

# The Relationship between the ‘Banality of Evil’ and the Nuremberg Trials

Miss Ananya Charoenwong



An Independent Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts in European Studies  
Inter-Department of European Studies  
GRADUATE SCHOOL  
Chulalongkorn University  
Academic Year 2019  
Copyright of Chulalongkorn University

ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างแนวคิด 'the Banality of Evil' และการพิจารณาคดีนูเรมเบิร์ก



สารนิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต  
สาขาวิชายุโรปศึกษา สหสาขาวิชายุโรปศึกษา  
บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
ปีการศึกษา 2562  
ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Independent Study Title      The Relationship between the ‘Banality of Evil’ and the  
Nuremberg Trials  
By                                      Miss Ananya Charoenwong  
Field of Study                      European Studies  
Thesis Advisor                      Assistant Professor TUL ISRANGURA NA  
AYUDHYA, Ph.D.

---

Accepted by the GRADUATE SCHOOL, Chulalongkorn University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Master of Arts

INDEPENDENT STUDY COMMITTEE

..... Chairman  
(Assistant Professor Bhawan Ruangsilp, Ph.D.)  
..... Advisor  
(Assistant Professor TUL ISRANGURA NA  
AYUDHYA, Ph.D.)  
..... Examiner  
(Assistant Professor SURAT HORACHAIKUL)



จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

อนัญญา เจริญวงศ์ : ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างแนวคิด 'the Banality of Evil' และการพิจารณาคดีนูเรมเบิร์ก  
 ก. ( The Relationship between the 'Banality of Evil' and the Nuremberg  
 Trials) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : ศศ. ดร.ศุภชัย อิศรางกูร ณ อยุธยา

นาซีเยอรมนีสร้างประวัติศาสตร์ยุคมีคของมนุษย์จากอาชญากรรมต่อมนุษยชาติ เช่น เหตุการณ์โฮโลคอสต์ หรือ การฆ่าล้างเผ่าพันธุ์ชาวยิวที่ชาวยิวเสียชีวิตไปกว่า 6 ล้านคน เพื่อเป็นการให้ความยุติธรรมกับเหยื่อ เจ้าหน้าที่นาซีถูกนำตัวขึ้นศาลยุติธรรมระหว่างประเทศหลังเยอรมนีแพ้ในตอจบสงครามโลกครั้งที่สอง เช่น ศาลนูเรมเบิร์กที่ถูกจัดขึ้นระหว่างปี ค.ศ. 1946 ถึง 1946 และ Eichmann Trial หรือศาลที่ถูกจัดขึ้นในอิสราเอลปี ค.ศ. 1961 เพื่อพิจารณาคดีอดีตเจ้าหน้าที่นาซีอดอล์ฟ ไรช์มัน ศาลพิจารณาของไรช์มันเป็นแหล่งพัฒนาแนวคิดที่เรียกว่า the Banality of Evil ซึ่งถูกพัฒนาโดยฮันนาห์ อารนต์ แนวคิดนี้แสดงถึงการที่บุคคลไม่มีความสามารถในการคิดและเชื่อฟังต่อคำสั่งจนทำให้กลายเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของอาชญากรรมร้ายแรง ถึงแม้จะไม่ได้มีเจตนาร้าย รายงานการศึกษาเล่มนี้มุ่งหมายตอบคำถามสำคัญคือ กรณีศึกษาจากศาลนูเรมเบิร์กกับจำเลยวิลเลียม ไคเทิลว่ามีแนวความคิดคล้ายกับอดอล์ฟ ไรช์มันหรือไม่ โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์จากคำให้การในศาล และแนวคิด the Banality of Evil สามารถใช้อธิบายกับกรณีของจำเลยวิลเลียม ไคเทิลได้หรือไม่ ผลปรากฏว่าถึงแม้ไคเทิลและไรช์มันจะมีความแตกต่างในด้านภูมิหลังชีวิตและความมุ่งมั่นในอาชีพต่างกัน แต่ความคิดของไคเทิลและไรช์มันคล้ายกันเพราะทั้งคู่เป็นเจ้าหน้าที่ที่เชื่อฟังและเชื่อสัจต่คำสั่ง และให้ความสำคัญกับหน้าที่มากกว่าความเจ็บปวดของเหยื่อ



สาขาวิชา ยุโรปศึกษา  
 ปีการศึกษา 2562

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....  
 ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก .....

# # 6284006820 : MAJOR EUROPEAN STUDIES

KEYWORD nazi, violence, world war II, dictatorship, hannah arendt

D:

Ananya Charoenwong : The Relationship between the ‘Banality of Evil’ and the Nuremberg Trials. Advisor: Asst. Prof. TUL ISRANGURA NA AYUDHYA, Ph.D.

Nazi Germany gave the history of human the dark period from their crimes against humanity, the Holocaust, in which 6 million Jews were murdered. To provide justice for victims after Nazi Germany’s defeat in World War II, Nazi officials were brought to the International Courts of Justice (ICJ), such as the Nuremberg Trials, which lasted from 1945 to 1946, and the Eichmann Trial in 1961. The Eichmann trial provided a fertile ground for the concept called the Banality of Evil developed by Hannah Arendt. The concept shows that one’s inability to think and blind obedience to duty can lead to be part of crimes in a gigantic scale without their evil intention. This paper aims to answer two crucial questions: Does the chosen case of the Nuremberg trials defendant Wilhelm Keitel resemble Eichmann in aspects of attitudes analyzed from their testimony, and does the Banality of Evil concept can explain the case. The result shows that despite the fact that Keitel and Eichmann were different because of their life background and career ambitions, their attitudes were similar as both of them were obedient officials, loyal to their duty, and thought they must prioritize their duty first before the pain of the victims.



Field of Study: European Studies

Student's Signature

Academic Year: 2019

Advisor's Signature

Year:

.....

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my advisor, professor Tul Israngura Na Ayudhya, as he played a very crucial role in helping me organising the structure for the paper since the beginning, and also for his understanding, useful advices, guidance, and patience throughout the whole process of conducting this paper. Moreover, I would like to thank my family and friends for always being with me and so supportive even for times that I did not even realise that I needed it. I also would like to thank Hannah Arendt, the German philosopher who developed the concept 'the Banality of Evil', as her concept inspired me a lot, and provoked me to discover new dimension of human mind. In addition, I would like to say that I am very thankful for the existence of Liverpool Football Club as they were the ones who kept inspiring me, and reminded me that all achievements in life do not come easily. Most importantly, I would like to thank myself the most for being consistently active, passionate to learn and acquire new knowledge that I did not have the opportunity to learn before, and fully committed.

Ananya Charoenwong

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
.....	iii
ABSTRACT (THAI) .....	iii
.....	iv
ABSTRACT (ENGLISH) .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
Introduction.....	1
I. The Banality of Evil .....	6
II. The Reader .....	13
III. The Nuremberg Trials.....	15
Conclusion .....	24
REFERENCES .....	26
VITA.....	29

## The Relationship between the ‘Banality of Evil’ and the Nuremberg Trials

### Introduction

*“A foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it”<sup>1</sup>.*

The extract above is from the first book of the world wide famous fantasy novel series Harry Potter, written by J.K. Rowling. The quote shows the perspective of Voldemort, one of the most famous villains on screen who strongly believes that being an average good person is nonsense, and his crimes are not horrible but merely a way of living for only brave people who are bold enough to do what others cannot, or do not want to do. Looking through his way of thinking, despite the fact that one appears to be someone whose soul is filled with evil thoughts and no sight of goodness. It is still quite a surprise why Voldemort is so blind after all the chaos resulting from his abnormal actions. Roy Baumeister stated in his study ‘Human Evil: The Mythical and the True Causes of Violence’ that “[a]s I said, however, most people whose acts are condemned as evil do not see their own actions as evil. For example, they may recognize that they harm or exploit someone but believe that the action is justified or that victim deserved to be treated that way”<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, Baumeister coined these characteristics as “Myth of Pure Evil”. For instance, he argued that pure evils do not harm others by accident or negligence, but that pure evils are satisfied when committing crimes instead of feeling uncomfortable and suffered<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, Baumeister contended that pure evils are people who have always been evils, not those who transform themselves from the good to the evil, and pure evils aim for no peace but mess. However, in M. Korstanje’s review of *Lucifer Effect*, written by Philip Zimbardo, Korstanje shows that not all evils are the born-evil type,

---

<sup>1</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> (Baumeister, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



and normal people can turn into evils by adjusting their behavior to the situation that they are in, and to avoid being alienated<sup>4</sup>. It is interesting to think of reasons why one chooses to commit crimes, and why one who commits serious crimes does not acknowledge that their actions are unacceptable and immoral, and fails to see that he or she is an evil. In this paper, it reveals the Nuremberg trials in which defendants who were former Nazi officials tried to come up with excuses to convince judges that they not be guilty, for their crimes were not driven by evil intentions, but only obeyed to given orders despite the fact that their actions carried with it criminal nature, and obviously harmed people, specifically Jewish people. This complex can help us better understand causes, processes, and reasons of violence that keep happening in present day, including dictatorship, mass murder, and terrorism in the name of specific beliefs and organizations for the hope that one day the world will find out how to reduce or, if possible, prevent those violence from reoccurring.

One of the greatest crimes against humankind the world has ever witnessed was the one caused by Nazi Germany, an extreme-right political party officially named the National Socialist Germany Workers' Party, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, as known as the Führer, left scars to Europe, specifically to Jewish people, since one of its main goals was aimed at excluding and abolishing Jewish people, including German Jews starting from removing fundamental rights and citizenship to physical extermination, which reached its zenith during the Holocaust, killing approximately 6 millions of Jewish population in Europe<sup>5</sup>. Germany started World War II, when Hitler violated the Treaty of Versailles by invading other countries and remilitarizing Germany. After Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Britain and France declared war against Germany. Therefore, during World War II, Europe was divided into two sides which were the Axis led by Germany and the Allies led by Britain, France, and the Soviet Union<sup>6</sup>. World War II lasted in Europe until May 1945 which eventually ended with Hitler's committing suicide and Germany's capitulation. After World War II, Nazi officials were brought to the International Court Justice

---

<sup>4</sup> (Korstanje, 2013)

<sup>5</sup> (Cesarani, 2016)

<sup>6</sup> (Simms, 2019)

(ICJ) to be responsible for their roles and participation in Nazi crimes. The well-known trials for Nazi officials were the Nuremberg Trials held between 1945 and 1946 by the Allies, based on the story of World War II and concentrated on what Nazi officials did or the role they involved in the Nazi Party<sup>7</sup>.

Another well-known trial concerning Nazi was the Eichmann Trial in 1961 by the Israeli Government, concentrated on one specific Nazi official named Otto Adolf Eichmann, and the trial prioritized what the Jews suffered from his participation in the Holocaust, and all projects concerning the extermination of the Jews. The difference between the Nuremberg Trials and the Eichmann Trial is that the former was based more on World War II, while the latter was focused more on Jewish's suffering<sup>8</sup>. During the Trial, Eichmann denied that he did not kill, or order to kill anyone, and he did not personally hate Jews. Throughout the trial, Eichmann repeated time and again that he only obeyed orders given to him from Nazi officials of higher-ranks. However, the prosecutor argued that Eichmann was not actually left choiceless, for it was still entirely possible for him to quit his position. Furthermore, as Eichmann claimed that he did not kill or order for any Jews to be killed, the prosecutor also argued that Eichmann should have actually realized that his task, which he was responsible for mass evacuation and transportation of Jews to be physically exterminated, bared the criminal nature with it. The Eichmann trial was where a concept called the Banality of Evil received a lot of attention. It was developed by the German philosopher Hannah Arendt. It refers to the thinking that normal average people can commit crimes in any gigantic scale without being born evil if they keep obeying to given orders without questioning them, since they do not possess the ability to tell right from wrong, and they also could not make decisions with their own conscience and thinking<sup>9</sup>. However, the Banality of Evil has received severe criticism, because the data analyzed by Arendt were mainly from the statements by Eichmann in the trial. Some of them were false, such as the fact that Eichmann claimed that he did not personally hate

---

<sup>7</sup> (Myanmar & Justice, 2019)

<sup>8</sup> (Yablonka, 2012)

<sup>9</sup> (Arendt, 1964)

Jews. Yet, Dieter Wisliceny, his former assistance, told in the Nuremberg Trials that Eichmann once said to him “I will jump into my grave laughing, because the fact that I have the death of five million Jews on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction”<sup>10</sup>.

There are other various studies working on the mindset of personnel who worked with the Nazi regime, and can be compared to the Banality of Evil. Tom Segev published a book called *Soldiers of Evil*, which contains his interviews with former Nazi officials, including those who involved in the Holocaust. The book shows that many Nazi officials did not do their jobs out of their own belief, political perspectives, and Nazi ideology, but only because of orders that were given to them, and they just had to do their duty. It was unnecessary to consider, or even doubt those orders<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, the book *An Uncompromising Generation* by Michael Wildt shows a story of the sample group of those born during the early 19th century who witnessed unpleasant historical events of Germany while growing up, like such as the First World War, the Versailles treaty, and the hyperinflation, which later made them become radical and revolutionary. These young educated males gradually became more and more radical as they worked for the Nazi institutions, such as the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) and the Einsatzkommandos. They were responsible for managements and technical work relating to the Holocaust, even though they might not foresee the terrible events, when they first joined the Nazi institutions. Wildt pointed out that these men lacked self-reflection, and again, they did not think that their actions were crimes, only because everything was happening during the war time. They just thought that it was rational, and they had to carry out their duty<sup>12</sup>. Christopher Browning’s famous book *Ordinary Men* points out that not all officials of Nazi Germany were pleased with the tasks they were responsible for. However, some willingly chose to continue doing their jobs which involved killing people, even when they were given an opportunity to withdraw, because possessing power was too

---

<sup>10</sup> (Macdonald, 2019)

<sup>11</sup> (Segev, 1988)

<sup>12</sup> (Wildt & Lampert, 2009)

desirable for them to abolish it<sup>13</sup>. What these studies have in common with Arendt's Banality of Evil is that officials who worked for Nazi Germany focused on obeying orders and being strict with their duties rather than thinking whether what they were doing was harmful and inappropriate. However, the three mentioned scholarly works give us other different ideas about factors that make normal people transform into evils which are the lack of reflection on their duty and its consequences, the attempt to justify their radical actions as being rational and necessary for the chaotic period, and the ambition of power.

Still, the Banality of Evil concept is inspirational. It can also be seen in the film *The Reader* (2008)<sup>14</sup>, originally a book written by a German novelist Bernhard Schlink<sup>15</sup>. *The Reader* tells a story of a couple with a wide age gap. Michael Berg is about 15 years old when he meets Hannah Schmitz who is already in her thirties. The two are brought to each other by an accident when Hannah helps Michael go back to his home after she spots him vomiting because he has *Gelbsucht*, jaundice in English. In the novel originally written in German, *Gelbsucht* in this context does not only refer to jaundice, but also has the hidden meaning, for it resembles the yellow badges that Jews were forced to wear in Nazi Germany to accentuate the shame of being Jews. They start their affair since, before she disappears from his life without warning. One day, Michael, who then becomes a law student, attends a trial concerning former an SS guard accused of the death of Jews who were burnt alive in a church. To his surprise, Hanna is there as a defendant. She is found guilty, for she admits that she is the one signing a document authorizing the church to be locked, even though the signature appears to be fake, since Hanna is illiterate, but she chooses to hide her illiteracy. Remarkably, she also tells the prosecutor that she cannot unlock the church, for her duty is to guard the prisoners. Eventually, Hanna is given life sentence, before she is released on parole. She commits suicide afterwards. Hanna's argument to the trial is similar to that of Eichmann when he gave to the prosecutor during his trial, in

---

<sup>13</sup> (Browning, 1992)

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Daldry, "The Reader," (2008).

<sup>15</sup> Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

terms of clarifying that they do not intend to kill anyone, but it is their duty to obey orders. Neither do they realize that their actions contain criminal nature, nor have they the ability to tell right to wrong, or even make decision by themselves.

The Banality of Evil is indeed an interesting concept and debatable. It would be interesting to see if the concept can be used to explain other cases of Nazi officials, including those who possessed high ranks in Nazi Germany. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to study the relationship between the Banality of Evil concept and the Nuremberg trials by analyzing the testimony of Wilhelm Keitel who was the defendant in the Nuremberg trials in order to see if his testimony is similar or comparative to Eichmann's. This paper attempts to answer the questions whether the Nuremberg trials defendant Keitel resembles Eichmann in terms of attitudes shown through their testimony, and whether the Banality of Evil concept has explanatory power when applying to this particular case study. This paper argues that testimony of some of the Nuremberg trials defendants reveals similar mindset of former Nazi officials, including Eichmann and Keitel, and the Banality of Evil concept can be used in order to gain better understanding towards the mind of the Nuremberg trials defendants. However, the limitation of this paper is that the source is only the testimony of the defendant during the Nuremberg Trials with no other sources included, such as personal diary or other official documents, and the testimony which will be used to analyzed here is only available from the first day to the fourth day of Keitel's testimony and not the one from the last day of his interrogation.

## **I. The Banality of Evil**

Hannah Arendt, a German philosopher and political theorist, was sent by the *New Yorker's* to write the report on the Eichmann Trial. Adolf Eichmann, a German-Austrian who worked for Nazi Germany with responsibility for Jewish emigration, mass deportation, and the Final Solution. Eichmann was captured by Israeli agents in 1960, after he escaped to Argentina and lived there anonymously. After that, Eichmann was brought to Israel to stand on trial for his crimes. Gideon Hausner, the header for the team of prosecutors of the Eichmann Trial held in Jerusalem in 1961,

stated that the Eichmann Trial was based on what Jews had to suffer more than what Otto Adolf Eichmann had done, and he also believed that “Only a Jewish court could render justice to Jews”<sup>16</sup>. Ben Gurion also added that the destruction of Jews of Europe was not only the crime for only Nazi Germany to be responsible, but also other nations as well, including some of Jewish leaders. In addition, the Eichmann trial had some differences compared to the Nuremberg Trials. According to the study conducted in 2012 by Hannah Yablonka who is an Israeli historian and scholar, the Eichmann trial concerns more sufferings of Jewish people and the Final Solution than the Second World War story like the Nuremberg Trials, as the Eichmann trial was held by Jewish people while the Nuremberg trials was held by the victorious allies<sup>17</sup>. Additionally, while the Nuremberg trials basically divided their criminal categories into three, including crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, the Eichmann trial was legally relied on Nazis and Nazi Collaborators Punishment Law of 1950 whose first section is crimes against the Jews<sup>18</sup>.

Eichmann denied the indictment of murder, as he explained that he neither killed nor gave an order to kill a Jew and non-Jew. Eichmann further added during the trial that he did not have any personal hatred towards Jews, since he had some good relations with Jewish officials in the past, which later this was revealed to be false. He further attempted to clarify that he was not someone who had a soul of evil, but someone who was obedient to the orders given to him and took that seriously as a duty, and he also claimed that he himself was a victim. Furthermore, some psychiatrists even identified him as mentally normal. However, apparently the judges did not agree with all this, and preferred to focus on many lies told by Eichmann, as he appeared to be someone who was self-deceptive, and had a quite unreliable memory which can be seen occasionally throughout the trial. The judges also added that he should have recognized that the actions that he had committed contain criminal nature in them<sup>19</sup>.

---

<sup>16</sup> (Arendt, 1964)

<sup>17</sup> (Yablonka, 2012)

<sup>18</sup> (Yablonka, 2012)

<sup>19</sup> (Arendt, 1964)

Throughout the whole of his life before joining Nazi, he was apparently not an intelligent man, and his career was not anything but exciting and prosperous. Later, this resulted in his attempts from time to time to have the feeling of being a part of something, and climb up to higher career positions so that he would not be viewed as a failure. In 1938, he was sent to Vienna to organize forced emigration of Jews under Reinhard Heydrich's directives, and later he became competent in organizing and managing emigration. In Vienna, he also had negotiations with the Jewish Community which he initiated the idea to assemble all the processes concerning emigration of Jews in one place instead of running from different offices. After the procedure was done, Jews would be left with no money and must leave the country in a short period of time lasts for about two weeks. He claimed that he saved many Jewish lives by this forced emigration which unlikely seems to be true as it would be difficult for the Jews to be welcomed when entering other countries, since they were left with only passport and little money<sup>20</sup>. Additionally, he also negotiated with the emissaries from Palestine who came to offer help for illegal immigration of Jews into British Palestine. However, it was reported that they were uninterested in rescue operations, but in selecting suitable material as they would mostly choose the young ones. This cooperation led Jews to encounter the fact that their enemy then was not just the Nazi authorities, but the Jewish authorities, too. As an emigration expert and a successful model of the emigration center in Vienna, in 1939, Eichmann was back to Berlin and appointed the head of the Reich Center for Jewish Emigration which gave him difficulties during the war time<sup>21</sup>. This shows that Eichmann could have been viewed as a small-cog in a big wheel, since his position was obviously not considered as a high rank Nazi official, but he still had some authority and competency, especially in the aspects of emigration and evacuation which was important in the Nazi regime. In addition, even though he was not amongst higher-rank Nazi officials, but the contribution from his work definitely had consequences specifically towards Jews. The trial faced confusion when wanting to identify specific responsibility of Eichmann because there was competition amongst the Nazi institutions as they all

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> (Arendt, 1964)

tried to come up with different solutions to the concern of getting rid of or killing Jews. The competition then was seen honorable, but later appeared to be something they were not very fond of as it can be seen from the Nuremberg Trials where many Nazi officials blamed one another, but no one blamed their Führer, Adolf Hitler<sup>22</sup>.

In 1941, Heydrich became the Protector of Bohemia and Moravia located in Czechoslovakia, and he intended to make the territory become *judenrein* or 'clean of Jews'. Heydrich gave an order to move instantly the Native Czech population out of Theresienstadt, a ghetto and concentration camp located in German-occupied region Bohemia and Moravia, so that there would be more space provided for the Jews. Eichmann was sent to the Theresienstadt to observe the conditions of the place only to be disappointed, for the place did not look very satisfying due to its small size. Theresienstadt initially was designed by Heydrich to serve a space for the Jews of privileged ranks, but it was unfortunately disguised with a hidden purpose which was physical extermination of Jews or the Final Solution, which was something Eichmann did not foresee and out of his competency<sup>23</sup>.

The final solution was a top secret, and not every Nazi official was closely involved in this matter. They were being very careful when referring and talking about the final solution. For example, they would not use the words like killing or extermination in documents, but there would appear the ones such as evacuation, final solution, and special treatment to hide this sinister crime from the world<sup>24</sup>. For the roles of Eichmann in the Final Solution in the Wannsee Conference (1942), aimed to find cooperation for the Final Solution, Eichmann appeared to be the secretary of the meeting, since he was responsible for keeping the minutes and related documents. Moreover, he would be sent to camps and killing centers to inspect the capacity and preparation before reporting to his superiors. Another important role of Eichmann in the Final Solution is that he was responsible for mass deportations of Jews, for he and his team were the one who decided meticulously, such as the number of Jews that would be deported and the management of timetables concerning the matters like

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> (Arendt, 1964)



departures and arrivals. Therefore, even though he did not participate in the actual killing process, but it is undeniable that he knew enough what the Final Solution was all about including the purpose and methods that would be used for the Final Solution, and he knew well that his tasks would lead Jews to their death. Eichmann tried to tell the trial that he himself did not personally feel pleased seeing terrible sights of people being murdered horribly<sup>25</sup>. However, actually it was possible for officials participated in the extermination to withdraw from their task or transfer without serious consequences that would cost them their own life. Additionally, Eichmann's position was not really something like a crucial missing piece that would make it impossible for him to quit his task, and Eichmann himself even admitted that the fact that there was an opportunity for him to withdraw was true, only that he thought it would not be a decent thought to do it.

It was not a wonder why he thought it would not be admirable to do as such, since he was an official that was obedient to given orders, and also the fact that Nazi regime influenced the idea of people under the regime to be distorted from reality. Besides the code names or language used with the Final Solution, there were winged words. For example, instead of thinking that killing people is wrong, they thought they sacrificed themselves being assigned and committed that action, so that other people would not have to do it<sup>26</sup>. This demonstrates that it does not require sadist or killing mentality to be a murderer, but it can result from the influence of systematic effort under the system they are in. Eichmann also stated that "Nobody came to me and reproached me for anything in the performance of my duties"<sup>27</sup>. He argued that even though he was accused of committing crimes against Jews from his participation in the Final Solution, but he was only following the order from the superiors and could not change anything. Eichmann obeyed to not just orders but the law, as he considerably a law-abiding citizen, and tried to clarify that Hitler's words equal to law. Eventually, Eichmann was sentenced to death<sup>28</sup>.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> (Lasok, 1962)

Arendt described the situation of Eichmann as the Banality of Evil. The concept is that one normal and average person can be an evil, even though he or she is not an evil by heart. It occurs when one is not being able to think and make decisions for their own action which results in consequences that one must be responsible for, and to distinguish between right and wrong. In the case of Eichmann, it appears that he was in fact not an evil, even described to be mentally normal, and did not hold personal hatred towards Jews. Only he was profoundly obeying orders given to him by the superiors as his mind seemed to be heavily influenced by the Nazi systematic effort in terms of shaping way of thinking, such as using winged words to encourage people under the regime to follow and believe the Nazi and language code in the Final Solution which played a key role in deceiving people and distorting reality to make people think that the crimes or actions committed by Nazi Germany were less horrible than what they really were<sup>29</sup>. Apparently, Eichmann was not a man with high level of the ability to think and realize that his actions involved criminal nature. Most importantly, he kept justifying from time to time that it was his duty to obey orders, that there was not much he could do or change, and even said that he himself was also a victim<sup>30</sup>. It is worth thinking that if he could only question those orders with his own conscience, would there be any situation that he could prevent, or would more lives of Jews be saved? Moreover, it was shown that he was not left completely choiceless. Even though he knew much enough that his responsibilities like organizing mass deportation, managing Jews emigration, and participating in the Final Solution would lead to the death of many Jews, he did not withdraw from the Final Solution regardless that the opportunity to do such was available since he thought it would not be admirable to do so, as he had always been encouraged by the Nazi systematic effort in using winged words to make him feel like obeying orders is a great valuable deed<sup>31</sup>.

Stanley Milgram stated in his study that “I must conclude that Arendt’s conception of the Banality of Evil comes closer to the truth than one might dare

---

<sup>29</sup> (Arendt, 1964)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

imagine”<sup>32</sup>. Milgram did an experiment consisting of two persons acted as teacher and learner, and the learner was tied to an electric chair. The learner will get electric shock every time the learner gave wrong answer, and the level of electricity will be increased for each wrong answer ordered by the teacher who was ordered by the experiment conductor<sup>33</sup>. The focus of the experiment is concentrated on the teacher as it aims to see how far one could keep obeying orders even when those orders were against his or her conscience. The result of the experiment is the teacher kept going until the last level of the electricity, and did not stop even the learner protested. Moreover, the teacher also said that the responsibility should be on the experimenter claiming that he was just doing what he was told, and the experimenter was the one who told the teacher to keep going. After that, Milgram gave two factors why the teacher kept obeying. The first factor is the teacher felt that he needed to fulfill the expectation that the experimenter had of him in delivering the task he was ordered to do. Secondly, he felt that he would not be the one taking all the responsibility since the experimenter was the one giving order. Milgram further stated that “it is psychologically easy to ignore responsibility when one is only an intermediate link in a chain of evil action but is far from the final consequences of the action. Even Eichmann was sickened when he toured the concentration camps, but to participate in mass murder he had only to sit at a desk and shuffle papers”<sup>34</sup>. Interestingly, this work of Milgram raises an interesting thought that we can sit back and condemn these immoral actions but would we act differently if we were put under the same pressure situation? <sup>35</sup>. Moreover, Damian Catani conducted a study on a book called *The Kindly Ones*, written by Jonathan Littell, and the book has the influence of the Banality of Evil concept. The study shows that Littell apparently agrees with the idea that ordinary people are capable of being evils. He once commented that many Holocaust historians, including Christopher Browning, should pay more attention towards the psychological aspect. Catani also added that Holocaust historians rely too

---

<sup>32</sup> (Milgram, 1974)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

much on documentary sources made by the Nazis which Littell thought that such sources provide details, but do not demonstrate real psychological dimension behind evil deeds committed<sup>36</sup>.

However, Cesarani viewed that Eichmann was not really an exceptional or special case and he was not all banal, for receiving orders was not all he did during his career with the Nazi Party. Instead, as the entire Nazi working system was quite complicated and consisted of competition between institutions in the issue of killing Jews, Nazi officials actually had some freedom to initiate ideas and take actions concerning with the Jews. For Eichmann, he once even proposed the idea of the Jewish problem in Hungary which was about the deportation of Jews which they would be killed eventually when arriving at the set destination. Therefore, Cesarani stated that “Eichmann had to learn what it meant to be a genocidaire and then chose to be one”<sup>37</sup>. In addition, Haslam and Reicher conducted a study countering the Banality of Evil concept by showing that Eichmann only seemed to be banal, but actually he was not. Eichmann was first nothing outstanding but he became unsympathetic more and more, as time passed, due to personal developments including career ambition and perspective change from being absorbed into environment he was in, and he even had a role in establishing organization concerning with Jews which showed that he did not just act thoughtlessly<sup>38</sup>.

## II. The Reader

Bernhard Schlink, the author of the novel *The Reader*, is a German lawyer and novelist. Schlink studied law and started his career as a judge before becoming a professor for public law and the philosophy of law, and decided to retire in the early of 2000s. He had done many literary works in German, and one of the most remarkable works is *The Reader*, which was first published in 1995, which received a lot of attention and became so popular that it was translated into many languages.

---

<sup>36</sup> (Catani, 2015)

<sup>37</sup> (Cesarani, 2004)

<sup>38</sup> (Haslam & Reicher, 2007)

*The Reader* demonstrates the influence of Arendt's Banality of Evil concept. It tells a story of love affair between a young boy and an older woman who is about two times older than him. In the early of the year 1958, a young German man named Michael Berg wandering around before vomiting as he has a fever. Fortunately, Hanna Schmitz, a woman who works as a tram conductor, finds him and helps him get back to his home. After his recovery, he comes back to Hanna's apartment with flower to thank her for her aid. From then, the two start talking and begin their secret love affair despite their age gap with Hanna being 36 and Michael is still in his 15. Throughout the whole time that they have been seeing each other, Hanna always asks him to read aloud books or literacy work for her. However, the relationship turns bitter and more stressful after Hanna is promoted, and later she moves out without telling him. In 1966, Michael becomes a law student, and he attends with his professor a trial of female SS guards who are charged for being responsible for the death of 300 Jewish women burnt in a church since they cannot escape, as the church door is locked. Michael is shocked when Hanna appears as one of the defendants. In the trial, she admits that she acknowledges that Auschwitz camp also has a purpose as an extermination camp that aims to kill Jews. She further states that all the guards would randomly pick prisoners to be executed in order to provide more room for upcoming prisoners. She further clarifies that she personally would choose the ones who are physically weak. She asks them to read for her, and later they would be found out dead. For the accusation against Hanna in the church incident, apparently Hanna has the authority to unlock the church and makes all the exists available but she decides not to do so. In Hanna defense, she denies the accusation and claims that she is not authorized to order all exists of the church to be locked, and she also states that her duty prevents the possibility to let the prisoners escape as she is one of the guards. After that, the prosecutor of the trial brought up a document related to the authority concerned with the church incident, and the document shows that her signing is there. Still, she denies, and claims that the signing is fake as she is not the one who signs it. To prove that her word is true, the prosecutor asks Hanna to write in order to compare her handwriting with the one demonstrated in the document. Suddenly, she refuses to do so, and just admits that the signing is signed by herself. Eventually, Michael comes to his realization that Hanna is actually illiterate, and she has always kept this secret

that she can neither read nor write. As a result, Hanna is punished with life sentence before being released on parole in 1988. Sadly, she later commits suicide after leaving a note to Michael saying she intends to give her life's savings to one of the family who are prisoners in Auschwitz. However, the money ends up being donated to organization concerning with adult illiteracy instead as Michael decides to do so<sup>39</sup>.

Hanna's illiteracy makes it able for her character to be perceived into two ways which are both victim and criminal as she is unable to make decisions relating to the tragedy that happened results from her illiteracy which later makes her become a criminal from the action that she commits<sup>40</sup>. However, her punishment could be reduced from the trial if she informs the persecutor about her illiteracy only she does not do so, and choose to be labelled as a criminal instead of an illiterate person which shows that she choose to hide her own shame rather than showing guilt towards those who suffer from her crimes<sup>41</sup>. Overall, *The Reader* is important and worths reading as it reminds readers to reflect on their perspective towards the horrible history, and to learn what factors which made that event in the history was possible to prevent it from reoccurring<sup>42</sup>.

### III. The Nuremberg Trials

Alexander Macdonald wrote a book named *The Nuremberg Trials* which is a book based on true story of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg. The Nuremberg trials held after World War II ended by the Allies, and the tribunal charged high-ranked Nazi officials including those who worked under the government and military for three categories of crimes which were crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The defendants or the Nazi officials stood at the

---

<sup>39</sup> (Schlink, 1997)

<sup>40</sup> (Castillo & De, 2018)

<sup>41</sup> Nothing Slabbert and Melodie, "Memory, history and guilt in Bernhard Schlink's der Vorleser" (2009).

<sup>42</sup> (Murray et al., 2017)

trial surprising people with how normal they appeared to be as persons, which contradicted to the imagination of people which might expect them be some kind of monsters as they committed such crimes they did under the Nazi regime and especially towards Jews<sup>43</sup>. Some of the defendants in the trial insisted that they only obliged to their duty, and some did not even seem to acknowledge their guilt at all, for instance, in the case of Wilhelm Keitel which will be analyzed below based on his testimony collected and translated into English by the Avalon Project, a project of a digital library from Yale Law School of Yale University<sup>44</sup>.

Wilhelm Bodewin Johann Gustav Keitel had been familiar with military sphere for his whole life. For the early 1900, he worked with the Prussian army beginning as an officer candidate and later ended up with working as a general staff which was simply like a body of assistance before voluntarily joining the Reichswehr, a German organization concerning with military lasted from 1919 to 1935. In 1938, he became the Chief of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW), which was the high command of the Armed Forces, and this position provided him an opportunity to work closely with Adolf Hitler. However, Keitel described to the tribunal that the word Chief in the context could be misunderstood as having authority to order, while in reality the position did not allow him to work as a commander and neither as a chief of general staff as he further explained that Hitler wanted all the authority to be centrally up to him. He also added that he was not a master in aspect of Wehrmacht's organization system and equipment. Eventually, he was appointed to be the Field Marshal in 1940 which was typically considered to be the highest rank in the army<sup>45</sup>.

In the Nuremberg Trials, Keitel was charged with Crimes against Peace, War Crimes, and Crimes against Humanity<sup>46</sup>. From his testimony to the tribunal, he showed sight of his inability to think and make decision by himself, as he mostly just

---

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Linder, "The Nuremberg Trials," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (01/01 2000), [h\[ps://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1027995\]](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1027995).

<sup>44</sup> (an electronic publication of the Avalon, William, & Lisa A. Spar, 1996)

<sup>45</sup> (Project)

<sup>46</sup> "Nuremberg Trial Judgements: Wilhelm Keitel," [h\[ps://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nuremberg-trialjudgements-wilhelm-keitel\]](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nuremberg-trialjudgements-wilhelm-keitel).

followed orders from Hitler even sometimes some of the orders were against his conscience. For example, when he was asked about the letter that he wrote to Colonel Amen, the chief interrogator for the Nuremberg Trials, that

*"In carrying out these thankless and difficult tasks, I had to fulfill my duty under the hardest exigencies of war, often acting against the inner voice of my conscience and against my own convictions. The fulfillment of urgent tasks assigned by Hitler, to whom I was directly responsible, demanded complete self-abnegation."<sup>47</sup>*

From the excerpt, one could firstly assume that the inner voice and convictions that he mentioned could be interpreted in terms of morality. However, his answer showed that, by against the inner voice and convictions, he did not mean that he felt sympathy for people who were affected from his immoral deeds but only he had to do his military work that was different from the military training that he experienced from his years of military working. The tribunal further asked him to choose some of the worst tasks that he did, and he started with the working system from the war in the east that he claimed it was against his knowledge concerning with the usage of war, and lastly said that the *Nacht und Nebel* decree, or the *Night and Fog* which was the order assigned to him by Hitler to kidnap those suspected to be dangerous for the German Security<sup>48</sup>, which he admitted that the decree left him worried from its consequences that he had no full idea about. In addition, when the trial asked him how come he was able to stand seeing young people got killed without raising objection when perhaps he could do so, as his rank was high. He replied to the question that he did not think he could stop the action even if he wanted to. When asking whether he approved the order which allowed authorities to bring nationalists, democratic-bourgeois, and communists in the occupied territories of the Nazi to be held hostages, he answered that he basically disagreed with the order, and that his personal view on the matter was different, but he eventually signed the order to be effective as he was

---

<sup>47</sup> "Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10," ONE HUNDRED AND FIRST DAY, Yale Law School, [h\[ps://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-06-46.asp#keitel4](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-06-46.asp#keitel4).

<sup>48</sup> "Night and Fog Decree," [h\[ps://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/arQcle/night-and-fog-decree](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/arQcle/night-and-fog-decree).



ordered to do such. From this, it can be seen that most of the times where he felt uncomfortable from fulfilling his job were caused by his concern on his work, responsibility, and military perspectives rather than having sympathy and empathy towards other humans. Most importantly, when the conflict between his own conscience and his duty occurred, he chose to complete his duty even when it was against his personal thinking<sup>49</sup>.

Throughout his career, he was often described that he was a man who lacked self-characteristics as he mostly followed orders given to him, and he was not ambitious towards job competition as he was already working quite closely to Hitler<sup>50</sup>. From the trial, he repeated from time to time that he did not apply his personal attitude in terms of political idea into his work, and all considerations for any tasks were only concentrated on military's point of view. When he was asked about his personal view on the topic of Wars of Aggression against countries including Austria and then Czechoslovakia as he was accused of involving in the process of planning and preparation, he said that the word "War of Aggression" had no meaning from the perspective of soldier as war is war and wars all contains of same format and measures such as attack and defence, and the level of aggression did not appear to be matter. He further stated that for him, as a military man, the word was only to demonstrate a political idea and did not concern with military<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, as he seemed to clearly said that war of aggression was only political and not militarily, he commented that soldiers should not be qualified to make judgement or interpretation towards this term, for soldier should concentrate on military and not politics. He further emphasized the fact that he had no intention to get involved when it came to politics by answering that the issue was related to political aspect, and that was why he did not object to this when being asked about the potential issues on foreign affairs with England and France from Germany having conflict with Czechoslovakia. He also firmly added that Hitler usually denied to discuss about political topics. In addition, when asking about his attitude towards the Fall Weiss, the strategy plan by Germany

---

<sup>49</sup> (Project)

<sup>50</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Wilhelm Keitel," [h\[ps://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/wilhelm-keitel](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/wilhelm-keitel).

<sup>51</sup> "Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10." NINETY-EIGHTH DAY, Yale Law School, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-03-46.asp#keitel1>

launched in 1939 involving the invasion of Poland<sup>52</sup>, which he replied back to the trial that he personally against the idea of fighting against Poland. The reason why he objected to the idea was not because he felt gutted for Poland, but because he did not think that Germany was ready to wage war at that time due to the fact that the army was not well-prepared from the lack of military capacities including equipment and supply. After that, the tribunal asked whether he only considered issues only in military aspects, and he admitted doing so before repeating again that he did not think about political perspectives but only thinking “Can we or can we not?”<sup>53</sup>. The fact that he only thought “Can we or can we not”, which means was the army ready to have war or not, about any given tasks shows that he lacked the ability to think for himself, and only saw the small picture of his own duty responsibility, and he did not even question whether the army should or should not conduct war considered the fact that many innocent lives could be killed. It also shows that he cared for his responsibility as a soldier more than the consequences of his actions which led to many deaths, and there was not an appearance of his attempt of mitigating situations. Additionally, the trial asked that by the fact that he agreed to join the Nazi party meant he agreed with the Nazi ideology, he, again, said that he only considered it as formal registration as he already worked with Nazi Germany, and that he had always considered himself as a soldier, and not a politician<sup>54</sup>.

As it was already shown above, Keitel was a man who would choose his duty before empathy for human. For example, from an order of 16 September 1941 relating to communist chaos in occupied territories, it was stated that

*“In order to nip in the bud any conspiracy, the strongest measures should be taken at the first sign of trouble in order to maintain the authority of the occupying power and to prevent the conspiracy from spreading...”* and *“...one must bear in mind that in the countries affected human life has absolutely no value and that a*

---

<sup>52</sup> Cathal J. Nolan, "World War II: German invasion of Poland (September 1–October 5, 1939)," *The Encyclopedia of War* (2011/12/09 2011), h[ps://doi.org/doi:10.1002/9781444338232.wbeow705 10.1002/9781444338232.wbeow705, h[ps://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338232.wbeow705.

<sup>53</sup> (Project)

<sup>54</sup> “Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10.” ONE HUNDRED AND FIRST DAY, Yale Law School, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-06-46.asp#keitel4>.

*deterrent effect can be achieved only through the application of extraordinarily harsh measures.”*

In the same subparagraph “b”, the order was said

*“To atone for the life of one German soldier, 50 to 100 Communist must, as a rule, be sentenced to death. The method of execution should strengthen the measure of determent”.*

Keitel was the one signing this order, and the trial questioned if he realized that this order was a literally evil one. Keitel explained that the order was necessary as the situation was intense and also to prevent the spread of phenomena. For the subparagraph “b”, he was asked if he agreed with Hitler on the order, and he said that he was just signing the order but Hitler was the one who set the number. However, he further added that he initially told Hitler that he thought the number should be around 5 to 10 communists equal to a German soldier. Therefore, the trial concluded that the only difference between Keitel and Hitler on this matter was just the number, and Keitel valued lives of communists less than lives of German soldiers by agreeing with the idea of sentencing communists to death. After that, the trial brought up the issue of the order, signed by Keitel concerning with Frenchmen who fought for the Russians, which was stated that

*“Detailed investigations are to be made in appropriate cases with regard to relatives of Frenchmen fighting for the Russians. If the investigation reveals that relatives have given assistance to facilitate escape from France, then severe measures are to be taken.*

*“OKW/Wi. Ru is to make the necessary preparations with the respective military commander or the Higher SS and Police Leader in France. - Signed -- Keitel.”*

Keitel was asked what was his view towards this order as it contains brutality, and he gave his opinion that he felt sorry for those families who had to face consequences of their sons’ misdeeds, which left the tribunal displeased with the word “misdeed” from him as it shows that he still did not seem to acknowledge that this

order was immoral and wrong for people to be killed from fighting for the allies of his country<sup>55</sup>.

He was clearly concerned more on his duty responsibility than those lives affected from his orders, in other words, he chose honour from his duty before guilty towards those who suffered. He stated in the trial that everything he did was only considered as just duty to him, and he thought that soldiers who were in the front lines or those who participated in the real battlefield should not be charged with guilt as they were brave and had good intention with the belief in military<sup>56</sup>.

Keitel also talked about his opinion on Hitler in the trial when he was asked whether he knew about Hitler's plan with rearmament to remilitarize the German army and upcoming violence. He did not provide clear answer if he knew but he explained that he felt welcomed with Hitler becoming Chancellor as Hitler apparently was a man with strong intention to lead Germany forward to a brighter era. The trial was also curious of the fact whether Keitel had any influence on Hitler in area of military because of his long experience with military. Keitel denied this and deliberately described how genius Hitler was to him. He explained that Hitler was knowledgeable in military, which he gave a compliment that Hitler's knowledge on this was incredible, such as the matters of general staff, military strategy, military tactics, and military operations, and that was why he himself was impressed with Hitler and thought, on his word, "Only a genius can do that<sup>57</sup>". However, he occasionally talked about times where he disagreed with Hitler, and how Hitler sometimes destroyed his confidence by ordering him to do plans that were against his military knowledge that he possessed from his military training and experiences.

Keitel had great trust towards Hitler, and was so loyal to his duty. He often mentioned about duty responsibility and obedience especially as a soldier and a man

---

<sup>55</sup> "Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10." ONE HUNDRED AND FIRST DAY, Yale Law School, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-06-46.asp#keitel4>.

<sup>56</sup> "Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10." NINETY-EIGHTH DAY, Yale Law School, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-03-46.asp#keitel1>.

<sup>57</sup> "Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10," ONE HUNDRETH DAY, Yale Law School, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-05-46.asp#keitel3>.

with long military experience when answering to many questions by the tribunal. For instance, the trial asked about his thought when he felt it was difficult and uncomfortable to do his duty, and his answer was that he was a soldier by conviction who had strong devotion for his profession, and he had always tried his best with his profession under all the leaders he used to work with including the last German emperor Kaiser, the first president of Germany President Ebert, and the leader of Nazi Germany Adolf Hitler. Moreover, he was asked whether he gave consideration towards any tasks that seemed to be unjustified, and he said that traditionally soldiers do not question about given orders, and had to abolish personal thought. He also added that he did not concern with political matter as a soldier and he should be confident with his leader, and to be obedient and fulfill duty. Furthermore, the trial raised a question if he worked for Hitler because of his own trust or belief and not only because it was a duty. To the question, he responded with the same old phrase that he had stated from time to time in the trial that he was a soldier who was loyal and obedient to his leader, and he further stated that he believed other soldiers and generals in other countries would not act any different from this.

From his testimony to the tribunal, he apparently trusted Hitler, as Hitler seemed genius to him in areas of military. Importantly, he showed sight of being unable to think such as obeying even when orders were against conscience and focusing only on his duty responsibility without sufficient consideration of the consequences. He also kept repeating from time to time that all his actions were not committed out of his personal political perspective but only from the view of military aspect that had to carry out the orders from Hitler who was the one responsible for political area. Keitel was a man who was proud of his military profession as he prioritized the importance of fulfilling his duty than the importance of morality and lives of those who suffered, in other words, he would prefer to cherish honour from being loyal to his duty to feeling guilty towards those who suffered as he barely showed his empathy for them and did not even try to mitigate any severe orders and situations. Keitel also attempted to justify soldiers' actions by commenting that those who fought in the front line should not be found guilty in his opinion as they acted out of good deeds and military conviction. Eventually, Keitel was found guilty with all

the charges against him, and he was sentenced death by hanging on 16 October 1946<sup>58</sup>.

For the responses of the two research questions of this paper, firstly, Keitel and Eichmann had some differences in background and career ambition. Keitel's background and personal life was not shown much from the testimony as he mostly talked about his long career in military while Eichmann was not the smartest and his profession before joining the Nazi was not something that could be called a great achievement. Moreover, Eichmann was confirmed that his mentality was just as normal as other ordinary people while Keitel's testimony did not show that but it only showed that he carried the soul of soldiers and was very proud of his military profession. Another difference spotted between the two is in the aspect of career ambition. As it was said before that Eichmann's career was not that successful before joining with the Nazi which made him feel the need to compete in order to have advancement in his career while Keitel did not feel the need for career competition, as his position was already crucial in German military, and he already worked closely with Hitler before eventually being appointed with the very high rank in military system which is the Field Marshall position. However, despite the fact that Keitel's rank was much higher than Eichmann's, Keitel showed the same attitude throughout his testimony and it could resemble Eichmann's testimony given in the Eichmann trial such resemblances including the cliché word relating to the loyalty and obedience towards duty with inability to think and decide for oneself, and responsibility being prioritized before the pain of those who suffered for their actions. Secondly, the Banality of Evil Concept can be used to examine the case of Keitel as Keitel was another example of how being obedient and loyal to one's duty without questioning and thinking of immorality carried in those duties can make one become a criminal even they act out of good deeds like Keitel commented that everything he considered everything he did as a duty, and soldiers fighting in the front line should not be charged with guilty as they acted with good intentions and with the belief in military.

---

<sup>58</sup> (International, 2016)

## Conclusion

Evils can be divided into types like pure evils, people who willingly commit crimes without feeling guilty, and are pleased to see chaos, and those who changing from being good to evil for varied reasons like survival and changed behavior. One of the great evil acts the world has ever witnessed was crimes committed by Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler as the leader. Nazi Germany's famous crime was the Holocaust or the genocide that killed 6 millions of Jews. Nazi Germany also started World War II before ending up being defeated. After the defeat, former Nazi officials were brought to the Nuremberg Trials, the international military tribunal held between 1945-1946, and they attempted to convince the trial that they should not be found guilty as they did not intend to commit crimes but only to carry their duty. Studying on the crimes by Nazi Germany provides us an opportunity to deepen our understanding on causes of violence, and together prevent the history from repeating itself. In 1961, another international trial concerning the Nazi crimes called the Eichmann Trial which was held in 1961 in Israel. The Eichmann trial was for the only defendant Otto Adolf Eichmann, a former Nazi official responsible for mass deportation of Jews. During the trial, Eichmann, like many defendants in the Nuremberg Trials, defended himself by saying that he was obliged to fulfill his duty, and that he did not personally hate Jews, which was revealed later that it was a false claim. The Eichmann trial introduce the Banality of Evil concept initiated by Hannah Arendt. The concept shows that average people can be a part of great crimes if they only obey and loyal to their duty without questioning or, especially in the case of Eichmann, realizing that their jobs contain criminal nature. The concept can also be seen in *The Reader*, the book written by Bernhard Schlink, which tells a story of a former female Nazi official who defended herself in the court that she, again, only did her duty, and did not intend to murder victims. Additionally, this format of testimony also appeared during the Nuremberg Trials by Nazi defendants like the case of Wilhelm Keitel, a high-ranked Nazi soldier in the German Army. Even though Keitel and Eichmann had differences in life background and career ambition, yet, the two portrayed the same mindset of working under Nazi Germany through their testimony as they both repeatedly stated about their loyalty and obedience towards their duty, and how their responsibility would come before the suffer of victims. Additionally,

the Banality of Evil concept has the explanatory power of this phenomenon as what Keitel and Eichmann had in common was their inability to think for themselves which resulted in them being a part of the world's greatest crimes without their conviction but only the thought of fulfilling their duty.





## REFERENCES

- an electronic publication of the Avalon, P., William, C. F., & Lisa A. Spar, C.-D. (1996). *The Avalon Project at the Yale Law School : documents in law, history and diplomacy*: New Haven, Conn. : The Avalon Project, c1996-.
- Arendt, H. (1964). *Eichmann in Jeresalam: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: The Viking Press.
- Baumeister, R. F. (2012). Human evil: The myth of pure evil and the true causes of violence. In *The social psychology of morality: Exploring the causes of good and evil*. (pp. 367-380). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Browning, C. R. (1992). *Ordinary men : Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland*: HarperCollins.
- Castillo, S., & De, M. (2018). *Deconstructing the Character of Hanna Schmitz in Stephen Daldry's The Reader (2008): Literacy as a Vehicle towards Moral Awareness*.
- Catani, D. (2015). Hannah Arendt reconsidered: collaboration and the banality of evil in Jonathan Littell's "The Kindly Ones". *Sociology Study*, 4.
- Cesarani, D. (2004). *Eichmann : his life and crimes / David Cesarani*. London: W. Heinemann.
- Cesarani, D. (2016). *Final solution: the fate of the Jews 1933-1949*. London: Macmillan.
- Haslam, S., & Reicher, S. (2007). Beyond the Banality of Evil: Three Dynamics of an Interactionist Social Psychology of Tyranny. *Personality & social psychology bulletin*, 33, 615-622. doi:10.1177/0146167206298570
- International, T. (2016). Wilhelm Keitel. Retrieved from <https://trialinternational.org/latest-post/wilhelm-keitel/>
- Korstanje, M. (2013). Review of "The Lucifer Effect. Understanding How Good People Turn Evil". *Essays in Philosophy*, 14, 353-3357. doi:10.7710/1526-0569.1482
- Lasok, D. (1962). The Eichmann Trial. *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 11(2), 355-374. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/756599](http://www.jstor.org/stable/756599)
- Macdonald, A. (2019). *The Nuremberg Trials: The Nazis Brought to Justice*. Bangkok:

Gypzy Group.

Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority: An experimental view*. New York: Harper & Row.

Murray, S., Amarasingam, A., Basso, A., Burnett, K., Chambers, L., Cohen, L., . . .

Sarkissian, R. (2017). *Understanding Atrocities: Remembering, Representing, and Teaching Genocide*.

Myanmar, M., & Justice, I. (2019). *ALL ABOUT INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE (ICJ)*.

Project, T. A. Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10. *NINETY-EIGHTH DAY*. Retrieved from <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-03-46.asp#keitel1>

Project, T. A. Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10. *ONE HUNDRED AND FIRST DAY*. Retrieved from <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-06-46.asp#keitel4>

Project, T. A. Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 10. *NINETY-NINTH DAY*. Retrieved from <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-04-46.asp#keitel2>

Schlink, B. (1997). *The Reader* (C. B. Janeway, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Segev, T. (1988). *Soldiers of evil : the commandants of the Nazi concentration camps*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Simms, B. (2019). *Hitler: a global biography*. New York: Basic Books.

Wildt, M., & Lampert, T. (2009). An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office. *Bibliovault OAI Repository, the University of Chicago Press*.

Yablonka, H. (2012). The Eichmann Trial: Was It the Jewish Nuremberg? Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ilr/vol34/iss3/2>



จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
**CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY**

## VITA

**NAME** Ananya Charoenwong

**DATE OF BIRTH** 7 May 1997

**PLACE OF BIRTH** Bkk

**INSTITUTIONS  
ATTENDED** - king mongkut's institute of technology ladkrabang  
- Chulalongkorn university



จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY