

12. A Borderless World

This book has been animated by a desire to imagine a borderless world where humans and the more-than-human can move freely, think and be together. A time when no one is pushed back into the sea. The current political moment clearly demarcates a planetary-scale intensification, a hardening of movement and a thickly-bordered political imaginary. Psycho-spatial politics, assemblages of infrastructure, myriad surveillance technologies and the production of ordering regimes of fear create zones of permanent administration from which none of us are exempt.

As Hagar Kotef notes in her book *The Colonizing Self*, Arendt saw placelessness as a crisis. Refugees lost “the right to stay, to take place, to reside and with it the ability to form community[...]”¹ The right to have rights is conditioned on the right to be placed with others in proximity. Without the wall of the polis or the boundaries to convey who has rights within a political community, the very formation of the political community is at risk. So, in the present time, the delineation of boundaries, fences, enclosures is touted as part of the ‘stability’ required for a precondition of politics. But the originary violence of the spatial demarcation of territory is never fully sublimated. The political tension reappears again and again as the formation of community remains irresolvable and irresolute.

If we are to adequately think past the colonial fixities of nationalist thinking, between the preservation and thriving of life and the earth in a planetary sense, we offer that friendship allows a possible route out from

¹ Hagar Kotef, *The Colonizing Self: Or, Home and Homelessness in Israel/Palestine*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020, 58.

this closure. A borderless world is possible where a revolutionary politics runs through constantly unfinished exposure: a vitalist politics that speaks to solidarities with the more-than-human. The adjudication of ecological crises is currently contained primarily inside the human: if we can acknowledge the creativity and subjectivities of the more-than-human world, a new possibility of the political emerges. As Mbembe writes:

The Earth's specificity lies in that it makes room for all its inhabitants, with no distinction of race or species. It mocks both the blind particular and the bare singularity. It reminds us of how each body, human or otherwise, however singular, bears on it and within it, in its essential porosity, not the marks of the universal, but traces of the in-common. As a result, every politics of the living rests, by definition, on the idea that the living is that which is priceless. And because it is priceless, it is fundamentally beyond measure. As such, it can neither be counted nor weighed. It belongs simply, to the incalculable.²

The idea that without strong borders you cannot have a strong nation is precisely the closure that has to be challenged in order to consider a new way of being in the world. Through this porosity, we rediscover the essence of politics and its reinvigoration.

The permanent administration and intricacies of human and more-than-human mobility characterizes our global present. This is a time of accelerating planetary entanglement for structural reasons: a combination of late-capitalism, hyper-technological forms of warfare, digital surveillance, planetary-scale computation and acceleration of speed. These phenomena produce new forms and possibilities of exposure and tension points of border zones. To be inextricably bound with the other is a technical and pragmatic reality, and one we are forced to critically grapple with. The price of abandoning those who are relegated to surplus life is to banish them to the carceral space of colonial boundaries and border controls.

² Achille Mbembe, *The Earthly Community: Reflection on the Last Utopia*. V2 Publishing, 2022, 34.

It is in the possibility of sharing our fate with others, by opening our borders to fight for a world in common, that politics can take its proper form. There is a moral and ecological imperative to rethink democracy beyond the human, to do away with the absurdity of the state being the guarantor and protector of community. A borderless world presupposes a shared fate as a precondition for its durability and existential viability. A death in the Mediterranean, a migrant crossing the Texas border, an Afghani without status, or a Uygur in China, are bound together as much as floods and fires bind us to one another. Brute conditions unravel into a world degenerating upon itself in elemental indifferences.

The various forms of extractivist capitalism and its ordering mechanisms turbo-boosted by state policy capture are the perfect dead-end vicious circle that we find ourselves in. When the future is mortgaged to a trajectory of planetary collapse and perishability, time stands still waiting for economic and civilizational disorder. It can produce either a nihilism or accelerationist orientation that undermines political agency in the present. It models a futurity that asks nothing of people but to wait quietly in the corner for the catastrophe-to-come.

How can sociality be borderless and private property abandoned? How can we move from the insularity of a given community to an assemblage of a becoming public? In this time of planetary nihilism and the foreclosure of being that it intimates and gestures toward, can a sweetness of living open up a horizon beyond the exhaustions of present-day politics? How can a relationship between inoperativity and destituent potential be forged? What are the modes of intervention to overcome the civil war between human and animal, beast and sovereign, that exists inside every being? Within the localization of the disaster, violence destroys language and transforms conditions of the possible into an unspeakable community.³

We submit that through friendship, it is possible to apprehend a world where trees can speak, a rock can dance, a starling can turn with the flock, a fish can pivot with a school and a dog can cut an umbilical

³ See artist Grace Euna Kim's 'Unspeakable Community' project.

cord after giving birth. Our current crises can never be solved by borders – they can only consolidate, and exacerbate dead-end orientations and structured forms of domination. Establishing a durability for our collective planetary existence is to abandon some parts of ourselves, to share the impossibility and absurdity of existing in a self that is bound to the existence of another, an openness that remains open, always unfinished.

To be *with* is to be inside of a world that belongs in the space of proximity and porosity, both mysterious and intimate. That capacity to touch, to make and remake the world with humans, trees, rocks and animals, is the place where friendship forms the basis of politics.

Even if the barriers, barricades and borders remain, we must think over, through and around them to the site of a new possibility. In this political moment, where the closures and exhaustions of thought are all around us, the refusal to be enemies, to imagine a borderless world where the human and more-than human can correspond, touch, feel, think, love and congregate is precisely to open up a political space of friendship where it is possible to think of a proper freedom for all and imagine together the preservation of collective life in an interstitial zone of irresponsibility. When the nature of time takes on new meanings, when the immanence of truths is a work never completed but always open and moving, a borderless world beyond language and dreams is possible.

Love and friendship are bound up with precarious vulnerability. The potent durability of a contingent 'we' is based around the premise that a community may no longer exist in time. The binding relation is not a legal commitment but the mutual creation of a solidarity beyond the law – moving from *being-with* to *being-for*.

All living things, human and more-than-human, conceive and conspire towards an existence beyond recognition that collectively is a story of the living. Plants, bacteria, skies, clouds, lakes, flora, fauna, rocks, mountains, cheetahs and reptiles. Conceiving of a future that includes all is an opening to imagine friendship and community beyond the limits of the human and the planetary technological frame. To render possible a shared dignity is to separate ourselves from the inheritances of

human-centred lines of thought and embrace the multitude of possible futures. The mutations of subjectivity, and possibilities of dissolution, that come to the surface when the perishability of the earth and its life forms is made visible, ask for new doors and thresholds at the closures of the emerging frontlines where community is made durable through constant exposure.

There is an unaccountability of accelerated time that closes in on itself through the proliferation of fires, floods, displacements and artificial intelligence careening beyond human or technological control. The right to move becomes non-negotiable as a site of existential preservation. To imagine a world beyond borders and the extension of a carceral landscape is to be inside the reflexive plasticity of dwelling on the earth. As Mbembe argues, to overcome the architecture of violence that functions at a planetary scale, there is a call to be attuned to the constitutive fragility of the critical zones of life and their places of encounter and entanglement that form the basis of a possible resistance amongst different forms-of-life.⁴

It is through the assembling of practices by which living beings and the more-than-human cohabitatem with friendship and hazard the tenuous formation of communities. The return to mutuality, transformative solidarity, the recognition of our planetary vulnerability beyond the limits of reactionary human identities is a call to collectively reinvigorate our existence in the time that remains, to build proximity to a seemingly impossible justice. The organizing of a series of ruptures towards a new life is to think around the inherited order and open the door to the potency and poetry of new thresholds, through visible and invisible solidarities, where the creative mutations of politics can form promiscuous alliances that surpass contemporary thresholds and modes of the possible.

4 Notes adapted from Achille Mbembe's seminar on 'The Last Utopia' in Saas Fee at the European Graduate School in July 2023.

