

Chapter 2: Towards Planetary Rights

Introduction

Mbembe's critique extends beyond redefining our understanding of community (chapter 1). He investigates the notion of rights within liberal democracies. He exposes the ambivalence inherent in the modern idea of rights and proposes an alternative that ensures all members of the Earth's community, both human and non-human, can live sustainably. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 96) However, how should the concept of planetary rights be articulated? What are its foundations and implications? Addressing these questions requires exploring how planetary rights arise not from the norms of any single community, but from the broader context of general ecology. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 17–22) By clarifying these connections, I seek to demonstrate how Mbembe's political philosophy offers a compelling case for the politics of cohabitation within a planetary community, as discussed in the preceding chapters. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how his approach diverges from cosmopolitan theories, one of the most prominent frameworks that address current forms of domination, particularly as observed in the political, economic, and financial systems of global governance.

I. Meaning and Foundation of Planetary Rights

Achille Mbembe's reflections on planetary rights first appeared in the French journal AOC under *Le droit universel à la respiration*. (2020b) This article was subsequently translated into English by Carolyn Shread and published in *Critical Inquiry* (vol. 47). (cf. Mbembe 2021c) A revised version of the article is scheduled to be included in the book *The Earthly Community*. (2022) The essay discusses the state of global sociopolitical and economic crises, especially during the man-

agement of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism exemplified by the murder of George Floyd in the United States. Mbembe's ideas about the universal right to breathe and circulation stem from a critical reflection on these tragedies and current crises in international relations, particularly those related to migration, ecology, economy, and politics.

1.1 The Planetary Right to Breathe

Examining the conditions for a sustainable planetary community involves exploring the rights to breathe and move freely across the world. I have previously explained that Mbembe's concept of the planetary aim is to sustain life on Earth. Since being alive is inherently connected to the ability to breathe and move, addressing the conditions necessary for planetary existence within the planetary community entails analysing the political structures that establish the prerequisites for breathing and for the freedom of movement on Earth. These two aspects of existence – breathing and mobility – stand out as vital conditions for the continuation of life on Earth, which should be recognised as fundamental rights. By framing breathing and movement in this manner, Mbembe underscores their essential role in the broader discourse of planetary ethics, emphasising the interconnectedness of rights, sustainability, and the political responsibilities that govern human collective existence.

Philosophical Significance of Breathing

The literature following the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of examining breathing as a biological and socio-political condition essential for the sustainability of life on Earth. (cf. Härting and Meek 2024; Selim 2022; Keeva 1999; Bandman 1982) The pandemic has not only reaffirmed humanity's understanding of the crucial role of breath in the generative process of life. It has also highlighted the extent to which such a capacity can be imperilled. (cf. Gangadhar and Anand 2022) Moreover, the pandemic underscores humanity's momentous responsibility as a critical agent in the intricate evolution of life, whether through destructive practices, such as air pollution and the eradication of living conditions, or through reparative efforts centred on law and planetary justice.

Judith Butler effectively explores the theme of breathing as part of the existential crisis intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising how the spectre of death and illness has infiltrated everyday life. (cf. Butler 2022b; Butler 2022a) She refers to a common experience: a pervasive atmosphere filled

with illness and mortality that has shaped our collective existence, primarily targeting the human capacity to breathe. (cf. Dillon and Sze 2018) This profound confrontation with death invites a more nuanced reflection on grief, social connection, and the ethics of mourning in a fragmented world. (cf. Butler 2022b, pp. 1–2) In this light, as Dipesh Chakrabarty articulates, the pandemic has revealed that humans have become a geological force; our actions have engendered conditions ripe for disease and pervasive mortality, with air and the very act of breathing functioning as primary vectors of this existential threat. (cf. Chakrabarty 2021)

Furthermore, the topic's interest in breathing – and its sociopolitical and existential significance – extends beyond reflection on the pandemic, encompassing a critical examination of the history of Western philosophy in general. Many Scholars have recently critically diagnosed the absence of this theme within this history. From June 18 to 21, 2023, the Institute for Philosophical Studies at the Science and Research Centre Koper in Portorož, Slovenia, convened a conference titled "Respiratory Philosophy: A Paradigm Shift in Philosophy." Organised by Petri Berndtson, Maja Bjelica, and Lenart Škof, the conference aimed to explore the relatively under-examined theme of respiration within philosophical discourse. The call for papers articulated a significant concern:

"Breathing is a rare theme in philosophy, and it is only in recent years that philosophy of breathing as a new way of doing philosophy has begun to interest some thinkers. [...] the 'forgetting of air and breathing' (Irigaray) in European philosophical discourse is by itself one of the deepest, unacknowledged tensions, shaping its unfortunate outlook on the world." (Berndtson et al. 2023)

This observation is pertinent given that, aside from sporadic contributions in ethics (cf. Wang and Macaulay 2018), political philosophy (cf. Söffner 2023; Jankovic 2021; Dillon and Sze 2018; Bandman 1982), critical philosophy of race (cf. Meikle 2020), and environmental sciences (cf. Gangadhar and Anand 2022; Huck et al. 2021; Boyd 2019), there exists a notable absence of systematic philosophical literature dedicated to the subject of breathing. In 2013, Lenart Škof edited an anthology titled *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (2013), where he, alongside Emily A. Holmes, examines the contributions of French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (1983), as well as Peter Sloterdijk (1998), who have played a significant role in the emergence of this nascent current known as respiratory

philosophy. As Berndtson et al. (2023) elucidate, respiratory philosophy possesses the dual merit of decolonising the philosophical curriculum by incorporating non-European sources while illuminating how the act of “breathing” has been a fundamental, albeit frequently erased, element in the history of philosophy. Consequently, it can be posited that this philosophical trajectory implicates various domains, including ontology, politics, ethics, and even spirituality, as evidenced in the writings of Škof and Berndtson (2018), Heine (2021), and Berndtson (2023). Instead of conducting an exhaustive analysis of this emerging trend, which still lacks clearly defined contours, the following section aims to examine Achille Mbembe’s engagement with this theme.

The Perspective of General Ecology

If the ultimate aim of ethics and political philosophy is the preservation of life’s reserves on Earth, the foundation of this political framework is the universal right to breathe. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 37) As I outlined in the introduction to this section, this right must be differentiated from the notion of the right to breathe as formulated by Bobeck (2023), Gangadhar and Anand (2022), Huck et al. (2021), Meikle (2020), and Boyd (2019). Whereas these thinkers derive their concepts from Western philosophical traditions, Mbembe’s framework is grounded in an understanding of general ecology inspired by African cosmologies. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 18) Reflection on the universal right to breathe emerges from a broader inquiry into life beyond the confines of politics, economics, or anthropology. Indeed, in his essay *The Universal Right to Breathe* (2021c), he asserts:

“As that which is both ungrounded and our common ground, the universal right to breath is unquantifiable and cannot be appropriated. From a universal perspective, not only is it the right of every member of humankind, but of all life. It must therefore be understood as a fundamental right to existence.” (Mbembe 2021c, pp. 61–62)

A critical analysis of this quotation provides a nuanced understanding of the meaning, foundation, and implications of the right to breathe. In this section, I aim to elucidate the significance and genealogy of this right, as well as its role within Mbembe’s political philosophy, ethics, and overarching ecological framework. What does it mean to breathe? How is breathing conceptualised as a fundamental right? The answers to these inquiries are embedded within Mbembe’s aforementioned articulation.

The discourse on breath, as articulated through the postulate of general ecology, posits that ‘breathing’ is an essential prerequisite for the existence of all living beings. It is crucial to contextualise the term ‘living’ within a broader ecological framework, where it encompasses not only humans but also the myriad of non-human entities – ranging from biodiversity, flora, and fauna to ecosystems and the Earth itself. Mbembe asserts that all these elements possess a form of life, unified by a shared capacity reliant on breathing. The repeated emphasis on concepts such as “the ground,” “our common ground,” and “the common soil” serves to illuminate the breath that animates and connects all living beings on Earth. Without this shared breath, the existence of animals, plants, and even minerals would be rendered impossible; breathing becomes the foundational condition of possibility for life itself.

At this stage of inquiry, two essential questions invite a more nuanced understanding of the concept of breathing articulated by Mbembe. How can we consider that minerals may possess an ontological capacity for respiration among plants and humans? This understanding prompts a second critical question regarding the legal standing of stones recognised as ‘living beings’ with the right to breathe. Suppose minerals are indeed considered living entities capable of respiration. Could it be argued that they deserve recognition as subjects of rights, in line with the proponents of the rights of nature? While I will not delve deeply into the complexities of rights of nature theories, it is helpful to summarise their essence. (cf. Tola 2018; Boyd 2017; Borràs 2016) Their central thesis asserts that nature should be granted rights like those conferred upon human beings. (cf. Nash 1989) A range of ethical, cosmological, and political arguments supports this perspective.

From a cosmological viewpoint, the rights of nature theory arises from recognising an ontological interconnectedness among all elements of the Earth, which is crucial for maintaining ecological balance and the viability of life itself. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 66) This interdependence among plants, animals, and humans highlights a vital earthly bond characterised by reciprocity. Thomas Berry articulates this relationship through the concept of the “jurisprudence of the Earth.” (cf. Berry 1999) Thus, acknowledging the rights of nature equates to affirming the intrinsic value of the natural world, akin to the recognition of human rights, and encompasses a commitment to ecological stewardship. Furthermore, this theoretical framework contends that human responsibility for protecting nature is intrinsically linked to the sustainability of human existence and the broader integrity of our ecology. (cf. Shiva 2006; Boyd 2017)

Based on these arguments, proponents of the rights of nature advocate transformative changes in legal theory and political practice, particularly regarding land ownership and associated jurisprudence. (cf. Borràs 2016) Such a shift is essential to align human laws with the ecological imperatives that our interconnected existence dictates. This contemplation enhances our understanding of the potential implications of classifying minerals as living things. If we assert that plants are entitled to existence free from the threat of destruction, does this not suggest that stones warrant similar protection? Equating stones with trees in terms of respiration implies that they could share similar rights. Such reasoning introduces complex considerations that deserve thorough exploration. A crucial step in addressing these inquiries involves clarifying Mbembe's perspective on life and respiration. Mbembe argues that being alive enables close communication with other universes, including the cosmic and the plant kingdom. (Mbembe 2022, p. 18) It is essential to note that he does not draw strict boundaries between human existence, the plant kingdom, and the animal kingdom; instead, he weaves these realms together through their shared quality of being alive, defined by mutual communication.

The idea that diverse kingdoms share beings highlights their unique roles in supporting life on Earth. The relationship between the mineral and plant kingdoms exemplifies complementarity, in which their interactions promote the exchange of energy essential to sustaining the cosmo-telluric balance. It becomes crucial to reconceptualise 'breathing' not solely as a biological function but as a critical form of energetic interaction that underpins the collective existence of all beings. Such interaction maintains the viability of life on our planet and ensures ecological harmony. While this philosophical stance resonates with vitalism, it distinguishes itself by rejecting a separation between the animal, mineral, and plant kingdoms. (cf. Coulter et al. 2019; Lash 2006)

Lipman (1966) describes vitalism as the belief in a specific operational principle that sets living organisms apart from the inorganic realm, operating on a dichotomy between the animate and inanimate. In contrast, the holist perspective of General Ecology advocates for rediscovering the commonalities that all entities share within the Earth and cosmos, forming the foundation for sustainable life. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 17–22) This conception of the common good defines the Earth as an overarching Living Being, encompassing both human and non-human life. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 18) Defining the Earth in this holistic way inherently affirms its capacity to breathe alongside that of all its constituents. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 8–9) As Mbembe argues:

“We must thus, when treating the Earth, bear in mind the living world in its entirety and its innumerable manifestations. Of this Earth, humans, together with animal, plant and mineral species, as well as microbes, bacteria, and viruses, seas and oceans, skies, climates, technological devices, and other artificial and externalized apparatuses, are an inseparable part.” (Mbembe 2022, p. 7)

Therefore, to reimagine the concepts of “Earth” or “Living,” one might begin by recognising the collective dependence of all elements – humans, minerals, and plants – on the vital process of breathing. In general ecology, breathing is not only an attribute of living organisms but of all entities on Earth, including minerals. Exploring this argument reveals its fundamental role in Mbembe’s perspective on planetary rights. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 100)

The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the human experience of living in a toxic environment, underscoring the vulnerability of respiratory capacity in humans and other forms of life. (cf. Selim 2022; Butler 2022b) Two forms of toxicity endanger the breathing capacity of living entities during the pandemic: biophysical toxicity, characterised by the degradation of air, water, and land quality alongside the destruction of habitable environments, and systemic toxicity, rooted in the exploitative practices of industrial pharmaceutical firms within the framework of global financial capitalism. (cf. Smith 2009; Edwards 2014; Mbembe 2024) Environmental toxicity includes the widespread use of chemicals, such as pesticides, antibiotics, and dyes, as well as significant nitrogen and phosphorus emissions, which directly correlate with the proliferation of viruses and diseases that compromise the integrity of vital tissues in living beings. (cf. Davies 2018; Mbembe 2021c)

Just as physiological toxicity undermines human respiration and the ability to breathe, necro-political powers systematically attack the breathing capacity of the most vulnerable populations. (cf. Mbembe 2021c) This vulnerability is a specific form of social and political death, manifested in the inability to breathe, as powerfully illustrated by the tragic case of George Floyd, whose last words – “I cannot breathe” – resonate with the harsh realities imposed by contemporary necro-power within liberal democracies. Here, necro-power includes all systems of violence and domination based on race, gender, xenophobia, or police brutality that disproportionately target marginalised groups such as migrants, undocumented populations, and racial minorities. (cf.

Mbembe 2019b, pp. 38–39; Brennan 2024) Mbembe explains that in geopolitics, the forces of power are likely to remain dominant. The lack of shared infrastructure worsens global fragmentation, increasing divisions among states. (cf. Mbembe 2019b, pp. 43–46) In their pursuit of self-preservation, many nations reinforce border defences and obscure the systemic violence inflicted upon the most vulnerable. (cf. Mbembe 2024, p. 78)

Mbembe further elucidates that the vulnerability manifests vividly in regions where innocent populations suffer amidst conflict, militarisation, extrajudicial killings, economic despair, and confinement in camps and prisons. For these groups, political space has morphed into a toxic environment, leading to precarious existence and uncertain futures, where the spectre of death looms ominously, targeting the breath of life itself. Consequently, general ecology provides a robust normative framework for interpreting the thesis of a planetary right to breathe. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 17–22) Mbembe expands on this idea by asserting that any political discourse concerning the living must acknowledge that life is beyond valuation; it is, by nature, immeasurable and incalculable. (Mbembe 2022, p. 34) Thus, the right to breathe thesis seeks to present a legal counterpoint to the dominant logic of calculation that underpins the global political economy. As previously discussed, this logic fosters toxicity within biophysical, sociopolitical, and economic realms. (cf. Nading 2020; Pearce and Tombs 2019) The right to breathe signifies not only the chance for existence but also the essential need for all living beings to inhabit environments free from toxicity – whether political, environmental, economic, religious, or cultural. (cf. Davies 2018) For human beings, this implies inhabiting a space free from pollution, alongside a socio-political and economic environment that facilitates equitable access to essential resources for life, whether intellectual, ethical, nutritional, or health-related.

Ultimately, the right to breathe on a planetary scale promotes a healthy environment and protects life from the harmful effects of global systems of violence, dominance, and death. By emphasising respiration as a core aspect of life, Mbembe strengthens his critique of oppressive systems and develops an alternative view of rights. This critique is deeply connected to reflecting on the right to breathe, as the sustainability of life on Earth depends on the ability to navigate its varied landscapes, enabling the sharing of vital resources necessary for survival among all living beings. (cf. Mbembe 2024, p. 104)

1.2 The Planetary Right to Mobility

The foundation of planetary rights has been a central theme in Achille Mbembe's scholarship, particularly since his seminal work *Critique of Black Reason*. (2017) In the preceding sections, I have traced the genealogy of this inquiry through his earlier writings. In this section, I will examine Mbembe's conception of the planetary right to mobility, which is understood as the inherent right of all living beings to freely traverse the Earth. (cf. Mbembe 2024, p. 104) This right is supported by Mbembe's assertion that the Earth is a shared entity that requires collective stewardship and the unrestricted circulation of life for all its human and non-human inhabitants. (cf. Mbembe 2024, p. 150) Moreover, Mbembe emphasises the urgent need to restore these essential circulatory flows during this critical period, which is marked by growing barriers and restrictions. (cf. Mbembe 2023, p. 83) In the following discussion, I will elaborate on the philosophical implications and arguments underlying the thesis regarding the right to mobility.

Contemporary Debates on Mobility

Before examining Mbembe's arguments, it is essential to contextualise the broader discourse surrounding mobility. (cf. Sheller and Urry 2006) This will illuminate the significance of his conceptualisation of planetary rights. Sheller and Urry (2016a) outlines this broader context, positing that the field has historically been motivated by concerns for social justice, societal transformation, and the prospects of future societies. (cf. Sheller 2023) As evidenced by the monograph *What Is the Future?* (2016), published after the inaugural conference organised by the *Centre for Mobilities Research at Lancaster University* in 2004, the discourse on mobility interrogates the future of urban transport, infrastructure, and the requisite conditions for a sustainable energy transition. The Alternative Mobility Futures Conference in Lancaster in 2003 underscored the pressing need for ecological transformation on a global scale. (cf. Sheller 2017, p. 4) Despite the interdisciplinary nature of the contributions from geographers, sociologists, engineers, urban planners, and environmentalists alike, a common theme emerges: the imperative to scrutinise the foundation and scope of what has come to be known as the "mobility paradigm."

Drawing from Sheller and Urry's (2016a) insights, Baldwin et al. (2019) argue that the mobility paradigm is a mode of social thought that endeavours to comprehend social life by analysing diverse mobilities and their intricate interrelations. (cf. Sheller and Urry 2016b) Its origins can be traced back to the spa-

tial turn in social theory that began in the 1990s. (cf. Baldwin et al. 2019, p. 292) For Sheller and Urry (2016a), social relationships encompass diverse forms of connection, whether proximate or distant. Thus, aim of the mobility paradigm is to examine the integral role of movement within the fabric of social institutions and practices. (cf. Sheller and Urry 2016a, p. 11) From this perspective, Coletta et al. (2020), for example, analyses mobility through the lens of spheres, connections, timelines, and processes that shape daily existence and the socio-political and economic landscape. Other scholars have explored the historical dimensions of mobility, considering its profound impact on human identity and social formation. (cf. Büscher et al. 2016) This line of inquiry also resonates with Thomas Nail's assertion that society is perpetually in motion, emphasising that human movement is always socially directed—manifested through border security, urban traffic management, technologies, and work schedules. Nail also argues that societies are not static entities but dynamic processes inherently involved in the continuous direction and circulation of social life. (cf. Nail 2020, p. 151) Consequently, mobility is viewed as an essential attribute of human existence and a key factor shaping social order and activity.

Furthermore, the social and political importance of mobility is also reflected in the work of scholars such as Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt (2013) and Tim Cresswell (2006). Bærenholdt (2013) posits that contemporary societies are increasingly managed through mobility rather than merely governing it. (cf. Bærenholdt 2013, p. 20) This perspective aligns with Carpio's examination of the historical dimensions of mobility in the American context, specifically in Los Angeles and the Inland Empire during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which explains how mobility has historically influenced racial identity and hierarchies, allowing certain groups to move while imposing restrictions on others. Cresswell (2006) employs a similar methodology to investigate the contemporary increase in human mobility and the concurrent efforts to regulate it through migration policies, as well as through art and mass culture – including photography and the automobile – and their implications for the integration of the European Union.

However, despite this diversity of scholarly contributions and methodologies, a unified perspective is evident across much of the mobility literature, which I would term “social ontology”. This concept is echoed in the works of authors such as Thomas Nail, who argues that, within a mobility-oriented framework, social stasis is an illusion; instead, we encounter regimes of social circulation punctuated by transient, contingent sites of convergence. (cf. Nail 2020, p. 151) To comprehend the migrant figure, we must also reconceptualise society

through the lens of movement. From this standpoint, the symbolic representations of migrants and refugees are significant for their capacity to reflect a social reality characterised by institutional and relational change. In contrast, a normative perspective transcends the phenomenological or social ontological frameworks above.

Bianchi et al. (2020) for example interpret the “mobility crisis” as a manifestation of inequalities in global tourism politics. They scrutinise how the rights to freedom of movement for marginalised or less privileged individuals are thwarted by systemic racism, xenophobia, and restrictive border controls, all of which are perpetuated by the historical impacts of colonial legacies, global capitalism, and geopolitical shifts. These elements are intertwined with the multi-scalar governance systems that delineate, manage, and police borders. (cf. Bianchi et al. 2020b, p. 290) Mimi Sheller emphasises the need to integrate descriptive sociological analyses with normative considerations regarding mobility justice. She asserts that the injustices of mobility stem from embodied experiences in daily life. For instance, when individuals with disabilities, pregnant women, or the elderly encounter barriers to accessing essential services due to the designed inaccessibility of transport systems and urban infrastructure, such conditions embody a profound injustice of accessibility. (cf. Sheller 2020, pp. 12–13)

Thus, the discourse surrounding mobility is reframed from its focus on the mechanistic aspects of transportation and urban planning to include a normative perspective that examines the exclusionary implications of restricted mobility for society’s most vulnerable members. (cf. Cook and Butz 2019; Heller 2021) Sheller’s broader concerns regarding macro-mobilities refer, for example, to the systematic exclusion that occurs at global scales, primarily shaped by infrastructure and transportation mechanisms, along with their political, economic, and cultural implications for human lives and movements. (cf. Sheller 2018) These implications impact issues such as climate change, migration policies, and border controls. Scholars of macro-mobility examine how narratives surrounding climate change and migration operate within a distinct power regime that is embedded in a broader political landscape. (cf. Baldwin et al. 2011) They advocate expanding Sheller’s notion of mobility justice to establish a new political discourse on climate change, framing her insights as foundational for articulating individuals’ rights to migrate in a climate-altered context. (cf. Wainwright and Mann 2018) Baldwin et al. further contend that conceptualising mobility justice as a pivotal principle would significantly enrich the political lexicon surrounding these issues, fundamentally proposing

movement as the foundational condition of social existence rather than an exceptional circumstance. (cf. Baldwin et al. 2019, p. 2)

While numerous scholars acknowledge the critical role of mobility in understanding the world's socio-political dynamics, the predominant trend is to adopt an analytical approach. (cf. Canzler and Kaufmann 2016) Rather than venturing into a normative critique that rigorously interrogates the philosophical concepts and paradigms informing the discourse on mobility, this approach is primarily framed by the social sciences. In contrast, Mbembe's notion of general ecology contemplates mobility in a manner analogous to the 'planetary mobility' described by Clark and Szerszynski (2021). Szerszynski posits that "planetary mobilities" encompass not merely long-distance movements or a compendium of interconnected mobilities across the Earth's surface; instead, they compel us to recognise all forms of mobility as phenomena intrinsic to a far-from-equilibrium planet, existing as a loosely bound dynamic assemblage that traverses the atmosphere and extends into near space. (cf. Szerszynski 2016, pp. 614–615) This cosmological perspective on mobility necessitates an examination of all the universe's constituents as an interrelated whole. Consequently, social ontology and historical phenomenology give way to a cosmological framework that Mbembe utilises to extrapolate ethical principles – namely, mobility, sharing, solidarity, and the circulation of living resources – while simultaneously engaging in a philosophical critique of state sovereignty. It is this normative orientation that I now seek to investigate.

Achille Mbembe's Approach to Mobility

Mbembe's examination of the planetary right to mobility offers a constructive perspective rooted in the African context. (Mbembe 2024, p. 97) He thoughtfully addresses the paradoxical relationship between the continent's rich human, material, and cultural resources and the systemic enclosures that hinder their potential. (cf. Mbembe 2024, pp. 100–102) Central to this discussion is the critical evaluation of the colonial idea of borders, along with the extensive bureaucratic, policing, and military infrastructures that uphold these boundaries. These factors have transformed Africa into a vast prison, where the free movement of populations is greatly restricted. To promote genuine vitality and development on the continent, Mbembe argues, emancipation from these barriers to mobility is essential:

“Of all the major challenges facing Africa at the beginning of this century, none is as urgent and as far-reaching as the mobility of its population. To a large extent, the immediate future of the continent will depend on its ability to free up forces of circulation, to set up territories and spaces in such a way that its people can move about as often as possible, as far as possible, as fast as possible and, ideally, unimpeded.” (Mbembe 2024, p. 97)

Although Mbembe does not propose a specific framework for overcoming barriers to circulation, his reflections nonetheless inspire a reimagining of the continent’s potential through ethical, cosmological, and political ambitions. Mobility is generally seen as essential for creating opportunities for societal change and economic development. Whether planned or organic, it is vital as a response to demographic growth and as a solution to climate change-related issues. The call to rethink mobility serves as a powerful reminder of the potential for renewal, international cooperation, and the sustainability of life on a global scale, particularly in light of the tragic effects associated with the migration policies of European nations. Mbembe explains:

“Today, the human cost of European border control policies continues to intensify as potential migrants face heightened risks. The number of those who have died crossing no longer gets counted. Each week brings its share of stories, each as scabrous as the next. These are often stories about men, women, and children who have drowned, become dehydrated, poisoned, or asphyxiated on the coasts of the Mediterranean, the Aegean, the Atlantic or, increasingly, in the Saharan desert.” (Mbembe 2024, p. 101)

This strong critique of European migration policies highlights not only the brutal practices of border militarisation, airport and sea controls, but also the entire bureaucratic system that almost systematically restricts visa applications from people originating in Southern countries. While citizens of Northern countries can usually move freely across borders, this right is consistently limited for those from Southern nations. The critique also involves analysing the theories that underpin these practices, which are rooted in a long Western philosophical tradition, especially regarding migration rights.

Thus, from a normative standpoint, Mbembe’s discussion of the planetary right to mobility engages in a critical dialogue with Western political philosophy. He examines the theories of hospitality that underpin modern asylum rights, notably drawing on Immanuel Kant’s insights. (cf. Mbembe

2024, pp. 24–25) He particularly highlights the importance of Kant's idea of universal hospitality, which asserts that all humans have the right to travel and find shelter, grounded in our shared ownership of the Earth's surface. (2024, p. 24) From Kant's viewpoint, as long as 'no one has an inherent greater right to any part of the Earth than anyone else,' borders do not serve as strict prohibitions. Nonetheless, Mbembe emphasises a crucial nuance in the Kantian model: the right of hospitality is merely a 'right to visit,' with no implied duty or obligation for the host community, as there is no implicit contract between asylum seekers and host societies. (cf. Mbembe 2024, pp. 24–25)

Unlike Kant's view that the social contract restricts movement and residence rights, Mbembe highlights their deep, pre-political roots. Humans naturally have the right to move freely and share the Earth to support their existence. This right is not derived from social agreements but is grounded in our fundamental nature as living entities. The right to circulation is therefore based on a cosmological and ethical perspective that emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings and the essential need for movement. (cf. Mbembe 2024, p. 91) Although migrants, refugees, and undocumented individuals are among those most affected by mobility issues, this discussion primarily focuses on humanity as a whole. (cf. Mbembe 2024, p. 92) The main goal of creating a universal right to move is to lessen existing migration inequalities and foster a shared world – where everyone, regardless of their origin, religion, language, or continent, can live and travel freely, without facing the systemic violence present in current global migration policies and border controls. Mbembe affirms:

“How can we, under these conditions, resist this claim by one of the world's provinces to have a universal right of predation unless we dare to imagine the impossible: namely, the abolition of borders, that is, the restitution to all the inhabitants of the Earth, human and nonhuman, the inalienable right to move about freely on this planet?” (Mbembe 2024, p. 39)

Mbembe's critique prompts a reevaluation of border policies and mobility rights. Yet, it also raises concerns about whether such policies mainly advantage privileged nations, especially as travel costs – by air, sea, or land – increase. Rising expenses could benefit wealthier populations while disadvantaging those from poorer countries. Although these concerns are valid, they do not fully capture the core ideas and broader context of Mbembe's critique. Philosophically, his primary focus is on principles. The notion of borders

invites questions about the separation that underlies the political community on Earth. This separation becomes particularly problematic when it results in differentiating populations based on identity criteria of belonging. Such justifications can legitimise actions ranging from simple exclusion to more extreme measures like violence, war, or death. Ultimately, the issue is not the border itself but the underlying principles and the possible consequences of applying these principles in global politics.

A critical review of history helps us see how relevant this argument is, as it shows how the principle of separation – whether for political, biological, cultural, or religious borders – has often been used to justify some of humanity's most shameful crimes. Suppose we accept that the primary goal of any political community is to promote widespread sharing of life among all members. In that case, any form of separation based on borders contradicts this core purpose. Such separation tends to concentrate power and vital resources in the hands of a few – those who create and legitimise borders – and exposes others, especially those excluded, to harm. In international relations, borders legitimise land theft by those with political, economic, and military dominance and deny many people around the world access to these resources. This critique urges us to rethink how we define living beings and their connections, not through separation but by their fundamental need to move. This perspective can enhance our understanding of rights, freedom, sovereignty, territory, and belonging. Here, freedom encompasses both the ability and opportunity to move, which questions conventional power structures centred on borders and migration policies. Consequently, it is crucial to reevaluate our concepts of belonging, ownership, and equitable and inclusive sharing of the planet, as the extent of this freedom varies greatly worldwide.

Thinking Mobility with Édouard Glissant

The right to circulation stems from a universal ethic of sharing and reciprocity. Mbembe references poet Édouard Glissant, who states that we need others' memories not out of virtue or charity but because of the importance of Relationships. Glissant emphasises that Relationships allow us to share both suffering and the world's beauty, promoting solidarity. This process involves collectively learning how to repair the world's fabric. (Mbembe 2024, p. 25)

Mbembe's reflection on Glissant's humanistic view serves as the foundation for planetary circulation rights. It emphasises three key ideas: the shared experience of human suffering, the importance of solidarity, and the concept of reparation. Since I will explore the meaning of the ethical principle of repa-

ration in detail in the final chapter of this book, I will focus here on elaborating the general idea of relation as the basis for justifying planetary rights of circulation. Without delving into the complexities of Glissant's philosophy, it is crucial to recognise that his work is rooted in a meditation on human suffering, primarily through the lens of black suffering – a perspective shaped by the tragedies of slavery and colonisation. Glissant's inquiry guides him towards what he terms a thought of the "Whole World" or a "Poetics of Relation," driven by a keen awareness of the dangers linked to essentialising difference and identity. Historically, such metaphysical frameworks have underpinned numerous atrocities.

In the name of race theories, millions of Blacks have suffered exclusion, violence, murder, and displacement, forcibly removed from their homelands and sold into slavery on plantations across the Americas. Remembering this historical crime is crucial to preventing the recurrence of past tragedies. This outlook inspired Glissant to explore key concepts like creolity, the poetics of relation, and the rhizome. Drawing on the Caribbean's diverse, hybrid cultural history, Glissant develops a cosmological, ethical, and political framework that emphasises encounter, sharing, and solidarity among all peoples – transcending ethnicity, culture, race, religion, and nation. Such reflection aims to cultivate an ethics of encounter, solidarity, and sharing, encompassing not only historical memories and inheritances but also current and future resources for life. While identity-based thinking can cause conflict and violence along racial, gender, or national lines, focusing on the common good and solidarity promotes peace. It's about recognising our shared humanity, not erasing differences, to create a more livable world for all.

Indeed, the ethical principle of solidarity holds that humans should assist one another, regardless of their differences. This principle contrasts with individualism or communitarianism, which are often associated with a focus on self-interest. The case for solidarity among humans comes from recognising our interconnectedness, since no one can truly exist as an isolated monad. While the concept of territorial borders that justify exclusionary migration policies creates systemic inequalities in mobility between nations, solidarity encourages more positive interactions, enabling the sharing of life resources globally. In discussing the ethics of solidarity, Mbembe notes:

"It is therefore not a question of closing in on yourself, of allowing yourself to be haunted by the obsession of a home, of an in-itself, of a transcendental in-itself, but of contributing to the emergence, upon an open sea, of this new

region of the world where all of us will be able to enter unconditionally, in order to embrace, eyes wide open, the inextricable nature of the world, its intangible structure, its composite character” (Mbembe 2024, p. 25)

In today’s global environment marked by violence fueled by identity-driven obsessions – such as nationalism, populism, tribalism, and communitarianism – Mbembe’s insights invite us to revisit the roots of our planetary existence. While history has created divisions among people, reflecting on our true nature shows that these differences do not exclude one another. Instead, they are filled with a richness that, when recognised, fosters openness to encounters, sharing, solidarity, and mutual understanding. This interdependence among humans underpins the concept of a terrestrial community. Recognising and acting on this interdependence at the political and social levels calls for reimagining laws, the state, sovereignty, and freedom. Politically, this means working toward the removal of borders.

To sum up, the universal right to mobility isn’t just a theoretical idea; it plays a vital role in healing the world – a shared home for all living beings, human and non-human. The ethical principles of solidarity and sharing support the case for a planetary right to mobility in one key way: they highlight that no one can claim exclusive ownership of Earth, since all existence is temporary. This perspective brings Mbembe to assert: “Being in transit is ultimately the human condition on Earth. The task of democracy in the planetary era is to ensure passage, not to instruct new closures.” (cf. Mbembe 2023, p. 176) This argument underscores the necessity for a transformative approach to our global interactions, prioritizing shared mobility, connection, and the collective well-being of humanity.

II. Planetary Rights and Cosmopolitanism

The concept of planetary rights remains relatively nascent within contemporary philosophical discourse. Instead, we frequently encounter terms such as ‘universal human rights’. (cf. Mackey 2005; Spini and Doise 2005; Waltz 2001), global rights (cf. Oberleitner 2007; Hernandez-Truyol and Johns 1997), global citizenship (cf. Haigh 2008; Thompson 2001; Pierce 2017), and “cosmopolitan rights.” This section aims to clarify the similarities and distinctions between Achille Mbembe’s concept of planetary rights and existing cosmopolitan frameworks. While these paradigms exhibit notable divergences, they co-

alesce around a shared advocacy for alternatives to the restrictive nature inherent in national rights frameworks.

II.1 Planetarianism and Cosmopolitanism

Mbembe's idea of the planetary is similar to cosmopolitanism. Appiah, who articulated this notion in depth, traces its roots back to the Cynic philosophers of the fourth century BCE, particularly Diogenes. Historical accounts suggest that Diogenes opposed the global ambitions of figures like Alexander the Great. (cf. Appiah 2006, p. 2376) His intellectual movement encouraged individuals to detach from the customs of their localities, fostering an identity defined as a "citizen of the world." The term's etymology reflects this universality, deriving from the Greek words "*kosmos*" (meaning universe) and "*polis*" (meaning city). Appiah elucidates that the term "*kosmos*" originally referred not to Earth but to the broader universe. The early discourse on cosmopolitanism rejected the conventional notion that civilised individuals were confined to a single community among many. (cf. Appiah 2007, p. xiv) This intuition, manifest in Diogenes's daily life, was further developed by Stoic philosophers such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, as well as Christian theologians. Enlightenment thinkers, including Kant, as exemplified in the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) and the League of Nations – Christophe Martin (1788), and Voltaire, expanded upon these ideas. (cf. Appiah 2007, pp. xiv–xv)

The Relevance of Cosmopolitanism

It is essential to recognise the historical and political context that supports cosmopolitanism. The modern significance of this idea is underscored by the awareness of the atrocities committed by nation-states against innocent people. Domination appears in many forms, mainly through the denial of human rights, past injustices, and discrimination based on race, gender, class, and ethnicity. Appiah (1997) acknowledges his engagement with these issues, propelled by his father's experiences with authoritarianism in Ghana. (cf. Appiah 1997, p. 637) This environment culminated in the suppression of freedom of thought and expression, echoing the conditions highlighted by Hannah Arendt regarding the plight of refugees, minorities, and stateless individuals in Europe during the interwar period. (cf. Arendt 2017, p. 351) Hannah Arendt expands the discussion on cosmopolitanism within the European philosophical context, building on the work of thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Martha Nussbaum. In his 1996 speech at the International Writers' Parliament

in Strasbourg titled “Cosmopolites de tous les pays encore un effort!”, Derrida highlights a troubling decline in political asylum recognition in France, which he labels as a “dark year for asylum seekers in France.” (cf. Derrida 2003, p. 5) Though his focus is on France, he stresses that these core issues of cosmopolitanism extend beyond borders, echoing throughout Europe, the U.S., Asia, and Africa. (cf. Giorgi 2010; Cornelisse 2010)

Furthermore, Derrida underscores the plight of “intellectuals, scholars, journalists, and writers”, who often face substantial barriers in their quest for refuge due to political repression sparked by their public engagements. (cf. Derrida 2003, p. 6) This injustice against intellectuals, combined with the treatment of migrants described earlier, underscores the need for a critical reassessment of global rights – one that challenges prevailing notions of sovereignty and nationhood. While countries often ignore their moral and political responsibilities to support migrants and asylum seekers, reflecting on ethics is essential to rethinking how humans coexist worldwide, emphasising equal respect for dignity, freedom, and life. As a result, there is a strong need to revisit the concept of cosmopolitical rights. (cf. Ackerman and Furman 2013) Rethinking the right to asylum entails the establishment of conditions that liberate migrants, undocumented individuals, refugees, and asylum seekers from the systemic violence of nation-states, advocating for a more humane approach to national and global migration policies. (cf. Spena 2017) In the following discussion, I will explore the implications of Mbembe’s framework, considering its potential to reshape our understanding of rights in the face of global crises and ecological interdependence.

Cosmopolitanism: Between Praxis and Theory

Cosmopolitanism goes beyond just being a normative doctrine that outlines the conditions for a just model of international relations; it mainly functions as a way of life. This cultural outlook is shaped through interactions among diverse populations worldwide, especially within contexts of domination. (cf. Beck 2002; Cheah and Robbins 1998) Consequently, cosmopolitanism can be explored through two distinct yet interconnected perspectives: as an emancipatory praxis and as a critical theory of domination. The discourse seeks to unpack these dual interpretations underlying Mbembe’s analysis. (cf. Mbembe 2021b, p. 177; Landau and Freemantle 2010) While many scholars adopt an analytical and prescriptive stance, Mbembe’s approach to cosmopolitanism remains mainly descriptive. His inquiry highlights global sociopolitical, cultural, religious, and economic dynamics, emphasising urban centres, borders,

and contexts both within and beyond Africa. Critical to his discourse is the identification of an inherent desire and an active emancipatory praxis among marginalised groups. Mbembe asserts,

“This brand of cosmopolitanism, that of lower-class migrants, has led to the proliferation of fragmented spheres. We see this in the creation of veritable “holy” cities. We also see it in the fluid practices adopted by undocumented immigrants in their destination countries and the xenophobia that, at the same time, contributes to keeping them even more in the shadows.” (Mbembe 2021b, pp. 177–178)

For undocumented migrants and refugees, a common characteristic is that they face daily experiences of oppression caused by various exclusionary political, cultural, religious, and economic structures that exist worldwide. These systemic obstacles often restrict these individuals within rigid geographical, political, or historical boundaries. In this context, migration becomes a means to dismantle oppressive systems and foster the development of alternative, hybrid, open, and adaptable ways of living. Thus, cosmopolitanism can be characterised as a transgressive praxis. (cf. Landau and Freemantle 2010) Millions of itinerant individuals manifest a sustained capacity to transcend the geographic, political, and economic constraints imposed by national and international governance frameworks. (cf. Cheah and Robbins 1998) They adeptly navigate borders, forge new spaces, and engage in informal entrepreneurial activities to sustain themselves, often in ways prevailing political models deem ‘criminal.’ Mbembe explains how new bonds are formed within these spheres. In extreme cases, lawless zones emerge, creating significant disruptions to the urban fabric. (cf. Benhabib 2007) An informal economy emerges at the intersection of local and international environments. Social actors create resources under permanent instability, near-absolute uncertainty, and an extremely short temporal horizon.

These observations position cosmopolitanism as a realm of life and freedom, facilitating the emergence of new subjectivities resistant to subjugation by global structures of domination. (cf. Kriegman 2006) While this existence is invariably marred by enduring uncertainty, exemplified by the constant threat of interventions by state authority, including surveillance and repatriation, the paradox resides in the potential of this uncertainty to engender novel modes of life and existence. (cf. Pieterse 2006; Bowden 2003) While existing on the periphery of formal systems, these conditions challenge and redefine notions

of belonging and agency within an increasingly interconnected world. Appiah (2007) and Kurasawa (2004) described these contemporary emancipatory global dynamics within the framework of “cosmopolitanism from below.”

Furthermore, this definition of cosmopolitanism contrasts with the classic view, which is centred on cultural issues. It aims to consider the power relations, authority, and domination, where the stakes are no longer the struggle for recognition of identities within the context of cultural diversity in a globalised world, but rather the fight for access to resources of wealth and power. (cf. Hannerz 2007, pp. 201–202) It aims to critically reflect on the conditions for global equality as an alternative to global imbalances of power and access to resources. As Hannerz notes: “The cosmopolitan impulse has tended to favour more inclusive arrangements of compassion, solidarity, and peacefulness – again, then, extending shared moral principles to all humanity, as ‘a community of citizens of the world,’ as one dictionary definition of cosmopolis would have it.” (Hannerz 2007, p. 202) She notably cites philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum, who shares this vision of cosmopolitanism defined as love for humanity beyond identity-based divisions, patriotism, or the interests of a community founded on criteria of class, race, or nation. (cf. Nussbaum 1996; Hannerz 2007, pp. 203–204)

Nonetheless, it appears crucial to differentiate between a top-down cosmopolitanism, associated with elites or aristocrats, and a bottom-up cosmopolitanism, which Hannerz describes as ‘subaltern’. (Hannerz 2007, p. 206) The former, associated with the so-called “neoliberal cosmopolitanism” of Peter Gowan, sees the need for a global order that is free from the legal restrictions imposed by strong nation-state control and taxes on the market, and perceives this as a chance to strengthen their advantages, along with their cultural, economic, and political networks of power, influence, and transnational dominance. In a compelling article outlining this trend, Gowan explains how the new liberal cosmopolitanism “seeks to overcome the limits of national sovereignty by constructing a global order that will govern important political as well as economic aspects of both the internal and external behaviour of states”. (Gowan 2001, p. 79) Contrary to this version of cosmopolitanism, the top-down approach opposes exclusionary and dominating structures based on race, class, gender, and culture. (cf. Fouquet 2018) Its advocates aspire to develop a new global political model, particularly through increased solidarity among states, which are often complicit in exclusionary structures and the domination within global governance.

Thus, what is demanded by neoliberal cosmopolitanism is deregulation and a minimal state, along with greater liberalisation of competition and the international market. (cf. Calhoun 2012; Ypi 2013; Robinson 2004; Beitz 2003; Gowan 2001) The top-down cosmopolitanism from the masses, however, calls for transnational solidarity and the creation of new structures for the equitable redistribution of global wealth. (cf. KURASAWA 2004) Excluded from the structures of international competition and scarcely benefiting from the market, the masses see in cosmopolitanism the dream of a political community founded on the ethical values of justice and solidarity among peoples beyond borders. (cf. Cheah 2006) This means that what grassroots cosmopolitanism aims for is not the dismantling of the State, but its radical transformation through the abolition of global domination and unequal redistribution of wealth. (cf. Song 2023) In other words, for grassroots cosmopolitanism, the idea of being a ‘citizen of the world’ only makes sense if the concept of global citizenship is based on the equitable sharing of planetary resources among all members of the Earth community. It is in this sense, I believe, that the possible links between cosmopolitanism on the ground and Mbembe’s idea of a planetary community beyond the nation-state should be understood.

II.2 Thinking Beyond the Nation-State

Mbembe’s reflections on cosmopolitanism address the critical question of the relevance of nation-states in the context of increasing planetary mobility and the imperative of a universal right to breathe. As previously highlighted, planetary mobility is evident in contemporary global dynamics, characterised by the movement of people and goods. These dynamics form the foundation for emerging forms of belonging and ways of inhabiting the Earth that extend beyond traditional nation-state boundaries. By rethinking these parameters, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity and community in a globalised world.

Mbembe’s Reflection on Cosmopolitanism

The anti-globalisation movements have cultivated counter-collectives united in solidarity and resistance against the detrimental consequences of contemporary globalisation. (cf. Badger 2014) The idea of “cosmopolitanism from below” describes this horizontal and transversal struggle that brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. (cf. KURASAWA 2004; Borghi 2019; Ingram 2018) Such movements manifest in many contexts

worldwide, ranging from local neighbourhood councils and communal land tenure initiatives to transnational campaigns advocating for women's rights and environmental sustainability. Alongside this idea, Mbembe observes another aspect of cosmopolitanism, specifically concerning the elites. As in "cosmopolitanism from below," its subjects seek to escape the structures of domination and create new conditions of existence, rights, and spaces of possibility that enable the development of culture, economy, and practical intelligence. (Mbembe 2021, pp. 177–179)

Mbembe articulates that the second form of cosmopolitanism is inextricably linked to the complex emergence of a private sphere of life. Several factors influence this trend toward the establishment of a private domain. The first of these is associated with the migration opportunities available to elites, who can distance themselves from familial obligations and mitigate the social control exerted by their communities. The second factor stems from new pathways for wealth accumulation that are primarily unencumbered by state intervention – an avenue legitimised by prevailing ideologies of privatisation. In this context, elites are crafting a new identity, exploring novel horizons of opportunity, and asserting new rights as part of a global citizenship that straddles the line between tradition and modernity, as well as national and transnational domains. This reconfiguration of traditional spaces and identities brings significant advantages in terms of individual rights and property ownership. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the transformative impact of the millions of Africans in the diaspora, who contribute to the development of their home countries.

Furthermore, the cosmopolitan experience of transnational mobility benefits Africa and fosters development in other regions, including China, Europe, and the United States. Moreover, cosmopolitanism introduces an innovative paradigm for considering the individual, society, and politics. The cosmopolitan subject transcends fixed historical identities, embracing a universalist perspective rooted in shared humanity. This approach contrasts with certain philosophical strands in African thought that have sought to delineate African identity in terms of its distinctions from other cultures. Instead, cosmopolitanism foregrounds the affinities and commonalities that exist beyond mere differences. Mbembe elucidates that among African elites, this second form of cosmopolitanism aims to reconstruct African identity and the public realm through the universal imperatives of reason. (cf. Mbembe 2021b, p. 178)

The reconstruction of African cosmopolitan identity unfolds in two dimensions: first, through efforts to reenchant traditions and customs, and second, by emphasising how Africa shares the Earth with all the Living. In this philosophical framework, the discourse on property and rights takes precedence over considerations of racial, cultural, or religious particularities. The lived experience of cosmopolitanism gives rise to a non-essentialist political anthropology that serves as a foundation for rethinking socio-political, artistic, and spiritual existence in Africa and beyond. In this view, Africa is no longer perceived as an isolated entity; instead, it is integrated into the global context, characterised by its rich diversity. (cf. Mbembe 2021b, pp. 177–178) Consequently, the discourse surrounding identity shifts toward focusing on the conditions that facilitate life and the socio-political, cultural, and economic environments in which it can be empowered. (cf. Silva 2009; Appiah 2007)

Thus, Mbembe's analysis offers a profound understanding of cosmopolitanism's theoretical and normative dimensions. From a normative perspective, cosmopolitanism emerges as a doctrine that seeks to address the pervasive issue of contemporary structures of domination. This inquiry is grounded in the empirical realities of domination, juxtaposed with emerging forms of socialisation that advocate for an emancipatory global existence. Appiah, therefore, delineates two critical aspects of cosmopolitanism: The first is an ethical imperative advocating for universal solidarity that transcends citizenship. He posits that our obligations extend beyond those to whom familial or formal ties of citizenship connect us. Intrinsically intertwined with cosmopolitanism is the understanding that we have responsibilities to others that surpass conventional boundaries. (cf. Appiah 2007, p. xv)

While Appiah acknowledges the nation as a valid framework for individual development, he challenges the essentialist notion of national identity. His critique, informed by anthropological and metaphysical insights, embraces the plurality of human existence, viewing diversity as a source of richness rather than a detrimental deviation. The equal recognition of diverse cultures fosters harmonious communities of free and autonomous individuals, all of whom are endowed with equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. Appiah further argues for recognising the intrinsic value of human life in general, the particular lives of individuals, and the unique practices and beliefs that give their lives significance. (cf. Appiah 2007, p. xv)

Thus, cosmopolitanism emerges as a critical response to the ethical and political challenges of coexistence in a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-re-

ligious society. It embodies an ambition for universal solidarity among all humans, ensuring that all peoples and cultures are respected in their dignity, regardless of their differences. (cf. Appiah 2007). (cf. Appiah 2007, p. 15) Unlike a planetary community founded on ethnonational, racial, or religious exclusion, cosmopolitanism envisions a pluralistic world, where all members equally enjoy fundamental rights and are afforded the same privileges of citizenship, autonomy, and freedom in cultural, religious, and political spheres.

Jacques Derrida offers a nuanced interpretation of cosmopolitanism that aligns with previous definitions while introducing a more humanitarian and pragmatic perspective, especially regarding how to treat migrants and refugees amidst state violence. He asks: “How can the right to asylum be redefined and developed without repatriation and naturalisation? Could the City, equipped with new rights and greater sovereignty, open up new horizons of possibility previously undreamt of by international state law?” (Derrida 2003, p. 8) This re-examination of asylum rights calls for a rethinking of political communities that include and accommodate migrants with hospitality. In seeking alternative models for such communities, Derrida proposes the idea of a “free city” (*ville franche*). This concept of a cosmopolitical community, or a “city of refuge,” sharply contrasts with the nation-state’s structure and legal principles. Within this reimagined framework, individuals are viewed through a universal perspective, as Cohen states: “Cosmopolitanism considers the individual in a universal perspective”. (Cohen 1999, p. 25) However, rather than a universal concept of humanity that excludes cultural differences, cosmopolitan universalism acknowledges the diversity of cultures, nations, peoples, and religions that make up humanity. This effort is not just idealistic; it involves a critical engagement with the complexities of human coexistence in the pursuit of justice and recognition within an increasingly interconnected world.

The concept of cosmopolitanism, as explained by Appiah and Derrida, sharply contrasts with Mbembe’s approach, particularly in their core assumptions and goals. Although all three thinkers begin their critique of national legal systems from a shared recognition of the deep violence and oppression experienced by vulnerable populations worldwide – based on their origins, race, or religion – they differ considerably in their philosophical foundations and suggested solutions. Appiah and Derrida base their arguments on classical Western political philosophy, emphasising the inherent rights of individuals as human beings. Their views reflect a normative framework grounded in uni-

versal human rights, supporting the protection of asylum seekers, migrants, undocumented individuals, and those fleeing conflict.

In contrast, Mbembe's framework is deeply rooted in the principles of general ecology, which situates human rights within the broader context of the ecosystem. He argues that the basis of individual rights emerges from an awareness of life's interconnectedness, emphasising that human existence is inextricably linked to other living beings. This discrepancy in the normative justification of rights has significant implications for how we conceptualise normativity. Mbembe's critique seeks to create a protected space for the movement and flourishing of all life forms, transcending a narrow focus on human interests. This broader outlook calls for a paradigm shift from an anthropocentric worldview towards ecological consciousness. Unlike Appiah and Derrida, Mbembe's ideas stem from the Earthly perspective of the Living. As a result, cosmopolitanism is reimagined as a more profound sense of belonging to an Earthly community that grants new mobility rights and breathes new life into all its inhabitants.

Beyond the Nation-State Paradigm

Mbembe's imperative to develop new modalities of inhabiting the planet leads to the essential question: "How can we achieve this, unless by imagining political and state forms and ways of belonging that are ever more flexible, pliable, and mobile?" (Mbembe 2024, p. 104) This question encapsulates his ambition to conceptualize frameworks of belonging that move beyond pervasive mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination.

Central to this discourse is the interrogation of the parameters that delineate state belonging – precisely, the criteria that determine who qualifies as a member of the state, who possesses the right to inhabit its territory, and the underlying principles that govern these delineations. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 37) This interrogation necessitates a rigorous critique of the constructs of nationhood and state sovereignty, especially in their roles as legitimizers of violence, exclusion, and domination against specific populations. In his thorough analysis of global political and legal structures, Mbembe advocates for re-evaluating the legal foundations of mobility rights on Earth. (cf. Mbembe 2022, 92; 104) He posits that if there is an inherent connection between legitimate state violence, territorial sovereignty, and historical racism and colonialism, it becomes essential to establish a legal framework that supports planetary rights of circulation as a countermeasure to the discriminatory nature of migration policies. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 111–113) Herein lies his call for rethinking polit-

ical theory that transcends the nation-state paradigm, emphasising the need to move beyond strict notions of territoriality, borders, and defined belonging to a singular state.

Consequently, Mbembe argues that the basis for planetary mobility rights should stem from the idea that the Earth collectively belongs to all its inhabitants; in other words, no individual can monopolise or exclude others from Earth's vital resources. This conceptualisation links the planetary right to mobility with the right to land ownership and challenges the traditional understanding of state sovereignty and citizenship. In modern political philosophy, territoriality and citizenship are central symbols of state sovereignty, in which a state asserts exclusive claims over a defined territory. Within this framework, only citizens with legal recognition have primary rights to reside in that territory, with the right of residency representing a collective form of sovereignty. This model inadvertently underpins exclusionary migration policies, with borders acting as tangible symbols of such exclusion.

In contrast to this exclusivist notion of territorial ownership, Mbembe advocates for a reconceptualization of a planetary community as the foundation for mobility rights. He argues that contemporary political theory must grapple with the historical paradoxes afflicting those labelled “foreign” by existing political frameworks, who often face exclusion from essential rights within territorial communities, including the right to temporary or permanent residency. The core of the planetary right to mobility posits that states should not exercise sole ownership over territories to obstruct the movement of inhabitants or restrict their residency options. The justification for co-ownership by “foreigners” relies on a reconceptualization of the state's foundation, envisioning it as the Earth in its entirety. Drawing upon African cosmological traditions, one may conclude that the Earth possesses sovereignty by its very nature. (cf. Mbembe 2024, p. 150) This perspective characterizes the Earth not as belonging to a singular entity but as a shared inheritance amongst all its inhabitants. (Mbembe 2022, p. 36)

Ultimately, the assertion of the Earth's sovereignty allows for a critique of the current discourse on territorial sovereignty, which supports the argument for a state's exclusive control over its territory. Recognising that the Earth is sovereign and inalienable requires rethinking the state's authority and legitimacy within the context of planetary rights. The consequence of this discourse is a significant redefinition of the concept of citizenship. (cf. Mbembe 2023, p. 88) Rather than confining citizenship to individuals residing within the borders of a nation-state, it extends to what Mbembe terms the “earthly commu-

nity.” This notion is pivotal, suggesting that “the very nature of the Earth is indeed to make room for all its inhabitants.” Mbembe further posits that every human, along with other entities, embodies not merely universal qualities but the marks of shared existence, highlighting our intrinsic bonds. (cf. Mbembe 2023, p. 84) Just as the Earth accommodates all its residents, so should the State, which derives its conceptual framework from ecological principles that encapsulate the notion of community. Earth’s inherent sovereignty serves as the fundamental standard governing social and political rights to mobility and challenges the biopolitical concept of exclusive territorial sovereignty. It encourages nations to promote fair sharing of Earth’s resources, ensuring the well-being of all its inhabitants.

Conclusion

This chapter examines Mbembe’s concepts of planetary rights, focusing on their significance, key principles, and central themes. His analysis reveals that contemporary power structures often depend on segregationist ideas linked to rights, citizenship, sovereignty, and national identity. These systems promote domination not only among individuals but also between humans and the environment, impacting Nation-States and global ecological systems. To challenge these mechanisms, Mbembe suggests rethinking the concept of planetary rights. This new concept aims to create a global community rooted in sharing, reciprocity, repair, and the circulation of life. The right to circulate questions the notion that one state has sole control over its territory. His cosmological argument emphasises Earth’s sovereignty over individual states. Additionally, the discussion emphasises the close connection between the right to breathe and the right to mobility, proposing that the former sustains living communities and fosters an Earth-centred community where fair resource sharing supports the sustainability of life. Finally, the chapter examines how Mbembe’s planetary rights intersect with cosmopolitanism, arising from the need to bridge human divisions and address unequal access to rights and resources. These ideas share essential similarities with Mbembe’s concept of the planetary, though they are distinct in key ways. The upcoming chapter will examine how Mbembe’s concept of planetary rights underpins ideas of planetary justice, including its meaning, origins, goals, and normative features.