

Nature–Culture Relations over World History: Globalization, Crises, and Time

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The basis for the reproduction of material life over world history has been the wide-scale utilization of the resources of Nature. If the accumulation of surplus, urbanization, and population growth are the main socio-historical dynamics that determine the trajectory of Nature–Culture relations over world history, intensification of these socioeconomic dynamics tend to lead to ecological exhaustion, and perhaps, even ecological crisis conditions. The motions of world history exhibit periods of ecological recovery of the degraded areas, and the penetration (incorporation) of new areas for fresh natural resources to sustain further world system evolution (globalization).

At the world systemic level, for at least the last five thousand years, the ceaseless accumulation of materialistic surplus/wealth, urbanization, and population growth seem ultimately self-defeating as they have produced recurring system crises and unequal distribution of ecological degradation across zones of the system. The ‘world systemic connections’ formed as a result of the evolution of the world system (globalization) over world history have led to ecological and socioeconomic system crises (Dark Ages) and collapses being experienced simultaneously and unevenly. It might be that ecological relations are as primary as socioeconomic relations in the self-expansory processes of the evolution of the world system (globalization). Thus, an analysis of the dynamics of the Nature/Culture relations (ecological relations) and other conditions – climatological changes (natural rhythms and human induced) and natural processes (for ex., volcanicity earthquakes, and tsunamis) – as conducting factors in system reproduction and crisis is necessary to understand the trajectory and limits of the globalizing world (the evolution of the world system). In order to examine and understand such historical system limits, an awareness of the dynamics of the Nature with its own natural duration and characteristics of reproduction and regeneration, and the Social domain with its own logic of reproduction that are conditioned by historical world system processes need to be theoretically and methodologically fleshed out. In doing so, ‘Time’ in its ecological and social dimensions warrants our attention. Theoretical and methodological attempts to decipher cycles and trends of social systems, and articulation points between social and natural systems need to consider these different aspects of ‘Time’. Exemplars from world history will be presented to reflect on the above theoretically generalized account of the dynamics and structures of world system evolution (globalization).