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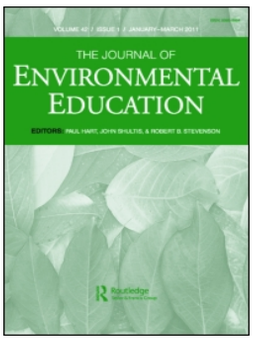

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Of big hegemonies and little tigers: Ecocentrism and environmental justice

Helen Kopnina[a,b]

[a]Leiden University, Leiden, The Neatherlands; [b]The Hague University of Applied Science (HHS), The Hague, The Netherlands

**ABSTRACT**

Stefan Bengtsson's commentary about policy hegemony discusses the alternative discourses of socialism, nationalism, and globalism. However, Stefan does not adequately demonstrate how these discourses can overcome the Dominant Western Worldview (DWW), which is imbued with anthropocentrism. It will be argued here that most policy choices promoting sustainability, and education for it, are made within a predetermined system in which the already limiting notion of environmental protection is highly contingent on human welfare. What would really contest the dominant assumptions of Vietnamese policy and, more specifically, education for sustainable development (ESD) is an alternative discourse that challenges the DWW. That alternative discourse embraces philosophical ecocentrism and practices of ecological justice between all species, and deep ecology theory - all perspectives fundamentally committed to environmental protection.

**KEYWORDS**

anthropocentrism; environmental education; education for sustainable development

## Little tigers

Let me start with an historical snapshot. In the past, tigers used to roam the large forested territory of Vietnam. French colonial reclamation schemes centered on the development of canals to open land for agriculture (Biggs, 2012), European hunting expeditions (Bui & Letwin, 2014), industrial development in the post-colonial period (Quang & Kammeier, 2002; Hansen, 2014), the American Agent Orange defoliating vast tracts of the jungle and poisoning water sources and soil during the war in the 1960s and 1970s (Phung, Tran, & Le Van, 2002), and recent Vietnamese government concessions on logging and timber exports to boost economic growth (Lang, 2001) all have largely reduced the original forest cover (UN-REDD, 2015). Whereas the production forest (6.2 million ha or 48.2% of total forest area) has expanded, various regions of Vietnam have high rates of deforestation (UN-REDD, 2015). This reforestation has had a devastating effect on forest inhabitants, including tigers. Due to habitat destruction and poaching, as few as 350 tigers now prowl the greater Mekong region (WWF, 2015) with fewer than 50 tigers in Vietnam (http://www.thanhniennews.com/education-youth/vietnam-has-fewer-than-50-wild-tigers-left-19393.html).

The current population of Vietnam exceeds 93 million people (Worldometers, n.d.). Consumption has risen (The World Bank, 2016), including the consumption of cats. The local specialty, known as "little tigers," is an increasingly popular delicacy in Vietnam. Although officially banned, cats are widely available for human consumption in specialist restaurants. On January 29, 2015, "three tons of live cats destined to be eaten have been seized in Vietnam" (AFP, 2015a). Consequently, the smuggled cats were buried alive by the Vietnamese authorities (AFP, 2015b).

**CONTACT** Helen Kopnina h.kopnina@hhs.nl; h.n.kopnina@fsw.leidenuniv.nl Institute Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Faculty Social and Behavioural Sciences, Leiden University, Wassenaarseweg 52, 2300 RB, Leiden, The Netherlands.

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The plight of the big and little tigers opens up the pressing question of "environmental justice" that I shall explore in relation to Stefan's article. Importantly, Stefan sees a "need to map and strategically invest in discursive formations specific to the practices and contexts that we engage in as environmental educators and researchers in order to promote the shared demand of environmental protection in the politics of education" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 79). It is not clear how we can promote this demand. I shall argue here that Stefan's analysis of policies pertaining to sustainability need to pay much stronger attention to what, in reality, is to be sustained in the Vietnamese "nvironment" (as well as education about or for it). Environmental protection currently reads as an afterthought, notwithstanding that focus already limits the much wider nature and scope, or purposes, of EE/ESD and its research. Stefan's contestation of neoliberal hegemonies without consideration of ecological justice exemplifies a limit of the discourse that elsewhere I have sought to rectify, and expand upon here in my response. Here, I examine Stefan's ideological sourcing of the politics of policy formulations of SD and ESD. I highlight how certain problems are, ironically, "sustained" irrespective of ideological variations. I draw on personal experiences of growing up in the Soviet Union.

I highlight my perception of a major flaw in Stefan's lead article, which deals only with policy formulations in a particular anthropocentric context. An explanatory gap exists between how these formulations are implemented, enacted, and evaluated in relation to environment, hence sustaining the "trickle down" logic to real world practices of abstracted policy. To explore this gap, I elaborate an ecocentric alternative, associated with the "naturalist current" (Sauvé, 2005) and education *for* ecological literacy (e.g., Orr, 1992), *for* environment (e.g., Fien, 1993), *for* deep ecology (e.g., Drengson, 1991; LaChapelle, 1991), *for* experiential and transpositional outdoor environmental education (Payne, 2014), *for* ecological justice (Glasser, 2004), *for* strategic environmental behavior (Chawla & Cushing, 2007), *for* animal rights (Gorski, 2009) and *for* ecological justice (Bonnett, 2007; Payne, 2010). The primary question I examine is one Stefan seems to avoid; that is, identifying "an 'enemy' in the documented configuration of an economist/globalist discourse that is shared beyond the particular context of Vietnamese policy making." I argue that the locus of critique of hegemonies addressed in Stefan's article should extend beyond the neoliberal and economist rhetoric, reconceiving policy development as in need of more ecocentrically attuned and inclusive environmental justice.

## The context: Sustainable development and environmental justice

Various critical environmental educators and more radical proponents of ESD identify the "enemy" as a capitalist neoliberalism (see, for example, Huckle & Wals, 2015; McKenzie, Bieler, & McNeil, 2015). Like many EE/ESD scholars Stefan cites, I agree that hegemonic tendencies of neoliberalism favour economic growth, open markets, and the commodification of nature and warrant critical analysis (e.g., Kopnina & Blewitt, 2014; Kopnina, 2014d, 2014g, 2015b). Indeed, Stefan notes that "the articulation of environmental protection does not draw on a distinct environmentalist discourse—one that would highlight the value of protecting the environment for its own sake. For the most part, Vietnamese policy addressing SD conceives of environmental protection in economist terms as a form of resource" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 85).

The vantage point I elaborated elsewhere combines the philosophical perspective of ecocentrism and its reinterpretations in, for example, environmental justice, and identifies anthropocentrism as a close ally of neoliberalism (Kopnina, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014a; Kopnina & Meijers, 2014; Kopnina & Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015). Crucial here is the conception of environmental justice as primarily socially based—be it intergenerational (justice between present and future generations of people) or intragenerational distributive justice (among different group of people within nations or between nations). I seek to ecocentrically qualify the notion of environmental justice, emphasizing the ideological persistence of anthropocentrism, which also permeates and limits our very ideas of ethics, equality, and justice (Crist & Kopnina, 2014; Kopnina, 2012c, 2013d, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014f; Shoreman-Ouimet & Kopnina, 2015). Environmental justice concerns, as commonly conceived (e.g.,

Gleeson & Low, 1999), seek to socially and economically redress the inequitable distribution of environmental burdens (e.g., pollution, climate change) and benefits (e.g., natural resources, ecosystem services) both within and between nations (e.g., Gleeson & Low, 1999; Saha, 2010; Kopnina, 2014g). Within this "social"' conception of environmental justice, the concept of environmental racism, for example, refers to the placement of low-income or minority communities in proximity of environmentally hazardous or degraded environments (Saha, 2010). Environmental justice in relation to socially or economically disadvantaged people is seen as *the* central moral imperative within the sustainable development (SD) discourse. SD emphasizes "development that meets our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (WCED, 1987), with environmental justice presented as an equitable division of resources between present and future generations. But who are these future generations? Are they just us, humans?

Subordinating "ecological" or "environmental" phenomena to social or economic agendas reifies the anthropocentric power hegemonies that have led to environmental problems in the first place (Rolston, 2015; Washington, 2015). The critique of commonly conceived anthropocentric justice puts an accent on ecological justice, arguing that the accepted notions and prevailing wisdoms and practices of environmental justice do not go far enough and that justice between species should be an essential part of environmental justice (Strang, 2013). Support for ecological justice is close to ecocentrism (or ecological-centredness), and "deep green" ecology (Naess, 1973). Proponents of eco-justice see humans as being part of the natural world, and assign intrinsic value to nature elements, arguing that they should be respected for their own sake (Catton & Dunlap, 1978; Crist & Kopnina, 2014; Katz, 1999; Regan, 1981; Rolston, 2015).

Many ecocentric thinkers lack faith in the ability of modern technology present in variety of social systems (including socialist and nationalist countries) to solve sustainability challenges. In this regard, Regan (1981) referred to the distinction between "environmental ethic" from a "management ethic." In order to be an environmental ethic a theory must hold that there are non-human beings that have "moral standing" (Jamieson, 1997) and linking ethics to justice. In this conception, environmental ethics is seen as an inclusive philosophy that treats environment and people as part of the same whole and animal welfare and rights are intertwined, and socially focused environmental justice and ecological justice need to be viewed as morally equal (e.g., Baxter, 2005; Strang, 2013). As Jamieson (1997) has argued, notwithstanding certain differences between various ecocentric approaches, animal liberationists and environmental ethicists are on the same side in the transition from anthropocentric view and toward concerns about the entire ecosystem, and its elements: species, and individuals within the species. The position of ecological justice also necessitates rethinking of intergenerational and intergenerational justice, including the rights and entitlements of future generations of non-humans (e.g., Devall & Sessions, 1985; Kopnina, 2014g; Rolston, 2015). These concerns range from the destruction of habitats upon wildlife is dependent, to abuse of animals in the industrial food production system (CAFOs), or in the medical industry (Crist, 2012; Crist & Kopnina, 2014).

Ecological justice or justice between species (e.g., Baxter, 2005; Devall & Sessions, 1985), that links deep ecology and animal rights (Kopnina, 2014h, 2014i), combines concern for big and little tigers and the environments they once inhabited, yet, it is rarely mentioned in the ESD literature, including Stefan's analysis. Perhaps to avoid the unpleasant academic, ethical, and practical implications of ecological justice, some EE/ESD scholars have argued against what is seen as the simplistic binary of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism in favor of more plural ethical approaches (e.g. Öhman and Östman, 2008; Payne, 2010; Bengtsson & Östman, 2013; Kronlid & Öhman, 2013). The insistence on diffusing the dichotomy is based in part on, first, an aversion to what some EE/ESD scholars see as authoritative tendencies of 'monistic' ethics (e.g. Öhman & Östman, 2008) and, second, in part on the 'convergence theory' (Norton, 1984).

In regard to the first point, in opposing "monistic ethics" many EE/ESD scholars see ecocentrism and deep ecology as, at best, one of many possible perspectives, rather than a unique position that offers a powerful contestation of current hegemonies, and at worst, a potentially totalitarian, authoritative position of "eco-totalitarianism" (e.g., Wals, 2010; Wals & Jickling, 2002;) Although Stefan tries to engage with a radical revisioning of the ontological-epistemological tension, he presents non-

anthropocentrism as only one of numerous "examples" among many other social and economic key issues:"the dominance of documented neo-liberal discourse associated with ESD is limited by existing alternate discourses that articulate ESD, *for example (sic!)* environmentalist discourses that depict market liberalisation and the reduction of the environment as a form of resource as unsustainable" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 81).

The argument about monistic ethics and "eco-totalitarianism" can be turned on its head (Kopnina, 2012a, 2013d, 2013b, 2014i). Any shade of anthropocentric ethics can be said to be monistic as it is based on single-species interests that exclude all other species (Dobson, 2014; Eckersley, 1995;). In this sense, human chauvinism is the most virulent strand of planetary totalitarianism (Crist & Kopnina, 2014), which fosters pernicious and yet morally undisputed environmental racism—the enslavement of the global non-human world (Crist, 2012).

In this context, ecocentric ethics represents the most plural and 'democratic' perspective of all earths' citizens (Kopnina, 2012a). As I have insisted elsewhere (Crist & Kopnina, 2014; Kopnina, 2012a, 2013d; 2014c, 2014d, 2014e, 2014g; Shoreman-Ouimet & Kopnina, 2015), the anthropocentrism and ecocentrism distinction remains crucial at both a philosophical as well as practical level, having implications for policy formulations and curriculum/pedagogical consequences.

In regard to the second point, Norton's (1984) "convergence" theory assumes that social objectives and ecological interests largely coincide and that anthropocentrically motivated environmental protection offers pragmatic solutions to a range of sustainability challenges. However, empirically, the shallow ecology, or "weak" anthropocentric motivation for environmental protection, does not always lead to the same outcomes (Katz, 1999), especially in the case of biodiversity protection (tigers) or animal welfare (little tigers). *Sometimes* convergence of environmental and human interests does occur. Climate change, be it anthropogenic or "natural," endangers social and economic systems, and pollution endangers human health (Huckle & Wals, 2015; McKenzie, Bieler, & McNeil, 2015). Healthy ecosystems are indeed beneficial for humans, and some individual animals or species can be quite useful: for example, tigers, lucrative as pharmaceutical ingredients and admired in zoos, can be kept for medicine and entertainment. Cats can be kept as pets or food.

However, we can do well without tigers and cats, as we are reasonably well sustained by agricultural monocultures, synthetic medicines, and electronic entertainment. The passenger pigeon and other species that are now extinct have gone without so much as a sigh from sustainable development proponents as their survival was NOT contingent upon human welfare. Thus, moral ecocentrism and ecological justice is *necessary* if the interests of non-humans and their habitats are to be protected. Empirically speaking, variations on anthropocentric ideologies (neoliberalism, nationalism, socialism) might be grossly inadequate in addressing environmental challenges. Thus, nature advocates cannot afford to surrender to the easier argumentative route of shallow ecology (Crist, 2012; Eckersley, 1995; Katz, 1999). Considering that ecocentrism, deep ecology, and ecological justice cannot be easily dismissed unless one can ethically justify the position in which only one species on earth deserves moral consideration, where does this lead us in regard to Stefan's case study?

## The case study

So far, the different conceptual framing of ecocentrism and environmental justice I have elaborated provide for a different reflexivity about key issues pertinent to how Stefan's case study is theoretically framed. Stefan's account of issues pertaining to policy hegemony is a double-edged sword. His elaborate analysis and critique is satisfying, as it methodically represents central arguments and issues in the policy development from the political conceptual frame he works within. Stefan rightly points out that neoliberalism, defined broadly, contains some openings for challenging power hegemonies (Bengtsson, 2016). Indeed, Hursh, Henderson, and Greenwood (2015) reflect that although neoliberalism is a dominant social imaginary, there is not one form of neoliberalism, but patterns of neoliberalization that differ by place and time. Similarly, Blewitt (2013) commented "there is still enough space for dissenting academics to be progenitors of alternatives, if they are courageous enough to act" (p. 62). In some cases,

sustainable development, just like neoliberalism, can aid both environmental and ecological justice, evidenced in the context of education[1].

Indeed, sustainable development is not a unitary notion, but a big discursive tent where many can gather, at best an inoffensive position from which to launch mild, non-threatening demands for change. As critics have noted, we cannot trace a neat line from the Brundtland to the present, assuming a clean sense of synergy between neoliberal capitalism and environmental protection (e. g., Rees, 2008). Empirical investigations of unsustainability-in-action (Blühdorn, 2011; Foster, 2012) complicate this argument, laying bare myriad economic and ecological arrangements that demonstrate how ecological modernization and other economic development theories fail. Rich societies continue "living far beyond its means" (Wijkman & Rockström, 2012, p. 4), failing to address the challenges ranging from climate change to resource depletion to population growth (Blühdorn, 2011; Foster, 2012; Rees, 2008). The SD policy and practice is ambiguous, and the licensing power of industrial elites, both within socialist and capitalist societies continues to be threatening to social and environmental sustainability (e.g., Wijkman & Rockström, 2012).

Stefan presents socialist, nationalist, and globalist discourses as oppositional, alternative, and contesting, and highlights the "antagonistic relation between the demand for economic growth and marketization and the demand for social equality and equity" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 85). The dominance of economic discourse in the Vietnamese SD and ESD policy documents is well-established, e.g., "to obtain a stable economic growth rate with an appropriate economic structure, satisfy the people's demands for living standards improvement" (PM & GovViet, 2004, p. 14 in Bengtsson, 2016, p. 87). Indeed, as Stefan observes, "SD is articulated through repeated association with the demands for economic growth, reformation of the economy, and market liberalization" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 85).

Adding to the collective light shed by other Special Issue respondents on the "global" impacts, issues, and problems associated with ESD from different theoretical and empirical perspectives, I can add some personal insights. I grew up in the Soviet Union whose political orientations and machinations somewhat resemble the experience of Vietnam. Notwithstanding this "subjectivity," I observed how the discourse—or more pertinently, the *practices* of socialism, compared to a wide range of the environmentally damaging practices of extractive industrial development in the global West. Although consumption patterns and attitudes between people from socialist and capitalist countries differ (e.g., Kopnina, 2005), related demand for social reform by no means prohibits exploitation of the environment. "Socialist"environmental protection in comparison to capitalist or globalist practices (if these "ists" can be distinguished from "neoliberalist") have had equally dismal results (e.g., Efird, 2011; ; Hansen, 2014; Sandberg, 1999, Schwartz, 2006).

The emerging economies such as Vietnam play vital roles in meeting and fueling a seemingly endless growth in demand for energy and natural resources. While the advanced capitalist countries are still driving global environmental degradation, particularly if measured in per capita terms or from a consumption perspective, emerging economies such as Vietnam are swiftly catching up (Hansen & Wethal, 2014). Despite socialist or nationalist discursive "streams," Vietnam does not seem to be fostering any new development paths in terms of environmental protection. Despite the mainstreaming of SD, growth strategies pursued in Vietnam resemble the cruder development thinking with economic growth taking the driver's seat, and "catch-up" with the global North as the overriding goal (Hansen, 2014; Hansen & Wethal, 2014). In order to establish the convergence of environmentally damaging practice in socialist and capitalist countries one only needs to consider the rate of natural resource depletion or biodiversity loss in the former Communist countries (e.g., Schwartz, 2006). Neither is there evidence that teaching practice in socialist societies somehow fosters greater environmental awareness (e.g., Efird, 2011; Hansen & Wethal, 2014; Schwartz, 2006;).

Stefan writes, "If the globalist/economist discourse in our case is dominant, or would *be* hegemonic, in terms of working as a reproducing structural principle, then it follows that a socialist or nationalist discourse cannot be articulated" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 87). Stefan appears to accept a liberal assumption that pluralist alternative discourses can somehow dissolve existing power hegemonies, yet it is not immediately apparent in Stefan's commentary how the alternative discourses of socialism, nationalism, or globalism "allow for the emergence of a space of contestation." Can these alternative discourses

overcome the "unrestrained play of anthropocentrism and the metaphysics of mastery" (Bonnett, 2013, p. 19) and the Dominant Western Worldview (Catton & Dunlap, 1978)? Either some crucial piece of data is missing to illustrate this (e.g., socialists taking resources away from the rich to give to the poor—as in the Russian revolution so that the total global economic pie stays the same), or Stefan's analysis misses its specific mark of demonstrating that alternative discourses are really all that different as the growth model is not really challenged under either socialism or nationalism[2].

## Tigers on the run

In fact, capitalist neoliberalism, socialism, and nationalism, as systems, as ideologies, and as practice *were* and *are* compatible in the former Soviet Union, in China, and, I suspect, in Vietnam as they do not challenge the economic growth models or the exploitation of environment (e.g., Efird, 2011; Sandberg, 1999; Schwartz, 2006>). Nothing in the policy documents quoted (perhaps with one unexplored track[3]) disputes the casting of the environment as anything more than a resource for social and economic "development." Exploitation of resources in the name of social equality or nationalism remains undisputed as most choices about environment by policy makers or educators are made within a predetermined system in which environmental protection is contingent on advancing human and social welfare. Judging from the excerpts from Vietnamese policy documents presented by Stefan, neither the "globally oriented economists" nor the "nationally oriented socialists" seem to have a vision of an ecologically benign society. Neither of these discourses' alternative "framing" allows us to see the space of the forest for the (palm oil-generating) trees. In fact, socialist, nationalist and neoliberal discourses are still heavily constrained by the social and political determinism of chronic anthropocentrism.

In dividing the economic "pie" between people, socialists may be aspiring to the abstracted objectives of social equality and economic fairness. In Stefan's own words, "SD and consequently ESD are overdetermined by the struggle among different social groups in the battle for predominance" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 86). Indeed. The issue is how the "pie" is divided between humans and not about *what* is in the pie (for example, tigers for ecotourism or cats for restaurants). Whether the "pie" feeds the lucky few (the fat cats of political and corporate elites), or the "bottom billion," the environment is still, metaphorically speaking, stuffed in the crust and burnt in the cooking.

One of the greatest paradoxes of SD is the assumption that a bigger economic pie also "produces the politically convenient side-benefit of reducing grassroots pressure for the redistribution of wealth" (Rees, 2008, p. 686). This distributive justice does not detract from the fact that the economic pie contains elements of nature, animate and inanimate, consumed by a greater number of people. With the marginalization of a truly alternative vision of development, in which environment is understood as *the* only bottom line, developing countries' strategies resemble the Western logic of climbing up a linear path toward "progress" (Hansen & Wethal, 2014; Kopnina & Blewitt, 2014). With development understood as economic growth and catch-up with the high-consumption societies, judging from the Vietnamese policy documents, SD is not likely to be challenged by either nationalist or socialist discourse. Resources are still used to create wealth, and to maintain power, particularly through clever geopolitics, which are equally important for socialists (e.g., China, Vietnam) or nationalists (e.g., Islamic State[4]).

Anthropocentrism persists at the center of political and policy formations in *all* advanced industrial societies of either the capitalist *or* socialist economic form. The socialist transition of economist policy formulations cannot fully or adequately address the unsustainable problems of ecological injustice and their acceleration in the Anthropocene (Kopnina, 2014e). The persistence of a socialist/nationalist form of anthropocentrism reconstitutes the hegemony—all that really matters is that there is enough pie for all *humans*, as long as it is equally divided. Thus, when notions of environmental justice are assertively incorporated into policy critique, foregrounding questions of their authority, power, and alleged hegemony, a number of overlapping themes in relation to environment can be discerned. We can connect these themes by answering questions posed by Stefan from an ecocentric perspective of environmental justice:

"How should we understand the relationship between these policy concepts, structural power, hegemony and the hegemonic discourses that articulate them?" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 77). *Neoliberal capitalism, socialism and nationalism are related through the shared hegemony of anthropocentrism.*

"If discourse is so determinative, why would there be dissensus or struggle over different meanings?" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 81). *There is a dissensus about social issues. However, anthropocentric discourse is so determinative that it suppresses calls for ecological justice to a degree that we do not even notice that there is a (dead) elephant in the room.*

"How can the subject emancipate itself from the determining power of the social matrix that animates what it has to speak?" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 80). *To use* Kahn's (2010) *formulation, emancipation from the determining power of anthropocentrism cannot come without a wide-spread rebellion that radically challenges human supremacy thinking (exceptionalism, speciesism. What we need is a "radical reconfiguration of who is able to have a voice and of what is expressible in public discourse around 'sustainability' in education policy"* (McKenzie, Bieler, & McNeil, 2015, p. 333).

"If universal discourse is powerful in the sense of globalization as a force that has effects on context and imposes meaning, what theoretical possibilities do exist for opposition and resistance to global hegemony and its ability to co-opt?" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 79). *If socialism and nationalism is seen as "limiting structural power and dominance" of neoliberalism, this 'resistance' is either hypocritical or blind, as far as the world outside of humans is concerned. One theoretical possibility is to ask ourselves and our students: Why do we discriminate against every other species on earth, including future generations of big tigers and little tigers? How can this be morally justified?*

"Wouldn't an investment in non-hegemonic concepts result in that we would purely become self-referential, writing for and to environmental educationalists?" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 88). *Unless we justify or radically dispute the anthropocentric bias, this contestation becomes nothing more than a succession of random stabs at diffuse neoliberal hegemonies, and entirely self-referential. Opportunities to launch radically new ways of thinking and living based on a "truly democratic social order" are likely to be overlooked (*Huckle & Wals, 2015, p. 493*), if we continue to conceive of democracy and justice as intended for single species.*

## Ethical positioning

What I am also missing in Stefan's article is a clear statement of his own ethical position and a question of our positioning as educators and researchers (Hart 2013; Sauvé, Brunelle, & Berryman, 2005). This also raises questions about how Stefan's argument fits in with education and "sustainability." Given that education, curriculum, and pedagogy have not figured prominently in Stefan's response and considering these vagaries open up "cans of worms" that cannot be easily contained in this response, I wonder: Should the students not be taught to care about big and little tigers? Stefan includes an impressive array of contributors to the longstanding debate about EE and ESD. Do we, contributors to EE/ESD debate care about environment beyond its instrumental value? What then is environmental education? And what is being sustained in and by its policies, research, curriculum, and pedagogy?

Perhaps we should admit that we do not care about the environment outside our human needs, and that we are a dominant species, and that "might makes right," yet few academics are willing to admit it. As Eileen Crist (2012, p. 145) has eloquently put it, "genocide of nonhumans is something about which the mainstream culture observes silence. Academics largely follow suit, perhaps because they view issues about which silence is observed as a non-sequitor."

Perhaps, we have not yet worked out the complex ethical justification for ecological injustice. Instead, we flirt with anthropocentric alternative discourses. Like Stefan's article, we share vague "concerns about the suitability of ESD to satisfy the demands of a genuine commitment to the environment relevant to the social changes needed to underpin environmental protection" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 79). I would have liked to see more of this commitment in Stefan's analysis.

From the different eco-political vantage point built upon the mix of ecocentrism and environmental and ecological justice, there remain limits and gaps in Stefan's analysis. What would really contest Vietnamese policy and ESD more generally is a discourse that challenges the "enemy"—anthropocentrism.

The ecocentrically alternative discourse I have outlined would embrace a range of conceptions already well established but currently marginalized; the New Ecological Paradigm (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978), ecological justice (Baxter, 2005), inclusive pluralism between all species (e.g., Kahn, 2010), deep ecology (e.g., Naess, 1973), and earth democracy (Shiva, 2005)—all perspectives fundamentally committed to environmental protection. If we do care we *should* educate *for* ecological literacy (e.g., Orr, 1992), *for* environment (e.g., Fien, 1993), *for* deep ecology (e.g., LaChapelle, 1991), *for* experiential and transpositional outdoor environmental education (Payne, 2014), *for* ecological justice (Glasser, 2004), *for* strategic environmental behavior (Chawla & Cushing, 2007) and *for* animal rights (Gorski, 2009) along with the social justice that we already teach. Anthropocentric hegemonies will not allow space for dissent unless we create it.

As an anthropologist, I am in favor of the "indigenous"[5] (e.g., Fien, 1993; Kopnina, 2012b), or "post-colonial" (e.g. Gonzalez-Gaudiano, this Special Issue) alternatives. The indigenous ontologies historically disputed a dualistic vision of human-environment that produces separate "social" and "environment" categories, and demonstrated that sustainability can only be achieved by the provision of simultaneous social and ecological justice (e.g., Fien, 2003; Shiva, 2005; Strang, 2013). In the context of Vietnamese ancient religion, pre-colonial ways of living, historical sustainability of social and ecological systems, the economist rhetoric is nothing more than our Western neo-liberal (and rapidly globalizing) misguided fantasy.

Yet, it would be naïve to suppose that any of the "indigenous" perspectives are not marred by the permeating 'global' consumerist ideology, after influential members of our society have successfully pushed our misguided ideas of "progress" upon post-colonial nations. As Fien (2003) has argued, "by and large, indigenous priorities and systems of education have been supplanted by the narrow view that the environment and culture are valuable only in so far as they are economically productive. The consequent disregard for land and culture has meant that knowledge, values and skills for living sustainably have been underplayed in contemporary education."

Thus, all the more effort is needed. Planetary democracy requires that we *privilege* the position of eco-advocates, in a continuous affirmative action that guarantees representation of the silent majority of the earth citizens (2014; Baxter, 2005;Dobson, 2003; Kahn, 2010). This approach to environmental justices in education is a far cry from the "contestation" and "resistance" currently supported by Stefan's critiques of the various Vietnamese policy documents in his case study.

## What next?

Elsewhere I have already announced how alternative educational programs can radically extend and challenge existing discourses and practices, and prevailing wisdoms, insights, and qualifications of different critical vantage points. The alternative conceptual framework distinguishing my work can more precisely inform not only a reconceptualized policy formation but also the related curriculum, pedagogical issues, and their research in "what next" in SD and ESD. Encouraging justice between all species and global democracy and exciting others to shift their assumptions and interests in order to embrace the greater than human world can signal a truly radical departure from the power hegemony of the greatest enemy, anthropocentrism.

I hope that the conceptual work I have undertaken here, potentially and incrementally scaffolds into an important conceptual extension of a debate in radically critical EE/ESD. This radicalism seems to have withered over the past decade because of the lack of conscious and compassionate comprehension of the injustice done to the natural world, as ecocentrism, ecological justice, and deep ecology seem to have a marginal position of academic "conversation" of alternative frameworks.

To sum up, like the majority of ESD scholars, I support SD's quest for environmental (social) justice, but I also see *inclusive ecological justice* as the necessary "next step." This requires the recognition of the mutually constitutive processes that compose people and environments, both in teaching and research, enabling a bioethical position encompassing the needs of other species (Shoreman-Ouimet & Kopnina, 2015; Strang. 2013) and a clear commitment.

In the face of expanding zoocide—as in "genocide of non-humans" (Crist, 2012), to think that incorporation of non-human interests in educational practice could occur without widespread rebellion and, ultimately, revolution, seems naïve (Kahn, 2010, p. 137). Perhaps I am being naïve, and unrealistically idealistic in thinking that we could collectively realize the injustice of this particularly virulent strand of anthropocentrism, *human supremacy* (Crist, 2012). Yet, revolutions have happened and will happen, as the status quo regime sustaining the unsustainable is likely to collapse under the pressures and traps of its own making (Blühdorn, 2011).

To prevent sudden collapse, worthy of further consideration is the need for "a reversal of the dominant discourse" (Sauvé, Brunelle, & Berryman, 2005, p. 280, in Bengtsson, 2016) embracing a genuinely critical praxis in both EE and ESD. Potentially, ecological justice and deep ecology would dethrone the anthropocentrism of the policy discourse as it trickles down and endangers both human and ecological sustainability. To achieve this we need the type of commitment that has de-colonized continents, liberated the slaves, gave vote to women, and condemned practices that discriminate against minorities. I propose a form of *post-colonial engagement and inclusive pluralism that goes beyond one species' sustainable development*. Since this SI aims to develop a collectively critical frame that might inform studies of policy formulation, environmental justice, postcolonialism (also in a sense of human domination or colonization of the earth), and ecopedagogy, I hope that my revisioning can help emancipation from the determining power of anthropocentrism and can equip potential advocates with the intellectual resources to engage in the challenge of developing praxically ecocentric pedagogy. The next step for EE/ESD research and practice community is putting a stop to discrimination against billions of non-human beings through teaching our students that human supremacy is just as intolerable as slavery, racism, and colonialism.

Although ecocentrism and deep ecology are not new conceptual theoretical vantage points as they have been around for some time lurking within that historical continuity of the EE/ESD fields' all too inclusive discourse, my main argument or plea is to recognize their moral and political potency and transformative strength. In moral and political terms, ecological justice is strong as ideas of abolitionism, or as women's liberation, not just "one of many" perspectives in pluralist (and neoliberal) discourse. If we assume that consideration for human rights, equality, and equity can be learned[6], so can be consideration for ecological justice. We need to devise ways of teaching more critically as to how to protect environment. In answering the "what next after the Decade of ESD" I hope that it is education *for the* environment.

## Notes

1. In one of my case studies of International Business Management Studies in the Netherlands a student reflected neoliberalism "allows us to choose between different ways of living our lives… and being sustainable." Discussing students' reaction to viewing the film *Schooling the World*, which criticizes Western education for neoliberal indoctrination, another student reflected: "Education makes it possible to question these images of a perfect world critically and value the own traditions and use the best aspects of both the modern and the traditional way of life" (Kopnina, 2013a, 2014a, 2015a).
2. As William Rees (2008, p. 686) has reflected: Clearly, achieving global sustainability will require that the wealthy branches of the human family curb their material excesses. We must achieve both sustainable and equitable levels of consumption. To date, however, most official sustainability policies remain growth-dependent and rely on enhanced supply-side efficiency directed at what are really mere symptoms of systemic ecological dysfunction. Consequently, material growth in even the most efficient economies overwhelms the positive gains from efficiency, and per capita consumption and waste production continue to increase…
3. Stefan writes: "socialist discourse can be seen to counter this economist narrative of improved living standards through economic growth" and "The gap between the poor and the rich and social stratification tend to be on rapid increase in the market economy" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 85). So, what do socialists propose other than more equitable distribution of wealth? Are they against the growth economy? Are they against exploitation of resources? Are they for more environmental protection?
4. In fact, IS might be literally fueled by oil money (http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/01/economist-explains).
5. As Strang (2013) has argued, many indigenous cultures have provided exemplars of more collaborative relationships with the non-human and a genuinely different political ecology in human-environmental engagement.

6. Support of social equality is not innate, or morally absolute, but learned. By the same token I assume that respect for non-humans can be learned, even more so because biophilia, although not shared by all individuals, actually does seem to be universal, judging from an anthropological and historical record.

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