

Review of: "From Necro-Politics to Necro-Ecology: framing the current climate environmental politics in the Americas"

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Following anthropologist Dominic Boyer's (2014) reflection on coining the term 'energopolitics' (2014), I would concur with his assessment that Foucault would not object to the expansion and the use of concepts like biopolitics. In necro-ecology, Lucatello and Fernández Carril have developed an important companion to Foucault's biopolitics and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics. Lucatello and Fernández Carril make some relevant contributions to the understanding of our current epochal crisis, one that is increasingly defined by governing and managing death that results from the deformation of capitalism into a system increasingly defined by more violent means of accumulation (see Esteva (2022), for a discussion). They formulate the term *necro-ecology* to point out that today there are little distinctions that can be made between left and right, progressive or conservative or even authoritarian and democratic governments. As decolonial thinkers have already argued, we live in an epoch crisis where 'democracy is being dismantled democratically' (Santos, 2020). Their analysis shows how so-called left-wing of populist governments like the one led by Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) in Mexico, have systematically dismantled the state apparatus for environmental protection, while rapidly increasing and advancing the reconfiguration of the territory making land legible for capitalist investment and extraction (for an analysis on this see Tornel, 2023). In a similar vein, they show how right-wing populism in Brazil led by Bolsonaro, also used the democratic institutions to dismantle environmental regulations and expand extractivism, in this case by mining and deforestation.

This trend is analyzed through the paper and expands from the North and South, but shows how there are also 'souths' within the North and vice versa, that is the necro-ecological characteristic of our current epoch is rapidly expanding extractive and commodity frontiers in the global south, which includes the subaltern populations, racialized communities and 'new' sacrifice zones in the geographical north, as well (Zografos and Robbins, 2020). Their text is useful to understand the nature of the nation-state in a context of late-liberalism – understood as 'the governance of social difference in the wake of the anticolonial movements and the emergence of new social movements' (Povinelli, 2011)– and neoliberalism capitalism, a system that forced the economic logic to the management of all aspects of reality and existence. Lucatello and Fernández Carril show how the state has become little more than the enforcer of capitalist mechanics and corporate power, institutionalizing and producing subjectivities rooted into extractivist ideologies. While it could be argued that there might still be some possibilities of challenging and transforming the nature of this condition through state power – which the authors seem to advocate and a point that I will come back later on –, their overall assessment is that state has become capitalism's enforcer, securing private property and disciplining populations as the process of extraction, pillage and ecological degradation continues in the relentless pursuit of economic growth.

With that said, I believe that the notion of necro-ecology would have to be further developed and formulated before we could actually think of it as an 'evolution' of the concept of necropolitics. At this point, necro-ecology can be perhaps best understood as a *companion*, mostly because the necropolitical character that is embedded into neoliberalism and late-liberalism, is already defined by the expansion of the necropolitical power of capitalism and the way it uses recognition and the economization of everything as a form of subordination and exploitation. I thus advocate that the authors think of it as a 'companion' to Mbembe's concept and Foucault (and others) notion of biopolitics. Some of the areas that the concept could engage in more detail are fivefold. First, the text would have to develop a closer engagement with the different socioecological regimes of accumulation that have shaped historical capitalism and that have continuously redefined the nature-society relations and their interaction with energy (for an analysis see Moore, 2015; Fraser, 2022). This approximation would enable a better understanding of how necropolitics has evolved throughout the different conceptions of these regimes of accumulation, but also how resistance and subversion emerged in each one of these – a question that Foucault himself advocated about the notion of power—. For example, the work of Timothy Mitchell (2011) around the substitution of coal to oil revealed some of the ways democratic forms of organization that were shaped by the material production chain of coal, were disrupted by oil infrastructure.

A second point would also come from the need to expand necro-ecology's approach to extractivism. While the authors draw on concepts such as draws on the experience of Latin American and concepts like extractivism and neo-extractivism (Gudynas 2021; Svampa, 2015), the link between extractivism and global capitalism has become more spatially and temporally complex via expanding commodity frontiers, and the inclusion of new technologies. As Martin Arboleda (2020: 25) argues, such expansion is underpinned by a technological and organizational modernization that has made the geographies of extraction ubiquitous at a global scale. In this new form of extractivism, data flows in 'new' directions, not only along traditional North/South paths; extractive operations move from everywhere and in every direction. For example, Mezzadra & Neilson (2019: 19) expand the concept of extraction to include financialization, logistics, and extractive global commodity chains to better understand the current politico-economic logic of capitalism. While Durante and colleagues (2021: 20) also define extractivism as an ontology, "a particular way of thinking and the properties and practices organized towards the goal of maximizing benefit through extraction, which brings in its wake violence and destruction."

In a similar vein, McNeish & Shapiro (2021) demonstrate how multiple forms of 'resource' extraction—be it fossil fuel extraction, atomic power, hydropower, biomass and industrial agriculture, or low-carbon infrastructures—co-produce an accelerated global capitalism and give way to an interconnected "hyper-extractivism." This form of "hyper" or "Total extractivism" alludes to the expansion of extractivism beyond its traditional purview as an economic activity with a material character. Total extractivism entails a 'new phase of capitalism' or "a particular mode or imperative of capitalist accumulation" (Ye et al. 2019) that moves toward a global totality of material and resource appropriation. Extractivism is the "dominant mentality of our era" (McNeish & Shapiro 2021: 3). It now includes financial (through debt creation), logistical (expanding around the globe), digital (data and information mining) (Durante et al. 2021: 22), and epistemic (extracting knowledge) forms of extraction (Chagnon et al. 2022), all of which perpetuate capitalism's violent logic of "accumulation for accumulation's sake". A definition of necro-ecology would have to absorb this expanded conception of

extraction to properly assess how extractivism defines and sustains our current epochal crisis.

Third and drawing on the two previous points, a much closer approximation to the expansion of ‘greening’ techniques deployed as ontological categories used to sustain and further expand capitalist commodity frontiers would also be useful. The authors do note that this form of necro-ecology also includes the neoliberalization of the climate and nature itself – as exemplified by emission trading schemes – but a more detailed approximation to the way neoliberal environmental approaches legitimize existing regimes of extraction by ‘greenwashing’ mining and other ecologically harmful practices, but also by understanding how ‘greening’ or notions like sustainability create new economic opportunities in the so-called ‘green economy’ (Verweijen & Dunlap, 2021). The result is the emergence and institutionalization of ‘green extractivism’ a process that refers to the direct extraction of wind, solar, hydro and bioenergy resources and to the extractive operations, such as supply chain of so-called renewable energy technologies, which depends on large quantities of minerals and hydrocarbons (Dunlap & Jakobsen, 2020). In other words, neco-ecology would have to be informed by the continued process of expansion and reconfiguration of landscapes that become legible for extraction as well as new green sacrifice zones resulting from the efforts to decarbonize capitalism (Dunlap, 2021).

A fourth point would be to encourage the authors to build a genealogy of the concept drawing on the work of decolonial scholars and particularly of political ecologists/ontologists on other matters. The authors do reflect on the colonial forms of oppression and extraction that have historically informed necro-ecology, however, they reduce this to the form of colonization rooted in British colonialism in the 19th Century. Decolonial scholars have instead expanded this genealogy to 1492 and have theorized the origins of capitalism to the colonial invasion of the Americas by Europe, giving way to a system of economic, cultural, political and ecological domination (Grosfoguel, 2022). This is commonly referred to as a Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP) or a system of colonial oppression that persists even after the political system of colonialism ended in the Americas more than 200 years ago. This system manifests in terms of a coloniality of power, knowledge and being, reproduced and maintained by the codification of racial difference and the imposition of normative rules such as definitions of development/progress; the domination of symbolic system/judith vers and the negation or rejection of other forms of knowledge; and, via mechanisms of subjectivation of life, body and mind, respectively (Rodriguez, 2021: 85). Thus, it not only seems odd to start in the 19th century, but this also becomes a problem when trying to understand the eco-territorial turn (Svampa, 2018) that has informed the place-based struggles and challenges to capitalism, the state and patriarchy and the persistence of the CMP throughout the continent.

This point also resonates with what Mario Blaser and Arturo Escobar (2023) have recently called third generation political ecology, which can and should also inform how we understand necro-ecology. While the authors draw on political ecology as a one of the traditions that informs necro-ecology, they seem to limit their analysis to the contributions made by first and second generation political ecology. While this is valid and useful, an engagement with the third generation would also entail recognizing that questions about “power relations between actors and struggles related to natural resources” (p.6) reveal an epistemological dimension of political ecology, one that enables a better understanding of these power relations by challenging the “taken-for-granted ontological character of the divide” (Blaser and Escobar, 2023) between nature and culture, enabling us to think beyond dualisms. This is an essential point if we want to understand how different societies in movements throughout the continent are redefining autonomy, self-determination and struggling

against the necro-ecology that the authors describe.

Finally, the last and perhaps the most relevant point would be to question the nature of the state itself in a context of necro-ecology. While the authors provide an appropriate description of the role of the state in our current epochal crisis, they – somewhat paradoxically, I might add – seem to fall back on the state and on public policies as the main tools that could ‘act urgently to carry out long-term environmental programs and ecological public policies, with a vision of sustainability’ (p.19). Aside from the use of the word ‘sustainability’ here – which, as I mention in point number 3 is quite problematic as it links back to strategies of legitimization for the extraction and accumulation utilized by the green economy– falling back on a reliance on the state and on the adoption of “correct policies” seems to suggest that the state can be transformed or captured to reduce the necro-ecological condition they propose.

While there might be some spaces for dialogue and maneuvering still available within some levels of the state –mostly at the local level –, there seems to be an increasing awareness of the limits of what can actually be achieved by taking state power and developing public policies (for a detailed review see for example: Dinnerstein, 2015; Anthias, 2018; Esteva, 2020; Holloway, 2022; Guitierrez Aguilar, 2020; Machado y Zibechi, 2017; Walsh, 2018; Giraldo, 2020, to name a just a few). These examples show the experience of countries like Bolivia and Ecuador and the limits of decolonization that resulted in their reconfiguration of public policy and their constitutions by adding concepts such as *Buen Vivir* and recognizing rights to Mother Earth. The result was a simultaneous expansion of the processes of extraction and *reprimarization* of their economies, paired with the same old and new tactics of repression. Recognizing these experiences and the importance of other governing systems emerging from grassroots movements, and societies in movement (i.e. from the ground up), should be an important consideration of the analysis of necro-ecology, particularly for its contestation and rejection.

Lucatello and Fernández Carril have opened up an important dialogue that deserves to be recognized and discussed. However, I advocate for understanding necro-ecology as a *companion* concept to biopolitics and necropolitics. This approach can help us better understand the nature of the state in our current civilizational crisis, its interactions with capitalism, colonialism and the many forms of extractivism that informs its governmentality.

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