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## The Holberg Committee Citation: Achille Mbembe

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Born in Cameroon in 1957, Achille Mbembe obtained his PhD from Université Paris 1 (Pantheon Sorbonne) in 1989 on the history of anti-colonial resistance in Cameroon. Mbembe is research professor of history and politics at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. From 1996 to 2000, Mbembe was the Executive Secretary of CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa). He has held positions at various universities, including Berkeley, California, Columbia, Duke, Harvard, and Yale. He has been a visiting professor at Maison de la Science De L'Homme in Paris and has been awarded several honorary doctorates.

Mbembe is recognized as one of the foremost thinkers of postcolonial Africa and is a key critical theorist of the planetary. He has played a major role in advancing thinking on racism and its effects on subjectivity, particularly through the concept of the 'racial subject'. Mbembe's refusal of all forms of racism also draws inspiration from the uneven impact of the climate crisis on the Global South. This is encapsulated in his most recent work, *Brutalism* (2020/2024).

Mbembe's early work focused on colonial violence, African resistance and struggles for independence. This analysed the nature of state power and led him to rethink the notion of the 'postcolony'. His key books, many of which have been translated from the original French, include *On the Postcolony* (2000/2001), *Necropolitics* (2016/2019), *Out of the Dark Night* (2010/2021), *Brutalism* (2020/2024) and *The Earthly Community: Reflections on the Last Utopia* (2022). These cover a broad range of themes, including the contradictions inherent in democracy, race, ethnicity, biopolitics and identity politics within African states.

Mbembe's groundbreaking *Critique of Black Reason* (2013/2017) is a philosophical study of the meaning of Blackness as it historically emerged. It assesses how the term 'Black' was used to dehumanize in the interests of capital. The analyses show how Blackness was associated with being non-human or animal-like, justifying the reproduction of oppressive and exploitative structures. Mbembe argues that some Black critiques of race have implicitly reproduced the epistemology of racial difference.

His gaze has recently shifted to developments in the current colonial-imperial world; the nature of late Eurocentrism, the impact of the Anthropocene and the implications of Artificial Intelligence for humans.

Mbembe's oeuvre goes beyond a particularized notion of decolonization to a universalist recentring of the human. For him, this involves a dedication to facing historical truth, while learning and remembering across South-North divides.

Achille Mbembe is undoubtedly a highly worthy recipient of the 2024 Holberg Prize.

On behalf of the Holberg Committee,

Heike Krieger, Committee Chair