

“An Essay on Responsibility and Obedience”

The Specialist and The Banality of Evil

The Specialist, a 1999 documentary film, written and directed by Israelis Rony Brauman¹ and Eyal Sivan respectively, offers a unique perspective on a spectacle which exponentially increased the world’s comprehension of the Holocaust.² In 1961, Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi bureaucrat who once headed the German government department which coordinated the transport of several million European Jews to their deaths during World War 2, faced trial by the State of Israel at Jerusalem.³ Eichmann was charged with 15 counts of crimes against the Jewish people, and his guilt was a foregone conclusion even before the hearings commenced.⁴ Nevertheless, Eichmann’s trial challenged the status quo in respect to numerous political and ontological issues, some of which I will elaborate upon in the course of this essay.⁵ *The Specialist*, released thirty-seven years after Eichmann’s execution in 1962, raised quandaries in respect

¹Although Brauman’s role is undoubtedly important, it is apparent that he was subordinate to the director, his cousin, Eyal Sivan. For that reason, I will only offer a limited discussion of the part which Brauman played in the making of *The Specialist*.

²Hanna Yablonka. The State of Israel Vs. Adolf Eichmann. Trans. Ora Cummings and David Herman. New York: Schocken Books, 2004: 221. Benjamin Robinson. "The Specialist' on the Eichmann Precedent: Morality, Law, and Military Sovereignty." Critical Inquiry 30 (2003): 65.

³Peter Papadatos. The Eichmann Trial. London: Stevens and Sons, 1964: 27. Simone Gigliotti. "Unspeakable Pasts as Limit Events: the Holocaust, Genocide, and The Stolen Generations." Australian Journal of Politics and History 49.2 (2003): 167.

⁴Moshe Pearlman. The Capture and Trial of Adolf Eichmann. New York: Simon and Schuster Ltd, 1963: 156. Hannah Arendt. Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. London: Faber and Faber, 1963: 9. Gal Raz. "Actuality of Banality: Eyal Sivan's 'The Specialist' in Context." Shofar 24.1 (2005): 13.

⁵Pearlman, p. 137. David Cesarani. Eichmann: His Life and Crimes. London: William Heinemann, 2004: 239-40, Arendt, pp. 2-3.

to how the State of Israel has conducted its affairs during its short history.⁶ In this essay I will identify these questions and suggest how and why Sivan and Brauman, put them how they did.

In order to properly discuss *The Specialist* it is necessary to elaborate upon the situations which inspired its production. The first, and most apparent, of these is the Eichmann trial itself: an event which generated considerable discourse internationally within the period that it transpired.⁷ The second important inspiration for Sivan's film was Hannah Arendt's classic tome, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of Evil*, first published in 1963.⁸ Sivan acknowledged that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* constituted the basis for *The Specialist*, within its opening credits.⁹ Arendt, a vocal critic of Hertzlian Zionism¹⁰, portrayed Eichmann as a personification of the abominable acts ostensibly normal people can commit when operating within totalitarian regimes.¹¹ I would propose that, by making *The Specialist* in the late 1990s, Sivan meant to give renewed currency to the ideas Arendt had propounded in

⁶Raz, pp. 10-20.

⁷Jeffrey Shandler. *While America Watches: Televising The Holocaust*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999: 88.

⁸Raz, p. 4.

⁹*The Specialist*. Dir. Eyal Sivan. 1999. DVD. Home Vision Entertainment, 2002.

¹⁰Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), was the founder of modern political Zionism. Born into a German-speaking Jewish household in Budapest, Herzl was an atheist and for many years, a German nationalist; however, he became an avowed Zionist after witnessing the Dreyfus Affair while a reporter in Paris. For further information on Herzl's brand of Zionism, please see Jacques. *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993.

¹¹Jose Brunner. "Eichmann, Arendt and Freud in Jerusalem: On the Evils of Narcissism and the Pleasures of Thoughtlessness." *History and Memory* 8.2 (1996). 23 Aug. 2008 <<http://iupjournals.org/history/ham8-2.html>>.

The Banality of Evil: regarding the potential threats posed to humanity by governmental policies and blind adherence to any ideology.¹²

Although *The Specialist* is ostensibly a film about the trial of Adolf Eichmann, it is apparent that Sivan meant to comment on wider issues - such as politics and the policies of modern states - than the destruction of European Jewry which took place during World War 2. Sivan, born at Israel in 1964, perceived parallels between the way in which the Nazis had treated the Jews of Europe and the treatment of Arab Palestinians by the State of Israel which persisted within the period in which he created *The Specialist*. "I grew up in Israel under the memory of the Shoah and its lessons. In 1989, during the first Intifada, I was living in Jerusalem, just opposite a Palestinian village. One day, there were shots, then attempts at escape and a launching of tear gas. There was a wind, and the gas entered through our open window. My mother closed it and cried. She said, "Now I understand why German neighbors closed their windows" I entered this framework, this Jewish tradition of giving voice to repudiated speech."¹³

It is worth noting that both Eyal Sivan and Hannah Arendt have both been accused of being opponents of Zionism.¹⁴ "For him, Israelis are the Nazis of today, and the Palestinians, the Jews of today," said Claude Lanzmann of

¹²Benjamin Robinson, p. 93.

¹³"Cabinet Magazine Online - Sivan vs. Finkelkraut." Cabinet Magazine Online. 23 May 2006. 2 Sep. 2008 <<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/26/sivan.php>>.

¹⁴Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizmann. "Cabinet Magazine Online - The Barber Trial: Sivan vs. Finkelkraut." Cabinet Magazine Online. 2 Sep. 2008 <<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org>>. Bat Ami Bar-On. The Subject of Violence: Arendtean Exercises in Understanding. London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002: 136.

Sivan in 2006.¹⁵ I would argue that Sivan is perhaps more culpable of this than Arendt, who spent several years working for a pro-Zionist group prior to the creation of the State of Israel in May 1948.¹⁶ In contrast, Sivan has directed a number of films which express opposition to the manner in which Jews have treated Palestinians since the UN partitioned former British Mandatory Palestine in 1947.¹⁷ Sivan defended his right to criticise Israel in 2003, by suing a French radio personality, who had slandered him on-air for libel. At the trial, Sivan was called to task by such fearsome pro-Zionist critics as Claude Lanzmann, the director of the iconic Holocaust documentary, *Shoah*.¹⁸ For this reason, I will argue throughout this essay that *The Specialist* might be interpreted as an indictment of Zionism.

Sivan chose to address the magnitude of the crimes committed by the Nazis against European Jewry by focussing on the testimony Eichmann gave at his trial.¹⁹ This approach is unusual, as far as documentaries about the Holocaust are concerned, inasmuch as the majority of such films tend to give voice to the survivors rather than the perpetrators.²⁰ Though Sivan included the testimony of a few survivors in *The Specialist*, the primary concern of the film is not for the audience to become more familiar with personal perspectives from Holocaust victims. By providing a window upon Eichmann and his

¹⁵Keenan and Weizmann.

¹⁶David Laskin. *Partisans: Marriage, Politics, and Betrayal Among the New York Intellectuals*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001: 149.

¹⁷Keenan and Weizmann. Efraim Sicher. *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory After Auschwitz*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998: 155.

¹⁸Keenan and Weizman.

¹⁹Frances Guerin. "The Perpetrator in Focus: Turn of the Century Holocaust Remembrance in "The Specialist."" *Law Text Culture* 10 (2006): 167.

²⁰Alan L. Mintz. *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*. Olympia: University of Washington Press, 2001: 168.

interactions with the judges and lawyers who tried him, Sivan successfully portrayed the Nazi functionary as an ordinary man, rather than a faceless demon.²¹ I will later discuss how and why Sivan employed particular editorial techniques in order to demonstrate Eichmann's humanity.

When one reads Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, it is clear that the author took issue with the way in which Eichmann's trial was conducted by the Israeli authorities.²² Within the course of my essay, I will argue that Arendt was wary that Zionism, as practiced by the State of Israel at the time of the trial, bore resemblances to totalitarian ideologies, such as Nazism and Stalinism. Eyal Sivan and Rony Brauman, both expatriate Israelis resident in Paris, shared many of Arendt's views in this regard, which explains why *Eichmann in Jerusalem* inspired them to compose *The Specialist*.²³ Sivan, like Arendt, feared the negative influence that loyalty to any ideology can cause: he personally witnessed this when making documentary films about the maltreatment Palestinian Arabs suffered by Zionist Israel.²⁴ A focus of this essay will be to propose that *The Specialist* is as much a film about Israeli history as it is about Eichmann's trial.

The Specialist is a compilation of footage of Eichmann's trial, originally captured by an American television company called Capital Cities, under contract from the Israeli government.²⁵ Capital Cities, the one company that was allowed to film the trial, elected only to record certain parts of the

²¹Guerin, p. 176.

²²Raz, pp. 12-14.

²³ibid., p. 9.

²⁴Keenan and Weizman.

²⁵Yablonka, p. 58.

trial, which means that a substantial amount was never filmed.²⁶ In creating *The Specialist*, Sivan faced the challenge of condensing 350 hours of footage into a two hour film. In doing so, he reduced the sparse footage of Eichmann's trial, accessible to the public, even further. Critics have accused Sivan of manipulating the messages contained within the footage, especially in relation to the testimonies of survivors, like the Vilna Ghetto fighter, Abba Kovner.²⁷ I will expound upon the criticisms which have been made in relation to the manner in which Sivan utilised trial footage within *The Specialist*.

Adolf Eichmann's trial lasted from April 1961 until March 1962 and marked a turning point in the world's understanding of the genocidal activities perpetrated by the Nazis throughout World War 2. Scholars generally concur that it was only after the trial that term "Holocaust" came to symbolise the mass-murder of European Jewry which occurred in the death-camps, gas-vans, ghettos, and forests of Europe's East.²⁸ The importance of Eichmann was that, for most of the war, he led the notorious *Referat IV B4* unit of the Reich Security Service (SD).²⁹ At the beginning of the war, Eichmann's responsibility initially entailed coordinating the forced expulsion of Jews from the Reich to desolate Poland, where some were re-housed.³⁰ Many of the Jews

²⁶ibid., p. 60.

²⁷Lawrence Douglas. "Trial as Documentary: Images of Eichmann" in *Law's Moving Image*. Leslie J. Moran, Emma Sandon, Ian Christie, and Elena Loizidou, eds. London: Routledge, 2004: 102.

²⁸Lawrence Baron. *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: the Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005: 9.

²⁹Yaacov Lozowick. *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil*. Trans. Haim Watzman. London: Continuum, 2000: 188.

³⁰Pearlman, p.245. Christopher R. Browning and Jurgen Matthaus. *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007: 36.

deported to “the East” met a more immediate end at the hands of the SS *Einsatzgruppen* death-commando, which were usually charged with executing the hapless migrants by firing-squad.³¹

Eichmann’s role changed markedly after the infamous Wannsee Conference of January 1942. At Wannsee, where Eichmann claimed to have taken the minutes, the Nazi’s policy in regard to the Jews shifted from expulsion to extermination.³² The “Final Solution,” as this policy became known, meant that Eichmann would organise the transportation of Jews from throughout the Reich and nations under German influence, to be destroyed in camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Sobibor.³³ This process only slowed in 1944, when it became apparent to Himmler that Germany would lose the war; IV B4 was relegated to less significant duties.³⁴ Despite this, Eichmann facilitated the deaths of a few million Jews while his unit operated.³⁵ When the war ended Eichmann remained in Allied-occupied Germany, under false identities, until 1950, at which time he fled to Argentina.³⁶ Ricardo Klement, the name Eichmann assumed in Argentina, lived a relatively simple life, doing menial work, but managed to finance the travel of his wife and young sons to Argentina a year after his own arrival.³⁷

³¹Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes*. pp. 93-4. Arendt, p. 194.

³²Arendt, pp. 100-1. *The Specialist*: 56:20.

³³Ruth Sachs. *Adolf Eichmann: Engineer of Death*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2001: 72.

³⁴Jacob Robinson. *And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative*. New York: Macmillan, 1965: 207. Arendt, pp. 183-4.

³⁵Tom Segev. *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*. Trans. Haim Watzman. New York: Henry Holt, 2000: 426.

³⁶Cesarani. *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes*. pp. 202-03, 205.

³⁷*ibid.*, pp. 209-10, 214.

Eichmann enjoyed a decade of freedom in Buenos Aires, before he was kidnapped by Israeli secret service agents, who met him on his way home from work on the night of 11 May, 1960.³⁸ From there, Eichmann was flown to Israel to stand trial for his part in the annihilation of Europe's Jewry.³⁹ Argentina, which Israel had not consulted before abducting Eichmann, complained vociferously to the United Nations about the breach of its sovereignty, once they discovered the act; however, hostility between the two nations was short-lived and the UN decided that Israel should be allowed to retain Eichmann.⁴⁰ This cleared the way for Eichmann to become the first Nazi to be tried under Israel's "Nazi and Nazi Collaborators Law of 1950": a unique piece of legislation as it allowed for Israel to act as a retroactive representative Europe's Jew, who until the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, had been unrepresented.⁴¹

The trial of Adolf Eichmann began in April 1961 and was an international spectacle. Sivan demonstrated this in one of the opening sequences of *The Specialist* by playing the reading of the charges laid against Eichmann in the languages of the various countries in which he had committed the crimes.⁴² I would argue that Sivan's use of language within *The Specialist* adds to the historic significance of the film. The judges, Moshe Landau, Benjamin Halevi, and Yitzhak Raveh generally addressed the court in Hebrew,

³⁸Arendt, p. 217. Cesarani. *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes*, p. 229.

³⁹Cesarani. *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes*, pp. 253-4.

⁴⁰Arendt, p. 218. Jacob Robinson, p. 106.

⁴¹Yablonka, p. 31.

⁴²Benjamin Robinson, p. 75.

but when they spoke to Eichmann they used German.⁴³ All three judges were German born and educated Jews, who migrated to British Mandate Palestine before the beginning of World War 2.⁴⁴ Gideon Hausner, Israel's Attorney-General who elected to prosecute Eichmann himself, was Polish born, but like the judges, he generally spoke Hebrew.⁴⁵ What is particularly interesting about Hausner, as shown by Sivan in *The Specialist*, is that he was something of a polyglot. Hausner addressed one witness in English, when it was apparent that the court translator was not conveying his meaning properly; he once assisted the judges with a difficult translation from Polish into Hebrew.⁴⁶ At another point in *The Specialist*, Hausner spoke directly to Eichmann in German in a particularly mocking fashion.⁴⁷

The Israeli government, at various levels, carefully stage-managed the trial and this is evidenced within *The Specialist*, to some degree. The role of the judges and especially the presiding judge, Moshe Landau, is the aspect of this which is most evident to the viewer. Sivan showed Landau disciplining various members of the court at innumerable junctures throughout *The Specialist*: Eichmann, witnesses, the prosecution team, and the court audience.⁴⁸ "In many parts of this evidence we have strayed far from the

⁴³Shandler, p. 115.

⁴⁴Arendt, p. 2. Yablonka, p. 134.

⁴⁵Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan Pelt. *Holocaust: A History*. New York: Norton, 2002: 380.

⁴⁶*The Specialist*. Dir. Eyal Sivan. 1999. DVD. Home Vision Entertainment, 2002: 20:54, 01:45:20. Session 93, Part 5. of SoI Ministry of Justice. "The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: District Court Sessions, Vol. 4." *Eichmann Trial: Complete Transcripts*. 24 July 1961. Project Nizkor. 22 Aug. 2008 <<http://nizkor.com/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/index-04.html>>.

⁴⁷*The Specialist*: 01:17:40, 01:20:00. Shandler, p. 115.

⁴⁸For examples of this see *The Specialist*: 06:13, 06:40, 10:00, 17:19, 20:15, 23:00, 28:09, 32:59, 38:35, 41:10, 42:03, 01:17:10, 01:23:00, 01:24:46, 01:30:55.

subject of *this trial*," Landau remarked to Attorney-General Hausner, expressing an obvious sense of exasperation at a point when Hausner's cross-examination of Eichmann verged on the being theatrical.⁴⁹ The representation of captivity in *The Specialist* requires some extrapolation. The glass-booth within which Eichmann remained for most of the trial is significant. Although the capsule served to protect Eichmann from would-be assassins, the viewer can not help but perceive it as a symbol of his imprisonment and mortality; the ultimate representation of a role-reversal in which the Jews held the lives of Nazis in the balance.

Hannah Arendt, the German-born, Jewish philosopher argued that the appeal this role-reversal held for David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, explains why the Eichmann trial took place in the Jerusalem in the way that it did.⁵⁰ The State of Israel was born as a result of pressure applied to the United Nations, by organisations such as the Jewish Agency for Palestine, of which Ben-Gurion served as Chairman prior to Israel's independence.⁵¹ From the point that the State came into being, Israelis were required to fight for its existence, in the Israeli War of Independence, against the Arab neighbour-states that strived to wipe Israel from all maps.⁵² Warriors like Abba Kovner who acted as witness for the prosecution at Eichmann's trial, had battled Nazis within the Vilna Ghetto, and also the Arabs in Israel's War of

⁴⁹Raz, p. 15.

⁵⁰Arendt, p. 7-8.

⁵¹Tom Segev. One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under The British Mandate. Trans. Haim Watzman. London: Henry Holt, 2001: 512-13.

⁵²Zakai Shalom. Israel's Nuclear Option: Behind the Scenes Diplomacy Between Dimona and Washington. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2005: 169.

Independence.⁵³ According to Arendt, Ben-Gurion hoped to garner support for the nascent Jewish state from the nations of the world, by making-known the genocide that the Nazis had wrought upon European Jewry and by drawing parallels between that and the contemporary Arab intentions to obliterate Israel.⁵⁴

Arendt called Ben-Gurion “the invisible stage manager of the proceedings” alluding to the fact that he directed Eichmann’s trial in the manner of a show or play.⁵⁵ Arendt’s notion that the trial was stage-managed is historically significant, inasmuch as it gives one reason to question the event’s legitimacy. Because Ben-Gurion, who did not attend the trial at any stage, planned it as a deliberate political statement against genocide and anti-Semitism, it could be argued that Eichmann may not have received the justice due to him.⁵⁶ An occurrence that is not depicted within *The Specialist*, which I would argue should have been, featured at the beginning of the trial, when Robert Servatius, Eichmann’s defence lawyer, disputed Israel’s right to try him.⁵⁷ Servatius objected on the grounds that the judges were Jewish, and as such, could not be expected to judge Eichmann’s alleged role in the Nazi’s mass-murder of European Jewry during World War 2.⁵⁸ Prosecutor Hausner,

⁵³Idith Zertal. Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood. Trans. Chaya Galai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 214.

⁵⁴ibid., p. 98. Arendt, p. 8.

⁵⁵Arendt, p. 5.

⁵⁶ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁷I am aware that footage of this exists because it was used in an earlier documentary on the trial The Trial of Adolf Eichmann. 1997. Videocassette. PBS Home Video.

⁵⁸Cesarani. Eichmann: His Life and Crimes: 258.

who Arendt viewed as Ben-Gurion's plenipotentiary in the trial⁵⁹, skilfully rebutted this by arguing:

“Your Honours. A person cannot demand from you that you should be neutral in regard to the crime of genocide. And if Defence Counsel thinks that there is any man in the world who can be neutral in respect to this crime, such a judge would be the one who is not competent. But it is possible to be just, even with such a grave crime. It is possible to have a fair trial even when the judges are required to suppress within their hearts their personal or national anguish, and to judge according to the evidence which is before them. And only in this way do I ask you, Your Honours, to judge.”⁶⁰

Sivan agreed with Arendt's proposition that the State of Israel had ulterior motives for placing Eichmann on trial. In his view, Ben-Gurion hoped that the trial would serve “pedagogical” purposes, for Israel, and the wider world.⁶¹ As he put it, Ben-Gurion meant to give survivors of the Holocaust a platform from which to speak. In the view of Sivan and Brauman, the trial was a laughable spectacle, but Eichmann was nonetheless charged legitimately as his crimes required justice.⁶² As a result, most of the archival footage which Sivan and Brauman located entailed Holocaust survivors testifying against Eichmann.⁶³ For this reason, Sivan and Brauman made an effort to shift the balance by allowing Eichmann to explain himself.⁶⁴ This is why the vast

⁵⁹Arendt, p. 3.

⁶⁰Session 1, Part 4 in SoI Ministry of Justice. "The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: District Court Sessions, Vol. 1." Eichmann Trial: Complete Transcripts. 8 May 1961. Project Nizkor. 22 Aug. 2008 <<http://nizkor.com/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/index-01.html>>.

⁶¹The Specialist - An Interview with the Authors. Perf. Eyal Sivan and Rony Brauman. DVD. Home Vision Entertainmnet. 2000: 12:24.

⁶²ibid.: 13:25.

⁶³The Specialist – An Interview with the Authors: 13:56.

⁶⁴ibid.: 02:19, 09:54.

majority of *The Specialist* focuses on Eichmann and the way in which he perceived his own place within the Nazi hierarchy.

Arendt's account of Eichmann's trial is the best-known, but it has been criticised by many scholars for being overly-critical of Jews, Israel, and Ben-Gurion's Zionist enterprise.⁶⁵ According to Berel Lang, the famous Jewish religious scholar, Gershom Scholem, who had previously been a good friend of Arendt's, elected never to speak to her again after the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.⁶⁶ This anecdote serves to show the strength of feeling that surfaced in relation to Arendt's book. One of the implicit assertions made by Arendt is that acts of evil are only a short step away from acts of normality.⁶⁷ According to Lang's reasoning, Arendt's depiction of Eichmann, as a bumbling bureaucrat who spoke in clichés and fawned in the presence of father figures - such as the judges at his trial – diminished the reality of his evil-doing.⁶⁸ The controversy *Eichmann in Jerusalem* generated explains, in part, explains why Sivan chose to use it as a basis for *The Specialist*.

The notion of administrative evil is a significant feature of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as well as *The Specialist*. A prominent feature of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is Arendt's critical attitude toward the Jewish councils (*Judenrat*), which the Gestapo established in order to control the migration of Jews to the Nazi death-camps.⁶⁹ From Arendt's perspective, these councils were nearly as

⁶⁵Cesarani. *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes*: 347.

⁶⁶Berel Lang "Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Evil" in *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*. Lewis P. Hinchman. ed. New York: SUNY Press, 1994: 44.

⁶⁷*ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶⁸*ibid.*

⁶⁹Israel Gutman. *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*. Trans. Ina R. Friedman. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982: 206.

complicit in the murder of Europe's Jews as Eichmann.⁷⁰ Although they did not push the Jews aboard the trains, or into the gas-chambers, it is unlikely that the Holocaust would have progressed with the success that it did had it not been for the assistance of the *Judenrat*.⁷¹ Sivan and Brauman make a similar case by featuring Pinchas Freudiger, who had headed the Hungarian *Judenrat*, within *The Specialist*.⁷² They develop Arendt's thought on administrative evil by showing that, despite the fact that Eichmann performed the role of an office manager, by organising timetables and fulfilling other duties, the consequences of his actions were far from banal.⁷³ Eichmann and the Jewish Councils of Europe might be seen as representations of the evil that can be done by individuals or groups that are good at their work.⁷⁴

The reasons why Sivan chose *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as the basis for *The Specialist* deserve discussion, as by aligning himself with Arendt in the way that he did, Sivan made several implicit political statements regarding the Israeli government and Zionism. In order that these messages, encapsulated within *The Specialist*, might be understood, I will now offer brief biographical sketches of Eyal Sivan and Hannah Arendt so that the reader is aware that notable similarities exist between these two personages. I argue that Arendt and Sivan, both of Jewish ethnicity, had negative views of the Israeli

⁷⁰Alan Rosenberg and Gerald Eugene Meyers. Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988: 20.

⁷¹Ervin Staub. The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence. London: Cambridge University Press, 1992: 159.

⁷²The Specialist: Pinchas Freudiger is shown at 01:42:00. The *Judenrat* are also discussed at 01:03, 01:27:19. The Specialist – An Interview with the Authors: Sivan and Brauman discuss the *Judenrat* at 01:27 and 44:58. Benjamin Robinson, p. 66.

⁷³The Specialist: 13:35, 30:35.

⁷⁴Raz, p. 9.

governmental policy at the time of formulating their respective works.⁷⁵ The point that I propose is that Sivan's antipathy towards the Israeli government came into being under entirely different socio-political circumstances to that of Arendt. Sivan's opposition, I suggest, is more justifiable than that of Arendt. The political status of Israel, within the Middle-East, and the world generally had evolved markedly in the decades which elapsed between the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963 and the release of *The Specialist* in 1999.

Eyal Sivan, now a Reader in Media Production at the University of East London, was born in 1964 at Haifa, Israel.⁷⁶ Sivan trained as a photojournalist in Tel Aviv before departing Israel for Paris in 1985.⁷⁷ According to Sivan's staff homepage at the UEL, he has produced over ten feature-length documentaries on political topics. One of these films, *Aqabat-Jaber – Peace with No Return?*, released in 1996 - documented the lives of Palestinians living in a refugee camp and their responses to the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993.⁷⁸ Sivan regularly lectures at universities throughout Europe and America, lecturing on diverse matters: "Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

⁷⁵Richard J. Bernstein. Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question. Boston: MIT Press, 1996: x-xi.

⁷⁶Eyal Sivan, UEL SSMCS – Staff Profile – Eyal Sivan." University of East London - School of Social Sciences, Media, and Cultural Studies. 2008. 29 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.uel.ac.uk/ssmcs/staff/eyal-sivan/index.htm>>.

⁷⁷ibid.

⁷⁸ibid. The Oslo Accords of 1993 constituted a momentous, although infamous event, in the history of diplomacy and that of the Middle East. The agreement reached (termed the Oslo Declaration of Principles) between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Head Yasser Arafat (as representative of the Palestinian People) was mediated by US President Bill Clinton. The most notable consequences of the DOP were that the PLO accepted Israel's right to exist and Israel committed to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 242, which ordered that Israel withdraw from all the territories it occupied after the Arab-Israeli War of June 1967. By default, the DOP agreement meant that the Palestinian refugees who were displaced from Israel proper during the 1948 War of Independence, would not be allowed to return to their homes. To view the Oslo DOP in full, see: <http://www.mideastweb.org/meoslodop.htm>

political filmmaking and issues concerning political crime instrumentalization of genocide and its representation, as well as the political use of memory in Israel, the question of civil disobedience.”⁷⁹ All of these topics are of pertinence to my discussion of Sivan’s role as auteur of *The Specialist*. This biography, presumably an autobiography by Sivan, is illustrative of several ways in which his politics could have affected his perspective and resultant portrayal of the Eichmann trial.

Hannah Arendt was born into a secular Jewish home at Hanover, Germany in 1906, making her approximately the same age as Adolf Eichmann.⁸⁰ She studied philosophy at the University of Marburg, with Martin Heidegger, with who she had a long and tempestuous romantic relationship.⁸¹ Arendt received a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Heidelberg in 1928, for which she wrote on the moral philosophy of St. Augustine.⁸² Arendt fled Germany for Paris in 1940, as a result of interrogation by the Gestapo, but left Paris for New York a year later when Germany occupied northern France in 1941.⁸³ In America, wrote several influential works of political philosophy: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), *The Human Condition* (1958), and as a reporter for *The New Yorker*, a series of articles which she eventually reworked into *Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of*

⁷⁹Eyal Sivan, UEL SSMCS – Staff Profile – Eyal Sivan.”

⁸⁰Sylvie Courtine-Denamy. Three Women in Dark Times: Edith Stein, Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil. Trans. G.M Goshgarian. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000: 7. Arendt. Eichmann in Jerusalem, p. 23.

⁸¹Seyla Ben-Habib. The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt. London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003: xiii-xiv.

⁸²Dermot Moran. Introduction to Phenomenology. London: Routledge, 2000: 293-94

⁸³Dana Richard Villa. The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000: xiv.

Evil (1963).⁸⁴ Arendt's literary interests, influenced by her experiences as a Jew and as a refugee from Nazi Germany, were strongly orientated around the evil she perceived could be wrought by totalitarian regimes.

Arendt wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem* partly as a response to the Holocaust, but significantly, in order to use Eichmann a case-study example of her theories.⁸⁵ In a letter to a friend in September 1963, Arendt wrote of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: "If one reads the book carefully, one sees that Eichmann was much less influenced by ideology than I assumed in the book on totalitarianism. The impact of ideology upon the individual may have been overrated by me. Even in the totalitarianism book, in the chapter on ideology and terror. I mention the curious loss of ideological content that occurs among the elite of the movement. The movement itself becomes all important; the content of anti-semitism [*sic*] for instance gets lost in the extermination policy, for extermination would not have come to an end when no Jew was left to be killed. In other words, extermination per se is more important than anti-semitism [*sic*] or racism."⁸⁶ This explanation, given by Arendt, tallies with the depiction of Eichmann she provided within *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Eichmann, who had Jewish relatives, sublimated his personal convictions to the tenets of the totalitarian ideology to which he subscribed: Nazism.⁸⁷

⁸⁴Judy Barrett Litoff and Judith McDonnell. European Immigrant Women in the United States: A Biographical Dictionary. New York: Taylor & Francis, 1994: 8.

⁸⁵David Cesarani. Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a 'Desk Murderer'. New York: Da Capo Press, 2006: 6.

⁸⁶Hannah Arendt. "'Holes of Oblivion': The Eichmann Trial and Totalitarianism. From a Letter to Mary McCarthy." in The Portable Hannah Arendt. Ed. Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003: 389-90.

⁸⁷Cesarani. Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a 'Desk Murderer': 301.

Sivan used *The Specialist* as a conduit by which to gain an audience for his pre-existing political agenda, in much the same way as Arendt had within *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Like Arendt, Sivan went to significant lengths to show Eichmann as a normal individual, who organised the murder of Europe's Jewry purely because his superiors within the Nazi party had ordered him to. In 1991, Sivan directed a controversial documentary film entitled *Yizkor, Ha'avadim Shel Hazikaron*, which translates to 'Remember, the Slaves of Memory.'⁸⁸ This film illustrates the elaborate remembrance rituals, for Holocaust victims and Israel's war-dead, which Israeli high-school students are forced to observe. In the course of *Yizkor*, Sivan proposed that such rituals are direct consequences of Zionist ideology, designed to make Israelis perpetually aware of their status as supposed victims of their *goy* neighbours. Sivan's inference is that this remembrance came at the cost of acknowledging the belligerent acts which Israel perpetrated against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.⁸⁹

When Sivan's record as a director is considered, it is apparent that he views the Israeli government's modus operandi as problematic. It is unsurprising then that Sivan's film about Eichmann's trial, an event that had been entirely under the control of the Israeli government, was highly critical. At the time *The Specialist* was released, Israel discriminated against

⁸⁸Oliver Leaman. "Yizkor, Ha'avadim Shel Hazikaron (1991)." *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*. London: Taylor and Francis, 2001: 321.

⁸⁹ibid. It is apparent that Sivan is discussing a phenomenon, which the sociologists of Judaism and Israel, Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya have described as Civil Religion. For a comprehensive discussion of Civil Religion in Israel see Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya. *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 1983.

Palestinian Arabs on the basis of their ethnicity and religious practices.⁹⁰ As a result of the 1993 Oslo Declaration of Principles agreement, Palestinians were theoretically moving towards autonomous statehood in the territories which Israel had occupied in the Six Day War of June 1967; however, within the period within which Sivan created *The Specialist*, the Palestinian State was in reality, mere speculation.⁹¹ The IDF controlled the movement of Palestinians between areas in the Occupied Territories; people required special permits in order to visit family members in other areas, only a few miles away.⁹² Sivan undoubtedly knew of the abominable circumstances under which Palestinians subsisted as consequence of Israeli governmental policies and his resultant hostility toward Israel evidences itself throughout *The Specialist*. In the following section of this essay I will suggest how Sivan utilised filmic techniques to convey his antipathy for Israeli government policy qua Zionism.

Sivan reorganised the available footage of the Eichmann trial into a new document. He and his cousin, Rony Brauman, a former head of the “Doctors without Borders” charitable organisation of *The Specialist* demonstrated commendable ability as historical researchers at the beginning of the film’s production. They spent months trawling through the Israeli government’s film archive and successfully located a significant amount of forgotten film of the trial, only to find that much of it had sustained damage.⁹³

⁹⁰For examples of discrimination by Israeli authorities against Palestinian Arabs in this period, see Daphan Golan-Agnon. "Separate but Not Equal: Discrimination Against Palestinian Arab Students in Israel." *American Behavioral Scientist* 49 (2006): 1075-84.

⁹¹Tamara Cofman Wittes. *How Israelis and Palestinians Negotiate: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Oslo Peace Process*. Washington D.C: US Institute of Peace Press, 2005: 6.

⁹²ibid, p. 25.

⁹³Douglas, p. 102.

Nevertheless, some of this footage is used within *The Specialist*; perhaps most notably at a point where Attorney-General Hausner is shown requesting Eichmann's execution.⁹⁴ This particular sequence is disconcerting to the viewer, as the picture becomes distorted and this is overlaid by a combination of the equally warped sound recording of Hausner's voice and dissonant cello plucking.⁹⁵ In orchestrating such a peculiar sense of cacophony, Sivan caused Hausner to appear much more malevolent than Eichmann. Like Arendt, Sivan saw fit to portray Hausner negatively and I argue that this is a definite manifestation of his political perspective in relation to the Israeli government.

The lack of a speaking narrator is a feature of *The Specialist* which warrants discussion. Rather than having an omnipotent, god-like voice describing the proceedings, Sivan allows characters and events to speak for themselves. This approach was pioneered by Claude Lanzmann in his landmark Holocaust documentary *Shoah* (1985).⁹⁶ This is somewhat problematic for a couple of reasons. If the viewer is not familiar with events of the trial through reading works such as Arendt's, he or she is likely to accept Sivan's portrayal of them. The fact is that *The Specialist* does have a narrator: Sivan. Like Lanzmann in *Shoah*, Sivan narrates the trial through his methods of editing the footage.⁹⁷ Sivan intended to provide a narrative for events, which extended beyond the Jerusalem courtroom in which Eichmann was tried

⁹⁴The Specialist: 06:15.

⁹⁵ibid.: 04:45.

⁹⁶Douglas, p. 102.

⁹⁷Raz, p.9. Sivan and Lanzmann have argued, at least once, regarding what constitutes honest editing techniques. Please see "Cabinet Magazine Online - Sivan vs. Finkielkraut." Cabinet Magazine Online. 23 May 2006. 2 Sep. 2008
<<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/26/sivan.php>> for details.

between 1961 and 1962.⁹⁸ He meant to comment on human nature, and I would argue that he did so with relative success. Through showing Eichmann performing ordinary, borderline obsessive compulsive actions - such as cleaning his spectacles - and with a nervous twitching lip, Sivan portrays him as a character to be pitied rather than reviled.

If Eichmann, the defendant, is depicted as sheepish by Sivan, the prosecution and judges are depicted as wolves. Judge Moshe Landau of the Jerusalem District Court presided over the trial, and Sivan showed him as an uncompromising taskmaster, who would not tolerate any disruption to the proceedings, whether it came from the defendant, the prosecutor, witnesses, or trial spectators. Although it is natural for judges to play sizeable roles within the trials upon which they deliberate, I would argue that the focus Sivan gave to Landau was perhaps disproportionate. With a little extra knowledge, which is not conveyed within *The Specialist*, I propose that the reasons why Sivan paid so much attention to Landau are more significant. As Benjamin Robinson noted: “Moshe Landau, has in fact gone on to rule in favor of the right of the Israeli security force, the Shin Bet, to torture Palestinians and to deplore later court decisions that try to elevate judicial authority over the legislative authority of the Knesset.”⁹⁹

Judge Landau and Attorney-General Hausner, for Sivan, represent the negative aspects of Zionism; however, one major criticism which has been levelled against Sivan is that he treated the trial witnesses disrespectfully by

⁹⁸Gigliotti, p. 167.

⁹⁹Benjamin Robinson, p. 93.

misrepresenting the testimony they gave to the Jerusalem court.¹⁰⁰ I see this criticism as wholly justifiable, insofar as I reached a similar conclusion after watching another documentary on the trial, entitled *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, produced by America's PBS network in 1997.¹⁰¹ In a scene which features in both *The Specialist* and the PBS film, Hausner is shown questioning the famous Vilna Ghetto fighter, Abba Kovner.¹⁰² Kovner's answer, given on May 4 1961, went as follows:

Your Honours, a question is hanging over us here in this courtroom: how was it that they did not revolt? In Vilna too they had gone - by 27 December 1941 there were already no more than 40,000 Jews. And confronting us in this courtroom is the question: how is it that they did not revolt? I, as a fighting Jew, would rise in protest with all my strength at this question, if it contains a vestige of accusation. And to a person sitting opposite me here and to the 80 million who in the streets of their town sang the song "Wenn's Judenblut vom Messer spritzt" (When Jewish blood spurts from the knife...) I do not owe any such reply.

But if I ask myself...if I were to be asked, then, only in order to understand the truth, Your Honours, in order to fight under all conditions and not only under ghetto conditions - one first of all requires organization. And an organization of fighters could come about by virtue of the order of a national authority, or by virtue of an internal movement. For the Jews of Europe the order of a national authority did not apply, nor could it apply. By virtue of an internal movement - then an organization like this under these conditions of terror, separation and paralysis, when we and not they - we were in a glass cage - who would dare to ask: How is it that you did not rise up in a glass cage? An organization of this nature can be created only with people determined in their resolve, and people who are determined in their resolve are not usually to be found amongst those beyond despair, subjugated, and those tortured to the extreme.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰¹The Trial of Adolf Eichmann. 1997. Videocassette. PBS Home Video.

¹⁰²ibid, 43:20.

¹⁰³Session 27, Part 8. of SoI Ministry of Justice. "The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: District Court Sessions, Vol. 1." Eichmann Trial: Complete Transcripts. 24 July 1961. Project Nizkor. 22

Kovner answered in response to Hausner's question, "Why did the Jews not fight back or resist?" The answer he gave was compelling, but the way in which Sivan used the footage of it within *The Specialist* completely altered his intended meaning. The crux of Kovner's argument was that people, who are emotionally and physically broken, such as the Jews who subsisted within the Vilna Ghetto during the Nazi occupation, could not have been expected to fight back considering the direness of their circumstances. Kovner did not appreciate Hausner's implication that the Jews met their deaths willingly, like lambs to the slaughter.¹⁰⁴ This is the meaning which is conveyed within the original transcripts of the trial, which matches with that of the 1997 PBS documentary; however, it is intentionally lost by Sivan, as he presented it within *The Specialist*.

Sivan stopped edited Kovner's testimony, stopping it immediately after he said "I, as a fighting Jew, would rise in protest with all my strength at this question."¹⁰⁵ In doing so, Sivan made it appear as though Kovner had intended to say that Jews generally did rebel against the persecution of the Nazis, when the opposite was in fact true. I would argue that the scene with Abba Kovner can be interpreted as a complex manifestation of Sivan's anti-Zionist philosophy. By abbreviating Kovner's speech, Sivan excluded the parts of the testimony which might be construed as pro-Israeli, such as the reference to the

Aug. 2008 <<http://nizkor.com/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/index-01.html>>

¹⁰⁴Kovner coined the phrase "like lambs to the slaughter" in respect to Jewish victims of the Holocaust. For an interesting discussion of this concept, please see: Avner Falk. [A Psychoanalytic History of the Jews](#). New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996: 719.

¹⁰⁵[The Specialist](#): 01:16:15.

lack of “a national authority” to which the Jews of Europe might have turned for strength.¹⁰⁶ As stated earlier, Kovner was a potent symbol of Zionism inasmuch as he fought for the State of Israel in its War of Independence against the Arabs.

“We may not be living in totalitarian conditions, but for some people, the way Eichmann acted is normal, even desirable,” Eyal Sivan once said.¹⁰⁷ This statement could be used to summarise the central argument of *The Specialist* and also Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Arendt perceived issues with the way in which the State of Israel staged Eichmann’s trial, for which she was accused of being an opponent of Zionism. Sivan, through his record of making films which are openly critical of the Israeli government’s program of discrimination in regard to the Palestinians, is openly anti-Zionist. The concern which both Sivan and Arendt mean to promote through their works is to discuss the possibilities of the bad that can occur when normal people follow rules without considering them critically first. For Arendt, Eichmann epitomised this danger, whereas, from Sivan’s perspective, it is evidenced when Israelis tolerate the cruelty of their nation in respect to the Palestinian people.

¹⁰⁶Emil L. Fackenheim "Concerning Authentic and Unauthentic Responses to the Holocaust Responses ." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1.1 (1986):105-106.

¹⁰⁷*The Specialist: An Interview with The Authors*: 57:24.

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