

Challenging Moral Corruption in the Postcolony: Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Hannah Arendt's Notion of Individual Responsibility

'Morality concerns the individual in his singularity'.

Hannah Arendt, 'Some Questions of Moral Philosophy'

'all the cool sadness seemed able to do was to raise thoughts of the lonely figure finding it more and more difficult to justify his own honesty'.

Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

Hannah Arendt's unique elaborations on imperialism and totalitarianism have given rise to many polemics during the last decades. In particular, her views on imperialism as a test laboratory for emerging European totalitarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* have been seen as an important early contribution to the corpus of postcolonial theory.¹ Yet at the same time, scholars have clearly shown that Arendt was not straightforwardly an anti-imperialist thinker, and too often implicitly aligned herself with the viewpoints of colonizers confronted by unknown and 'uncivilized' cultures in Africa, and thus unfortunately maintained a Eurocentric approach to African cultures.² The work in question, particularly in its historical details, often remains vague, but the strength of *The Origins*, as with her whole oeuvre, lies not in its historical exactness, but rather in its bold attempt to create connections and to think anew; thus I claim that it is particularly Arendt's idea of radical thinking that we need again in our globalized world plagued with structural inequalities. I maintain further that regardless of her unfortunate Eurocentric remarks, the theoretical tools concerning political philosophy, totalitarianism, and imperialism that she provided remain vitally important for researchers focusing on African cultures and their current political problems.

In order to defend my claim, I shift attention away from Arendt's realizations concerning the continuity between imperialism and forms of European totalitarianism, and toward her analysis of totalitarianism itself. This shift of attention enables me to propose that violent political orders were not merely 'imported' to Europe, but instead, that power structures derived from imperial practices and the nondemocratic forms of government to which they lead rooted themselves firmly on the African continent as well. As Christopher J. Lee argues, it is pivotal that some scholars have 'returned concern toward the legacies of imperialism to the continent of Africa, not Europe, thus conveying a means for thinking through and applying her ideas to postcolonial politics more generally'.³ Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism provides us with an important analytical approach when we scrutinize the aftermath of decolonization processes in Africa, where earlier imperial rule gave space to emerging forms of pernicious power regimes. Such regimes are often grouped under the heading of 'postcolony', which can be understood as 'the effective continuation of the authority structures of the colony in the post-imperial nation despite "flag independence"'.⁴ The connections between European totalitarianism and the African postcolony have been made apparent by scholars including Mahmood Mamdani, who, for instance, has examined the connections between the Nazi Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide: 'there is a link that connects the genocide of the Herero and the Nazi Holocaust to the Rwandan genocide. That link is *race branding*, whereby it became possible not only to set a group apart as an enemy, but also to exterminate it with an easy conscience'.⁵ In his earlier work, too, Mamdani has drawn 'parallels between European fascism and the Idi Amin regime in Uganda, a strategy of comparison that also echoes Arendt'.⁶

Mamdani has done important work in continuing Arendt's analysis in the context of contemporary political problems in Africa. My interest here, however, is not in the postcolony as a violent political power structure per se, but rather in the ways in which it plagues its citizens and pushes them into difficult moral situations. This is where I find Arendt's work crucial: in highlighting the idea of individual responsibility in situations in which the democratic public sphere has failed, Arendt provides

a useful set of tools for thinking about abuses of power occurring in the African postcolony as well. In connection to this, Arendt's later writings concerning thinking and individual responsibility under totalitarianism, particularly her essays in *Crises of the Republic* and *Responsibility and Judgment*, can serve a compelling function. In these texts, Arendt pays careful attention to the need for moral judgment and independent thinking during times of moral collapse.⁷ She emphasizes the ideal of good citizenship in nondemocratic situations and illuminates the notion of the banality of evil by suggesting that people become too much accustomed to malignant political systems and stop short of analyzing their own roles within such systems.⁸ While Arendt is best known for bringing these ideas into the discussion concerning Nazi Germany, her model of the thinking individual who refuses to conform is derived from Socrates, and hence Arendt's ideas should not be too hastily equated with modern, Western totalitarianism, but should instead be seen as a method that applies in any situation in which democracy has collapsed. This aspect of Arendt's work has attracted attention among scholars such as Seyla Benhabib, who are concerned with the myriad forms of the banality of the evil in our contemporary world.⁹

Far from being limited to contexts of European totalitarianism, then, the tools Arendt's body of thought offers can help us to consider anew the problems confronting the individual in the postcolony. I claim that her thoughts on the lack of political responsibility interestingly resonate with Achille Mbembe's discussion of the intimacy of tyranny in the realm of the postcolony.¹⁰ Mbembe's work helps us to shift attention away from the context of European power hierarchies, and toward the African postcolony. Mbembe's reading of the intimacy of tyranny, the ways in which power hierarchies are internalized and repeated in everyday lives of the 'postcolonized people', helps not only to deepen my analysis of the functionings of power in the postcolony per se but also, and more particularly, can aid us in scrutinizing the lack of interest in political resistance in those nondemocratic settings prevailing in many African countries. Mbembe thus widens Arendt's theoretical notion of the banality of evil as he discusses similar problems in the context of the postcolony. Although they arise from a different political

context, Mbembe's theorizations, like Arendt's, call attention to the ways in which nondemocratic rule prevailing in unhealthy political realms becomes 'normalized' for desensitized citizens who are willing to play along with such nondemocratic constructions rather than rising against them. This problem is acute, as it deprives people of the chance to criticize the postcolony's perpetuation of colonial abuses. Noting this acute issue, Mbembe concludes that 'it is here, within the confines of this intimacy, that the forces of tyranny in Africa must be studied'.¹¹

In connection to these questions, I turn to Ayi Kwei Armah's first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). Beginning from the standpoint of ordinary citizens' lack of political resistance as both Arendt and Mbembe have discussed in connection to crisis situations, I argue that this novel features a protagonist engaged in a type of political thinking similar to the one Arendt advocated: he is capable of active moral resistance to corruption, and of individual thinking. In contexts like the postcolony, where political resistance is scarce and difficult to envision, it is all the more important to analyze the ways in which Armah describes a protagonist outside the structures of polite society that seem to hold captive most of the other characters, rendering them incapable and unwilling to change the political situation in the novel.

Armah's first novel, like Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965) and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), expresses frustration concerning discouraging postcolonial letdowns in West Africa in the mid to late 1960s. Emmanuel Obiechina observes that '[t]he most outstanding feature of these novels is the uncompromising way their authors attack the post-independence elite of Africa'.¹² I argue, however, that more than his contemporaries, Armah gives meticulous attention to individual attempts to devise a way out of the disillusionment that results when a united effort against corrupted power, in the style of the decolonization movement, has lost its effectiveness. Armah's novel puts an emphasis on individual ethics as the nameless main character, unlike most of the other characters in the novel, persistently resists totalitarian rule and moral collapse by refusing to accept bribes. I further argue that

through this concentration on individual morality during the darkest of times, Armah can actually imagine a way forward; it is only through the main character's ethical actions that any light is brought into the novel. In this fashion, he also manages to eschew postcolonial disillusionment more effectively than other West-African writers at the time.

I juxtapose Arendt's analysis of the phenomenon of living with one's inner conscience during times of corruption and moral decay with Armah's representation of his courageous main character, who remains capable of moral judgment, and hence of confronting postcolonial disillusionment. In the novel, the hope that challenges the darkness comes from the idea that democracy can still be saved, even when the rules of democracy have been destroyed. Armah's nameless man nourishes the seeds of a democratic future-to-come through his commitment to rebuilding a public realm in which people can once again interact in their plurality. This ideal of the democratic regime was crucial to Arendt's thinking as well. By reading Armah's novel in close connection with Arendt's political thinking, I hope to suggest a new approach to Armah's and Arendt's work and their unique views on the problems of moral collapse in the postcolonial world. Through my analysis of Arendt's ideas concerning political responsibility—vis a vis Armah's novel and its representation of a model citizen living with his conscience—I raise the question of our responsibilities today as global citizens who tend to become 'desensitized to the banal, thoughtless, "ordinary" origins of ... violence' directed at people in the global south.¹³ In the case of Armah's man, he fights against uneven power structures within the postcolony by exposing its naturalized and banalized logic of inevitability. By reading his actions in connection to Arendt's radical thought, we as postcolonial scholars can become reminded of these questions of responsibility, resistance and living with one's conscience in this world in which we are implicated in ways we often tend to forget.

Failed democracy in Armah's fictional postcolony and the hope for future regeneration

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the author provides a dark image of post-independence Ghana in which hopes for a revolution liberating the whole country from the dark times of colonialism have given way to a postcolonial disillusionment created by the national elite's power abuses. It is, more precisely, Armah's disappointment in Kwame Nkrumah's regime in the late 1960s that darkens the picture of the country in the novel. Nkrumah, who has become a greatly debated African figure, initially emerged as a young, promising leader who wanted to show the world how the transition from colonial rule to independence could take a peaceful route. His attempt to transfer from colonialism to democracy failed, nevertheless, as in 1964 he 'instituted a one-party state in the face of the challenge of building a nation-state', and Nkrumah's later regime has been accused of turning into a more totalitarian system.¹⁴ Armah's first novel, in its representation of a particularly strong sense of discouragement concerning the ethically compromised actions of the elite, parallels Frantz Fanon's ideas as he expresses them in his 1961 essay 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness', in which he claims that '[t]he national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement' because '[t]o them, nationalization quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period'.¹⁵ Similarly to Fanon's ideas, in the novel, harsh criticism is directed at the men in power, including Nkrumah, who, as false Messiahs, come to power only to improve their own situations in postcolonial Africa. A former activist, the Teacher, contemplates the outcome of independence: 'How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders? ... We were ready here for big and beautiful things, but what we had was our own black men hugging new paunches scrambling to ask the white man to welcome them onto our backs'.¹⁶ The disappointment in independence is real; instead of being a genuine revolution, the post-independence transfer of power merely enables a new form of colonial exploitation to emerge, aided by corrupted African leaders, while at the same time people's beautiful dreams give way to desperation. In Armah's fictional Ghana, the rise of the corrupted elite has changed the atmosphere from one of revolutionary hope to the current mentality of decay surprisingly quickly: 'How

horribly rapid everything has been, from the days when men were not ashamed to talk of souls and of suffering and of hope, to these low days of smiles that will never again be sly enough to hide the knowledge of betrayal and deceit. There is something of an irresistible horror in such quick decay'.¹⁷ The disappointment in earlier promises that failed to be fulfilled creates an acute dystopian feeling in the present, and the novel's focus on dirt and filth should be understood from this disillusioned point of view. Images of decaying lavatories and rotting dump yards are a common focus of the narrative. On his way back home on a bus, for instance, the main character reflects upon how 'all around decaying things push inward and mix all the body's juices with the taste of rot'.¹⁸ This degeneration symbolizes the doomsday mentality and the corrupted state of affairs in the country.¹⁹

Despite the novel's descriptions of decay, it still—almost stubbornly—maintains hope as well. In order to account for this hope for a better future-to-emerge, I suggest that, complementing the existentialist readings of the novel other critics have proposed, *The Beautiful Ones* should be read in light of Arendt's political philosophy, which emerged in close connection to existentialist thought. While both of these approaches emphasize individual responsibility in a contemporary, alienated world, Arendt's political philosophy also puts a heavy emphasis on democratic communal existence, an ideal shared by Armah's novel. Therefore Arendt's theory is useful in our analysis of the hope for a more democratic future-to-emerge, and it enables us to see beyond the existentialist readings, which tend to be more pessimistic in their analyses of individual existence in the modern world. My comparative review of Arendt and Armah's thought—an approach not taken by any other critics of the novel—shows how Arendt's philosophy helps to shed light on this political alignment in Armah's novel in a nuanced way.

Existentialism has often been invoked by critics to explain the novel's individualistic orientation. According to Richard Priebe, for instance, Armah and other second-generation Anglophone African writers seem more existentialist in their approach than did the first generation since their focus is on the Fanonian colonized individual, rather than on more traditional African topics such as 'myths and

rituals'.²⁰ In grim political circumstances, writers like Soyinka and Armah focused on current problems and showed 'unwillingness to fall back on the past as a solution for present-day social and political problems'.²¹ In fact, Armah's novel shows how existentialist issues emerge in postcolonial and disillusioned Ghana, where, according to Norman Spencer, '[t]he same oppressive social conditions and "degraded" values' that give rise to existential philosophy and 'transform men and women into isolated and disoriented individuals who lack a sustaining sense of community exists simultaneously in the West and in the Third World'.²² This existentialist approach to West African issues is not without its critics; it has sparked strong criticism from Achebe, for one, who claims that Armah is not capable of writing of 'Ghanaian experience', but rather 'is clearly an alienated writer, a modern writer complete with all the symptoms. Unfortunately Ghana is not a modern existentialist country'.²³ Regardless of Achebe's criticism, *The Beautiful Ones* shows how existentialist philosophy has also become relevant in postcolonial African writing due to the rising phenomenon of the so-called postcolony, which, as a form of society, poses itself as an enemy against its citizens rather than enabling them to act together in the public space and create democratic models of rule.

The notion of societal alienation is important in relation to Armah's early fiction, but at the same time, it is not quite as overarching a theme in Armah's first novel as some of the existentialist readings of the novel suggest: even if these analyses importantly focus on the problems that the individual character has to face, they offer an overly pessimistic assessment of the situation, implying that an individual is incapable of altering his circumstances.²⁴ For instance, Shelby Steele writes that Armah's characters 'lack the essence that comes from choice and decision', and are thus 'doomed to merely exist'.²⁵ In contrast to this, I read the protagonist of Armah's first novel as a character making active decisions to challenge the corrupted power regime. He is very critical of the lifestyle of the elite, which he names 'the gleam'; it consists of the luxuries enjoyed by top politicians, including his old schoolmate Koomson, who benefit materially from their positions in power, a phenomenon summed up in 'the

blinding gleam of beautiful new houses and the shine of powerful new Mercedes cars', attracting the attention of the rest of the population as it struggles to survive in poverty.²⁶ In this corrupted world, the only way out of acute misery is the road of fraud and bribery, as the main character sums it up: 'Only one way. There would always be only one way for the young to reach the gleam. Cutting corners, eating the fruits of fraud'.²⁷ But instead of following the examples of deceit, the main character conscientiously lives 'against the gleam', as Neil Lazarus puts it, and sets himself 'to defeat it by living positively in the face of its negative imperatives'.²⁸ These choices and decisions he makes, then, show how Armah's main character is represented as an active decision maker, constantly and deliberately resisting the doomsday mentality in Armah's fictional Ghana. Arendt's analysis of political actions helps us to put into perspective the hope that the novel also embodies through its depiction of the main character's resistance to the overall moral decay around him. Thus rather than embracing the existentialist readings of the novel emphasizing the hopelessness of the alienated individual's situation in postcolonial Ghana, I am interested in analyzing the particular hope that the novel features through its depictions of the acts of this exceptional individual.

Arendt, like the existentialists, pays attention to the individual's moral choices, but more than the existentialists, she emphasizes the need to create and maintain an active sense of communal existence whenever it is possible; as Leroy Cooper notes, '[t]his emphasis on participation is the dominant theme in Hannah Arendt's political philosophy'.²⁹ Margaret Canovan further claims that it is precisely this idea of men existing together in the world that separates Arendt's philosophy from existentialist philosophy.³⁰ Armah's novel also aims not to underline man's loneliness in the world, but rather to put an emphasis on the possibility of existing together in the world—however difficult that might be. And indeed *The Beautiful Ones* emphasizes the predicament of democratic interaction in postcolonial Ghana. Armah's novel, to use Arendt's terminology, illustrates a totalitarian system in which the national elite, in its corrupted power, has destroyed the faith in any form of political existence that would guarantee men's

possibility to act together, in their plurality, in what Arendt calls the public realm. In democratic settings, this space forms a very important aspect of human existence as it creates a forum for political interaction and gives citizens a chance to act together in their plurality.³¹ Such democratic development has failed in Armah's fictional Ghana, creating a situation in which almost everyone's moral standards have collapsed and the citizens no longer find it important to actively resist the corrupted regime, but instead prefer to chase crumbs from the elite's table. Any healthy communal existence is almost impossible in these circumstances, but both Armah in his first novel and Arendt in her writings concerning Nazi Germany consider precisely those ways in which the *idea* of democracy could be saved when the *rules* of democracy have been destroyed. Arendt, in considering the reasons some people were capable of resisting totalitarian rule in Nazi Germany, concluded that this happened through one's commitment to ethical rules not defined by the public realm, which had collapsed, but instead by one's internal morality, and by one's commitment to rebuilding a public realm in which people could once again interact in their plurality. Similarly to Arendt's considerations concerning citizens' ethical responsibility to challenge corrupted power, Armah, in *The Beautiful Ones*, also vocalizes the need to rely on one's conscience during such times, when the public realm has collapsed. By this means, Armah's man, like individuals resisting totalitarian rule in Arendt's work, is capable of envisioning and maintaining the idea of democracy even if it has failed in his society. In my reading, the nameless main character becomes a politicized figure whose actions are aimed at creating a better community so that the 'beautiful ones' can emerge in the future.

This being said, my intention is not to undermine the distinctions between these two writers. It remains vitally important to acknowledge the major differences between Arendt's approach to Nazi Germany and Armah's treatment of postcolonial Ghana. Arendt's writings on totalitarianism spring from her own experiences in Nazi Germany, as she actively questioned its politics and consequently had to flee the country in 1933. Armah's disillusionment has its sources elsewhere, and unlike Arendt's

considerations of totalitarianism, it concentrates not on an old European nation-state gone wrong, but instead on a young African nation struggling to emerge as an independent state after years of foreign rule. Thus, if democratic rule had collapsed in Nazi Germany, it has never yet even emerged in Armah's fictional modern Ghana, but the hope of the novel is that it can materialize in the future. Still, there are important similarities: in both Armah's fictional Ghana and Arendt's Nazi Germany, we are confronted with highly undemocratic power structures. Thus, as Crawford Young argues: '[Ghana's] celebrated 1957 independence was the key landmark in the decolonization dynamic. But by 1960, a new constitution empowered President Kwame Nkrumah to rule by decree, preventive detention legislation had been adopted, and opposition leader J. B. Danquah was soon headed for prison'.³² It is the profound feeling of disappointment with the Nkrumah regime that Armah expresses in his novel.

Along these lines, while Arendt was shocked by the ways in which ordinary citizens enabled the Nazi regime's totalitarian politics in Germany, Armah is dismayed by the fact that elite Ghanaians are not fighting against the system in order to help the political situation of the larger masses, but instead focus only on their own gain. In this sense, the novel seems to follow the criticism against 'Kwame Nkrumah ... and Kofi Busia who followed him [as they] are generally regarded as leaders who placed politics ahead of economic development, prioritizing the transfer of political resources to elites whose support they coveted, instead of addressing the welfare demands of the masses'.³³ In the case of Armah's fictional Ghana, it is this neglect of the rights of ordinary Ghanaians and the greed of the elite that push the main character to think differently. At the same time, though, in Armah's fictional Ghana there is no ideological agenda to destroy others, even if the masses directly suffer from the totalitarian government. This is a key difference to keep in mind. Thus in focusing on the linkages between Arendt and Armah, my intention is not to create a direct parallel between the two regimes. Instead, my goal is to analyze the ways in which both writers discuss the difficult dilemmas such unhealthy power structures pose for

individuals hoping to live responsibly, and to show how both writers put an emphasis on the notion of radical thinking during a political crisis.

Without trying to diminish these major differences, I still maintain that if we keep these distinctions in mind, we can read the work of these two writers side-by-side in order to illuminate aspects of Armah's novel that have not yet been fully examined. In fact, one can see how both writers understand their respective states as being plagued by political situations in which democratic political culture is ruined, making space for totalitarian rule and causing compromised behavior in citizens. Under such political conditions, their emphases on individual ethical actions remain surprisingly similar as they both consider how a democratic world could be sustained or rebuilt.

The good citizen's political actions and communal futurity

Regardless of the political differences concerning the worlds they write about, Arendt's distinction between people's different reactions to the collapsed system bears a striking similarity to Armah's analysis of individuals' reactions to the moral corruption in his fictional Ghana: I find Arendt's division between 'good men', members of 'respectable society', and 'good citizens' particularly useful in relation to my analysis of Armah's novel.³⁴ Most of Armah's Ghanaians can be analyzed in light of Arendt's discussion of a group of people representing respectable society: the majority of people living in Nazi Germany. In relation to totalitarian systems in which the shared moral standards have collapsed, Arendt maintains that 'the members of *respectable* society'—who had not been particularly strongly affected by Nazi propaganda—were nevertheless 'the first to yield'. She was referring to a category of people who were willing to follow authorities and subject themselves to authoritarian rule without any internal dialogue or second-guessing. In relation to Nazi Germany, Arendt further writes that learned moral codes proved to be quite easily changeable, as most people 'simply exchanged one system of values against

another'.³⁵ Some Arendt critics have read this phenomenon in connection to other forms of the banality of evil in the context of our contemporary world. Richard J. Bernstein, for instance, writes of Arendt's Eichmann report that the reason it 'is so troubling is that it compels us to face up to painful questions about the meaning of evil in the contemporary world, the moral collapse of the respectable society... These, unfortunately, are not issues restricted to Nazi horrors. They are still with us, and they demand that we struggle with them again and again'.³⁶ In juxtaposing Arendt's writings with Armah's novel, I detect in the latter a similar type of concern regarding 'the feebleness of the so-called voice of conscience'.³⁷ Armah is criticizing his fellow Ghanaians for consumerism and their interest in personal gain at the expense of changing the political situation of the country to help those struggling in poverty.

The lack of criticism and real interest concerning the political status of the country is highlighted when Nkrumah and his ministers, including Koomson, are dethroned by a new coup. In the novel, the coup only changes the elite in power, however, and fails to do anything else, as the protagonist thinks to himself: 'for the nation itself there would only be a change of embezzlers and a change of the hunters and the hunted'.³⁸ This does not seem to upset other people, nevertheless, who immediately know that they need to start praising new leaders and cursing old ones, even if they have been singing the praises of the old leaders just the day before: 'through the windows their sound came: old songs with the words changed from the old praise for Nkrumah to insults for him'.³⁹ On the day the coup takes place, the workers at the railroad office are expected 'to go out and show loyalty to the new men in power. With a silence that spoke everybody's shame, the men in the office went out singly to join the crowd outside. In the manner they had gone out in fear to hear the farts of the Party men'.⁴⁰ These people's moral codes are easily changed, like those of the members of the respectable society discussed by Arendt, but through the access it grants to the main character's thoughts, the novel illustrates his disappointment in people's behavior, as it lacks any political insight.

The main character, who has been an eager critic of Koomson and of the former regime, nevertheless resists going out to show his loyalty to the new regime. Instead, he asks the people what they will be demonstrating for and receives an answer: “Don’t you know there is a new government?” “They tell me so. But I know nothing about the men. What will I be demonstrating for?” “Look, contrey, if you don’t want trouble, get out”.⁴¹ People are expected to approve automatically of the new regime, and they do so in order to avoid any trouble. The main character, however, is not willing to act in favor of the new regime just because he is supposed to do so. He is the only one who refuses to collaborate, and he remains sitting at his desk while others sing the praises of the new government. Through this character’s point of view, Armah’s novel explicitly takes up the frustration with people who are not willing to consider their own political roles in this situation.

The novel’s representation of the lack of political thinking that plagues the so-called respectable people should also be analyzed in connection to Achille Mbembe’s scrutiny of the lack of political resistance in the context of the African postcolony. Mbembe directs attention away from the politics of coercion and instead suggests that ‘[p]recisely because the postcolonial mode of domination is a regime that involves not just control but conviviality [. . .] the analyst must watch for the myriad ways ordinary people guide, deceive, and toy with power instead of confronting it directly’.⁴² Armah’s novel poignantly represents such mentality; for instance, the main character’s colleagues do not find the new leader any better or worse than the earlier leader, all they care about is their own situation in the larger scheme. They want to avoid trouble, and find ways in which they can benefit from the existing system, which is thoroughly nondemocratic since more or less everyone is taking bribes in order to follow the lifestyle of the elite, the gleam. Mbembe writes that the subjects of the postcolony ‘have internalized authoritarian epistemology to the point where they reproduce it themselves in all the minor circumstances of daily life’.⁴³ Thus taking bribes is just a smaller instance of the same nondemocratic logic that the government maintains. Since such an epistemology is internalized and reproduced by the regime’s citizens, it

becomes difficult for most of the other characters to understand the nameless man's differing actions. For his coworkers, his refusal to participate in ways that would conflict with his conscience seems merely self-destructive, and not in any way politically effective. In fact, his coworkers do not even consider the option of being politically rebellious.

In this scheme of things, political resistance becomes utterly difficult. Mbembe writes, 'we may assert that, by dancing publicly for the benefit of power the "postcolonized subject" is providing his or her loyalty, and by compromising with the corrupting control that state power tends to exercise at all levels of everyday life, the subject is reaffirming that this power is incontestable—*precisely the better to play with it and modify it whenever possible*'.⁴⁴ Most of the characters in Armah's novel are precisely playing with the power rather than resisting it. They also reproduce the state power's nondemocratic logic in their own everyday lives, keeping it alive. Mbembe's analysis of the lack of political resistance arising in the postcolony differs from Arendt's analysis of the so-called respectable society in many ways; however, at the same time, they both identify an overarching tendency among citizens in nondemocratic regimes not to resist their policies, not because they are afraid of doing so, but because they are willing to accept the power regimes' compromised social mores without that causing further conscientious problems for them. I thus read Armah's novel as a fictional study of the intimate relations of power, as well as a story that manages to envision ways out of such interwoven structures of power by creating a character who can resist forms of subjection to the existing power games.

Armah's novel introduces two characters who actively criticize the contemporary situation: the main character and his only friend, the Teacher. Through the main character's thought processes, as well as through the dialogue between these two characters, the novel clearly illustrates how the lack of critical thinking among most of Armah's fictional Ghanaians is detrimental to their own wellbeing, as they play along with the corrupted system rather than try to change it. One way in which the two characters utter their disappointment concerning people's unwillingness to improve their own situation is to refer to

Plato's allegory of the cave: through their use of this allegory, these two characters conclude that most people find critical thinking uncomfortable, and thus would rather remain in the cave, as the old chains are reassuring and people do not want to get rid of them. It is comfortable not to take any risks. The two characters want to see a different Ghana, and what remains particularly difficult for them is the fact that all the other people in Armah's fictional Ghana seem to prefer to remain in the cave. The Teacher explains 'that men were all free to do what they chose to do, and would laugh with hate at the bringer of unwanted light if what they knew they needed was the dark'.⁴⁵ Most citizens are willing to follow the power games of each government without second-guessing it, and remain in the darkness of the cave, choosing not to improve their own situation politically.

These two characters, actively challenging the regime in their conversations, can be further understood through Arendt's ideas concerning the dissident members of a totalitarian society. Against the members of the respectable society, Arendt distinguishes two different types of people who—in urgent situations—are unwilling to follow the herd mentality; these are good men and good citizens.⁴⁶ In reference to people who act differently during totalitarian rule, Arendt asks: 'in what way were those few different who in all walks of life did not collaborate and refused to participate in public life, though they could not and did not rise in rebellion?'⁴⁷ She concludes that the difference is that these few people based their actions on their own consciences, and not on learned moral codes. The few dissident members of society, or

the nonparticipants were those whose consciences did not function in this, as it were, automatic way—as though we dispose a set of learned or innate rules which we then apply to the particular case as it arises, so that every new experience or situation is already prejudged and we need only act out whatever we learned or possessed beforehand.⁴⁸

In *The Beautiful Ones*, the coup exchanges one corrupted regime for another, but people do not change their behavior. Yet the protagonist's moral conscience does not function in this automatic manner; instead, he considers his actions very thoroughly.

In both Armah's novel and Arendt's thinking, a particular emphasis is put on an individual's own ethical actions and conscience during the times when 'healthy' political interaction has collapsed and society no longer functions to maintain certain standards of ethical behavior, but is instead corrupted. Particularly in these situations, Arendt concludes: '[m]orality concerns the individual in his singularity'.⁴⁹ Armah's fictional man attempts to behave in a way that will enable him to continue to live an ethically sustainable life. In other words, going out to show his loyalty to the new government without knowing anything about its politics would contradict his conscience. This is where Arendt's elaborations concerning individual ethical actions in a morally corrupted situation become relevant, because Armah's man's behavior and ethical choices are based on his own internal moral codes, which he holds onto tightly even if the society around him seems to have agreed upon the fact that these moral codes can be let go. We can further read Armah's main character's actions in relation to what Arendt writes about an internal dialogue one needs to have with oneself. Following Socrates, she maintains that there are two in each person, meaning that 'even though I am one, I am not simply one, I have a self and I am related to this self [. . .] and there can be harmony or disharmony with the self'. Furthermore, Arendt maintains that 'if I do wrong I am condemned to live together with a wrongdoer in an unbearable intimacy'.⁵⁰ This idea originates in Socrates' statement according to which 'it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong', and Arendt explains this idea by illustrating how it is difficult for an individual to live with himself or herself if he or she has done wrong.⁵¹ Arendt further writes, following Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, that a man 'must not contradict himself by making an exception in his own favor, he must not place himself in a position in which he would have to despise himself'.⁵² This is a definition of a good man 'in the

Socratic sense [as it] is a matter of keeping clear of evil doing'.⁵³ In Armah's novel, it remains important to the main character to live in harmony with himself and avoid ethically suspicious actions.

The man in Armah's novel often follows these types of principles, which in his case amounts to honesty, as he does not accept bribes or follow the herd mentality. Yet Armah's novel also shows how it becomes very difficult to live according to one's private conscience when the world is playing by different rules, as the man finds

[i]t more and more difficult to justify his own honesty. How could he, when all around him the whole world never tired of saying there were only two types of men who took refuge in honesty—the cowards and the fools? [. . .] in these times honesty could only be a social vice, for the one who chose to indulge in it nothing but a very hostile form of selfishness, a very perverse selfishness.⁵⁴

Armah's fictional man refuses to live like others and to accept a bribe at work, but this leaves him with a feeling of dishonesty and loneliness rather than moral superiority, a feeling that there is 'something unspeakably dishonest about a man who refuse[s] to take and to give what everyone around was busy taking and giving: something unnatural, something very cruel, something that was criminal, for who but a criminal could ever be left with such a feeling of loneliness?'⁵⁵

Going back to Mbembe's analysis of internalized structures of intimate tyranny, one could say that Armah brilliantly shows here again how thoroughly 'the postcolonized subjects' have internalized authoritarian epistemology, and how they are reproducing it in their everyday lives.⁵⁶ In other words, through this internalization, citizens embrace the moral values of the established power. Namely, taking a bribe becomes recommendable, whereas turning one down is a dubious act, per se. When moral codes are turned upside down, one can understand better how refusing a bribe can turn someone 'unspeakably dishonest', and when playing with the system rather than resisting it is important, then it becomes clear how only 'the cowards and the fools' would take refuge in honesty. Armah sharply represents the inverted

logic of moral codes and shows how against this mindset, the main character's actions seem counterintuitive to his fellow countrymen, including his wife, to the point that a man living according to his conscience is left feeling like a criminal. This leaves him exhausted as well, as he is alone in his resistance. Throughout the novel he feels he has to justify his ethically sustainable decision against a corrupted world. He has not chosen an easy path, but in these situations it still remains more important to him to live in harmony with himself than to follow the corrupted path that the world around him has chosen.

When the man refuses to change his honest ways, he also feels like a disappointment in the eyes of his wife, who cannot understand his decisions and claims that he is acting like a chichidodo bird, which 'hates excrement with all its soul. But ... only feeds on maggots ... [which] grow best inside the lavatory'.⁵⁷ This suggests that the man hates corruption, yet nevertheless becomes a hypocrite as he enjoys the fruits of the corrupted wealth that his wife might be able to bring home by doing shady business with Koomson, who is a personification of this moral decay and the attractive capitalist consumer culture maintained by fraud and greed. In vain, the main character tells his disbelieving wife that the perfect-looking life Koomson is living with his own wife 'has more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of a garbage dump'.⁵⁸ These marital issues push the man into a difficult situation, as he has been trying to maintain an uncorrupted lifestyle, even if it would have been much easier for him to follow the flow and try to achieve some of the material prosperity that everyone else is pursuing. In such circumstances, it is even more difficult to control oneself: 'How was it possible for a man to control himself, when the admiration of the world, the pride of his family and his own secret happiness, at least for the moment, all demanded that he lose control of himself and behave like someone he was not and would never be? Money. Power'.⁵⁹ The man pays a heavy price for his honesty, and his family life suffers as his family continues to live in poverty. Even if he blames himself for his 'selfish' actions, he nevertheless has very strong reasons for his ethically sound behavior: like Socrates, he thinks that 'it is

better to suffer wrong than to do wrong' in these circumstances.⁶⁰ He could not please his wife by taking a bribe because it would mean that he would have to live in discord with himself. Thus like Socrates, he believes that it is better to disagree with many rather than to be 'out of harmony with myself'.⁶¹ A corrupted lifestyle would make it difficult for him to face himself and to move on with his life, and maintain hope concerning an ethically brighter future.

Arendt writes that during the collapse of the public realm, people may have to withdraw from the public world. Armah's novel illustrates a political situation in which political engagement is extremely difficult. Since Armah's main character is not surrounded by a 'normal' democratic political realm but is instead deprived of it, he is pushed toward a model of nonparticipation, a model provided by Socrates (or the 'good man'), which is only needed during the times when the political realm is no longer functioning. Namely, 'where participation, and that as we know can mean complicity in criminal activities [in totalitarian regimes], is a matter of course [. . .] nonparticipation [is] as matter of decision'.⁶² Armah's man makes active decisions, including the decision not to take bribes. It is as if Armah is maintaining that during dark times, the seed of the democratic world can be nurtured only by citizens who behave according to their own consciences, and do not participate in corrupted activities. Thus building a better world might mean occasional solitary actions, but withdrawing from the public world is nevertheless only favorable, both in Armah's novel as well as in Arendt's thinking, during the darkest of times, when political participation is not a viable possibility.

I would thus maintain that Armah's novel does not prioritize solitary actions per se, but only presents them as morally necessary at the most difficult political times. I would argue, then, that for Armah, as for Arendt, a political world in which people can cooperate in their plurality is the ideal form of human interaction. It is again through the main character's thought processes that this alignment becomes clear in the novel. Namely, for Armah's nameless man, his utmost motive for honesty is not only to maintain his own moral purity but also to consider the integrity of the public world around him,

which at the moment is in a state of amorality. This becomes clear when the man returns home from work on the day the coup has taken place. He thinks that the coup will not really change the politics of the country, as it will only reinstall the same corrupted state of affairs. The government won't change the name of the game, and thus citizens themselves should consider how to change the situation. For the man, then, '[t]he future goodness may come eventually, but before then where were the things in the present which would prepare the way for it?'⁶³ These 'things' in the present seem to be nonexistent, but the man's thought process makes it clear that in order for anything to be changed, citizens should act politically in the present, rather than waiting for 'the future goodness' to materialize on its own. Citizens should ask these same questions and try to find answers to them as well. This often-quoted thought of the man should be understood as a consideration regarding his own role in the world; he is thinking what he, along with other citizens, should do in the present to prepare the way for 'the future goodness' to arrive. His position represents Arendt's category of the 'good citizen' who is concerned about the public realm and preserving it. If a good man needs to live in harmony with himself, no matter what, then a good citizen has to balance between two priorities: remaining true to himself and maintaining or creating a public realm around him: 'In the center of moral considerations of human conduct stands the self; in the center of political considerations of conduct stands the world'.⁶⁴

The man's priorities concerning the idea of preserving the common good become even clearer when they are compared to the ideals of his friend, the Teacher, whose question, on the other hand, is 'why men [like the protagonist and the Teacher] should stand apart and disappoint themselves when people free to choose, choose what they want?'⁶⁵ He is referring to Plato's allegory again, suggesting that people in Armah's Ghana, like the slaves in Plato's cave, decide to stay in the darkness and remain politically inactive. The Teacher, a former activist, is preoccupied with the memory of the revolutionary moment, when things could have turned into something more promising, and is paralyzed by his subsequent disappointment in the current state of affairs: "It was all so good, the youth and the thoughts

of honest living water flowing to thirsty land, wasn't it? But what happens when you come out and you see the land wants you, not honest and living, but completely like its dead self?'"⁶⁶ The Teacher lives the life of a hermit who avoids the national game and has decided not to participate in the public world anymore. This is the manner in which these two characters significantly differ from each other. The Teacher, the man's only friend, resembles Arendt's category of the good man: he is solely concerned with his own internal integrity and has given up on the corrupted world. He remains a solitary figure resigning from the world; he is like Thoreau who, according to Canovan's reading of Arendt, represents the category of good men, since he believed that 'individuals must follow their conscience even if the cost of this was the downfall of the republic'.⁶⁷

The Teacher is a lonely figure who has cut himself off from society in order to save himself and his inner integrity in the face of social decay⁶⁸. In Armah's novel, the main character remains unconvinced that this withdrawal from the world helps society, and he criticizes his friend for this reason: 'The man wonders, sitting there, whether this resignation does not make his naked friend infinitely smaller than he could be. Why should there be such a need for shrinking the hoping self, and why must so much despair be so calmly embraced? Is so much protection necessary for life itself?'⁶⁹ The man, also disillusioned by the political situation, nevertheless thinks that his friend is going too far, as he withdraws from the public world altogether and becomes politically 'infinitely smaller than he could be.' The problem with the Teacher's nonalignment, as Canovan writes of the Socratic good man, is that 'although this kind of personal integrity may stop its possessor becoming implicated in evil, it is unlikely to prompt him to take positive political action because it is not sufficiently tied to the public world'.⁷⁰ Thus Arendt—along with Armah—does 'not suggest that conscience could be the answer to the political problems posed by totalitarianism. Its effects are too personal and too negative for it to provide any such political solution'.⁷¹ The Teacher's reclusiveness does not help to raise the disillusioned country from its current state, and this is why his friend is displeased with him. Instead, good citizens who are concerned

about the integrity of the public world can better respond to the problems posed by totalitarianism, as Armah illustrates through the actions of his main character.

Armah's novel does not prioritize the Teacher character's solitary actions, but rather depicts the main character as a good citizen, challenging his friend's total withdrawal. Since the main character is concerned about the state of the public world, he confronts his friend and asks him why he does not approach his old friends, the men in power, because, '[s]urely, something could still be done by a good man'. The nameless man would like to try to rebuild the public world. He thinks that the Teacher should act publicly and 'move closer to those of his old friends who were now in power' because by renewing his ties with old friends, he would hold a key political position, and could thus do something for the shared world.⁷² This, then, is the position that the novel prioritizes: one has to do something for the common good even if it means that one would have to partially sacrifice one's internal 'purity'. In this case, according to the main character, the Teacher would have to try to act together with corrupted politicians. The man, then, unlike the Teacher, is a good citizen, a kind of figure who, according to Keith Breen, 'accepts that worldly realities must take precedence over the self's congruence with self'.⁷³ In other words, it is the public world that takes priority over the main character's private conscience, which means political existence: 'being a good citizen means assuming shared responsibility for the public world'.⁷⁴ Hence Armah's main character prioritizes the wellbeing of the larger community by being willing to renegotiate his internal moral codes if need be.

The main character's responsibility for the public world becomes truly tested at the end of the novel, when, after the coup, he returns home and finds there the 'dethroned' Koomson, who has lost his position in power and has become the outcast and the main target of the next political regime, equally corrupted. The man has earlier found out that 'all big Party men were being arrested and placed in something called protective custody—already a new name for old imprisonment without trial. New people, new style, old dance'.⁷⁵ Thus Koomson is the only one still hiding from the new leaders, and if

he is turned in, he will face 'imprisonment without trial.' In an ideal world, Koomson would face a fair trial and pay for his crimes, but in these circumstances, it is not possible, and the man decides to save the politician's life. If the protagonist refused to help Koomson in this situation, he would be helping the new corrupted regime to act in an equally nondemocratic manner as the previous one did. As a good citizen in Arendtian terms, his 'concern is exclusively with having a world in which such acts [as imprisonment without trial] do not occur'.⁷⁶ In the absence of democratic rule, he must make a moral judgment, which, according to Rosalyn Diprose's reading of Arendt, 'is only relevant to politics in times of crisis, that is, when customary moral standards, which would ordinarily guide action without thinking, have been suspended or reversed in the public realm'.⁷⁷ Armah's man keeps the future open through his own responsible actions, meaning that his reactions to the world are not automatic, but will be checked by his conscience, and by his internal dialogue with himself.

Through the main character's actions, the novel presents a way toward the possibility of social regeneration. In order for that to happen, though, a more collective sense of responsibility in the present would be required. Hugh O'Connell has criticized the novel for failing to illustrate the future collectivity; however, I argue that Armah, cautious after the postcolonial letdown, refuses either to describe those 'beautiful ones' yet to emerge, or to make messianic promises regarding the better future-to-arrive, as the purpose of the novel is not to depict a better future, but rather to show how responsibility in the present will keep the future open and undetermined and pregnant with potentiality.⁷⁸ The main character's radical form of thinking paves the way towards a possible postcolonial change, if other Ghanaians are willing to become sensitized to the banalized evil around them. Thus in Armah's novel, the beautiful ones can only emerge once the citizens and the leaders enable this new futurity by acting as ethically responsible individuals, taking responsibility for themselves and the world around them, as '[s]omeday in the long future a new life would maybe flower in the country, but when it came, it would not choose as its instruments the same people who had made a habit of killing new flowers'.⁷⁹

This analysis of the novel in connection to Arendt's thoughts on the political involvement of good citizens during the darkest of times enables us to scrutinize the novel's most particular political efficacy, and makes it possible to see how the novel's emphasis on reconsidering the nature of political involvement and responsibility in these grim circumstances is unique in postcolonial African writing at the time, yet also curiously resonant with Arendt's discussion of Germany in the 1930s. I further suggest that Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism and individual responsibility can, first of all, offer us important tools to address problems concerning the unhealthy political structures of the postcolony, and to envision new ways of resisting postcolonial disillusionment. Secondly, I propose that we—who are implicated in the myriad logic of the banalized inevitability of political violence on the level of global and local inequalities—take seriously her simple request, which 'is nothing more than to think what we are doing'.⁸⁰

¹ Pascal Grosse, 'From Colonialism to National Socialism to Postcolonialism: Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*', *Postcolonial Studies*, 9(1), 2006, p 36.

² See Kathryn T. Gines, 'Race Thinking and Racism in Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*', in Richard H. King and Dan Stone (eds), *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, pp 42-4; and Robert Bernasconi, 'When the Real Crime Began: Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and the Dignity of the Western Philosophical Tradition', in Richard H. King and Dan Stone (eds), *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, pp 61-4. See Kathryn Gines, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2014, for how Arendt's understanding of the specific cultural and political situations of African Americans, during the civil rights movement and its aftermath, was also narrow and filtered through her white privilege.

³ Christopher J. Lee, 'Locating Hannah Arendt within Postcolonial Thought: A Prospectus', *College Literature* 38(1), 2011, p 103. Important work concerning Arendt's analysis of imperialism and totalitarianism in relation to post-independent African political rule has been undertaken by some scholars. See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996; Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

⁴ Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton 'Introduction: Terror and the Postcolonial', in Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (eds), *Terror and the Postcolonial: A Concise Companion*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p 7.

⁵ Mahmood Mamdani, *When victims become killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, p 13. He writes that 'when Hannah Arendt set out to understand the Nazi Holocaust, she put it in the context of a history of one kind of genocide: the settlers' genocide of the native. [. . .] [T]he prototype of settler violence in the African colonies was the German annihilation of over 80 percent of the Herero population in the colony of German South West Africa in a single year, 1904'. Mamdani, *When victims*, p 10.

⁶ Christopher J. Lee, "'Causes' versus 'Conditions': Imperial Sovereignty, Postcolonial Violence and the recent Re-Emergence of Arendtian Political Thought in African Studies', *South African Historical Journal* 60(1), 2008, p 138. Lee refers to Mamdani's book *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1984).

⁷ The reason why individual thinking and totalitarianism are so deeply at odds with each other is that totalitarianism expects uniformity of thought: Arendt writes that 'completely heterogeneous uniformity is one of the primary conditions for totalitarianism', *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Orlando: A Harvest Book, 1968, p 322. According to Arendt, this means that

totalitarian governments' 'total domination reaches out into all, not only the political, spheres of life. [. . .] There is no office [. . .] in which an unequivocal acceptance of the ruling principles is not demanded', 'Personal Responsibility', *Responsibility and Judgment*, Jerome Kohn (ed), New York: Schocken Books, 2003, p 33. A totalitarian regime "coordinates" human existence toward, for example, a uniform national identity', Rosalyn Diprose, 'Arendt and Nietzsche on responsibility and futurity', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 34(6), 2008, p 621.

⁸ In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt overhauls earlier understandings of evil as mysterious diabolic darkness, as her famous phrase concerning the banality of evil instead refers to the idea that evil springs from a lack of thinking. Arendt showed that evil actually 'possess[es] neither depth nor any demonic dimension yet [. . .] it can spread like fungus over the surface of the earth'. Amos Elon, Introduction, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York: Penguin, 2006, pp xiii-xiv. Arendt's most striking example of such a lack of thinking is Adolf Eichmann, who refused to take responsibility for shipping victims to the concentration camps, as he 'had steadfastly insisted that he was guilty only of "aiding and abetting" in the commission of the crimes which he was charged, that he himself had never committed an overt act'. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p 246.

⁹ See Seyla Benhabib, 'Introduction', in Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, pp 1-16.

¹⁰ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

¹¹ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p 133.

¹² Obiechina, *Language*, p 123.

¹³ Patrick Hayden, *Political Evil in a Global Age: Hannah Arendt and International Theory*, London: Routledge, 2009, p 33.

¹⁴ Ama Biney, 'The legacy of Kwame Nkrumah in retrospect', *Journal of Pan African Studies* 2(3), 2008, pp 139-140. See also Harcourt Fuller, 'Civitas Ghaniensis Conditor: Kwame Nkrumah, symbolic nationalism and the iconography of Ghanaian money 1957 – the Golden Jubilee', *Nations and Nationalism* 14(3), 2008, pp 530-1.

¹⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Richard Philcox (trans), New York: Grove Press, 2004, p 152. Without explicitly referring to Fanon's essay, Armah writes that '[t]he trouble was that [Nkrumah's] Party's petty bourgeoisie leadership did not see much wrong with the neocolonial system inherited from the British. They were content to expand that system, replacing white personnel with Black', 'Black Star', *Black World* 23(10), 1974, pp 90-91. Fanon's work remains an important source of motivation for Armah. See e.g. Armah, 'Fanon, The Awakener', *Negro Digest* 18, 1969, pp 4-9. The connection between Armah's novel and Fanon's essay has been discussed by other critics as well, see Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction*, New Haven: London, 1990, pp 55-6; Derek Wright, *Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa: The Sources of His Fiction*, London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1989, pp 35-6.

¹⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1968, p 80-1.

¹⁷ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 62.

¹⁸ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 40.

¹⁹ On the symbolic uses of scatological elements in Armah's novel, see Emmanuel N. Obiechina, *Language and Theme: Essays on African literature*, Washington, DC: Howard UP, 1990, p 128; Derek Wright, 'Totalitarian Rhetoric: Some Aspects of Metaphor in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*', *Critique* 30(3), 1989, pp 210, 215.

²⁰ Qtd. in Tommie L. Jackson, *The Existential Fiction of Ayi Kwei Armah, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre*, Lanham: UP of America, Inc., 1996, p xviii. See also Emine Snyder, 'New Directions in African Writings', *Pan-African Journal* 5, 1972, p 257.

²¹ Charles Larson, *The Emergence of African Fiction*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1971, p 244. See also Wole Soyinka, 'The writer in a modern African state', *The Writer in Modern Africa*, in Per Wästberg (ed), Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968, p 18.

²² Qtd. in Jackson, *The Existential*, p 8.

²³ Chinua Achebe, 'Africa and Her Writers', *The Massachusetts Review* 14(3), 1973, pp 625-6. Contrary to Achebe's accusations, Armah has throughout his career concentrated on African questions and seen himself as a Pan-Africanist writer. See Armah, 'One writer's education', *West Africa* 26, 1985, pp 1752-3.

²⁴ See Jackson, *The Existential*, p 35.

²⁵ Shelby Steele, 'Existentialism in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah', *Obsidian* 3, 1977, pp 11, 10.

²⁶ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 56.

²⁷ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 95.

²⁸ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 67.

²⁹ Leroy A Cooper, 'Hannah Arendt's Political Philosophy: An Interpretation', *The Review of Politics* 38(2), 1976, p 145.

³⁰ Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992, p 192.

³¹ See Canovan, *Arendt*, p 117.

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- ³² Crawford Young, *The Postcolonial State in Africa: Fifty Years of Independence, 1960-2010*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012, p 123.
- ³³ Edmond J. Keller, *Identity, Citizenship, and Political Conflict in Africa*, Bloomington, IN, US: Indiana University Press, 2014, p 161.
- ³⁴ Arendt writes about the members of respectable society in her essay 'Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship', in *Responsibility and Judgment*, Jerome Kohn (ed), New York: Schocken Books, 2003, pp 42-5. She further differentiates between good men and good citizens in her essay 'Civil Disobedience', in *Crises of the Republic*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969, pp 64-5. Some Arendt scholars also discuss these three categories of men in Arendt's thinking. See Keith Breen, *Under Weber's Shadow: Modernity, Subjectivity and Politics in Habermas, Arendt and MacIntyre*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, p 108; Canovan, *Arendt*, pp 178-9.
- ³⁵ 'Personal Responsibility', p 44.
- ³⁶ Richard J. Bernstein, "'The Banality of Evil' Reconsidered", in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, Craig Calhoun and John McGowan (eds.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p 298.
- ³⁷ Bernstein, "'The Banality'", p 298.
- ³⁸ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 162.
- ³⁹ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 158.
- ⁴⁰ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 158.
- ⁴¹ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 158.
- ⁴² Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p 128.
- ⁴³ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p 128.
- ⁴⁴ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p 129.
- ⁴⁵ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 79.
- ⁴⁶ 'Civil Disobedience', pp 61-2.
- ⁴⁷ 'Personal Responsibility', p 43.
- ⁴⁸ Arendt, 'Personal Responsibility', p 44.
- ⁴⁹ 'Some Questions of Moral Philosophy', in *Responsibility and Judgment*, Jerome Kohn (ed), New York: Schocken Books, 2003, p 97.
- ⁵⁰ 'Some Questions', p 90.
- ⁵¹ 'Some Questions', p 72.
- ⁵² 'Some Questions', p 67.
- ⁵³ Canovan, *Arendt*, p 178.
- ⁵⁴ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 51-2.
- ⁵⁵ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 31-2.
- ⁵⁶ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p 128.
- ⁵⁷ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 45.
- ⁵⁸ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 44. On the representations of commodity fetishism in the novel, see John Lutz, 'Pessimism, Autonomy, and Commodity Fetishism in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not yet Born*', *Research in African Literatures* 34(2), 2003, p 105. Simon Simonse also writes about 'the deceptive effects of money' in the novel, see 'African Literature Between Nostalgia and Utopia: African Novels Since 1953 in the Light of the Modes-of-Production Approach', *Research in African Literatures* 13(4), 1982, p 474.
- ⁵⁹ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 115.
- ⁶⁰ 'Some Questions', p 72.
- ⁶¹ Arendt, 'Thinking and Moral Considerations', in *Responsibility and Judgment*, Jerome Kohn (ed), New York: Schocken Books, 2003, p 181.
- ⁶² Arendt, 'Collective Responsibility', in *Responsibility and Judgment*, Jerome Kohn (ed), New York: Schocken Books, 2003, p 154.
- ⁶³ Armah, *Beautiful*, pp 159-60.
- ⁶⁴ Arendt, 'Collective Responsibility', p 153.
- ⁶⁵ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 80.
- ⁶⁶ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 55.
- ⁶⁷ Canovan, *Arendt*, p 194.
- ⁶⁸ I revise Joshua Esty's analysis, according to which, 'the protagonist cannot quite come into his own as a figure of political resistance; he remains a tragically (if stubbornly) inert principle of ethical nonalignment'. See 'Excremental Postcolonialism', *Contemporary Literature* 40(1), 1999, p 40. I maintain that these words apply to the Teacher character rather than to the main character. In contrast to the Teacher's actions, the main character's actions fundamentally differ from the principle of ethical nonalignment, as he is acting in order to improve the future of society. My reading comes much closer to Lazarus's, who also

clearly distinguishes between these two characters and their ethical standpoints, as he claims that the Teacher ‘retreat[s] into marginality’ whereas the main character ‘refuse[s] to accept its [the elite’s] dominion over social reality’. Lazarus, *Resistance*, p 67.

⁶⁹ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 79.

⁷⁰ Arendt, p 178.

⁷¹ Canovan, *Arendt*, p 178; See also Breen, *Under*, p 109.

⁷² Armah, *Beautiful*, p 79.

⁷³ *Under*, p 109.

⁷⁴ Canovan, *Arendt*, p 178.

⁷⁵ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 157.

⁷⁶ Arendt, ‘Some Questions’, p 93.

⁷⁷ ‘Arendt’, p 625.

⁷⁸ See Hugh Charles O’Connell, ‘A weak utopianism of postcolonial nationalist *Bildung*: Re-reading Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48(4), 2012, p 381.

⁷⁹ Armah, *Beautiful*, p 159-60.

⁸⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p 5.