

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

Jeffrey Martin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pacific Southwest Research Station

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

This article seeks to develop and apply a new transdisciplinary concept / framework of *necro-ecology* through examples drawn from across the Americas, building on Foucault, Agamben, and crucially Mbembe, and drawing on political ecology (essentially taking Mbembe's necro-politics and combining it with a PE approach / set of concerns).

While there is the kernel of something interesting here, drawing on a wide range of examples from across the Americas and bringing into much-needed conversation Anglophone and Latin American political ecology scholarship, the piece suffers from a number of issues around clarity and argumentation.

**Language issues:** flow, word choice, and clarity issues that currently distract from arguments. These issues are extensive / throughout the piece, hence suggestion for professional / dedicated copy edit by a native English speaker.

- E.g., in (American) English conventionally refer to "the Americas" to describe North, Central, and South America collectively; otherwise "the continent" needs to be clarified as referring to either North America or South America.
- Avoid use of "man" as neutral (p.7).
- Tierra del Fuego is referred to as such in English (doesn't need to be translated) (p.8).
- "Cut to the bone" (p.10) is a bit too idiomatic.
- "...phases out the existence and peculiarity of 'rentier' States" (p.13) – unclear.
- Watch out for incomplete sentences (throughout, but most obviously the final sentence!)

**Formatting and grammar:** punctuation, article, and heading usage issues throughout. These distract from the argument, and improved signposting would help readers follow along.

- Citations should come after quotes, before final punctuation (periods go outside parenthetical citations).
- Commas and articles (e.g. 'the') are frequently overused or absent where needed (see language issues, above).
- Quotes should be formatted in a standard form; italics are unnecessary, but if used should be standardized. Also watch for missing quotation marks.
- Watch out for misspellings and typos (including in reference list).
- Given the structure provided here, unclear why headings 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 are used, rather than 1, 2, 3, etc.? Also, section 1.3 is relatively large: recommend breaking up with subheadings (perhaps for each dimension).
- "...the region is also 9 with a broader environmental crisis" (p.7) – typo?
- Sources like "the Environmental Justice Atlas" (p.11) need in-text parenthetical citation as well as inclusion in the

reference list.

**Argumentation:** the authors might consider what their contribution is and how the argument could be restructured to best make that contribution. There is a lot of great detail here with a great many examples, but it reads as something of a shallow overview rather than the theoretical contribution the authors might intend. They state that necro-ecology “provides concrete suggestions on how deaths may be reduced if governments in the Americas would [were to] act differently” (p.2), yet it is not clear where this is in fact shown in the article.

Four main dimensions of necro-ecology are identified and explored through these examples / illustrations, and yet it is not clear what is new. Much feels like a (re)hashing of merely the latest form of longstanding dynamics of (neo)colonialism and capitalist political economy across the region (something long discussed by PE scholars and others); the authors even note this at times, e.g. this “does not represent ‘anything new’” (p.13).

So what does the necro-ecology framework/concept provide that is valuable for analyzing and intervening around these issues? In other words, we need a much clearer “so what?”

- The literature review (1.2) does some good work in reviewing some of the Latin American political ecology scholarship, but it needs to do more to explore disagreements, trends, etc. rather than simply listing.
- For example, political ecology and deep ecology (p.6) have significant disagreements, including around ideas of biophysical limits (p.8) that might be worth clarifying where relevant to the arguments here.
- The claim that North American PE is “little” or has “only recently” shifted to look internally is becoming increasingly dated, particularly given scholarship on the (North) American West from the past 30 years (see [Martin, et al. 2019](#) for a brief overview).
- Linkages to British colonialism, “aesthetic” (?), “Victorian studies and British literature” (p.7) need to be clarified – walk the reader through how these all link up?
- The claim that “necro-ecology can be therefore considered as the latest stage of the political ecology thinking” [sic] should be complicated through an engagement with other recent trends in and around PE (e.g., degrowth, convivial conservation, others?)
- Arguments on the role of the state in delivering public goods, maintaining/protecting the environment, etc. (e.g. pp.8-9) need to be developed -- perhaps earlier in the lit review as these can be situated within the broader oeuvre of PE!
- Discussions of dispossession, enclosure, etc. have a lot of potential (yet underexplored) ties to the PE literature (see p.12); recommend a deeper dive / more exploration in the literature review? Doing so would also help clarify later examples, such as the intensification of extractivism across political alignment (p.12)
- Section (1.)3 provides a great many examples that are read, in part, through a vaguely defined necro-ecology framework. However, there is no discussion or broader analysis tying it all together. Many of the dimensions also appear deeply interrelated – perhaps worth exploring this in more detail?
- The included maps (and nods to critical cartography) need to be analyzed and integrated with the arguments in the text. As they stand they appear tacked on and disconnected. Tell your readers what they should gain from these images, and how they fit into your broader argument(s)!

**Minor/miscellany:**

- Watch for over/misstating, attributing/assuming knowledge and intent (hard to tell if thi is a language or argumentation issue, but it comes off as lacking nuance):
  - “complete lack of political understanding” (p.2)
  - “...politicians disobey [ignore?] scientific advice on purpose...” (p.3)
  - “The federal decision is not considering the impact...” (p.12) – (vs. other priorities?)
- A few concepts are dropped in and left undefined and/or uncited: “social murder” (p.2), “negative governance” (p.3), etc.
- Linkages to COVID, while illustrative of necro-politics, are less clearly connected to necro-ecology (if that is even intended?)
- Re-use of Mbembe quote – both pp.3-4 and again later on p. 4 with no clear reason?
- Check that all citations are in the reference list (e.g. Nhemachena & Mawere 2019).
- On p.4, recommend better defining capitalist political economy and/or the relevant drivers (consider also a nod to Marx, reserve army of labor, etc. – longstanding analysis of these dynamics even if they take a particular contemporary form)
- The second “main factor” of necro-politics, the “camp-form” (p.4), does not clearly appear later in the paper. Does this represent a departure from Mbembe? At the least it seems worth a quick discussion.
- If you are including the table (p.5), you probably don’t need to list the characteristics in-text (p.4); the table, however, needs a title and different headings (‘characteristic’ rather than ‘phrase’?), and recommend a caption that simply states something along the lines of “based on Mbembe and Pele (Date) (note: also not in references list?)
- Give a *year* wherever possible to situate us temporally (e.g. avoid “recent case” (p.7)).
- The table on p.8 is unnecessary (and too large) – this is just a list of four dimensions (also watch spelling – neo-extractivism).
- Figure 2 (p.9) needs a source, axes labeled, and should have darker labels for legibility.
- The flooding / Obrador case described on p.10 is an interesting one, but reads more like a “trolley problem” than a policy question. Recommend doing a bit more to link examples back to broader analysis (i.e. really make clear that this is a question of cuts and social prioritization based on power, etc.)

As stated above, there is definitely something valuable here, and I encourage the authors to make the revisions indicated in order to improve their contribution!