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CLAIMING JUSTICE MATTERS IN ENERGY POLICY

WHY ENERGY POLICY IS NOT ONLY ABOUT ECONOMIC OR ECOLOGICAL ISSUES, BUT ALSO FUNDAMENTALLY REQUIRES THE CONSIDERATION OF ITS IMPACTS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE.

Energy policy is one of today's major challenges for modern societies. The question whether and to what extent we have access to energy highly affects our everyday lives. Moreover, impacts from energy usage – notably from greenhouse gas [GHG] emissions, or from changes in land use – upon living conditions may be tremendous, from the local to the global scale. It is therefore of great importance to further think, speak, and discuss about future trajectories of energy production and supply. From a leftist perspective, it is important that these considerations do not only address economic or ecological issues on a broader scale, but further include ethical considerations of a socially just energy future. Moreover, in view of decreasing production costs for renewable energy technology and rising awareness about climate change impacts all over the world, it is the right time to place the topic of energy justice more prominently on domestic and international agendas and link it to ongoing debates on climate change, development, economic growth, sustainability, and so on. This must be done by applying a broad understanding of social justice, taking into account the full range of justice issues, including the distribution of costs and benefits as well as recognition-related aspects connected to energy production and supply.

When we hear the word 'justice' being used in relation to the energy sector, it is mainly meant to point to unequal access to electricity or fuels. While this indeed affects many people in the world, especially with regards to the electricity sector – either because they are not connected to a power grid or because they can't afford electricity – injustices connected to the energy sector may be much more diverse. For example, in Indonesia, where coal is one of the most important energy sources, injustices also stem from the mining and firing of coal. This highly affects farming and fishing communities in rural areas, who often suffer from a severe reduction of their harvests.¹ While these effects stemming from energy production are often overlooked, the problems and normative trade-offs connected to the sector are even much broader. Energy supply is a necessity for all modern societies, impacting everyone's daily life.

Clearly, energy policy poses multiple challenges to policy-makers, and many terms have been coined to describe them. For governments, energy-related challenges mainly revolve around how to secure the energy supply in order to maintain or foster economic growth levels. Looking at the 'big picture', they often disregard negative impacts on individual people's lives or on the environment, thereby ignoring a whole range of important ethical considerations

related to the energy sector. From a leftist perspective, that entails understanding the role of energy under neoliberal-capitalist conditions, as well as demanding a socially just energy future. In contrast to mainstream definitions of the terms 'energy justice' or 'energy equity' as merely improving access to energy supply, a comprehensive framework should also consider the uneven distribution of costs of energy production and consumption from the local to the global scale.

ENERGY – THE BACKBONE OF OUR IMPERIAL MODE OF LIVING

We may think about energy in many different terms in order to understand its importance for today's societies. One more recent approach that tries to grasp the interconnected problems arising from current production and consumption patterns has been coined the *imperial mode of living* (*imperiale Lebensweise*). Originally the structural basis of politico-economic arrangements in the Global North, primarily marked by the unjust distribution of resources and the exploitation of labour and nature alike, the imperial mode of living has been rapidly spreading to countries of the Global South. One of its main stabilising factors is the uneven distribution of costs and benefits between and within societies based on spatial and temporal outsourcing patterns. The overall struc-

ture is deeply anchored in, and enforced through, the everyday practices, aspirations, and knowledge structures of a transnational consumerist class, physical and material infrastructures, and politico-economic institutions pursuing so-called 'false solutions' such as green growth approaches.²

Energy – and especially fossil fuel-based energy production – may be considered the backbone of the *imperial mode of living*, ensuring its steady operation as a major driving factor as well as the basis of exploitation strategies targeting labour and nature. It intensifies the unequal appropriation of nature on a local and a domestic, as well as on a global scale. Obviously, this is the case not only for local impacts around production sites as described above, but also for the global impacts of energy consumption. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), GHG emissions from the energy sector account for around two-thirds of all anthropogenic GHG emissions, with the power sector making up the biggest share of it. Fossil fuel-based energy generation is regarded as the major driver of anthropogenic climate change. It has been well recognised that GHG emissions foster climate change which in turn impacts the lives of many people around the globe, especially in the Global South. Moreover, climate change reinforces social injustices as marginalised groups are far more vulnerable to these impacts. Despite these facts being generally acknowledged by policy-makers, fossil fuel-based energy production – which, due to its production and usage structure, has severe impacts on climate change – is still *en vogue* in many countries, due to various economic and political interests connected to it. This is the case for so-called developed countries like Germany, but also for so-called emerging economies such as Indonesia that had formally positioned themselves as progressive actors in climate change policy.

FOSSIL FUEL-BASED ENERGY POLICY AND RELATED INJUSTICES IN INDONESIA

Indonesia is one of the largest GHG emitters worldwide. The World Resource Institute estimates that while the land-use sector is currently still dominating emission rates, energy-related emissions are going to increase up to over 50 percent of total emissions in Indonesia by 2026–2027, becoming the largest source of GHG emissions. This development is underpinned by a fossil fuel-based energy production, to a large extent made of coal, which accounts for more than half of the electricity generated in the country. On the economic plane, Indonesia remains the world's second largest coal exporter (after Australia), providing almost 28% of global coal exports as reported by the IEA. Coal production was expanded significantly in Indonesia when international coal prices were on the rise in the early 2000s. As this pointed to good investment opportunities in local coal businesses, many international and national business actors started to jump on the train. This development was favoured by weak law enforcement and widespread practices of bribery and self-enrichment by local elites. However, when international coal prices began to decline and several small mines stopped their production, the Indonesian government under current president Joko Widodo (since 2014) slightly changed its coal policy. In 2015, the government issued a new energy policy plan targeting the expansion of domestic coal-based power production. Within this so-called *35 Gigawatt Program* it expressed the intention to produce an additional 35 gigawatts of electricity until 2019, including 20 gigawatts from

coal-fired power plants. Even though government representatives have acknowledged meanwhile that this target might not be met, several new power plants are currently being erected. For Indonesia, these infrastructure investments indicate a lock-in to fossil fuel-based power generation for the decades to come, while it is assumed that Indonesian coal reserves might be depleted within the next 20 years (providing existing rates of production continue). Both the prolonged production of high quantities of coal and the construction of a vast number of new coal power plants not only call into question the country's emission reduction targets, but also pose new and reinforce old social injustices and environmental destruction in and around production sites.

On a general level, the Indonesian government argues that this approach is important to ensure and enhance economic growth rates, as well as to improve energy access for the vast number of households that haven't been connected to an electricity grid yet. However, energy planning should also consider the fair distribution of costs and benefits along the entire production chain and for all stakeholders. For example, the costs of coal-based energy production in Indonesia are mainly shouldered by local communities around the mining and power plant sites. They suffer from reduced income opportunities, restricted access to farm land and fishing grounds, general environmental destruction, and specific problems such as floods, air pollution, and connected health impacts. Protest against these developments is often criminalised. Threats by private and public security forces occur on a regular basis, and human and citizens' rights are often not respected. Furthermore, it is exactly these rural areas which suffer from error-prone electricity supply and regular black-outs, and a large share of households in Indonesia (mainly located on the Eastern islands) is not connected to a power grid. These conditions point to the multiple aspects that have to be considered when arguing for a more socially just arrangement of energy systems.

THE FRAMEWORK(S) – FROM ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE TO ENERGY JUSTICE

The term 'energy justice' and connected concepts have only been emerging within the last couple of years. We may locate it within the broader agenda of the more established approaches of environmental and climate justice. While environmental justice refers to concepts and claims that first emerged during the 1980s, mainly in the US and with regards to inequalities regarding pollution, the climate justice approach has been developed on this basis since the early 2000s, addressing global effects and respective responsibilities. Both terms are being used within academia as well as civil society debates. While the exact definitions and frameworks are contested, they generally attempt to combine environmental concerns with socio-economic ethical considerations.

While environmental and climate justice approaches are by now consolidated terms, energy justice is still a new concept. In civil society discourses, it is still rarely used, and the topic of energy is usually subsumed under climate or environmental justice. In academia it has only started to receive attention during the last five years through a number of books and articles published by a rather small group of academics.³ The frameworks they developed seem highly promising, especially because they demand an evaluation of energy policy according to justice principles that takes into

account the entire production chain, instead of solely tackling questions of power supply. Furthermore, they have in common that they usually combine different notions of social justice. Most of the authors refer to distributional justice, procedural justice, and justice of recognition. However, building on environmental justice approaches, the vast majority of scholars promotes an energy justice concept entailing the three tenets of distributional justice, procedural justice, and recognition justice. They have developed detailed and sophisticated concepts ready to be used as decision-making tools by policy-makers.⁴ Nonetheless, the different justice dimensions included in an additive manner in their frameworks overlap to a certain degree in reality, and in social justice theory literature, they are often treated as mutually exclusive or presented within a hierarchical order. Therefore, it is worth taking another look at political theory literature on the topic.

ENERGY JUSTICE À LA NANCY FRASER – BETWEEN REDISTRIBUTION AND RECOGNITION

Nancy Fraser is a renowned scholar in the field of social justice theories who has long been engaged in reconciling different justice claims within a single concept. Responding to a broader debate on redistribution and recognition, Fraser argues that both aspects should be perceived as two poles on a continuum, as opposed to perceiving them as mutually exclusive positions. She claims that, while there might be political struggles that we should locate at one of the two ends (such as class struggles, where the remedy would be redistribution, and status according to sexuality, where the remedy would be recognition), in fact, both dimensions are relevant to all kinds of struggles to a certain extent, and many of them may be located somewhere in the middle. This results in what Fraser calls a *bivalent* conception of justice, where redistribution and recognition (related to societal status, not to 'mere' identity politics) are two possible remedies for meeting social injustices. However, the normative core of her concept is *parity of participation*.⁵ According to this objective, "justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers."⁶ This certainly requires standards of legal equality, a distribution of resources that ensures peoples' independence (*redistribution*), and institutionalised cultural patterns that express equal respect for everyone (*recognition*). This integrative approach therefore transcends a merely additive understanding of different justice dimensions.⁷

For the Indonesian case sketched above – coal mining and coal power plants in Indonesia – we may well find injustices connected to both ends, (re)distribution and recognition. However, based on my interviews and conversations with people directly affected by either coal extraction or coal-based power production, I argue that energy justice is located closer to the redistribution side. This is mainly based on my experience that socio-economic factors (or the distribution of costs and benefits) are the primary concerns and claims people state, when asked about their close proximity to a coal mining site or power plant. The most severe changes impacting their lives are the reduction of income due to pollution, and restricted access to land and coastal areas, which minimises their harvest (of rice, fruits, and fish). Other costs include environmental destruction and pollution-induced

health problems. Moreover, they generally do not benefit from an improved electricity supply (in fact both localities still suffer from regular blackouts), and new income opportunities, for example through direct employment at the mines or the power plant, remain limited.

Further ills include the criminalisation of protest activities and related threats. We may perceive this as a matter of misrecognition or non-application of basic human and citizen rights. A related dimension connected to the recognition paradigm is a self-perception as "small people" who do not have access to political channels and representation of their needs. Another, more concrete aspect of legal recognition relates to compensation payments for local fishermen living close to a coal-power plant in Java: Only those owning boats received compensations, as shore fishers were not recognised as fishermen.

Both dimensions lead to a lack of parity of participation. For example, very often, those people most affected by coal mining or power plants not only lack adequate information on what is going to happen in their surroundings, but are also excluded from decision-making procedures. Informational events, although formally required, either do not take place at all, or the people affected are not invited, or they are framed in incomprehensible technical jargon. Environmental impact assessments, which are also part of the prerequisites for both mining activities and power plant construction, are often not conducted thoroughly, are sometimes issued far too late (for example, after constructions have already begun), and are often not publicly accessible.

Drawing from these theoretical insights, the experiences from the Indonesian case, and the existing frameworks mentioned above, I propose the following core tenets for further discussions on domestic energy policies. They are far from being complete, nor are they perfectly applicable to other circumstances. However, I hope for fruitful future discussions on general approaches, as well as elaboration on specific cases. Moreover, I perceive this list as another step in putting the topic on the agenda and hope it may prove a useful start for a basis for argumentation in favour of streamlining social justice issues in the debates on energy and climate policies.

In general, a social-ecological transition towards non-fossil and non-nuclear energy resources that ensures social and environmental sustainability shall be the primary target of energy policies on all political levels (a); everyone should be able to access sufficient energy to live a dignified life (good life instead of equality) (b); and efforts to reduce energy consumption shall be encouraged and supported by all political and social entities (c).

Concrete demands for energy justice include: Costs and burdens arising from energy production shall be shared between different parts of society and take global responsibility into account (a). Thereby, it is important that already socio-economically marginalised people shall not be further disadvantaged by energy production (compensatory sharing of burdens). Furthermore, costs and burdens must be assessed with a view to the entire production chain. In addition, benefits from energy production shall be for the common good, i.e., no individual should be able to extract significant income from energy production, as it is a basic commodity that everyone needs. If surplus through energy production is generated, it shall be for the common good, especially for countering negative impacts related to the production (b). Also, affected communities must have full

access to information (including on costs and benefits distributions) and meaningful decision-making procedures (c). This includes that local peoples' needs and perspectives shall be prioritised in decision-making processes up to the level where decisions over energy production and supply shall be taken by communities on the local level through democratic procedures (for ex., a local referendum or other forms of decision-making accepted by the local community). Thereby, divergent perspectives and needs have to be acknowledged (and given the possibility to be raised). Marginalised parts of society shall be empowered to access information and take part in decision-making procedures. Decisions shall always be made in democratic, non-discriminatory ways (respecting different needs related to class, gender, race, abilities etc.). This furthermore requires that communities have access to multi-level legal systems. Moreover, there shall be no intimidation and criminalisation in case of civil society protests.

JUST ENERGY – AND THE CHALLENGES BEYOND

While this concept might hopefully serve as another starting point for enforcing the consideration of justice claims in dealing with future trajectories of energy production and supply, many challenges remain. The example of coal mining and coal-based power production in Indonesia sheds light on justice-relevant aspects that are too often being disregarded by policy-makers, albeit its tremendous negative impacts on local livelihoods. However, the transportation sector, which is equally important for fossil fuel-based energy systems, is not covered in this paper, nor are many other energy sources that might differ in their impacts from the coal example. This is why the list of justice-related claims presented above can only serve as a starting point for further discussion and elaboration of the issue. Nevertheless, the list of justice-related claims presented above can serve as a starting point for discussions and elaboration on the issue, possibly relevant to several sectors.

Notably, what also needs further attention is an elaboration on visions that are able to challenge our *imperial mode of living* by applying alternatives to economic rationalities. Such a vision could be a community-organised and -owned, cooperative-based energy production and supply, based on small-scale renewable energy projects. While for now, it may seem rather unlikely that such an approach may be found on a global or even national scale in the near future, in fact, there are many already existing projects oriented towards this idea in various parts of the world. For example, consider the power rebels from Schönau,⁸ a small village community in the Black Forest in Germany that has started to build up their own energy production and supply system in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, as well as so many other initiatives from all over the world. Although their scope does range from establishing completely self-sufficient, non-market based small-scale energy systems, to larger cooperatives operating based on market mechanisms, they do provide valuable examples for future pathways towards what has been termed *energy democracy* (*Energiedemokratie*) in recent German debates.⁹

Besides these considerations mainly targeting the national scale, it is highly important to seek solutions to solve existing injustices related to energy and climate policy on the global scale. This tackles the myriad questions of historical responsibilities and ecological debt, the quest for continued eco-

nomie growth, technology transfers, investment practices, and general development strategies. It is certainly not an easy task to arrive at agreements on these matters in international fora. However, there is the clear need for a global movement to raise its voice in order to overcome existing injustices on all levels. So, let's talk about energy justice – in Indonesia, in other countries, and in international negotiations such as the climate summits!

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¹ The majority of the information on Indonesia used in this article draws from empirical field research in Indonesia (East Kalimantan, Jakarta, and West Java) in 2011, 2016, and 2017 as well as from earlier publications by the author, namely *Staatlichkeit als lokale Praxis: Kohleabbau und Widerstand in Indonesien* (Berlin 2016), *The State of Coal Mining in East Kalimantan: Towards a Political Ecology of Local Stateness* (ASEAS 9(1) 2016), and *Wenn sich nicht mal mehr der Teufel heimisch fühlt – Widerstand gegen die Energiepolitik in Indonesien* (Asien im Windschatten des Wachstums, Stiftung Asienhaus, Köln 2017). ² See Brand, Ulrich/ Wissen, Markus: Crisis and continuity of capitalist society-nature relationships. The imperial mode of living and the limits to environmental governance, in: *Review of International Political Economy* 20 (4), 2013, pp. 687–711, and I.L.A. Kollektiv: *Auf Kosten Anderer. Wie die imperiale Lebensweise ein gutes Leben für alle verhindert*. München: 2017. ³ Some authors who have published quite a lot on the topic include R. J. Heffron, K. Jenkins, D. McCauley, and B. Sovacool. See for ex. Jenkins, Kirsten et al.: Energy justice, in: *Energy Research & Social Science* 11, 2016, pp. 174–182; Sovacool, Benjamin K. / Dworkin, Michael H.: Energy justice, in: *Applied Energy* 142, 2015, pp. 435–444. ⁴ E.g., see Sovacool/ Dworkin: Energy justice. ⁵ Fraser, Nancy: *Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation*. Stanford, 1996. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30. ⁷ *Ibid.* ⁸ See the homepage of the Energiewerke Schönau: <https://www.ews-schoenau.de/>, and Morris, Craig / Jungjohann, Arne: *Energy Democracy*. Cham: 2016. ⁹ For further information on the concept, as well as descriptions of other initiatives, see, e.g. Kunze, Conrad / Becker, Sören: *Wege der Energiedemokratie*. Stuttgart: 2015; Weis, Laura / Becker, Sören / Naumann, Matthias: *Energiedemokratie*, Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Studien 1/2015, Berlin 2015.

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