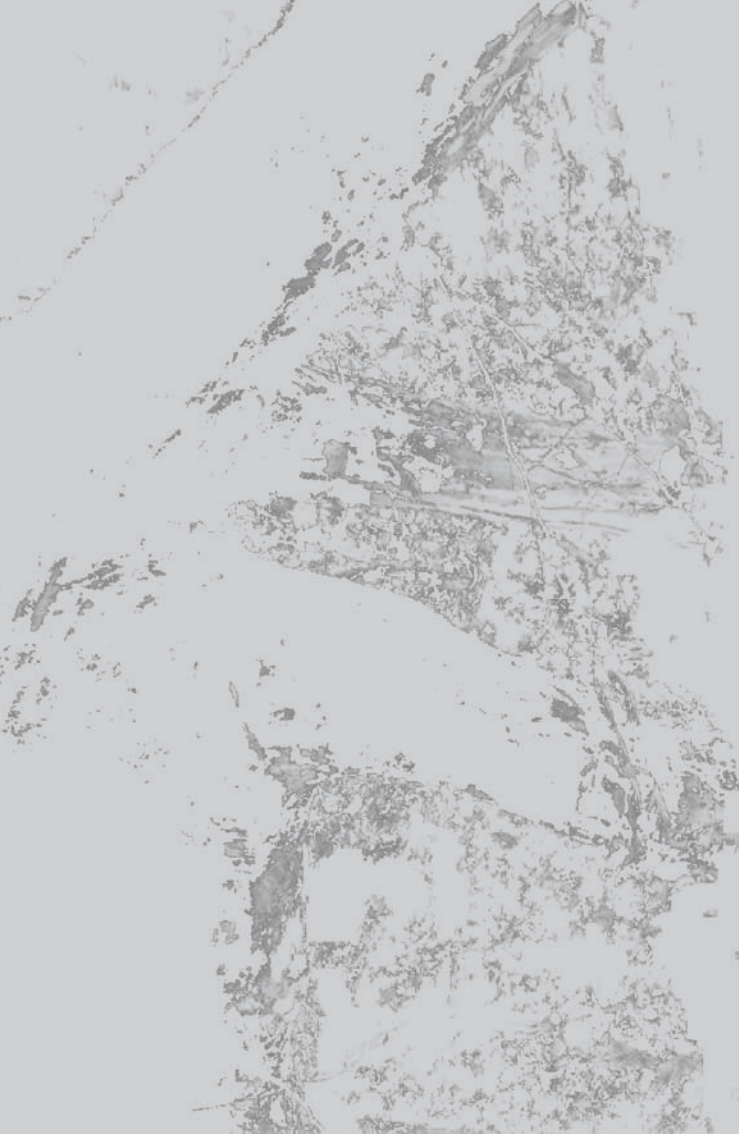




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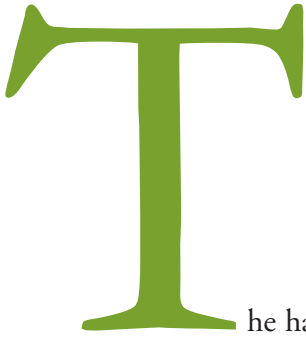
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editorial

Mauro Agnoletti and Gabriella Corona



The half-yearly journal *Global Environment. Journal of History and Natural and Social Sciences* intends to act as a link for ongoing researches on the environment and world history, with special regard to the modern and contemporary ages. Our principal objective is to understand the processes that have led to the present state of our environment, as well as differences between its state and management today and in past epochs. The journal will not limit itself to promoting historical studies. It will also offer space to texts dealing with current times. Our intent is to stimulate and gather studies and researches which, in spite of diverse approaches and themes, share a conception of the environment as a perspective from which to look at the problems of the world and its history, at conceptions of economic development, social and productive relations, government, and relations between peoples.

One of the journal's main commitments should be to bring together different areas of expertise in both the natural and the social sciences to help them find a common language and a common perspective in the study of history. It is not a matter of abstractly proclaiming the need for interdisciplinarity; rather, there is a need for more and better contributions to our knowledge of the environment and its history employing a wide range of sources and methods. The approaches and methods of environmental historians have changed a lot over the last few years, and have seen the contribution of disciplines other than traditional historiography.

For these reasons, both the editors and contributors of the journal,

on the one hand, and its public of readers, on the other, should include not only historians, but also ecologists, agronomists, experts in forest sciences, botanists, geologists, climatologists, economists, sociologists, urbanists, jurists, archaeologists, etc. The present environmental crisis is also a crisis of the instruments human beings have been using to interpret reality, partly as a result of the separation of the social sciences, on the one hand, and the natural sciences, on the other; a separation largely due to the prevailing of a mechanistic approach over a systemic and evolutionary one in modern science. This trend has had an important reflection on the actions of political decision-makers, and especially on the separation between economy and the environment in decisional processes. Thus, history can play a fundamental role in looking for models for relations between the sciences capable of informing institutional actors in making the right choices.

We intend to strive to maintain an interdisciplinary approach taking account of the remarkable evolution of historical investigation over the last few decades as regards sources and methods. Today historians no longer rely merely on written documents; they also turn to material sources and biological archives, drawing from both the ecological sciences and the social sciences, and sometimes effectively combining them.

That is why the work of environmental historians appears to be more difficult than that of traditional historians. The environmental historian needs to master more investigation techniques and manage more information. Hence, a lot still needs to be done to improve the effectiveness and quality of environmental-historical investigation.

Taking a multidisciplinary approach can also make it easier to incorporate research results into environmental politics. This is an important challenge that may allow environmental history to gain a place among the scientific disciplines presently engaged in defining the action to be taken to achieve sustainable development.

Multidisciplinarity and a long-term analysis looking back from the present to the past are not the only pillars of the scientific project behind our journal. The supranational character of phenomena is confronting historiography with new challenges. Environmental problems – as well as the politics they determine and the movements

they spawn – have become global, from the effects of deforestation to those of carbon emissions on climate change; from the use of chemical agents in industrial agriculture and the intense commercialization of its products to the whole system of energy and raw material flows connecting distant places and cities all over the world; from the acceleration of the mobility of human resources to the planetary dimension of the effects of desertification; and so on. There is need for a historiography capable of reflecting all this.

For some decades already, under the impulse of growing awareness of the global character of the environmental question, historical research has been studying the implications of the great processes of economic and social transformation involving the modern and contemporary world, and analyzing the transnational aspects of the material and scientific construction of environmental situations. Still, in spite of authoritative exceptions, the historical approaches developed so far are finding it difficult to expand beyond their respective national borders, and hence to embrace the global perspectives that environmental studies have opened onto the past and present of our whole planet. That is why one of our main focuses will be modes and levels of integration at the global level in the change processes that have affected the environment in various parts of the world. What we will strive for is an appropriate, non-paradigmatic evaluation of the historical relations between man and the biosphere. As regards the chronological dimension, while it is true that the first forms of widespread exchange – of men and women, products, techniques, cultural models, and representations of nature – between distant lands arose in remote ages, it is beyond doubt that a wide and integrated system of relations between the different parts of the globe first sprang up in the modern age.

The environment has been the weak element in the formation of the global capitalist system. There is a wide consensus among historians that Western hegemony over the last two centuries has been mainly founded on the appropriation of the natural resources of colonized countries. In spite of this, it is too simplistic today to interpret this circumstance in terms of a simple dualistic antithesis between European and North-American countries, on the one hand, and the

rest of the world, on the other. Our journal intends to transcend the Westerncentric and “developist” bias that has informed international environmental historiography so far, whereby global phenomena are mainly analyzed in terms of the West’s successes and failures, and the nature of its relations with other parts of the world (colonial exploitation, depletion of resources, underdevelopment, etc.). While it is true that over the last centuries the world’s economic system has evolved under Western hegemony, it is equally true that its history has witnessed continuously mutating spatial overlaps, connections, and confluences which our “dualistic”, “developist”, and “Westerncentric” paradigm has blinded us to.

Thus, the journal should favor the emerging of spatially and culturally diversified points of view. It should replace the notion of “hierarchy” with that of “relation” and “exchange” – between continents, states, regions, cities, central zones and peripheral areas – in the construction and destruction (in cases where exchange processes involve damage and degradation) of environments and ecosystems. The global history of the environment cannot limit itself to looking at how the Western model asserted itself in the countries of the South of the world; it also needs to study how this model merged with local experiences. We should narrate not only how the West appropriated natural and human resources, but also the strong resistance and antagonism it met with. Precisely because the globalization processes that modern imperialism set under way requires a perspective transcending the national, and often even the continental scale, global studies cannot neglect to take into account the encounter and the clash between the colonized and the colonizers. In spite of the horror and the violence, this is a common historical experience and should be portrayed as such. It favored the merging of different worlds, and present reality is the result. To be grounded in an authentic concept of integration, both politics and educational models require a knowledge of local historical experiences and the ways in which they blended with Western culture. This is a knowledge that can only be attained through *global communication*. We need to transpose to the scientific plane the great merging of cultures that has been going on for a long time now as the result of globalization in its various forms.

This is why our journal's aim cannot be merely to analyze the global or transnational aspect of historical processes. We need to take due account of the "local" dimension when analyzing environmental historical processes. We need to give voice and space to historical experiences from the most remote regions of the globe, not just to represent the role played by the West in their transformation processes, but looking at them as autonomous and independent entities. We will strive to provide a medium for communication and discussion between scholars from very distant – culturally as well spatially – parts of the world, seeking to highlight the relationship between global phenomena and local factors. Case-studies do not merely help us to understand small-scale processes that are not reflected in researches at a global scale; they also allow a better understanding of changes and adaptations at the biological and anthropic level. The regional scale helps us to avoid excessive recourse to generalizing interpretive paradigms, which today are influencing not just research, but also the political debate on global change. It also helps us to adapt to local conditions environmental policies that would otherwise be doomed to failure.