

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

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Dear Simone and Luis Ricardo,

I think your paper deals with an extremely important topic, uses a theoretical framework that has potential and makes some good points. I don't think, however, that it's quite ready for primetime yet.

The ideas of necro-ecology and (environmental) necropolitics are interesting, but they need to be more fleshed out. To start with, these concepts need be defined in a clearer manner in the introduction. They also need to be theoretically expanded and, in some parts of the text, it needs to be clearer what they bring to the empirical analysis that is different from simply talking about violence, appropriation by dispossession, extractivism, etc. I find that the theoretical expansion is the main shortcoming here.

The discussion of Foucault seems insufficient. His arguments on biopolitics are well known and they don't need to be reproduced here, but they do need to be presented in a slightly longer and more robust way (see section 1.1). There are crucial references missing: I'm assuming that you're using the excerpts from *The History of Sexuality*. Vol 1 found in *Power/Knowledge*. But going directly to this book, as well as looking into *Society must be defended* would be helpful.

Something should also be said about Foucault's idea that biopolitics can only become premised on death if racism is involved (see the last lecture in *Society must be defended* for this argument). For Foucault, since biopolitics is a form of power inherently interested in fostering life, it can only kill when a racial discourse turns the act of promoting the life of a population into something that requires killing another population. This would allow you to do three things here: make your discussion of Foucault stronger; provide a rather direct link between Foucault and Mbembe; and, possibly, flesh out the undeniable racialized working of (bio/necro) power in Latin America. Foucault's argument can be agreed with or not, but it needs to be stated.

Agamben is in a weird spot in your argument. Despite his argument (in *Homo Sacer*) that he is "expanding" Foucault's work on biopolitics, he is really going in a different direction. What Agamben and Foucault call biopolitics isn't exactly the same. Agamben fuses Foucault's arguments on both biopolitics and sovereignty in a very peculiar way and he ends up talking about biopolitics using mostly Arendt, Schmitt and Benjamin. Their arguments can be made to work together, but you seem to consider this automatic when it isn't. The mention to *homo sacer* in particular would benefit from some additional reflection. *Homo sacer* isn't really at home in Foucault's line of thought. If this figure is to be brought up (and this doesn't appear necessary depending on your arguments), it needs to be expanded. Alternatively, *homo sacer* can be

remove from your arguments. What are you saying? That all individuals in America (or at least in Latin America) are *homines sacri*? If so, then this need to be extensively argued.

Also, your brief discussion of the role that the camp plays in necropolitics could be clearer. Doesn't the expansion of necropolitics to environmental problems like climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, etc., change the ways in which governmental practices are spatialized? Does the metaphor of the camp still hold when the consequences of necropolitics are problems that cannot be contained, thus affecting many more individuals than those of spatially contained populations? I'm not saying that your arguments don't work here, but rather that this should be further discussed.

It could also be argued that those that cannot be exploited become the victims of murder in myriad ways, but aren't "carefully managed by exposing them to deadly dangers and risks" (p. 4). The problem is in the "carefully" part of the argument: governments, multinational corporations, etc., just don't give a damn about them, hence they become killable. Depending on your arguments, this could either make them into *homines sacri* or make the concept of *homo sacer* inappropriate in this text.

I'm not the greatest fan of Mbembe's work since I fail to see exactly what it brings to the table that Foucault, Agamben or Esposito haven't already said better. Despite using a different neologism, his necropolitics isn't really that original when considered among discussions of thanatopolitics found in Agamben and Esposito, or even when stacked against Foucault's arguments on racialized biopolitics. But I admit that in an argument where colonialism is central to biopolitics, Mbembe's work can be important. However, if this is the case, then colonialism needs to be more relevant to your arguments and your theoretical discussion of necropolitics needs take other works on thanatopolitics into account.

This brings me to the modernity/coloniality school of thought of Quijano, Mignolo, Dusselet *al.* It's almost entirely absent from your paper (despite some mentions to political ecologists who have worked with them, such as Escobar) and it might be important to think the specific features of necropolitics/neco-ecology in Latin America.

The environmentality school is also absent and it could help to expand Foucault beyond intra-human interactions.

That I know of, there isn't that many political ecological research on "necropolitics". But there is some and it is mostly absent here. I'd highlight the following:

Lynch, H. (2019), Esposito's affirmative biopolitics in multispecies homes, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 22 (3), 364-381.

Dutkiewicz, J. (2015), Important cows and possum pests: New Zealand's Biodiversity Strategy and (bio)political taxonomies of introduced species, *Society & Animals*, 23, 379-399.

Wolfe, C. (2013), *Before the law: Humans and other animals in a biopolitical frame* University of Chicago Press.

Although I'm hesitant to mention it, I've also done some work on moving thanatopolitics beyond the intra-human. I'm not fishing for citations (feel free not to mention my work in your paper) but I do think that you might enjoy reading two of my

papers:

Aldeia, João (2022), "Pestering Capitalism. Thinking with Halyomorpha Halys about multispecies relations and ecological unsustainability", *Journal of Political Ecology*, 29 (1), 513-533.

<https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/jpe/article/id/2370/>.

Aldeia, João, "Contemporary Extinctions and Multispecies Thanatopolitics", *The Journal of Population & Sustainability* (accepted for publication; it should appear in one the next numbers).

I'd also suggest that you incorporate Justin McBrien's work into your arguments since his discussion of the "Necrocene" could be helpful. See: McBrien, J. (2016), Accumulating extinction: Planetary catastrophism in the Necrocene, In Moore, J. (ed.), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, history, and the crisis of capitalism* (pp. 116-137). PM Press.

Just a few small points. References need to be double checked since not all of them appear in the list at the end (e.g., Devine and Ojeda, 2017). The phrase "subjugation of life to the power of death" appears twice: it seems to be attributed to Mbembe in pages 2/3 and to Pele in page 4. English usage needs to be revised.

Best of luck with your work,

João Aldeia