Chapter 1: The Planetary Community

Introduction

A primary survival strategy in the face of poverty, war, and limited vital resources is to retreat into one's identity. In this context, it is common to identify strongly with a particular ethnic, national, or racial group and fiercely defend one's interests. These interests are not solely material or economic; they can also be cultural, religious, or political, often involving issues of race, gender, and other social identities. Behind every claim to identity lies a hope for survival in a death-world. Although this approach protects the specific interests of a community or group, especially those with more power, it also raises concerns about its long-term effects on all living beings. Pursuing specific interests can create divisions between communities, leading to conflicts, segregation, and even wars. The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy offers an essential insight in this context. He argues: "The dissolution, dislocation and conflagration of communities represents the most significant and distressing testimony of the modern world." (1990, p. 11) This chapter examines ways to address the modern problem of community dislocation by exploring Mbembe's idea of a planetary community. It highlights its main principles and key components. Additionally, it discusses how Mbembe's concept, which encompasses the collective interests of all living beings – humans and biodiversity – offers a compelling rationale for advocating for planetary rights and justice. This topic will be further developed in subsequent chapters.

I. The Foundations of the Planetary Community

Through a critical review of the current global situation, especially the numerous crises affecting relationships between individuals and communities driven

by the pursuit of exclusive control over power and resources, Mbembe's political philosophy endeavours to explain the conditions under which a new form of human relation can be established that sustains life. Humanity's progress is only possible within a community that requires a redefinition of its essence. After exploring Mbembe's concept of a planetary community, this chapter will examine one of its key features: its planetary scope. The aim is to clarify the idea of the 'planetary community', its core features, guiding principles and purpose. An analysis of this question is framed within a broader reflection on the ideas of "imperative of declosion" or the "politics of rising humanity" addressed by Mbembe in his book *Out of the Dark Night*. (2021b)

I.1 The *In-Common* as the Basis of Community

While contemporary political philosophy bases its concept of community on anthropocentrism, emphasising the centrality of human beings in defining community, general ecology relies on what I interpret as Mbembe's biocentrism. This perspective highlights the common life force that exists in all beings and entities on Earth.

From Anthropocentrism to Biocentrism

Mbembe's concept of community is rooted in the assumption of general ecology outlined in the first chapter of *The Earthly Community* (2022). The core assumption of general ecology is that all living beings on Earth share a fundamental trait: they have a "body." The concept of the "body" here refers to Earth itself, which supports the life of all these organisms, as evidenced by terms like "body of the Earth" and "body in its earthly dimension." This suggests that the entities that compose the earthly community are interconnected through an exchange of vital organic properties that sustain the life they share on Earth. This definition of entities based on their bodies is essential for understanding Mbembe's concept of the community, which is seen as that "common" element that the Earth possesses, as evidenced in phrases such as "common fabric," "common soil," and "common thing". (Mbembe 2023, pp. 87–89) By this, Mbembe means the constituents of humans, animals, fungi, plants, viruses, and bacteria – all forms of life that exist in diverse ways but are part of the same living system. (Mbembe 2023, p. 127)

What defines them is the fact that they share in "common" properties such as air, water, matter, and energy. (Mbembe 2023, p. 111) Sharing these core qualities allows members of Earth's community – such as humans, animals, plants,

and minerals – to undergo various forms of transformation, as demonstrated by the coexistence of organisms on Earth's surface. Building on pre-colonial African cosmogonies and engaging with the phenomenology of the body, as developed by philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is essential for examining the nature of beings, seen as the intrinsic condition for the sustainability and vitality of the earthly community. (Mbembe 2023, p. 111) In other words, general ecology advocates for a shift from an anthropocentric view to a biocentric perspective on planetary habitability and community. To fully understand the meaning of biocentrism, it is essential to differentiate it from interpretations offered by physicists and proponents such as Robert Lanza and Bob Berman. (Lanza and Berman 2010)

Mbembe's biocentrism arises from the 'general ecology' framework, as I have outlined earlier. By assuming that no human being or society exists outside their body and that the body is inseparably connected to the Earth, it follows that humans are part of the terrestrial community. From this ecological perspective, life is seen less as static and more as a complex, dynamic community of interconnected beings that cannot be simplified into single forms. This immanent structure mirrors human coexistence with their environment and the entire living world. It follows that, despite its unique characteristics, every human body bears the imprints of the universe both externally and internally. To grasp the essence of humanity and the concept of an earthly community, it is vital to consider the biological processes shared with all other living organisms on Earth. Humans only define themselves, create culture, inhabit territories, develop knowledge, and practise religion within the broader community of living beings.

The Hospitality of the Earthly Community

Raising the question of the meaning of the terrestrial community from the perspective of biocentrism and general ecology involves examining the Earth's inhospitable nature, which results from a rupture between humans, their fellow creatures, and their environment. The planet's inhospitability indicates its inability to sustain life in the long term. However, for Mbembe, this environmental crisis must not be conflated with transcendent causes or with metaphysical determinism, as articulated by Mathews (2010), Hamilton (2017), Adelman (2021), and Kotzé and Kim (2022). Instead, Mbembe postulates that this crisis is rooted in human actions and decisions. In the Anthropocene epoch, humans have emerged as a geological force. (cf. McEwan 2021; Chakrabarty 2018; Clark 2017; Davis 2016) The signs of the Anthropocene transition are evident

in climate change, ecosystem destruction, and genetic modifications. (cf. Hamilton 2017) Furthermore, this transformation signals a notable shift between humanity and its environment, impacting the complex web of relationships among humans and the wider Earth community. (cf. Haraway 2015) This rupture exposes the fragility and vulnerability of life itself, including its physical forms, supporting mechanisms, and essential resources, not only for the human race but also for all terrestrial creatures. (cf. Mbembe 2023, p. 154)

Thus, Mbembe's conceptualisation of Earth's habitability extends beyond mere geographical boundaries, encompassing all conditions necessary for the flourishing of living beings. These conditions are not solely material – such as housing, nutrition, and health – but they also highlight symbolic aspects, including the importance of sharing existence with others, asserting rights, and fulfilling responsibilities within socio-political and cultural frameworks that extend beyond ethnic, national, or continental borders. As articulated by the philosopher Nadia Yala Kisukidi (2020), inhabitation implies residing within a territory where the full range of human potential is not forcibly suppressed, and where the means of subsistence necessary for a dignified life are guaranteed. (cf. Mbembe and Sarr 2022, pp. 107–108) Therefore, the material prerequisites for habitability are deeply intertwined with ethical, political, and cultural contexts. Such frameworks allow human beings to navigate life purposefully and cohabit peacefully with all living entities. Kodjo-Grandvaux Séverine further develops this idea of "habitability as she states:

> "World-making means inhabiting a world that is mine, because it makes meaning for me and because it permits me to reaffirm my belonging to a world that also belongs to me and in which I fully participate, since I co-produce it with others and with the whole of the living. But that is not all. This world is vaster still. I must expand it to the scale of the cosmos and understand that every world-memory is a cosmic memory." (Kodjo-Grandvaux Séverine 2022, p. 184)

Thus, human habitation of the Earth extends beyond simple physical or geographical presence; it involves a deep engagement with the living world itself. It requires active and cooperative creation that reshapes human relationships with the environment. The capacity to genuinely engage with all dimensions of human life enhances collective human potential, allowing humans to create a shared world that includes all living beings. When the essential conditions for a universally accessible life are met, people from all backgrounds – regard-

less of their origins, race, nationality, class, or gender – can inhabit and share the world. This dynamic interaction fosters an environment that supports life within the larger context of the Earth. It highlights humanity's responsibility to address disparities in conditions that affect different communities and ecosystems.

I.2 The Planetary Living

This section aims to clarify the notion of "planetary" within Mbembe's work, providing a more detailed interpretation of his political philosophy and ethical considerations. By examining Mbembe's concept of the 'planetary', I will trace its origins and development, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the meanings, principles, and ultimate aims that inform his vision of a planetary community. The analysis will adopt a critical approach, engaging with authors whose works intersect with Mbembe's in direct or indirect dialogue. These thinkers propose a transformative model for planetary coexistence that challenges the historically ingrained objectives of power and domination.

The Planetary Shift in Human History

The discourse surrounding the planet has expanded in recent years, sparking numerous debates, conferences, and academic publications. (cf. Bonneuil 2023) Mbembe's reflection on the notion of the planetary emphasises this shift, arguing that "the emerging paradigm is that 'human societies and the Earth have now forged a tenuous unity." (Mbembe 2021b, p. 88) In other words, the paradigmatic shift in perspective within contemporary social sciences moves away from the notion that human beings and societies are separate from nature. (cf. Bonneuil 2023; Elias and Moraru 2015; Drengson 1980; Green 2022) The term 'Anthropocene' is central to this discussion, capturing the idea that humanity has become a geological force capable of causing significant changes in the planet's atmosphere, geosphere, and biosphere on a global scale. (cf. Lynch and Veland 2018) This reframing challenges the traditional view of human existence by portraying individuals as active participants in the Earth's geological narrative. (cf. Rockström 2015)

In this light, examining Mbembe's contributions to the concept of planetary broaden our understanding of political ethics within an interconnected global community. Mbembe's idea of "Planetary" embodies the recognition of the interrelation between nature and society, as well as between human and non-human entities. (Mbembe 2021b, p. 88) The idea of the planetary sug-

gests that the specificities and differences of cultures, histories, languages, and even socio-political conditions do not eliminate the commonality of the world, which remains the sole unifying factor among all terrestrial life forms. Mbembe argues:

> "We only have one world. We might dream about colonizing Mars or Venus or other unknown planets in the future, but for the time being that is not part of our actuality. We only have one world, one solar system and for this world to last as long as possible and for this solar system not to calcinate life as such, we need to become a bit more intelligent and wiser." (Mbembe 2021d, p. 126)

One might question what "We" that Mbembe references here actually means. Addressing this question involves considering the concept of "world." From a broad ecological perspective, Mbembe's notion of the "world" refers to the relationship among humans, all living organisms, and the universe. The "world" is not simply an a priori subjectively lived experience of the relationship between humans and their fellow humans or the Earth. Instead, it is the fundamental condition of this relationship, encompassing terrestrial existence, the body, breath, and life. This definition thus informs Mbembe's idea of the planetary. Judith Butler explains how this idea challenges the realities of differences rooted in colonial histories and epistemologies. She quotes Mbembe's assertion that "the political in our time must start from the imperative to reconstruct the world in common." (cf. Butler 2022a, p. 6) Furthermore, she articulates the necessity of scrutinising the epistemological ramifications accompanying this shift from a human-centric worldview to one that embraces the concept of the planetary. This perspective holds the promise of addressing and potentially redressing global power inequities, challenging prevailing paradigms of nationalism, militarism, and coloniality, and confronting the ecological crisis faced by the terrestrial community today. (cf. Butler 2022a, p. 6)

Moreover, in her inaugural lecture titled, "Planetary Thinking in the Era of Global Warming," delivered on the occasion of her appointment as Professor of Continental Philosophy at Leiden University on Monday, 20 November 2023, the philosopher Susanna Lindberg clearly emphasises the urgent need for continental philosophy to make a planetary turn towards an awareness of the "ecological disaster" that our terrestrial human history is facing. (cf. Lindberg 2025) In the same vein as Mbembe and Butler, and particularly thinkers such as Hans Jonas, Bruno Latour, Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Dipesh

Chakrabarty, among others, whom she cites, Lindberg delineates three essential dimensions of the planetary turn in continental philosophy: epistemological, ethical, and political. She states:

"I do believe that continental philosophy has a specific role to play in the task of thinking contemporary planetary disasters, because, more than most other academic disciplines, it can make sense of the affective charge of a situation. It can conceptualize, that is, disaster, disorientation, and even despair." (Lindberg 2025, p. 3)

From an epistemological perspective, Lindberg recognises that the turning point to which the current ecological crisis invites us signifies a shift away from impersonal thought towards a personal experience of the disaster that threatens our being in the world. (Lindberg 2025, pp. 3–4) In Heideggerian terms, it is for our contemporary humanity to experience not finding ourselves at home in the planetary space, since this space does not make sense to us, and we do not know how to orient ourselves within it. The crucial question emerging from this planetary turn is how to understand this new space. Just as with Mbembe and Butler, whose importance of reflection on the world I have just cited in the previous paragraphs, Lindberg explains that the disorientation in which humanity finds itself due to the ecological disaster leads to an ontological reflection on the very question of the meaning of the world as such, which some continental philosophers have thematised in various ways, sometimes as an event, or 'the end of the world'. (Lindberg 2025, pp. 5–6) What these terms have in common is that they invite us to redefine the meaning of the subject's presence in the world, who experiences inhabitation in this devastated planet. By this, it is meant not only a new way of thinking about the world but also a new way of acting, of relating to it and to each of us – in short, both an ethics and a politics based on a new imaginary of reason. (Lindberg 2025, pp. 8–9)

Therefore, based on Butler's analyses, and to Lindberg's reflections, one could argue that Mbembe's planetary concept prompts essential reflections on humanity's need to develop a shared consciousness of the world. This perspective views decolonisation as a courageous act of embracing the world, encouraging humans to dismantle barriers and redefine identity, fostering a collective bond with the planet rather than withdrawing from it. (cf. Butler 2022a, p. 10)

Transcending the Boundaries of Our Worlds

The concept of a planetary community does not precisely align with the idea of 'world.' To understand this difference, it is essential to distinguish Mbembe's interpretation of "planet" from that of "world." The "world" is characterised by

separation, whereas a "planet" signifies radical openness, a shared world that transcends borders. In other words, the idea of a planetary world offers real possibilities that can only be realised through collective effort. Rather than being a tangible reality recognised by all Earth's inhabitants, it is a work that remains incomplete. Mbembe emphasises this idea by focusing on the potential for a shared existence that goes beyond individual experiences, stating:

> "Planetarity has thus a double dimension. On the one hand, there is no planetarity in the absence of a capacity for global representation of the Earth. On the other hand, there is no planetarity without the consciousness of a common belonging to a spatial order embracing all humanity. A planetary consciousness consequently supposes the representation of a world common 'to all men and to all peoples,' a common star." (Mbembe 2024, pp. 29–30)

Although Mbembe's interpretation of the terms "world," "planet," and "globe" sometimes seems ambiguous, these words can be seen to reflect the complex relationship between humans and their environment. Despite differences in languages, cultures, histories, and nationalities, all of humanity is interconnected. These differences are not fundamental; rather, they are temporary phenomena that humans can overcome. Embracing our shared humanity involves recognising our deep interconnectedness with the broader ecosystem. This concept of planetary living is further expanded in a 2022 interview with Gilman, providing additional insight into Mbembe's perspectives.

> "The planetary evokes what we call in French *le vivant*, which in English is something like 'the living world.' *Le vivant* is, for me, the planetary in its multiplicity, in its animate and inanimate forms, as it undergoes its endless process of transformation – a transformation which, for me, has no Omega Point. It is not supposed to reach an apex or a moment of unification."[1]

Mbembe's clarification of the notion "planetary" offers a critical understanding of differences rooted in species, gender, class, race, religion, culture, and nation-states. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 116–117) These specificities that shape identities mask a fundamental reality: the ontological condition of the Living (le Vivant). Additionally, Mbembe's distinction highlights the difficulties in translat-

1 Mbembe, Achille; Gilman, Nils; Blake, Jonathan (2022): How To Develop A Planetary Consciousness? Edited by Noema Magazine. Online. https://www.noemamag.com/how-to-develop-a-planetary-consciousness.

ing the French term 'le Vivant,' which in English can be understood as the 'living world' or the 'planetary.' This refers to essential conditions for Earth's sustainability and coexistence – both organic and inorganic, including plants, minerals, and other forms of life. In his interview, *Thoughts on the Planetary* (2021d) Mbembe explains that understanding humans' relationship to the Earth, as the central body in the solar system, is key to this discussion of the meaning of the notion of the Living world. The Earth is not merely a background for existence; it is also the principle of habitation that links all living beings and their components in terms of definition and relation. Therefore, the Earth can be seen as a living entity. Mbembe asserts:

> "What comes to my mind is the biophysical organic material and mineral order – a geological magma-filled rock topped with the entangled orders of physical, organic phenomena such as plants, animals, minerals and so forth, as well as the artifacts and things and tools we have invented. (...) I find it almost impossible to think of the planetary without thinking about life and about the Earth."[2]

While anthropocentric frameworks emphasise a dualism between humans and the natural world, Mbembe's perspective on general ecology advocates for unity, symbiosis, non-essentialism, and dynamic relationships. This idea first emerged in the article *Life, Sovereignty, and Terror in the Fiction of Amos Tutuola* (2003), wherein Mbembe critiques Western metaphysics' inadequacies in accommodating a notion of human existence that embraces the dynamism of life's interconnectedness with all beings. Furthermore, the detailed analysis of precolonial African cosmogonies strengthens the understanding of the planetary as an indivisible process of life. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 7–9) Recognising this ontological attribute emphasises the relational aspect of human existence, highlighting its non-absolute nature and its communion with all living entities. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 19–20) This relational ontology is clearly reflected in the Dogon metaphysics of Mali, the Yoruba metaphysics of Nigeria, and the cosmological stories of various communities in the Congo Basin, all of which Mbembe examines. (cf. Mbembe 2003) A key idea in general ecology, inspired by African cosmologies, is the emphasis on the principle of animation, primarily through the sharing of vital breath. Breath demonstrates that existence is not an isolated process but a shared life experience of animation,

2 Ibid.

illuminating the interconnectedness that permeates all forms of existence. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 17–18)

The Radical Openness of The Planetary

Although humans can express their ontological connections with all living beings, these representations are inherently limited by their finitude and by the transcendence of life itself. In essence, the planetary resists any complete notion of totality. Therefore, approximation is the only practical epistemological method. This view aligns with the ideas of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, like Mbembe, argues that the planetary exceeds a simple physical depiction of the globe. Mbembe further suggests that the concept of the planetary parallels Edouard Glissant's idea of "Tout-Monde." This term captures the openness of the living world, its irreducibility to a fixed form. To effectively contextualise Glissant's idea, one must invoke the notion of the "rhizome," which recognises the complex interrelations among life forms, reflecting their dynamism and vulnerability to unexpected transformations. Mbembe expresses this perspective by stating:

> "For the rest, life involves a great deal of randomness. By definition, living things are infinitely open, subject to uncertainties and probabilities. Determinism exists, but ultimately it does not govern history. History is fundamentally made up of the unforeseen, of surprises, of things that escape any systematic quantification." (Mbembe 2023, p. 169)

From the perspective of general ecology, living beings are defined by ongoing movement, which drives their change and renewal. Ethically, this view challenges traditional notions of identity, advocating for openness and encouraging a sense of responsibility in accepting life's unpredictability within the planetary system. (cf. Mbembe 2023, p. 187) Gayatri Spivak expressed a similar idea, though using different terms. She maintains the concept of alterity to define her idea of 'planetarity'. In her 1997 article, *Imperatives to Re-Imagine the Planet*, Spivak argues that the term "planetary" should be clearly distinguished from related concepts, such as the planet, Earth, the world, the globe, globalisation, and other similar terms. (cf. Chakravorty Spivak 2015, p. 290) She argues that these familiar terms, which have gained popularity among environmentalists and scholars of sustainability, do not fully capture the depth of the idea of "planetarity", making this concept difficult to translate. The main issue lies in the differing underlying intentions behind

"planetary" and words like "globe" and "Earth". Spivak critiques how the latter terms uphold power relations and obscure the more nuanced significance of the concept of planetarity in tackling ecological and social justice issues. They are often employed to justify contemporary forms of imperialism and the commodification of nature within the dominant capitalist system. She writes:

> "The sense of custodianship of our planet has led to a species of feudality without feudalism, coupled with the method of 'sustainability,' keeping geology safe for good imperialism, emphasizing capital's social productivity but not its irreducible subalternizing tendency. This is what translates and provides the alibi for good global capitalism." (Chakravorty Spivak 2015, p. 291)

In other words, invoking the idea of planetarity does not always serve a positive purpose. This concept can be exploited to promote hegemonic goals. The representation of the entire world, justified through the exercise of power at a given time, may conceal imperialist aims—politically, economically, and culturally. Instead of a totalitarian concept that seeks exclusive rights of appropriation or domination, Spivak proposes a concept of the planet that embraces openness and otherness. It is our experience of living on Earth – recognising its otherness – that influences what Spivak describes as "planetarity." She sees this as encompassing Otherness and everything beyond human control. It involves the shared environment that sustains us and the planet's own alterity, which resists human ownership or protection. Therefore, "planetarity" cannot be fully understood through geopolitical notions of the "globe" because of its profound complexity. This idea supports a view of the world that cannot be reduced to its mere existence or any specific part of it. As Spivak explains:

> "In that era, then, of a breakneck globalization catching up speed, I proposed the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is achieved by the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. [...] The globe is on our computers. It is the logo of the World Bank. No one lives there; and we think that we can aim to control globality. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, indeed are it." (Goetschel and Spivak 1999, p. 338)

To fully grasp Spivak's definition, it is vital to distinguish between "the globe" and "the planet." The first concept signifies a homogenised state that erases differences, characterised by near-complete systematisation and standardi-

sation of social, economic, and cultural norms guiding human interactions. In contrast, the planet denotes an existence within an alternative order of reality, characterised by alterity, as we navigate through it as transient inhabitants. This domain resists efforts at capture, systematisation, or homogenisation, particularly of an imperialist nature. From this viewpoint, "planetarity" is closely connected to our everyday interactions with the world, often perceived as a unified whole but experienced through lenses of distance and the unknown.

II. Towards a Planetary Community

In her interview with Sjoerd van Tuinen, titled *Care in Spite of Carelessness,* Maria Puig de la Bellacasa raises a crucial question, drawing attention to a significant insight about our current time: an increasing disconnection between humanity and the living universe. De la Bellacasa asks, "Do we live in a time of carelessness?" This question underpins Mbembe's discussion of "planetary consciousness," which he considers vital for understanding the true crisis facing the planetary community. I will examine the implications of Mbembe's perspective on planetary politics and demonstrate how he addresses these issues, primarily by reflecting on Ernst Bloch's principle of hope.

II.1 The Concept of Planetary Consciousness

The phrase "planetary consciousness" is frequently used in contemporary discussions of social, political, and environmental issues. (cf. Gidley 2007; Laszlo 2023; 2018; Leiserowitz and Fernandez 2008; Malhotra et al. 2023) Previous authors have mainly situated the concept within environmental discourse. In contrast, Mbembe provides an alternative interpretation within the broader discourse of general ecology.

Definition of the Term: Mbembe and Afro-Diasporic Thought

The ideas of "planetary consciousness" and "the planetary" are absent in Mbembe's seminal work *On the postcolony* (2001), suggesting an evolution in his philosophical thought. In his later work, *Brutalisme* (2020a) he elucidates the notion of planetary consciousness, arguing that it represents a "common world" to all men and all peoples of a shared planet. (cf. Mbembe 2020a, p. 61) This definition is essential for two reasons. First, it establishes

the fundamental idea of planetary consciousness as inherently connected to the "representation of a common world," thereby advancing debates over the concepts of "world," "sharing," and "global citizenship." However, Mbembe differentiates his interpretation of planetary consciousness, seen as a common world, from the idea of global citizenship. He argues that the planetary includes a truly astral consciousness – an inscription within a universe that, while suggesting a terrestrial life, broadens our understanding towards the cosmos. (cf. Mbembe 2020a, p. 61) Furthermore, he advocates for a cosmological perspective that aims to transcend self-representations confined to narrow parameters defined by racial, tribal, or national affiliations.

Furthermore, often referred to as the "common world" or "capacity for care," this idea stands in contrast to the "racial consciousness" that emerged during the early modern period, particularly within the contexts of transatlantic slavery and colonialism. In *Critique of Black Reason* (2017) Mbembe explains how Europe's spatial imagination grew considerably from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, with the Atlantic becoming the centre of a new interconnection of worlds and the site of a fresh planetary awareness. (Mbembe 2017, p. 13) In examining his reflections on slavery and colonisation, it becomes evident that the notion of "consciousness" bears an ambivalent significance. Mbembe speaks to the development of what he terms "racial consciousness" alongside "consciousness of empire" and "imperial consciousness." (Mbembe 2017, p. 62) At times, he describes a "negative consciousness" (Mbembe 2017, p. 127), which captures the pessimism experienced by the colonised – particularly their limited capacity to exercise free agency and to assert their existence as autonomous beings, independent of the colonial master's control.

Moreover, the concept of "negative consciousness" refers to the historical dichotomy that existed between the enslavers and the enslaved, and, by extension, the racial divide between "whites" and "blacks". This binary division was not only spatial; it also established a hierarchical structure that hindered equality and shared existence, thereby hindering a culture rooted in sharing, care, and reciprocity. To fully grasp this complex consciousness, Mbembe interprets the experiences of colonisation and plantation life, in which humanity faced a profound separation of consciousness. Yet, paradoxically, this division and estrangement rooted in racial capitalism became the foundation for an aspiration towards a planetary consciousness that transcends racial distinctions. Mbembe recognises that the plantation and, later, the colony constituted mechanisms within a new planetary consciousness. (Mbembe 2017, p. 79) This

insight encourages a deeper reflection on how critical reflection on the tragedy of colonisation can also present opportunities for a more inclusive and interconnected view of humanity. The plantation economy greatly influences the consciousness of both enslaved people and settlers.

Furthermore, a proper understanding of the concept of consciousness in Mbembe's work necessitates an examination of the methodological frameworks offered by W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Gilroy, particularly their use of the concept of "double consciousness." As outlined by Sindre Bangstad, Tony Sandset, and Gard R. Højberg in their article *The Double Consciousness of Paul Gilroy* (2018), Gilroy elucidate the identity crisis faced by Black populations in the shadow of slavery through the lens of "double consciousness." (Bangstad et al. 2018) He articulates this phenomenon as "the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others." Eze (2011) further elaborates on this concept, noting that Gilroy extends Du Bois's idea to explain the complexities of racial ambivalence faced by Black individuals in postcolonial Europe, which is strongly influenced by imperial, racist, and ethnocentric legacies, alongside abstract notions of national identities such as Englishness or Frenchness. (cf. Eze 2011, p. 877)

In the concluding sections of *Critique of Black Reason*, (2017) Mbembe shifts his view of "consciousness" from a descriptive to a normative perspective. Unlike Gilroy and Du Bois, he presents "planetary consciousness" as an ethical and political duty, emphasising the importance of equitable sharing of the Earth among all its inhabitants. He argues: "Restitution and reparation, then, are at the heart of the very possibility of the construction of a common consciousness of the world, which is the basis for the fulfilment of universal justice." (Mbembe 2017, p. 182) Here, the concept of "planetary consciousness" emerges as a counterpoint to both "racial consciousness" and "imperial consciousness," marking a notable shift in how humans perceive themselves. Fostering shared consciousness is crucial for humanity to recognise the importance of building relationships based on ethical principles such as "sharing," "restitution," and "reparation." (cf. Mbembe 2017, p. 182) Furthermore, this collective awareness has significant implications for our self-understanding and challenges existing notions of justice, law, and the essence of what it means to be human.

The development of the concept of "planetary consciousness" is further manifest in Mbembe's later works. Significantly, during the 25th anniversary of the Prince Claus Foundation on 10 December 2021, Mbembe presented his first detailed theorisation of "planetary consciousness" in a lecture titled "Planetary Consciousness and the Possible Future of Culture." A year later, this idea

resurfaces in an interview with Nils Gilman, titled "How to develop a Planetary Consciousness," where it becomes a vital framework for analysing ethical and political issues, including principles of renunciation and reparation. This idea also raises important questions about whether universal principles are essential and how they foster positive human interactions worldwide. By developing this understanding, people are prompted to reevaluate their ethical beliefs and the foundations of social agreements. (cf. Mbembe 2017, pp. 182–183) In the book *Out of the Dark Night* (2021b), the idea of "planetary consciousness" is further elaborated, drawing upon the works of Édouard Glissant. Here, it is equated with the term "disclosure," suggesting a state of mind characterised by openness, encounter, and the synthesis of diverse identities. Mbembe observes,

> "The veritable disenclosure of the world is thus the encounter with the world's entirety: what Glissant calls the Tout- Monde [All- World]. In this, it is above all a praxis of putting in relation. This thematic of relation and this question of entirety are also present in the work of British postcolonial writer Paul Gilroy, where they take the shape of a new planetary consciousness." (Mbembe 2021b, p. 64)

As Mbembe notes, the aim in Gilroy and Glissant's work is neither segregation nor the fragmentation of the world. The state of "disenclosure" requires detachment from the self and a resistance to the forces of self-enclosure. Conversely, planetary consciousness fosters openness to others, emphasising coexistence, reciprocity, and shared stewardship of the Earth. It means that openness prioritises mutuality and conviviality, calling for a redefinition of beings within the human sphere and the conditions under which they inhabit the planet.

Debates on Planetary Consciousness

A thorough analysis of recent literature on planetary consciousness shows its significant impact on the development of political theory, ethics, and the human and natural sciences over recent decades. Kriegman (2006) articulates the concept of "transformation of consciousness" to elucidate the increasing global awareness of interconnectedness that has evolved since the 1960s. He characterises this period as the "planetary phase of our civilisation," providing a series of arguments supported by notable scholars such as Raskin (2006), Anderson (2006), Dower (2007), Stryker et al. (2000), and Wood et al. (2005). Moreover, Kriegman posits that individuals are increasingly inclined to perceive them-

selves as integral members of a shared community encompassing all of humanity and the broader biosphere. (cf. Kriegman 2006, p. 10) This awareness manifests through the principles and tenets of cosmopolitanism. He draws on Appiah's work to analyse how cosmopolitanism opposes chauvinism and embraces diverse cultures, perceiving all people on Earth as branches of a single family tree. For him, the spread of this enduring awareness within the new paradigm of globalisation lays the groundwork for the development of global citizenship. (cf. Kriegman 2006, p. 12)

Thus, from a cosmopolitan perspective, the concept of planetary consciousness seeks to dismantle the reification of cultural archetypes that often overlook culture's fluid and evolving nature. As Appiah (2006) noted, human societies have historically exchanged cultural ideas, resulting in continuous blending and innovation. Kriegman's interpretation involves a critical engagement with the cosmopolitan argument, particularly its critique of culturalism and identity politics. He articulates a nuanced connection between experiences of vulnerability and mutuality, the emergence of planetary consciousness, the need for a shared global community, and the deconstruction of traditional identity categories. It is essential to recognise that 'consciousness' is used here in an ethical and political sense, synonymous with 'responsibility' or 'belonging' to a cosmopolitical world, where individuals would identify themselves and recognise their mutual obligations and rights as citizens of a shared humanity.

Moreover, Rosi Braidotti (2013) engages with the notion of 'universal consciousness,' highlighting the intersection of feminism and the posthuman condition, and its alignment with the principles of postcolonialism. Both feminist and postcolonial perspectives reject the binaries of *Otherness* and the dialectics of identity and difference, which are foundational to Western metaphysics. Grusin (2017) explains that the fundamental assumption is that subjectivity, as both a discursive and material practice, is aligned with rational, universal consciousness and self-regulating behaviour. In contrast, *Otherness* is portrayed as its negative counterpart. (cf. Grusin 2017, p. 23) This philosophical approach sharply contrasts with the subjectivity expressed in early modern philosophies, where the subject is reduced to a solitary, thinking ego – an entity considered the only certainty, underpinning freedom and denying the reality of the external world. The ethical and political consequences of this perspective include affirming the insurmountable otherness of the world, along with a claim to the authority of the ego. In this context, reframing the subject as 'discursivity' and

'openness' to a consciousness beyond the ego can help develop an ethic rooted in encounter and the shared nature of existence.

Moreover, the concept of planetary consciousness bears significant parallels to the notion of "species thinking". Citing Williams and Crutzen (2013), Chakrabarty elaborates on their categorisation of humans as a species, a framework they find indispensable in addressing the complexities of the current ecological crisis. (cf. Chakrabarty 2021, p. 213) This perspective seeks to transcend the temporality associated with specific human communities. Instead, it fosters an understanding of a broader historical context that illuminates both "planetary" and the "globality" of the ecological challenge. Furthermore, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2020) invokes this concept within a critical re-examination of Native American ancestral wisdom, positing that "ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgement and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world." (Kimmerer 2020, p. 1) The concept of planetary consciousness, often situated within religious and theological discourse, denotes a profound connection with the divine, the universe, and creation. (cf. Berry 1999)

Contemplating planetary consciousness is crucial across all these definitions for offering viable solutions to the modern crisis, which affects political, economic, sociocultural, religious, and ecological spheres. However, a review of the literature on this discourse shows a degree of particularism, especially when emphasising specific aspects such as environmental degradation, social inequalities, or gender- and race-based violence. The goal of promoting a global consciousness often encounters challenges in setting clear priorities, particularly in identifying problems and crafting practical solutions. Leiserowitz and Fernandez (2008) emphasize that transformative change necessitates the emergence of a new kind of human being or a shift in the human heart. (cf. 2008, p. 65) Thus, key questions arise about the conditions that enable this transformation, the processes involved, and the subjects driving this change.

For Leiserowitz and Fernandez (2008), the transition towards a new planetary consciousness hinges on creating a new narrative fostered through dialogue among all spheres of society and disciplines – from science to spirituality, encompassing the arts and education. (2008, p. 65) Elias and Moraru (2015) situate the discourse on planetary consciousness within a broader framework that transcends particular societal contexts, engaging particularly with comparative literature, literary studies, translation theories, art, and intercultural dialogue. They reference the works of Japanese-German author Yoko Tawada to argue that an awareness of translation issues is integral to the concept of plane-

tary consciousness. (cf. Elias and Moraru 2015, p. xxvii) Citing scholars such as Bernard Smith, J. G. A. Pocock, Tim Winton, Gail Jones, Christos Tsiolkas, and Alexis Wright, they contend that these authors challenge conventional notions of social scale and human agency, revealing the planetary as a stage for uneven cultural exchanges and interactions. (cf. Elias and Moraru 2015, p. xxix)

In his exploration of *Writing for the Planet: Contemporary Australian Fiction* (2015), Paul Giles traces the historical lineage of interest in planetary consciousness back to 19th-century American literature, spotlighting works like Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1967) – which employs the oceanic nature of the planet to critique terrestrial conventions – and Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838). (cf. Elias and Moraru 2015, p. 145) Although there is a broad consensus on the urgent importance of planetary consciousness, it is worth questioning whether the proposed solutions and identified problems go beyond Eurocentric and Western imperialist perspectives. Specifically, do they address inequalities based on race, gender, and class? Do they promote equitable resource sharing among all Earth's inhabitants while fostering care, reciprocity, and ecosystem restoration? In the following sections, I will examine how these proposals can be thoughtfully aligned with Achille Mbembe's concepts regarding the planetary community.

II.2 Community and the Politics of Life

In his work, *Brutalism* (2024), Mbembe succinctly articulates the dilemma confronting humanity:

> "For this is the final choice. Either repair or funeral arrangements. There will be no flight to any exoplanet. The Earth will be the oasis from which the 'whole of humanity' will undertake the gigantic work of regeneration of the living. Or it will be the universal tomb, its mausoleum, in keeping with the geological period of the history of the universe." (Mbembe 2024, p. 149)

Faced with growing global violence, Mbembe argues that humanity must collectively recognise its responsibilities. Instead of falling into catastrophic philosophies that predict an inevitable end of history or a clash of civilisations, he advocates for the possibility of creating a new model of planetary community. Central to this idea is the need for a paradigm shift in our understanding of intersubjectivity on a global scale, to repair the Earth as a whole.

Freedom and Shared Responsibility for the Living

The thesis underpinning the politics of living presents two fundamental arguments: first, it suggests that humanity must imagine a new conception of freedom that encompasses all people and fosters shared responsibility for the planet. Second, it promotes the establishment of new planetary rights that reflect the essence of living together. These arguments are shaped by decolonial discourse and form the core framework for the "politics of the living." The basis of anti-colonial struggles was fundamentally about rethinking the idea of freedom. As Mbembe states,

> "The objective of the uprising was to be born into freedom. Its objective was to break the dead forces that limit the capacities for life. Becoming free was the equivalent of being by and for oneself, constituting oneself as a responsible human subject – before oneself, before others, and before nations. This is what I have referred to throughout this book as the politics of ascent into humanity." (Mbembe 2021b, p. 229)

This idea of freedom sharply contrasts with the view common in Western liberal traditions, which has been involved in the injustices caused by slavery and colonisation. Mbembe's framework of the "politics of the living" promotes a model where all humans are given equal freedom. This freedom includes the right to be legitimate co-owners of the Earth and to share its resources fairly with all other beings. Drawing from philosophical traditions from India, Vandana Shiva (2006) agrees with Mbembe's view, suggesting that a new understanding of planetary coexistence is essential for the development of a 'planetary democracy'. For Shiva, planetary democracy means a community where individuals share rights, responsibilities, and freedoms equally, transcending traditional divides between the universal and the particular, the diverse and the common, and the local and the global. (cf. Shiva 2006) This idea aligns with Mbembe's concept of a planetary community, which Shiva describes as the "Earth family", a framework that envisions a community sustained by the Earth – one that does not belong to humanity; instead, humanity is an integral part of the Earth. Shiva believes that each democracy on Earth reflects awareness of these connections, along with the rights and responsibilities they bring. However, both Mbembe and her argue that achieving this "planetary community" – which they describe as "Earth democracy" – requires a collective imagination of life and political power on a global scale. This reimagining must actively support the flourishing of all living beings.

Furthermore, Mbembe's normative ideas about "Earth democracy" remain relevant today, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the urgent need for fairer redistribution and sharing of the conditions essential for habitability across the planet. In this context, he argues that rethinking the foundations of the democratic community must extend beyond the nation-state, implying that democracy must adapt to new demands shared by all beings on Earth rather than be limited to market laws. (cf. Mbembe 2021c, pp. 33–34) Therefore, the goal of engaging with the politics of living is to establish a normative framework for fostering a democratic community on a planetary scale, where all living beings share the Earth and its resources sustainably for the benefit of everyone.

When discussing Mbembe's insights in the context of South Africa's apartheid era, Kulundu et al. (2020) highlight the hardships faced by enslaved people, who were shackled and had limited mobility, making them vulnerable to oppression. They also question the crucial transgressive ability required to address crises stemming from this colonial history. From this viewpoint, Mbembe's contribution is key to reimagining a different concept of rights, particularly the universal right to move beyond traditional nation-state borders. This right grants all living beings the freedom to traverse the Earth without discrimination or restrictions. Hence, the right to move responds to modern coercion and limitations, especially those imposed within nation-states.

The Concept of a World Without Borders

In his 2021 article, *The Universal Right to Breathe*, published during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mbembe articulates the urgent need for a borderless world. The pandemic vividly exposed the limits of humanity's physiological endurance. It highlighted the fragility of public health systems and revealed grave injustices in the global distribution of healthcare resources, where wealthy nations secured vaccines while poorer regions suffered.

However, Mbembe's discussion goes beyond the immediate context of the pandemic. His analysis explores deeper issues, positioning the COVID-19 crisis as a prompt to reflect on the broader existential conditions of life on a planet afflicted by complex degradation and "suffocation." He critiques the systemic forces that contribute to the early end of life, emphasising the factors that have historically kept specific populations in a constant state of perilous breathlessness under capitalism. (cf. Mbembe 2021c, p. 61) Here, "breathing" is understood beyond its biological role; it symbolises the right to a dignified existence, protected by access to resources hindered by prevailing sociopolitical and eco-

nomic paradigms of global exploitation and domination. Therefore, the universal right to breathe becomes a fundamental affirmation of existence, necessitating the development of a planetary community based on equitable sharing of resources among all living beings. This critique is not just about survival; it inherently involves rejecting exclusive claims over the Earth by a privileged few. According to Mbembe,

> "The universal right to breathe is unquantifiable and cannot be appropriated. From a universal perspective, it is not the right of every member of humankind but of all life. It must, therefore, be understood as a fundamental right to existence" (Mbembe, Shread 2021: 61).

Therefore, rethinking the political landscape requires a shift in perspective that sees the Earth beyond the boundaries of nation-states. The idea of a "borderless world" is central to Mbembe's philosophical project and his vision for reimagining this global political system. This concept refers to the need for a profound reconceptualisation of global inequalities based on new economic status and geopolitical affiliations. Mbembe asserts,

> "If the Earth belongs to all of us, there's no reason why anyone who wants to shouldn't be able to visit it. This would translate into some juridical dispensation that would be close to a borderless world. It would entail one form or another of the abolition of borders."[3]

The planetary circulation of life is vital for modern democracies because it provides the essential foundation for fairly distributing the Earth's resources among all living beings, regardless of their origin, nationality, or religious beliefs. However, the condition for this reimagining is the creation of "an alternative imaginary of life, power, and the planet." (cf. Mbembe 2021b, p. 230) By this, Mbembe refers to the critique of the traditional concept of the Nation-State through the idea of sovereignty and borders, which colonial sociopolitical and economic structures have primarily shaped. Such an effort of critique and deconstruction requires the mobilisation of diverse resources, including spiritual insights drawn from religious traditions of deliverance, the consolidation and transnationalisation of civil society institutions, renewed juridical

3 Mbembe, Achille; Gilman, Nils; Blake, Jonathan (2022): How To Develop A Planetary Consciousness? Edited by Noema Magazine. Online. https://www.noemamag.com/how-to-develop-a-planetary-consciousness.

activism, and a capacity for dynamic, collective mobilisation – particularly about diasporas. (Mbembe 2021b, p. 230)

Furthermore, transforming global relationships requires integrating insights from the arts and humanities, which offer critical views and creative frameworks vital for revolutionary change. This blend of theory and practice is essential for establishing radical democratic ideas. Kulundu et al. (2020) contend that "our teaching, research, and community praxis must be border zone agile and 'intensely local and global simultaneously'" (Kulundu et al. 2020, p. 123) They advocate for the emergence of a new imaginary of everyday conduct, a necessity borne of contemporary humanity's existential crisis, rooted in colonial legacies. They emphasise that restoring human connection with itself and the world requires a comprehensive reform of knowledge systems and interdisciplinary collaboration, aimed at developing the skills to ask challenging questions that go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. This idea is conceptualised as "lead from the situation," meaning to prioritise our living realities, and to "stay with the trouble." (cf. Haraway 2015) The term "living realities" encapsulates the experience of daily existence where the interconnectedness of human-to-human and human-to-more-than-human relations manifests in ongoing struggles. (cf. Kulundu et al. 2020, p. 123)

These ideas align with Mbembe's call to decolonise the university and uncover global archives. (cf. Dübgen and Skupien 2018) Building a planetary community requires a re-evaluation of political foundations, goals, and values to protect the living planet and ensure equitable access to resources for all beings on Earth, including both humans and non-human beings. For this shift to become reality, a new democratic system is needed to replace the outdated nation-state model. This future planetary democracy would recognise fundamental rights, especially the rights to breathe and migrate. However, it raises the crucial question of its implementation in practice, particularly regarding the moral and political status of non-human beings. One can, for example, ask about the consequences of granting animals the right to breathe and move freely. Mbembe does not offer definitive answers to these questions, but suggests normative principles to guide both theory and practice of a new politics of life on the planet. In the following discussion, I will explore what this community-centred political philosophy could mean for Africa.

Africa in the Age of The Planetary

The idea of a planetary community challenges the notion of Africa as a separate entity, emphasising the continent's integral place in the global network of life.

(cf. Mbembe and Sarr 2022) While the first perspective sees Africa through the lens of the "metaphysic of identity and difference", the second advocates for exploring the historical and cosmological connections between this continent and the planetary. As Mbembe states, "Any inquiry into Africa's place in theory is necessarily a questioning of the experience of the world in the age of planetary power." " (Mbembe et al. 2010, p. 146) This effort to envision Africa beyond mere particularism necessitates a profound reflection on postcolonial African theory. (Dübgen and Skupien 2018, p. 129) Mbembe consistently expresses this vision throughout his work, including *On the Postcolony* (2001), *Out of the Dark Night* (2021b), and various essays such as *Africa in Theory: A Conversation between Jean Comaroff and Achille Mbembe* (2010), and *Africa in the New Century* (2016). This concept also serves as the basis for the ethical, political, and cosmological idea of "Afrique-Monde," as discussed by Mbembe and Felwine Sarr in their influential co-edited book *Écrire l'Afrique-monde*. (2017)

However, it is in Mbembe's early writings, *African Modes of Self-Writing* (2002), that he critically examines doctrines such as Afrocentrism, Afro-pessimism, and Pan-Africanism. He argues that these theories are driven by a "nativist impulse," characterised by an excessive emphasis on uniqueness and an obsession with the idea of being rooted in what is believed to be Africans' essential origins. (cf. Mbembe 2002; Dübgen and Skupien 2018, p. 129) Moreover, the concept of a planetary Africa is closely linked to the idea of Afropolitanism, which I will examine in detail in the final chapter, particularly in relation to the ethical implications of Mbembe's political theory. (cf. Theombogü 2023; Anasiudu 2022) Afropolitanism is a "non-ethnocentric" way of conceptualising the African continent. Unlike Marcus Garvey's pan-Africanism, Africa can be seen as a space that reflects humanity's rich diversity. (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 2016, p. 31) This critique heavily relies on long-standing doubts about ethnophilosophy, as voiced by African philosophers such as Paulin Hountondji, Eboussi Boulaga, and Marcien Towa. Ethnophilosophy, originating from Emmanuel Tempels' influential work on Bantu philosophy, sought to define a unique logic within African thought, differentiating it from primarily European intellectual traditions.

Mbembe's critiques of ethnophilosophy and his engagement with Afro-diasporic philosophy, particularly Édouard Glissant's concept of a shared world, underpin his idea of a planetary Africa. Africa is not seen as an essential, fixed entity ontologically separate from the rest of the world – whether historically, cosmologically, culturally, or anthropologically. Instead, beyond the assumptions of ethnophilosophy, which form the philosophical basis of Afrocentric

ideas about the continent, Africa is understood as an integral part of the global whole. This captures the core meaning of the term "Afrique-Monde," a phrase that echoes Glissant's concept of "Tout-Monde." Mbembe points out that Glissant's contribution "gave this living entity with multiple facets a name: *Tout-Monde*, or *Whole-World*." (cf. Glissant and Wing 1997) This notion of Tout-Monde emphasises how the very idea of humanity is both an epiphany and an ecumenical outlook. According to Glissant, the World is a complex whole, reflecting humanity's diversity not as a fixed object but as an assembly of diverse rhizomes. Humanity is not one single entity but a mosaic of countless cultures and experiences that intersect, influence one another, and evolve into new forms through symbiotic relationships. This convergence underpins the shared existence on Earth and the equitable distribution of its resources as a precondition of its sustainability and durability.

Moreover, in Mbembe's collaborative book, *Pour un monde en commun: Regards croisés entre l'Afrique et l'Europe* (2020), the idea of a planetary Africa is emphasised as crucial for reconceptualising the continent's development. This perspective extends beyond economic considerations, aiming to repair the world and distribute resources equitably among all inhabitants – humans and non-humans alike. Based on concepts such as "Afrique-Monde" or the "earthly community," the notion of a planetary Africa envisions the African subject as an integral part of the whole world – culturally, politically, economically, and cosmologically. This "planetary turn" in Mbembe's philosophy reflects an effort to identify the conditions that foster subjectivity in Africa, as part of a global movement to recognise all living beings as interconnected within a planetary consciousness.

Therefore, engaging with global socio-political and economic issues concerning a Common World is particularly relevant to sustaining life and building resilience on the African continent in the present and future. As the world moves away from the centralisation of power in a single region, there is a growing need to consider how truly free and autonomous individuals can emerge within the global community. Freedom and autonomy involve developing coexistence methods that make Africa a sustainable place for all its inhabitants. These ideas are essential for liberating both Africa and the broader world from ideologies that promote exclusive control over Earth's resources or territories.

Nonetheless, the planetary vision raises the question of the conditions for its realisation from a political, economic, or environmental standpoint: how can a political idea of shared community among nations be justified in

Africa while persistent global structures of inequality and ongoing political, economic, and cultural dominance still exist?

Thus, the realisation of Mbembe's concept of planetary habitability raises an important issue when comparing it with Spivak's ideas. Although formulated in different contexts, Spivak's analysis provides profound insights into the challenges of translating the concept of planetarity in political environments marked by power struggles, violence, and dominance. A key question remains about the conditions necessary to foster a planetary relationship. If we are to create a utopia where all lives are valued equally and freedom is accessible to everyone, we must break away from current systems of control. Humanity is called upon to confront the obstacles posed by powerful interests, greed, and the deeply ingrained desire to dominate that seem inherent to human nature.

The awareness of the intrinsic requirement for the relational dynamic does not diminish the validity of the ethical and political principles underlying the idea of a planetary Africa. Instead, it acts as a safeguard against the potential misuse of these principles for ideological purposes, which could perpetuate existing power inequalities. However, Mbembe's critique does not hide the realities of division and conflict; instead, it encourages confronting the implications of living in an era of mutual exposure. He acknowledges, like Spivak, the reality of antagonism but aims to find a collective way of sharing the Earth as equitably as possible. While acknowledging the dystopian possibilities, both Mbembe and Spivak maintain hope for a more just form of planetary relationality. (cf. Goetschel and Spivak 1999, pp. 336–337) In this challenging environment, Mbembe's reflections on hope become particularly significant, providing avenues for further exploration in the next section. Addressing this requires a fairer approach to relationships – one that involves transformative change in how we coexist, emphasising autonomy and sovereignty for marginalised groups rather than their subjugation. Superficial planetary solidarity or mere collaboration risks merely perpetuating other forms of domination.

The Principle of Hope: An Engagement with Ernst Bloch

Given the significant challenges in establishing a planetary community, one might doubt the practicality of Mbembe's utopian vision. However, this section will examine a key argument in favour of the planetary community theory. Mbembe's approach stems from a firm rejection of nihilism, scepticism, and philosophies rooted in catastrophism. From this perspective, he demonstrates a profound engagement with the question of life, especially in his recent

works. Although his critiques can sometimes seem pessimistic, particularly in light of his early publications, an evolution towards hope for a fairer world is increasingly evident. This concept is central to his philosophy of planetarity.

Mbembe's political critique and ethics draw on a rich array of influences, including African historical sources, Afro-diasporic traditions, postcolonial theories, and pre-colonial African cosmologies. An ongoing dialogue with African Christian theologians, such as Jean-Marc Ela and Eboussi Boulaga, as well as Western theological traditions, also shapes his thought. Among these, Ernst Bloch's influence stands out. From the works of these theologians, Mbembe adopts the premise that history remains open to the possibilities of justice and reparation. This perspective is particularly evident in his seminal text, *Critique of Black Reason*, (2017) where he carefully examines the concept of hope in relation to political demands for justice and reparations. Mbembe asserts: "But as long as the retreat from humanity is incomplete, there is still a possibility of restitution, reparation, and justice. These are the conditions for the collective resurgence of humanity." (Mbembe 2017, p. 179) Therefore, the concept of a planetary community is based on the core hope that humanity's process of consciousness evolution is still ongoing, thereby enabling the development of meaningful relational foundations.

Mbembe further elaborates on the notion of hope, drawing heavily on Bloch's *The Spirit of Utopia* (2000). Bloch describes hope as a cultivated attitude intrinsic to our human condition. He states that hope demands deliberate effort and ongoing commitment, viewing it not just as a passive emotion but as an active force that urges individuals towards a process of 'becoming'. He argues: "Here the world's labyrinth and the heart's paradise become visible discretely; the world in the focus imaginaries, in the more hidden, intelligible part of our subjectivity, begins to appear as hope for the future." (Bloch and Nassar A 2000, p.176)) The transformation towards a better future highlights the dynamic nature of human experience, stressing that individuals are constantly engaged in a dialectical journey toward self-realisation and collective advancement (cf. Mbembe 2020a, p. 174). This definition emerges from contemplating the meaning of human existence, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of birth. Bloch contends that the core human instinct driving existence is the pursuit of joy and happiness, an impulse that sustains hope. However, this hope, rooted in the unfinished nature of human life, is not automatic; it requires daily collective effort, especially in a landscape marked by violence and despair. Bloch argues:

> "So it seems, indeed it becomes certain, that this precisely is hope, where the darkness brightens. Hope is in the darkness itself, partakes of its imperceptibility, just as darkness and mystery are always related; it threatens to disappear if it looms up too nearly, too abruptly in this darkness. We tremble in hope, in amazement." (Bloch and Nassar A 2000, p. 201)

This quote from Bloch, which stems from his critical reflection on the modern history of the decline of the West, echoes in many ways the critique of African history by Mbembe, notably through the use of metaphors such as 'night', which plays a crucial role in Mbembe's thought, as the title of the book *Out of the Dark Night* (2021b) reminds us. In this book, as in Mbembe's entire body of work, there is undoubtedly a critical reflection on the socio-political crises occurring in Africa, viewed within the context of global crises. But beyond critique, it is a reflection on the conditions that make the emergence of life within death possible. Just as with Bloch, it is, in other words, hope for a better life that underpins the critique.

Furthermore, Mbembe adopts Bloch's assertion that "all is not lost" and that "the future remains open," suggesting that humanity has the potential for renewal that prevents falling into "absolute pessimism." This idea is crucial for comprehending Mbembe's comprehensive ethical perspective. Absolute pessimism, which sharply contrasts with hope, is depicted by what Bloch calls "negative faith." Mbembe notes, echoing Bloch's views, that absolute pessimism describes those who claim that life will continue its mediocrity forever, that humanity will remain in lethargy, and that the world will always look like a tomb. (cf. Mbembe 2020a, pp. 174–176) This discourse reflects a nihilistic and cynical metaphysics of pessimism. In stark contrast, hope emerges as a form of "critical and militant optimism," rooted in a serious ethical and philosophical inquiry into the nature of humanity and the numerous possibilities for renewal on this planet. It involves the courage to embrace risk, enabling the reconstruction and reparation of a liberated, just, and joyful humanity. It is such Hope, which derives from a dynamic vision of history and time, that one finds in Bloch's words, who affirms:

> "Only the philosophy of history, also reviving what was, utopically overhauling it, places time, the intuitive form, the operative sphere of active life, at the center; and as for the concept of hope, of the philosophy of value, when it recognizes a stiller kind of simultaneity, a 'spatiality' of ensembles, shapes, categories, spheres, these are all finally centered around the true simultane-

> ity, around the far-near 'inner space' of absolute life and existential disclosure, where the Now first brightens." (Bloch and Nassar A 2000, p. 200)

Thus, Bloch's conceptualisation of hope is rooted in a philosophy and theology of history. According to this conception, time is perceived not as a place of decline and despair, but as an opening towards a higher consciousness, which connects the human being to its source, that is, the event of absolute life. Such an event, however, can only be perceived by the subject if they have the audacity of faith to rise above the contingency of passing historical forms. In other words, space and time, in their external manifestations, call the subject to a transcendence towards a greater interior, which is the reality of the present moment. This opening of consciousness towards the absolute horizon of presence in the world is the condition of possibility for perceiving hope.

Mbembe's formulation, however, is firmly grounded in the critical philosophy of history, drawing on the memory of abolitionist and anti-colonial African struggles. He draws on the biographies of iconic Afro-descendant figures, including Martin Luther King Jr., Frantz Fanon, and Nelson Mandela, to illustrate this enduring legacy of hope. At the core of their historical struggles lies a persistent aspiration for a more humane existence. They are steadfast in their determination to counteract the pervasive nihilism and despair that marked their era. However, beyond mere survival or passive resistance, they sought to create a new reality: emancipation from the most intolerable dimensions of racism and colonialism. Mbembe explains how this pursuit ultimately aimed at the formation of a subject that, in its self-referential awareness, acknowledged its pure potential and free expression, thereby fostering a relationship with the world and others. (cf. Mbembe 2021b, p. 229) This pursuit of a free and autonomous subject forms the core principle behind every anti-colonial movement. It informs historical struggles and current reflections on hope, while embodying the planetary perspective central to Mbembe's political philosophy. This same dynamic of the battle for freedom and autonomy at the heart of suffering is what Bloch describes in these terms:

> "And yet what is left for us here, we who suffer and are dark, is to hope far ahead. If it remains strong enough, becomes pure, possesses itself un divertedly enough, it will not go to ruin-hope will not let us go to ruin. For the human soul embraces everything, including the other side which is not yet. Hope alone is what we want, and thought serves hope, hope is its only space, its semantic content and its object scattered into every part of the world, hid-

> den in the darkness of the lived moment, promised in the shape of the absolute question." (Bloch and Nassar A 2000, p. 276)

These words profoundly reflect the aspirations and struggles for liberation, in which formerly colonised peoples have played a central role. Believing in the incomparable value of life despite suffering, and viewing their pain as relative compared to the immeasurable life they carry within and must defend, these people have sacrificed their lives in the fight for independence against colonisers. Thus, as Mbembe articulates, the legacy of African nationalism worth engaging with in contemporary conditions is the pursuit of a message of hope for a better future accessible to all peoples, all nations, and all species. (cf. Mbembe 2021b, p. 229) His understanding of hope does not involve a transcendent finality. The goal is not to reach a celestial realm, often associated with specific religious beliefs. Instead, hope is a dynamic process firmly rooted in the temporal realities of human existence. Rather than aiming for a state beyond historical experience, the core of hope lies in working towards a positive transformation of history itself. This is evident in the anti-colonial struggle, where hope becomes practically significant, with its horizon stretching across the Earth and its ultimate aim being universal humanity. This utopian vision of hope builds on the intellectual journey begun by anti-colonial movements.

Drawing inspiration from Césaire and Fanon, the utopia of hope aspires to create a new world founded upon the values of reciprocity, sharing, and a universal community. The shadow of catastrophe, as Frantz Fanon called it, the "Dark Night," represents the despair brought on by violence and the decline of human dignity. Thus, the hope of utopia can be viewed as a project aimed at "emerging from the Dark Night," a quest to rediscover the core of the human experience amid imminent threats of death and catastrophe. In this framework, Fanon's concept of leaving the "Dark Night" resonates with Aimé Césaire's vision of a brighter future for humankind. However, this understanding of hope does not dismiss realism. Sure, the *Common World* promoted by the planetary ethic does not currently exist. Mbembe observes that more than fifty years after decolonisation, life remains plagued by forms of violence, not only in former colonised nations but worldwide. He describes how, instead of genuine self-repossession, one witnesses a lifeless mass that signifies nothing except the form of a vibrant, joyful body. (cf. Mbembe 2021b, pp. 226–227) The ongoing presence of both traditional and modern violence and exploitation supports the desire for justice and reparation. Because violence is global, the ethics of hope imply that there is still a chance for freedom and planet-wide repara-

tion. Humanity's challenge is to transform ethical ideas into cultural practices that can lay the groundwork for concrete political steps, as without these, the future will remain out of reach.

Conclusion

This chapter examines Mbembe's concept of a planetary community. I argue that his idea of the planetary extends beyond geographical borders, encompassing a universal awareness and the intricate relationships between the physical Earth, living organisms, biodiversity, and both organic and inorganic matter. This perspective is grounded in cosmological and ethical-political ideas, promoting a way of living that encourages fair sharing among all living beings, both human and non-human. This philosophy also envisions the development of a new consciousness that includes bio-symbiosis – living in harmony with humans and the broader ecological system. In the next chapter, I will explain how Mbembe's ideas about an earthly community demand a fundamental rethinking of rights. Specifically, these include the rights to inhabit the Earth, to breathe, and to move freely. Securing these rights relies on fostering dialogue among all parts of humanity and, importantly, on listening to the planet itself.