

PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to reconceptualise energy justice as a unifying agenda for scholars and practitioners working on issues of energy security, fuel poverty and climate change. It argues that justice should be central to re-balancing the global energy system. Justice is often reduced to a secondary role in energy matters. I argue that the energy justice agenda challenges researchers, policymakers and activists to reconsider positioning fairness and equity at the heart of energy solutions. It is written specifically for a global and multidisciplinary (but primarily social science) audience. Too often our energy focus is dominated by uni-disciplinary nationalistic conceptualisations of security, poverty or carbon reduction priorities. In addition to multiple research grants, I have enjoyed the privilege of leading two Special Issues in Energy Policy and Applied Energy on energy justice involving over 400 abstracts from leading scholars throughout the world. I also teach on a highly selective energy programme that includes US and Russian students at the University of St Andrews. Both experiences drive a will to inspire trans-disciplinary global viewpoints in order to inspire new innovative long-term solutions.

Throughout the book, I establish four assumptions that I hold about the global energy system which all students, scholars, activists and decision-makers should explicitly reflect upon. The first is that we are on a trajectory towards a low-carbon energy future. The Paris climate change agreement has thrust the world into a quest for low-carbon energy sources in a bid to reduce the highly damaging effects of global

warming. At a time when populism and nationalism are on the rise, the global community is faced with the irrefutable requirement to decarbonise its energy systems. The second assumption is that new injustices will emerge from this transition towards a low-carbon future. We have still to wake up to this fact. Decarbonisation goes a long way to solving the injustice of intergenerational carbon emissions. It does not, however, mean that injustice itself is eradicated. Quite the opposite.

This assumption regarding the global energy system is that old injustices will remain. In rightly assuming that we are on track towards a low-carbon future, we must not allow this to take attention away from the continuing injustices of a high-carbon world. The transition will be transitional. In other words, both high-carbon and low-carbon energy systems will exist in tandem for quite some time. We must consider the development of new solutions to these old injustices, and not simply prepare for those in the new world. A final assumption is the requirement for new frameworks in order to encourage long-term sustainable research, policy and resistance strategies. I suggest in this book that energy justice is one such opportunity.

Existing literature on energy justice can often confuse with multiple uses in evidence and a seemingly never-ending checklist of dos and don'ts on show. It can feel like energy justice is a philosophical or abstract place that is disconnected with the realities of research and practice. I aim to take a more focused approach in this book. I construct a framework of analysis which is capable of being tested in theory and practice. I focus on applying the three key concepts of justice (distributional, recognition and procedural) to three leading priorities for energy policy (energy security, fuel poverty and climate change). This framework is set out in Chap. 1. I then assess the applicability of the framework to fossil fuel (Chap. 2) and alternative low-carbon (Chap. 3) energy systems through making use of a range of global examples. Chapter 4 lays out the most important implications of this energy justice framework, as well as identifying future opportunities for research and practice.

A final word on limitations. This is designed to be a relatively brief coverage of energy justice. It does not set out to cover extensively each potential component implied in the energy justice agenda. It is rather a timely re-conceptualisation of the dominant paradigms in energy research. A second limitation is its time-specific context. It is incumbent upon energy scholars to be more explicit about the energy situation

when writing as the sector is increasingly in flux. I fully expect some of the assumptions (based upon multiple reports and data sets) I make on production or consumption rates will change on an annual basis. It is, nevertheless, an important discipline for an energy scholar to set out how the global energy system is viewed at the time of writing. A third limitation is a lack of extensive coverage in terms of energy issues. It is not possible to cover the full range of nuances in the global energy system. I also have to make some oversimplifications (especially for a natural scientist) at some parts in the book, which I acknowledge. The critical aspect here is developing the dominant conceptualisations of energy and social science research and practice, rather than debating the detail of natural energy systems.

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Energy Justice

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