**Introduction to the Case Study**

Ecuador is a developing country with deep economic problems, resource abundance, and significant biodiversity. Gonzalo Escribano’s 2013 article “Ecuador’s energy policy mix: Development versus conservation and nationalism with Chinese loans” describes how the Ecuadorean government struggles to balance its responsibilities to its people and its environment. These two objectives are very difficult to reconcile, however, because the remedy for one issue exacerbates the problems of the other. As a developing nation, Ecuador needs income to bolster its impoverished population. However, its main sources of income are extractive industries that directly harm its unique environments and ecosystems.

**Background on Ecuador**

Ecuador is a developing nation and the smallest oil producer of OPEC (Escribano 154). Of its population of 15.6 million people, 25.6% live below the poverty line (CIA World Factbook). Additionally, its GDP of $10,600 USD per capita is the 116th smallest in the world (CIA World Factbook). Economically, Ecuador depends on oil production. The country produces 526,000 bbl/day and is the 22nd largest exporter of crude oil globally (CIA World Factbook). Due to the growing national debt and widespread poverty in Ecuador, redistributive economic policies are in demand, and these programs necessitate an interest in the lucrative oil industries for funding. Geographically, Ecuador contains many of the world’s most unique and fragile ecosystems, including parts of the Amazon Rainforest and the Galapagos Islands, as well as other coastal and mountainous regions. These delicate regions often overlap with the areas that produce oil. Ethnically, Ecuador is very diverse, with the vast majority of the population identifying as mestizo, and with other white and indigenous segments. The wealth disparity between ethnicities and geographical locations is quite large in Ecuador, creating another imperative for the redistributive social programs (CIA World Factbook).

**The Project**

A wide range of energy related issues exist within Ecuador, and because of the rarity of the environment there, a spotlight can be shone on the nation’s mitigation between development and conservation. The other two case studies in the Ecuador section deal specifically with oil drilling in the Amazon and the expansion of hydroelectricity in the country. This case study, however, provides context for the other two by presenting the framework of Ecuadorean policy- and decision-making. Escribano’s article, especially when put in conversation with other texts, sheds light on the policy tensions underlying Ecuador’s fight to balance conservation and development.

**Energy Justice Framework**

Scholars Benjamin K. Sovacool and Michael H. Dworkin developed a platform called the “Energy Justice Framework” as the capstone of their book *Energy Justice: Problems, Principles, and Practices*. They define an energy-just world “as one that equitably shares both the benefits and burdens involved in the production and consumption of energy services, as well as one that is fair in how it treats people and communities in energy decision-making (Sovacool and Dworkin 5). In their framework, they propose eight principles that would bring about energy justice. For this case study, the three most relevant elements of the framework are Sustainability, Due Process, and Responsibility. This case study is framed as an energy *injustice* because Ecuador fails to fulfill any of these principles. While trying to balance conservation and development, Ecuador has failed to fully do either, leaving both the people and the environment with inadequate protection.

**Sustainability**

Sustainability means development that meets current needs while ensuring that the needs of future generations can also be met (Sovacool and Dworkin 369). Escribano’s description of Ecuadorean energy policy presents an energy injustice for sustainability in two ways: first, the energy needs of the present are not being met, and critical environmental sacrifices are being made, which will negatively impact future generations. Ecuador suffers from severe poverty, and not all citizens have access to electricity (Escribano 153, 155). As Escribano points out, Ecuador’s best hope for revenues to remedy these issues is the oil industry (154). The lucrative nature of many extractive industries makes them a tempting option for quick economic boosts, but often these processes come with many negative externalities (Griswold 3). This trend continues in Ecuador. Correa, the current president, espouses a platform of redistributive programs to alleviate poverty, and these are mainly funded through oil revenues. However, since Correa came to power in 2007, these programs have had limited success. Clearly, then, Ecuador is failing to meet the needs of the present. Additionally, Ecuador does not satisfy the other requirements of “Sustainability” because its policies are damaging to landmark ecological areas, such as allowing oil drilling in the Amazon. Sustainability in the Energy Justice lens would require an ideal balance between conservation and development, and Ecuador has not yet found that balance.

**Due Process**

Sovacool and Dworkin’s next principle, Due Process, asserts respect as a fundamental aspect of energy justice (368). Both respect for human rights and laws are necessary to achieve energy justice. Once again, Ecuador fails to meet this requirement. Escribano’s article focuses on the conservation efforts in Ecuador, specifically the Constitution’s assertion of Nature Rights (155). Ecuador is the first country in the world to include a declaration of the rights of nature in its constitution (Art. 71, Ecuador Const.) and these rights are on par with the rights of humans. While Correa’s government claims to be pro-conservation, in reality, little has been done to ensure conservation and that these rights of nature are upheld (Escribano 154). The best example of the injustices brought on by a lack of due process is the failure of the Yasuni Initiative. The proposal was intended to raise funds internationally to protect the Yasuni area of the Amazon, the most bio-diverse area in the Western Hemisphere (156), from oil drilling. If Correa could gather half of the money that could be made from drilling, he would preserve the area. The funds were not raised before the deadline, and the Yasuni region is now available for drilling. The legal loopholes exploited for the Yasuni initiative are part of another large trend in extractive industry legislation, in that due process is not given (Rabe and Borick 326). For Ecuador, despite the government’s insistence in its own conservationism, upholding the rights of nature directly contradicts its ability to provide for its citizens. Escribano’s article demonstrates that injustice results from a lack of respect for both the people’s and the environment’s rights.

**Responsibility**

Finally, Sovacool and Dworkin describe the principle of responsibility as essentially the requirement for nations to reduce negative externalities, particularly for the environment (371). Once again, Ecuador’s energy policy fails to reduce externalities, creating injustices in society. One example of Ecuador’s shirking of responsibility is the Yasuni initiative itself, since the proposal essentially places responsibility on the international community (Escribano 156). Additionally, because many Ecuadoreans, especially in rural or poor communities, are marginalized by new oil drilling or hydro plants and left without representation, the government is irresponsible toward its own citizens. These same citizens are the ones without access to the energy produced on their lands. Escribano’s article illustrates Ecuador’s balancing act between development and conservation, but doing both half-heartedly is irresponsible and ineffective.

**Conclusion**

In putting Escribano’s article in conversation with Sovacool and Dworkin’s Energy Justice Framework, the injustices in Ecuador’s energy policies become apparent. Balancing development and conservation has left both the Ecuadorean people and environment unprotected. By refusing to commit to development, Ecuador is sacrificing its people, who desperately need revenue from oil. By refusing to commit to conservation, Ecuador is sacrificing its environment, including some indigenous communities, who need protection from industry. Moving forward, it is clear that Ecuador must change its policy strategy to both uphold its constitutional rights for nature and people, while expanding its ability through other industries to gather revenue to alleviate poverty. Once the right balance is found, energy justice can be achieved in Ecuador.

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