

Conference Agenda

Session

1005-210: From different places and through multiples lenses: Memories, histories and measures of burning landscapes

Time: Thursday, 24/Aug/2023: 2:15pm - 3:45pm

Location: Unitobler – F 013

Session Chair: Ana Isabel Queiroz

53 seats Unitobler, Lerchenweg 36

Panel

Session Abstract

In this panel we convoke different contemporary histories of fire in distant places around the world. As we will see, with the change of place but also of the one telling the history, the perspectives, scales of work, and sources used to produce knowledge about the uses, representations, and dynamics of fire change substantially. There is no global history of fire, but the dialogue among the three papers that make up this session highlights common political and biophysical realities that go beyond local or national frameworks.

Kroumirie on the Tunisia-Algeria mountain border, communities in fire ecologies in Canada, and the Monchique mountain range at the southwestern tip of Portugal and Europe offer a rich panorama of contemporary wildfire regimes as the result of particular ecological, colonial and scientific entanglements.

The researchers ask: What is the relative importance of climate and landscape changes as part of new fire regimes? To what extent are the ecology and the political economy of planted forests driving an increase in large fires? Is there a link between the ban and decline of agricultural fires and the onset of high-intensity wildfires (the so-called 'firefighting trap')? What politico-judicial processes have governed the use of fire in rural and agricultural areas? How might the survey of practical knowledge of fire leverage a critical history of burning landscapes? How has forestry shaped and been shaped by these (fire) chronologies? After all, what makes an arsonist?

Presentations

From different places and through multiples lenses: Memories, histories and measures of burning landscapes

Chair(s): Ana Isabel Queiroz (NOVA University Lisbon, Portugal)

Presenter(s): Mica Jorgenson (University of Stavanger, Norway), Myriam Amri (Harvard University, USA), Miguel Carmo (NOVA University Lisbon, School of Social Sciences and Humanities (NOVA FCSH), Portugal)

From different places and through multiples lenses: Memories, histories and measures of burning landscapes

Ana Isabel Queiroz, Miguel Carmo & Inês Gomes

Chair: Ana Isabel Queiroz

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Individual presenters:

Bureaucratic Burning: Beginning an Environmental History of Prescribed Fire in Norway

Mica Jorgenson

In June 2021, the Sorta fire in western Norway burned over 700 hectares of encroached heathlands, destroyed three buildings, forced evacuations, and jumped a 270-metre fjord. Norway has not historically experienced aggressive fires like Sorta. Although climate change is responsible for changing fire regimes here, it is working in conjunction with a host of other historical factors: migration resulting from colonisation and war, the industrialisation of agriculture, and the subsequent spread of flammable juniper into former pasture lands.

Land stewards in rural and mountain regions of Norway have a long history of intentionally burning forests for aesthetic, economic, and safety purposes. As fire regimes worsen under climate change, Norway and other nordic states have begun experimenting with prescribed fire based on North American models. However, integration into wildfire prevention policy has been slow. Poor reception of prescribed fire in Norway is a result of the historic alienation of rural people from traditional burning practices and the rise of environmentalism, including scientific forestry and suppression policy, from other parts of the world.

This talk introduces my Norwegian Research Council-funded project on the history of prescribed burning in Norway and the boreal north, including Scandinavia and northern Canada (running from 2023-2026). I will present the early results of my research, specifically government efforts to regulate landscape fire in the early twentieth century. I argue that there is a close relationship between fire and power, and that burning regulations were tied to wider colonial and capitalist projects in Norway.

A Border on Fire: *Pyromanes* and colonizers in the Kroumirie

Myriam Amri

This paper contends with the governance of fire in the region of Kroumirie, today's northern border between Algeria and Tunisia. I consider how forest fires in the Kroumirie, known for notorious green landscapes, became ways for French colonizers coming from Algeria to justify their annexation of the region, from the 1880s onwards inaugurating as such, the beginning of their rule on contemporary Tunisia and the Maghrib region more broadly. Through archival and ethnographic research linking colonial to

contemporary times, I examine fires as social events from which modes of disciplining emerge. In particular, through archives of French environmentalists mixed with newspapers of the early colonial period, I look at how colonizers perceived people of the region as "malicious natives" who set the unique region's flora on fire. These claims that bring intention into fire discourses, render specific individuals into *pyromanes*, arsonists who ought to be controlled and ultimately governed. Fires in the Kroumirie region become as such battlegrounds for the management of the region in contested times. From colonial times onwards, this paper ultimately attempts to understand how fires create in their flaming trails new figures, and new modes of rule that ought to be apprehended from the start of a fire onwards. Ultimately, this paper reckons with fire as a technology of rule that frames processes of annexation, enclosures, and border-making.

The burning landscapes of Monchique: in search of a people's history of extreme fires in the mountains of southern Portugal

Miguel Carmo, Joana Sousa, Marta Silva & Frederico Ágoas

The mountains of Monchique overlook the Atlantic coast in the southwestern corner of the Iberian Peninsula and have been frequently crossed by very large fires during the last few decades. At least since the 1980s the large wildfires of Monchique have figured in Portugal's statistics. Even older inhabitants today reproduce this frightening and unpredictable image of the mountains; stories of surviving fire are told. However, other chronologies, data and perspectives are beginning to shape a curiously distinct history.

Knowledge about fire regimes in Portugal has been tied to state records of occurrences that started in 1980, leaving what happened before in the shadows. Forestry sciences are the main producers of knowledge about fires, being less inclined to provide social-historical thickness and duration. Our study in Monchique is a transdisciplinary microhistory experiment crossing environmental analysis with ethnographic and documentary collection, which is part of a larger research on the uses of fire in the Portuguese national space between 1950 and 2020.

Focusing on the survey of fire practices in the mountains (past and present, sanctioned and illegal) we aim to gradually leverage a critical history of large fires in Monchique. We focus on testimonies and narratives of firsthand users of fire, but also on media, scientific, and governance representations of these practices recorded by other actors in written sources. Today we can say, regardless of future self-correction, that fire has returned to Monchique in the 1980s in uncontrolled and uncultured forms after having been slowly excluded (and forgotten) from the mountains.