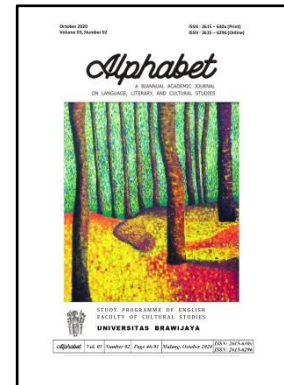


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The Association of the Secret, Guilt, and Ego Defence Mechanism in the Novel and Then There Were None

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The Association of the Secret, Guilt, and Ego Defence Mechanism in the Novel *And Then There Were None*

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Abstract

And Then There Were None is about ten strangers who are lured to a remote island on August 8th, 1940s. Each of these ten characters harbor deep secret that they have been complicit in the deaths of other person(s) but either escaped justice or deemed innocent. The theme of guilt played in this novel an important role in the novel because it showed how the characters' minds worked. Fictional character is designed to closely resemble real human beings, and thus their minds can be psychologically analyzed just like real people using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories. Using this theory, this study psychoanalyzed four characters from the novel *And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie. The objective of this study is to identify the correlation of secret and guilt that affect the characters' psyche and elicited the use of defense mechanisms. The findings of this study showed that the characters' conscious act of keeping secret has unconscious repercussions on their psyche. The characters kept secret that they have been complicit in the death of other people, and thus the guilt from that event is repressed into the unconscious mind. The defense mechanism is then employed to keep the upsetting guilt hidden and away from consciousness. The repressed guilt slowly builds up and manifests in various symptoms until it finally resurfaces to the conscious mind.

Keywords: Freudian psychoanalysis, guilt, secret, defense mechanism, unconscious mind

Commonly, novels tell of a character's life and their interactions with others and their surroundings. Watt (2001) believes that novel attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, and in doing so, the authors of novel either indirectly or directly make a commentary on topics that they discuss in the story. One of the significant authors of this genre is Agatha Christie, a novelist from England who is dubbed as the 'Queen of Crime'. Although she also write romance under the pseudonym of Mary Westmacott, she wrote mostly stories with crime as the defining genre, and one of her most notable work is *And Then There Were None*. This novel is Christie's best-selling novel, one of

the best-selling books of all time with over 100 million copies sold worldwide (Grabianowski, 2011), and the object of this study.

And Then There Were None is about ten strangers who are lured to a remote island on August 8th, 1940s. Each of these ten characters harbor deep secret that they have been complicit in the deaths of other person(s) but either escaped justice or deemed innocent. After dinner on the first night, all of them were indicted with their respective 'crimes' by a gramophone recording and surmises that they are brought to this island to pay for their actions. They are trapped on the island, unable

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to go back to the mainland because of the inclement weather and no transportation, with an unknown assailant who is killing them in turn methodologically, as if the deaths resembles the nursery rhyme 'Ten Little Indians' that were hanged in all the rooms of the guests.

This study then will analyze four characters' mental state; they denied the accusation vehemently before they finally confront their dark secret. Their guilt and the sinister tone of the entire ordeal in the mansion have affected their psyche and force them to unconsciously defend themselves against the unpleasant situation.

Only one character fully developed as a round character who changes over the course of the story, but others remain flat. Most of the individuals are experiencing many emotions while the tone of story changes. At the beginning of the story, for example, all of them acts civilized at dinner, eating fine foods and conversing formally and politely as they did not know each other. But by the five killings, they are wary of each other and eat tinned foods directly from the can. These setting of mood progressed the changing of mental states of the characters. As the story goes, it can be seen how a character's façade starts to crumble down as guilt and the repercussion of their past actions (in regards to their role of the death of their respective 'victims') catch up to them.

The writer would like to comprehend the guilt that was caused by keeping secrets and played an important role in the novel, altering the characters life, bit by bit, even while repressed by the defense mechanism. The results of this study may suggest a connection of keeping secrets and guilt affects a person's psyche. The four characters show signs of using defense mechanisms to protect themselves from the heavy burden of keeping secret and feeling guilty and it took a toll on their unconsciousness, especially after they put in a tense situation where they can no longer control their emotions. Most of them are irritated, suspicious, jaded, and started to

hallucinate the longer they stayed in the island. This study will be an endeavor in understanding how secrecy, guilt, and defense mechanisms correlate. By understanding how they correlate with each other, readers are hoped to be able to take guilt and keeping secret into consideration on how they affect human consciousness and unconsciousness.

The focus on the object is its characters' mental states. Seeing that, this study questions on how secrecy, guilt, and defense mechanism affect the characters' mental state in the novel *And Then There Were None*. This study focuses on to identify the relation of secrecy, guilt, and tense. situation affect the character's psyche and elicited the use of defense mechanisms. This study then will use Freud's psychoanalytic theories to analyze the literary element character on *And Then There Were None* because his view on how the mind works will help the study in analyzing the characters.

The data will then be analyzed using psychoanalytic approach; in regards that this study questions the connection between secrecy, guilt, and defense mechanism with the character's mind. To determine whether the data taken from the novel is relevant or not, psychoanalytical theory of Freud is then applied and used to interpret the data.

METHOD

A character can be revealed through the character's actions, speech, appearance, and the comments of other characters. To portray the character, there are several different methods that an author can use to describe a character in a literary work. These methods is classified as the discursive method, the dramatic method, and the contextual method (Hermansyah, Herminingrum & Fajar, 2011).

In its function as a literary approach, Sims and Stephens (2005, p.187) identified psychoanalytic theories as an approach that "involves the interpretation of symbolic meanings within texts that illuminated shared developmental and life experiences of all

human". As mentioned before, fictional character is designed to closely resemble real human beings, and thus can be psychologically analyzed just like real people. The analysis is based on the character as literary element, exploring how they behave, act, talk, and many more as explained in the preceding paragraphs, which can be summed up as a study of mind and behavior.

As explained by Ahmed (2012, p.61), the basis of Freudian psychoanalysis is that: [Freud] strongly believed and popularized the idea of conscious versus unconscious mind. In his hypothesis, the conscious mind is what one is aware of at any particular moment like someone's present perceptions, memories, thoughts, fantasies, feelings etc. and preconscious mind is what closely work with the conscious mind or it is the memories that is not presently conscious but can be made conscious easily. According to Freud these two are the smallest parts of brain, the largest part is what he called the unconscious. In Freud's view this unconscious level of mind is the source of man's motivation.

Although 'secret' is something that psychoanalysts often heard from their patients, usually in the form that the patient want to keep a secret and maintain the secrecy nature, it was only after the 1950s that papers specifically addressing 'secret' and 'secrecy' in print. Gross (1951, cited in Akhtar, 2006, p.256) defined secret as "that which is known by one person and not by others around him". He noted that a secret is consistently associated with impulses to retain it as such and to reveal it as well. There are reasons that force the ego to keep a secret, such as guilt, shame, and consequences of not keeping things a secret.

Freud (2000/1905, p.1414) once said, "no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore". Although a person may be desperate to keep their secrets hidden, the harder they try to bury them, the more they rise to the surface. Human are impulsively compelled to confess because

confession is good for the body. Biologically speaking, a person's level of stress goes up when keeping secret, and drops down when the secret is confessed. The more a person tries to keep their secrets buried, the more those secrets affect their cognitive, physical, social, and mental health (Slepian, Camp, & Masicampo, 2015).

Guilt serves as both an inhibitor and indicator of wrongdoing. It is developed from an individual's superego, as mentioned before, where the ego ideal creates an imaginary picture of how a person ought to be, and the conscience acts as a limitation of id's immoral impulses. Guilt works as an inhibitor of bad impulses to ensure that the mind strives for the perfection that the ego ideal has set for the person. By feeling guilt, the ego is less inclined to consent id's bad urges. Guilt also works as an indicator of what the conscience establishes as bad behavior. The ego understands certain behaviors are wrong from the sense of guilt that arises so it is also less inclined to do so. That is why Freud perceives guilt as a constraint imposed by civilization to control people's emotions and instincts. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (2000/1930), Freud (2000/1930, pg.4514) mentioned that:

A person feels guilty...when he has done something which he knows to be 'bad'...even when a person has not actually done the bad thing but only has recognized in himself an intention to do it; he may regard himself as guilty....Both cases, however, presuppose that one had already recognized that what is bad is reprehensible, is something that must not be carried out.

By creating a story in which every character has committed a crime, Agatha Christie explores different human responses to the burden of a guilty conscience. As previously mentioned, guilt is "an emotional state produced by thoughts that we have not lived up to our ideal self and could have done otherwise" (Strickland, 2001, pg.285). Guilt operates on two levels; first, it is cognitive, where a person is consciously aware of their perceived failures or wrongdoings; and guilt is

also an emotional experience that can make a person feel sad, angry, or anxious. Guilt can cause somatic reactions as well, ranging from upset stomachs to anxiety attacks. In *On Dreams* (2000/1901), Freud asserted that feelings of guilt, if repressed from conscious mind will inevitably surface in unconscious symptoms such as nightmares or psychosis.

Sigmund Freud noted a number of ego defenses which he refers to throughout his written works. In his work of *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence* (2000/1894) Freud first mentioned how the ego reacted defensively:

to the moment at which an occurrence of incompatibility took place in their ideational life—that is to say, until their ego was faced with an experience, an idea, or a feeling which aroused such a distressing affect that the subject decided to forget about it because he had no confidence in his power to resolve the contradiction between that incompatible idea and his ego by means of thought-activity. (p.303)

Freud suggested that defense mechanisms protect an individual from unsettling experiences, ideas, or feelings. These defense mechanisms are not voluntarily, in which that their formation is not under conscious control. The ego created a shield to protect the conscious mind from the conflict that ensued from the id's impulses and the superego's ideals and forced them to unconscious mind. The unconscious mind manipulates, denies, or distorts reality in order to deflect the anxiety or guilt that arouses from the uncomfortable situation. Freud (2000/1896, p.383) also defined defense mechanism as "an attempt to repress an incompatible idea which had come into distressing opposition to the patient's ego". Simply put, psychological defenses are forms of self-deception that the mind employs to avoid unbearable pain, but "in the process, they subtly distort our perceptions of reality—in both our personal relationships and the emotional terrain within us" (Burgo, 2012, p.6).

According to Szondi (2011/1956), Anna Freud (Freud's daughter) itemized ten defense mechanisms that appear in the works of Sigmund Freud: (1) Repression, (2) Regression, (3) Isolation, (4) Undoing, (5) Projection, (6) Introjection, (7) Turning against One's Own Person (Self-Harm), (8) Denial, (9) Sublimation or Displacement

The four characters that are going to be analyzed in the novel are General John Gordon Macarthur, Emily Caroline Brent, Dr. Edward George Armstrong, and Vera Elizabeth Claythorne. Among the ten characters introduced in the story, General Macarthur is the third person to die; he was bludgeoned while sitting on the shore. Then, Emily Brent was killed from injected potassium cyanide, making her the fifth character to die in the story. Following the death of Miss Brent, Dr. Armstrong then drowned in the sea as the seventh victim. And the last of them to die, also the main character, is Vera Claythorne in which she hanged herself. This order of death, according to the killer in the story, is based on their varying degrees of guilt. "Those whose guilt was the lightest should, I decided, pass out first, and not suffer the prolonged mental strain and fear that the more cold-blooded offenders were to suffer" (Christie, 1939, pg.344). Thus, the story itself (or rather the author herself) judges the characters through their guilt.

The analysis of this study is divided into four parts, each part represent a character and the analysis of their secret, guilt, and ego defense mechanism as represented in the novel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Macarthur

General Macarthur is a retired World War I war hero. At the beginning of his story, the notable characteristic of him was that he was not portrayed as the stereotyped military men, but rather as the strange, delirious old man. Typical war hero is drafted to always strike a

conversation about the wartime, the soldier, or fighting for the country, but despite this, when the chance arises, General Macarthur did not mention the War to any other guests (Christie, 1939). He is more of a flat character that embodies the quality of a person suffering from a long-time guilt that he starts to lose his mind. He is not shown as a brave veteran, but more of a resigned old man, ramblingly talking about death. The author reveals it dramatically when another guest, Mr. Blore, stated that General Macarthur has gone 'balmy' (mad), in trance, and crazy (Christie, 1939). While others are busy waiting to get rescued, he is the only one who has accepted that no one is going to save them, that they are being punished for their misdeed and there is no escaping it. The killer made sure that the General would die a painless death because he believed that General Macarthur had suffered enough and repented from his sin (Christie, 1939).

As mentioned above, General Macarthur is suffering from a long-time guilt, which rooted from his secret. During the war, General Macarthur had sent a young officer, Arthur Richmond, to his death by assigning him to a mission where it was practically guaranteed he would not survive. He found out that his favorite officer had an affair with his wife, Leslie, when she mixed the letter she was supposed to send to Richmond but instead was sent to her husband. At first, General Macarthur pretended to know nothing of the affair, but as the murderous rage slowly built, he then deliberately sent Richmond to his death. No one had suspected him of murder, merely a mistake amongst all the confusion and panic the war brought.

General Macarthur completely knew that he was responsible for the death of Arthur Richmond, but he somehow had introjected the beliefs that since Miss Claythorne and Miss Brent were innocent—to his opinion—then he must also be innocent. He insisted that Miss Claythorne and Miss Brent could not have done those, and thus the reliability and the validity of the accusations should fall apart. "Damned curious business the whole

thing! Crazy, nothing less" (Christie, 1939, pg.95) was General Macarthur's opinion after the gramophone incident. Although what the gramophone record had accused of him is true, by believing that neither Miss Claythorne nor Miss Brent were capable of doing their own alleged crimes, General Macarthur on some level does not fully accept the fact that he had killed someone. "Best really to leave this sort of thing unanswered. However, feel I ought to say—no truth—no truth whatsoever in [the accusation]," (Christie, 1939, pg.73) was what General Macarthur had said to comfort Miss Claythorne who wept as she defended herself against the accusation. General Macarthur fully believed that the indictments are baseless rumor and denied his guilt—"There had been a pack of other nonsense, just as far-fetched"—then introjected her supposedly-innocence to his own. Only at later time, when two people were already murdered, did he come to peace with what he did and fully accept responsibility for what he had done by resigning to his death and sat by the sea waiting for redemption.

Emily Caroline Brent

Miss Brent is an old, ruthlessly religious spinster who delights in her own perfection. She is self-righteous, compassionless, and condemns all people who do not live up to her standards. By keeping herself in line and not falling into 'worldly' things, she has brought herself to believe that she is superior to others. In the book, she was described that:

She was sixty-five and did not approve of lounging. She sat upright as was her custom....Enveloped in an aura of righteousness and unyielding principles, Miss Brent sat in her crowded third-class carriage and triumphed over its discomfort and its heat. (Christie, 1939, pg.7-8)

This passage shows that from the very beginning Miss Brent is a lady who looks down on other people and holds herself as the paragon of morality. Miss Brent keeps silence about her secret, a shameful story from her home, only later talks about it with Miss

Claythorne. Miss Brent is indicted by the gramophone record of causing the death of Beatrice Taylor, a servant whom she fired upon learning that she was pregnant out of wedlock. Despite the fact, however, Miss Brent does not perceived it as her doing nor feeling the need to defend herself against the accusation.

To deal with her repressed guilt, Miss Brent employed two defense mechanisms, projection and denial. Projection is a mechanism where a person repressed their impulses and ascribing it to someone else, or in another form, it is where the ego throws blame to someone else while the mind actually knows that the blame is theirs and theirs alone, such is the case of Miss Brent's projection. Denial has been mentioned before in General Macarthur's instance, but simply put, it is where Miss Brent does not accept the reality of her fate in the remote island.

Different from the other guests who feels the foreboding sense that they are being hunted and tries to survive, Miss Brent believes that she is not going to die because she is not guilty—"she had never done anything to be ashamed of...naturally, she wasn't going to die", that because she did nothing wrong so that the killer will not kill her. This is an absurd idea because she is practically accused of the same thing as the rest of them, that they all have caused death in other persons, and she is no exception. The killer has made sure that there will be ten people on the island to complete the ten deaths as depicted in the nursery rhyme 'Ten Little Indians'. But despite the glaring facts, Miss Brent believes that she will not die—while others will—and denies the grave reality that she is in. Even when people start dying at Soldier Island, Miss Brent is sure that her moral superiority will keep her safe—even though everyone else is surely guilty for their crimes. While she mentioned that she does not fear death, she also denies the possibility that she might dies. Miss Brent is not only self-righteous, but she is selfish and in denial, the traits that is often associated with fanatical religious person.

Dr. Edward George Armstrong

Doctor Armstrong is a well-known and highly respected physician. He is a gullible person and believes that a person of high status is above reproach. From the context of what Doctor Armstrong has said against the supposition that one of them are the killer, "...Is there any one whom we can definitely eliminate from suspicion on the evidence which is in our possession?" Dr. Armstrong said quickly: 'I am a well-known professional man. The mere idea that I can be suspected of—' (Christie, 1939, pg.178), he finds it ludicrous that a person of his standing should ever be questioned. As a flat character, this inability to see beyond 'respectability'—that it is inconceivable to Doctor Armstrong that a man of high standing could actually be a murderer—is what in the end will cost his life. He is careless, gullible, and serves as nothing more than a pawn in the killer's plan.

Doctor Armstrong is responsible for the death of a patient, Louisa Mary Clees, after he operated on her under the influence of alcohol many years earlier. Among all the guests, he is one of the few who admits to himself that he did murder his patient, knowingly.

The death of Louisa Mary Clees is a tragedy, but something good managed to come out of it. Doctor Armstrong may be pompous and something of a fool, but he tries to be a decent man. And yet, despite all the good things he has done since then, Doctor Armstrong is haunted by guilt. Consciously and unconsciously, Doctor Armstrong understands very well that he has murdered Clees.

Although Doctor Armstrong feels the guilt and fear that follows the gramophone incident, he does not fully comprehend that they are all 'a sitting duck'. He employed denial as his defense mechanism, in which he refuses to accept the hard fact that they are in danger. Doctor Armstrong is in denial and a fool, even when the fact is right in front of him. There is a gnawing fear and suspicion on

Doctor Armstrong's mind, but he does not want to accept it.

Deep down, however, he has always known. All Doctor Armstrong needed from Lombard was an excuse, validation that what he is thinking (that those deaths are not part of a sinister plan) is not beyond the realms of possibility. But his worst fears has been confirmed, and he still does not heed the warning from his own dream. To the bitter end, Doctor Armstrong rebuffs his own hunch, believing that they can get off of the island, even to a point where he acted foolishly (as it is his quality), conspiring with and trusting the wrong person, the killer.

Vera Elizabeth Claythorne

Miss Claythorne is a governess turned games mistress at a third-rate girls' school. She is a cool, smart, efficient, and resourceful young woman. The author initially presented her dramatically (from Lombard's opinion) as a character "who can hold her own—in love or war" (Christie, 1939, p.5). She is also described as "a nice straight jolly girl" (Christie, 1939, pg.342) who is humble and calm during most of the story. Vera Claythorne lasts the longest on the island, partly because she is a levelheaded girl who knows how to keep calm in a difficult situation, but mainly because the killer assumes her misdeed to be the worst of them all. The killer purposely let her survives that long because he believes she deserves the most mental anguish and terror from the entire tribulation. As a round character, she takes pride in keeping a level head, but, in the end, the murders on the island and her incessant guilt that haunts her gradually drives her to hysteria. Her initial reserve and self-control falls apart as she sees her fellow guests die, one after the other. The killer's psychological maneuvers build on her nervous tension, causing Miss Claythorne to finally lose the last vestiges of her control.

She acts perfectly as the grieving teacher, when in truth, she was the one who told Cyril to swim and distracting his mother's attention.

She is manipulative and cunning; she manages to look like a damsel in distress and put on a show for the others—"she broke down, weeping bitterly". There is no doubt that Vera murdered Cyril in cold blood, according to her own confession when she said "...and herself, swimming in easy practiced strokes after [Cyril]—cleaving her way through the water but knowing, only too surely, that she wouldn't be in time..." (Christie, 1939, pg.3). Her crime was cold, calculated, and ruthless because she killed him for money and for Hugo, the boy's uncle and her lover. She was practically engaged to marry Hugo, but he did not have any money for a wedding. He stood to inherit the Hamilton's wealth if Cyril were to die, so she saw her opportunity—should Cyril die, Hugo would inherit, then they would get married and live happily ever after. According to the killer, her premeditated murder because of greed puts her in the highest list of murderer. For her happiness, she is willing to do anything.

Whenever she smells the sea, she remembers the day the boy died, as if hallucinating—"a picture rose clearly before her mind. Cyril's head, bobbing up and down, swimming to the rock"—reliving the day over and over again. Part of Miss Claythorne's guilt also lies in the fact that no one ever questioned whether or not she was guilty for Cyril's death. In fact, she was praised afterwards and thanked for being levelheaded, admired for her courage and composure (Christie, 1939).

In a state of fear, Miss Claythorne believes that the dead Cyril has come to haunt her on the island, to the point that she imagines it is the dead Cyril's hand that has touched her neck, out for her blood ("It was that which she had taken for a clammy hand, a drowned hand come back from the dead to squeeze the life out of her!"). Based on how her mind goes to Cyril's hands, on some unconscious level, Miss Claythorne expects to be punished for killing Cyril, expecting him to exact revenge. She realizes that it was mostly her mind—her guilt—filling her with fear and driving her crazy. But in the end, she is so guilt-ridden

that she ends up killing herself, believing that Hugo had wanted it.

Her plan worked perfectly; Cyril died, Hugo inherited the wealth, and she was exonerated from any involvement in his death. But Hugo had left her. What slipped from her calculation was that Hugo had loved Cyril, and when he looked at her, he knew what she had really done. The plan backfired, and since Hugo had left her, Miss Claythorne kept haunted by the image of Hugo and Cyril. She is racked with guilt, constantly reminded of her misdeed and thinks about it all the time. Just as the story started, it revealed how troubled Miss Claythorne is about going to the sea. From the moment the story started, she thinks about Cyril and Hugo.

Miss Claythorne reasons that she let Cyril swim too far for Hugo to inherit money and for her happiness, that she did nothing wrong, so she did not really admitted that she was a killer, at least not until she killed herself. To corroborate that reasoning, Miss Claythorne employed projection as her defense mechanism. Projection, as previously mentioned, is a mechanism where a person repressed their urges and attributing it to someone else, or in another form, it is where the mind (in this case, Miss Claythorne's) believes that others are just as bad as her, even though she did not acknowledge that she is a bad person.

The passage above happens when there is only four people left on the island. That night, she locks herself in and stays awake until morning. She starts to think that she can survive by staying inside her room—"I can stay here! Stay here locked in!"—denying even the basic need of life, food, and hoping to just be rescued. She is in denial, because she cannot survive staying at the room, not without food and company. Her mind will always torments her with Hugo and Cyril if she is alone (Christie, 1939), she knows this, and as if on cue, her thought of staying in the room is distracted by the images of her past when she allowed Cyril to swim away. Miss Claythorne desperately believes that she can

survive the island; coming out on top and alive. This was actually proven true, yet ironically, even when she emerged victorious as the lone survivor, she ended up killing herself out of guilt.

CONCLUSION

The novel *And Then There Were None* puts ten different people together; each with varying degrees of guilt, conscience, and personality while harboring the same dark secret. While these characters maintain a show of innocence, however, their guilt emerges less consciously, through dreams or memories that undermine their self-assurance and faith. Thoughts of their victims trouble a number of the guest because they hide their guilt not only from others but also from themselves. General Macarthur avoids people that can connect him with his dead officer; Miss Brent feels haunted by the spirit of her servant; Doctor Armstrong's failed-to-save patient terrorizes him in his dream; and for Miss Claythorne, the smell of the sea seems to summon the image of the drowned boy. Their mental health deteriorates under the pressure of guilt and survival instinct. All of them are forced to accept their guilt and the consequences of their action that escaped justice. These episodes point to the way in which guilt, even if denied by the rational faculties, can make its presence felt in other ways.

There are four defense mechanisms employed; reaction formation, introjection, projection, and denial. The most common defense mechanism in this story is denial, which is employed by all of the characters discussed in this study. For the people in this novel, they tend to deny death and mortality. They believe that they are not going to die, that they will prevail, no matter what happens, in the face of danger. They stubbornly fail to see the situation that they are in and refuse to acknowledge that they are mortal; that somehow they defy the law of mortality. But specific to General Macarthur's case, his

denial is more on his innocence rather than death (as he comes to peace with death).

To sum it up, their overwhelming sense of guilt and survival instinct forces them to defend themselves against the unpleasant situation. They keep their involvement in a person(s) death as secret, thus repressing their guilt. When it happens, the mind employs defense mechanism to represses the guilt, to a point. The guilt that keeps being repressed does not simply disappear, it builds up as time goes by, to the point that it manifests in various ways. When the mind simply cannot ignore it any longer, the guilt will then surfaces to the conscious mind and the person will finally have to deal with it.

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