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Laurie Parsons, *Climate Hegemony: Confronting the Politics of Environmental Impasse*, London: LSE Press, 2026. ISBN: 978-1-911712-63-3 (paper); ISBN: 978-1-911712-64-0 (ebook)[1]

Climate Hegemony is a book shaped by a 20-year engagement with the situated knowledges of waged workers, rice farmers, fisherfolk, and policymakers in Cambodia. Their differentiated and "partial" perspectives on climate change are what animate the text, and they are what enable Laurie Parsons to advocate for "a newly liberated eye" and "a new pathway in the social scientific analysis of climate change" (p.178). This is a powerful and important argument that will resonate with geographers. The book nevertheless starts on a slightly odd note as Parsons writes "This is not a book about climate change in Cambodia. It is not even a book about climate change. It is about you. About why your actions against climate change are ineffective, however much you may want them to work" (p.1).

As I started reading the book, I found myself wondering how Parsons knows who I am, how he knows where I'm positioned in relation to climate change knowledge construction, and—perhaps most intriguingly—how he knows I am the same as all the other readers of the book. For a monograph so centred on the partiality of knowledge, and so inspired by the variegated lenses through which we might come to such radically different conclusions about a given situation, the opening sentences perform an oddly universalising move. It's also a move that I think distracts from the more vital contributions within the book, contributions that deserve to be engaged with in all their richness.

After laying out the claim that the monograph is about "you", the text goes into a more detailed theoretical overview, framing "climate hegemony" in relation to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) theoretical framework in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. The latter's conceptualisation of hegemony "pays homage to that of Gramsci" while drawing in "more of the discursive dynamism of Foucauldian relationality" (p.9). I take the latter as flagging the importance of language, a language that is simultaneously profoundly influenced by—and an influence on—subjectivity. This importance is demonstrated in Chapter 2, which focuses on "the tyranny of environmental metaphors" and their role in shaping analyses of climate

[1] Open access version available at https://doi.org/10.31389/lsepress.che

change while restricting social-scientific focus and policy responses to the polarities of "mitigation" and "adaptation". These polarities come to be expressed in a global North vs South dualism—with mitigation being the problem for the North, and adaptation the issue for the South. Metaphors therefore shape interpretations: these interpretations then have very real spatial consequences.

Subsequent chapters build on such themes, turning to the construction of the "climate migrant" as an "antagonistic outside" and the role of categorisations in shaping understandings of the economy and climate change. The book also develops more in-depth, grounded analyses of the Tonle Sap Lake, and of situated struggles over irrigation. The empirical depth in these chapters—and the sensitivity with which Parsons treats the empirics—are deeply impressive. A third section of the book returns to the question of uncertainty, mobilising the idea of "thumbnail knowledges", which provide limits to what "we" know about climate change. Recognising these limits serves to denaturalise dominant ways of knowing, thereby freeing space for alternatives.

There's so much to admire in the book, which is carefully argued, thoroughly researched, and serves as a much more situated complement to *Carbon Colonialism* (Parsons 2023). But I remain troubled by the opening lines, and by the constant references to "you", "we", and "us". Part of the problem, I suspect, is that Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) "post-Marxist" framing does harm to the more contextualised account of knowledge production so evident in the book. Rather than "moving beyond" a Gramscian conceptualisation (these are the stagist terms in which Laclau and Mouffe frame their approach), such a framework limits interpretations of the relation between situated practices and knowledge construction.

Parsons does turn to this relationship in some of the final pages of the book, drawing on Sultana's (2022) interpretation of climate coloniality and her emphasis on the "praxis of material outcomes and lived experiences". This "praxis" provides hope that alternative worldviews might be acted upon. Turning "over to you", Parsons sees hope that changed perspectives might be acted upon. But alternative ideas—whether good or bad—don't simply leap from the page. Nor do they come from the minds of "me" or "you" before materialising directly in policy. As the book has shown so deftly, ideas—and, indeed, discourses, if you will—articulate with spatially and ecologically differentiated contexts. Those sedimented histories of knowledge production combine in sometimes contradictory ways with those of

subaltern social groups. These groups are simultaneously shaped by social relations of class, race, gender, caste and religion. Crucially, and as the book demonstrates so clearly, the lives of subalterns are shaped not only by these social relations, but they are also influenced by relations to broader environments. Getting to grips with this terrain of ideology necessitates—I suspect—a far more dynamic framework than the "discursive dynamism of Foucauldian relationality" developed in the theory chapter.

I hold my hands up here. I write this review as someone deeply influenced by Antonio Gramsci's philosophy of praxis and as one deeply irked by Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) condescending—and problematic—review of his writings on hegemony. I didn't expect to see *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* play such a central role in *Climate Hegemony* and I am not sure its centrality is justified. But without wishing to develop a partisan argument, I can't help but feel that Gramsci's writings—on hegemony, on the philosophy of praxis, on subaltern social groups, and on the terrain of ideology—would have provided an understanding that resonates better with what Parsons is trying to do and with what is so genuinely good about this book. Furthermore, Gramsci also provides a carefully articulated theorisation of the "person" that challenges reductionist views of the human subject. Indeed, it challenges the very figure of the universal reader with which the book begins.

Overall, Parsons has written a deeply compelling book, one based on two decades of learning from Cambodia but one reliant on a conceptual framework in Laclau and Mouffe (1985) that ends up limiting his analysis. If situated social subjects, with their multiple and partial knowledges, are to challenge "climate hegemony", I'm convinced the in-depth geographical insights within the book need a theoretical framework that does justice to the forms of praxis that Parsons so evidently wishes to see come forth.

References

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