Chapter 3: Planetary Justice

Introduction

In previous chapters, I elaborated on planetary consciousness as a profound sense of belonging to a collective, earthly community that encompasses both human and non-human entities. This ethos of belonging extends beyond mere interdependence; it underscores the urgent need for a holistic approach to justice that considers the intertwined socio-political, economic, and environmental challenges confronting all forms of life. Mbembe's seminal question – "What does it mean to be human at the beginning of the 21st century?" – invites profound reflection. He posits that contemporary existence entails an awareness of the planet's shared ownership among all its inhabitants (2022, p. 34), which leads to his assertion that any exclusive claim of ownership over Earth is illegitimate (2022, p. 37). Furthermore, he advocates for an equitable sharing of the Earth's resources among all beings (2022, p. 39), thereby emphasizing the importance of the "Earthly community" in discussions on planetary justice, understood as equitable sharing, truth, and reparation. This chapter will elucidate the meaning and connections between these principles, highlighting the originality of Mbembe's viewpoint. By examining the ethical and political implications of these ideas, I aim to highlight their relevance to contemporary debates in global politics. After this examination, I will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Mbembe's arguments within the broader discourse on planetary justice. Furthermore, I will propose an alternative model of planetary governance to mitigate the risks of "abstract utopianism" that may emerge in discussions of Mbembe's ideas. This investigation aims to foster a more practical and realistic approach to addressing the challenges of justice in our increasingly interconnected world.

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I. Planetary Justice as Equitable Sharing

Central to Mbembe's exploration of cosmology, ethics, and political philosophy is the recurring concept of "sharing." (cf. Mbembe 2017, 84; 157–158; 176–177; 182–183) Nicholas A. John's article, *The Social Logics of Sharing* (2013), highlights the etymology of the term "sharing" as it appears in The Oxford English Dictionary, tracing its origins back to the 16th century. Notably, it is synonymous with "distribution":

> "The verb to share meant to cut into parts or to divide. A ploughshare, therefore, which is the cutting edge of the plough, is so called because it shares, or splits, the earth. Likewise, when a child shares his or her chocolate bar, he or she divides it by breaking it up into shares, or parts." (John 2013, p. 114)

This definition views sharing as a form of division involving separation, aligning with the idea of a zero-sum game where giving reduces one's resources. In contrast, Mbembe considers "sharing" as a process that transforms fundamental differences based on gender, race, historical injustices, class, religion, or power dynamics. This perspective is crucial for understanding the concepts and normative principles that underpin his idea of planetary justice.

I.1 The Meaning of the Concept of "Sharing"

As discussed earlier, cosmopolitanism enhances the ethics of sharing by recognising power disparities and the historical backgrounds of the involved stakeholders. In a world with uneven power dynamics, shared ethics must be rooted in equality and reciprocity to promote meaningful participation by those who have been historically, politically, socioeconomically, and culturally marginalised. Consequently, the ethics of sharing require active measures to reduce inequalities and empower everyone to set interaction rules. The difference between "sharing" and "giving" is key; sharing focuses on fair access to resources as a basis for positive engagement, rather than just the distribution of goods. (cf. Plage et al. 2017, p. 19) This distinction highlights the importance of ethical values – such as respect, humanity, and dignity – over merely material concerns. It advocates that interaction quality goes beyond access to resources and underscores the intrinsic worth of every individual, regardless of background. Essentially, the concept of sharing prompts us to reevaluate the ethical frameworks that shape our understanding of planetary

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justice. It calls for a transition from materialistic views to a more refined experience that emphasises dignity, respect, and the relational aspects of human interactions. This idea raises fundamental questions that Mbembe formulates in such terms:

> "how to belong fully in this world that is common to all of us, how to pass from the status of the excluded to the status of the right- holder, how to participate in the construction and the distribution of the world." (Mbembe 2017, pp. 176–177)

The debate about planetary justice, which sharing aims to address, primarily concerns inequalities among people. While not new to philosophy, this issue remains central in modern political thought. Mbembe's role is to place this problem within a new philosophical framework and approach we have discussed earlier. His unique method draws from often-overlooked traditions in Western political philosophy, especially Afro-diasporic, African, and postcolonial perspectives. These traditions seek to highlight what Mbembe calls the "dark side" of the West – its history of domination through slavery and colonisation. Various political and anthropological ideas justified these practices, often grounded in racial hierarchy, notions of civilisation, and property rights. In slave plantations and colonies, these ideas influenced laws and practices that upheld social order and sovereignty, leading to systemic inequalities among enslaved people, enslavers, and colonized groups. (cf. Mbembe 2017, p. 183)

Consequently, exploring conditions of planetary justice demands innovative methods to foster a shared sense of planetary community. This includes tackling the core issues behind both traditional and modern cultural, economic, and political domination, as well as the conditions necessary for sharing the Earth. This perspective resonates with ideas articulated by Volker Grassmuck in *Cultures and Ethics of Sharing* (2012), wherein he similarly explores the normative dimensions of sharing beyond mere material transactions. Grassmuck explains how the contemporary "Sharing Turn" in social theory indicates a rising interest in sharing practices. (cf. 2012, p. 17) Plage et al. (2017) further examine this transformation in their article *Cosmopolitan Encounters* (2017). They argue that ethical discussions about sharing should not only recognise historical power relationships among individuals but also address existing structures of inequalities and violence. This understanding of sharing suggests that its meaning goes beyond a purely quantitative view

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focused on zero-sum resource division. Only through this approach can sharing become a central principle for a fairer planetary justice system. In the next section, I will examine Mbembe's arguments on sharing and explain how this shift in concept supports his vision of planetary justice.

I.2 A Path Toward Equitable Sharing of the Earth

The reflection on planetary justice aims to identify the key conditions for transformative politics. Among these conditions, which should promote new ways of inhabiting the Earth for all living beings, are an equitable sharing of life resources and rights regardless of race, colour, gender, origin, culture, or religion. This inquiry requires establishing normative frameworks that move away from social, political, economic, and environmental domination that have historically been justified and continue to cause suffering for vulnerable populations and harm ecosystems. Mbembe highlights this need clearly, stating:

> "Given that we have not completely escaped the spirit of a time dominated by the hierarchization of human types, we will need to work with and against the past to open up a future that can be shared in full and equal dignity. The path is clear: on the basis of a critique of the past, we must create a future that is inseparable from the notions of justice, dignity, and the in-common." (Mbembe 2017, p. 177)

This view emphasises the importance of critically evaluating historical injustices to build a future grounded in dignity and collective well-being. From a cosmological perspective, reevaluating the concept of sharing provides new insights into our understanding of time and space. It also removes any excuse for humanity's failure to confront past atrocities like colonialism, slavery, and genocides. Moreover, ethically, sharing stories of suffering fosters a sense of universal responsibility among humans. It encourages acknowledging historical crimes and supports a collective push for reparations. Politically, this moral duty underscores the importance of working toward restoring the dignity and rights of victims and their descendants. Grassmuck (2012) resonates with this idea, asserting that humanity can only confront these challenges through collaborative efforts. He also clarifies the importance of restitution and reparation in achieving justice. (cf. Grassmuck 2012, p. 32)

The concept of shared history, along with the ideas of responsibility and restorative justice, reflects humanity's quest for planetary equality. This quest

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has been fundamental to the efforts to liberate enslaved and colonised populations. Contemporary debates on planetary justice and equality should therefore reflect on these struggles, as they offer essential insights into current systems of inequality and their profound philosophical, political, economic, and cultural roots. Mbembe rightly observes:

> "As long as destructive ideas about the inequality of human races and the differences between human species remain alive, the struggle led by people of African descent for what we can call an "equal share" – or the struggle for rights and responsibilities – will remain a legitimate struggle. It will have to be carried out not with the goal of separating oneself from other humans but in solidarity with humanity itself – a humanity whose multiple faces we seek to reconcile through struggle." (Mbembe 2017, p. 176)

While Mbembe recognises the importance of African revolutionary movements, such as Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism, and Afro-pessimism, in challenging colonial rule and seeking independence, he critically examines the political and ethical aspects of their ideas of autonomy. (cf. Mbembe 2002) He warns against grounding autonomy in identity-based, ethnic, or nationalistic views, recommending instead a universal approach based on humankind's planetarity. The idea of planetary justice emerges as a response to a limited view of historical oppression, aiming to reshape our understanding of humanity and life on Earth. It emphasises sharing – of history, responsibilities, the Earth, and existence – as the key to overcoming the legacies of slavery, colonization, and exploitation.

Although Mbembe critiques postcolonial theories and their concept of identity, he nonetheless recognises their potential for emancipatory change. Thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Léopold Sédar Senghor have disputed the notion of an "absolutely universal" and instead embraced "unity in diversity." They viewed diversity dialectically, recognising that it includes a sense of shared humanity – acknowledging our common existence, cohabitation on Earth, and equal rights as vulnerable beings. In other words, advocates for independence have emphasised that "the only universal is the community of singularities and differences, a sharing that is at once the creation of something common and a form of separation." (Mbembe 2017, p. 158) This essential dialectic of singularity and difference is crucial for understanding the cosmological, ethical, and political implications of sharing; it illuminates our comprehension of a planetary community and planetary justice.

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The view of general ecology, combined with reflections on planetary rights and justice as fair sharing of Earth's resources, rests on the philosophical idea that a universal human perspective does not erase individual differences; rather, it enhances them. This careful sharing of individualities helps foster a "reimagining of the universal community." At the core of this dialectic, according to many decolonial theorists, is an "active will to the community." However, Mbembe cautions that a desire for community must be intrinsically linked to a desire for life: "This will to community is another name for what could be called the will to life." (Mbembe 2021b, pp. 2–3) Such aspirations shaped the anti-colonial imagination, inspiring revolutionary movements that advocated for a universal redistribution of the right to exist, communicate, and inhabit the Earth. Mbembe describes this philosophy of sharing, which includes the idea of a planetary community, as the "politics of humanity." In examining his ethical and political frameworks, I aim to clarify how his concept significantly supports defining planetary justice. In the following section, I will explore the relationship between sharing and the idea of justice, which is understood as the pursuit of truth.

II. Planetary Justice as Capacity for Truth

This section will explore the epistemic conditions that underpin sharing. Recognition involves determining the truth about the nature and causes of historical injustices, which is essential for reparation. Without acknowledging human responsibility for the ongoing violence against living beings, the construction of just political communities, defined by ideals of sharing life, remains elusive.[1] Therefore, justice should not only serve as a means of sharing but also enable the pursuit of truth and the effecting of reparation.

1 The reflections in this section are inspired by Achille Mbembe's lecture "The Capacity for Truth. Of 'Restitution' in African Systems of Thought" delivered at Anton Wilhelm Amo Lecture N°6, in Germany, 2023. In this lecture, truth is defined not only as the condition of possibility but also as one of the essential meanings of justice and the reparation of historical crimes.

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II.1 The Denial of Historical Crimes

In examining the essential value of memory, truth, and reconciliation for achieving planetary justice, Mbembe highlights the critical importance of addressing denial, which denotes two interrelated forms of violence and domination. Firstly, it refers to the historical violence experienced by oppressed peoples, for example, during slavery, colonisation, and modern genocides, as well as their present manifestations. In this respect, denial signifies an ethical, political, or historical negation of life and the dignity of fellow human beings. Secondly, denial is not only the negation of life but also the refusal to confront the truth and accept responsibility for these historical crimes, thereby hindering their repair. Therefore, denial encompasses the unwillingness to confront the structural realities of past injustices and the hesitancy to engage in the arduous yet essential processes of justice and reconciliation. Mbembe states:

> "In a country where very few apartheid-era atrocities have been prosecuted, where key political figures refused to testify to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where there have hardly been any acts of public contrition from former executioners and where most killers and torturers have escaped jail time, the persistent denial of white privilege partly explains the acrimonious nature of the controversy." (Mbembe 2015a, p. 4)

Thus, Mbembe's remark extends beyond the South African context. His reflections serve as a call to action, advocating an examination of denial, an inherently tied concept to justice, as articulated by some scholars. (cf. Cohen 2013; Lacey 2013; Cajani 2021; Magnusson 2021; Avakian 2018; Ware and Harkins 2014) Moreover, the act of remembering means re-establishing the truth surrounding past atrocities. (cf. Davies and Isakjee 2019) This truth-telling process involves illuminating the enduring consequences on international relations today. To disregard this truth is to permit their perpetuation in contemporary societies, evident in the systemic racism perpetuated by state apparatuses – such as the police, judicial systems, and immigration policies – against racial minorities. (cf. Agier et al. 2008; Margarida 2017) Moreover, the denial perpetuates enduring economic and political dependence, trade inequities, and international power dynamics. It operates as both an active and passive force but is predominantly epistemic. (cf. Wall 1998; Spivak 2014)

Stanley Cohen analyses the sociological dimension of denial in the South African context. While black individuals grapple with extreme poverty, Cohen

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argues, white populations continue to enjoy privileges inherited from the apartheid regime. This power imbalance only appears normal through the lens of denial, highlighting how silence and ignorance sustain such inequalities. (cf. Cohen 2013, p. x; Welch 2004; Mackenzie 2007) Cohen's sociology of denial interrogates the roots of the inequitable hierarchy between white and black populations and questions the justification for such disparities. He poses profound inquiries:

> "Why had our family (and everyone like us) been allocated black men and women (who were called 'boys' and 'girls' or just 'natives') as domestic servants? Why did they live in tiny rooms in the backyard? Where were their wives, husbands and children? Why did they address me as 'baas', or 'master'?" (Cohen 2013, p. ix)

Cohen describes this moment of realisation regarding the injustices faced by the oppressed as an "epiphany." (Cohen 2013, p. ix) This 'awakening' engenders an ethical and political consciousness, prompting the fundamental question of how to engage with the suffering of marginalised populations: "What do we do with our knowledge about the suffering of others, and what does this knowledge do to us?" (Cohen 2013, p. x)

Thus, the epistemological inquiries into the knowledge of suffering among the oppressed are intrinsically linked to ethical questions surrounding the responsibilities and complicities of the privileged. Establishing the truth about past and ongoing injustices is not merely an intellectual exercise; it requires a thorough examination of collective responsibility for perpetuating these crimes. Ultimately, this consciousness regarding injustice, its systemic roots, and the obligations of the dominant must catalyse political action, particularly the cessation of violence. In Mbembe's and Cohen's works, a critical reflection on denial arises from empirical observations of socio-political and historical realities alongside normative inquiries prompted by those observations. Nonetheless, while Cohen's analysis is rooted in a specific political context, Mbembe adopts a planetary perspective. He employs psychoanalysis and political sociology to explore denial within modern human history, living memory studies, planetary ethics, and political philosophy.

Mbembe extends the discourse on denial to planetary implications, focusing on humanity's relationship with itself, nature, and biodiversity – essentially, with all living beings. He provocatively questions how knowledge of nature, biodiversity, and human and non-human populations can be transmitted

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to present generations, ensuring accountability for these crimes and facilitating reparations. The goal of addressing denial is to prevent the recurrence of past atrocities and dismantle the structures that perpetuate them. Historical knowledge should serve as a foundation for a collective representation of suffering, which is essential to its resolution. This endeavour encompasses epistemic, ethical, political, and aesthetic dimensions. It is vital to establish a planetary community in which all human and non-human members engage in relationships characterised by mutual debt and reciprocity.

Moreover, politically, denial constitutes a rupture in the relationship between individuals and communities. In his seminal work, *African Modes of Self-Writing* (2002), Mbembe elucidates that long before colonisation, slavery was fundamentally predicated on a dual negation: the denial of the relationship between master and slave and the systematic dehumanisation of the latter. One of his most incisive articulations of this thesis appears in the book *On the Postcolony* (2001b), where he defines the crime of colonisation as rooted in the denial of the colonised's humanity. Mbembe posits that this denial serves as the very principle of coloniality. He writes,

> "The removal of the native from the historically existing occurs when the colonizer chooses – and has the means to – not to look at, see, or hear him/her – not, that is, to acknowledge any human attribute in him/her. From this instant, the native is only so far as he/she is a thing denied, is only in as something deniable. In short, from the standpoint of a 'self' of one's own, he/she is nothing. In the colonial principle of rationality, the native is thus *that thing that is, but only insofar as it is nothing*." (Mbembe 2001, p. 187)

From an anthropological perspective, this notion of denial encapsulates the refusal to acknowledge the humanity of the 'native,' stripping individuals of the attributes that signify personhood. While the quotation does not provide a precise delineation of these attributes, it identifies the colonised as not "seen," "heard," "listened to," or "recognised" as human beings but rather as mere "things." This duality – human versus thing – illuminates a core understanding of humanity in Mbembe's work: a fellow human being is defined by mutual recognition and dignity. To be a fellow human means to be seen, listened to, and understood, affirming one's dignity as a living being and as a human being. Our inability to witness the suffering of others and our silence in the face of attacks on their dignity signify their non-existence in our universe as entities with intrinsic value. Denial thus becomes both a fracture

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in recognition and a severance in relational ties. This negation, as Mbembe articulates, has historically been an object of colonial violence:

> "Such is perhaps the most determining characteristic of colonial violence. On the one hand, it proceeds as if it can produce nothingness from a negation. It operates through annihilation (Nichtung). It would make it sufficient to deny the Other for him/her not to exist – ready, if need be, to demonstrate her/his nothingness by force. By consigning the native to the most perfect Otherness, this violence not only reveals the native as radically Other, it annihilates him/her." (Mbembe 2001, p. 188)

Notably, Mbembe juxtaposes the notion of similarity with radical otherness that delineates the native's experience. This concept has profound implications for both politics and anthropology, as well as for ontology. Unlike the similar, the natives are subjected to forms of annihilation which render them "nothing," stripping them of their identities as human beings. The fellow human being emerges as an alter ego, sharing the same existential conditions of birth, death, vulnerability, and suffering; one who possesses the right to exist and to enjoy life's material and symbolic resources equitably. In ethical and political terms, denial fundamentally undermines the ethical principle of reciprocity. Social and political anthropology elucidates how this crisis of reciprocity has manifested in the historical subjugation of enslaved individuals to extreme forms of suffering and degradation:

> "Slavery, colonization, and apartheid are supposed to have plunged the African subject not only into humiliation, debasement, and nameless suffering but also into a zone of nonbeing and social death characterized by the denial of dignity, heavy psychic damage, and the torment of exile." (Mbembe 2002, pp. 241–242)

Orlando Patterson's notion of "social death" captures the denial of essential attributes of sociability inflicted upon the individual. (cf. Patterson 1982) This concept sheds light on the multifaceted meanings of denial described in Mbembe's works from the early 1990s to the 2020s. Denial is presented as violent and intersects with themes of humanity (cf. 2002, p. 253), dignity (cf. 2002, p. 242), memory, law, citizenship (cf. 2019b, p. 79), responsibility (2021b, p. 167), relational debt (cf. 2021b, pp. 167–168), cultural objects, and the power (cf. 2002, p. 244). From this synthesis of references, denial can be

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interpreted as a form of silence regarding past injustices, contributing to a broader narrative that seeks to obscure collective memory and accountability. In the latter scenario, the refusal to acknowledge historical crimes often stems from a critique that yields both evidence of underlying truths and a framework for potential reparative actions. Cohen articulates recognition as an "inchoate feeling not exactly of guilt but that something was wrong" (Cohen 2013, p. ix)

This perspective challenges the typical neutrality in dominant sociological approaches, as observers frequently experience profound psychological discomfort. This discomfort likely arises from a deep-seated ethical compass that informs their judgment of the specific actions' immorality. Cohen further elucidates this dialectical relationship between knowledge and ethics, merging empirical sociological methodologies with normative philosophy. He reflects, "When I began to think sociologically about apartheid, privilege, injustice and racism, I would still return to some version of that early psychological unease. I saw this unease – correctly, I believe – arising from knowing something was deeply wrong." (Cohen 2013, p. ix) This notion of "epiphany" can be understood as the manifestation of a collective inability to perceive injustices, leading to widespread indifference. Understanding confession as a precursor to justice becomes essential, as it lays the groundwork for rectifying inequalities and fostering a more equitable society.

In conclusion, denial is a significant barrier to pursuing planetary justice, as it often legitimises, explicitly or implicitly, the historical injustices of the past and their ongoing manifestations. Engaging with the concept of planetary justice involves breaking the silence surrounding historical injustices by revealing the truth, which could lead to reparative justice. As Mbembe articulates, "Today, the West does not simply want to rid itself of the strangers that we are. It also encourages us to reclaim our belongings. Without giving any account of itself, it finally wants to be able to declare: 'Not having done you any wrong, I owe you all strictly nothing'." (Mbembe 2021b, p. 168) Highlighting denial is crucial for developing a restorative justice framework. Addressing this question will form the focus of the subsequent section.

II.2 Truth and Memory of the Past

In contrast to this pervasive denial, the thesis of planetary justice posits an imperative of truth and recognition through memory. As memory is a crucial 'mirror' through which humanity confronts its existence, revealing truths without evasion or denial. (cf. van Noorloos 2017; Brito 2001) A profound il-

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lustration of this assertion can be seen in Mbembe's critical re-evaluation of apartheid history in South Africa, where he examines the interconnection of memory, truth, and justice in relation to historical atrocities. He underscores the imperative of demythologising South African history to unearth the truths surrounding the nation's apartheid crimes. Central to his project of demythologization is the role of memory, which is posited as essential for facilitating reparations for the injustices wrought by white racism. Mbembe poignantly states,

> "Bringing Rhodes' statue down is one of the many legitimate ways in which we can, today in South Africa, demythologize that history and put it to rest – which is the work memory properly understood is supposed to accomplish" (Mbembe 2015b, p. 3)

This statement is framed within the broader discourse on colonial monuments, particularly addressing the case of Cecil Rhodes, a British colonist pivotal in the colonisation of what is now known as Zimbabwe and Zambia. The ongoing debate about Rhodes' statue – and similar monuments erected during apartheid – raises critical questions about their preservation as 'places of memory' in South African public life. Two concepts illuminate the relationship between memory, truth, history, and justice from this context. First, Mbembe draws our attention to the collective South African memory of apartheid, emphasising the importance of removing the Rhodes statue. The statue embodies a place of memory, reflecting the historical atrocities of colonialism and the institutionalised racism of apartheid. Second, Mbembe calls for a transformative engagement with this memory, advocating for dismantling symbols of oppression rather than merely recounting past injustices. This proposed removal should not be interpreted as a repudiation of memory; instead, it is a recognition of the crimes that such symbols represent and an invitation to engage in "demythologization" – a process synonymous with a "capacity for truth." It is essential to confront the nation's tragic history, challenge longstanding narratives, and foster genuine justice and reconciliation in South Africa. Mbembe argues:

> "Many whites have retreated to a comfortable position of personal non-culpability and are unwilling to tell the truth about past misdeeds. Born to positions of enormous social and economic advantage, they are reluctant to wash

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their hands of the privileges they accumulated over three centuries and a half." (Mbembe 2015a, p. 6)

Thus, justice is contingent upon the community's collective capacity for truth regarding past offences; engaging with this memory is fundamental to meaningfully reconstructing society. (cf. Bernecker 2009; Nora 1989) Such recognition enables societies to reflect on themselves and rectify the historical wrongs. (cf. San Martín and Wood 2022b) Mbembe articulates the notion of becoming (*advenir*) as an ongoing process of self-awareness – an inherently fluid and never final realisation. (cf. 2023, p. 90) This concept emphasises that human relationships with time and space are characterised by dynamic growth and progression, emerging dialectically from the reparation of the past. (cf. Amadiume 2000; Campbell 2009) Hence, the capacity for truth cannot be disentangled from the collective capacity to remember; it necessitates a dialogue that bridges the present and future, prompting a critical reinterpretation of humanity's relationship with the world. (cf. Schechtman 1994) This dialogue can ultimately lead to the establishment of a global community in which all individuals achieve reconciliation with themselves and the broader ecosystem. (cf. Mbembe 2022)

In conclusion, pursuing a more just and equitable earthly community hinges on our ability to engage with memory constructively, acknowledging past injustices while fostering a collective commitment to truth and reconciliation. Through such endeavours, we hope to build a future that reflects humanity's diverse experiences and aspirations.

II.3 The Truth About Historical Crimes

The concept of historical crimes is mentioned in Achille Mbembe's work, particularly in his book *The Earthly Community* (2022), where he introduces the thesis of planetary justice, defined as the capacity for truth. Mbembe asserts, "Wherever historical crimes have been committed, truth must come first, and the duty of reparation must apply to all, without discrimination."[2] Historical crimes are past atrocities that have severely damaged the relations between communities and people. From a cosmological standpoint, truth-making involves remembering them and recognising them as concrete tragedies that

2 « Là où des crimes historiques ont été commis, la vérité doit venir en premier, et le devoir de réparation doit valoir pour tous, sans discrimination. » Mbembe 2023, p. 196.

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require reparation, rather than mere figments of imagination or mythical narratives. To engage with the truth is to unearth traces of this history embedded in this wounded collective memory. (cf. Cubitt 2013) Mbembe addresses this topic through the lens of "yesterday's crimes," describing them as "stains and profanity, the splendid sterility of an atrophied existence: in short, they show the impossibility of 'making community' and rewalking the paths of humanity." (Mbembe 2021b, p. 2)

In his article *Conceptualising Historical Crimes* (2012), De Baets questions whether the term "historical crimes" encompasses slavery, colonisation, genocide, war crimes, civil wars, colonial wars, wars of independence, and more. A critical feature of these definitions is their nature as "retroactive labelling" (cf. Baets 2012, p. 61) They aim to classify past violence to enable a critical reassessment of history, promote truth, and pursue reparations. While De Baets does not explicitly explain how these classifications help restore justice, it remains an essential reference for analysing Mbembe's engagement with the concept of historical crime. Such insights can deepen our understanding of how confronting historical injustices is vital for truth-telling and fostering a meaningful debate on reparations in today's world. This exploration clearly shows that addressing historical crimes is essential for creating an equitable justice system that includes all communities affected by the legacy of the past.

The complexity of historical injustices – encompassing slavery, colonisation, genocide, and violent conflicts – is a crucial element in understanding our shared humanity during modernity. As articulated by De Baets, these crimes have led to the deaths of millions and have not yet been fully acknowledged or addressed in terms of responsibility and reparations. The enduring presence of these tragedies speaks to the nature of relationships forged throughout modern history. Engaging with these past atrocities requires preserving their "traces" or "marks". (cf. Mbembe 2023, p. 71) The exploration of truth involves rediscovering the profound implications of this shared and tragic memory: What do these events reveal about our identity, our interrelations, our communities, and the structural violence that persists in our present world? Such inquiries illuminate our planetary responsibility, a crucial condition for achieving justice, reparation, and reconciliation.

This interplay underscores why the question of memory is vital in understanding the discourse surrounding truth. (cf. Campbell 2009) Mbembe aligns with Tania Murray Li's assertion that the Earth serves as a temporary and transient dwelling site. However, he posits that memory is integral to sustaining life; without it, the continuity of existence is jeopardised. The endurance of

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life on our planet is intrinsically tied to the capacity to repair all forms of broken existence, whether within society or the natural realm. This perspective resonates with philosophers and scholars of memory, including Paul Ricoeur, Michael Rothberg, and Aleida Assmann, who recognise the intrinsic connections among memory, truth, and history. They highlight the critical roles of these elements in reconstructing human communities grounded in ethical and political principles of sharing, reciprocity, solidarity, and justice. (cf. Bernecker 2009)

III. Truth and the Idea of Reparation

In the previous section, I emphasised the importance of acknowledging the truth regarding historical crimes. A critical truth is that these crimes have established debt relationships among communities worldwide. However, debt goes beyond being merely a historical concern; it has an ontological aspect, symbolising the interconnectedness of human societies and the Earth's ecosystem. Recognising and addressing this debt is vital for understanding planetary justice, which can be viewed as a form of reparation. This section examines how these relationships of truth and debt shape the concept of planetary justice, incorporating Mbembe's perspective.

III.1 Truth About the Mutual Debts

Remembering entails recognising a bond of mutual debt among all living beings, a relationship often overlooked in contemporary discourse. (cf. Rossi 2020; Grätzel 2008) Mbembe articulates this notion by stating, "What founds both time and community is debt or, precisely, this awareness of unpayable debt, but which, perhaps because it is unpayable, must be able to be claimed back at any moment."[3] This debt encapsulates the interactions of human communities throughout history, allowing for continuous development. (cf. Grätzel 2008, p. 96; Mbembe 2023, p. 65) If it is accepted that no community exists in isolation, cut off from nature or other people, then recognition of

3 « Ce qui fonde en effet et le temps et la communauté, c'est la dette ou, précisément, cette conscience de la dette impayable, mais qui, peut-être parce qu'impayable, doit pouvoir être réclamée à tout moment. » Mbembe 2023, p. 156.

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this debt is essential to cultivating truth amongst communities. This acknowledgement of debt can manifest in both constructive and destructive contexts. On the one hand, beneficial interactions have historically enriched the culture and economy of specific communities. (cf. Mbembe 2023, pp. 163–164) On the other hand, violent exchanges – evidenced by the legacies of slavery, colonization, and genocide – have resulted in profound suffering, erasing entire populations and cultures (Lotter, 2017; Mbembe, 2023, pp. 12–13).

The German philosopher Stephan Grätzel (2004) has conducted a comprehensive analysis of the concept of debt, with a primary focus on its ethical dimensions. While a detailed exploration of his reflections is beyond the scope of this discussion, certain critical aspects can illuminate Mbembe's interpretation of debt. Grätzel posits that individuals experience an existential debt – a concept that transcends personal wrongdoing or transgressions. (cf. Grätzel 2004, p. 31) Rather than being a debt attributable solely to personal actions, this existential debt stems from the fundamental condition of being human – a shared burden that all sentient beings carry. This debt is intrinsic to our existence; it emerges from being alive. Moreover, in examining this existential debt, Grätzel draws on the works of existentialist philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger. (cf. 2004, p. 31) According to Heidegger, existence cannot be self-sustained or self-justified; instead, it is contingent upon an external influence or force that 'throws' beings into existence. Consequently, no individual can sustain life – eating, drinking, and simply living – without recognising their interconnectedness and indebtedness to other living entities. (cf. Grätzel 2004, p. 32)

This notion of relational debt is echoed in the works of contemporary thinkers like Jean Baudrillard and Jean Ziegler, who discuss the "denationalisation" within "capitalist society". Their analyses further emphasise the ethical implications of our interconnected existence and the inherent responsibilities that arise from our relationships with others, both living and deceased. Engaging with these philosophical perspectives can deepen our understanding of existential debt as a foundational aspect of human relationships and ethical considerations in contemporary society. Beyond existential debt, Mbembe's ethics, general ecology, and political philosophy highlight the importance of recognising historical debt as crucial for ensuring the sustainability of life on Earth. In other words, to engage effectively with planetary justice, we must acknowledge the debts humans owe one another from past injustices, along with the urgent need for accountability and reparation.

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By fostering awareness of the connection between historical debts and the need to address them, we can develop a more equitable and responsible relationship among people worldwide. Mbembe asserts that recognising the debt among nations requires a framework of mutual memories. The idea of "mutuality" suggests that no single group monopolises memory; all memories deserve fair acknowledgement and narration. Engaging in remembrance helps us uncover these historical crimes and the negative legacies they leave. Such awareness offers opportunities to move beyond violence and pursue reparative justice. This capacity for truth is vital for the sustainability of life, as it fosters self-awareness within humanity and helps break the cycle of violence. Memory acts as a lens through which humanity can "reproduce itself," and "aligns words with deeds." (Mbembe, 2023, p. 46).

Mutuality promotes the development of new relationships where communities recognise the inherent worth of each other's lives over time. It also represents a form of coexistence that enables the fair distribution of vital resources across different people and generations. (cf. Rose and Wadham-Smith 2004) Mbembe underscores this critical relational framework when he queries: "Have we drawn all the consequences from the fact that the present is the product of a debt, and that, outside this circle of uninterrupted and unpayable debt, time does not exist, or at least the consciousness of time does not exist?"[4] This poignant question underscores the premise that the potential for planetary justice hinges on humanity's ability to learn from the past by recognising the debts owed to one another and the Earth itself. Repairing these debts is crucial for dismantling the existing power dynamics of exploitation.

III.2 Truth as Reparation of the Living

Reflecting on the necessity of truth regarding historical crimes, Mbembe raises an essential question: "What happens when [those responsible] are no longer alive? Do their descendants inherit wrongs of which they are not the direct perpetrators?"[5] While Mbembe does not extensively specify what reparation

4 « Mais avons-nous véritablement tiré toutes les conséquences du fait que le présent est le produit d'une dette et que, hors de ce cercle de la dette ininterrompue et impayable, le temps n'existe pas ou, du moins, la conscience du temps n'existe pas ? » Mbembe 2023, p. 156.

5 « Mais qu'advient-il du moment où ils ne sont plus vivants ? Leurs descendants héritent-ils de torts dont ils ne sont point les auteurs directs ? Qu'entend-on par « irréparable » ? » Mbembe 2023, p. 189.

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should entail for the descendants of past injustice victims, he recognises the crimes as inherently 'unmeasurable,' 'incalculable,' 'priceless,' and 'unpayable.' (cf. Mbembe 2023, p. 196) The urgency of recognising responsibility for historical crimes confronts the harsh reality that what has been lost is incalculable. This is particularly relevant in cases of innocent lives claimed during the brutal histories of slavery, colonisation, and modern genocides, as well as the substantial material and symbolic resources seized from non-European populations since the onset of modernity. Recognising this limitation in the discourse surrounding planetary justice, Mbembe asserts, "The incalculable and the irreparable, however, neither eliminate nor proscribe the demand for care and truth, still less than for justice. On the contrary, they merely underline their urgency and interminability." (Mbembe 2023, p. 5) The concepts of "urgency" and "care" emphasise the critical need to cultivate a notion of justice that comprehends truth, despite the formidable challenges such an endeavour entails.

This argumentation highlights that the pursuit of truth and the practice of reparation stem from a collaborative engagement between individuals who choose to share their intertwined histories. Justice seeks to address and repair historical injustices, with truth–telling articulated as the primary manifestation of justice – serving not as a vehicle for revenge but rather as a means to regenerate a new form of planetary relationship based on responsibility towards the Living (Le Vivant). Thus, the concepts of truth, sharing, and reparation form the cornerstone of the argument for a planetary politics. In the first chapter of this essay, I have analysed the idea of a planetary community as the essential political horizon for the realisation of principles of sharing and reparation. My aim is not to develop these ideas further but to explain how they play a crucial role in Mbembe's reflection on planetary justice. Together, they provide the foundational principles for a reconciled earthly community, in which each member occupies their rightful place and contributes to the sustainability of life. Mbembe argues:

> "to build a world that we share, we must restore the humanity stolen from those who have historically been subjected to processes of abstraction and objectification. From this perspective, the concept of reparation is not only an economic project but also a process of reassembling amputated parts, repairing broken links, relaunching the forms of reciprocity without which there can be no progress for humanity (Mbembe 2017, p. 182).

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During the modern era, African descendants were forcibly stripped from their ancestral homelands, transported across the Atlantic in brutal slave ships, and sold into enslavement. They were compelled to work without pay, stripped of the fundamental rights of human dignity and freedom. (cf. Klein 1990) The impact of these historical crimes has resulted in the loss of millions of lives and the obliteration of entire communities. The ramifications of slavery and colonialism extend far beyond a mere global imbalance of wealth and power; they have fractured relationships among human beings, who have been hierarchized, categorised, and treated as exploitable objects. (cf.Candido 2013) Ultimately, the very fabric of relationships among living beings globally has been irrevocably altered. Thus, from a retrospective examination of modern history, the idea of justice defined as reparation aims to establish normative foundations for renewing relationships on a planetary level. Mbembe states,

> "As long as the idea persists that we owe justice only to our own kind and that there are unequal races and peoples, and as long as we continue to make people believe that slavery and colonialism were great feats of 'civilization,' then the notion of reparation will continue to be mobilized by the historical victims of the brutality of European expansion in the world." (Mbembe 2017, p. 178)

The concept of reparation does not merely entail acknowledging these crimes; it also entails creating a new human community based on reciprocity and the sharing of resources, including those related to life and dignity. This imperative of sharing is crucial as it serves as the foundation for politics and democracy on a planetary scale. Mbembe argues that for such sharing to become possible and for a planetary democracy to materialise, the demands for justice and reparation are unavoidable, especially in the context of the democracy of species. (Mbembe 2017, p. 40).

Moreover, Mbembe points out that the violence of Western modernity has been directed not only at humans but also at the environment. (cf.Beinart and Hughes 2007a; 2007b) The term '*the Other*' extends beyond human beings who have been commodified; it encompasses all of reality, which has been exploited and destroyed since the rise of modernity. (cf.Savage 1992; Klein 1990; Miller 1997) Consequently, the object of reparation is the living system as such. Here, 'repairing' refers to creating the conditions necessary for sustaining life. (cf.Mbembe 2017, p. 181) These conditions necessitate the implementation of socio-political, economic, and cosmological care struc-

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tures. (cf. Mbembe 2017, p. 180) It requires all human beings and communities to change their ways of thinking, behaviours, and collective structures in ways that support life rather than destroy it. As Mbembe observes, humans are not the sole inhabitants of the Earth, and the boundaries of humanity should not be the only determinants of the world's inhabitants. It is increasingly clear that these inhabitants include numerous artefacts and all living, organic, and plant species. Additionally, geological, geomorphological, and climatological forces contribute to the diversity of the Earth's new inhabitants. (cf. Mbembe 2017, p. 13) Therefore, the imperative for reparation is founded on a profound awareness of the vulnerability of all human and non-human living beings. This awareness leads to both individual and collective practices of care.

The concept of vulnerability highlights that humans and all living beings are not immortal. (Mbembe 2020a, p. 27). The negative impacts of their actions are evident in tragedies such as wars and genocides, resulting in the loss of millions of lives. (Mbembe 2020a, p. 21) Additionally, the unequal distribution of wealth on Earth leads to humanitarian crises, including famine and epidemics. Ecological disasters caused by industrialisation and 'technological escalation' are also responsible for the disappearance of numerous animal and plant species. (Mbembe 2020a, pp. 68–69) These examples illustrate the extent to which living beings are vulnerable and the responsibility of humanity. (cf. Raymond et al. 2020) They challenge the modern myth of power and warn human beings against actions that could lead to the extinction of all life on Earth. Mbembe argues:

> "No one has the absolute sovereign power across the entire expanse of the Earth. Some singular uses can be made of this common soil and shelter here or there. But no one actually earns it, and it is unable to be entrusted to the goodwill of a single person. In truth, we are above all its inhabitants and, most of us, passers-by on it" (Mbembe 2022, p. 36)

Given the impact of instrumental reason, which transforms human beings and the Earth into commodities, ethics seeks to guide human behaviour in accordance with principles that sustain life on Earth. The concept of reparation signifies the care of life, rather than its appropriation and destruction. (cf. Mbembe 2020a, pp. 230–231; Appiah 2004) While exclusive ownership fosters an illusion of omnipotence, leading individuals to desire the possession of living things and their commercialisation, the principle of reparation emphasises our relationship with the living and recognises their inherent vulnerability.

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Mbembe metaphorically depicts this process of identifying and repairing our shared vulnerability as "reassembling the parts of an amputated body" (the body of the Earth) or "rediscovering the meaning of a shared humanity." This reassembly transcends mere legal reparation, demanding a new ethical and political framework that aims to achieve an equitable distribution of life's resources among all Earth's human and non-human inhabitants.

Authors such as Buckley-Zistel et al. (2014) assert that the overarching goal of reparations is to secure and facilitate recognition and inclusion for those who have been harmed. As such, the scope of reparative measures broadens to include financial compensation, material goods, and essential services. Thus, beyond the material dimensions, reparations encompass reconciliation. (cf. McGary 2003; Jagmohan 2023; Fraley 2007) Lisa Laplante (2013) emphasizes this connection in her quest to establish a comprehensive theory of reparation. Echoing the thoughts of theorists like Mbembe, she encourages contemplation of reparation through the lens of a "continuum of justice." Laplante describes a restorative justice model with four dimensions: material compensation, which is a fundamental first step; restoring victims' dignity through meaningful encounters and reconciliation with their oppressors; a civic dimension that involves the state's recognition and inclusion of victims, ensuring their access to essential goods and services necessary to uphold their rights, dignity, and freedom; and the redistribution of socio-economic resources to reduce inequalities between wealthy and impoverished populations.

Therefore, the concept of reparation extends beyond merely redistributing economic resources to embrace a sense of global responsibility. It seeks to reconsider the very status of humans in their relationships with one another and with other elements inhabiting the Earth – minerals, plants, and animals – on a new foundation. In this sense, Mbembe's philosophy aligns with some principles of environmental ethics and planetary and global justice. The following section will provide a brief outline of these points of comparison. The aim is not to give a detailed analysis of these theories, but to highlight their shared approach in proposing solutions to the problems of sustainability and the perseverance of life on Earth within a planetary context of death-worlds. This comparative study will lay the groundwork for a critical reflection on the limits of Mbembe's perspectives and open new pathways for thought.

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IV. From Environmental Ethics to Planetary Justice

I aim to examine the roots and potential links between Mbembe's ideas on planetary justice and the discussions surrounding environmental ethics. By comparing his thoughts with these debates, we can better identify their similarities and differences. This also allows a more detailed assessment of the originality of Mbembe's perspective.

IV.1 Planetary and Environmental Ethics

Rethinking the conditions for sustaining life on Earth prompts us to explore certain philosophical traditions, environmental ethics, and ethics of nature that emerged in the 1970s through the 1990s. These movements, primarily developed in English-speaking and German-speaking countries and later in France, should not be viewed as a single, structured discipline with fixed objects, methods, or protocols. Instead, they involve diverse questions, often approached through interdisciplinary methods, that concentrate on human relationships with so-called evolved organisms, such as mammals (animal ethics), or with nature itself, including lower organisms like plants, insects, microorganisms, bacteria, and entire ecosystems. This hope is notably expressed in the works of theorists such as Hans Jonas (1984), Dieter Birnbacher (1988), Michel Serres (1995), Luc Ferry (1995), Dominique Bourg (1992), Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich (1996) and Albert Schweitzer (2006), to cite some examples.

As a physicist, philosopher, and politician, Meyer-Abich develops the notion of an ethics that goes beyond bioethics, proposing ideas for a planetary ethics. (cf. Meyer-Abich 1979; 1983) He critically analyses the historical and conceptual development of the concept of nature in the West and explains how this has led to humans being made the centre of nature. Rethinking the connections between humans and nature requires moving beyond anthropocentrism towards a perspective focused on nature itself. (cf. Meyer-Abich 1977; 1996) In other words, the human challenge is to justify our way of positioning ourselves within what he calls an 'open cosmos', which is neither centred on the Earth nor on humankind, but on nature itself. (cf. Meyer-Abich 1996) Such a revolution is even more necessary and justified because, he affirms:

> "Our present state is to live without peace, to live in violence, alienation, and disorder. To endure this state and to use nature's gifts of human dispo-

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> sition, we have the chance in the future to recover what has been lost. We are actually living in evil, but better circumstances and ultimately peace may emerge from this intermediate state between nature lost and nature recovered." (Meyer-Abich 1996, p. 182)

In Meyer-Abich's essay, *Toward a Practical Philosophy of Nature (1979)*, this critique is deepened and expanded into a reflection on how nature is treated through science, with a practical approach similar to Mbembe's planetary ethics. Among the crises critiqued by Meyer-Abich and supporters of environmental ethics, one could mention ecological disasters that paralyse certain regions of the world: millions of people face droughts each year caused by global warming, desertification, deforestation, or pollution; these tragedies are worsened by violent bushfires that, annually, paralyse entire regions and lead to the loss of human and animal lives; finally, some areas experience flooding due to heavy rains and uncontrollable rise in waters in coastal regions, destroying habitats or farmland.

Thus, according to proponents of environmental ethics, the threat of death manifesting in the sociopolitical sphere, through social inequalities or forms of political and economic violence, is seen as a reflection of another, even more brutal violence, aimed at the environment, particularly the animal and plant species that inhabit the Earth. It is the entire ecosystem – animals, plants, and minerals – that is targeted by human brutality, as Albert Schweitzer, one of the advocates of environmental ethics in Germany, reminds us. He states:

> "That we are forced to destroy diverse life, whether for our preservation, to eliminate animals that are born and cannot be raised by us, or to protect ourselves from harmful animals, is the terrible law of the disunion of the will to live, to which we are subjected. We must never surrender to it thoughtlessly." (Schweitzer 2006, p. 68)

Recognising the impact of human activity on the environment, advocates of environmental ethics are seeking a new way of relating to nature – including animals and plants – that transcends an anthropocentric view. From this perspective, three key effects emerge, each set to revolutionise our understanding and practices. Firstly, epistemologically, this shift advocates replacing an anthropocentric approach with either a biocentric or physicalist one, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of the connections between humans and the natural world. Ethically, rejecting an anthropocentric view leads to the de-

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velopment of new principles guiding human behaviour – principles based on respect, responsibility, empathy, reciprocity, and care for non-human species, particularly animals and plants. Politically, the idea of respecting and caring for plants and animals prompts reflection on their fundamental right to exist, opposing their killing. This ethic of life underpins Albert Schweitzer's concept of "*Ehrfurcht für das Leben*" (reverence for life), as expressed in his statement:

> "Keep your eyes open so that you do not miss the opportunity to be a saviour! Do not pass by carelessly the poor insect that has fallen into the water, but sense what it means: to struggle with death in the water. Help it out with a blade of grass or a little stick, and when it then cleans its wings, know that something wonderful has happened to you: the happiness of having saved a life... acting in the name and with the authority of God." (Schweitzer 2006, p. 68)

In his commentary on Schweitzer's ethical thought, the German philosopher Stephan Grätzel (2006) explains the meaning of Schweitzer's concept of reverence for life, its foundations, and its ultimate purpose. Grätzel emphasises that Schweitzer's core idea centres on his 'mystical experience,' which leads to an internal transformation of thought and being. Schweitzer's ethics go beyond simply promoting abstract principles of conduct; instead, they are seen as an 'inspiration' that fosters a profound connection to oneself, the world, and the universe, guiding behaviour rooted in caring for life. His concept of 'reverence for life' is:

> "an attitude towards life. An attitude is a relation. Here, a behaviour is developed, which, however, is not behaviour in the sense of a behavioural theory, but behaviour that has to do with the Self." (Grätzel 2006, pp. 22–23)

The concept of the Self here refers to a higher ethical instance, rooted in the primary and fundamental source of life, which manifests in the ethical subject in relation to all living beings. It is within this harmony with oneself, with the life that is within oneself and in nature – a life that calls to be protected – that ethical consciousness emerges as self-awareness in the world.

Thus, beyond their diversity of approaches and the context of their emergence, most theorists of environmental ethics question the principles that should guide human conduct towards nature. These ethics aim to critically describe the tragic effects of human activity on both animals and plants. On

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the other hand, they adopt a normative perspective, focusing on the principles necessary to regulate human behaviour in accordance with greater responsibility and care for all living beings. In the face of ecological crises resulting from human activity towards animal, plant, and mineral species, these ethics affirm the possibility, even the necessity, of reforming behaviours to ensure the sustainability of life on Earth.

IV.2 Debates on Planetary and Global Justice

Reflections on ecological ethics have shaped what is generally referred to as the planetary turn in contemporary political theory, particularly through questioning the idea of planetary justice. (cf. Biermann and Kalfagianni 2020; Hickey and Robeyns 2020; Misiaszek 2020; Dryzek and Pickering 2018) Debates centre on the concept's meaning, its implications for contemporary politics and international relations, and for global governance. (cf. Kalfagianni et al. 2024; San Martín and Wood 2022a; Gupta et al. 2021a) This section aims to briefly outline their connection to Mbembe's thought. This short comparison will help us clearly position Mbembe's ideas in relation to these established and emerging perspectives.

Pedersen et al. (2024) discuss the meaning, object, and horizon of planetary justice, explaining how the holistic nature of contemporary crises necessitates a transdisciplinary, multispecies, and intergenerational methodological approach. (cf. Ryder et al. 2024; Chao and Celermajer 2023; Winter 2022) Their approach fosters awareness of the interconnectedness between the ecological and social challenges humans face today, in relation to themselves and the broader web of living and non-living beings. From this awareness emerges the concept of planetary justice as 'eco-social justice', which profoundly influences the future of life beyond current generations, aiming towards those to come. (cf. Pedersen et al. 2024) This definition is valuable because it considers ecological and social issues together, particularly in the context of climate change, global inequalities, sociopolitical and economic violence, and the relationship between humans and the natural world. Moreover, the concept of eco-social justice provides space for indigenous, non-European knowledge. It challenges the historical global power structures inherited from colonisation, particularly those that perpetuate unequal relations among peoples within political, economic, or scientific spheres of international relations. (cf. Agathangelou and Killian 2021) Central to this is the equitable sharing of life among all Earth's inhabitants. (cf. Gupta et al. 2021a, 2021b)

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However, the question of what conditions are necessary to achieve this idea of justice remains. Jeremy Bendik-Keymer (2024) emphasises the importance of personal reflection and self-work, which connect the individual to the planetary context. Kurki (2024) favours an approach based on creating relational networks between 'pluriverses'. Ryder et al. (2024) argue that transformative changes must occur at multiple scales and across various temporal horizons. Agathangelou (2024) emphasises the direction and horizon of these changes, asserting that an equitable planetary transition requires a profound restructuring of social structures from the bottom up. This diversity of approaches to planetary justice illustrates the complexity of this notion and the need to integrate multiple perspectives to safeguard a vital, harmonious connection between all non-human species and the entire biosphere as they participate in the balance of life on the planet. (Gupta et al. 2021b)

Moreover, Mbembe's concept of planetary justice aligns with those of the referenced theorists in several respects. On the one hand, this concept adopts a comprehensive view of the crises threatening life on Earth. The ecological approach is integrated with sociopolitical and economic perspectives, alongside a historical and decolonial approach to global injustices. This holistic view underscores that issues of planetary justice cannot be disentangled from broader questions of social justice, collective responsibility, and solidarity. (cf. Mbembe 2024, p. 25) Moreover, Mbembe's perspectives can be engagingly compared with those of contemporary environmental thinkers like Brown and Corbera (2003), Schlosberg (2007), and Carmin and Agyeman (2011). Central to his philosophy is the ecological crisis, which he rigorously interrogates in works such as *Brutalism* (2024). Here, he draws from Anthropocene theories to explore the environmental crisis's political, economic, and biological ramifications.

Additionally, Mbembe introduces the concept of a "general ecology," inspired by Dogon metaphysics, that highlights the interconnectedness of all Earth's inhabitants – humans, non-humans, ancestors, and future generations – as well as all human-made objects. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 17) This framework critically reflects on the histories of slavery and colonisation, laying the groundwork for analysing ecological challenges that transcend mere climate concerns. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 17–22) Thus, Mbembe's critique of brutalism raises essential issues regarding the quantification of existence through digital capitalism, the commodification of life, and systemic problems such as racism and sexism within the context of general ecology. Besides, the quest for a suitable concept of planetary justice resonates with the ideas of Biermann and Kalfagianni (2020). These scholars share a vision of broad-

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ening the climate discourse to encompass equitable resource distribution and sharing. They note the historical marginalisation of these issues in Northern countries but also recognise a burgeoning interest in international public policy, as demonstrated by scholars' initiatives such as *Future Earth* and the *Earth System Governance Project*.

Furthermore, the academic community is increasingly engaged in discussions about who qualifies as a subject of planetary rights. For instance, Hickey and Robeyns (2020) argue for an inclusion that transcends human boundaries. Rather than adhering to a purely nationalistic framework of law and justice, they propose a planetary scale that complements existing civil rights frameworks. This concept resonates with the non-anthropocentric and post-nationalist legal perspectives articulated by theorists like Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011), who emphasise the importance of incorporating non-human entities into contemporary political discourse. In conclusion, Mbembe's insights present a profound call to reconceptualise justice in a planetary context, aligning with Caney (2006), who emphasize global solidarity among all Earth's inhabitants. His vision for a just planet invites a re-evaluation of ethical and political priorities, pushing for a collective notion of planetary justice that is both inclusive and responsible.

The originality of Mbembe's thought extends beyond mere comparative analysis, particularly his theses on planetary rights, which serve as the foundation for the concept of planetary justice. Achieving planetary justice requires acknowledging the universal right to circulation, dwelling, and breathing. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 72–77) Unlike essentialist cosmologies that portray beings as static entities, Mbembe's cosmological perspective conceptualises beings as dynamic participants in a reciprocal relationship, engaging in an ongoing exchange of matter, energy, and information with their environment. (2022, p. 54) Water, air, and soil form the basis of these vital exchanges. (2022, pp. 7–8) Mbembe elucidates the cosmological idea's significant political implications, emphasising the necessity of material, cultural, and intellectual exchanges for the survival of human communities. It also lays bare the need to critique the discriminatory migration policies currently in effect globally, as exemplified by the borders that separate nations and continents. (2019b, pp. 102–103) While citizens of Northern countries often enjoy the freedom to move across the globe, a substantial segment of the population residing in Southern countries finds such rights systematically denied. This imbalance informs the philosophy behind the universal right to circulation, which seeks to redress global injustices related to housing and residency. The idea of a

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universal right to shelter envisions reconfiguring the planet as a habitable environment for all. This would necessitate the abolition of artificial borders and the implementation of policies to achieve equitable wealth redistribution. (2017, pp. 22–24)

Although Mbembe shares the libertarian critique of a predominant sovereign state (cf. 2019b, pp. 76–77), he advocates for the possibility of equitable circulation across the Earth's surface. Here, freedom does not equate to an unregulated market; instead, it embodies a commitment to the ethical principles of sharing and responsibility towards the planet's diverse inhabitants. Therefore, any notion of justice predicated on free trade, enterprise, and market dynamics must be complemented by a fair distribution of the planet's resources – encompassing not just material wealth but also intellectual, cultural, and human capital.

Furthermore, the rights to mobility and dwelling are intricately linked to the universal right to breathe, synonymous with the right to life. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical nature of this right, illuminating the severity of the ecological crisis facing humanity. (2021c, pp. 59–60) The pandemic revealed the global scope of human vulnerability, affecting every corner of the world. It also highlighted the collective responsibility to respond to such crises. It highlighted disparities in healthcare access, particularly between the Northern countries that hold vaccine patents and the majority of Southern countries. (2021c, p. 59) Thus, the notion of a universal right to breathe entails the establishment of sustainable health ecosystems globally. This right emphasises the value of all forms of life and humanity's collective accountability to dismantle oppressive structures of violence. In summary, Mbembe's understanding of planetary justice prompts critical inquiry into the normative frameworks for the "politics of the clinic" within a global context. (2017, p. 163) Ethically, this necessitates a shift in perspective, prioritising care for all living entities and restoring mutual relationships between humans and non-human beings.

IV.3 The Relevance of the Idea of Planetary Justice

Mbembe's insights into history, political economy, ethics, and cosmology provoke vital questions about the nature of planetary justice. They urge us to consider: what lessons must humanity learn from the recent course of modernity? How can our reflections on past and present injustices shape the philosophical base of a new, equitable justice framework for all living beings – humans and non-humans alike? By "history," we mean individual national stories and the

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broader continuum of existence that unites all life on Earth. The term "we" encompasses all individuals who recognise a shared responsibility for the Earth and its future. At the heart of this discussion is the crucial choice between defining human identity narrowly – such as within nation-states, races, or religions – and adopting a broad vision of humanity, recognising our interconnectedness on this planet. Thus, to define human beings solely through the lens of individual identity or racial affiliation carries significant consequences for global economic and political dynamics. (2017, pp. 27–28) Addressing the question of planetary justice necessitates a bold inquiry into our aspirations for a human community that can collectively navigate the tragic memory of slavery, the violence of European colonialism across the Americas, Africa, and Asia, and the genocides endured by the Herero and Nama, the Jews, and the Armenians, among others. We must ask: What form of human community is essential for ensuring the survival of our planet? (2017, pp. 107–108)

Contemplating planetary justice requires recognising the interconnections between violence, power, and domination. Two fundamental points emerge from Mbembe's discourse, forming the bedrock of a novel concept of planetary justice. The first pertains to identifying false dilemmas. For instance, how can we legitimately discuss "national sovereignty" in an age marked by the global climate crisis and the stark disparities in wealth distribution? The planetary nature of our economic, political, and environmental injustices implicates the survival of discrete societies and the viability of all living entities, human and non-human. Mbembe explains how these injustices pose global challenges that demand coordinated responses, shifting the focus from the sovereignty of nation-states to a conscious acknowledgement of the vulnerability of life as a whole. (2017, pp. 115–116)

The second point addresses the ethical frameworks that underpin the concept of justice, which include the principles of renunciation, reparation, and sharing. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 109–110) The principle of renunciation calls for re-evaluating individual freedoms, particularly regarding property rights and rejecting the notion of unrestricted freedom, which often legitimises the monopolisation of resources by a minority. Mbembe advocates for a paradigm that emphasises solidarity and responsibility towards all life forms. Consequently, the principle of renunciation is inextricably linked to the principles of reparation and sharing. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 37) Reparation signifies our obligation to mend the fractured relationships between humanity and the natural world. Reflecting on historical atrocities – such as slavery, colonisation, and genocide – yields deeper insight into the inequitable structures that govern con-

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temporary political, economic, and cultural realities. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 118) Current ecological crises, armed conflicts, and poverty cannot be dismissed as random or predestined; instead, their roots lie in prolonged human actions and systemic injustices. The principle of reparation activates present generations' awareness and accountability for historical crimes – whether sociopolitical or environmental. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 114–115) This awareness empowers contemporary societies to foster new relationships with ecosystems based on sharing and reciprocity. (cf. Mbembe 2022, p. 110)

Lastly, the principle of sharing advocates for the equitable distribution of opportunities and resources among all living beings, irrespective of their origins or identities. It asserts that all inhabitants of the Earth – human and nonhuman – have the right to thrive by accessing the planet's shared resources. (cf. Mbembe 2022, pp. 96–97) The Earth is a common heritage; as such, all beings must be granted the opportunity to realise their potential within its embrace. The urgent recognition of Earth's vulnerability and the inherent threats it poses to all living beings necessitates reevaluating planetary relationships that transcend identity-based frameworks. Consequently, the discourse on planetary justice should be articulated as a comprehensive politics of the living that encompasses the entire planet. This framework posits that at the core of human-nonhuman interactions lies a principle of reciprocity, asserting that all living entities on Earth deserve fundamental rights.

Thus, engaging with Mbembe's idea of planetary justice requires establishing a methodological framework that supports his theoretical discourse. Central to his perspective are three intertwined domains: history, political economy, and the ethics of the living. (Mbembe 2022, p. 113) From historical analysis, Mbembe contends that human evolution must be contextualised over the long term, incorporating a sense of Earth's temporalities that interlace human and non-human experiences. (Mbembe 2022, p. 88) The basis for this triadic understanding of temporality is the living world itself. (Mbembe 2022, p. 28) Moreover, this metaphysical interpretation is complemented by an existential understanding of history, in which past and present events are essential for making sense of human existence and community identity. (Mbembe 2022, p. 99) Thus, it becomes paramount to reinterpret historical tragedies – such as slavery and colonisation – which serve as foundational elements of modernity. (Mbembe 2022, p. 108) Mbembe's exploration of the fraught historical relationships among Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas provides the ethical grounding for his analysis. A critical assessment of slavery and colonisation

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reveals a fundamental tension within the political economy: the relationship between sovereignty and property.

This argument raises vital questions: What rights do individuals or communities have regarding the exclusive ownership of Earth's resources, and what ethical implications do these rights entail? If production, the market, and property are essential to human existence and political relations, should property rights be considered exclusive, or should their limitations be considered? (Mbembe 2022, p. 36) Our understanding of the historical black slave trade, its transformation into commodities, and the ecological injustices wrought during both colonial periods and contemporary capitalism underscores the necessity for a critical discourse on freedom and sovereignty concerning property, applicable at both national and global levels. (Mbembe 2022, p. 110) Instead of adhering to an interpretation of freedom and sovereignty favoured by libertarian thought, Mbembe proposes a reimagined framework that emphasises ethical principles of co-ownership of the Earth and the shared stewardship of living beings. (Mbembe 2022, p. 102) Consequently, the underpinning of planetary justice is an ethical framework focused on the living. (Mbembe 2022, p. 123) This ethic is grounded in the ontological principles of reciprocity and mutuality among all living entities inhabiting Earth. (Mbembe 2022, p. 119)

The concept of reciprocity challenges the notion of humans as isolated monads, as essentialist ontologies suggest. Instead, it posits that terrestrial life is characterised by continuous exchanges among all beings – minerals, plants, animals, and humans alike. Dogon cosmology reinforces this viewpoint, which does not establish a hierarchy between humans, other living beings, and ecosystems but regards them as interconnected and dynamic. (Mbembe 2022, p. 18) Through this lens, Mbembe offers a conception of humanity that acknowledges human finitude and interconnectedness, framing individuals as transient participants on Earth, indebted to and in relation with every other being. (Mbembe 2022, p. 25) Ultimately, sharing the Earth entails relinquishing exclusive ownership rights over living beings and their resources, advocating for a systemic circulation of life's reserves and developing a politics dedicated to the flourishing of all living entities.

IV.4 Where does Mbembe's Critical Utopianism Fail?

The originality of Mbembe's theory invites critical engagement with the notion of planetary justice. While his premises are thought-provoking, they also ex-

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pose limitations that warrant examination. This discussion will focus on two primary criticisms: the formal aspects of his theory and its substantive implications. A pressing challenge of our century, which resonates with Mbembe's propositions, is the effectiveness of political and justice theories, precisely their ability to manifest in daily practices, decision-making processes, and the frameworks of our regional and global institutions. (cf. Young 2023, p. 55; Grothmann et al. 2013) Humanity must grapple with the fundamental question of the intellectual capital required to establish an earthly community dedicated to life preservation and sustainability.

Additionally, we must consider how this capital can be operationalised within our institutional frameworks to navigate the complex landscape of planetary governance. (cf. Young 2021, pp. 1–15) This inquiry is central to contemporary global political theory. (Young 2021, p. 13) Here, "intellectual capital" refers to the knowledge required to develop behavioural mechanisms that drive transformation within institutions. (Young 2021, p. 17) Consequently, the effectiveness of modern planetary justice theories depends on their capacity to translate principles into laws, institutions, decisions, and behaviours. This task is all the more daunting given the complex realities of our world today. (cf. Young 2021, p. 7; Meadowcroft 2013) Moreover, the philosophical challenge of operationalising principles of planetary justice and their efficacy in global governance institutions is intertwined with practical issues in international politics. (Young 2021, p. 130) These practical issues encompass the asymmetries of power and diverging interests among nations. Mbembe's vision of an earthly community prompts us to consider the foundational steps required to construct an international political community capable of meaningful dialogue that transcends cultural differences.

However, given the diverse cultural notions of rights and justice, what institutional frameworks are essential for building consensus? Although some strategies for establishing normative conditions for global engagement in response to shared environmental, political, and economic challenges have been successful, a more profound commitment to creating equitable institutions that reflect ideals of justice and solidarity is vital for effectively addressing global issues. This situation emphasises the urgent need for a paradigm shift in our understanding of theory, especially within the discourse on planetary justice, to effectively confront the practical challenges of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. As Young states, tackling these planetary governance issues requires a focused effort, metaphorically described as the need to "put all our eggs in this basket". (Young 2021, p. 11) While this metaphor

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emphasises the fundamental need for solutions in effective global governance, it also raises important questions about governance structures, implementations, and effectiveness: Who is entrusted with this "basket," and under what conditions?

Furthermore, the egg metaphor underscores the complexities of achieving Mbembe's ideal of justice. For example, how do we effectively accommodate diverse entities and interests – whether "chicken eggs," "ducks," "big fish," or "little fish" – within a single framework? This complexity challenges our understanding of the Earth's systems and the limits of Mbembe's concept of planetary justice. The substantive critique aims to outline the conditions necessary for a philosophical inquiry into the effectiveness of contemporary theories of planetary justice, which are based on a paradigm shift. It raises crucial questions: Who are the subjects of planetary justice? What are their collective and individual responsibilities? How do historical contexts influence their political, cultural, and environmental interactions? Addressing these questions is vital to avoid the trap of abstract utopianism, which overlooks the realities shaped by diverse historical trajectories that affect the Earth system. These realities are deeply influenced by the enduring impacts of colonialism, which continue to shape collective experiences and narratives worldwide.

The concept of a paradigm shift necessitates a thorough examination of the organic conditions that support planetary justice and governance. Exploring the meta-legal aspects of planetary governance encourages reflection on how to promote individual responsibility and develop the full range of human abilities necessary for creating sustainable institutions. This effort has two main goals: first, to assess the impact of personal actions on ecosystems, legal systems, and institutional frameworks; and second, to engage the entire human population in our shared responsibility to protect the planet. It is argued that various political subjectivities can coexist within a unified framework of planetary justice. Engaging with governance from a meta-legal perspective can be instrumental in resolving intricate challenges, such as the constitutive and positional effectiveness highlighted. (Young 2021, p. 13) If it holds that individuals bear ultimate responsibility for planetary crises – exemplified by harmful behaviours like environmental violence, xenophobia, corruption, and exploitation – then a nuanced understanding of these issues' historical and cultural origins can facilitate a solution to the question of institutional effectiveness. I propose the term "organic effectiveness" to describe this approach, which seeks to address problems at their roots within empirical contexts, rather than merely addressing their broad institutional manifestations. Organic effective-

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ness underscores the importance of cooperation among all agents within the Earth system for achieving effective global governance and addressing planetary injustices.

The concept of "organic effectiveness" emerges from the framework of organic philosophy, a subject I explored in a prior article. (Cf. Téwéché 2023) This paradigm posits that the foundation for fostering global peace requires a profound transformation of the individual, engaging the faculties of intelligence, heart, and will. When enlightened by these three faculties, individuals attain a heightened awareness of themselves, their surroundings, and societal dynamics. They align with the ideals of goodness, truth, and unity. Such individuals transcend mere self-interest, assuming responsibility for their own existence and actively collaborating with others to shape a collective future. The significance of this perspective lies in its ability to elevate critical inquiries regarding the prerequisites for actualising the ethical principles and political philosophies that underpin genuine global democracy. In the face of an imbalanced distribution of power, characterised by the increasing monopolisation of sociopolitical, economic, and technological resources by the powerful, the notion of structural reform initiated from above risks becoming merely utopian.

In contrast, cultivating the intellectual and ethical capacities necessary to constrain the elite's power emerges as a viable alternative. This approach emphasises the education of individuals, empowering them to recognise and harness the faculties that foster their liberation. In the context of Southern countries, particularly across the African continent, this organic philosophy offers a dual benefit: it equips individuals with the means to assert their autonomy from Western influences and simultaneously encourages them to realise their full potential as the fullest expression of their humanity. By fostering these transformative capacities, communities can collectively pave the way toward a more equitable and democratic society where the principles of justice and collaboration are upheld.

Conclusion

The principles of justice articulated by Mbembe are fundamental, providing the theoretical basis for a reimagined concept of global governance. Their effectiveness depends on comprehensive reform of planetary institutions, grounded in grassroots actions. Our organic effectiveness hypothesis suggests that profound individual transformation can drive institutional change.

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Change involves translating planetary justice principles into practical actions, enabling individuals to embody ideals of care and responsibility towards nature, extend hospitality to all living beings, and share resources fairly to sustain the Earth's system. The goal is not to dismantle existing legal frameworks or undermine the legitimacy of global political institutions. Instead, it aims to establish organic foundations for their effectiveness, rooted in the emergence of free, autonomous, and responsible subjects informed by planetary rights. By cultivating innovative individuals who engage in relational ecologies, we can develop a new model of organic and planetary governance that is efficient, inclusive, and focused on preserving and sustaining the Earth system. Such a governance model, based on autonomous and co-responsible entities, would embody a system of governance by all, for all, and of all. This approach could ultimately be the most effective way to achieve true planetary justice and democracy.

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