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## **Abstract**

This article considers the challenges that follow from giving conceptual priority to injustice in the analysis of political life. Human geography, urban studies, and related fields of spatial theory meet this challenge halfway, in so far as expressions of injustice through social movement mobilizations are given primacy over philosophical elaborations of justice. However, the privileging of practice over theory reproduces a structure of thought in which justice continues to be understood as an egalitarian ideal against which injustice shows up as an absence or deviation. The practical primacy accorded to expressed claims of injustice inadvertently displaces a model of authoritative, monological reasoning about the meaning of justice from ideal theory onto explanatory accounts and ontologies of space. Basic assumptions about how spatial theory matters to questions of justice are disclosed by tracing the recurrent disavowal of “liberalism” in debates on social justice and the city, the just city, and spatial justice. Thinking about claims of injustice in a double sense - as involving demands on others that require vindication – calls into question the value of inherited ideals of the political significance of the “the city”, by drawing attention to the enactment of distributed public spaces of claims-making, reasoning, and accountable action.

### **Keywords**

Democracy Injustice Justice Public Reason The City

## 1). Introduction

Social justice has been a central theme of critical scholarship in human geography, urban and regional studies, and planning theory since the 1970s. However, spatial theorists are often reluctant to specify the content of justice or other normative standards. While some scholars do argue that it is necessary to justify the substance of normative standards, it is more common to assert the primacy of practice as the arena in which the value of justice arises, so that analytical attention is given to the investigation of explicit struggles against injustice. Both of these pathways remain faithful to a “normal model” of theorising justice (see Shklar 1990). In both cases, it is assumed that justice is a positive ideal from which injustice is a deviation, an ideal that is only ever empirically registered as an absence. The paradigm case of the “normal model” is the work of John Rawls (1971, 1993), who held fast to the view that injustice is recognised as a departure from a prior ideal of justice. In spatial disciplines, commitment to the normal model of thinking about justice is most evident in the stylistic convention of running justice and injustice together as one word - as “(in)justice” (Soja 2010, 5).

The idea that injustice appears against the background of an egalitarian ideal, from which injustice is a departure, is a shared feature of what are otherwise quite different traditions of analysis. In strands of radical geography, the insights of alternative ontologies or explanatory theories are meant to supersede what are regarded as the inherently individualizing and universalizing tendencies of normative reasoning about the justifiability of particular social arrangements. In strands of radical empiricism, it is presumed that amassing empirical data on patterns of inequality is equivalent to mapping injustice, the persistence of which is attributed to a set of “beliefs” (e.g. Dorling 2015). More generally, critical social scientists often assume that injustice becomes visible by comparing actual patterns of disadvantage against ideal theories. For example, Smith’s account of social justice as a process of “equalisation” presupposes that injustice is identified by reference to an ideal of equality: “*Social justice is manifest in reductions in inequality: a process of returning to equality*” (Smith 1994, 118). From a somewhat different perspective, Wright (2009) invokes Jacques Derrida’s account of the aporia that separates the idea of justice from its impure expression in any given form of law to argue that justice is an ideal that while never fully realizable in practice nevertheless orients action in the present.

I argue here that by continuing to think of injustice and justice as laying either side of a division between practice and theory, spatial theorists inadvertently reproduce the form of authoritative third-person reasoning that is the most problematic feature of normative political philosophies of justice. My suggestion is that giving *conceptual* priority to injustice in understanding the dynamics of political life – where this refers to theorising injustice independently from a prior formulation of an ideal principle of justice - requires a more fundamental reconsideration of the conventions of critical theorising about the spatialities of political action (see Barnett 2017). Giving priority to injustice is associated with an emphasis on claims-making as the dynamic through which relations of domination are challenged. Thinking of justice in terms of claims-making might appear, at first sight, to support a view of the spaces of politics that privileges accessibility to classically defined public spaces, not least those of “the city”. It seems to invite us to think of claims as being expressed in particular ways, through more or less spectacular performance of presence in physical space. In contrast, I argue that giving conceptual priority of injustice as a norm for critical

analysis requires a rather more provisional account of the spatial configurations through which claims of injustice can be articulated and vindicated than has become established in contemporary geographical thought. It also challenges the prevalent conventions of critique in these fields. Critical analysis often presents the exposure of the facts of geographical entanglement and the contingencies of spatial patterns as if this carried automatic normative force (e.g. Massey 2004, Whatmore 2002). By contrast, from the perspective associated with giving conceptual priority to injustice, the demonstration of relations of spatial interconnectivity and interdependence should serve as the occasion for further reflection on the parameters of practical reasoning about political action - parameters that remain somewhat taken-for-granted in critical spatial thought (see also Young 2011).

## **2). Justice emergent**

The idea that questions of social justice are best approached by closely cleaving to “*the plurality of injustice*” is a long-standing convention in human geography and urban studies (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1995, 3). Spatial disciplines have become adept at pluralizing the norms of justice, to include issues of distributive equity, recognition, interactional justice, procedural justice, and care (e.g. Fincher and Ivesen 2012, Low and Ivesen 2016). Research on environmental justice is perhaps the most advanced field of geographical inquiry in which primacy is accorded to the practical emergence of expressions of injustice. The guiding ethos in this field is a vision of movement-oriented scholarship that is “more focussed on understanding and addressing the problem than on constructing an ideal” (Schlossberg 2013, 47). On this understanding, the focus of attention is on how various standards of justice are strategically developed and deployed by social movements. Likewise, research guided by the idea of “the right to the city” is framed by an assumption that values arise from engaged political action. So, for example, Soja’s (2010, 8) discussion of “spatial justice” tracks how this notion “is being used politically and strategically in social movements of all kinds”. The emphasis on the emergent qualities of normative criteria is associated with a view of claims-making as the medium through which expressions of injustice are articulated, as in Lefebvre’s (1996, 158) presentation of the idea of the right to the city as a “cry and demand”.

The recommendation that critical analysis be responsive to the immanent values that express shared senses of injustice should certainly be taken seriously. However, there are two temptations that the practical privileging of injustice can lead us into, and both should be resisted. The first is the impression that one could reconstruct the meaning of justice by tracing the contents of visible expressions of the sense of injustice. The second, and related, temptation is to assume that critical analysis necessarily involves an elective identification with favoured activist voices or with the interests of victims. Both of these temptations threaten to distract from the conundrum that arises from any assertion of the primacy of expressions of injustice: attending only to expressed claims of harm or injury or exploitation can lead us to pass over the ways in which the dampening of victims’ capacity to express their own experiences of harm and injury and exploitation is often a central feature of unjustifiable power relations. This problem of “epistemic injustice” – that is, the systematically skewed distributions of believability and self-interpretability (Fricker 2007) – complicates any straightforward assertion that analytical attention and normative primacy should be given to expressed claims of injustice.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the reluctance to explicitly theorise about the content of justice necessarily undermines the normative stance of critical thinking in spatial disciplines (compare Olsen and Sayer 2009). Despite appearances, in fact, this reluctance leaves in place the forms of normative authority that characterise more explicit constructions of ideal criteria of evaluation. My argument is that giving only *practical* priority to injustice leaves in place a set of assumptions about modes of justification that are most in need of revision. In discussions of “the urbanization of injustice”, “the right to the city”, or “grammars of injustice”, visible expressions of injustice are routinely interpreted as responses to what remain largely taken for granted sources of wrong: capitalist exploitation of labour and the environment; neoliberal governance; intersectional formations of gendered, sexualised, and racialized oppression; accumulation by dispossession. In this recurring form of analysis, the authoritative apprehension of the meaning of injustice is displaced from normative philosophies of justice onto the revelatory force ascribed to explanatory theories of space and alternative ontologies of spatiality.

The practical primary accorded to claims of injustice in critical spatial theory is, then, associated with a form of justification that actually retains many of the most problematic features associated with normative philosophies of ideal justice. This is evident in a particular view of what spatial theory can do for critical analysis. Alternative ontologies and explanatory narratives are supposed to be normatively compelling because they demonstrate that things could be different, that things are not as they first appear, and that current arrangements are crossed by histories and contingencies that mean that they could be reconfigured, performed differently, or imagined afresh. Revealing the processes shaping the production of space, the assemblage of constituted orders, and the formation of provisional settlements goes alongside an affirmation of the dynamics of becoming, contradiction, performativity and paradox that both explain the reproduction of fixed patterns and relationships, yet also offer the possibility of transforming them. Spatial theory is therefore meant to assist in *laying bare the devices* through which overarching structures of injustice are reproduced, revealing fundamental sources of injustice by unmasking the exclusionary, naturalizing, or essentializing effects of flat, absolute, fixed concepts of space or identity. The authority for this revelatory manoeuvre sometimes relies on access to a superior epistemology capable of determining the difference between significant and insignificant differences (Harvey 1996); or sometimes it relies on ontological accounts of the necessarily contingent formation of settled orders that give implicit normative priority to the relative openness and contestability of those orders (Massey 2005); or sometimes it relies on the idea that the processes of spatialization through which the world is constituted as knowable and actionable in the first place are themselves sources of injustice (e.g. Dikeç 2010). Across different forms of theoretical discourse, it is presumed that the task of spatial theory is demonstrate “the ontological case for social justice” (Gleeson 1996, 233).

Questions of social justice are not open to either epistemological or ontological resolution, and to think that they are is a kind of category error. Matters of justice are essentially contested, for sure, but this is only to say that their significance is unavoidably a matter of appraisal and of judgment. This implies that political hope should not be hinged on demonstrating the possibility of change *per se*, supported perhaps by proclaiming the need for a renewal of utopian vision. My suggestion here is that the primacy accorded to expressions of injustice does not go far enough, and

that it needs to be freed from its continuing subservience to the monological styles of reasoning associated with both normative political philosophy and critical theories of space and spatiality. To elaborate on this claim, in the next section I consider the significance of the recurrent gesture of disavowal towards “liberal formulations” that defines the engagement with issues of justice in critical spatial thought.

### **3). Dogmas of egalitarianism**

In spatial disciplines, John Rawls’ (1971) account of justice as fairness functions as a kind of obligatory passage point for discussions of social justice. It is an account that many writers feel they must *mention* without ever quite wanting to *use* in any fundamental fashion. In his critique of utilitarian approaches to justice, Rawls proposed two principles that, he claimed, deserved universal assent: a principle that everyone should be accorded as wide a range of basic political liberties as plausible; and a principle to regulate socio-economic distributions. It is here, in the second principle, where Rawls elaborated on what he called the “difference principle”, according to which just distributions of wealth and income need not necessarily be equal “but must be to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls 1971, 61). The two principles are arranged in “a serial order”, so that departures from the first principle cannot be justified by greater social and economic equality (Rawls 1971, 60-61). Rawls summarised the significance of the two principles of justice by saying that “Injustice, then, is simply inequalities that are not to the benefit of all” (Rawls 1971, 62).

The real originality of Rawls’ theory lay not in the identification of the two principles themselves, but in his account of the universal justifiability of those two principles. Here, too, lies the source of the most sustained criticism of his account. Rawls presented the notion of “the original position” - the set of contractual obligations people would agree to if placed behind “a veil of ignorance” - as the device to establish that these two principles of justice are indeed those that people would and should rationally adopt. Across his own refinements of his theory of justice, Rawls remained committed to a vision of de-personalised public reason, guided by a conviction that value pluralism is a threat to peaceable politics, and therefore that “comprehensive doctrines” should be sequestered away from the public sphere. In this conviction and its theoretical sublimation via an ideal model of disembodied third-person reasoning, Rawls seems to place questions about unequal, unfair and discriminatory social relations of class, gender, race, or sexuality beyond the scope of the conversation of justice. It is this model of rational justification as a guide to institutional design and as a mode of philosophical reasoning that defines “methodological Rawlsianism” (Pateman 2002, 39-40).

Critical analysis in human geography and urban studies has tended to focus attention on that range of issues covered by Rawls’ difference principle – questions about the distributive equity of social and economic outcomes. For example, Smith (1977, 7) operationalized the Rawlsian account of justifiable “constraints on equality” in relation to a series of geographical patterns and processes. Importantly, Smith’s elaboration of a welfare approach to geographical inquiry is shaped by a presumption that inequality is not the same as injustice (Smith 1977, 131-157). His proposition that “An unequal distribution is not necessarily unjust” (Smith 1979, 40) follows from a geographical imagination that is sensitive to the value of difference, particularity, and pluralism, one which foregrounds the question of under what circumstances

differential treatment can be justified (see also Davoudi and Brooks 2014, Walker 2012).

In Smith's engagement with the significance of the difference principle, however, Rawls' ordering of two principles is not registered. More generally, in human geography, urban studies and other spatialized social sciences, the significance of Rawls' first principle is not given much attention at all (see Katznelson 1995). Writing in the 1970s, Smith presumed a functioning practice of "Planning" as the medium through which principles of justice and welfare would be delivered. A similar assumption, about the promise of a de-centralized planning system, underwrites David Harvey's pivotal treatment of the principle of territorial justice in *Social Justice and the City*. Thinking of justice as a matter pertaining to the "the division of benefits and the allocation of burdens" which arise from the division of labour and social cooperation (1973, 97), Harvey transposed Rawls' difference principle onto relations between cities and regions, addressing the problem of how to maximize "the prospects of the least fortunate region" (1973, 110).

Harvey's deployment of the difference principle to establish the *content* of a just distribution was a prelude to his conclusion that markets are wholly incompatible to the *achievement* of a just distribution, however that is formulated (1973, 116). And this proposition is just one example of a broader habit of mind that has shaped radical spatial thought ever since, in which "liberal" philosophies of justice are dismissed as remaining at the surface level of "distribution", when what is needed is an attention to the causal dynamics of "production" (1973, 15). From such a perspective, one always already knows in advance that distributive concepts of justice and liberal theories of rights obscure and sustain the underlying structural sources of injustice. These are properly located in processes of class power, property relations, accumulation by dispossession, and exploitation, mediated by dynamics of gender, race or sexuality, and state formation. Elaborating on the "production" of such formations is given both diagnostic pre-eminence and normative primacy. It is a move evident, for example, in Harvey's own treatment of his original proposition that theorising justice involves specifying the forms of "a just distribution justly arrived at" (Harvey 1973, 98), which he later refines so that the idea of justice refers to the "just production of just geographical differences" (Harvey 1996, 5). The latter formula expresses simultaneously the idea that an analysis of the production of phenomena always trumps concerns about fair distribution; and that grasping the dynamics of a particular order of production provides the key to discriminating between forms of difference that are to be valued, on the one hand, and patterns of disadvantage that are expressions of unjust inequalities on the other. The same form of reasoning informs Soja's (2010) treatment of the idea of spatial justice. He presents Rawls as over-emphasising distributive "outcomes" at the cost of the analysis of "process". In so doing, the focus of Rawlsian theory on the rationality of principles of justice – on the *process* of justifying the two principles – is completely elided, so that the question of the adequacy of that account does not even arise. In the same move, Soja also conflates a concern with process in terms of procedural justice – with the fair application of rules – with a social scientific notion of grasping the causal processes behind the production of inequality.

The preference for identifying fundamental causes has the unfortunate effect of reducing the meaning of distributive justice to substantive equality in the allocation of

divisible socio-economic goods and services. The specifically political meaning of the difference principle in Rawls's original formulation – as one part of an account that is governed by a norm of “democratic equality” – is barely mentioned in the engagement with questions of social justice and equality by spatial theorists. The foreclosure of the problem of the democratic justification of normative standards in spatial theories of social justice is illustrated by Fainstein's (2011) account of “the just city”. She finds theories of communicative planning and deliberative democracy to be inadequately attentive to the underlying social relations of inequality that will always ensure that outcomes of putatively fair procedures will fall short of creating just outcomes. Fainstein sets up a stark contrast between democracy (defined as a set of procedures of deliberation and inclusive participation) and justice (defined as a substantive principle of equity). In drawing up this contrast, Fainstein (2011, 15) is explicit in asserting the “precedence of justice”, presented as a standard of equitable outcomes that has precedence over norms of democratic process. She thereby effectively reverses Rawls' serial ordering of principles. Fainstein's elevation of substantive justice as a principle of evaluation illustrates a structure of thought that is perfectly able to pluralise the criteria to be mobilised – extending these to include ideals of recognition as well as equality, need as well as merit – without addressing the democratic limits of this way of reasoning about justice as an ideal.

I have dwelt on the marginal reference to Rawls in debates about justice in human geography, urban studies and planning theory not because I think we should cleave closely to his style of philosophical reasoning. I have done so because the gesture of disavowal through which Rawls shows up in this tradition of thought reveals some of what is involved in being “in the true” of critical spatial theory (see Bennett 1993). First, Rawls' is often mentioned as offering an overly consensual view of justice, so that spatial theorists are able to claim special sensitivity to issues of antagonism, conflict, and hostility. But liberalism is concerned with nothing so much as issues of antagonism, conflict, and hostility (it just thinks about these in particular ways). Refusing to recognize this concern leads to the rather one-sided view that what properly counts as “the political” is only to be found in acts of disruption, resistance, and contestation (see Barnett 2012). Second, Rawls is condemned for proposing a merely distributive understanding of justice, so that spatial theorists can assert their superior grasp of the generative dynamics reproducing inequalities – a grasp that is availed them by complex theories of the production of space, ontologies of relational spatiality and the constitutive spatialization of the political, or spatial dialectics. Thirdly, it is common to claim that Rawls was concerned with the maximization of individual liberty, as if his liberalism was essentially a variation of a Lockean tradition of limited government. However, whatever its various faults, Rawls' theory of justice is a rather serious attempt to think through problems of cooperation and co-existence – of sharing, of being-with others – without reducing these problems to the ideal of self-owning selves; or to higher-order abstractions such as community, hegemony, the public, or the state; or to hopes invested in ethics or personal virtue. The *kind* of individualism central to Rawls' theory of justice - one that seeks to honour the principle of treating persons “not as means but as ends in themselves” (Rawls 1971, 179-180) - is not invalidated by simply invoking facts about interdependence or ontologies of relational entanglement. It *starts off* from both an acknowledgement of, and a worry about, relationships of dependence, vulnerability, and unintended consequences. Keeping this in mind helps us to see that to engage critically with the problem of justice does not depend on access to superior

explanatory or ontological insight. It requires a consideration of the full implications for spatial theory of thinking of practices of justification as intersubjective affairs, undertaken in second-person registers.

#### **4). From geographies of justice to democratic inquiry**

My contention is that the ways in which Rawls is referred to – either as a representative of a liberalism to be dismissed as hopelessly parochial in its unreflective universalism, or as a source of an ideal theory to be used as an evaluative yardstick – indicate a recurring misrecognition of the central concerns that animate a great deal of the political theory that *does* now show up in geographical research. Human geography, planning theory, and urban studies have drawn on ideas from a range of political theorists in the last two or three decades, including writers such as Chantal Mouffe, Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Jacques Rancière, James Tully, John Dryzek, William Connolly and Iris Marion Young. What is usually found in the work of these thinkers is a willingness to insist on the importance in political life of “power”, or “difference”, or “antagonism”, or “affect”. But this is a discovery made without much reckoning with the various pictures of critical *reasoning* presented by these thinkers. If “liberalism” is a problem for the political theorists most popular in spatial disciplines, then it is above all because of the difficulties identified in the account of public reason of the sort presented by Rawls.

So, for example, Iris Marion Young’s work has certainly served as an important reference point in geographical thought for re-centring the analysis of justice on the shared apprehension of injuries and harms such as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, violence, and cultural denigration (Young 1990, 39-65). Young’s work seems to have much in common with spatial theorists’ own attunement to the worldly sources of injustice (see Fainstein 2007). In this respect, as with the appeal made to other political thinkers, spatial theorists most often find in Young’s work a confirmation of the things that, as social scientists, they already know anyway. But the real significance of Young’s work lies not just in what she theorised about, but *how* she theorised about normative issues (see Jaggar 2009). Young did not start from a prior model of an ideal society, beginning instead from particular expressions of injustice. She does not seek to control for the messy pluralism of commitments and passions that differently placed people bring to the conversation of justice; she treats such differences as epistemic resources rather than obstacles or impediments to shared reasoning. And she did not appeal to ideal images of society to assess real situations, instead looking for the modes of evaluation that are articulated by struggles against injustice. Each of these three departures from methodological Rawlsianism would, no doubt, find affirmation in the characteristic privileging of struggles for justice over ideal theory in critical spatial theory. But crucially, Young did not rest content with the simple affirmation of emergent feelings of justice. Questions of justice, for Young (2006) as much as for Rawls (1999), always remained a *political* matter, rather than a matter of epistemology or metaphysics. Saying “political” here certainly implies a reference to matters of basic institutional design (see Waldron 2016). Perhaps more fundamentally, it also refers to questions of how to imagine the forms of reasoning and justification through which collective living might be coordinated.

Two decades ago in the midst of debates in geography about difference, relativism and universal values, Young (1998, 40) asserted, “To invoke the language of justice and injustice is to make a *claim*”. It is here that we can begin to specify just what

giving *conceptual* priority to injustice implies for critical inquiry (see Barnett 2017). There are two initial points that need to be underscored. First, giving conceptual priority to injustice requires shifting away from an idea that the currency of justice is some form of divisible set of primary goods, or resources, or rights, or even capabilities. It requires instead thinking of matters of injustice and justice as primarily to do with questions of “the relative social and political standing of persons with respect to each other – the issue, in short, not of *what you have* but of *how you are treated*” (Forst 2007, 260). Giving conceptual priority to injustice involves thinking about how social relations, institutional arrangements, and norms systematically disadvantage some persons as participants in shared practices of public life (see Fraser 2003). And this leads to the second point about giving conceptual priority to injustice: it involves focusing on the ways in which questions of justice always involve claims made by one party on other agents - claims about the justifiability of a state of affairs that call for vindication of certain sorts (see Anderson 2010).

The significance of claims-making to the view of the priority of injustice I am recommending here lies in the presumption that the meaning of injustice is necessarily arrived at through intersubjective engagement. This emphasis on reasoning about justice dialogically rather than monologically is a feature of Storper’s (2013, 204-223) recent revival of the theme of justice and territorial development. He focuses on the difficult relationship between thinking of justice in procedural terms - in terms of “fair interactions” - and in substantive terms - in terms of “good consequences”. Storper’s recommendation is that we need “more social choice conversations” (2013, 228), that is, a concerted and systematic search for better ways of finding out what people in one place consider to be just ways of relating to other places. In critical spatial theory, this is one of the few examples of theorizing not only about how to achieve a just conception in a just manner, but about how to arrive *democratically* at conceptions of what is just in the first place, where this involves respecting the pluralism of peoples’ concerns.

Grasping the difference between two ways of thinking about the justification of ideas of justice – a third-person, monological style; and a second-person, dialogical style – is therefore central to fully appreciating the challenges of giving conceptual priority to injustice. Young once argued, against David Harvey, that saying a situation is unjust does not necessarily imply a reference - implicit or explicit - to a standard of ideal justice (Young 1998). To insist that it must do so is to presume that “justice” is a label of some sort, which can be more or less appropriately applied to various phenomena. Thinking that we must in advance have a standard against which to judge affairs gets the grammar of justice the wrong way around, and it always leads back to the idea that justice is some kind of ideal. But justice-talk is, in a strong sense, rhetorical: “The meaning of “justice” has to do with what people intend to convey in saying it, not with the features of the phenomena they say about it” (Pitkin 1972, 173). On this view, injustice is understood not as an absence of justice, just as illness is not an absence of health. Injustice is a positive condition, arising from an experience of injury of some kind or, more broadly, from an “abhorrence of wrong” (Wolgast 1987, 194). The strong implication of this simple sounding proposition is that justice is something developed not to satisfy an ideal standard – either an *a priori* principle or an emergent one - but is a universalizing response to situated expressions of injustice: “We craft responses to wrong, our purpose being not to satisfy some preconceived picture of justice but to address the snares of injustice” (Wolgast 1987, 145). To put it another

way, justice is not an ideal at all. It is a condition that is approached through processes of *repair, recognition, redress, reparation, and redistribution*.

It is worth noting that on this understanding of the grammar of justice, giving conceptual priority to claims of injustice involves affirming the passionate dynamics through which political action is generated as a response to varied forms of harm, injury, or mistreatment (see Barnett 2016). This too may resonate with current interests in spatial theory in political affect, emotions and feelings. However, two difficulties arise from any simplistic affirmation of the passions, both of which seem to undermine the normative value of attending to experiences of injustice that the affirmation is meant to support. First, the emphasis that is placed on forms of passionate expression in arguments for the priority of injustice seems to make judgment a purely capricious matter. This appearance might be only heightened when one notices that the “sense of injustice” often starts out from negative emotions, such as anger, indignation, resentment, or vengeance, rather than empathetic or sympathetic ones (see Shklar 1990). And this is related to the second difficulty that arises from privileging passionate claims of injustice. Recalling the phenomena of epistemic injustice should temper any straightforward valorisation of explicit cries of injustice precisely because such valorisation risks obscuring the structures of harm that stifle the expressions of some actors.

These two difficulties suggest that giving priority to claims of injustice runs the risk of merely lending a normative sheen to the grievances of those with the loudest voices. Taken together, both issues therefore demand a further clarification of the double significance of the idea of “claims” that is so central to the project of giving conceptual priority to injustice. First, the idea of claims at work here implies that matters of justice arise in contexts in which existing patterns of power are contested through the voicing of objections of one form or another. In this sense, claims are *asserted* against felt injustices. But second, the idea of claims of injustice also refers to the notion that these claims are, indeed, *assertions*, that is, they are claims made on the attention of others, and as such are subject to a democratic test by being passed through the medium of argument and debate. It should be said that the proposition that claims of injustice can be assessed as to whether they are warranted is not just a matter of determining epistemological certainty or even normative validity. It follows instead from a view in which practices of justification are made central to the experience and articulation of injustice *as* injustice. This is not to be mistaken for a linear process in which individual, subjective, emotional feelings are subsequently given cognitive rationalization. Giving conceptual priority to injustice involves, instead, thinking of the sense of injustice as arising from and being processed through intersubjectively mediated, shared inquiry. Injustice is, in short, a thoroughly *public* phenomenon.

## **5). Conclusion**

What makes a state of affairs unjust - to those immediately on the receiving end of domination, exploitation, or violence as well as to those called upon to act in response to such states of affairs - is not the reference to a prior construction of what counts as a properly just arrangement. Saying this does not cast us adrift from the safety accorded by clinging to universal principles into the depths of relativism. Giving priority to the double sense of claims of injustice outlined above involves treating other persons democratically, that is, as free and equal citizens. The conceptual

prioritization of injustice in critical theory rests on a commitment to the idea that harms and violations and wrongs are experienced, felt, expressed, assessed and vindicated in situations of intersubjective interaction.

Giving conceptual priority to injustice in critical analysis, in the sense I have outlined here, should compel us to adjust the normative assumptions through which geographical thought continues to apprehend the spatialities of political action. The double significance of claims as assertions alerts us to the fact there is more to political claims-making than practices of assembly, dissent, encounter and protest (see Parkinson 2012). The scope of claims-making extends beyond the mere expression of a demand, to include the processes by which claims are evaluated, adjusted, are accorded recognition and validity, and acted upon. The emphasis on practices of justification as the mediums in which injustice is experienced and articulated therefore disrupts the political significance usually ascribed to the figure of “the city”. Accounts of the dynamics of capitalist urbanization, or more generalised accounts of processes of exclusionary spatialization, often posit a homology between urban space as both the arena in which injustice is produced and the stage upon which it is best resisted. But the spaces in which injustice is apprehended and justice is enacted are stretched-out over space and time – they are distributed spaces of recognition, justification and vindication. They are not well modelled on the images of co-presence evoked by ideas of “the city” or “the forum” or “the street”. Critical inquiry into the geographies of injustice requires an appreciation of the variable relations between three analytically distinct dimensions of political action: the spatial dynamics involved in the *generation* of inequalities and injuries; the spaces through which those patterns are translated into *expressions* of injustice; and the spatialities of the practices that seek to vindicate claims of injustice by crafting just courses of legitimate *action* (see Barnett 2014). And there is no reason to suppose that the articulated geographies of these three distinct aspects of claims-making will always coalesce into a shape that conforms to the inherited associations between politics and the city found across various strands of spatial thought.

In short, the focus on claims-making involved in giving not only practical but conceptual priority to injustice requires an acknowledgement of all of the ways in which the spatialities of political action exceed the romantic preference for performative models of assembly and demonstration and protest. The geographies of justice emerge through the combination of spaces of mobilisation and agitation, deliberation and compromise, bargaining and deal making, decision and delivery, accountability and revision – that is, across all the spaces through which the “full ritualization of conflicts” is enacted (Hampshire 1993, 6).

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