An example of that new approach was the work of the eminent local forest officer, Gioacchino Labollita, who proposed cutting down of all dead and diseased plants, converting 1/3 of the area into agricultural land, and replanting the rugged steep slopes<sup>69</sup>. This plan never materialised.

In 1851 a severe earthquake affected the socio-ecological balance of the area and stressed a second strategic role of the forest besides its ecological and silvicultural importance. Hundreds of peasants were being forced to leave their damaged home towns and had moved towards the wooded area, particularly to the Municipality of Rionero in Vulture<sup>70</sup>. In 1861 Rionero had 13000 residents, but neither fields nor commons available for the poor, thereby causing the forest to acquire a greater social relevance. Nevertheless, that natural abundance of forestland was not placed at the disposal of local people.

During the Bourbon Kingdom the collective rights of wood gathering, overnight stays, grazing, irrigation, passage, hunting, and collecting acorns, forage and wild fruit were almost eradicated through bureaucratic procedures and police interventions. When the new kingdom was created, the hope of a restoration of those lost collective rights was mounted among local citizens. Hundreds of residents and the representative assembly of Rionero petitioned the Italian king to acknowledge the plight of poor peasants and their right to benefit from the new national property. In their petition, those citizens related the forest issue to a broader political agenda, arguing that the acceptance of those rights would have ensured a peaceful establishment of the new Italian legal and institutional framework, including the poorest classes into the nation-building process<sup>71</sup>.

The authorities not only recommended rejection of the petition, but also imposed a higher grazing charge. At that stage the Municipality demanded protection of the common rights but in 1872 the Appeal Court ruled against the municipality; in the ruling the judges rejected the request of Rionero as “wanting of history, right and law”<sup>72</sup>.

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67 Rombai, Tognarini, *Follonica e la sua industria del ferro*, 242; Michele Lungonelli, *La Magona d'Italia. Impresa, lavoro e tecnologie in un secolo di siderurgia toscana (1865-1975)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991), p. 51.

68 Gioacchino Labollita, *Monografia del Bosco di Monticchio* (Perugia: Tipografia Martini e Boncompagni, 1863), p. 13.

69 Labollita, *Monografia del Bosco di Monticchio*, 22.

70 Donato De Carlo, *Il Vulture volgarmente detto Monticchio* (Napoli: Tipografia dell'Ariosto, 1851), pp. 3-4.

71 ACS, Ministero di Agricoltura e Foreste, Direzione Generale Affari Generali e Personale, Usi Civici, Comuni, Busta 801, fasc. Rionero in Vulture.

72 Giuseppe Pica, *In difesa del Comune di Rionero contro il pubblico demanio per usi civici sulla tenuta detta Badia di Monticchio* (1872), pp. 3-4, 49, 126.

Disillusion with the new Italian Kingdom, poverty, and loyalty to the Bourbon dynasty contributed to ignite the brigandage within Southern Italy especially with a remarkable stronghold in the forest of Monticchio<sup>73</sup>. Among contemporaries the wild nature of the Apennine forests was considered “not only the background framing the brigand but seemed to generate him and share some basic features with him”<sup>74</sup>. In order to defeat the rebels, the military had to take control of those forests, transform them, modernize them. The topography had fostered the formation of rebel bands and the army needed to change it<sup>75</sup>. In 1864 the Ministry of Agriculture decreed the opening of the Monticchio forest through the construction of five ten metre wide roads for the movement of wood. To design the ordered forest, the project included the hiring of farmers, engineers, soldiers, and rangers. The plan was expected to restore peace and order, to implement communication and thus enhance trade among communities living in the area. In addition the money earned from logging was a helpful incentive for the the public treasury.

Concerning infrastructures, nothing represented modernity better than the train. No other public work than a railway line could have better exploited such a large wood supply. Since 1861 a potential railroad project crossing the forest threatened its socio-ecological system<sup>76</sup>. Although a sustainable management plan would have advised against the massive felling of trees, even the local forest office bowed to the promise of the railroad, agreeing to the deforestation of a three-kilometre section of the forest along the proposed route. In 1862, although the Department of Agriculture had not completed the routing plan, the government opened an auction for the sale of the land and the production of railway ties. The authorities rejected the single bid they received because the cost of the railway ties was too high and the bidder would have kept all of the unused timber<sup>77</sup>.

In the minds of the authorities, a railway would have provided a significant step towards the modernization of the entire region and the civilization of its inhabitants:

The culture would expand; masses forced to live out of whatever sort of human community, as often happen in Basilicata, would be seen bestialised and wild in the forest no more; especially in winters because of swollen streams and rivers entire villages would not be seen short of everyday comforts or obliged to pay for them such a high price to consider ordinary stuff privileges<sup>78</sup>.

From 1871 on the railway construction intersected with a second issue, the selling of the national property. A private society, the *Società Civile di Monticchio*, contracted to build the railway and buy the forest to cope with the high demand for ties, but in the end it managed to

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73 After Garibaldi's military expedition in the South, a dramatic uprising started to inflame the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Historians have explained this insurgency in different ways, connecting it to the failure of the agrarian reform policy, loyalty to the former king and the Church, rejection of conscription and taxation, and common criminality.

74 On the Monticchio forest and the civil war after the Unification see Armiero, *A Rugged Nation*, pp. 66-87, *infra*.

75 Giuseppe Bourelly, *Il brigantaggio dal 1860 al 1865 nelle zone militari di Melfi e Lacedonia* (Venosa: Edizioni Osanna, 1987), pp. 76-77; Adriana Ricciuti, *Origini e sviluppo del brigantaggio in Basilicata dopo il 1860* (Napoli: Loffredo Editore, 1871), pp. 47-49.

76 ACS, MAIC, Direzione Generale Agricoltura, I Versamento, Busta 753, fasc. 2940.

77 ACS, MAIC, Direzione Generale Agricoltura, I Versamento, Busta 753, fasc. 2939.

78 Roberto Sangiovanni, *Strada ferrata da Barletta a Potenza. Esposizione sull'utilità del progetto* (Napoli: De Angelis, 1873), pp. V-VII.

pay only the first instalment and the property returned to the state<sup>79</sup>. These two environmentally risky issues moved in parallel for 20 years and both ended in 1892 with the opening of the Ofanto railway line – built by the *Società Italiana per le Strade Ferrate Meridionali*, a private society from Tuscany – and the forest privatization.

At that point the fate of Monticchio Forest was clear. In 1892 a private society from the Marche region, *Società A. Lanari*, purchased the estate and launched the reclamation. The programme was expected to last eight years and to tackle the economic, social and health conditions of the area. In order to increase productivity the plan distinguished between soil suitable for farming and soil suitable for silviculture. The farm land was divided into 20 or 30 hectare plots, complete with a house and assigned to colonists from the centre of the country; the forestland which included steep slopes, was renewed, reforested or allocated to private pasture<sup>80</sup>. The agrarian colonization fulfilled three requirements: filling the demographic gap generated by the late nineteenth century mass emigration; improving the landlord-tenant relationships; providing land and work to skilled but poor<sup>81</sup>.

The establishment of the new unified state applied The establishment of the new unified state created a pressure on Monticchio. The eradication of brigandage, the need for infrastructure development connecting Northern and Southern provinces, the imposition of private property over any form of commons, and the reclamation plan were priorities in the political agenda of the new Kingdom of Italy. In 1900, compared to 1863, about half of the forest that had previously covered the Vulture mountain was gone: of 7000 hectares 3500 had been converted into regular tree plantations or farmland.

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79 Franco Cacciatore, *La storia infinita della ferrovia in Lucania. Due protagonisti: F. Del Zio e M. Mancini* (Melfi: Tarsi, 2001), pp. 13-14, 18-21.

80 Società A. Lanari & C., *La tenuta di Monticchio in Basilicata (ettari 5340). Bonifica e colonizzazione (1892-1900)* (Roma: Officina Poligrafica Romana, 1900), pp. 14-16.

81 Franca Assante, *Basilicata 1904. Il mito della colonizzazione interna*, in R. De Lorenzo (ed.), *Storia e misura. Indicatori sociali ed economici nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia (secoli XVIII-XX)* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2007), pp. 263-364.



Figure 3: Map of the Monticchio domain showing infrastructure, land use and vegetation in 1900. From Società A. Lanari & C., "La tenuta di Monticchio in Basilicata (ettari 5340). Bonifica e colonizzazione (1802-1900)". Roma: Officina Poligrafica Romana, 1900

## Conclusions

According to James Scott, state authorities have simplified nature, imposing official measurements, knowledge, and property rights. Simplification is what also occurred in the three case-studies we have analysed. Contrasting views abounded: among communal, state, and private tenure; between poor peasants and middle-class; among *carbonai*, entrepreneurs and officials; and between brigands and loyalists. Those clashes clearly revealed irreducible visions and practices of nature appropriation and the state's attempt to codify property rights. In the course of Italy's national unification project, the first comprehensive Civil Code was enacted in 1865 and it was grounded on private property as a univocal, time-limited, and one-to-one relationship between individuals and resources. The establishment of a clear system of property access, use, exclusion and management led the governmental socio-economic agenda until the 1890s, and, thus, if public property represented an exception, common property regimes were incompatible with that new scheme<sup>82</sup>. Common lands and collective associations partially resisted and somewhere survived on the ground and at lower administrative levels, producing long-lasting legal disputes, often endless. Two judicial systems confronted each other throughout the late eighteenth century revealing themselves

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82 Alberto Aquarone, *L'unificazione legislativa e i codici del 1865* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1960), pp. 37, 49-50.



absolute and incapable of dialogue<sup>83</sup>. According to the state vision, the multiplicity of property regimes, and of economic uses were the debris of the feudal past and revealed an unfinished project of modernization aiming to clear the remains of a feudal past<sup>84</sup>.

The reduction from multiple uses to a prevalent use is a leitmotif in the three cases we have presented. In the process of simplification, the socio-ecologies in which those forests were embedded changed. The Fontana Forest became a space for leisure, a natural projection of the city which was negotiating its economic role in the new nation. Transforming that forest into a park, thereby turning an aristocratic estate into a green area, accessible through tramways and open to the new middle-class sociability, offered the possibility for the urban elite to reclaim their historical grandeur while remaining consistent with a spirit of modernity, which turned an aristocratic estate into a green area.

In Follonica, forests and ironworks formed what we have labelled a natural factory, a perfect example of a hybrid between human and non-human. Simplification here implied constructing trees as standing piles of charcoal ready to be burnt in the furnaces. It was at least from the late eighteenth century that multiple uses of the forest resources were discouraged in order to focus only on the charcoal production. But after the political unification of the country, local communities and the Municipality of Massa Marittima had to deal with another entity, whose power and authority easily overcame the factories' owners and regional authorities. As a matter of fact, an 1876 forest inspection recorded some other uses occurring in those forests, but unequivocally defined them as illegal.

Located in the interior part of Southern Italy, the Monticchio forest was symbolically and materially at the borders of the newly constituted state, representing the otherness that unification sought to erase. Monticchio was the headquarters of the rebels fighting against the regular army; it embodied the backwardness and wildness of the Italian South. In Monticchio modernity arrived at bayonet point and strode into the forest to conquer it. And indeed the state did conquer Monticchio, expropriating it from the Church, expelling the rebels, placing its trees at the service of the railroad, and, in the end, transforming a large portion of the forest into farmland.

In each of our case studies the state simplified the forest in order to make it easy to manage, control, and shape, that is, to place it at the service of what we define as a modern socio-ecological formation. Since 1861 the socio-economic simplification runs parallel to legislative and bureaucratic simplifications and elaborations: national codes and homogeneous local governments replaced old legal statutes and by-laws. The state progressively extended its offices, co-opted local elites, and, as owner, filtered out entrepreneurs' proposals as well.

Modernity was not the opposite of "nature", it did not develop outside nature, and it did not free humans from it. In our case studies it is evident that modernity constructed new socio-ecologies which incorporated forests. The Fontana Forest was at the centre of an urban-rural system, comprising the local elite, the mosquitoes, the tramways, the peasants from Marmirolo, and the historical memories embodied in that place. In Follonica the forests were part of a hybrid landscape; we might be tempted to label it as an industrial landscape, but wasn't it also a "natural" landscape with trees, stagnant water, and mosquitoes? After all, the smoke obscuring the skies over Follonica rose from both the furnaces and forests. In the case

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83 Paolo Grossi, *Un altro modo di possedere. L'emersione di forme alternative di proprietà alla coscienza giuridica postunitaria* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1977).

84 The institution of commons dated back to the Middle Age and they literally represented the remains of a feudal past. Especially in the Southern provinces the motto encapsulating the legal beliefs of these rights was "UBI FEUDA IBI DEMANIA". Giovanni Curis, *Usi civici, proprietà collettive e latifondi* (Napoli: N. Jovene, 1917).

of Monticchio the political burst into the forest with great vigour. The rebels hiding in it were – at least partially – the by-product of a hoped-for new arrangement in the socio-ecologies of the South, that is, the agrarian reform that should have radically transformed the relationships between humans and the land<sup>85</sup>. That reality did not mean that the forest stayed untouched. On the contrary, the new state changed Monticchio radically through the construction of the railroad and the reclamation and allotment of a large part of the forest. Those plots allocated to colonists from Central and Northern Italy, loyal to the new kingdom, thereby confirming the incorporation of Monticchio in the new socio-ecology of the nation but on a subaltern basis.

In our cases, it is clear that forests did not have obvious or self-defined roles within concepts of political modernity. The Fontana Forest represents the transition from an almost abandoned rural area granting wood and fruit to peasants to a peri-urban park serving different recreational needs; the Follonica Forest reveals the over-exploitation of wood by the local ironworks; and the Monticchio Forest illustrates how the making of the nation state shaped that area, imposing a new property regime and a new political order. However, we have avoided a declensionist narrative – that modernity destroys nature – by instead trying to see how modernity built new socio-ecological systems. The critique of those systems cannot be based simply on the understanding of when and where the forest survived, but we believe it must include the structures of socio-ecologies, as for instance, the survival of common uses, the discipline of labour, the redistribution of profits, and the organization of property.

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85 The link between the brigandage and a hoped-for land reform is an argument supported by two key milestones in the Italian Southern question: Franco Molfese, *Il brigantaggio in Italia dopo l'Unità* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1964; Re-edition West Indian, 2012); Antonio Gramsci, *Il Risorgimento* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1971).