Green Transitions, Just Transitions?

Broadening and Deepening Justice

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Introduction

The strategy of Just Transition emerged in response to the fitful environmental transition that has been going on since the 1970s in the USA (Young 1998; Brecher 2015; Labor Network for Sustainability and Strategic Practice 2016). Over the years it has expanded beyond the USA and as a result of the efforts of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Labour Organization's Workers' Office (ACTRAV) it has become a central element of global labour environmentalism, especially with respect to global climate policy (Rosemberg 2010, Felli 2013). In fact, the language was included in the Paris Climate Agreement even though more symbolically than practically. Parallel to this geographic expansion Just Transition has also been employed with respect to communities (Farrell 2012), building a legal system that connects work and climate change (Doorey 2016) and whole political economies (Newell/Mulvaney 2013).

  In its most reactive versions Just Transition reflects a desire to protect those left behind by the Green Transitions, often reinforcing capital's "jobs vs environment" trap. In its more proactive and expansive versions it aims towards a more socially and ecologically just Green Transition as an alternative to the various forms of green capitalism and green growth competing for hegemony (Tienhaara 2014; Jacobs 2012; for a critique see Sweeney 2015). In short, there are varieties of Just Transition, reflecting the politics of its various advocates (Felli/Stevis 2014; Stevis/Felli 2015). Moreover, the dynamics of the world political economy can well turn Just Transition strategies at one level into Unjust Transition results at another level. Our goal in this essay, therefore, is to place Just Transition in front of its considerable promise as the grand narrative of labour environmentalism (Räthzel/ Uzzell 2013) without losing sight of its variability and possible unintentional impacts. We do so in three steps and in a manner that can be easily applied to the international political economy of climate change. First, we offer a heuristic typology of (in)justice; we then do the same with the geographies of justice; in the last part we bring varieties and geographies of justice together and explore the implications. In each case we illuminate our typologies with short examples and elaborations. We close by outlining some theoretical and practical implications and directions.

Varieties of (In)justice

Discussions of environmental justice often center around various dimensions, such as distribution, recognition, participation and so on (Schlosberg 2007; Kuehn 2000), Here we propose a simple concatenation of social and environmental standing that does not foreclose these debates (Hopwood et al. 2005). Social standing ranges from social inequality to social equality (which can be manifested in terms of distribution of material harms and benefits – if one adopts such a narrow approach to distribution – recognition, participa-

tion and so on). Environmental standing ranges from denying nature any ontological or moral value (unfettered anthropocentrism) to extending ontological and moral primacy to nature (strong ecocentrism).

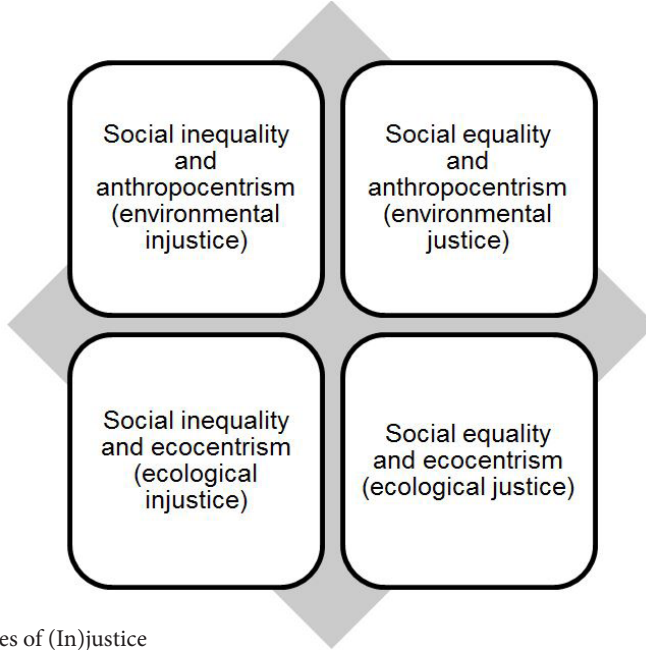| Social inequality and anthropocentrism (environmental injustice)	Social equality and anthropocentrism (environmental justice)
Social inequality and ecocentrism (ecological injustice)	Social equality and ecocentrism (ecological justice)

Table 1: Varieties of (In)justice

Out of these two dimensions we derive four types, which should be thought of as the end points of broad spectra. Social inequality and anthropocentrism are likely to producewhat we conventionally call environmental injustice. Those able to decide impose harms upon the vulnerable while depriving them of benefits. This can take place in two general ways. One way is via the siting of hazardous practices and externalities close to people, which are least able to reject them, often in collaboration with local forces (Bullard 1990; Cole/Foster 2000). Another way is through the ability of those less vulnerable to 'exit' by moving away from areas that become environmentally hazardous. Global climate change is often taken as an example of how the benefits and losses of environmental degradation are unjustly distributed: those countries that have least contributed to the problem are those who will bear the heaviest losses (Ciplet et al. 2015).

   A second type is that of environmental justice, more likely if there is social equality. At its most narrow vision environmental justice may mean the fair distribution of existing harms and benefits. Ecomodernist technological utopias – although we would be rather skeptical about them – claim to enhance environmental justice in this sense. At its more emancipatory version it envisions the liberation of all people from unequal harms and equal access by all to benefits (Cole/Foster 2000; Farrell 2012). Such an emancipatory version is likely to move towards more standing for nature but that is not necessarily the case. It can well take place via adaptation to harms, rather than their mitigation, although

it is difficult to imagine that it could take place without some mitigation. In the context of anthropogenic climate change, and with some environmental degradation already "locked in", reducing the vulnerability to dangerous environmental changes (for instance by developing public water distribution infrastructures to mitigate the effects of climate change induced droughts) can be seen as a form of environmental justice (Ribot 2014).

One kind of ecological injustice is the result of ecocentric views, which consider a commitment to nature as a sufficient foundation for social choices about nature (Hopwood et al. 2005). One historical result has been an appropriation of spaces in the cause of preservation and at the expense of the vulnerable. The US national parks are a testament to that as is the post WWII mutation of natural parks in East Africa and other post-colonial places (Montrie 2011; Macekura 2016). Greenhouse gases emissions accounting allows similar practices, such as replacing forests by plantations in parts of the world (thereby supposedly "pumping" CO_2 out of the atmosphere) , to serve to purify those that can purchase these services, while displacing (sometimes violently) their current occupants and users. Urban gentrification, justified in quality of life and environmental amenity terms, continues this process (Rawson/Tawatao 2012). Forced displacement in rural areas are sometimes justified in terms of climate change adaptation, although they more often reflect local power struggles and appropriation of land (e.g.: Arnall, 2014). Similarly, some versions of the "anthropocene" thesis tend to obscure the differentiated responsibilities, and consequences, of environmental transformations (Malm/Hornborg 2014).

Finally, ecological justice refers to social choices that are embedded within nature, fully understanding that natural dynamics are subject to a sociologically and historically informed approach to science. Arguably, some of the best environmental actions by trade unions have been informed by such ecological justice visions – starting from the preservation of specific natural places through broader contestation of urban development and the power of capital to shape cities and nature (Burgmann 2000). Ecological justice, like gender justice, is not evaluated solely on whether nature or women are better valued within the existing parameters. Rather, nature's standing and gender equality set the structural parameters, which, now, inform policies.

Geographies of Justice

Social practices cast longer or shorter shadows across time and space. In the same sense that they can displace negative externalities across space they can also do so across time, a process poignantly captured by Rob Nixon's (2011) notion of "slow violence". Blatant temporal externalizations are easy to recognize but inadvertent ones require more research. In some cases temporal externalities may be unintentional – a solution that seemed benign at a point in time proves to be disastrous in interaction with new factors. In other cases present constraints and calculations may lead to inferior choices in the hope that future technologies or concatenations of power will solve the problem. What, of course, are the most difficult cases are solutions that solve present inequities and problems by displacing the costs and dangers across time. Carbon sequestration, geo-engineering and radioactive waste storage are such examples and they are properly subject to EJ evaluation (Tyree/Greenleaf 2009; Ottinger 2011). In all cases, temporal injustice is not the result of an undifferentiated present generation imposing costs on equally undifferentiated future generations. Rather, inter-temporal injustice is the product of the same dynamics that produce intra-temporal injustice.

With a clear understanding that intra-temporal dynamics are at the source of both present and future (in)justice we now turn to the spatiality of justice. Political and economic geographers highlight the social constitution of scale –which also includes what we denote as scope (Castree et al. 2004; Gough 2010; Holifield/Porter/Walker 2009; Herod 2011). It is not adequate to say that we need to move from a local to a national to a regional and then to a global scale as if these scales are nicely nested within each other. Some actors (firms and imperial states, generally) have more power than others (workers, communities) in choosing the scale at which they will deploy their resources and initiatives, although they can also be forced to reckon, for instance, with solidarity across national borders or between regions. The scales of a transnational activity have to be explored empirically in order to ascertain how particular places shape each other and the power relations involved in this process (Sassen 2005; Adkin 2016). Not all locations in a core country, for instance, are similarly situated with respect to the production, circulation or consumption of fossil fuels or renewables.

Complementarily, an account that fully maps the scale of an activity may do so only with respect to particular stakeholders or affected parties (Young 2006; Fraser 2005), i.e., have limited scope in the sense that they provide selective standing. For instance, blaming "Northern" consumers indiscriminately for greenhouse gases emissions does not recognize the very different abilities (along the lines of class, gender, race, etc.) not only to make alternative consumption choices (eating organic food, commuting by bicycle, etc.) but to shape the major investment decisions that affect northern political economies. Similarly, transition plans that cover only certain people or places within a supply chain, for instance, fall in that category. Compensation or retraining may alleviate the distress of laid off workers but they often do not extend to the community in which these workers are embedded or do not address the gendered nature of their jobs. For both political and ethical reasons just transitions have to take into account all the affected parties, as well as the unequal power relations amongst them.

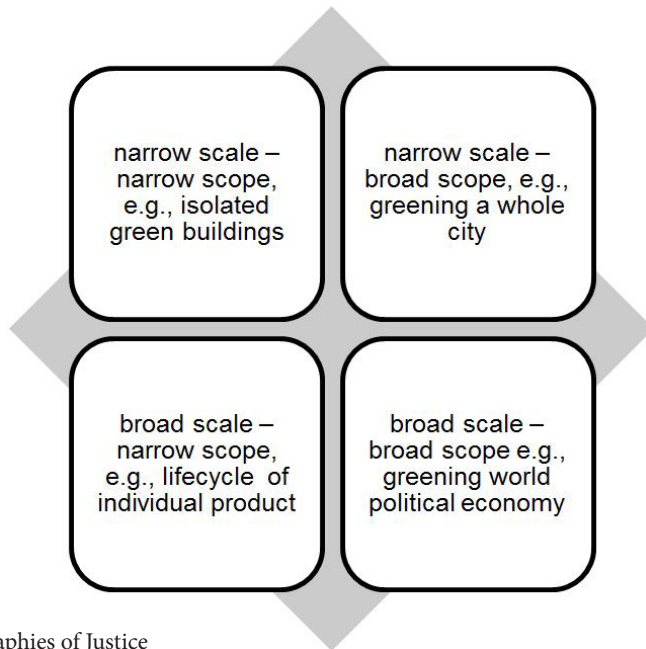| narrow scale – narrow scope, e.g., isolated green buildings	narrow scale – broad scope, e.g., greening a whole city
broad scale – narrow scope, e.g., lifecycle of individual product	broad scale – broad scope e.g., greening world political economy

Table 2: Geographies of Justice

Using scale and scope in this manner results in four spatial concatenations. The first is most prominent in neoliberal solutions to climate change (and other environmental problems). It places responsibility on individual consumers about discrete events –such as a building. That does not mean that efficient buildings are not necessary ingredients of a green transition. Rather, buildings that are not embedded in a broader reorganization of space and the economy can well intensify the use of energy and materials while obscuring the dynamics producing these events (Good Jobs First 2016). But, another example of narrow scale and narrow scope would be the creation of so called green jobs – for instance in renewables – that are not part of a broader green and just economy (on green jobs see Crowley 1999; Goods 2013).

The greening of cities has become a prominent strategy over the last twenty-five years (Campbell 1996) while urban planning is one of the foundations of contemporary environmentalism and is increasingly seen as a major lever for climate action (Bulkeley/Betsill 2013). Greening whole cities does confront us with the multidimensionality of green transitions as it often involves more or less comprehensive plans of action – in the USA often climate action plans. As a result, the scope of urban policies is broad, if not necessarily egalitarian. While the formal scale of cities is delimited, the ways in which a city becomes greener (or more just or more efficient or more industrial or service oriented and so on) produces a footprint that may cut across distant ecosystems and countries. Creating "islands of sustainability" within the urban core may well translate into more resource and energy consumption on the outside (Bonard/Mathey 2010). The same logic applies to greening subfederal states or whole countries.

The study of linkages across the world – ranging from product life cycles to global production networks – has helped us better understand the mechanisms through which global divisions of labor are organized and operate (Scientific Applications International Corporation 2010; Bair 2009; Henderson et al. 2002). It is not surprising that capital and its allies prevented the ILO from formally focusing on value chains until very recently. It seems to us that as we are moving beyond product life cycle assessments and towards GPNs we are able to broaden scale and scope. The GPN approach probably best captures the universe of actors involved in shaping transnational bonds, and it is the most concerned with labor issues (Taylor 2007; Rainnie et al. 2013). But GPNs must be treated as specific cases, intended to help us better understand the deeper rules of the world political economy, rather than insulated and uncontested social spaces (Levy 2008; Nativel/Routledge 2008). As Dustin Mulvaney (2014) has argued with respect to life cycle assessments, metrics cannot simply average what goes on across a GPN or life cycle but must be particularly sensitive to unequal exposures to harms and benefits. For instance, exposure of a smaller number of people to carcinogenic substances during the manufacturing of a solar panel – that allows for the production of electricity with no carbon emissions – may result in more severe harm to more people than the diffusion of larger amounts of carbon emissions from a coal fired plant. As we understand it this comparison does not justify the use of coal or fossil fuels, in general, but, rather, invites us to pay more attention to the ecological impacts of green manufacturing.

The ultimate goal, then, is to understand the overarching dynamics of the global political economy. There is no lack of research in this area, going back to the foundations of the modern social sciences. Research on global historical processes is paying closer attention to their environmental dimensions (Bonneuil/Fressoz 2016). Other social scientists have examined unequal ecological exchange (Behrens et al. 2007) and the patterns of global so-

cial metabolism (Muradian et al. 2012). Global governance is one of the most prominent elements of international relations and environmental governance is a subfield in its own right. Global governance took off with the creation of global standards and infrastructure during the 19th century (Murphy 1994; Mazower 2012) and has accelerated in our days. Climate and 'trade' negotiations are the most prominent such efforts. We already have global policies in a variety of areas – most of them facilitating the infrastructure of global capitalism and entrenching its hegemony. The global climate regime, such as it is, is having profound impacts on local and global politics and it is justified on grounds of global governmentality. The challenge, therefore, is not one of global rules but the well-known one of what kinds of global rules.

The Differences that Scale and Scope Make

The relational and historically grounded examination of scale and scope is necessary because what may seem as a just practice at one scale may well be unjust or deleterious at another. In some cases such solutions may be simply predatory and, unfortunately, unions are frequently involved in such strategies (Gough 2010; Herod 2012). In other cases such displacements may be the result of successful local strategies employed by workers and communities desperately seeking to survive. In the absence of transnational networks and strategies such valiant and sincere efforts can well reflect militant particularism (Williams 1989; Harvey 1996) rather than a just transition strategy. In fact, just transitions strategies have been developed precisely in order to avoid the situation in which workers, fearing for their jobs and livelihoods, become the "last defenders of the indefensible" (in Brian Kohler's words).

Before moving on to the articulations of geography and justice we want to underscore that no single scale or scope is inherently better from the point of view of justice or democracy. Smaller communities can facilitate direct democracy but, also, inescapable oppression. Global policies can break down local inequities but can also strengthen them through global rules. Living outside authority may be the best solution for some groups. In our view, the impacts of scale and scope are inexorably related to the configuration of social forces. Global capital knows that well. In the case of the European Union, for instance, capital did not consent to EU level incorporation until it had weakened enough the prospects of EU level social regulation (Swyngedouw 2000).

Local policies can be more or less predatory and more or less empowering (Hess 2009). Much depends on local politics and the ability and willingness of local forces to forge policies that engender upward harmonization. Some analysts have labeled such dynamics the 'California effect' to capture how local policies, such as car emission standards, can force companies to improve their overall emission standards. Recent efforts by social movements in Germany to take back into public hands energy utilities ("remunicipalisation") are examples of such progressive local politics (Moss et al. 2015) – especially when they are linked to broader demands about global climate justice.

In the USA, for instance, many localities have mobilized against horizontal hydraulic fracturing (fracking). The fossil fuel industry and its supporters approach this by accusing them of NIMBYism, i.e., of wanting to benefit from fracking elsewhere but not in their own backyard, and have spent millions of dollars opposing them. There are certainly instances in which local opposition serves to protect local privileges. But the empirical record suggests that "NIMBYs" are often valiant efforts to deprive fossil fuel industry of its

ability to pit community against community through blackmail. The efforts of unions and communities to limit carbon leakage by opposing pipelines (for example the successful opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline), ports and plants intended to facilitate the export of fossil fuels to Asia – at the same time that US states adopt Renewable Energy Standards – is another example of how local justice can engender global justice rather than predatory competition and downward harmonization.

Local justice – global injustice, e.g., local practices lead to downward harmonization	Local justice – global justice, e.g., local practices lead to upward harmonization
Global justice – local injustice, e.g., justice at the level of countries, injustice within countries	Global justice – local justice, e.g., global rules, locally translated

Table 3: Bringing Geography and Justice Together

A great deal of International Relations and international environmental justice has been cast in terms of countries. GPN and related analytics have made apparent what historically informed theorists have known for a long time. Countries are co-constituted within world historical processes rather than being ontologically prior to world politics. Stated differently, they have been produced within and by uneven global divisions of labor or uneven and combined development – pick your preference. As a result, these juridical spaces that we call countries are not internally cohesive, hence requiring state power to keep them together – frequently unsuccessfully. In short, every country in the world is a mini-empire with local cores lording it over local and translocal peripheries – think of world cities (Sassen 2005). So, what may seem as fair and equitable arrangements amongst countries can deepen and legitimate domestic inequities.

   This is not to say that any argument in favor of country-based rights promotes inequality. As has been argued by various authors (e.g., Stevis 2002, Eckersley 2004) it all depends on what politics is involved. Democratic countries – whether social democratic or ecologically democratic – provide us with the resources necessary to contest neoliberalism's 'totalitarian impulse'. As we said with respect to local NIMBYism, it is preferable

to let more democratic countries bloom than constrain them through global neoliberal or imperial rules.

As a consequence, we do not automatically value global rules over local or national rules. Rather, along with many critics of neoliberal and imperial globalizations and of nativism we believe that another world is possible – if detested by neoliberals, imperialists, and nativists and contested amongst its proponents. In such a world global rules will require and enable transnational and local justice. Accordingly they have to be flexible enough to accommodate local dynamics and needs but strong enough to prevent any local elite from claiming an exclusive right to determine how global rules will be implemented. The possibility of imperial intervention here is profound – as has been the case of the "responsibility to protect", and of many forms of "environmental" protection or remediations that betray deeply unequal relations between North and South. And so will it be with a Just Transition that is limited to white, male workers in manufacturing, construction and infrastructure. For that reason, the translation has to be evaluated not on the basis of an international relations that reifies countries or cosmopolitanism but, rather, on the basis of rules of democracy and justice that cut across countries and challenge the historical relations that empower the powerful and weaken the vulnerable.

Conclusions

We have argued that Just Transition has to take nature into account and do so seriously, albeit not in the naturalist and often totalitarian mode of some ecocentrists and biocentrists. Yet for many environmentalists and unionists that share our political priorities bridging the social and ecological components of justice is an interesting theoretical exercise with little practical value. We agree with those who argue that this is a challenge worth addressing and that doing so can lead us to the adoption of principles of action that are good for both workers and the world in which we live (Bookchin 2002[1991]; Harvey 1996; Goodman/Salleh 2013).

At the most general level social justice aims at both empowering the weak and weakening the powerful. The same forces that discipline and consume nature also discipline and consume humans. Deepening and broadening Just Transition can lead us to questioning the right of capital to act as it sees fit and outside democratic deliberation. But demands for Just Transition can be particularistic. It can apply, for instance, to male workers leaving women out, or core workers offloading the risks onto precarious workers. Or it can postpone dealing with nature until social dislocations have been addressed. The Soviet and Chinese experiences do not allow such mechanistic visions. The scope of social justice has been enriched through the recognition of women, ethnic groups or other hitherto excluded groups. Just Transition can move us towards a broader and deeper view of social ecological justice and do so in a programmatic and proactive fashion.

We have also argued that geographies of justice must be central to the study and practice of Just Transitions. We have long known that our world has been shaped by international and transnational processes and divisions of labour. Increasingly global historians (Mintz 1985; Beckert 2015) and social analysts from various disciplines have provided fine-grained and compelling accounts of these processes. The proliferation of research on supply, commodity, and value chains and global production networks is evidence of that. Just Transition strategies – by any name – which serve to legitimate national industrial policies and competitiveness will inexorably produce predatory competition amongst and

within workers and communities and will erase the possibility of an alternative world political economy.

A recent article in the New York Times argued that the rise of manufacturing, the grey transition of the 19th and early 20th centuries, led to better paying jobs and quality of life. Clearly those improvements owe a great deal to the labor and socialist movements, amongst other, and their success in broadening citizenship and deepening democracy (even with significant and painful gaps with respect to race, gender and ethnicity), as has been forcefully argued by Mitchell (2011). Arguably, we are again embarking on an important transition into a greener economy. Like the grey economy before it, this Green Transition can be as exploitative of people and nature as the grey economy was, if there is no countervailing power and vision. Egalitarians of all hues are called upon to offer an alternative and proactive program of thought and action. There will be successes and failures in this process. But a deeper and broader Just Transition can provide a compelling and forward-looking narrative for our times.

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