

SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION AND THE METAPHYSICS OF YASUNÍ-ITT

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Abstract

This paper takes up Michael Bonnett's challenge to re-examine the role of Metaphysics in Environmental and Sustainability Education (Bonnett, 2003). If, as Bonnett claims, metaphysics is at play in setting up the conditions for – and the destiny of – our relationship to places of environmental concern, then we would expect to see the traces of the metaphysical in the ways in which such places are spoken about. If this were the case, we would then have to re-conceptualise Environmental and Sustainability Education to take into account the metaphysics of our times and do so in ways that are sensitive to the plurality of ways in which to speak about such places. This paper focuses on 'Yasuní-ITT': a place of environmental concern in Ecuador. The geographical region of 'Yasuní-ITT' is the site of an ongoing controversy: a recent shift in government policy has overturned an earlier, radical plan for its conservation. Through document analysis of the many way in which 'Yasuní-ITT' has been spoken about, this paper demonstrates the degree to which this 'political' shift manifests the kind of metaphysics Bonnett has in mind. Thus, it serves as the basis for examining the future role of metaphysics in any Environmental and Sustainability Education that concerns itself with places.

An Introduction to the Yasuní-ITT initiative

An innovative yet controversial initiative took place in September 2007. The president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, presented to the Assembly of the United Nations a proposal to restrict exploitation of the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) oil field within the Yasuní National Park: hereafter the Yasuní-ITT initiative (Correa, 2007). Although the initiative was originally created a year earlier by grassroots action from the Non-government Organisation (NGO) *Acción ecológica* (La Jornada: Jun 30, 2013 in Martínez et al, 2013), it was the government that officially tabled it for international consideration. The initiative proposed leaving 846 million barrels of crude oil in the soil in Ecuador's Amazon forest region in exchange for almost US\$3.5 billion (Larrea & Warnars, 2009). The funds sought would come from targeting yearly multi-million dollar international contributions (Larrea, 2009). Its main objective was to leave poverty behind and pursue a creative model of growth that was distinct from the existing one, which relied heavily on oil extraction (Correa, 2007), by aiming to avoid fossil fuels emissions, protect biodiversity along with conservation of cultural tribes and aid in a transition to renewable sources of energy (Larrea & Warnars, 2009). In order to manage the contributions sought under the initiative, a trust fund was established by the government of Ecuador and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2010 (MPTF, 2013).

The source of the controversy rests primarily with the oil fields in question (located in the regions of: Ishpingo, Tambococha and Tiputini), which lie largely within the bounds of Yasuní National Park deep in the Ecuadorian Amazon region (Figure 1). Its unique features underscore the national and international significance of the Yasuní National Park.

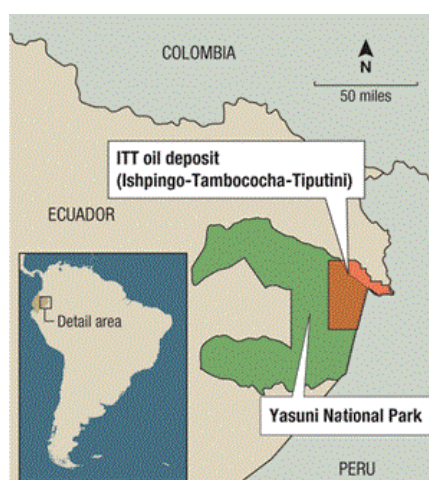


Figure 1. Location of Yasuní-ITT

This region of the planet was not intensively affected by the freezing conditions during the Pleistocene era, which allowed species to find refuge and proliferate (Kreft et al, 2004). Yasuní National Park is a species-rich biosphere reserve with 45,000 species of insects and spiders, 200 of mammals, 610 of birds, 100 of amphibians, 62 of snakes, 1,300 species of trees per 50 hectare, among others (UNESCO, 2011; Bass et al, 2010; Finer et al, 2009; Larrea & Warnars, 2009). In addition, this location is culturally rich because it is home to the Waorani – a contacted indigenous tribe – and the Tagaeri and Taromenane – both of whom are culturally related to the Waorani but live a voluntary, non-contacted life (Cabodevilla, 2004).

Yet in spite of the cultural and ecological significance of the region, after six years of promotion the initiative was neither able to claim the interest of the international community, nor meet its international funding objectives. After shifting the initiative's government appointed members on several occasions (El Comercio, 2010) and having spent around US\$7.3 million on its promotion (La Hora, 2013), in August 2013 president Correa announced that the proposal had failed and Ecuador would continue with "Plan B": that is, start drilling in the oil fields in the ITT areas set out from the start (El Comercio, 2013). In response, activist groups resisted the oil extraction plan and lobbied for the citizens of Ecuador – not the government alone – to have a voice in the decision. According to the Ecuadorian Constitution, any group could demand a referendum be called on this issue if five percent of the total population signed a petition (El Diario, 2013). April 11 of 2014 was the due date for the presentation of the signatures to the government, and the *collective* "YASunidos" (which includes NGOs, activist groups and associations, and others) opposed to drilling the Yasuní for oil presented more than 700,000 signatures (El Comercio, 2014). Despite this, the government institution CNE (Consejo Nacional Electoral, or National Electoral Council) in charge of verifying the validity of the signatures recognized only 359,761 of these signatures as valid. This amounted to a significant shortfall from the 584,000 needed to call a referendum (Diario Hoy, 2014). YASunidos accused the CNE of electoral fraud and of altering the forms during the verifying process (El Universo, 2014). At the time of writing this paper, the struggle continues between those who want oil extraction and those who want to conserve the Yasuní.

Why Yasuní-ITT is important for Sustainability Education

The current status of the Yasuní-ITT initiative may seem like an effect in search of a cause, a set of circumstances demanding a causal explanation that would allow us to work out definitively the chain of events that led to the Ecuadorian government abandoning the pro-environmental stance it

took seven years ago. Moreover, it would seem reasonable to think that knowing the cause of this change of heart would be of paramount importance to environmental activists and educators whose motivations are linked to such places of environmental concern. For theirs is the task of overcoming or preventing, through environmental and sustainability education, the reoccurrence of such events. The causal chain is likely to be a complex one involving economic and social as well as political forces at the national and international level. And while viewing Yasuní-ITT from this perspective has its merits – and is assumed to be the most conventional approach (Martin, 2014; Coyuntura, 2014; Nguyen et al, 2013) – this paper chooses instead to emphasise two different philosophical approaches to questions concerning Yasuní-ITT.

The first approach follows the work of Bonnett (2003) in asking after the metaphysical forces that shape our understanding of the Yasuní-ITT as a place of environmental concern. The second approach appropriates Bruno Latour's idea of "modes of existence" as the means of giving an account of the multiple ways in which Yasuní-ITT is spoken about (Latour, 2013). Taken together, this paper aims to trace out the metaphysical shaping of the Yasuní-ITT through the multiple ways in which its meaning is constructed by different people. In this way we see what has happened (and what is still happening) to the Yasuní-ITT in terms that are meaningful but not necessarily causal; about the political destiny of Yasuní-ITT, but not the political cause of Yasuní-ITT's demise; about the economic destiny of Yasuní-ITT, but not the economic cause of Yasuní-ITT's failure; and so on. Having said that, this paper, does not strive to undermine conventional viewpoints on the Yasuní-ITT case. Neither does it strive to re-iterate what has already been said on the matter – although social-scientific and political-scientific literature on the evolution of the initiative is sparse. Rather, its objective is to draw on empirical data available to re-examine philosophical questions about the place of metaphysics in our educational thinking.

Metaphysics has been conceived of in a number of ways by various authors, and this has resulted in a conceptualization that is neither easily defined nor readily explained (Van Inwagen 2013). Consequently, this research focuses on a definition of metaphysics that is not only grounded in a philosophical and empirical consideration of education, but more importantly on environmental and sustainability education in particular. The definition we take up here comes from Michael Bonnett's seminal work on Environmental Education (Bonnett, 2003) where he distinguished it from other renderings of metaphysics as follows:

But there is another interpretation which sees the metaphysical not as some ultimate abstract classification of entities or processes...but as a vital influence that, for example, *leads* us to understand the world in the ways that we do, *provokes* the constructions—theoretical and abstract or otherwise—that we might make (for clearly understanding is bereft without some kind of conceptualisation). Metaphysics in *this* sense seeks not to set up ossified fixtures, but to reveal the primary motives and relationships which are working themselves out in various epochs of human existence and which therefore shape our lives – the complexion of our lived relationships and understandings – in the most fundamental of ways. (Bonnett, 2003: p. 564, original emphasis)

Bonnett goes on to write:

The working out of these motives provide the realities in which we exist, for there is an important sense in which reality – our understanding of it – is thoroughly conditioned by our projects towards (and within) the world. (Bonnett, 2003: p. 564)

Here metaphysics works to set up the conditions that "lead" and "provoke" our "motives". Taken in this sense, metaphysics is, as he puts it "properly thought of as constituting our *destiny*" (ibid p. 565, original emphasis). But Bonnett makes it clear that while metaphysics may set the conditions for our "destiny" it in no way determines our destiny. That is, metaphysics should not be interpreted in strictly causal terms.

How then might we access the metaphysics in play with our encounter with the Yasuni-ITT initiative? The answer is to look at the multiple ways in which Yasuni-ITT is spoken about. According to Latour's most recent account of the anthropology of modernity (Latour, 2013), the way moderns speak of an entity or entities reflects their different modes of being. Each mode of being relies upon a network of interconnections between human and non-human agents, for sure. But it also depends upon finding ways of speaking about entities that satisfy the conditions of truth and falsity within in each mode. A political mode of existence, for instance, does not involve agents speaking about politics, but rather, speaking politically. Latour's existential pluralism accounts for the possibility that certain ways of being are taken as dominating others. If this is so, then we might take the dominant mode – the dominant way of speaking – as constitutive of what Bonnett takes as metaphysics. So, by attending to the multiple ways the Yasuni-ITT initiative is spoken about (following Latour) we might be able to see what, if anything plays the role of metaphysics (in Bonnett's sense) in the life of the Yasuni-ITT.

If metaphysics is in play in the way we go about speaking about places of environmental concern, then surely we should ask ourselves (when we are speaking 'educationally' about places like Yasuni) whether Environmental and Sustainability Education is likely in the grip of such a metaphysical force. Or, put another way: should Environmental and Sustainability Education appropriate the metaphysics, oppose the metaphysics, or do something else? This paper looks to the Yasuni-ITT initiative to see what grounds there are for such questions.

Methodology

The empirical work of this paper is largely an analysis of publically available texts. We have approached the analysis of these texts from the methodological viewpoint of Grounded Theory (GT) since this was the approach least likely to introduce a priori theoretical obstacles that would limit the number of ways of speaking about Yasuni-ITT available for interpretations. Secondly, grounded theory affords the possibility of disclosing the metaphysics of Yasuni-ITT through the activity of research and interpretation rather than via abstracted theoretical positions. That is, if metaphysics is in play then it should also be apparent in the way the data invites the researcher into the act of interpretation, for "grounded theory is a *general methodology* for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). By no means does this paper posit the development of a whole new theory and nor does it necessarily aim at verifying existing theories using GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rather, this research can be observed as the grounds for further research into questions concerning Yasuni-ITT and metaphysics in Environmental and Sustainability Education. Despite the availability of other qualitative data analysis methodologies in research, GT was taken as most suitable given the multiple data sources, which include audiovisual material, printed official and non-official documents, and social media.

Put another way, the methodological approach taken here is hermeneutical. Rather than offering explanations, a hermeneutic approach, seeks to understand written human expression (Kinsella, 2006). By means of hermeneutics, this paper attempts to disclose the metaphysical in the different sorts of published material concerning the Yasuni-ITT initiative. According to Paterson & Higgs (2005), "Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation" hence, by analysing the text from several sources of information, this paper seeks to interpret what the authors have expressed in their work with respect to the Yasuni-ITT.

Data Collection and Selection

A comprehensive online literature search was conducted to survey the different modes and 'texts' used to speak of the Yasuni-ITT. This research uncovered records in English and Spanish in the form of audiovisual media, digitalised books, book chapters, magazine articles, news articles, NGO publications, official government documents, publications in scientific journals, technical

documents and social media texts. The search was restricted to online material because the research was conducted outside of Ecuador, making access to physical texts limited. A total of 124 primary text items were found. These data was reduced to 31 items which were analysed in detail and from that, a sample of quotations was extracted to illustrate the kind of argument that can be drawn from the data. A bibliography with references to these sources is provided as an appendix to this paper with sources directly used in this paper asterisked. For the sake of clarity and transparency in the presentation of that data and its analysis, we have grouped textual references according to their sources, namely: audiovisual material, research books and chapters, magazine articles, news articles, NGO publications, official government documents, scientific journal papers, and technical reports.

Data analysis

Audiovisual media

This following quotation is taken from a short government-produced advertisement shown on the public TV channel Gamanoticias in August 2010. The advertising slogan *La iniciativa Yasuní ITT también puede ser apoyada por los ecuatorianos* (The Initiative Yasuní ITT can also be supported by Ecuadorians¹) calls on the general public to make individual contributions to the initiative, thus attempting to shift the financial onus of the initiative on citizens as well as international governments. In the advertisement, a government representative says:

...podemos nosotros ehmm, garantizar que ehmm las personas que hagan su contribución estén debidamente registradas...

...we can ehmm [sic], guarantee that ehmm [sic] people who make their contribution are legitimately registered...

Hesitation in the spokesperson's call for the support of individual citizens is observable. It is recognition that a change to the Yasuní-ITT initiative that shifts the rhetoric away from demands that states outside Ecuador wholly funds the initiative, and towards local contribution, is politically hard to sell. In the same video, the vice-president of Ecuador at the time, Lenin Moreno said:

...vamos a necesitar el aporte de todos...

...we are going to need financial support from everyone...

After three years of no positive response from the international community (zero contributions had been placed in the trust fund by 2010 (MPTF, 2013)) the government's fiscal calls fell back on the Ecuadorian people.

These quotations illustrate what Latour would call "speaking politically" about Yasuní-ITT. Speaking politically is about shifting the direction of one's focus so as to gather – and re-gather – a polis. Here the shift is demonstrably a shift from a Yasuní-ITT initiative that sits squarely in the realm of international politics, to one that becomes the immediate responsibility of the citizens of Ecuador. The shift relies on, and helps support, the establishment of dichotomies: in this case the international-local dichotomy. All the same, what should be noticed is the way in which both members of the dichotomy are, nonetheless, shaped by language that focuses on economics.

In *Secretos del Yasuní – Extraheccion* (Secrets of the Yasuní – 'Extractivism'), a short film by Carlos Andres Vera, which includes an interview with Eduardo Gudyna; a expert on sustainable development critical of the government's oil extraction policies, Gudyna says:

¹ Hereafter all the translations from Spanish to English are the author's.

El extractivismo tiene fuertes implicancias políticas en cómo es la vida política entre los países y ahí de nuevo se ata la importancia creciente que están tomando los discursos que dicen yo necesito el extractivismo para atacar la pobreza, mantener los sistemas de bonos de pagos mensuales en dinero ...muy importante porque rescata familias de la pobreza...pero también genera adhesión...

Extractivism has strong political implications in how political life is amongst countries and it is there where once again, there is an increasingly important link to a discourse which states: 'I need 'extractivism' to tackle poverty, keep the monthly "bonus" payment system in cash...' very important because it rescues families from poverty... but also generates electoral adhesion....

Gudyna recognizes the level of connectivity, the relationship between politics, the extraction industry and the issue of poverty. It is evident that, as a government heavily reliant on oil, political propaganda exists in the form of welfare benefits to convince people that the oil drilling industry continuation will place the country on the threshold of development.

Once again we see a response that reveals the political necessities that shape the Yasuní-ITT initiative, and once again the language reveals tensions between dichotomies like the individual-collective binary, and more importantly the relationship between poverty and development. So, while Gudyna appreciates the complexity of the issue, his language too is couched in economic terms.

Book/chapters

The book, *Sacralización y desacralización del Yasuní* (Sacralisation and desacralisation of Yasuní) combines social, environmental, political and economical issues facing the Yasuní-ITT with informal insights from several authors' critical stances towards the government in 2013. In the chapter *La moratoria del Yasuní: una iniciativa del Sur* (Yasuní moratorium: an initiative from the South) Joan Martinez Alier states:

Extraer el petróleo significa sacrificar futuros ingresos sobre todo si se da el caso que en 20 o 30 años el petróleo alcance precios más altos que los actuales...

The extraction of the oil [now] means a sacrifice to future income especially if there is the chance that in 20 or 30 years oil reaches prices higher than today's... (p. 13)

An economic comparison between extracting oil now instead of in the future brings to light another dichotomy in the ways Yasuní-ITT is spoken about. Here it is the tension between present concerns versus future concerns. From the perspective of speaking politically, this was a common trope in the way different people conceptualised the Yasuní-ITT controversy. One could play off immediate concerns against future concerns. And yet, the concerns themselves remain, undoubtedly, economic concerns.

And even within the specialised discourse of economics we find this temporal dichotomy. Consider the example that is offered from the work of the Puerto Rican economist, Josep Henry Vogel who wrote *The Economics of the Yasuní Initiative. Climate Change, as if the thermodynamics mattered*, in 2009. In the chapter: *The tragedy of the commons. A Class of Problems that has no Technical Solution*, the author says:

Of all these misgivings, the most troubling is the calculation of value. The original estimate of the compensation was quoted in the international press at \$350 million annually for ten years. That annuity implies that someone did a discounted cost-benefit analysis of recoverable crude petroleum over the lifetime of the ITT oil fields. Any economist should cringe. (pp. 23-24)

But what is most striking in his chapter is the explicit recognition of the dominance of an economic way of speaking:

...Ecological economists will never be able to persuade the mainstream economist.
The language of resource allocation is simply not open for discussion. (p. 29)

As we have seen thus far, despite the multiplicity of dichotomies, what is emerging is a dominant – economic – way of speaking about Yasuní-ITT.

Magazine articles samples

In an article in the *New Internationalist* titled: *Oil or life? Ecuador's stark choice*, Esme McAvoy explains:

[President] Correa has one moment supported indigenous rights to land and clean water, and the next cracked down heavily on any peaceful indigenous protests [in opposition to oil drilling] against threats to those very same rights.

We could see in this observation by McAvoy the necessities of Correa's political way of speaking about Yasuní-ITT; in this case with respect to the interests of indigenous people. According to Latour we should not mistake the president's vacillation as the absence of a commitment to rationality, but instead as exemplary of the trajectory that politicians must take in order to collect and unify a people under particular entities. Political 'truth' here should not be confused with scientific 'truth' or even legal 'truth' – a political truth is measured by the degree to which it affects a political gathering of a polis.

News articles

There are other ways of talking Yasuní-ITT into being. In the two examples that follow, for instance, there is an attempt at reconciling dichotomies – that is, finding a balance, or a position that is mutually beneficial to both.

In the news article by CNN (Cable Network News, USA) of 13 March 2012, *Rainforest home to vast treasury of life*, the author Dave Gilbert says:

There are hidden benefits too. Forest plants are a source of chemicals and medicines, some of which have been used in the treatment of cancers.

By referring to "hidden benefits", Yasuní is treated as a resource for scientific and medical advances. It suggests the potential of a Yasuní-ITT initiative to deliver technological as well ecological benefits.

In the 17 August 2011 article by *El Comercio*, the journalist Patricio Teran wrote as part of his article *Yasuní, el encanto de plantas y animals* (Yasuní, the charm of plants and animals):

A orillas de la laguna Añangu se encuentran 16 cabañas, que conforman Napo Wildlife Center, el lodge administrado por la comunidad Kichwa Añangu, desde el 2001.

At the shore of the Añangu lagoon there are 16 cabins, which are the Napo Wildlife Center, the lodge is administered by the community Kichwa Añangu since 2001.

This sample shows an objectification of Yasuní of a different kind: Yasuní as eco-touristic destination, which produces perhaps the least negative impact upon the rainforest (Wearing & Neil 2009).

NGO publications

This sample is from the website of *Yasunidos* (updated 2014), arguing against drilling for oil in the Yasuní-ITT on legal grounds:

La Constitución del Ecuador, impulsada por este mismo Gobierno y aprobada en el 2008, en su artículo 57 dice textualmente: 'Los territorios de los pueblos en aislamiento voluntario son de posesión ancestral irreductible e intangible, y en ellos estará vedada todo tipo de actividad extractiva.' ...según el propio Gobierno, la actividad petrolera en esta zona sería inconstitucional.

The constitution of Ecuador, promoted by the same government and approved in 2008, on article 57 states clearly: 'The territories of the people living in voluntary isolation are of ancient possession, implacable and intangible as well, and no oil extraction will take place there'...according to the government, the presence of the oil industry in this area would go against the constitution.

Within the range of constitutional law it would seem that any extraction in this area would be illegal. But whereas speaking legally asks after the 'legal means' available to individuals or collectives, the political way of speaking is committed to the rights of people only in so far as it gathers a people under such rights in the most politically advantageous way.

Official government documents

The September 2007 UNDP (United Nations Development Program) General Assembly witnessed the introduction of the Yasuní-ITT initiative to the world. In *The Speech of the president of the Republic of Ecuador Excellency Rafael Correa*, the president said:

...the present model of growth, based on the intensive use of fossil fuel and in over consumption, it is an untenable model whose benefits reach to a "privileged" minority of the modern society, but that enormously harms all of us.

President Correa critiques consumerist habits and the use of fossil fuels. He states that the model that supports these activities will not last and the economic benefits do not reach those who need it most, and actually, is more harmful than beneficial. This 2007 statement is in conflict with statements he has made in more recent years where he clearly supports oil extraction. Later in his speech to the General Assembly, he continues:

The measures of adaptation to Climate Change represent a heavy burden on the budgets of developing countries that could rise to 40,000 million dollars, according to the studies of the World Bank. We do not need loans to execute adaptation. That would increase the burden of our external debt.

Despite having stated that the country does not "need loans", the government accepted a loan of US\$1 billion dollars to "cover the deficit of almost US\$5 billion generated by the government's investment plan" (Southern Pulse Correspondents, 2011) recently, changing its discourse once again. Correa's shift is parasitic on the development-poverty binary that he has used politically throughout the evolution of the Yasuní-ITT initiative.

Scientific publications

The 2010 article in the journal PLoS ONE, *Global Conservation Significance of Ecuador's Yasuní National Park*, focuses mainly in the biodiversity of the Yasuní with several authors reporting their findings. It says:

Yasuni has outstanding global conservation significance due to its extraordinary biodiversity and potential to sustain this biodiversity... However, further oil development in Yasuni jeopardizes its conservation values.

The paper recognises the importance of the area on ecological terms. This objectification of the Yasuni from global interest for its natural resources shows an ecological way of speaking from the viewpoint of dichotomies of local-international and conservation-utilisation. The suggestion that the significance relies on the conservation values portrays the ecologic way of being as the key.

In her 2011 *Global Environmental Politics* journal article, *Global Governance from the Amazon: Leaving Oil Underground in Yasuni National Park, Ecuador*, the author Pamela Martin "explores the saga of the complex transnational networks and global governance mechanisms that have emerged to save the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) block of Yasuni National Park in Ecuador's Western Amazon" (p. 22). She states:

The lessons from the Yasuni-ITT initiative provide fodder for researchers to better understand the global-local dimensions and networks that are producing alternative mechanisms of global environmental governance, as well as different visions of how to live within nature, and even possibly toward the good life.

The paper describes an interest in "global environmental governance" alternatives. The Yasuni-ITT was an initiative that included local and global actors, bringing together the poles of the local-international dichotomy. Yet, that very broad vision that made everyone interested in the issue has not led to any effective solutions thus far: a tragedy of the commons on a large scale.

Social Media

The *Facebook* presence of Yasuni-ITT discourse is dominated by two popular websites: one by the government and another by the collective YASunidos (YASunidos, 2014). Despite being a government website, only one out of the 100 comments posted on the former site, voices direct support oil extraction:

ES UN RECURSO QUE SE DEBE SACAR PARA MEJORAR EN ALGO LA VIDA DE LOS MÁS POBRES, PERO AY QUE EXPLOTAR CON TODA LA RESPONSABILIDAD Y UN BUEN PLAN DE MANEJO AMBIENTAL PERO YA, ANTES QUE SEA DEMASIADO TARDE O ANTES QUE NUESTROS VECINO HAYAN EXTRAÍDO, PORQUE EL RIESGOS ES LA EXPLOTACIÓN DE NUESTROS VECINOS, PERO NOSOTROS CON LOS OPOSITORES QUE EN SU MAYORÍA SON PELUCONES HIPÓCRITAS FALSOS EN DISCUSIONES [sic].

It is a resource that must be extracted to improve at least a little the life of the poorest, but must be extracted with great responsibility and a good environmental management plan but now, before it is too late or before our neighbour [sic] have extracted [sic], because the risks is the exploitation from our neighbours, but we with the opposition that in their majority are hypocritical yuppies who are false on their discussions.

The writer displays support for oil extraction if there is the right environmental management in place and certainly so that local interests are served ahead of the inevitable exploitation by foreign interests. The post suggests that the political 'voice' of the upper middle class has hijacked the debate, as underscored by the following comment:

Esta olvidada la página... recuerdo cuando tenía otro nombre.

This webpage is forgotten... I remember when it had another name.

By saying "I remember when it had another name" the poster acknowledges the shift in the discourse by government officials who administer the website. The politicized Yasuni changes and adapts to gather the most followers in this electronic Network of connections.

Technical documents

In the 2012 publication of *The Road to Rio+20* titled *Ecuador's Yasuni-ITT Initiative: an option towards equity and sustainability*, the academic Carlos Larrea describes the initiative and its benefits. He writes:

The shift towards equitable and sustainable development is an integrated and coherent strategy in Ecuador. The new constitution, approved in a referendum with the support of two thirds of voters in 2008, became the first in the world to recognise rights for nature, guaranteeing ecosystems the right to exist and thrive. (p. 62)

Larrea argues that the government's decision towards sustainability aligns with the 2008 constitution of Ecuador, which grants rights to nature. However, the president's ongoing interest in dealing oil contracts, especially with China well before the presentation of the Yasuni-ITT in 2007 (Escribano, 2013), suggests once again the need to speak politically about the two-level game of international and local interests.

The second sample is a 2011 collective collaboration publication: *La Iniciativa Yasuni-ITT desde una perspectiva multicriterial* (The Yasuni-ITT initiative from a multi-criteria perspective). This exhaustive technical publication analyses the Yasuni-ITT initiative and proposes the use of multiple perspectives. The paper states:

Cuando se realiza un análisis de sensibilidad sobre estas alternativas de decisión se encuentra que el Plan A sigue siendo el mejor escenario cuando se introducen condiciones más conservadoras respecto de las posibilidades de recaudación de fondos a partir de la colocación de CGYs.

When a sensitivity analysis is made about these alternatives decisions, it shows that the Plan A is still the best scenario when more conservative conditions are introduced according to the fund collection possibilities from promoting the CGYs.

The combination of such detailed reports with the president's political manoeuvrings highlight the dominance of political ways of constructing and re-constructing the Yasuni-ITT.

Implications/Conclusions

This paper presents an analysis of the different ways in which people have spoken about the Yasuni-ITT initiative. What is evident from the analysis is that in speaking about the Yasuni-ITT, people reveal a set of dichotomous positions: dichotomies that include binaries such as local versus international concerns; economic versus ecological concerns; the relationship between development on the one hand and poverty on the other; and between conservation and utility. In some cases one element of each binary stands for a position of interest that is set against the interests captured by its binary pair. On other occasions, there is an attempt to find a position that is mutually beneficial. At other times, there is simply an acknowledgment of having to accept the essential tension between dichotomous positions.

Two things follow from such dichotomies. Firstly, these dichotomies disclose the ways of being that different people hold as valuable. Some people come to value the interests of the environment over the interests of the global economy. Others express their concern for the welfare of indigenous communities along with a positive defence of the economic interests of the country. Speaking about Yasuni-ITT becomes then, constitutive of the ontology of Yasuni-ITT: it brings to light the plurality of the many 'Yasuni-ITTs' in play. If this is the case, then

Environmental and Sustainability Education plays an important ontological role as long as it serves the multiplication of ways of speaking about places of environmental concern.

The second point is related to the first. The political way of being (of speaking politically) described by Latour takes advantage of these dichotomies. The person who speaks politically – whether or not they consider themselves politicians – can shift the conversation between the kinds of elements of the binaries revealed in our analysis. But since the political way of being represents just one of the ways of being that is open to us, to exploit the dichotomies politically is to undermine the plurality that is gained from talking about Yasuní-ITT in the first place. What this suggests is that Environmental and Sustainability Education, if it is to be effective, must resist this totalizing political tendency. But it must also resist the domination of other way of speaking that appears in the data, for example, speaking economically.

What this suggest is that Environmental and Sustainability Education, like all educational ways of speaking, must at once honour plurality and eschew any mode of being that threatens to dominate over others. In other words, Environmental and Sustainability Education must overcome metaphysics, not through opposition, but by endlessly making available multiple way of being.

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