Agriculture and Nationalism
Discussion led by Tiago Saraiva (Drexel University)

This session will explore the interactions between life sciences, food and nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century. We will study how plant and animal breeders and their technoscientific organisms became crucial elements for radical nationalistic projects across Europe. In contrast to the more common association of race and nationalism, food issues will guide our discussions on the emergence of the notion of the “organic nation”. We will pay particular attention to fascist regimes in Germany, Italy, and Portugal, while also making explicit comparisons with different types of political regimes, namely the United States and the Soviet Union.

Students will discuss the interest of engaging with the technicalities of life sciences’ practices to discuss large scale historical contexts. They will test the ability of history of science for producing ambitious historical arguments about phenomena such as nationalism or fascism that tend to be dominated by political, social or economic historians. Historical ontology will be under scrutiny as form of history of science writing.


Additional reading:


Helen Anne Curry, Evolution Made to Order: Plant Breeding and Technological Innovation in Twentieth Century America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016)