

Themes in global environmental history

**CWEH workshop, 29th June, 2010, University of Sussex, 2p.m.- 5.30 p.m.
(Provisionally A155)**

Global history signals a move away from the nation state as the unit of analysis, an analysis which has long been predicated on the record keeping of bureaucratic state structures. In a sense, imperial history has always had this advantage as empires could only be studied on a global scale. For environmental history, the nation state is the wrong scale on which to operate as ecological transformations unfold without any conception of borders. One of the many attractions of environmental history is the fact that much of its subject matter soils, plants, animals, climate and disease, pay little heed to national or other political boundaries.¹ The only variety of environmental history for which the nation-state format makes sense is political and policy history or if you are studying island histories. Yet even these histories cannot be studied in isolation unless they lend themselves to the nation state format. Environmental historians are arguably best able to lead the historical profession away from its reliance on the nation state as an analytical category.

As Donald Worster has noted 'to think globally about environmental history means to take an all-inclusive view to see the world as a whole, to study the planet as a single environmental system that has been radically reorganised by a single, integrated economy, technology and culture.'² It means transcending national boundaries or local concerns and focus instead upon what today binds all p

now see a time when Asians especially the Chinese and the Indians will dominate the global economy and environment. The success of these economies is changing the direction of globalisation away from its European centre. What will it mean for nature or society? As yet there is everything to indicate that Asians will simply replicate the attitudes and institutions of the West and it does not seem that there is a new social and environmental ethic waiting to emerge in the wings of the new Asian economies.

At the Centre for World Environmental History we have always been interested in themes in global environmental history. This is most evident through our project on 'the British Empire and the Natural World'. Between 1600 and 1960 the British Empire brought about an unprecedented transformation of the landscapes and environments of the world. This transformation occurred as a physical and biological consequence of economic globalisation and territorial expansion. The resultant ecological re-shaping was closely documented and it

is the correspondence of William and Joseph Hooker as successive Directors

Workshop programme

Issues in Global environmental history: a panel discussion

2.00 to 3.00

Prof Alan Lester (Sussex) Dr Rohan D'souza (JNU, India)
Dr Vinita Damodaran (Sussex) Dr Pauline von Hellerman (York)

Tea: 3 p.m.

3.15-4.30

Chair: James Thomson (Sussex)

Prof Mark Elvin ANU/Sussex, 'How distinctive are the environmental histories of developed premodern societies? Reflections on China'

Dr Heather Goodall (Sydney); 'City ecologies: recognising working class and indigenous natures on city rivers'

Dr Rohan D'souza (JNU) 'Effecting separations, global histories about drainage'

4.30- 5.30

Chair: Rob Iliffe (Sussex)

Dr Jodi Frawley (Sydney) 'Environments of Hope and Fear: the dynamics of overabundance, scarcity and the circulation of botanical knowledge's through Inter-colonial networks.'

George Adamson (Brighton) 'Climate variability and adaptability in Western India.'

Concluding comments: Prof Rob Iliffe (Sussex)

Contact: V.Damodaran@sussex.ac.uk if you would like to attend.