

Throughout the book, Abranches repeatedly demonstrates how her research relates to general discourses and (longstanding) debates within anthropology, such as critical engagement with colonialism, modernity, cosmopolitanism, development and African subjectivities. Without running the risk of watering down the lived realities of her participants, she suitably contextualizes their embodied experiences through their engagement with the exchange of homeland foods. The ineffable strength of this book lies in the delicately placed ethnographic descriptions. Abranches allows her observations, encounters and participants' voices to both direct and underpin the analysis. In conclusion, this ethnographic study makes an excellent case for long-term multi-sited fieldwork that, simultaneously, does not shy away from complex theoretical debates.

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doi: [10.1017/S0001972024000895](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972024000895)

Achille Mbembe, *Brutalism*, translated by Steven Corcoran. Durham NC: Duke University Press (hb US\$99.95 – 978 1 4780 2087 5; pb US\$25.95 – 978 1 4780 2558 0). 2024, 196 pp.

Achille Mbembe, *Brutalisme*. Paris: La Découverte (pb €12 – 978 2 3480 7805 7). 2023, 246 pp.

Achille Mbembe, *The Earthly Community*, translated by Steven Corcoran. Rotterdam: V2 Publishers (pb €15 – 978 90 828 9353 3). 2022, 144 pp.

Achille Mbembe, *La communauté terrestre*. Paris: La Découverte (pb €20 – 978 2 3480 7238 3). 2023, 259 pp.

Achille Mbembe's latest two works explore the predicament of the Earth in an era of 'combustion' in which ecological catastrophe looms large (*La communauté terrestre* (CT), p. 8).<sup>1</sup> Above all, Mbembe discerns a pernicious extractive relationship that eats and discards human beings, immiserating them, and leaving behind a reduced existence of survival and precariousness. This unceasing extraction is powered by both digital technology and neoliberal finance. It is this process that he names 'brutalism' (*Brutalisme* (B), p. 7). A fundamental reconfiguration of the human subject is under way, Mbembe avers, in which humanity and machine become indistinguishable, and developments in nanotechnology and genetics increasingly implant, edit and

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<sup>1</sup> B and CT refer to the original texts, while BC is used for quick reference to Corcoran's translation.

re-engineer the human body (B, p. 9). To epitomize this dystopian state of affairs, Mbembe uses the term 'generic rupture' (B, p. 21).

Africa is central to this new conjuncture; its history, philosophy and visual culture have much to teach us about how to navigate this world of new and 'brutal' extractive formations (B, pp. 17–19; CT, p. 39). Brutalism involves processes of asymmetric extraction that recall slavery and colonialism (B, p. 21); it classifies and sorts bodies into the 'bioavailable' or insurable (CT, p. 136). The emergent earthly community described by Mbembe is one that remains out of reach for many Africans, due to increased practices of border control and frontier building by Western states and their clients (B, pp. 144–5). Mobility, he contends, has come to be seen less as a human right and more as a military or security challenge (BC, p. 93). In the West, increasingly intolerant populisms have consigned many to constituting a 'wretched of the sea' in the Mediterranean, or otherwise being abandoned to the abuses of outsourced immigration controls (CT, p. 161; BC, p. 99). Within postcolonial African politics, Mbembe warns that the language of 'tribe' has intensified as 'an elementary mechanism' linked to wealth and identity (BC, p. 118). In addition, the 'psychiatric salons' of Francophone African states, termed by Mbembe as 'crypto colonies', offer numerous opportunities for abuses (BC, p. 123).

If Mbembe warns of global catastrophe, he also sees Africa as offering the resources for renewing and building an evanescent 'earthly community'. This is to be based on reparation and a recognition of humanity's shared right to live on the Earth (CT, pp. 153–4). He sees this community not as a global system, but as a divisible whole (CT, p. 151). In both works, but especially in *La communauté*, Mbembe develops two key claims for the restorative importance of Africa's history and philosophy. He develops an argument found in earlier works<sup>2</sup> that philosophy in Africa offers ways of thinking about the world that avoid core issues within Western thought, including the divide between subject and object. At the same time, Mbembe argues that African systems of thought value mobility and fluidity (CT, p. 40). Cumulatively, this makes African philosophy well placed to augment Western thought and to guard against the 'drying out' of humanity's 'symbolic reserves' (CT, p. 34).

Mbembe opens an intellectual position in stark contrast to the denigration of African philosophy in European thought. It not only has the conceptual tools to guide humanity to its future, but it also provides accomplished and specific ways to think about how humanity must live with digital technology (CT, p. 23) and navigate the insecurities of a financialized, computerized world. Above all, an 'Africanization . . . of the planetary condition' is under way (B, p. 24). Mbembe sees African thought as serving as a counterpoint to the world of Brutalism (CT, pp. 23, 43).

Yet Mbembe's account of African philosophy, ethnography and intellectual history poses challenges. This is particularly important because Mbembe states that *Brutalism* (and one would be apt to extend this to *Community*) paints a 'fresco', not as sociology, political economy or history, but rather as work rooted in the 'socio-ethnographic' (B, p. 9). Mbembe warns against over-generalizing about belief systems based on specific scholarly descriptions (CT, p. 17, note 4). He identifies the perils of fixing African cultures and beliefs as essentially timeless, especially in his critique of colonial

<sup>2</sup> A. Mbembe (2017) *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham NC: Duke University Press; A. Mbembe (2019) *Necropolitics*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

discourse.<sup>3</sup> But his account of the thought of the Dogon is reliant on colonial ethnographic sources (sometimes later published in the postcolonial era) (CT, pp. 20–3, 41). This is in danger of ignoring subsequent critiques of ethnography produced by Griaule, Leiris and others.

A similar point might be made of Mbembe's reading of Tutuola's fiction. Although thinkers such as Nyamnjoh have persuasively drawn on Tutuola's fiction as a philosophical resource,<sup>4</sup> the way in which Mbembe reads the Nigerian novelist's fiction as a kind of window into a wider terrain of generalized 'African' myths and knowledge represents an approach explicitly challenged in criticism of the Yoruba novelist (CT, p. 43). The temporal markers in Mbembe's description of African thought form a key example of this. What is the meaning of the term 'ancient' in designations such as 'the animist metaphysics of ancient Africans' (CT, p. 17), 'ancient archives' (CT, p. 201), the 'ancient Dogon' (CT, pp. 47, 204) or 'ancient African traditions' (BC, p. 52)?

Mbembe's French prose operates significantly at a stylistic level (for example, CT, pp. 5–12). It moves with a rhythm and resonance, while incorporating a dense web of direct and indirect allusion to writers such as Labou Tansi, Glissant and Césaire (B, p. 187; CT, p. 184). More generally, although Mbembe's use of footnotes serves as a rough guide to the range of reference within his text, these notes are not exhaustive, and, on some occasions, they can appear more as suggestions for further reading than as anchors to Mbembe's own discussion. Corcoran's translation of *Brutalism* is closely based on the French publication. Corcoran's translation of a text under the title *The Earthly Community* predates the publication of *La communauté*, and, while it has major parallels with tracts of the French work, it also contains significant structural differences, reorganizing passages, including introducing different text, and, in some instances, using new subsections and chapter titles.

Readers familiar with Mbembe's previous writings will find a development of his ongoing dialogue with thinkers such as Fanon, Schmitt and Glissant. Newer engagements can be found here too, for example with Heidegger and Rosenzweig. Mbembe's well-known formulation of 'necropolitics' stalks his characterization of Brutalism as devouring humans, and border controls subjecting migrants to tedious and humiliating waiting with little end in sight (B, p. 34). Mbembe here returns briefly to the less-used term 'necrocapitalism' to describe the functioning of Brutalism, as well as developing a meditation on 'necrosis' (CT, p. 186), to evoke the intellectual decay occasioned by the popularity of alt-right conspiracy theories. Mbembe's interventions on the restitution of African objects in Western museums are treated in developed terms in the final section of *Brutalism* (BC, pp. 125–46). This discussion connects to Mbembe's warnings against superficial acts of return that do not constitute genuine reparation (they do not truthfully acknowledge the scale and damage of Europe's engagement with Africa) (BC, p. 142).

Mbembe voices a warning against a world that is becoming 'fissured' or cracked by the ongoing injuries of racism, colonization, computerization and environmental exploitation. Above all, he spells out the destructive potential of social media and algorithms on human flourishing in stark terms. Yet, both texts, and especially

<sup>3</sup> A. Mbembe (2001) *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

<sup>4</sup> F. B. Nyamnjoh (2017) *Drinking from the Cosmic Gourd: how Amos Tutuola can change our minds*. Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG.

*La communauté*, are hopeful. Mbembe ultimately shows us that it is possible to defend a conception of the Earth as a space held in common between all peoples. Its soil must remain fundamentally ‘inappropriate’ and unable to be captured by relations of power and enmity (BC, p. 165).

Both *Brutalism* and *Community* reorient Mbembe’s thought to contemporary concerns about the environment and digital technology. In all of this, Mbembe reminds us, the African continent stands at the centre of world thought. Africa and African philosophies have much to teach the world about how to navigate climate change, social media, digital technologies, and the boundary between humans and objects.

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doi: [10.1017/S0001972024000962](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972024000962)

Hamza Hamouchene and Katie Sandwell (eds), *Dismantling Green Colonialism: Energy and Climate Justice in the Arab Region*. London: Pluto Press (pb £22.99 – 978 0 7453 4921 3). 2023, 299 pp.

*Dismantling Green Colonialism: energy and climate justice in the Arab region* is a thought-provoking and timely book. Combining scholarship and activism, the book brings to light unique perspectives on climate change rooted in specific places and a wider global context. The first of its kind to apply ‘just transition’ to the Arabic-speaking world, this book provides a series of empirically informed analyses of ‘just transition’ in the North Africa and West Asia region (MENA). It provides a microscopic image of a multilayered crisis where climate justice is class struggle, while laying out hope for an ecologically and socially just future.

Throughout the book, the term ‘Arab region’ is used neither to denote state-centric or ethnic conceptions of Arabness, nor to extricate the region from its wider socio-economic (capitalist) context. Instead, the term is meticulously used to historicize the region as a ‘zone of capitalist accumulation’ and a space of resistance. More so, the book relies on an expansive definition of ‘working people’ that challenges rigid conceptions of class and takes into consideration different relationships to (non-)work. Further, the authors deploy innovative terms as analytical tools. Manal Shqair coins the term ‘eco-sumud’ (eco-steadfastness) to denote a distinctive relationship between Palestinian people, land and environment – a relationship rooted in collective ecological and anti-colonial survival. Saker El Nour adopts the concept of ‘unequal ecological exchange’ to demonstrate the (historical) tyranny of capitalist expansion and the environmental unevenness structuring the relationship between global North and South.

The introduction to the book explains the importance of just transition as a conceptual framework and argues that just transition has become so popular that states, corporations and international organizations appropriate the term for their own