Erschienen in: LERG, Charlotte A., Hrsg., Johan ÖSTLING, Hrsg., Jana WEISS, Hrsg., Anne KWASCHIK, Hrsg., Claudia ROESCH, Hrsg.. History of Intellectual Culture 3/2024 : Experimental Spaces: Knowledge Production and its Environments in the Long Nineteenth Century. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024, S. 205-226. ISBN 978-3-11-129138-3 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111291383-010

Gilberto Mazzoli

Climates of Migration: Science, Race, and Agricultural Diplomacy between Italy and the United States, 1895–1916

Abstract: At the turn of the twentieth century, the Italian and US governments sought to create agricultural development projects as a way to direct new Italian migrants toward allegedly underpopulated areas of North America and relocate urban migrants to so-called rural colonies. In order to tailor migrants and national interests, diplomats, politicians, agrarian experts, and social reformers developed a new basis for international collaboration labeled *agricultural diplomacy*. Scientific studies emerged to prove the potential of the southern US states as colonies. This paper focuses on exploring this transnational entanglement of science, race, economy, and politics with Italian migrants in the United States and their ecologies. These agricultural colonies turned out to be spaces of experimentation for both scientific and political purposes: Italian agronomists tested crops and collected data on climates, while Italian diplomats viewed such spaces as useful for experimenting with their ideas of informal expansionism. At the same time, US-American actors – USDA scientists, Southern landowners, and governmental officials – also looked at these agricultural colonies as experimental spaces: testing new forms of agricultural production that could improve urban food provisioning while changing the racial geography of both the city and the countryside.

By highlighting the contribution of the Italian Agricultural Colonial Institute of Florence and its agronomists in the transnational relationship labeled *agricultural diplomacy*, this paper emphasizes its role in the scientization of colonial practice.

Keywords: environmental history, Italian migration, experimental agriculture, climate politics, migrant and colonial transnational knowledge

Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Italian and US governments sought to create agricultural development projects as a way of directing new Italian migrants toward allegedly underpopulated areas in North America and relocate

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111291383-010

urban migrants to so-called rural colonies.[1] On the Italian side, these strategies should be understood as a form of "emigrant colonialism," as labeled by historian Mark Choate.[2] He uses this term to describe a particular trend in Italian foreign policy in which the Italian élites looked at their emigrant communities scattered around the globe as tools to "safeguard *Italianness*" abroad and fulfill imperialist purposes.[3] In the decades spanning 1880 to 1920, the notion of "colonial policy" embraced ideas of economic expansion in connection with migrants.[4] Furthermore, as recently highlighted by Lucy Riall, such transnational ties dated back to the early nineteenth century and are representative of Italian ambitions to have global influence before – and better than – formal colonialism. Following the successful assimilation of ordinary migrants reveals "hidden spaces of empire" and the global making of Italy as an "offshore nation."[5]

On the US-American side, the establishment of agricultural colonies with Italian migrants should be understood under the policy of "Americanizing" immigrants. Such a policy served two main purposes. First, finding a solution to the "urban question": the millions of immigrants arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe were stuck in the cities on the US-American East Coast and their presence was portrayed as an obstacle to a desired urban modernity. Second, the creation of agricultural colonies was seen as an opportunity to replace African Americans in the rural South after the abolition of slavery in 1865 and the subsequent Great Migration to the industrial North. For the US-American government and landowners, Italian immigrants combined the skills necessary for strong agricultural

1 I wish to thank all the colleagues with whom I discussed the matter of this article over conferences and workshops, and in particular: Marco Armiero, Roberta Biasillo, Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto, Colin Fisher, Bernhard Gißibl, Alice Gorton, Anne Kwaschik, Riley Linebaugh, Alina Marktanner, Sara Müller, Anne-Sophie Reichert, Lucy Riall, Claudia Roesch, Daniele Valisena, and Stéphane Van Damme. Furthermore, I am grateful to the editors of this journal and, lastly, to the anonymous peer reviewers for their precious remarks and comments.

2 Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008), 2.

3 Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 57–58. Furthermore, the word *Italianità* frequently reoccurs in the sources produced by the Italian government at the time, such as in the Bollettino Emigrazione Italiana (BEI).

4 Alberto Acquarone, *Dopo Adua: Politica e Amministrazione Coloniale* (Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1989), 261.

5 Lucy Riall, "Hidden Spaces of Empire: Italian colonists in Nineteenth Century Peru," *Past and Present* 25 (2022): 193–233; Lucy Riall, "Offshore Nation: Italians 'Overseas' in the Nineteenth-Century World," *Storica*, 28, no. 83/84 (2022): 9–51.

labor while also being white, which many landowners looked favorably upon.[6] As recently shown by Lauren Braun-Strumfels, a partnership between Italy and the United States in the last decade of the nineteenth century with regard to managing Italian migrants played a substantial role in shaping the restrictive immigration policy of the United States in the early twentieth century.[7] This dialogue included the possibilities of creating agricultural colonies and resettling migrants from the East Coast cities to the South.[8]

Nevertheless, environmental history has recently proved to be a fruitful field of inquiry unveiling new links between the Italian global migratory experience and its relationship with the environment.[9] This means that if we put the environment at the center of the analysis – focusing on agriculture and more deeply analyzing the role of Italian scientific institutions – new details emerge to expand the view on such a transnational dialogue. All institutional actors involved – social and urban reformers, government officials, Italian diplomats, journalists, agronomists, landowners – shared the common goal of managing migrants by exploiting their gardening skills. For some, gardening represented a way to educate immigrants and thus open up a path toward their possible Americanization. For others, gardening was the best means to clear modern cities of *undesirable* elements, while replacing other *undesirables*, the African American farmworkers, in Southern states. Hence, gardening emerged as the connecting element between all parties involved in a transnational network. I have labeled this entanglement between foreign policy, international science, imagined environments, private firms, and the agricultural knowledge of migrant communities as *agricultural diplomacy*.[10]

---

6 For an overview of how Italians in the US navigated race hierarchies and *whiteness*, see: Stefano Luconi, "Italian Immigrants, Whiteness, and Race: A Regional Perspective," *Italian American Review* 11, no. 1 (2021): 4–26.

7 Lauren Braun-Strumfels, *Partners in Gatekeeping: How Italy Shaped U.S. Immigration Policy over Ten Pivotal Years, 1891–1901* (Athens: Georgia UP, 2023).

8 Lauren Braun-Strumfels, "'A Desirable Class of Homeseekers': Colonization, Race, and Italian Migration in the Progressive Era US South," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 43, no. 2 (2024): 34–69.

9 Marco Armiero and Richard Tucker, eds., *Environmental History of Modern Migrations* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Roberta Biasillo, Claudio De Majo, and Daniele Valisena, "Environments of Italianness: For an Environmental History of Italian Migrations," *Modern Italy* 26, no. 2 (2021): 119–124.

10 For a deeper analysis of this entanglement of urban politics, Italian diplomacy, and migrants' gardening skills and the environment, see Gilberto Mazzoli, "Italianness in the United States between migrants' informal gardening practices and agricultural diplomacy (1880–1912)," *Modern Italy* 26, no. 2 (2021): 199–215.

Furthermore, adopting the perspective of environmental history allows us to conceptualize these agricultural colonies as experimental spaces. Such a conceptualization is relevant for the following reasons. First, approached as experimental spaces, agricultural colonies reveal how, and which, scientific knowledge was produced to support their establishment, as well as which actors and institutions contributed to these knowledge discourses: perceptions regarding climates, soil surveys, and gardening experimentation were intertwined with migratory and colonial policies in terms of affecting the cultural construction of a place as suitable for establishing a settlement with a specific population group. In addition, rethinking the role of such experimental spaces in colonial practice underlines the complex entanglement between science and colonialism characterizing the beginning of the twentieth century.[11]

Second, such a conceptualization sheds new light on the historical relationship between US-American agriculture and immigration, while revealing just how experimental agriculture was in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. One example is truck farming, which could be considered an experiment in terms of a more sustainable form of agriculture, which is why it caught the interest of the US government and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).[12] At the time, truck farming became more and more common among US-American farmers for an array of reasons: changes in the dietary habits of city-dwellers following the increase of urban populations due to migration influxes, the diffusion of railroad networks, and refrigeration systems allowing for better transit and commerce of otherwise perishable vegetables. Added to this was the establishment of agricultural experiment stations and the end of slavery in the South, all of which concurred with the rise of the practice of truck farming.[13] Hence, the extent of the diffusion of truck farming as a mature industry was supported by many US-American actors at the same time as immigrants – like the Italians – became available as suitable farm laborers.

Finally, analyzing the actual agricultural practices and experiments, rather than exploring the Progressive Era debates concerning these colonies as a gateway for studying US race relations and the desirability of immigrants, reveals a

11 Anne Kwaschik, "Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Kolonialen als kultureller Code und internationale Praxis um 1900," *Historische Anthropologie* 28 (2020): 399–423.

12 Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, "The Country Life Commission Reconsidering a Milestone in American Agricultural History," *Agricultural History* 78, no. 3 (2004): 289–316.

13 James L. Jr. McCorkle, "Moving Perishables to Market: Southern Railroads and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of Southern Truck Farming," *Agricultural History* 66, no. 1 (1992): 42–62; James L. Jr. McCorkle, "Agricultural Experiment Stations and Southern Truck Farming," *Agricultural History* 62, no. 2 (1988): 234–243.

much more complex picture of Italian immigration to the US. It highlights the role of migrants and their gardening skills as well as their willingness to experiment with crops that were native to their homeland but not to the US-American soil even though they were considered adaptable to the American climate. Furthermore, it highlights the active role of the Italian state in this transnational relationship: surely Italian governmental actors contributed to solving a pressing US-American question. At the same time, however, their participation in the dialogue was shaped by the opportunity of an economic and political – albeit informal – expansionism.

There were several actors who also contributed to imagining these experiments of agricultural colonization. Among them, we find Edmondo Mayor des Planches, who served as the Italian ambassador to the United States during 1901–1910, Prof. Antonio Ravaioli, the commercial delegate at the Italian embassy in Washington, Carl Bernhard Schmidt, a German recruiting agent for US railroad companies and senator in Colorado, and Louis Magid, the president of the Silk Association of America. Within this transoceanic network, science and scientists stood out with the specific task of proving the potential of the southern US states as prosperous rural colonies.

A pivotal institution between Italian and US parties was the Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano (IACI)[14] founded in Florence in 1907 and which was tasked with providing colonial agents with the necessary scientific knowledge on agriculture and other sciences. Italy's foreign policy in these decades viewed its emigrant population as a colonial opportunity, and the founding of an institution such as the IACI should be understood as part of this policy. In the early documentation produced by the IACI and its scientific director, Gino Bartolommei Gioli, the presence of an emigrant population to be supported in the acclimatization phase was considered a major driver behind the creation of the institute. In its foundational charter, the IACI states that its foremost objectives were "to prepare agents who are specialists in colonial agriculture, for service to our migrant population" and "to act as an information center for the diffusion of reports on colonial culture, and on the economic and agrarian conditions of non-European countries subject to agricultural immigration."[15] In this context, the institute was tasked with scientifically backing the interests of Italian communities, the state, and the Americanization attempts of US officials. Italian agronomists such as Tito Tabet and Gino Coppini were tasked with exploring the conditions of the environments in which a colonization project was planned. Through experimental cultivation, soil sur-

14 Italian Colonial Agricultural Institute, hereinafter IACI.

15 Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano, *Statuto* (1909): 5–6.

veys, and by studying the climate, they contributed to creating a body of information on US-American environments that would serve Italian colonial efforts. By uncovering underexplored avenues of the global history of Italy and its expansionist ambitions, this paper aims to investigate the interplay between science, race, and transnational politics with the environment that occurred between Italy and the US during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The paper is structured in two main parts driven by two research questions. First, what was the role of climate, agricultural knowledge, and the environment in the transnational relationship between Italy and the United States aimed at regulating migratory flows? Second, how did professional agronomists contribute to creating scientific knowledge in support of these experimental agricultural colonization projects proposed by the Italian government? Hence, the first part explores the settings of this entanglement of the Italian and US foreign policies regarding the possible creation of agricultural settlements. This phase saw the emergence of the idea of a necessary *acclimatization* of Italian migrants to the areas in which an agricultural colonization project was planned. These ideas of *acclimatization* needed scientific support, which is why the second part of the paper focuses on the work of the IACI and its agronomists to explore the role of a scientific institution in Italian foreign policy toward the United States at this time. Using the documentation it produced, it is possible to unveil perceptions and understandings of the new climates and environments but also ideas on how to exploit new US-American regions through agricultural experimentation.

This paper relies on multiple primary sources: US-American newspapers, correspondence between Italian diplomats and US-American landowners held at the Historical Diplomatic Archives of the Italian Foreign Ministry in Rome, and archival briefs and research papers produced by the agronomists of the IACI.

1 Contextualizing Climates: Gardening, Race, and the Politics toward *Acclimatizing* Italian Emigrants at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Between 1880 and 1924, more than four million Italians reached the United States, the majority settling in the large cities on the East Coast.[16] Many Italian migrants

16 Humbert Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans* (Oxford: University Press, 1983), 62.

practiced agriculture on the outskirts of major US cities as a part-time activity, while their main occupations were in the city, in factories or construction.[17] At the time, Italians alongside immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe were depicted as unhealthy subjects, living in US-American cities that were, in turn, described as unhealthy places for them. Immigrant neighborhoods were known for being overcrowded and for their poor hygienic conditions. Furthermore, US authorities feared the political activism of these migrants. These narratives contributed to creating an "urban problem" that needed a solution.[18]

A possible solution started to emerge with the new century as the Italian government pursued relocation plans involving various actors at different times. One of their main advocates was Edmondo Mayor des Planches. During his term as ambassador in Washington (1901–1910), he welcomed a few inspectors and scientific experts sent by the Italian government to evaluate the environmental and economic conditions of the land designated for establishing agricultural colonies. In 1904, Mayor des Planches suggested to the Italian government that it should send Adolfo Rossi, inspector of the Royal Immigration Department of Italy, to the United States. During his journey across Italian settlements in the United States in 1904, Rossi visited several Italian vegetable gardens on the outskirts of San Antonio and came to view Texas as a suitable destination for Italians, where there were promising opportunities for agriculture. At the same time, he admitted to being skeptical of a possible relocation of Italians to California due to the seasonal (and thus unstable) need for agricultural laborers in the wine industry.[19]

In 1904, Prof. Antonio Ravaioli, commercial delegate at the Italian embassy in Washington, released a report on the possibilities of agricultural colonization in the United States using Italian migrants. First, Ravaioli looked at agricultural colonization as a remedy to the heavy inflow of Italian migrants to urban areas. His report examined every region of the United States, describing the preexisting Italian agricultural colonies and reflecting on which states might have offered better conditions for establishing new settlements, such as Georgia, North and South Carolina, Virginia, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. Second, Ravaioli stated that climatic similarities between these areas and Italy would lead to cultural familiarity through crop cultivation and thus make Italian migrants feel at home. Ravaioli also suggested ways to improve the agricultural and economic conditions of the South after the abolition of slavery. In his view, these lands found their soil impoverished by extensive cultivation. A substitution, or juxtaposition, of a new

17 Luigi Villari, *Gli Stati Uniti d'America e l'Emigrazione Italiana* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1912), 256–257.

18 Mazzoli, "*Italianness* in the United States."

19 Bollettino dell'emigrazione italiana (BEI) no. 16 (1904): 104–108.

form of intensive cultivation, such as truck crops for vegetable markets, would allow the soil to regain its fertility. Furthermore, continued Ravaioli, the introduction of a European workforce – seen as already familiar with this type of intensive cultivation – was seen as favorable: "among them, the Italians are the most suited, particularly due to the warm climates."[20]

On January 5, 1905, Lous B. Magid, president of the Silk Association of America, wrote a letter to Mayor des Planches with the aim of building a colony of silkworm farmers in Georgia consisting of a few Italian families. Magid opened the letter – written in Italian – by stating that despite his German heritage, he was very much acquainted with Italy and its culture as he had graduated from the Istituto Bacologico in Padua in northern Italy. Since then, Magid had entered the silk industry and spent the previous three years planning the introduction of silkworm cultivation and a spinning mill in Tallulah Falls, a mountain village in Georgia. Across an area of 3,000 acres, he had already planted 200,000 mulberry trees. Magid went on to compare the US climate to the Italian climate, stating that "the weather conditions in Georgia, and hence in Tallulah Falls, are precisely the same as they are in Northern Italy" and, furthermore, "Georgia is currently anxious to attract migrants from Italy."[21]

Magid more than once emphasized his strong preference for families coming from the north of Italy consisting of at least four workers each. He would then provide each family with an area of 25 acres to cultivate legumes and vegetables next to the mulberry trees. "I believe that this could be very attractive to an Italian family," added Magid, "this area already hosts 10,000 American families interested in silk cultivation, but there is no doubt that Italian families would profit from their greater agricultural expertise."[22] Louis Magid invited Dr. L. H. Mandowsky, a physician on the *Prinzessin Irene* of the North German Lloyd steamship company, to be the scientific advisor for this colonization project. Dr. Mandowsky's first role was to inspect the climate conditions of Tallulah Falls. Later on, he would become the physician of the colony. When interviewed about his task by the *Atlanta Journal* on January 4, 1904, Mandowsky emphasized his expertise in such colonization projects, citing his previous collaboration with North German Lloyd. When asked why Tallulah Falls was a suitable place for setting up a silk colony with Italian migrants, he replied that "first, the climate here is ideal" since it is comparable with Italy, and second,

20 "La colonizzazione agricola negli Stati Uniti in rapporto all'immigrazione italiana. Relazione del Prof. A. Ravaioli addetto commerciale a Washington," BEI no. 4 (1904): 18. This the following quotations from Italian sources have been translated into English by the author.

21 ASDMAE, Fondo Ambasciata Italiana a Washington (1902–1912), b. 119, f. 2456.

22 Ibid.

> the Italian Colony that Mr. Magid will bring here will be one of the most thrifty and honest kind, as they come from Northern Italy. They understand the culture and manufacture of silk to perfection. They will not only raise silk, but they understand raising vegetables and making the finest wine and cheese in the world.[23]

The letter and the newspaper article highlight the assumptions made by authorities and scientific experts that the American South was a suitable destination for Italian migrants due to the climate being similar to that of the Italian peninsula. This is also one of the sources associating a migrant background (in this case northern Italy) with specific agricultural skills. Nevertheless, this last presumption – that northern Italians were associated with good agricultural skills – shows that a racist bias against Italians from southern Italy existed on an institutional level. Also, the possibility of growing vegetables for their own consumption was here used to attract migrants to move to Georgia for this colonization project.

The "urban problem" was still an urgent topic in March 1907. *The Sun*, a New York City newspaper, published an article titled "For Italian Farm Colonies," discussing the possibility of dispersing Italians from East Coast cities to rural settlements as part of a "plan to lessen congestion and crime in big cities." The article mentioned the proposal of a scheme for agricultural colonization "to relieve the congested districts in large cities, particularly in New York, Boston, Washington, New Orleans, and Chicago, and to reduce the percentage of criminality." According to the journalist at *The Sun*, such criminality was "the direct result of factory life and the unnatural conditions which surround the immigrants in a large city." This association with urban life and crime was reiterated with the purpose of supporting the relocation of urban Italians, as they were living in "unnatural conditions."[24] Relocating urban migrants meant putting them in an environment considered more "natural" and healthier for them.

In 1907, the Italian government sent another inspector from Rome, Dr. Brunialti. *The Sun* wrote that Dr. Brunialti would start a "tour of inspection through the states of the central West and the Northwest" in order to explore possibilities to relocate urban Italians to Wisconsin and Minnesota. On this tour, Dr. Brunialti was accompanied by Carl Bernhard Schmidt, a German recruiting agent for railroad companies and a senator in Colorado, Guido Servadio, Italian vice-consul in Denver, and Arminio Conte, Italian consul in Milwaukee. When interviewed, Consul Conte claimed that "Italians are naturally farmers. They are accustomed to

23 Ibid. The interview comes from a clipping of the newspaper *Atlanta Journal* found in the archival folder 119.

24 "For Italian Farm Colonies," *The Sun* (New York), March 3, 1907, 12.

living in the open air and they are not adapted to factory work."[25] This statement, imbued with a deterministic misconception of Darwin's ideas, was instrumental in communicating to the US government that the countryside was the ideal setting for Italians.

Relocating Italian immigrants from the crowded urban East, as stated by Consul Conte, had the aim "to preserve the virtues of our people and the good name of our race in America" but also to relieve US-American cities from crime.[26] In order to do so, the Italian government knew that financial aid to immigrants was needed and that "this large sum of money must be raised in some way," possibly with the cooperation of US-American landowners. In addition, the article concluded by reflecting on whether the climate of the north or the south of the United States would better suit Italians. Consul Conte stated that "the climate in the northwest is too cold and the winters too severe for our people [. . .] states further south are favored because of their warmer climate."[27] Interestingly, this article published in *The Sun* is one of the rare sources to mention the possibility of relocating Italians to the north of the US. In fact, in working together, the US and Italian governments had the common aim of relocating Italian immigrants from East Coast cities to the rural South.

In these sources, we see a difference emerging in how immigrants were portrayed in the American Northeast and in the South. As we have seen, in the urban North immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe were depicted as an (urban) problem. In the rural South, on the other hand, immigrants were portrayed as a solution. After the end of slavery, many African Americans started the Great Migration to the industrial North, leading to Southern landowners and politicians being interested in finding immigrant labor to replace them. For landowners at the time, there was neither an immigration problem nor an urban question (which, in fact, became more relevant in the first decade of the twentieth century, with the massive influx of immigrants from Europe) but more – as pointed out by Katherine Benton-Cohen – of a "race problem."[28] Attracting immigrants from Europe not only meant available cheap labor but also a significant increase in the *whiteness* of the American South. During this period, race was one of the main reasons driving

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem: The Dillingham Commission and its Legacy* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2018), 200–205.

US-American landowners and politicians to maintain relationships with Italian diplomats and promote the creation of agricultural colonies with Italian migrants.[29]

Alongside the perceived "race problem," the environment also entered the scene as an important factor in framing the foreign policies of these decades. The reference to Italians as being suited to the climate of the South is a recurring argument in sources produced by US-American and Italian authorities. The idea to put migrants to work in these areas was strongly linked to their easy *acclimatization* to a new environment. Debates concerning acclimatization had characterized the scientific community in many European countries since the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth: scientists and academics in disciplines such as geography, botany, medicine, biology, and anthropology fiercely discussed "how plants and animals may be introduced – either artificially or naturally – into climatic regions different from their domestic habitat so that they may survive and propagate in the new environment."[30] Soon, questions regarding the acclimatization of humans in new territories also entered the debates, along with the rise of many acclimatization societies in Germany, France, Great Britain, and the United States.[31] In European empires such as the French and the British, discourses related to the acclimatization of plants, animals, and humans played a major role in influencing politics and settlement projects. This interest resulted in the production of a large body of scientific literature filled with statistical data on many areas of the world.[32] Collecting climate data was a common daily practice in the US in the nineteenth century, also in a few intentional communities such as the religious and cooperative settlement of New Harmony, Indiana, and the German ethnic colony of Saxonburg, Pennsylvania. This practice played a key role in

29 For a deeper analysis of how Italian immigrants to the American South navigated racial hierarchies, see Jessica Barbata Jackson, *Dixie's Italians: Sicilians, Race, and Citizenship in the Jim Crow Gulf South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 15–31.

30 David N. Livingstone, "Human Acclimatization: Perspectives on a contested field of inquiry in science, medicine, and geography," *History of science* 25 (1987): 359–394, 359. For a deeper analysis of the debates regarding *acclimatization*, see also Warwick Anderson, "Climates of Opinion: Acclimatization in Nineteenth Century France and England," *Victorian Studies* 35, no. 2 (1992): 135–157; Costanza Bonelli, "Clima, razza, colonizzazione. Nascita e sviluppo della medicina tropicale in Italia (fine XIX sec. – metà XX sec.)" (PhD diss., Sapienza Università di Roma 2019), 303–358.

31 David N. Livingstone, "Human Acclimatization," 363.

32 Michael A. Osborne, "Acclimatizing the World: A History of the Paradigmatic Colonial Science," *Osiris* 15 (2000): 135–151.

influencing the decision on whether and when agricultural experimentation should be attempted by the settlers.[33]

We also find references to this idea of *acclimatization* in Italian sources. In 1895, Vincenzo Grossi reflected on this topic on the pages of Italian journal *Nuova Antologia* in a long article on Italian emigration to the Americas. Here, the Italian physician pointed out that it was necessary for the Italian government to start to regulate emigration. A starting and fundamental point in terms of pursuing this aim, Grossi underlined, would be the *acclimatization* of the emigrants to new areas in order to avoid human losses.[34] Even if he in his research mainly referred to equatorial regions with less temperate climates, Grossi nonetheless brought the climate argument to the discussion concerning the selection of possible sites for Italian agricultural colonies in the US. Indeed, climate considerations were to become one of the fundamental questions for the Italian government to grapple with when managing the country's migratory flows. These tropes – race and climate – characterized the attempts to create agricultural colonies, as they were often repeated and discussed by Italian and US-American actors. Let us now explore how the necessary scientific support to these agricultural colonization plans was provided by an Italian institution.

2 Scientizing Climates: Professional Agronomists and the Italian Colonial Agricultural Institute

The Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano (IACI) was founded in Florence in 1907 by Gino Bartolommei Gioli, a member of the renowned Accademia dei Georgofili, an institution devoted to the study of agriculture, forestry, and botany.[35] Gioli started reflecting on the necessity of an agricultural colonial institution in Italy in the first years of the twentieth century after he had spent a few months in Eritrea studying the possibility of agricultural colonization in that area.[36] The necessity to train ex-

33 See Claudia Roesch, "Talking about the Weather: Producing Climate Knowledge as Colonial Practice in Intentional Communities in the Americas, 1820s–1840s" in this book.

34 Vincenzo Grossi, "L'emigrazione Italiana in America," *Nuova Antologia* LV, no. III (1895): 19. In italics in the original text. Grossi uses the Italian word "acclimatazione."

35 The Accademia dei Georgofili was founded in 1753 in Florence to promote and improve the study of agriculture, mostly in Tuscany. It gained the status of national institution in 1897.

36 As noted by Franco Cardini and Isabella Gagliardi, the Italian Botanical Society also shared the same interests in creating an institution to address colonial agriculture in the early years of twentieth century. For a deeper analysis of the history of the foundation of the IACI and its relationship with the history of Italian colonialism, see Franco Cardini and Isabella Gagliardi, *Italy*

perts in colonial agriculture led to the creation of the IACI, with Gioli becoming its science director.[37] A year after its launch, the IACI introduced specific courses on colonial agriculture, both theorical and practical. For the academic year 1908–1909, the IACI offered its young students courses such as: Colonial Agriculture, Colonial Botany, Economic Geography and History of the Colonies, Colonial Zootechnics and Livestock Hygiene, Chemistry, Colonial Engineering, Hygiene of the Colonist, and foreign languages such as English, French, and Spanish. When advertising these courses, Gioli emphasized the link between agricultural colonization and emigration, while claiming that the Italian population had a predisposition for agriculture and that most Italian emigrants work in agriculture.[38]

In 1907, right after its establishment, the IACI started publishing *L'Agricoltura Coloniale*, its official journal. The first issue featured the scientific agenda of the journal and once again presented Gioli's reflection on the link between emigration and the necessity to have specific technical training to pursue colonization aims. In fact, he stated that "in Italy we cannot address the migratory problem without considering our colonial unpreparedness." He then claimed that the role of the institute would be exactly to fill this lack of technical skills, writing that the IACI "will undoubtedly be one of the most suitable tools for the technical preparation of future agricultural colonizers, whether they want to use the resources of our colonies or whether they intend to establish themselves in foreign countries and colonies."[39] These words also confirm that at an institutional level, Italian élites looked at emigration with a colonial gaze. It is also interesting to note Gioli's opinion regarding Italian emigrants, whom he described as having "innate dispositions [. . .] to adapt to the most disparate climatic environments" and "truly admirable natural aptitudes in the exercise of agriculture."[40] Gioli also commented

and Lands, in *L'Istituto Agronomico per l'Oltremare. La sua storia,* AA.VV. (Firenze: Masso delle Fate, 2007), 12–37.

37 Mori Attilio, "L'istituto Agricolo Coloniale e la sua Origine, Atti dell'Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano," *L'Agricultura Coloniale* 1 (1907): 74–79.

38 Gino Bartolommei Gioli, "ISTITUTO AGRICOLO COLONIALE ITALIANO: FIRENZE," *Bullettino della R. Società Toscana di Orticultura* 3.a serie, vol. 13, no. 7 (1908): 209–212.

For a deeper analysis of the scientific content of the agricultural colonial training offered by the IACI, see Riccardo De Robertis, "From colonialism to cooperation: The training of tropical agricultural experts in Florence (1908–1968)," *Journal of Agriculture and Environment for International Development (JAEID)* 113, no. 2 (2019): 253–271; Riccardo De Robertis, "Observe and imitate the work of the colonizer: Agricultural education for Africans in the Italian colonies," *Italia Contemporanea* 302 (2023): 34–55.

39 Gino Bartolommei Gioli, "Il Programma dell'Agricoltura Coloniale," *L'Agricultura Coloniale* 1 (1907): 2.

40 Ibid., 1.

on what he rephrased as the "Italian problem," namely the tendency of Italian emigrants to settle in the US-American cities on the East Coast instead of looking for agricultural jobs in rural areas. In this regard, Gioli agrees with the majority of Italian politicians and intellectuals supporting these projects – such as Mayor des Planches – reaffirming that agricultural jobs were more suitable for emigrants and would allow them to increase their wealth and social standing. Gioli concluded with a statement that summed up the importance of migratory flows for the political agenda of the IACI: "therefore it is precisely towards the land that we must direct our migratory current, without distinction of social class."[41]

The Institute's official publication included reports compiled by experts sent to the Americas with the purpose of evaluating colonization proposals submitted to the Italian government by US-American railway and mining companies looking for immigrant manpower. These agronomists were tasked with verifying soil conditions, fertility, and which types of crops were suitable for cultivation on certain land. The first issue of *L'Agricultura Coloniale* reported that on May 25, 1907, *La Tribuna Italiana Transatlantica*, an Italian American newspaper from Chicago, published a letter addressed to its director, Alessandro Mastro-Valerio, who besides his job as a journalist was also a social worker close to Jane Addams and a strong advocate of creating agricultural colonies with Italian migrants.[42] The author of this letter was C.B. Schmidt, the above-mentioned German recruiting agent who had helped create agricultural colonies with Mennonites in Kansas and with Germans and Italians in Pueblo, Colorado. Schmidt also worked as a recruiting agent for the company Rock Island-Frisco System. In his letter, Schmidt informed Mastro-Valerio that the US government had studied the environmental and economic condition of some areas in Texas and the Gulf of Mexico in order to host Italian migrants from

41 Ibid.

42 Alessandro Mastro-Valerio was born in Italy in 1855. After he emigrated to the United States in 1882, he started to work at Hull House together with Jane Addams and studied Italian settlements in Chicago. He was the editor of the US newspaper *La Tribuna Italiana* and contributed to the Industrial Commission, compiling surveys about Italian colonies in rural areas in the US, such as Vineland in New Jersey, Sunnyside and Tontitown in Arkansas, Asti in Sonoma County, California, and other settlements of truck farmers around Memphis, Tennessee and in Louisiana and Mississippi. He was personally involved in establishing an agricultural colony in Daphne, Alabama. In 1890 and 1893, he led a group of Italians from Chicago to Alabama, receiving assistance from the USDA to obtain seeds, shrubs, tools, and agricultural publications. From these reports, it emerges that Mastro-Valerio shared the opinion of the Italian diplomats that sending migrants to farm could resolve the overcrowding in some American cities. See JoAnne Ruvoli, "An Agricultural Colony in Alabama: Hull-House and the Chicago Italians," in *Small Towns, Big Cities: The Urban Experience of Italian Americans*, eds. Dennis Barone and Stefano Luconi (New York: AIHA, 2010), 146–164.

the East Coast cities and create agricultural colonies together with them. The "Italian problem," as a problem of the US-American urban East Coast, was also mentioned in this article, once again repeating the claim that agricultural colonization could be the solution to overcrowded cities. In cities, Italian emigrants could hardly find favorable living conditions as they competed with workers of other nationalities. US-American society was largely unwelcoming when it came to Italian immigrants as a result of their precarious situation. However, Schmidt viewed the narrative pushed by US-American institutions that the Italians were a menace as full of prejudices. He instead believed that Italian migrants were good workers, but just not well-acquainted with the economic possibilities that US-American agriculture could offer them.[43]

Schmidt also said a few remarkable words about the agricultural skills of Italian emigrants, highlighting their importance to the economic development of the US. The article went on to report on the experience of Schmidt in settling a colony with Italian migrants in Pueblo, Colorado, in the previous years. Some 200 Italian families were employed as fruit growers and truck farmers, and this group achieved great results both economically and in terms of respectability. They were praised for the luxuriant vegetable gardens they set up through hard work and for their frugality and reliability as workers. Schmidt also reflected on the possible motives why Italian migrants became uninterested in pursuing agricultural jobs after immigrating to the United States:

> I am convinced that the main reason for why so few Italian emigrants devote themselves to agriculture lies in the fact that they are completely unaware of the opportunities of acquiring inhabited land in our vast country on very advantageous terms. They come here with the preconception that they have to work only for wages, because wages are higher here than in Italy, and because some of their compatriots exploit this idea for their own profit.[44]

With these words, Schmidt confirmed his position as one of the strongest advocates of the relocation plans of Italian migrants from the cities on the East Coast to the American South. The article ended by mentioning a plan for agricultural colonization proposed by the Rock Island-Frisco System and already approved by the Italian government. According to this plan, families of Italian migrants who relocated to Texas could, in addition to being able to buy land for reasonable prices, still benefit from the Homestead Acts, which would allow them to get some 160 acres of land for free following a legal declaration of intention to become a

43 "Colonizzazione agraria italiana nel Sud-Ovest degli Stati Uniti," *L'Agricoltura Coloniale* 1 (Firenze: IACI, 1907), 65–67.
44 Ibid.

US citizen and some additional smaller bureaucratic procedures.[45] The Italian government showed interest in this project and activated its experts in agronomy – through the IACI – to visit the area and study its environmental conditions.

Hence, the IACI in 1907 sent the agronomist Tito Tabet to southwest Texas to report on soil conditions and fertility with regard to the creation of the abovementioned agricultural colony promoted by the Rock Island-Frisco System railway company. To pursue this objective, the company employed a professor of agriculture (named Dr. White) with close links to the recruiting agent C.B. Schmidt. The Rock Island Company put some effort into soliciting the cooperation of landowners and aimed to build a society to provide settler families with "soil, home, tools, livestock, and seeds."[46]

In his report, published in 1908, Tabet wrote several pages analyzing the current conditions for agriculture in the United States while also describing his journey from New York to Texas during which he also visited Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and Tontitown – the Italian colony in Arkansas managed by Father Bandini. Tabet also visited a private ranch, not far from Saint Gertrude, Texas, that was managed by Robert J. Kleberg II.[47] For Tabet, this farm served as an example of what could be achieved with agricultural colonization in the area of southwest Texas. Kleberg had set up his farm seven years earlier with the help of Dr. Gino Coppini, an Italian agronomist who had graduated from the Agrarian School in Pisa. In 1905, Coppini had founded an experimental agricultural farm in Raymondville, Texas, with the aim of creating "the model of the Italian Colony, to serve as a guide for all the agricultural Italian colonies in the United States." Coppini collaborated closely with the IACI, and reports of his agricultural experiments – on cotton, olive trees, and grapevine in particular – were published in the institute's journal.[48] Kleberg's farm was surrounded by thriving vegetable gardens full of cabbage, onions, tomatoes, celery, cucumbers, beans, lettuce, carrots, and more. These vegetables were then sold at markets in nearby towns such

45 Ibid.

46 Tito Tabet, *Per la Colonizzazione Agraria del Texas* (Firenze: Ramella, 1908), 3–4. Held at library of the Italian Agronomic Overseas Institute, Florence, this report was originally published in *L'Agricultural Coloniale* anno II, vol. 1 (February 1908).

47 Kleberg II was the legal counselor of the landowner and livestock entrepreneur Richard King. After King's death, Kleberg ran his ranch. See: https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/king-richard.

48 Coppini wrote these words to Edmondo Mayor des Planches on March 11, 1905. This letter also contains Coppini's ideas concerning agricultural colonization in the US. ASDMAE, Fondo Ambasciata Italiana a Washington (1902–1912), b.143, f. 3166. For a deeper analysis of the experience of Coppini and his role in connection to the IACI, see Gino Coppini, "La coltivazione del Cotone ne Sud-Ovest Texas," *L'Agricultura Coloniale* anno III, vol. 1 (1909): 1–24.

as Corpus Christi. Tabet was struck by the potential of these lands with regard to truck farming. In support of this view, he added to his survey a comparative list of the crops cultivated there along with a list of the average prices for each vegetable in the urban markets. Despite being a private ranch, it represented the ideal agricultural experiment, which interested a governmental institution such as the IACI. This example also highlights the complex layers of actors and knowledge involved in this agricultural diplomacy and how such an entanglement of actors and knowledge shaped these agricultural experiments.

After several weeks with Kleberg and Coppini, Dr. Tabet specified three evaluation criteria to adhere to when choosing locations to create agricultural colonies: salubrity, potable water, and a range of suitable weather temperatures. He also focused on setting the "fundamental parameters for agricultural exploitation": the potential fertility of the soil, the availability of water in relation to suitable crops for the chosen place, and the climate. In concluding the report, Tabet made a comparison of the climate of south Texas with the "northern shores" of Sicily, writing that these two regions shared a "salubrious climate and mild temperature, but with lower rates of rainfall."[49] By comparing these two climates, Dr. Tabet's objective was to make Texas appear familiar to those reading the report. In conclusion, Tabet wrote that if Texas was chosen as a destination for Italian emigration, it could become "the new California" and thus successful. Tabet's evaluation of the climate of Texas provided the scientific background to support the agricultural colonization projects with Italian migrants in Texas that the Italian government wished to pursue and for which it activated the experts from the IACI.[50]

This scientification of colonization projects provided by the IACI sought to support the argument for relocating Italians, thereby adding significant weight to it. Furthermore, in addition to the inquiries published in *L'Agricultura Coloniale* and the IACI's reports, there is a large amount of correspondence on specific agronomic matters held in the archives of the Italian Foreign Ministry. For instance, the Italian government asked the USDA for numerous scientific publications on various topics: the latest news in cultivation techniques and soil experiments, re-

49 Tabet, *Per la Colonizzazione Agraria del Texas*, 31.

50 Echoes of these colonization projects also reached the Italian Colonial Institute in Rome. Texas was among the few reconnaissance missions undertaken by the Italian Colonial Institute in the first years after it was founded. Furthermore, in 1908, *Rivista Coloniale*, the official journal of the institute, published an essay about Italian emigration and the colonization of Texas that mentioned the idea of creating the Italian Society for Texas to support such colonization. Gustavo Chiesi, "La nostra Emigrazione agli Stati Uniti e la Colonizzazione Italiana nel Texas," *Rivista Coloniale*, Fascicoli I, vol. 5 (Rome, 1908).

ports on crop diseases, innovations in farmers' tools and machinery. There were also some requests for particular varieties of crops and sample sets of chemical fertilizers to be used in Italy for experimentation.[51]

The correspondence between the IACI president Gioli and Ambassador Mayor des Planches is worth mentioning since it supports the argument that the IACI gave scientific backing to these experimental agricultural colonization projects with Italian migrants. On May 2, 1909, Gioli wrote a letter to Mayor des Planches, carefully describing the IACI's educational activities related to scientific and agricultural matters, such as courses on colonial agriculture and botanical experimentation with imported seeds and species. Gioli suggested that it was perhaps possible to introduce the crops uncovered in this research to Italy. Gioli also emphasized how IACI initiatives had already found support from Italians abroad who were interested in agricultural issues. The purpose of this letter was to promote the institute's expertise in colonial agriculture and to offer scientific support from the IACI for agricultural colonization projects in the United States. Moreover, Gioli asked Mayor des Planches to intercede with US institutions (such as the USDA) to send agricultural products and publications to the IACI.[52] This last request matched the intentions of the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce, which in 1908 had started to collect data on educational and experimental institutions working with agriculture and forestry around the world. Accordingly, Mayor des Planches in January 1909 wrote a letter to the USDA General Secretary James Wilson to obtain such information.[53]

A few words must be added regarding the role of James Wilson as the general secretary of the USDA. Wilson started his mandate in 1897 and was determined to end the reputation of the USDA as a mere provider of free seed samples and an institution exclusively devoted to answering simple farming questions. It was Wilson's idea that the USDA should act more like a research center attached to a university. This policy shift led to a change in the wider scientific practice of the Progressive Era, in which the boundaries between scientific professions were not particularly defined. The USDA started to become more interested in bacteriology and soil fertility, and in 1897, the Bureau for Seed and Plant Introduction, known as the "plant explorers" team was founded as well. This bureau was imbued with the idea that improving agriculture meant improving society: many USDA scien-

51 ASDMAE, Fondo Ambasciata Italiana a Washington (1902–1912), b.119.

52 Ibid., b.119, f. 2471.

53 Ibid. For the correspondence, ASDMAE, Fondo Ambasciata Italiana a Washington (1902–1912), b.119, f. 2457. For further reading on the history of USDA and James Wilson, see Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007), 99–130.

tists believed that living on a good soil would lead to a happier life (typical of the ethos of the Progressive Era).[54]

Interestingly, not all reports published by the IACI were in favor of agricultural colonization projects. As we have seen, along with soil fertility, the perception of climate played a major role when evaluating suitable locations for agricultural colonies. In a few cases, the presence of diseases, such as malaria, was also an important consideration – not to say the main consideration – that experts took into account in their reports and that could impact the evaluation.[55] During his reconnaissance of the lands to the southwest of Norfolk, Virginia, the agronomist Guido Rossati delivered a negative verdict with regard to settling a colony in this area. First, wrote Rossati, these areas were mostly swamplands, which, in order to become profitable for cultivation, required intensive drainage followed by the heavy use of fertilizers, both natural and chemical. Such drainage processes would be very expensive; however, they could make the soil suitable for garden crops (*ortaglie* in Italian) such as potatoes, peas, cabbage, tomatoes, spinach, eggplants, and strawberries, but not for fruit trees and crops with longer roots, which are unable to penetrate soil rich in clay. Second, in addition to such difficulties, Rossati noted the great presence of mosquitoes and the high danger of malarial fever that "our immigrants" would face. Finally, it is interesting to notice that in case the government attempted to set up a colony in that area, Rossati suggested employing migrants from areas of central and southern Italy with a similar climate and swampy soil, such as the Maremma area in Tuscany, the Pontine Marshes in Lazio, the plains in Basilicata, and the Simeto Valley in Sicilia. Once again, we have evidence of an IACI report specifying which migrants were suitable for possible agricultural colony sites based on their experience of certain climatic backgrounds. Rossati closed his report by saying that there were more suitable areas for colonization in the United States.[56]

54 Mark I. Finlay, "Science, Promotion, and Scandal: Soil Bacteriology, Legume Inoculation, and the American Campaign for Soil Improvement in the Progressive Era," in *New Perspectives on the History of Life Sciences and Agriculture*, eds. D. Phillips and S. Kingsland (2015): 205–229, Springer Verlag. See also Stuart Shulman, "The Business of Soil Fertility: A Convergence of Urban-Agrarian Concern in the Early 20th Century," *Organization & Environment* 12, no. 4 (1999): 401–424; Mark D. Hersey "What We Need Is a Crop Ecologist: Ecology as an Agricultural Science in Progressive Era America," *Agricultural History* 85 (2011): 297–321.

55 Malaria has been a variable in the choice for a new place to settle found in guides for emigrants. In fact, it often served as an actor itself with a large impact on the success – or failure – of a colony. See Marco Armiero, "Migrants and the Making of the American Landscape," Armiero and Tucker (2017), 53–70.

56 BEI no. 16 (1904): 35–41.

These institutional actors shared many beliefs regarding how and where Italian migrants should settle in the US. As the correspondence and reports show, scientists and politicians built a shared network in which they acted on and shared their ideas. An example of this is presented by Guido Rossati when he joined Adolfo Rossi, the inspector of the Royal Immigration Department of Italy, on his trip to the US at the beginning of 1904. They were sent to the country following the suggestion of the influential Ambassador Mayor des Planches. As scientific experts, they were asked to evaluate certain patches of land in the states of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. In his report, Rossati took an additional aspect of the land into account. He claimed that the area of the Mississippi Delta, in addition to being suitable for the cultivation of cotton, was also extremely good for experimenting with the production of all kinds of vegetables due to its fertile soil and strategic location. The area in question was located between a few large railroad nodes, namely, the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad, the Illinois Central Railroad, and the Southern Railway, which would have allowed farmers to sell their produce as far away as the urban markets in Saint Louis and Chicago. However, Rossati added that despite these favorable conditions, the climate of the area was particularly unhealthy during the summer months. This was due to the heavy presence of mosquitoes and the custom of drinking rainwater collected in washbowls, which was a source of malaria for farmers. Nevertheless, Rossati concluded: "Italians, for climatic reasons, are considered suitable for the American South, and are also welcome there for their reputation as good, honest, and modest workers."[57] These experiments of agricultural colonization in the American South failed due to a lack of cooperation between Italy and the United States and due to the reluctance of Italian emigrants to accept the economic conditions of the proposed settlements.

Conclusion

In 1916, the IACI reprinted, as a separate pamphlet, a report written by O.G. Capra originally published in July that same year in *L'Agricoltura Coloniale.* This pamphlet titled *The Colonisation in the United States* reflected on the possibilities and attempts concerning agricultural colonization in the United States, emphasizing the role of railroad companies and landowners. It stated how these experiments were complicated and slowed down by bureaucracy but also stimulated by speculation and a hunger for profit. Capra confirmed the interests of Italian politicians

57 BEI no. 14 (1904): 13.

in the agricultural colonization of Africa when he wrote: "if we are real patriots, we must work with any means to limit emigration, the colonizing and agrarian forms [of emigration] in particular. In our time, we need cultivators for our countryside, for our colonies in Africa."[58] However, a few lines later, Capra expressed his support for agricultural colonization in the United States, claiming that Italian élites should look at such colonization as a way to solve the US-American emigration problem. He also added that "my impression is that for Italians in the United States, it would be convenient to leave the cities for the countryside, but they must be helped and directed to do this." Such convenience would increase – wrote Capra – as any produce could be cultivated in the US given that all climates were to be found in this country.[59] These words underline how the interest of the IACI with regard to the emigrant population in the United States continued even after the Italian government shifted its colonial policies toward the African continent.[60]

This paper focuses on exploring the transnational entanglement of science, race, economy, and politics with Italian migrants in the United States and their ecologies. It highlights the experimental aspect in a series of agricultural colonization projects carried out at the turn of the twentieth century and which saw the contribution of a wide array of political and institutional actors in both the US and Italy. All these actors had different aims but a common plan: create agricultural colonies to relocate Italian migrants from the East Coast cities to the rural South, where they could benefit from their gardening skills. These agricultural colonies turned out to be spaces of experimentation for both scientific and political purposes. Here, Italian agronomists tested crops and collected data on climates, while Italian diplomats viewed such spaces as useful for experimenting with their ideas of informal expansionism. At the same time, US-American actors – USDA scientists, Southern landowners, and governmental officials – also looked at these agricultural colonies as experimental spaces in terms of testing new forms of agricultural production that could improve urban food provisioning while changing the racial geography in both the city and the countryside. Never-

58 O.G. Capra, "La colonizzazione negli Stati Uniti" (Firenze: IACI, 1916), 6.

59 Ibid.

60 The interest of the IACI in North America with regard to informal agricultural colonization in the twentieth century is a research avenue that deserves more historical scrutiny and that could help unveil a longer trend in Italian agricultural diplomacy. On IACI and Africa, see Roberta Biasillo, "Socio-ecological colonial transfers: Trajectories of the Fascist agricultural enterprise in Libya (1922–43)," *Modern Italy* 26, no. 2 (2021): 181–198; Michele Sollai, "How to Feed an Empire? Agrarian Science, Indigenous Farming, and Wheat Autarky in Italian-Occupied Ethiopia, 1937–1941," *Agricultural History* 96, no. 3 (2022): 379–416.

theless, despite their failure, such political projects required scientific support, which led the Italian government to activate its experts.

Hence, this paper highlights the contribution of the Italian Agricultural Colonial Institute of Florence and its agronomists in the transnational relationship named *agricultural diplomacy*, while underlining its role in the scientization of colonial practice. The IACI experts, through a series of scientific surveys in the United States, provided the necessary knowledge in support of the plans of both the Italian and US-American governments. They observed climates, tested soils, and experimented with crops, keeping in mind which areas were suitable for a profitable *acclimatization* of the Italian migrants. Such *acclimatization* would have contributed to the success of the experimental colony, thus pleasing US authorities, which sought to clear the East Coast cities from the "problematic" Italian immigrants. Exploring these decades of Italian foreign policies through the lens of environmental history allows us to uncover untold aspects of the Italian migratory experience in the United States while at the same time also highlighting the role of experimental spaces and agricultural knowledge in the support of colonial endeavors.

Gilberto Mazzoli is a post-doctoral researcher in North American environmental history at the University of Konstanz tied to the ERC project "Off the Road: The Environmental Aesthetics of Early Automobility." His research focuses on the merging of environmental history with migration and urban histories in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His recent publications include "*Italianness* in the United States between migrants' informal gardening practices and agricultural diplomacy, 1880–1912," *Modern Italy* 26, no. 2 (2021).