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Summary:

In her paper “Climate science and slow violence: A view from political geography and STS on mobilizing technoscientific ontologies of climate change”, Professor Shannon O’Lear examines elevated technoscientific approaches to consider the geopolitical implications of the climate crisis (2016). She argues that selective uses of the Global Circulation Models (GCMs) and IPCC carbon data contributes to “slow violence”: a term coined by Rob Nixon to emphasize latent human neglect as an indirect result from policy decisions (2011). Looking at methods of physical and geographical measurement, she offers an ontological perspective of the politics involved in uses of climate science rooted in STS literature. O’Lear supports a repoliticization of spatial reckoning because to enable transparent debates about how and where action should be taken to achieve place and context-specific adaptation. This notion emphasizes that one of the main challenges to stopping slow violence is representation and just narrative production from geographical data.

Reflection:

O’Lear’s article is situated at the increasingly important intersection between STS and the climate crisis. This paper resonates with me because working in environmental justice organizing; I feel like I am doing damage control. Work on the ground to measure acts of slow violence is sometimes immeasurable. Large-scale institutional data-sourcing can provide institutional, political, and technological capacities to “act quickly.” However, building scientific knowledge is not always site-specific, and people are often brushed over in the process. Academics in the ivory tower are not necessarily fit to address the complexities of the places they are divorced from. O’Lear is interrogating how carbon data can be politically presumptive if the plans do not include the problem. We increasingly see the shortcomings of broad-stroke climate policies and strengthen the mechanisms of slow violence, like the Paris Accord climate. I agree with O’Lear’s notion that repoliticizing technoscientific approaches to climate data are essential to enhancing climate justice efforts. In my research, I am interested in taking it a step further to inquire about post-politicization. After site-specific management of problems is framed as urgent, there could be little consideration for inherently disadvantaged groups. Engineering solutions to be useful is to make them useful somewhere. I see it as our job to narrate geographic data according to its implications as we will see widening disparities with devolving physical and social landscapes.

Reference

O’Lear, S. (2016). Climate science and slow violence: A view from political geography and STS on mobilizing technoscientific ontologies of climate change. *Political Geography*, 52, 4-13.