

The Hydro-Politics of Fascism: The Lake Tana Dam Project and Mussolini's 1935 Invasion of Ethiopia

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Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, also called the Italo-Ethiopian crisis (1935-1936), was a global historical event because it represented a major step in fascist aggression against the Versailles Order. My research project examines the Italo-Ethiopian war as an infrastructural conflict over the water resources of the Horn of Africa and investigates the hydro-politics of Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia. In particular, I focus on the plan for the construction of a dam at Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile.

The aim of this project is to write the first international environmental history of the Italo-Ethiopian war that places colonial natural environments at the center of the global conflict between the liberal international order and fascist imperialism. Analyzing past hydro-politics of the Horn of Africa is crucial to putting current geopolitics of sovereignty and water security in the Horn of Africa in historical perspective, including the current "Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam," a massive project begun in 2011 to harness the Blue Nile with the largest African dam ever, and the seventh largest in the world.

The continuity of Italian colonialism between the nineteenth and the twentieth century offers a unique laboratory to analyze the metamorphosis of liberal into fascist imperialism in terms of colonial practices, scientific planning, and environmental management. By examining the role of African ecologies, scientific expertise employed in the Lake Tana dam project, and colonial hydro-politics, I will explore how a fascist political economy violently targeting natural resources emerged in the years leading up to World War II.