

Environmental History and Public History: Perspectives for (re)igniting the dialogue in Brazil

História Ambiental e História Pública: perspectivas para (re)acender o diálogo no Brasil

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ABSTRACT

Environmental History and Public History were institutionalized in the 1970s. However, the dialogue between the two still lacks a greater understanding by Brazilian historiography. In this article, I discuss the intricacies and consequences of this lack of systematization. I start assuming that historiographical analyses of Environmental History in Brazil lead to an overlap: although Public History is present as a practice within the works of environmental historians, it is still examined through the lenses of Social History and Oral History. Divided into three sections, the article first maps the dialogue between Public History and Environmental History. Then, it addresses how concerns inherent to Public History entered Brazilian environmental historiography. Finally, it investigates perspectives opened by the idea of Environmental History as *a way of thinking*, of Public

RESUMO

A História Ambiental e a História Pública foram institucionalizadas na década de 1970. Todavia, o diálogo entre ambas ainda carece de uma maior compreensão pela historiografia brasileira. Neste artigo, discuto meandros e consequências desta ausência de sistematização. Parto do pressuposto de que as análises historiográficas sobre a História Ambiental no Brasil levam a uma sobreposição: embora a História Pública esteja presente enquanto prática nos trabalhos de historiadores ambientais, ela ainda é examinada pelas vias da História Social e da História Oral. Dividido em três seções, o artigo primeiramente mapeia o diálogo entre a História Pública e a História Ambiental. Em seguida, aborda como preocupações inerentes à História Pública adentraram a historiografia ambiental brasileira. Por fim, investiga perspectivas abertas pela ideia da História Ambiental como *modo de pensamento*, da História Pública como

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History as *a means of shared action* and Oral History as *a tool*.

Keywords: Environmental History; Public History; Brazilian historiography; History of Historiography.

meio de ação compartilhada, e da História Oral como *ferramenta*.

Palavras-chave: História Ambiental; História Pública; Historiografia Brasileira; História da Historiografia.

INTRODUCTION

Social engagement, “dismantling” and political commitment are key concepts in both Environmental History and Public History. But these are not the only points of contact between the two fields. Both areas originated and were institutionalized in the United States during the tumultuous era of the so-called Global crisis of the 1970s. This was a moment of critique of capitalist standards, especially those concerning the *American Way of Life*, of questioning industrialization and scientific modernization as universal solutions, the failure of progressive and developmental discourses, from the violent decolonization processes in Afro-Asian countries and the Vietnam War; and of a severe economic depression exacerbated, among other factors, by the Oil Crisis. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm (1995, p. 393), “the history of the twenty years after 1973 is that of a world that has lost its references and slid towards instability and crisis.”

From an environmental point of view, the unstable and critique atmosphere coincides with heightened debates surrounding the questions and uncertainties opened by the serious problems that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, such as air pollution in London and New York, cases of mercury poisoning in Minamata and Niigata, Japan, the decline of aquatic life in some of the American Great Lakes, and the publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962, in which the author Rachel Carson exposed the extensive use of DDT and the way such a substance penetrated organisms through “chains of poisoning”. In the academic and cultural context, we must also remember the broad changes that have occurred since the end of World War II, which have led to a questioning of the established order, including within the historical profession, and the opening of universities in the United States to a growing number of young people of modest backgrounds with diverse ethnic origins, which intensified the unease around academic elitism (Shopes, 2016, p. 74).

Environmental History and Public History are therefore institutionalized in a context that has indelibly marked them with ethical and political commitments. From this common ground emerge potentialities of dialogue that did

not pass by two of its greatest associations, namely the *Rachel Carson Center for Environmental History* and the *National Council on Public History*: the first, emphasizes that “Environmental History is particularly attractive to the public because it has moral purpose and political purchase” (Carruthers, 2011, p. 59); and the second, argues that public historians can help understand the connections between collective memory and humanity’s complex relationships with their environment and with unknown environments (National Council on Public..., 2014).

While in international environmental and public historiography it seems evident that there is a co-evolution of these fields and mutual gain in the interaction between Environmental History and Public History, the dialogue in fact still lacks a greater understanding in Brazilian historiography. This is the fundamental problem addressed in this article. I start from the premise that among Brazilian environmental historians there has not yet been a systematization of the debate, resulting in an overlap: Public History may be present as a practice within Environmental History works in Brazil but is still examined through the lenses of Social History and Oral History. In order to (re)ignite or replace the terms of the debate, highlighting the potentials to be explored, the article is divided into three sections. The first is dedicated to mapping, in the trajectory of Public History, the matrix of dialogue with Environmental History. The second section discusses how some concerns inherent to Public History have entered Brazilian environmental historiography through Social History. Lastly, the third section investigates the perspectives opened up by the idea of Environmental History as *a way of thinking*, Public History as *a means of shared action*, and Oral History as *a tool*.

ENGAGEMENT AND HORIZONTALITY: MAPPING THE MATRIX DIALOGUE

It seems consensual, in specialized historiography, that what we now call Public History has a place, a name, and a date of baptism. It would have been “baptized” in the United States during the 1970s, when Robert Kelley (1978, p. 16) defined Public History as “the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia: in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums, even in private practice.” For authors such as Paul Knevel, this was only the designation of a long-standing tradition of civil service within Western historiography. One wonders, then, why name an old practice? Barbara Howe gives us the clue by stating that Public History has emerged as a new way to identify historians (Cauvin, 2018).

Considering that “to identify” is to distinguish the identity of something or someone, when authors such as Thomas Cauvin (2018) affirm that the United States coined the term Public History, it is important to emphasize that this implies a process of creation, manufacture, invention. Coining the name was Kelley’s first step towards institutionalizing the field in the United States. Three other significant initiatives followed: the establishment of the first Public History program at the University of California, Santa Barbara (1976), the publication of the first issue of the journal *The Public Historian* (1978) by Wesley Johnson, and the formation of the *National Council on Public History* (NCPH).

By calling itself a response to the isolation of academic historians, Public History set itself in opposition to the “traditional historian”. As a representative of a new beginning, Cauvin explains, this “new historian” should be trained within academic programs to work beyond the realm of education, engaging with the mass media and collaborating with private capital entities. In the context of the global economic depression of the 1970s and the job crisis in American universities, expanding and, at the same time, demarcating the boundaries of historians’ work beyond academia was fundamental.

Concurrently, a reflection on the concept of Public History itself was taking shape in Great Britain. While the need for “dismantling” was shared with the Americans, the meaning given to it took different paths. If the predominance in the United States was in relation to the public use of history, in Britain it was about Public History associated with public policy. This distinction becomes evident through the work of Raphael Samuel, one of the leading representatives of Public History in England. In 1967, Samuel initiated a series of seminars at Ruskin College to explore how history could play a role in democratizing and raising awareness about the political uses of the past, by giving a voice to underrepresented social groups.

Samuel’s approach emerged from a long-standing debate in Britain, initiated after World War II by historians associated with the British Communist Party. In the 1970s, these historians and those affiliated with the journal *History Workshop* began advocating for a popular history (Aróstegui, 2001, p. 122). Thus, the period when “history from below” gained notoriety, with the works by Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, and Edward P. Thompson, coincides with and intersects the debates of Public History in Britain, although there is no consensus in historiography as to the validity of naming what was practiced as such.

For Cauvin (2018), the British movement, that already referred to itself as Public History at that time, was more radical than its American one, resulting in

a new impulse to the practice of local history, community studies, and Oral History. For Jill Liddington what emerged in Britain from then on was more akin to *English Heritage*. This is because the most intense debates about the interpretation of the past did not take place around Public History but rather around national heritage and memory, under the leadership of *landscape historians*, historical geographers, and cultural theorists (Liddington, 2011). If we take as a precaution what Liddington herself says about the fact that the term Public History is slippery, it interests us, rather than seeking to identify the roots of this “old practice” in Great Britain, to think that its conceptual debate emerged during a period in which the historians were called upon to engage in new ways in the preservation of historical places. No longer as the scholar or the professor, who from the top of their “ivory tower” thinks about the abstract concept, but as one who uses their expertise to support public policies aimed at safeguarding and preserving heritage. This seems a solid foundation for considering the relationships between Public History and Environmental History.

I base myself on the clue signaled by the statement of Dolores Hayden (1995). In her book *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, Hayden argues that the Social History of urban space has great potential to contribute not only to Public History, but also to broadening the perspectives of Urban History writing and preservation practices involving this space. Her statement attests to another fact that is also highlighted in the historiography of Public History: that one of the most fruitful aspects of the relationship that it establishes with Environmental History concerns the preservation of historical spaces.

Indeed, in the face of socialist threats to British manors during the mid-1970s, landowners and historians united in support of campaigns such as the *Heritage in Danger*. From this context emerged both the potential and the fragility of the new approach. Although the relationships between places, individuals and communities are at the center of debates around historic preservation, for too long the participation of local actors was neglected (Cauvin, 2016, p. 56). Only in the 1990s the category of heritage become a category incorporated into the public sphere and the humanities as a social form of political affirmation by diverse communities, bringing them to the forefront (Santiago Júnior, 2018). Such a horizontal political nature, which now allows the *National Council on Public History* to state that “public historians often function as bridges between the academy and places of shared heritage” (National Council on Public..., 2014), was already present in the horizon of environmental histo-

rians since the 1970s. However, as with Public History, it has gone through challenges along the way.

Environmental History was institutionalized in response to a society that saw its natural resources in constant transformation (and degradation), amid the whirlwind of the rapid development of capitalist economies and the system. It emerges calling to itself the social function of denouncing the devastation of nature and the impacts of capitalism on societies – both colonized and colonizing ones. For Donald Worster (1988), despite having been born with a moral purpose and strong political commitment, its maturation as an academic research field took place without managing to promote any political or moral agenda. In Martin Melosi's (1993) assessment, environmental history has been unable to find a consistent path to reach the political community or address many people, either in the environmental movement or in the general public. Equally inefficient was environmental history practiced within the realm of public historians.

To better understand these statements, it is important to acknowledge that Worster and Melosi's analyses date back to 1988 and 1993, respectively. This raises the question: what has changed since then? I believe that the perception that many historical preservation and environmental sustainability projects have been doomed to failure, due to a lack of dialogue and civic engagement (Cauvin, 2016, p. 56), has brought Public History and Environmental History closer together in more direct ways. However, their effectiveness in historiography – and here I think particularly of Brazilian historiography – still had to overcome another challenge, that of demarcating an area of activity sometimes attributed to Social History.

AND THROUGH THE ROUTE OF SOCIAL HISTORY...

The recognition that the subject of study for environmental historians lie in the dialectic between the natural and the constructed has brought some relevant modifications to think about the dialogue with Public History. In addition to the traditional focus on nature and the so-called wild or human-modified regions have been added concerns about culture, politics, and economics. Alongside written documents, landscapes have become fundamental analysis tools for environmental historians (Melosi, 1993, pp. 17-18). As David Blackbourn (2011, p. 19) explains, environmental historians were not the only ones to realize that history takes place in both time and space. However, environmental historians, by examining habitats, landscapes, and invasive specie-

shave played a crucial role as “prime movers in “restoring the spatial dimension to history”.

In fact, since the 1980s, works that are now reference to environmental history have already signaled this inclination. This is the case of *Man and the natural world*, published in 1983, by Keith Thomas (1989). In order to understand the position of English society in the face of current environmental problems, the author walked the lines of rising interest in the natural world in Great Britain. Armed with the tools of Historical Anthropology, Thomas investigated the changes in perception, emotions, and reasoning about nature – and its overlaps with factors such as religion and culture. He concludes that between 1500 and 1800, it is possible to glimpse significant shifts in how men and women of all social levels perceived and classified the natural world, with the questioning of the anthropocentric vision being one of the most important.

Considering forms of seeing, feeling and thinking about nature, to the analysis of how biological elements manipulated by human hands contributed to the alteration and colonization of spaces, another influential work for scholars of Environmental History is the boom *Ecological Imperialism*, published in 1986 by Alfred Crosby (1993). His subject of research is Neo-Europe – regions with predominantly Caucasian populations that were colonized by Europeans and located in the temperate zones of the northern and southern hemispheres –, unique for the large number of food surpluses they exported on a global scale. Crosby argues that European imperialism had a biological and ecological component. Intentionally, in search of a means similar to their own, or unintentionally, through boats, clothes and shoes, the colonizers brought with them three essential and determining factors for their domination over the territory and peoples of America and Australasia: plants, animals, and diseases, which not only “Europeanized” the territory, but also managed to impose themselves on the native ecosystem and population, often leading to their decimation.

His work provides, even today, a model for the evaluation of the successes of other exotic organisms, such as humans, and another dimension of environmental problems, that of the impacts of the environment on human life. Added to this, Warren Dean’s *With Broadax and Firebrand*, published in 1995, is also inescapable when it comes to founding works of Environmental History, in the analysis of how the society/biota dialectic has altered the natural landscape. His analysis on the history and devastation of the Atlantic Forest presented itself with the differential of starting not with the arrival of the colonizers, a view still common at the time, but 400 million years ago. Dean works,

therefore, with the long-term perspective, considering geological, ecosystem, cultural, social, political, and economic aspects that have influenced human intervention in the Atlantic Forest.

Examining seemingly distinct contexts in terms of ecosystem, cultures, politics, and economics, but that intersect, Keith Thomas, Alfred Crosby, and Warren Dean have carved out a demarcated space in the theoretical and methodological framework of Environmental History. Their works illustrate the three main lines of analysis in Environmental History as mapped out by Donald Worster in the late 1980s¹. In addition, they show not only that interdisciplinarity was the great asset of environmental historians, but also that the focus on the interrelation of cultural, economic and political factors was fundamental in understanding the dynamics of constructing, appropriating, and exploiting the physical environment.

In the Brazilian context, the concerns reflected in the works of Thomas, Crosby, and Dean have exerted significant influence at a time when Environmental History was disseminated and strengthened as a field of study in the country. I bring two works here². In chronological order, the first is *Os Historiadores e os Rios* (1999), in which Victor Leonardi starts from Regional History to the Environmental History, aiming to explain the “ruining”, interpreted as the act of running out of resources, of the Velho Airão – tributary of the Negro River, located in the Jaú River valley. Deepening his analysis, the author situates the problem within a global context, concluding that the “decay” of Airão cannot be disconnected from the modes of living, based on “predatory” extractivism and structured in the colonial regime. The central argument is that the depletion of natural resources is closely linked to violence against humans, exclusion, and declining living conditions.

This thread is also present in the work *Tietê, o rio que a cidade perdeu* (2006). In the work, Janes Jorge explores how the intensification of the urbanization process of São Paulo led to the degradation of the Tietê River. According to the author, there was a punctual rupture with the past in the way of life of the São Paulo population and their relationship with the river. The romanticized view of the beauties of its surroundings and the approach, easily proven in activities such as fishing, bathing and sports navigation that the “living” river provided, gave way to the distance and embarrassment that pollution and systematic degradation of this water resource brought.

Although both Leonardi and Jorge are often cited by environmental historians, in general their works are situated by historiography specializing in the intersection of Environmental History and Social History. Therefore,

whether in the American and European contexts or in the Brazilian context, the fact is that the interconnections between Environmental History and Public History, despite the evident affinities and shared concerns with the problems related to the built and natural environment, did not occur automatically. It can even be argued that this process is still ongoing. To encourage dialogue, in a kind of manifesto, Melosi reassessed his pessimistic analysis from 1993 and emphasized an important step for the 2000s: the realization that Environmental History should be seen not only as a field of study but as a *way of thinking*, that is, a tool for the study of human interactions with the natural and constructed environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AS A WAY OF THINKING, PUBLIC HISTORY
AS A MEANS OF SHARED ACTION, AND ORAL HISTORY AS A TOOL

From the 1990s, when Melosi writes, to the 2020s, the advancement of debates around the concept of sustainability was decisive, from which the effort to assert the interrelation between Environmental History and Public History became more central. For Jeffrey Stine (2017), the challenges posed by globalization and climate change have further intensified the interests in these two fields.

In 2014, a self-titled “task force” of the *National Council on Public History* released a document urging public historians to “to tackle the complicated and politically charged notion of Sustainability”. According to the document, in addition to the functions of coordinating environmental research and programs and sharing “good practices”, it was up to public historians to play the role of mediators, ensuring that the response of historians is communicated in a more accessible language for other disciplines that work with sustainability. The overall assessment was that sustainability issues exist at the intersection of environmental history and public history”. If only, because public historians who dedicated to the study of popular historical consciousness have already demonstrated that environmental perception is shaped by powerful memories, which emerge from the connections of the community with the physical environment (National Council on Public..., 2014). Based on this finding, scholars such as David Glassberg and Sarah Pharaon (2014, pp. 5-6) have even suggested the creation of “sites of consciousness” that foster public dialogue about environmental disasters and climate change. Another important point highlighted in the NCPH document is the recognition that it places environmental sustainability and eco-

conomic and social sustainability as overlapping, inseparable. In 2014, the journal *The Public Historian*, affiliated with the NCPH, published a special issue devoted to the relationship between Public History and Environmental History. In the introduction, Leah S. Glaser (2014, pp. 10-16) asserts that for public historians, throughout human history both the natural and the constructed environments have been vital components in the formation of sustainable communities. The author argues that public historians are well-equipped to contribute to the debate on this topic, insofar as they are accustomed to working with issues such as original research, engaging narratives, civic engagement, collaborative partnerships, and shared authority.

Among these aspects, I would like to draw attention to the last. The concept of shared authority was coined by Michael Frisch (1990), in a book of the same name, in which he demystified the figure of the academic historian who, in an act of benevolence, grants a community the right to engage in activities that historians do or should do. The historian does not choose to share authority simply because they do not possess it; *it is shared per se*, as something that is intrinsic to the nature of Public History.

The concept remains controversial today even among practitioners of Public History. According to James B. Gardner (2010), the boundary line between the idea of shared authority and that of radical trust is delicate. In the context of debates about Public History and community museums in the United States, the latter would correspond to the challenge of giving the public control, allowing them to develop content and guide the work of professional historians. If carried out, the idea may deviate from the crucial need to share to a total relinquishment of the historian's authority. For Faye Sayer (2015), suspicions of this type are due to the fact that historians would still be so attached to an ideal of authority that even terms such as *communication, engagement, cooperation, and collaboration*, which are associated with Public History, may still be associated with the conception of historians as they possess control over the past, contrary to the democratic processes expected in this field of historical practice.

As Marta Rovai (2018) emphasizes, a turning point in this conflict lies in the fact that historians now find themselves facing an audience that no longer acts as mere consumers but that actively participates in the construction and decision-making process regarding what, how, why, and to what extent their stories should be publicized. This phenomenon of individual emancipation towards history and, therefore, the construction of temporal and spatial narratives, modified the structures of historical production and the historian's role

(De Groot, 2009). According to Olivier Dumoulin (2017), historians today are expected to prescribe a “social remedy”, and not to describe or interpret it accurately, since their legitimacy is no longer solely based on objectivity and a pursuit of truth. They have become demiurges who, by reading the past, have a mission to shape the future, to arbitrate, to produce cultural identities, to be socially valuable as agents of cohesion and social harmony. Thus, historians find themselves today at a crossroads: they are the experts who are not experts and witnesses to events they did not witness.

Based on the above, it is plausible to assume that the relationship between historians and their audiences – which are often their sources and object of analysis – has also been substantially modified. But in what way? What is the role of historians in the contemporary debate on sustainability issues, especially within communities of “minority majorities”? Compounding the historiography on the subject, it is evident that historians have been compelled to respond, among others, to questions about whether or not social demands are met in policies to promote sustainability, and ways to facilitate and expand public access to them. This should not be considered a novelty, after all, in the United States, during the second half of the twentieth century, the increase in environmental disputes in state and federal courts has rightly led to a demand for specialists in public historical investigations (Stine, 2017, p. 7). However, this leads to the second crucial point, which I would like to highlight. Historians have had to reassess their authority in order to reconcile *expertise* and *experience* within a new decision-making model, democratic and horizontal, in which stakeholders – the community – must be called upon to participate, express their opinions, and make choices regarding what and how to preserve.

I do not think I am mistaken in saying that public historians have seen the dialogue with Environmental History as a way of exercising this shared authority. After all, articulated, Public History and Environmental History present themselves as a promising “tool for studying human interaction with the physical environment (both natural and built) that emphasizes communication and engages the audience” (Melosi; Scarpino, 2004, p. 291). It is crucial, therefore, to understand how this concept has been operationalized by environmental historians. Among them, there is a growing perception that landscape conservation planning should be directly linked to the interpretation of its historical importance for the community in which they are inserted. Understood as the association between physical components and human activities, the landscape emerges as a vital element in discussions surrounding the concept of sustainable development. In part, because the connections be-

tween heritage – seen in its broad perspective – and sustainability have had positive responses in public engagement for the preservation of “their” landscapes (Cauvin, 2016, pp. 56-58). Thus, for Environmental History, the dialogue with Public History presents itself as a way to recover its initial moral and political commitment. In 2011, the *Rachel Carson Center for Environmental History* published a document in which experts in the field discussed the major themes, needs, and challenges for the future of Environmental History (Coulter; Mauch, 2011). Despite the variety of topics addressed, it is possible to identify a great concern with spatial structures. Since environmental issues such as climate change do not adhere to geopolitical boundaries but can be intensified by them, environmental historians are called upon to reconsider the scales of their analysis. On the one hand, authors such as Frank Uekoetter (2011, pp. 24-26) suggest that Environmental History should become Global History, with an emphasis on ecological similarities and shared environmental problems. On the other hand, the NCPH points out that public historians focus on the place makes Public History directly answer the questions posed by environmental historians regarding changes in landscapes over time (National Council on Public..., 2014). As argued by Martin Melosi (2011, pp. 31-34), the difficulty – and the potential that leads him to propose (re)igniting the debate between Environmental History and Public History – lies precisely in a balancing between the narratives from the local to the global, in order to understand how local communities assume considerable risks for the production of products and capital goods exported worldwide.

Among Brazilians, perhaps the most significant and recent example of this dynamic is the Mariana and Brumadinho disasters. On November 5, 2015, the rupture of two dams owned by the mining company Samarco devastated the district of Bento Rodrigues in Mariana, Minas Gerais, resulting in the loss of 19 lives. In a matter of days, toxic mining waste flowed down the Doce River until it reached the sea, causing severe environmental, economic, and social damage to the surrounding municipalities in the states of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo. What should have become a lesson, unfortunately, repeated itself. On January 25, 2019, the municipality of Brumadinho, also in Minas Gerais, was devastated by the rupture of the Córrego do Feijão Mine dam, owned by Vale S.A., resulting in the loss of over 270 lives. A study conducted by Haruf Espindola, Eunice Nodari, and Mauro Augusto dos Santos (2019) demonstrated that the first socio-environmental disaster significantly altered the relationship of the community around Doce River with its space, based on the idea of a “landscape of fear”, a generalized climate of fear that

makes the population live in constant vigilance and feel powerless in the face of the devastating forces to which it was subjected. It is interesting to note that it was through official documents and newspaper reports that the authors accessed the public debate on this socio-environmental tragedy.

Another disaster – the floods in Rio de Janeiro – prompted historians Lise Sedrez and Andrea Casa Nova Maia (2014) to think about community relations with the production of space. In their study, the authors examine how a series of floods that hit the city of Rio de Janeiro from 1966 plunged the city's then four million inhabitants into chaos, with the flooding of streets, the collapse of hills, etc. In the collective memory of the city, the great rain of 1966 came to be known as the “punishment of Saint Sebastian”, the city's patron saint. Expanding the analyzes, the authors observe how this flood was responsible for the redesign of the urban landscape by building an *urban nature*. The Cidade de Deus, one of the largest communities in Rio de Janeiro, was created in this process, by a population that was expelled by the violence of the waters. Unlike the study of Espindola, Nodari & Santos, the oral narratives that gain prominence here. It was through Oral History that the authors sought to access the “goals, desires, and purposes” of this population that helped shape this *urban nature*, deconstructing the usual separation between the human and natural worlds.

Shifting from the urbanistic meaning to the affective meaning of interpreting the city's landscape as something perceived, the historian Regina Horta Duarte (2007) studied the process of afforestation and cutting of 350 *Ficus benjaminian* trees along Avenida Afonso Pena in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, on the eve of the 1964 military coup. The author's initial observation, which likely motivated her to investigate the topic, is that the abrupt cutting of these trees was still a very vivid event in the memory of Belo Horizonte residents, especially among the older generation, some of whom were interviewed for the research. The sudden disappearance of the *Ficus* trees sparked public debates in newspapers, political reports, and everyday conversations, highlighting not only the relationship between citizens and the natural elements present in the urban environment but also how daily practices and political actions are responsible for the formation of a space.

These three articles reveal both a gap and a potential. On the one hand, works such as those by Regina Horta Duarte, Lise Sedrez, and Andrea Casa Nova Maia use oral interviews to compose their list of sources. Paradoxically, on the other hand, they also demonstrate that the specific attention given to oral narratives is still recent. According to the most comprehensive and recent

historiographical survey on Brazilian Environmental History, it can even be said that it is incipient. I refer to *A construção de um país tropical: uma apresentação da historiografia ambiental sobre o Brasil* (2020), conducted by José Augusto Pádua and Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho, who analyzed 55 authorial books and 30 collections. Compiling thematic axes and sources used in all these works, the authors conclude that the potential of oral sources is still little explored. Incorporating these sources effectively from the narratives of *caiçaras*, *quilombolas*, indigenous people, small farmers, riverside dwellers, and settlers, could greatly contribute to Environmental History.

From the statement of Pádua and Carvalho (2020), I would like to address two issues. The first is that this extensive survey fails to mention the potential for linking Environmental History with Public History. Connected to this, I believe that there is an overlap in the role assigned to the more general orbit of Oral history when, in fact, it permeates the problems that are also dear to Public History, overshadowing the latter. And that's for a reason that was insightfully highlighted by Linda Shopes (2002). Oral history and Public History emerged as institutionalized fields in the 1960s/1970s, respectively, as a way to shed light on life experiences that traditional historical writing had previously ignored. On the common ground of Social History, oral historians and public historians have overlapped, not infrequently in the same professionals, blurring disciplinary boundaries. Their shared objective of giving a voice to historical subjects ignored by official narratives has made Oral History an essential tool for expanding both the content and audience of public programming (Shopes, 2002). Now, if, as I stated above, Social History was one of the ways in which Environmental History entered Brazilian historiography, it is plausible to assume that it was through Oral History, brought by the common ground established with Social History, that Public History entered the realm of Environmental History in Brazil.

Don Ritchie's analysis (2015) suggests that Public History represents an organized effort to bring accurate and meaningful history to a wide audience, with Oral History serving as the natural tool to achieve this goal. This view implies a counterproductive simplification, the result of the dispute for performance spaces. In an article in the first issue of *The Public Historian*, public historian Arthur Hansen (1978) attributed to Public History the opportunity to bring Oral History out of the archives and make it more relevant to contemporary public concerns. Hansen's effort to "pilot" Oral History through the channels of Public History, while not unfounded at a time of jobs crisis and labor market competition in the United States, was effective.

When discussing Oral History and Public History, the tendency is for people to limit themselves to understand the former as an interview-recorder-transcript combo, and the latter as the popular presentation of history to diverse audiences. The big question is that the two are much more challenging and complex, especially when thought of in relation with each other. Oral History explores ethical and epistemological questions arising from the relationship between narrator and researcher, and between memories, narratives, and identities. As for Public History, we have that, in depth, it is deeply connected to how we develop a sense of the past. From this we can redefine the terms of Ritchie's sentence: Oral History would be a natural tool for understanding how, in the sphere of public debate, we acquire our sense of the past and position ourselves in relation to contemporary issues. The way to do this, according to Ana Maria Mauad (2018), is to think about Oral History through the articulation of two movements: the aforementioned shared authority and the "possession of the word" by historical subjects. By doing so, it is possible to go beyond a model that still privileges an alleged authority from above – generally, that of the historian/interviewer, who applies questionnaires and then transcribes them to shape the narratives supporting their own problems and arguments, all under the pretext of sharing an authority of which they would be claiming to possess (Frisch, 2016).

In the field of what we might call American Environmental Public History, some initiatives that start from Oral History are noteworthy. This is the case of a project developed by The Cooperstown Graduate Program, one of the oldest graduate programs in Museology in the United States, based in New York. They utilized their extensive collection of oral accounts to engage four surrounding rural communities in reflecting on past and present environmental problems. From there, they produced new oral narratives about water quality, the comparison between traditional and contemporary uses of natural resources, and the management of water resources. In common, they concluded that land is the most important resource they owned (Gard; Walker, 2014, p. 7).

This production of an oral collection from the public debate within communities themselves on contemporary environmental problems is the one that comes closest to the proposal to think of Environmental History as *a way of thinking*, Public History as *a means of collaborative action*, and Oral History as *a tool*. We have to ask ourselves if in Brazil we have initiatives similar to The Cooperstown Graduate Program. Have Brazilian environmental historians been working in this way? Judging by the observation of Pádua and Carvalho,

that oral sources are still underutilized, the answer is that we are facing a potential that is still uncharted. While this is true, I argue that, if we broaden our perspective beyond oral narratives, we may discover other forms of intersection between Environmental History and Public History.

It is urgent to ask ourselves about some points: in what way have the works of Environmental History in Brazil succeeded, or not, in adopting a shared “historian attitude”? In other words, have Brazilian environmental historians, in the full sense of a Public History, acted in response to public demands, disseminating research results, in transposing a historiographic operation to the field of cultural products for public use (Mauad, 2018)? What are the benefits of adopting a public perspective for environmental historiography in a country with a continental dimension, indisputable biodiversity, but which has in the concentration of income and social inequality one of the main causes of environmental degradation? These are significant questions that have not yet been fully examined in the historiography dedicated to Environmental History or in the historiography focused on Public History in Brazil.

FINAL REMARKS

Throughout this article, I have provided an overview of the institutionalization of Public History and Environmental History, mapped the common concerns, the shared ethical, moral, and political commitments. This whole journey was made in order to support my argument that the dialogue between the two fields, while encouraged by the *Rachel Carson Center for Environmental History* and the *National Council on Public History*, remains open in Brazil. This is not because the country’s environmental historians are unconcerned or oblivious to public debates, but rather because many of their works are analyzed within the frameworks of Social History and Oral History. I see here a historiographical gap to be addressed, not by abandoning these approaches, but by reconfiguring them in two complementary directions.

The first direction is to start from the idea of Environmental History as *a way of thinking*, Public History as *a means of shared action*, and Oral History as *a tool*. By doing so, we will be able to reaffirm the importance signaled by Pádua & Carvalho and by the documents of the *Rachel Carson Center* and the NCPH: the promotion of sustainability invariably involves understanding the diverse meanings that communities attribute to the environments in which they are inserted. These meanings can be captured through the oral accounts of the members of these communities.

The second is to investigate how the shared “historian attitude” goes beyond the collection of oral narratives. Here, it is necessary to explore how, in the Brazilian environmental historiography, a history created *by* and *with* the public, in addition to analyzing how environmental historians have assessed the relationship between *history* and the *public* (Santhiago, 2016, p. 28). In this sense, I emphasize the need to evaluate other formats and languages of the so-called historiographic products produced by environmental historians³. I am referring here to considering not only academic texts but also other media that may serve as better indicators of increased interaction with the academic community or the general public. In this way, Public History and Environmental History in Brazil can (re)ignite the dialogue and strengthen the ethical and political commitment to Brazilian society.

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NOTES

¹ According to Donald Worster (1991, p. 202), the first aspect deals with the organization and functioning of organic and inorganic elements in the past. The second aspect, the studies pay attention to the socioeconomic dimension of the ecological environment, examining “tools and labor, with the social relations that arise from this work, with the various ways that peoples have created to produce goods from natural resources”. Lastly, the third level deals with human perceptions of nature, that is, the various ways of thinking and feeling about the natural world.

² In addition to these, there are other works influenced by Thomas, Crosby and Dean that can be mentioned, which are framed, for example, in the intersections of Environmental History with Political History, the History of Ideas, and Intellectual History. However, these works fall outside the scope of this article, considering the specific relationship with the community and the social element, which are points of contact with the concerns of Public History.

³ As an example, we have the pioneering initiative led by Regina Horta Duarte since 2013 in the Department of History at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, called “*As 4 Estações*” (The 4 Seasons, in English). It is a program broadcast by Rádio UFMG Educativa, with episodes available on YouTube and Spotify. Formatted in three-minute pills, the program addresses varied topics on the relations between society and nature throughout history, aiming to contribute to a broader dissemination of Environmental History and making content easily accessible to teachers. Although classified by Duarte as a scientific outreach program, the project has all the characteristics that can be view from the perspective of Public History.

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