'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), by tracing and revealing the hidden 'social lives' embedded at each stage of the commodities’ circulatory journeys’. Although this body of work has paved the way for Geographical considerations of how commodities move and interact with humans in a globalized world, ‘Follow-the-Thing’ scholars pay little attention to how commodities are enrolled as both objects and subjects of Geopolitics. Geopolitical scholarship extensively engages with questions of migration and mobility (Hyndman, 1997, 2000, 2012; Mountz, 2010; Squire, 2010), but does so in a human-centric manner. To this extent, Geopolitical scholarship exhibits a relative lack of attention to the Geopolitics of 'non-human' migration and mobility. This paper seeks to bridge the identified gaps by revealing the hidden ‘Geopolitical lives’ of mobile commodities. Specifically, the paper outlines and develops the idea of a Geopolitics of ‘commodity migration’. This is done via the lens of caviar: a luxury commodity derived from critically endangered sturgeon, and traded both legally and illegally on a global scale. Concurrent efforts to conserve wild sturgeon stocks whilst at the same time enabling an expanding global caviar trade, 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 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)mobility.

Key Words: Caviar, Geopolitics, Mobility, Commodities, Non-Human

References:


