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The Modern Day Lorax

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Latta, Alex, and Hannah Wittman, editors. *Environment and Citizenship in Latin America: Natures, Subjects and Struggles*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012. 262 pp.

Environment and Citizenship in Latin America: Natures, Subjects and Struggles seeks to understand how institutionalized power is imposed on our environment, which actors are given citizenship within this system and which are disenfranchised. This analysis is reminiscent of a familiar childhood story: “I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees. I speak for the trees for the trees have no tongues.” If the Lorax represents actors affected by industrial extraction and the trees represent the disenfranchised ecology sustaining the Lorax's livelihood,

then who is the Lorax of our times? If the Lorax spoke, would he be heard? What systems could the Lorax use to address his concerns for the trees?

This book is divided into three parts. Chapters two through five, “Assembling Nature's Citizens,” use four case studies to juxtapose the emergence of environmental citizens as reactive responses to a changing socio-environmental landscape and the distinct permutations these protests form. Chapters six through nine, “Environmental Marginality and the Struggle for Justice,” borrow from environmental justice studies to examine marginality of identity (e.g., race, class) and environment. In other words, to understand the power dynamics between society and ecology. Lastly, chapters ten through thirteen, “Citizens, Environmental Governance and the State,” study the larger context of institutional governance, assessing citizen engagement with nation-state structures that attempt to manage both humans and the environment.

In Chapter 1, Alex Latta and Hannah Whitman introduce the concept of environmental citizenship. They question how ecology is understood in a “discovered” land valued precisely for its natural resource extraction. In Latin America, colonialism thrives as environmental exploitation. Populations impacted by ecological crisis become forced activists, trying to raise ecological public consciousness for systemic change. This way, environmental struggles take on elements of citizenship and identity. Until environmental consciousness is implied for citizens of a biopolitical society, this new breed of public participation denotes an assumed ontological separation of nature and society.

In Chapter 2, Andrew Baldwin and Judy Meltzer analyze the violent clash of indigenous protesters and police in Andean Peru amidst fast-tracked oil and gas extraction. This corporate exploitation represents the neocolonialism of South America, protected by a state-sponsored military industrial complex defending trade liberalization. Security must change from its traditional definition of militarized protection to one of biopolitical safety from the multiplier effects of climate change.

In Chapter 3, Fábio de Castro compares environmental citizens in the north (those who voluntarily curb their carbon footprint with individual behavioral change) with those in the south (those compelled by their circumstances into collective activism). With modernity defined as industrialized overconsumption of globalized commodity chains, which environmental citizen is responsible for creating a sustainable society? If this responsibility of ecological guardian falls to indigenous populations, then we must bolster their political rights to counter their historic political and economic marginalization. This chapter studies community-based resource management in rural Brazil as a model for poverty alleviation, conservation, and sustainable development.

In Chapter 4, Anaiese Richard explores the Mexican food sovereignty movement as a response to environmental degradation due to international trade. The reconfiguration of global food systems can provide food security, local control, and a return to resilient agroecology. This agrobiodiversity promotes harmonious relationships between humans, ecosystems, and food (mostly maize)

as foundational for Mexican identity and social order. If identity and subsistence depend on the protection of the natural environment, then environmental citizenship becomes a birthright.

In Chapter 5, Renzo Taddei argues an epistemological dimension to ecological struggles. In particular, how science is branded as modern (therefore better), as absolute truth (therefore depoliticized), and has been used against the insurgence of political environmental consciousness. Political conflict is thus neutralized by technocratic management of natural resources controlled by an urban, academic elite. Indigenous resisters therefore struggle to convince the judicial system of the merits of their lived experience without the lent legitimacy of science.

In Chapter 6, Juanita Sundberg describes the rise of environmental institutions in Latin America within the post-dictatorship period. In Guatemala environmental activists were seen as imperial importers of often paternalistic ideology, keeping environmentalism for the elite and further entrenching the divide between urban and indigenous populations, replicating long-standing racial hierarchies.

In Chapter 7, María Teresa Grillo and Tucker Sharon tackle the Peruvian Amazon as a space simultaneously primed for national development for all and yet racially divided by who merits those benefits. This contradiction rests on the division of nature from society, a division required to systematize land rights and property ownership.

In Chapter 8, Jason Tockman delves into Bolivia's plurinational decision to endow nature with rights and therefore provide legitimacy to environmental citizenship. In the wake of the Water Wars, this declaration may reshape development from austerity measures to inclusive participatory protection of the patrimony. However, relegating natural resources for the common good does not mean protection from exploitation. In fact, it may be harder for social movements to protest the state's natural resource policy than corporate extraction.

In Chapter 9, Adam Henne and Teena Gabrielson examine the shifting relationships between global consumer demand, nation-state policies, corporate interest, advocate NGOs, and indigenous communities involved in the Chilean timber industry. Productive partnership to determine natural resource management may seem like cooption, especially for indigenous groups fighting within a legal system defined by paternalistic white supremacy.

In Chapter 10, Enrique Silva explores environmental citizenship in the context of urban Chile, where the post-dictatorship infrastructure concession system privatizes and commodifies public works. In this case, subcontracting a highway project proved inordinately expensive, unaccountable to environmental protection laws, and extremely negligent due to the institutionalized practice of deliberate improvisation. The resulting environmental citizenship manifested in mobilization and project obstruction.

In Chapter 11, María Gabriela Merlinsky and Alex Latta compare pulp mills on the Uruguayan border with the contamination of the Matanza Riachuelo

river basin and the effects that corresponding collective actions had on building momentum toward constitutionally-protected rights of a healthy environment, including for those who live there. As mentioned in previous chapters, this environmentalism is characterized by collective defensive action to protect local livelihoods. In both cases, mobilized marginalized parties ultimately stepped back to allow NGOs and professional activists represent the public interest in the courts due to the prioritization of science over local lived knowledge.

In Chapter 12, Brian Ferrero describes the environmental arena as reforming the social identities for those who seize emerging political possibilities around conservation. While the new development paradigm promotes community participation to contextualize protected areas in the surrounding political economy, environmental citizens are limited only to those with an ecological identity shaped by their relationship to the land.

In Chapter 13, Juliet Pinto closes the book by discussing Ecuador's constitutional adoption of *buen vivir* to connote collective well-being of humans and nature. A sharp contradiction to hierarchical, hegemonic, heavy-handed ideologies of modern development, this reform potentially institutionalizes environmental citizenship by challenging our linear understanding of progress through planetary domination. Inspired by traditionally subaltern philosophies this adoption repositions humans and nature as constitutional equals.

Together, these chapters address the underlying power that has wreaked havoc during the Anthropocene. Imported and improperly-imposed Western

colonial thought has emphasized and codified the false dichotomy of human versus nature into the zeitgeist of modernity. This falsehood has hidden itself in the human ego, cleaving an unnecessary rupture between humankind and the environment leading us to believe that we are masters of the Earth. Our shared narcissistic pathology has led to the climactic shift of the entire planet. Ultimately in the wars waged against the environment – disguised as progress, growth, development – we kill ourselves. The new scholarship presented in this book does not devolve into a sad story of the noble savages against the forces of modernity. Determining who speaks for the trees is the emergence of empowerment amidst emergency.