

# Intersecting Inequalities and Energy Justice: A Literature Review

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/22903>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/22903

**Published Online:** 18 September 2024

## Abstract

Justice is crucial in promoting global decarbonization, as technological innovations can exacerbate existing inequalities and contribute to environmental degradation. Energy justice addresses these imbalances, guided by moral fairness and ethical responsibility. Feminist, Indigenous, anti-racist, and postcolonial perspectives critique traditional justice frameworks. However, a substantial portion of the existing academic literature fails to adequately consider the complex intersections of gender, Indigeneity, race, and other dimensions of inequality. To explore this subject in depth, the research methodology incorporates a literature review methodology to identify and synthesise relevant academic works from diverse fields, including gender studies, Indigenous scholarship, critical race theory, and postcolonial critiques. This review spans foundational and contemporary contributions to energy justice, focusing on works published within the past two decades. The process involves a comprehensive search across academic databases and a thematic analysis of selected sources to highlight key trends and gaps. By integrating these diverse perspectives, this study will provide valuable knowledge for guiding future endeavours in the realm of energy justice study and application.

**Keywords:** Justice, Literature Review, Energy Justice, Environmental Inequality

## Introduction

Equity, fairness, and justice are not only ethical imperatives and moral demands, but they also play a crucial role in facilitating expedited and socially acceptable approaches to achieving climatic stability (Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2019; Sonja & Harald, 2018). Examining the distributional implications of renewable energy technology and the associated equity concerns are fundamental issues that are sometimes overlooked in policy deliberations and engineering proposals (Karthi et al., 2018; Lamb et al., 2020; Rendall, 2019).

Technological advancements, particularly those focused on sustainability, can potentially exacerbate pre-existing inequities and continue environmental deterioration while simultaneously producing novel gaps across different groups. Illustrative instances include hydroelectric dams, whose construction often necessitates the involuntary displacement of

Indigenous populations, resulting in the deprivation of sustenance and means of subsistence (Norgaard et al., 2011). Furthermore, the potential of these dams to produce energy may be undermined by the growing probability of droughts (Grady & Dennis, 2022) or the deforestation of tropical regions (Asmal, 2000). Nuclear power has not just the potential for accidents, as shown by the Fukushima incident, but also presents challenges in terms of waste management for both present and future generations. Wind farms depend on components with a high carbon footprint, including concrete, fibreglass, and steel. The manufacturing process of these components generates externalities that contribute to carbon emissions, and these externalities are mostly concentrated in the supply chain, particularly in Asia (Klinger, 2015a; 2015b; Sovacool et al., 2016). Minerals are a fundamental need for contemporary energy systems, necessitating mining activities that may encroach onto socio-ecologically fragile regions (Cohen & Riofrancos, 2020; Klinger, 2018). Sustainable agriculture might potentially be associated with exploitative labour practices or land grabs (Fairhead et al., 2012; Stanko & Naylor, 2018). The process of decarbonizing energy systems has the potential to exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities, produce unfavourable consequences, and perpetuate unjust labour and land utilisation practices. Sovacool et al. (year) assert in their recent literature review on energy justice that directing attention towards the concept of inequity allows for the examination of prevailing patterns of unfairness and injustice, which are intertwined with issues of inequality, injustice, and vulnerability (Sovacool et al., 2022).

Energy justice has recently gained prominence as a theoretical, methodological, and empirical framework aimed at addressing and resolving various challenges. It places equal emphasis on defining what is morally fair or equitable and conducting thorough examinations of pertinent power dynamics. This study's foundation is rooted in fundamental principles of justice theory, which often use or go beyond concepts such as process, recognition, distribution, and cosmopolitanism (Jenkins et al., 2016; Jenkins et al., 2021; McCauley et al., 2019). However, a significant portion of the existing scholarly literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of the intricate interplay between many forms of power and inequality. This includes but is not limited to considerations of gender, race, socioeconomic class, Indigeneity, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, colonial history, and caste, among other social statuses within the global framework. Both the origins of power and observable manifestations of power contribute to the creation of disparities evident in managing resources and uneven opportunities across several dimensions, such as gender, social classes, geographical locations, and historical periods. Recognizing and defining the intersections among marginalised identities are crucial in understanding how these intersections contribute to the exacerbation of current inequalities and the emergence of new ones.

### **Literature Review**

As shown by scholarly research, the convergence of these factors has significant implications for policy and practice across many settings (Jenkins et al., 2021). The majority of energy justice scholarship lacks an intersectional approach and often concentrates narrowly on what Nancy Fraser refers to as "affirmative remedies for injustice." These remedies primarily involve the distribution of new energy resources or the enhancement of representation. However, they fail to address the fundamental framework that gives rise to these injustices. The user's text does not contain any information to rewrite. A significant portion of energy justice endeavours, akin to the broader field of energy studies, tend to perpetuate dualistic

portrayals of identities within the context of energy transitions. One such example is the categorization of gender as either vulnerable or virtuous in relation to climate change (Fairhead et al., 2012). The remedies for energy justice can sometimes overlook the unsustainable nature of certain green initiatives. These initiatives prioritise the continuous expansion of mineral extraction and energy production for profit rather than prioritising the well-being of the public or the environment (Stanko & Naylor, 2018).

Moreover, it should be noted that a significant number of the fundamental theories of justice used by academics in the field of energy justice include inherent normative assumptions and may potentially exhibit biases. The foundations of these ideas are rooted in Western ideals and are often associated with liberal ideologies, emphasising principles like democracy and human rights. Consequently, they may not adequately address the needs and perspectives of non-liberal societies and authoritarian regimes (Jenkins et al., 2016; Sovacool et al., 2022), or non-Western philosophical traditions (Jenkins et al., 2016). Scholars have observed that individuals may prioritise justice as a social contract for the majority or as a means to maximise utility, which might potentially marginalise minority perspectives or perspectives that are not rooted in consequentialist reasoning (Klinger, 2015a; 2015b; Sovacool et al., 2016). The aforementioned perspectives may ultimately be rooted in patriarchal, heterosexist, colonial, and masculinist ideologies pertaining to identity, power dynamics, and principles, thus leading to the marginalisation of alternative viewpoints derived from queer theory (Jenkins et al., 2021) or ecofeminism, among others (Norgaard et al., 2011; Rendall, 2019).

It is said that feminist, indigenous, anti-racist, and postcolonial perspectives provide a significant solution to conceptions of justice that are rooted in colonial, liberalist, majoritarian, utilitarian, or masculinist presuppositions (Grady & Dennis, 2022). These methods focus significant emphasis on both the historical and continuing processes that contribute to the existence of environmental injustice. They highlight the need for what Fraser refers to as "transformative remedies for injustice," which aim to address the fundamental frameworks that give rise to damage. Our Perspective integrates these four approaches to justice and formulates a collection of alternative themes and principles that might serve as a framework for future study and application of energy justice. It is important to acknowledge that the aforementioned approaches to energy justice are but a subset of a broader range of perspectives. These include but are not limited to methods influenced by disability justice studies (Asmal, 2000; Kartha et al., 2018; Sonja & Harald, 2018), queer studies (Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2019), and abolition ecology (Lamb et al., 2020) and activism. However, the acknowledgement of intersectionality within the context of gender, Indigeneity, colonialism, and racism highlights their existence as social constructs that historical decision-making processes, including rules of inclusion, social hierarchy, and cultural norms have influenced.

## Methodology

The research methodology for this study will encompass a comprehensive examination of the socio-cultural context in which the selected plays were both created and received. This will involve a detailed analysis of historical records, contemporary critical reviews, and relevant scholarly discourse to provide a nuanced understanding of the socio-political climate during the period of the plays' production and performance. Historical context is crucial as it shapes the narratives and themes explored in theatrical works, allowing for a deeper understanding

of the playwright's intentions and the audience's reception (Huang & Doyugan, 2024; Zaheer, 2021). Furthermore, contemporary critical reviews will be analyzed to gauge the reception of these plays at the time of their release. Such reviews often reflect the prevailing societal attitudes and critical perspectives, offering a lens through which the plays can be understood in relation to their socio-political environment. For instance, the reception of Sellar (1996) "Blasted" has been noted for its political implications and its engagement with contemporary social issues, highlighting the interplay between theatre and the socio-political landscape (Carney, 2005). By situating these plays within their broader historical and cultural frameworks, the study aims to uncover how they engaged with and potentially subverted the dominant racial ideologies of their time (M. Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre, 2020). Furthermore, this analysis will explore the extent to which the plays influenced public perception, challenged existing racial narratives, and contributed to the evolving discourse on racial equality. Through this contextualization, the research seeks to highlight the significant role these works played in shaping literary and theatrical traditions, as well as their impact on both contemporary audiences and the broader movement towards social justice and racial equity.

### Findings

Each of these instances also sheds light on a distinct underlying structural factor contributing to injustice, highlighting a specific facet of the system that requires deconstruction: Feminism provides a challenge to the prevailing system of patriarchy, while anti-racist efforts aim to address racism and white supremacy. Indigenous justice seeks to honour Indigenous sovereignty and restore the intrinsic connections to lands and waterways. Postcolonialism, in turn, opposes imperialism and the enduring effects of colonialism. A common element that can be seen in all four of these approaches is the recognition of capitalism's involvement in producing, sustaining, and intensifying injustice and exploitation in many situations. According to Hannah Holleman, attaining "authentic justice" necessitates incorporating an additional set of principles beyond the commonly advocated three Rs of mainstream environmentalism (reduce, reuse, recycle). These fundamental four principles consist of restitution (involving the return of lands and sovereignty, as well as the restoration of power to the people), reparations (addressing historical injustices such as slavery, stolen labour, and genocide), restoration (focusing on the rehabilitation of earth systems), and revolution (entailing a departure from capitalism and the patriarchy). The user's text does not contain any information to rewrite in an academic manner.

Although these four methods offer unique perspectives, they have also cultivated robust intersectional traditions, particularly among Black, Indigenous, transnational, and decolonial feminisms. These traditions highlight the interconnectedness of many systems of oppression. The outcome has the potential to be transformational rather than additive when one refrains from portraying each sector as a self-contained entity. According to Chelsea M. Frazier, the emergence of Black Feminist Ecological Thought should not be seen as a mere amalgamation of Black feminist beliefs with the field of ecocriticism. This statement pertains to exploring the potential for generating new concepts and realms via intermingling the principles and objectives of these two ideological movements. The user's text does not contain any information to rewrite in an academic manner. Intersectional methods emphasise the need to consider the interplay between numerous viewpoints in particular circumstances in order to get a comprehensive understanding of how gender and patriarchy, racism and whiteness, and colonialism and imperialism are interconnected and mutually influential. An

intersectional framework acknowledges the perpetuation of injustices through agency, including patterns of family life, internal colonialism, and subaltern lived experiences. Additionally, it recognises that structural factors, such as historical stereotypes, sexism, and whiteness, influence these injustices. This statement posits that justice extends beyond merely acknowledging gender, race, and Indigeneity as subordinate identities or checkboxes on a list. Instead, it emphasises the significance of these categories in facilitating the exploitation of both the environment and individuals. Furthermore, it suggests that these materialist analyses are closely intertwined with research on ecological studies.

## Discussion

Feminist, anti-racist, Indigenous, and postcolonial perspectives provide valuable frameworks for advancing future endeavours in energy justice. Feminism directs attention towards the concept of patriarchy, the disempowerment of genders, and the exploitative aspects of capitalist relationships but also acknowledges the interconnectedness of diverse forms of injustice that contribute to marginalisation across different levels. The concept of anti-racism directs attention towards the existence and impact of racist systems, the influence of racial capitalism, and the perpetuation of white supremacy. Indigenous ideas provide light on the topics of genocide, injustices related to land and water, and enduring patterns of dispossession, often influenced by governmental actors. Postcolonialism directs attention to the perils associated with geopolitical and domestic colonialism alongside imperialism.

However, each approach has distinct academic foundations, a main emphasis, and a structural rationale for the concept of injustice, as shown in Table 2. Feminism originates within the realms of gender studies, women's studies, and feminist jurisprudence. Similarly, anti-racism initiatives draw upon Critical Race Theory, Black studies, African studies, and demography. Indigenous studies, Indigenous political theory, and Indigenous legal systems inform Indigenous justice movements. Area studies, development studies, and political ecology influence postcolonial thought. Feminist perspectives often prioritise the examination of family structures, gender norms, and power dynamics, whereas anti-racist perspectives tend to emphasise the practical application of knowledge and educational methods. Indigenous methodologies prioritise the adoption of responsibility-centered frameworks that underscore the values of respect, reciprocity, reconciliation, and restorative justice. Postcolonial theories place significant emphasis on the notions of emancipation from forms of dominance, epistemic injustice, and the lived experiences of marginalised groups known as subalterns.

## Conclusion

Feminist, anti-racist, Indigenous, and postcolonial justice theories can serve as conceptual frameworks that facilitate the integration or transcendence of typically separate concerns related to distributive, procedural, cosmopolitan, and recognition justice. These theories can be employed as analytical tools by energy researchers seeking to comprehend the incorporation of positive or negative values within energy systems or to address prevalent energy challenges. Additionally, they can function as decision-making tools to aid energy planners and consumers in making well-informed energy choices that align with localised requirements. Recognising the inherent value of each of the four viewpoints and the considerable range of opinions included within them can be beneficial in the formidable endeavour of challenging the oppressive and discriminatory forces that perpetuate sexism,

racism, genocide, and colonialism. These forces always prioritise financial gains above the well-being of individuals and the environment. Rather than only focusing on human rights and individual rights, these four approaches advocate for a shift towards considering communal responsibility. Justice researchers and practitioners have the responsibility of rectifying injustice, promoting inclusive decision-making processes in the energy sector, and prioritising the empowerment of marginalised populations whose voices have been systematically suppressed over an extended period of time.

The prevailing imbalanced nature of energy justice research is concerning from an ethical standpoint due to its dependence on Western theories and applications. Moreover, it is outdated considering that the transition to low-carbon pathways worldwide will impact numerous marginalised and disadvantaged groups who should have a say in shaping future energy systems. The exposure, deconstruction, and opposition of neocolonialism (with sexism and racism) in modern justice conceptions and the academic sphere are important in attaining a transition that is really fair and equitable. Decarbonization should be closely linked to the pursuit of liberation through establishing new energy practises, concepts, actions, and policies grounded in feminist, anti-racist, Indigenous, and postcolonial visions of the future.

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