

'Mobile Caviar': The Geopolitics of 'Non-Human' Migration and Mobility

Abstract:

The mobility of commodities is an on-going focus of work in Geography that seeks to '*Follow-the-Thing*' (Cook, 2004; Cook & Harrison, 2007; Lepawsky & Mather, 2011; Hulme, 2017) and 'de-fetishize' commodities by tracing and revealing the hidden 'social lives' embedded at each stage of the commodities' circulatory journeys': from production to final consumption and/or disposal.

Although this body of work paved the way for geographical considerations of how commodities move and interact with humans in an increasingly globalized world, '*Follow-the-Thing*' scholars pay little attention to how the commodities they engage with are enrolled as both objects and subjects of Geopolitics¹.

Moreover, Geopolitical scholarship has extensively engaged with questions of migration and mobility (see Hyndman, 1997, 2000, 2012; Mountz, 2010; Squire, 2010). However, such scholarship has exhibited a human-centrism in its appraisal of migration and mobility, and demonstrated a relative lack of attention to the Geopolitics of 'non-human' migration and mobility.

This paper, based upon preliminary PhD analysis, seeks to bridge the identified gaps, by revealing the hidden 'Geopolitical lives' of mobile commodities. Specifically, the paper will outline and develop the idea of a Geopolitics of 'commodity migration' via the lens of caviar: a luxury commodity derived from critically endangered sturgeon, and traded both legally and illegally on a global scale.

The high ecological and monetary value of sturgeon has seen these fish become embroiled in issues inherent to the 'green economy' such as biodiversity conservation and sustainable/ethical resource extraction. Concurrent efforts to conserve wild sturgeon stocks whilst at the same time enabling an expanding global 'green' caviar trade through aquaculture, have had considerable implications for the transforming mobility of sturgeon. Wild sturgeon have become increasingly immobile in their ecological ranges; farmed sturgeon have experienced trans-continental migratory journeys as the burgeoning aquaculture industry explodes in unlikely locations; and, once rendered into caviar sturgeon take on new liveliness as a highly mobile commodity. The paper makes the case that engaging with sturgeon and caviar as Geopolitical subjects and objects, can aid in the understanding of their transforming (im)mobilities.

¹ Geopolitics in this paper refers to how geography (human and physical) impacts upon politics at different scales

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