

Conclusion: Towards Afroplanetarianism

“All of us have our own life destination, a place we are trying to reach. And for everyone, there is the possibility of getting there someday. We just don't know where that promised fountain is located. But one we get there, we realize that this is it, this is the place we have longed for. We realize and experience the meaning of our life.”

— Mosatsugu Momotake

Two significant encounters have profoundly influenced my introduction to philosophy: Martin Heidegger and Achille Mbembe. My engagement with Heidegger's work accompanied me throughout my Master's degree in philosophy, which I completed in 2012 at the Catholic University of Central Africa in Yaoundé, Cameroon. In contrast, Mbembe's thought has been central to my doctoral research, which I began in 2020 at the University of Münster in Germany, and the outcomes of which are published in this book. When referencing Heidegger, I do not intend to suggest a direct connection between his philosophy and Mbembe's; instead, I aim to clarify the historical and philosophical context that sparked my interest in Mbembe. This background provides the context for a critical re-evaluation of the initial aims I set for my research into his work. After outlining this context, I will discuss several strengths of Mbembe's philosophy, especially its framing of ethical and political questions relevant to our time. I will briefly explain how this thought broadens new perspectives in contemporary debates about the future of life on Earth, initiated by those advocating for environmental ethics, global justice, or planetary ethics and justice. This critical re-examination will establish the foundation for exploring the concept of afroplanetarianism, which I propose

as a way to reimagine the future of life in Africa and worldwide, beyond the limitations of critical historicism and utopianism that characterise Mbembe's thought.

How to Philosophise in Death-Worlds?

My experience of socio-political and economic turmoil in my native Cameroon – and in various other African countries I have visited – has shaped my philosophical inquiries. The political landscape in which I was conducting my studies was characterised by profound violence and socio-political inequalities. In 2012, shortly after completing my Master's thesis on the question of ontological difference in Heidegger, I witnessed the eruption of violence caused by the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Cameroon. This conflict was followed by the brutal repression of populations advocating for educational and juridical reforms in the English-speaking regions of the country. These two geopolitical crises, marked by significant loss of life and massive displacement, were compounded by Cameroon's authoritarian rule of President Paul Biya, who has held power for over forty years.

But beyond these tragedies, what characterises Cameroon's crisis, as well as the crises in other African and European countries I have visited, is the experience I mentioned in the introduction to this book: the concept of the death-world. This refers to a common sense shared by many populations regarding the absurdity of life and its value, as well as the loss of understanding of humans' potential to overcome the socio-political, economic, and environmental crises of our time. This loss of meaning and wonder about human existence on Earth manifests negatively through increased pessimism, relativism, or catastrophism, signalling the end of history. Notably, the crisis has also manifested as an escape from history, with one primary symptom being the devaluation of the human. This imaginary of escape moves in two directions: upwards, with a rise – particularly in northern hemisphere countries – of blind faith in technology as an unconditional substitute for humans; or downwards, with a romantic revival – especially among some peoples of the southern hemisphere – of the belief in an original harmony between humans and nature, and the hope of finding within it a soul supplement to overcome our contemporary tragedies.

Thus, the demotion of humans in their essential uniqueness inevitably led to the emergence of a particular kind of relationship with life in general, char-

acterised by relativism or romantic indifference. In either case, humans were no longer regarded as a significant event, whose realisation of their incommensurable value and inner potential could enable them to overcome crises encountered in the realms of thought and sociopolitical, ecological, and technological action. Having lost faith in themselves, they were valued only insofar as they were constantly dependent on external supplements – technology or natural forces – whose ultimate aim was to avoid death. This perpetual struggle against death, which paradoxically led to the rejection of concrete reality, became the foundation of the bond humans maintained with the collective. It not only resulted in the obliteration of the sense of their belonging to the world as individuals and as a political community, but also in the withering of all hope regarding the development of their potential on Earth.

While Heidegger's work introduced me to the importance of the question of being through the lens of ontological difference, it offered limited guidance on how to overcome the existential and philosophical crises of the death-world I faced. Sure, Heidegger's concerns primarily focused on what distinguishes humans from other beings. His thesis suggests that humans are not engaged with the world like a tree; instead, they are open to being through what he calls the *Ereignis*, which could be interpreted as the divine aspect of humanity. However, in contrast to ontotheology, which defines the divine in terms of a transcendent horizon, Heidegger approaches it through the existence of *Dasein*. In Heidegger's view, humans reveal the *Ereignis*, implying that it is in everyday life where humanity demonstrates its unique capacity for self-reflection, existential questioning, and the awareness of mortality. This philosophical framework raises essential questions about reconciling such ontological ideas with the concrete realities of the death-world in my country, Cameroon, and abroad. Recognising human despair and the loss of hope for a better, sustainable life for all, as an alternative to the political and economic brutality experienced in Cameroon and elsewhere, leads me to question Heidegger's thoughts on the ontological difference between humans and other entities. It was this questioning that sparked my initial encounter with Achille Mbembe's work.

From Ontology to Ethics: The Utopia of the In-Common

As I outline in this book, the core focus of Achille Mbembe's philosophy extends beyond the traditional search for an ontotheological being; instead, it revolves

around the concept of the human relation to the whole Living. Although this emphasis might not be immediately apparent in his earlier writings, a critical re-evaluation reveals how this perspective has evolved. Consequently, the motivation behind my engagement with his thought was twofold.

Firstly, I identified specific limitations within Heidegger's philosophy, particularly regarding the meaning and implications of ontological difference. Overcoming these limitations, I believed, required a shift toward Mbembe's philosophy, which highlights the necessity of grounding ethically and politically the conditions for a new human relationship to the Living being – *le Vivant* – rather than merely questioning being itself. Second, I was convinced that moving beyond Heidegger's ontology can transform our understanding of humanity's role, guiding principles of behaviour, and relationships with all living entities towards the tragic realities of the death-world. By prioritising life over ontology, I sought, through Mbembe's work, to explore a method for overcoming the crises I faced, along with their effects – such as pessimism, relativism, and romantic indifference – that characterise our death-worlds, from which new principles of conduct may be derived.

This attempt to transcend the pitfalls of metaphysics motivated me to study Mbembe's philosophy more closely. His reflection begins with observing what he describes as the widespread circulation of death in Africa and globally, evident in concepts like necropolitics, politics of enmity, or brutality. In response, he adopts the methods of critical historicism and utopia. While the first method aims to uncover the historical roots of today's sociopolitical, economic, and technological crises, the second seeks to think, from a normative perspective, about ethical and political proposals to address them. These solutions involve reflection on the cosmological foundations to build sustainable relationships between humans and all living beings on Earth.

Rethinking the conditions for the sustainability and resilience of life on Earth, as a way to transcend the tragic realities of our death-worlds, involves rediscovering what humans share with other living beings and drawing on essential principles for positive and transformative conduct. Instead of pursuing onto-theological solutions, what is needed is a critical reflection on the intrinsic bonds that connect humans beyond differences based on gender, race, class, and species. My aim, therefore, was to examine how Mbembe's cosmology, ethics, and politics – defined by the core idea of human entanglement with all living entities – ground such common principles of sustainable and durable life on Earth, whose goal is to facilitate individual and collective action globally, as well as serve as a model for planetary community, rights, and justice.

The initial ethical principle, which could help humans transcend the tragedies of the death-world and is rooted in general ecology, is renunciation. This concept suggests that individuals, as passersby, should guide their behaviour through self-renunciation, involving the relinquishment of all forms of unrestricted power over living entities. Two main arguments support the thesis of renunciation. First, it is recognised that the presence of passersby is ephemeral; second, the idea is that any exclusive claim to control a specific territory will ultimately be illegitimate. My examination of these arguments has led me to reflect on the meaning, foundations, and consequences of ethical principles of sharing and repairing, as complements to the principle of renunciation. These three principles advocate for the redistribution of life resources among all living entities on Earth as a prerequisite for the sustainability and resilience of the entire ecosystem. They are essential to conceptualise an earthly community, rights, and planetary justice.

The Conditions of a Terrestrial Community

The utopian vision of an earthly community, grounded in the passer-by's ethics and the politics of living, raises critical questions that deserve consideration. The goal is not to challenge the ethical validity of the principles underpinning this vision nor to doubt the strength of its cosmological arguments or conclusions. Instead, the focus is on clarifying the conditions required to realise the utopia Mbembe proposes, highlighting the unspoken aspects – those ambiguities often ignored due to limitations in discourse or the challenges inherent in the questions themselves. These overlooked elements are crucial for understanding how to achieve the aim of utopia. A key point is recognising that not all individuals experience the same living conditions. The reality of global material and socio-political disparities is so significant that it cannot simply be dismissed by a utopian narrative, regardless of its importance.

Although the Earth is a single entity, its resources are unevenly distributed; access to wealth and opportunity is often unequal. Some populations have greater access to resources, while others face systemic barriers that hinder participation in political, economic, and technological progress. Additionally, historical contexts complicate discussions of responsibility for the damage to relationships between people and other living beings globally. Even though it is ethically justifiable to claim shared responsibility among humans, we must recognise the historical injustices committed by certain groups alongside those victimised at different times. Therefore, the responsibility for repar-

ative actions cannot be shared equally. Recognising these disparities in our collective experience of the world is not an assertion that such inequalities are unchangeable; instead, it emphasises the importance of seeking factual truths about history.

As Mbembe contends, this recognition is crucial for promoting justice and reconciliation, thus opening the way for meaningful responses to the ethical challenges of communal living. From this perspective, we can raise several important questions about the relevance of Mbembe's philosophy: Does it truly empower the marginalised towards political and economic liberation, or does it risk entrenching new forms of exploitation by those in power? What does a common world mean within a global socio-political and economic landscape marked by ongoing inequalities and deeply rooted structures of violence? How do we assess the significance of ethical principles, such as renunciation, reparation, and truth, in response to the pressing demands of oppressed groups for genuine empowerment?

Without tangible acts of justice and reparation, one might reasonably argue that this utopian vision risks becoming a new ideology that sustains existing power dynamics. By emphasising ethical and political norms of renunciation and reparation for all living beings, the concept of planetary may obscure significant differences, both in problem formulation and in the development of practical solutions. The core of this critique is simple: for the idea of a terrestrial community based on planetary rights to be meaningful and relevant, it must catalyse dismantling the current status quo. This revolution necessitates a shift towards an emancipatory framework for those oppressed by unjust systems, rather than a mere collective utopia that overlooks the realities of exploitation and inequality. Only through such a transformative approach can we hope to redefine the pursuit of a just and equitable earthly community.

To thoroughly appreciate the critique presented, it is vital to revisit the foundational context of my inquiry. As I have previously stated, my engagement with Achille Mbembe's thought was driven by the urgent experience of political and economic violence in my homeland, Cameroon. On one hand, Mbembe's exploration resonated with me on an existential level, going beyond mere philosophical and theoretical interest. The importance of Mbembe's ethical framework lies in his ability to draw from African and global histories – such as colonialism, slavery, and other systemic violence – to critique the underlying structures of being, identity, and difference that continue to cause harm. In this perspective, ethics is no longer limited to personal conduct; instead, it broadens to include a planetary scope aimed at nurturing and healing

the living. I believe this conception of ethics has the potential to transform significantly our understanding of crises that threaten individuals and communities worldwide, as well as the particular challenges I face in my own life.

The lack of a precise formulation of actionable solutions that empower the oppressed with the epistemic and practical means for their liberation raises serious concerns. The ethic of the passer-by, central to the vision of an earthly community, risks becoming an ideology of domination cleverly disguised as an ethic of coexistence. This does not challenge the validity of ethical principles or their intended purpose; instead, it questions the silence surrounding the necessary means to achieve the stated goals. By encouraging a re-examination of these means – specifically, the preconditions and practical capacities required for implementing coexistence – this critique assesses the relevance of such ethics in relation to their actual impact on those who endure injustice daily. This rethinking of ethics critically reflects the aims that guided my initial research on Achille Mbembe. Far from expressing disillusionment with the solutions he has proposed for today's crises, this critique seeks to go beyond them. Recognising the limitations within his extensive work provides a foundation for exploring what lies beyond the proposed solutions by emphasising the conditions necessary for their full realisation. From this perspective, it is essential to consider the criticism Mbembe has faced in recent years – particularly concerning his role in co-organising, alongside some actors from African civil society, the Africa-France summit at the request of French President Emmanuel Macron.

While this engagement may be justified within the framework of international cooperation, it inevitably raises important questions. Is this involvement truly aligned with liberating African nations from Western political and economic dominance, whose so-called *Francafrrique* is considered one of its tools? How can we assess the relevance of the pan-African civil society structure established under Mbembe's leadership, known as the Foundation for Innovation and Democracy in Africa, in genuinely defending the interests of Africa's populations against Western Global Institutions, given that these institutions are the Foundation's principal financial supporters? Therefore, it is not surprising that some critics perceive a contradiction between Mbembe's political efforts and his original critique of neo-colonial domination. Although such engagement cannot be fully equated with his theoretical work, it highlights certain limitations of that work, especially when considering the often complex relationship between theory and practice.

Beyond merely exposing the contradictions between theory and practice, this commitment highlights the limitations of the planetary approach to contemporary political crises – specifically, its failure to adequately consider the conditions necessary for realising the utopia of an earthly community. To address this, we must collaboratively reflect on our singularities and shared experiences as essential elements of authentic political thought. Considering singularities does not mean succumbing to metaphysical essentialism; instead, it requires an awareness of the contingency underlying the human political condition. Recognising this contingency – encompassing inequalities and injustices – enables us to develop solutions that respect the ideal of a shared world while outlining the tangible conditions for its realisation. This endeavour demands the dismantling of institutions and structures of predation that permeate both impoverished nations and the broader global context, characterised by political, economic, and technological exploitation.

What Can We Expect from Philosophy?

Mbembe recognises the unique historical trajectories of societies. The manifestations of power, violence, and domination, alongside modes of resistance shaped by slavery and colonisation, have historically varied across different regions. However, merely acknowledging these distinctions is insufficient; it is equally essential to propose nuanced solutions tailored to each community's specific needs. We must provide pathways for people to reclaim their economic, political, and technological autonomy. Framing the problem in this manner does not entail abandoning ethics; instead, it involves critically examining the tangible conditions necessary for ethical realisation, transcending mere utopian aspirations. These objectives, though relevant, raise several questions that I do not wish to discuss in depth here, but rather highlight as openings towards a search beyond Mbembe's thought. The first and perhaps most fundamental question concerns the very status of our research: what can philosophy do in times of crisis? Is there any hope? Or is all hope in vain? This question interrogates the status of philosophy in the face of vulnerability in all its forms.

On one hand, philosophy is called to seek truth. Humanity is both unified and diverse. This unity in diversity is felt in life's joyful and sorrowful moments. On one hand, all humans experience this unity simply through their biological nature, as Mbembe reminds us. We all require air, water, Earth, and the es-

sential elements for survival on our planet. We also feel unity during moments of joy and happiness, through friendship, love, and solidarity among people, whether in politics, economics, culture, or religion. It is essential to acknowledge the unity of the human experience and condition as part of the existence of living beings. However, while it is true that humanity is one, together with the living, it is also true that there are many humanities, many worlds, and that the experience of living varies across different parts of the Earth. The question is how to thematise the experience of multiplicity without obscuring the truth of commonality. Answering this question is not only an act of truth from a theoretical perspective; it is also an act of ethical responsibility and justice towards those who, although aware of their unity with the human race, tragically experience the reality of their singularity. This argument is all the more compelling given that these individuals make up the majority of the human population. It consists not only of those who have faced historical violence but also of those who continue to experience it today. What relevant response can philosophy offer these populations? This question leads us into the second dimension of philosophy, namely the need for modesty and humility.

Philosophy can be humble and modest in asking questions and providing answers about the crises of complex human experience, mainly when this experience occurs within a dominant context. By “humility” and “modesty,” I mean ethical qualities that arise from the heart, rather than the earlier-mentioned pursuit of truth, which is an intellectual attitude. From the heart, philosophy finds the need for compassion towards the most vulnerable. Compassion primarily involves listening to their grievances. This listening is possible when philosophy recognises that they are the primary recipient of its message. Even if philosophy has a universal aim, it cannot be deaf to the cries of suffering that come from ongoing worldly experience. To listen does not mean praising the differences at the core of humanity, but acknowledging the tragic reality of inequalities and domination.

Humility entails providing conditions for sharing. These are the appropriate words to address those excluded from humanity for various reasons. What do we say to help them out of this situation? This question introduces us to the third dimension of philosophy, which involves the courage and boldness of the right word. While the pursuit of truth stems from the intellect, humility arises from the heart, and audacity from free will. It is the capacity to stand with the weak and craft responses that restore strength rather than sustain the status quo, under the guise of offering a universal message. In the specific context of reflecting on political crises in Africa, I have introduced the concept of

“Afroplanetarianism” to describe this ability to unite intellect, heart, and will. (cf. Téwéché 2023) The importance of these aspects of our shared humanity becomes crucial in finding solutions to the complex crises confronting African populations and their diaspora.

Afroplanetarianism seeks to rediscover what it truly means to be human in this critical modern era. This calling applies to all people and communities who endure domination in religious, political, cultural, and economic spheres. The personal and collective experience of such domination necessitates a radical re-evaluation of philosophy’s role and mission in understanding and addressing daily crises, while providing meaningful responses. It is less about creating a new ethical or political theory of reality than providing individuals with tools to break free from their chains, wherever they may be, and to stand up again both as individuals and as a community. Through their intelligence, they uncover the secrets of their oppression, the meaning of their life, and what it truly means to live on this Earth. This question is neither political nor anthropological but existential. Thanks to their heart, those who ask this question realise that only they can free themselves from their daily circumstances. In other words, general ethical principles are illuminated by the practical realism of reflection. Ultimately, free will enables the application of concrete means to achieve the understanding gained by the faculties of both the intellect and the heart. In essence, it is vital to actively pursue autonomy without relying on the hope of redemption from an old master.

Any experience of the world is inherently linked to the ability to rediscover these vital resources of the intellect, the heart, and the will. Rediscovering the resources embedded within these fundamental human faculties for understanding and challenging political struggles on the African continent and its diaspora is a key condition for gaining autonomy from current structures of domination. Furthermore, I will argue, it is the only condition necessary for building, with the rest of the world, an earthly community founded on the ideals of ethics and planetary justice as envisioned by Achille Mbembe.

Towards Afroplanetarianism

When we think of Africa, a specific region of the southern hemisphere often comes to mind – its diverse population, rich cultures, languages, and traditions. Africa represents a treasure trove of knowledge and practices that shape the lives of its people in our daily imagination. However, from the perspective

of afroplanetarianism, this land – the African continent – is seen as a fragment of Earth's crust, which itself originated from a colossal explosion billions of years ago. Africa is simply a spark of this primordial explosion of Life, alongside other continents, planets, and galaxies. This explosion, which occurred in the distant past, continues to unfold through Africa's present. Yet this Life is not confined to a specific place; its boundaries extend infinitely. This is also true of Africa. Its boundaries are limitless. This implies that wherever Life flourishes, Africa is present: it lives and breathes in every mineral, plant, animal, and human face on Earth. Every element of this planet can be a source of creativity that contributes to Africa's Life.

Considering the conditions for a sustainable life in Africa means becoming aware of this intrinsic continuity with Life originating from the primordial explosion. Afroplanetarianism seeks to express the significance and reality of this belonging, its dynamic and ongoing evolution, of which African societies, along with the mineral, animal, or plant worlds, bear marks. This suggests that the death-worlds Africans experience are merely shadows hiding a much larger, more profound reality: *Life in its infinite expansion*. Just as every element that makes up the universe contains within it the spark of Life, so does every part of Africa, regardless of its appearance, form a fragment of this continuum. Beyond recognising this *event*, Afroplanetarianism raises the question of how each African, wherever they are, can express this Life through their thoughts and everyday actions, *in common* with the rest of the world.

Answering this question requires a new way of rethinking the meaning of human presence within the planetary dynamic of Life, of which Africa is a sign. While the critique of Western modernity has revealed the irrationality humans are capable of, particularly regarding the reasonable use of their powers, knowledge, and possessions, it has not yet shown us the ultimate horizon of Life. In other words, humanity has not yet answered the question of what truly makes human beings human and how to positively manifest the powers of their intelligence, heart, and free will for their own well-being, the well-being of their fellow beings, and the sustainability of planetary Life. Addressing this question requires the rehabilitation of anthropology not merely as a discipline, but as a daily transformative practice.

In other words, according to Afroplanetarianism, anthropology is no longer solely an abstract answer to the question of the meaning and purpose of human Life on Earth. This philosophical question must give way to the transformative practice of each individual in daily life. At the core of this transformation are self-work – the daily cultivation of the potential of intelligence,

heart, and free will – and the discovery of the meaning and incomparable value of our presence in this world, beyond historical contingencies. Such a work of transformation nevertheless requires a horizon for its manifestation. It is within the social and political environment, through the practical realisation of a concrete task, that it is accomplished. By *dialectical utopia*, I mean the sociopolitical, cultural, economic and spiritual transformation that emerges from the individual subject's self-awareness of their original bond to the source of Life.

The historical horizon manifests not as a foundation or an end goal, but as a laboratory for experimenting with the various models inspired by the subjects' creative imagination. The result of such a dialectic is the creation of innovative models of living together that are no longer solely based on knowledge derived from the past, but on the realisation of the immeasurable richness of each human potential – intelligence, heart, and will. Such a vision of individuals and societies in their becoming within space and time has the merit of drawing lessons from the past, without, however, hypostatizing its concepts and paradigms. Above all, what prevails is the implementation through daily action and reflection – both as individuals and as a community – of the ultimate potentials of imagination that humans possess, for the positive transformation of their existence and their environment.

Such a vision contrasts in its foundations, means, and purpose with the visions of critical historicism or utopian thought, due to its pragmatic realism on the one hand and its heuristic and symbolic value on the other. Pragmatic realism means taking into account the limits of human contingency, that is, what humans are capable of achieving within the scope of their current knowledge and means. On the other hand, from a heuristic perspective, this vision draws on knowledge of historical human societies, their ways of thinking, acting, and inhabiting the world, as well as established practices. However, these knowledges from the past are not regarded as definitive truths about humans and Life, but as hypostases of a deeper reality which, in itself, eludes all form. This reality is Life, of which each individual and collective history is only an imperfect manifestation. Finally, from a symbolic point of view, this vision recognises the essential value of each human person for the manifestation of the terrestrial becoming of planetary Life.

Wherever they are located, every human being is recognised as an essential part of this Life that flows from its origins, of which Africa is an integral component. In other words, every human is regarded, in body, mind and history as a manifestation of a deeper reality that transcends their subjective experi-

ence. However, this notion of transcendence should not be viewed as a utopian fantasy, but rather as the result of critical reflection and transformative action on oneself and the world, with the lived social experience in space and time serving as its horizon. Africa, being part of this horizon, participates in this movement of planetary self-transformation, of which Life is the principle and the ultimate goal.