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Environment and citizenship
Integrating justice, responsibility
and civic engagement

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of this one planet to address more effectively environmental and social injustice and promote greater environmental responsibility in the future. This book is dedicated to Harry, George, Tate and Skye, who like all future generations will face the task of finding solutions for the problematic environmental legacies of the twentieth century.

Box 3.1 is an edited version of an article published in *Society Matters*, the annual publication of the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Open University, and is used with kind permission. Box 4.2 is an edited version of a webpage of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and is also used with kind permission.

Introduction: environment, obligation and citizenship

The purpose of this book is to offer a series of new challenges on how we think through our relationship with the environment. At this time in both human and environmental history we have reached a tipping point in terms of anthropogenic impacts on environmental stability from the broad-based effects of climate change to the accumulated local toxic effects of industrial waste that have been piled up in the neighbourhoods of communities that have been least active in challenging the activities and decisions of politicians and companies for generations. For four decades, we have witnessed the growing awareness of environmental injustices, initially singly and isolated but gradually combining with other environmental problems so that they now impact on most human communities with varying degrees of harm, depending on where you live and who you are. Initially, this led to a turnaround in civic engagement in the most affected communities, by environmental justice movements in North America, community livelihood movements in Latin America, Asia and Africa, and citizens' initiatives and environmental safety groups in Europe. Recently, however, this increased awareness and willingness to mobilize of localized movements has generated a broader groundswell that acknowledges the trans-boundary impacts of many issues, from acid rain to marine conservation and the global impacts of climate change.

Right from the start we want to emphasize the importance of recognizing that environmental issues cannot be separated from questions of social justice – that there is no contradiction between addressing environmental issues and social inequalities. These are necessarily complementary issues, not contradictory ones. Even the preservation of wilderness areas and the conservation of transformed and managed landscapes have social implications both in terms of the access to environmental goods of people traditionally excluded from these benefits and the social justice concerns that directly pertain to rural folk and traditional livelihoods that can often be relegated to insignificance by environmental campaigns that some NGOs have initiated without consultation or forethought. Much environmental thought and ethics, as well as specific academic fields such as green political theory, has fixated on the environment as a ring-fenced and isolated issue. Even discussions of sustainable development tend to focus on its oxymoronic status rather

than establishing the connections between environmental and social justice. This is often combined with a corresponding assertion that most Western citizens need to engage in considerable *material* sacrifices in order to achieve a lighter ecological footprint. On the opposing side, environmental sceptics challenge environmentalism by focusing exclusively on the ways in which eco-improvement expenditures could be redeployed in order to promote poverty alleviation, health provision and education services. The battle lines drawn here tend to emphasize the differences between a materialistic conception of development and economic growth as a means to reduce human suffering and a post-materialist conception of a steady-state economy and, in some cases, a transformation to low-impact lifestyles with an improved quality of life.

The first problem with such a stark and in part ideologically driven contrast is simply that both sides of the equation have merit. We should be concerned with social injustices on a global as well as national scale and with the asymmetrical power relations between globalizers and globalized that feed both environmental degradation and increased differences between rich and poor. We should also recognize that the remaining pristine wilderness and biodiversity hubs are under threat, as well as acknowledging the need to push for lower human impact. While the environmental message has often been subsumed into established discourses of citizen rights and national energy security, increasingly it has recalibrated these discourses by making civil rights discourse and energy security a means of avoiding environmental harms and securing sustainable outcomes. Witness the events in the climate-change slow-coach, the USA, during 2007/08. The focus on alternative energy by the Bush administration in order to aid national security in a world where many oil-producing societies are seen as hostile to US interests has been rearticulated across the political spectrum in the primaries for the 2008 presidential election. Leaving aside a few sceptics at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), who regard Arnold Schwarzenegger as an 'eco-extremist', security concerns have now been subsumed by a recognition that sustainable energy should also be a source of green-collar employment, technological innovation, lower manufacturing costs and an improved quality of life for all citizens.

The second problem is that this academically and politically driven distinction between environmental and social issues ignores a fundamental change in the environmental debate. In the 1980s and 1990s the concern for environmental justice was often couched in terms of how academic and legal experts could act as the voice of groups that had no other means of addressing their grievances – with environmental activists, NGOs and

researchers placing themselves in the shoes of the most affected groups and speaking on behalf of the powerless. Much the same was seen in the work of development NGOs' charity campaigns on famine, poverty and health, and the official announcements on international aid programmes made by both Western and rapidly developing states such as China – acts based purely on compassion and altruism (perhaps sometimes a little guilt as well) rather than justice. This does not mean that humanitarian efforts are misguided; in fact the opposite is the case, for the *ties that bind*, which recognize the existence of a commonwealth of humanity, are just as important in resolving global environmental problems as the *ties that bind* based on justice. The fundamental change addressed in this book is the growing importance of citizenship and all its associated civic engagement practices – we note in particular that the distinction between public and private spheres hinders a better understanding of how to make policy and action more effective. Moreover, this points to a fundamental analytical shift marked by what has been described as the redefinition of 'the political' (Mouffe 2000) or the 'sociality of politics' (Smith 2000a, 2000b) – the way we comprehend the state, politics, national governments and even intergovernmental institutions is fundamentally shaped by the ways we understand civil society rather than being institutionally distinct.

The final problem is the role of ethics in current debates on these questions and issues. In the past we have been locked into an ethical stand-off between two dominant ethical traditions – utilitarianism, with its long-standing manifestations in both conservationist and state policy concerns with human welfare, and Kantian contractarian assumptions that underpin liberal politics through the principle that what applies to one must apply to all (including variations that include non-human animals as subjects of life in what counts as 'all'). Here, we also draw on an older tradition that has resurfaced in the late twentieth century, virtue ethics. Whereas the dominant traditions pose universal ethical solutions in terms of outcomes and rules respectively, virtue ethics focuses on how individual citizens engage in self-improving activities that benefit the community. In this way, it provides an alternative framework for linking the decisions of all actors, including citizens, NGOs and companies, to broader objectives established through political institutions.

Gone are the days when environmental activists were treated as marginal, irrelevant and slightly deranged. Gone are the days when a corporate CEO could announce at a general meeting of shareholders that a woman in the audience offering an environmental challenge to the company's waste policy should go home and look after her children.

Gone are the days when the concerns of marginalized groups on grounds of race, gender and class were also marginalized in debate on environmental harm in Western societies. After all, the activist impulses of these movements have routinely been based on the combined experiences of ethnic minorities, lower socio-economic status groups and gender. Environmental concern is now a rubric through which other policies are increasingly viewed, and with that the ground rules inevitably change. So, on the one hand, it has evolved from an oppositional movement to one embracing active involvement in policy-making. On the other hand, effective policy depends on changes at all levels of society, including personal behaviour and community organization, in ways that cannot be directed or achieved purely by financial (dis-)incentives. The debate on environment and citizenship brings these concerns together by addressing the ways in which civic engagement practices inform policy-making and how citizens understand the reasons for, and ethical assumptions underpinning, being environmentally responsible.

In developing these points, Chapter 1 explores the important questions of why, how, where and when the debate on environment and citizenship matters. This is followed by case studies on the Love Canal incident and the combined environmental and social effects of migration on the Thai-Burmese border. The first, in a developed society, is a classic worst-case incident in the history of environmental movements. Here we focus on the essential facts of the case, but as part of updating what has happened since (the issue is still ongoing) we address the central questions on environment and citizenship. The second focuses briefly on cross-border migrant labour and environmental issues in South-East Asia to consider how the role of NGOs is changing from one of advocacy to being agents of civil engagement as well as integrating environmental and social concerns.

Chapter 2 provides a summary of some recent relevant debates in citizenship studies and considers how the proliferating accounts of citizenship indicate its essentially contested character. In particular, it charts the shift from citizenship as bound to national political communities, how relations between entitlements and obligations should not always be seen as reciprocal, and the important contributions on cultural difference (especially the debate on group rights) and gender identity. It concludes with a heuristic model of circuits of justice and how these can inform the discussion of citizenship when considering environmental ethics. This chapter adds a new concept of citizenization to highlight how conceptions of citizenship are always provisional and in process.

Chapter 3 focuses on the recent discussions of environmental and

ecological citizenship, explains their differences and considers their strengths and weaknesses. As advocates of ecological citizenship we use this part of the book to conceptually clarify the meaning of rights, entitlements, duties and obligations, as well as to explore the benefits of using virtue ethics to prepare the way for new research in the field. We also develop the argument for a strategic focus in research that moves from concrete conditions to academic theory rather than the other way round. In this way, this chapter addresses how new research needs to address how theory and practice can be integrated more effectively while also linking acts in everyday life to ethics and policy. Both of these chapters start from the premise that the personal is political and challenge how 'the political' has been understood.

In the remainder of the book we concentrate on practical politics. By building and elaborating on the concrete case studies in earlier chapters, we address the political institutions that operate on local, regional, national and intergovernmental levels as well as addressing how personal actions feed into environmental movements and, in turn, affect policy-making. Chapter 4 addresses the intergovernmental context of environmental policy, action and ethics and the considerable obstacles to developing effective global agreements on issues as diverse as deforestation and climate change. In addition, it considers the governance experiment developed by the EU in linking social and environmental justice, the role of social movements and green parties and how environmental movements mobilize resources, before considering what aspects of this institutional framework have applicability in Asia.

Chapter 5 explores the potential and perils of corporate environmental responsibility, the increased role of self-regulation, and how codes of responsible conduct can be made more effective. The key issues covered are ecological modernization, ecopreneurialism, intangible assets and, crucially, the emergence of corporate citizenship. Chapter 6 focuses on the different ways in which borders can affect environmental responsibility, transnational activism and civic engagement through case studies from the Great Lakes region in North America, southern Europe and South-East Asia. Chapter 7 builds on these case studies by exploring environmental mobilizations in the South-East Asian mainland, taking account of development policy, cultural and religious beliefs, the rural-urban divide and social class differences to better understand conflicts over water and land use as well as energy projects and pollution. This chapter concludes with a discussion of participatory research and how it has informed civic engagement in this context.

The concluding chapter explores the issues raised throughout the

book, in particular how to integrate ethics, policy and action in the context of the new vocabulary of ecological citizenship, drawing upon aspects of virtue ethics. It also draws attention to the increased importance of urban sustainability. Central to the case developed here and throughout the book is the growing importance of qualitative research methods that enable us to gain a better understanding of how the relations between entitlements and obligations (as well as rights and duties) are context dependent. The story developed in this book is that an awareness of social and environmental injustices is not enough in itself. Not only do we need to identify how they exist side by side, in some cases making the effects of each worse, we also need to recognize that the promotion of environmental responsibility depends on broad-focus civic engagement strategies that translate the affected constituencies into stakeholders in the decisions that affect their lives.

PART ONE

Theory informed by practice