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The Making of Torturers: The Case of Abu Ghraib – An  
Exploration of Individual Psychological Factors, Group  
Factors, and Mimetic Structures of Violence

By

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED to the FACULTY of GRADUATE STUDIES  
in PARTIAL FULFILLMENT of the REQUIREMENTS for the  
DEGREE of MASTER of ARTS in CONFLICT STUDIES

## **Abstract**

The exposure of the prison abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib in 2004 deeply shocked the American conscience and triggered a widespread public debate surrounding both the legitimacy of the use of torture and American values. With the election of president Trump this discussion has once more moved into the limelight of public discussion. While much attention has been devoted to the morality of torture, little has been paid to the perpetrators of torture themselves. This thesis explores the theoretical framework of Grodin and Annas (2007) to assess individual and group psychological factors in combination with Redekop's (2002) mimetic structures of violence to assess how ordinary people turned into torturers at Abu Ghraib in 2004. The data analysed stems from the Central Investigative Departments investigation into the torture scandal, as well as the Taguba Report, the Fay Report, the Schlesinger Report, the Red Cross Report and Errol Morris award winning documentary *Standard Operating Procedure*. The study finds that individual and group psychological factors, in conjuncture with mimetic structures of violence appeared to have played a role in the making of torturers at Abu Ghraib.

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## **Glossary**

CID Criminal Investigation Department

Cpl Corporal

DoD Department of Defense

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

MG Major General

MI Military Intelligence

MP Military Police

Pvt Private

Sgt Sergeant

UCMJ Uniform Code of Military Justice

UN United Nations

UNCAT United Nations Convention Against Torture

# Chapter 1: Introduction

The exposure of the prison abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib in 2004 deeply shocked the American conscience and triggered a widespread public debate surrounding both the legitimacy of the use of torture and American values. With the election of president Trump this discussion has once more moved into the limelight of public discussion. While much attention has been devoted to the morality of torture, little has been paid to the perpetrators of torture themselves. The wealth of information available on the Abu Ghraib torture scandal that broke on NBC news in 2004, including the personal and legal accounts of the soldiers involved, presents a unique opportunity to understand the circumstances that have allowed for ordinary people to be turned into perpetrators of torture.

## **Background**

Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq originally served as one of Saddam Hussein's prisons. Built in the 1960's and located 20 miles north of Baghdad, the compound consists of five separate walled compounds. At the time of the fall of the regime in 2003, the compounds had been designated for foreign prisoners, as well as various other crimes, including capital and "special crimes. (BBC, 2004). The Baathist regime used the prison as a vast holding tank for enemies and undesirables, who were incarcerated, tortured and often executed. It is estimated that several thousands were killed at Abu Ghraib, often as part of a "cleansing" order (Danner, 2004).

On August 4<sup>th</sup> 2004, Abu Ghraib prison was reopened by Coalition forces and was meant as a temporary solution. With the Coalition forces temporarily taking over detention operations in Iraq, Abu Ghraib was becoming overcrowded and became increasingly targeted by insurgent forces due to its proximity to urban dwellings (Danner, 2004).

On October 15<sup>th</sup> 2003 the 327<sup>th</sup> MP brigade takes control of Tier 1A and Tier 1B, which have previously been designated for high value and high maintenance detainees. In an effort to merge Military Intelligence (MI) and Military Police (MP) operations, Colonel Thomas Papas makes MI responsible for the MP units conducting detention operations. On January 13<sup>th</sup> 2004 Sergeant Joseph Darby of the 327<sup>th</sup> MP Company reports prisoner abuse, launching a military criminal investigation. On January 19<sup>th</sup> 2004 the Commander of Combined Joint Task Force Seven (CJTF-7), General Ricardo Sanchez requests the appointment of an Investigating Officer in the grade of Major General or above, to conduct an investigation into the conduct of operations within 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police (MP) Brigade from November 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 to January 19<sup>th</sup> 2004. He reported that recent reports of detainee abuse, escaped detainees, and accountability lapses indicate systemic problems within the brigade, suggesting a lack in clear standards, proficiency, and leadership (Danner, 2004).

On March 20<sup>th</sup> 2004 eight soldiers were charged with dereliction of duty, prisoner abuse and various other related charges, and later convicted under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), including Charles Graner, Ivan Frederik, Megan Ambuhl, Lynndie England, Sabrina Hartman, Armin Cruz, Javal Davis, and Jeremy Sivits. The photographs of abuse were first broadcasted by the CBS television network on April 24<sup>th</sup> 2004 and published in the New Yorker several days later (Danner, 2004).

## **Literature Review**

Despite the ratification of the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) by 115 countries since 1984, torture has increasingly been on the rise over the past decades. A Globescan survey of more than 21,000 participants in 21 countries across every continent found that 44% of respondents fear torture if taken into custody. 82% believe there should be clear laws

prohibiting torture, while 36% believe that torture can be justified in some cases to protect the public (Amnesty International, 2014). Furthermore, Mayer and Armor's (2012) longitudinal study on U.S. citizen's support for torture, found that that public opinion is evenly split on the question of torture and in fact has risen to 54% in favour of the use of torture 2009 opposed to 42% in 2004 at the height of the Bush administration. The largest debate, they found are the methods used, not the fact that they constitute torture. Furthermore, they found that government policy has no effect on public opinion on the subject matter (444-445).

Much of the literature on Abu Ghraib has been dedicated to government complicity and involvement in torture, as well as the morality of using torture in a post 9/11 context, and the legal "shadow land" or grey area (Khalili, 2013; Aman, 2005) that allowed for prisoner abuse to become standardized during the Bush administration and beyond (Rothe et al., 2009). This bulk of literature focuses the debate on government and leadership responsibility, and removes agency from the actors involved to a large extent. While this part of the literature is certainly relevant for forming an understanding of the greater forces at work, it fails to explain why torture occurred in the first place, as it does not address the individual and social dimensions involved. This gap is the question this study seeks to address.

### Social Psychology

The most infamous studies on perpetrators come from Zimbardo and Milgram. Zimbardo's (1972) now infamous Stanford prison experiment, where college students were randomly assigned as guards or prisoners turned into cruel or sadistic guards or emotionally shattered prisoners, demonstrates the ease with which individuals turn into violent perpetrators. Milgram's (1963) study found that ordinary people are capable of cruelty simply by following the orders they are given. Waller (2002) argues that there are four ingredients that lead ordinary

people to commit acts of extraordinary “evil”: (1) an “ancestral shadow” that influences our response to authority (2) Identity (cultural belief system, moral disengagement, desire for social dominance) (3) social context (4) social death of intended victim (us/them thinking, blaming, dehumanization). Staub’s (1989) study on genocide and mass killings found that

certain characteristics of a culture and the structure of a society, combined with great difficulties or hardships of life and societal disorganization are the starting point for genocide or mass killing. The resulting material and psychological needs lead the society to turn against a subgroup in it. Gradually increasing mistreatment of this subgroup ends in genocide or mass killing. (4)

This brings us to the literature specifically pertaining to torture and the torture scandal of Abu Ghraib.

### Torture & Abu Ghraib

Few studies have been done on torturers themselves, but the findings all conclude that unlike the “bad apple” theory suggests, torturers are ordinary people that do not suffer from any particular pathology. Studies conducted during the Nuremberg trial, trying to prove that there was something fundamentally evil about the Nazi perpetrators found no indication of any psychological disorders or sadism. Similarly, Mestrovic’s (2007) study of the perpetrators of Abu Ghraib found that “most of ‘these people’ were actually relatively normal when they entered the military, and they did not have psychological disorders, pathologies, or early life traumas which provide an explanation for their cruel behavior” (Lankford, 2009, 388). In fact, Zimbardo (2007) conducted a study on several of the individuals involved at Abu Ghraib and found no abnormal pathology. Furthermore, Haritos-Fatouros’ (2003) study on Greek torturers found that twenty years after their release they went on to lead relatively normal lives. While studies on torturers are relatively rare, because they rarely get convicted, the evidence still points towards other social forces that are at play in turning ordinary people into perpetrators of torture. This

view is supported by Fiske, Harris, and Cuddy (2004), who also argue that “social psychological evidence emphasizes the power of social context; in other words, the power of the interpersonal situation” (1482). Similarly, Modvig and Jarason (2004) argue that, “through social learning, systems of reward and punishment, propaganda, comradeship, and so forth, learned obedience to authority can explain the behaviour of Torturers. According to this, anybody prone to social learning could become a torturer when subjected to the appropriate environment” (41). Furthermore, they argue that “(...) the creation of torturers is a conscious and systematic process by systems, not individual occurrences by extreme personalities” (Modvig and Jarason, 2004, 42).

The question that is often so hotly debated is “What is torture?” The Encyclopedia Britannica defines torture as follows: “Torture (from Latin “torquere”, to twist), the general name for innumerable modes of inflicting pain which have been from time to time devised by the perverted ingenuity of man, and especially for those employed in a legal aspect by the civilized nations of antiquity and modern Europe” (Donnelly and Diehl, 2013, 3). They further argue that “from this point of view, torture was always inflicted for one of two purposes: (1) as a means of eliciting evidence from a witness or from an accused person either before or after condemnation; (2) as a part of punishment” (2013, 3).

Merriam-Webster defines torture as follows:

1: A: anguish of body or mind

B: something that causes agony or pain

2: the infliction of intense pain (as from burning, crushing, or wounding) to punish, coerce, or afford sadistic pleasure

3: distortion or over refinement of a meaning or an argument (“Torture”, 2017)

This definition also includes the popular uses of the term, but is not particularly refined in terms of adequately addressing the issue in a serious scholarly manner. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, we will follow UNCAT in defining torture as follows:

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions. (UNACT, article 1, paragraph 1).

### **Research Question, Hypothesis and Overview**

This brings us to the research question to be explored by this study: Why did ordinary people become torturers at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003?

This study was undertaken for three reasons: (1) to enable greater insight into why the U.S. soldiers turned into torturers at Abu Ghraib. (2) to add to the literature on what enables normal individuals to commit extraordinary acts of violence; and (3) to provide for future avenues of research.

The specific purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how ordinary people turn into torturers, as well as the dynamics at work, by applying individual psychological factors, group factors and a framework of mimetic structures of violence.

The hypothesis is that a combined framework of individual psychological factors, group factors and mimetic structures of violence led to ordinary people being turned into torturers at Abu Ghraib.

Several sets of data will be examined by the study, including government reports, such as the Taguba Report (2004), The Schlesinger Report (2004), and the Fay Report (2004), as well as

the ICRC's Report on detention facilities in Iraq (2004), and the Criminal Investigation Department's investigation (2004) into prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. In addition, the documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) by Errol Morris will be examined. The nature of the data will be further expanded on in the next chapter.

The thesis consists of eight chapters. The first chapter introduces the overall topic. The second chapter provides an outline and the methodology of the research project. The third chapter deals with the definition of torture and argues that the events that took place at Abu Ghraib between 2003-2004 clearly constitute torture under the United Nations Convention Against Torture. Chapters four to six consists of an analysis of the data in regards to turning ordinary people into torturer via individual psychological factors, group factors and mimetic structures of violence respectively. Chapter seven consists of a comprehensive discussion of the three previous chapters and shows how they corroborate the hypothesis of the thesis. Chapter eight offers a summary of the research findings, their implications and possible future avenues for research.

## Chapter 2: Framework and Methodology

This chapter is dedicated to the framework and methodology applied throughout the thesis to provide additional clarity. The chapter will outline the theoretical framework used in the study, as well as the parameters of the study, the data used, as well as coding and the application of the data throughout the thesis. The definition of torture and how the incidents at Abu Ghraib constitute torture will be tackled in chapter three. Therefore, this chapter, anticipating the argument that torture occurred, describes the methodology that will be used to determine why people engaged in torture.

### **Theoretical framework**

Underlying this study are Grodin and Annas' (2007) framework for explaining individual psychological and group factors in the formation of torturers, as well as the theoretical framework developed by Redekop (2002), explaining the cycle of violence that can occur within a conflict. Michael A. Grodin is a Professor of Health Law, Bioethics, and Human Rights at the Boston University School of Public Health, as well as a Professor of Family Medicine and Psychiatry at the Boston University School of Medicine. In addition, Grodin is the Director of the Project on Medicine and the Holocaust at the Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies. His extensive fieldwork and work experience in this field has led to an integration of key ideas from the field of social psychology to the question of torturers. George J. Annas is a Professor and Director of the Center for Health Law, Ethics & Human Rights at the Boston University School of Public Health, School of Medicine, and School of Law. He is also a cofounder of Global Lawyers and Physicians, a transnational professional NGO that states it is dedicated to promoting human rights and health. Annas' work experience with human rights and his extensive knowledge of the field of social psychology has, in combination with Grodin, led to a solid basis

for the analysis of the social psychological processes behind torture. Vern Neufeld Redekop is a Professor of Conflict Studies at Saint Paul University and former President of the Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution (CICR). While this study uses their theoretical categories, it further draws from other social psychologists to further develop the concepts. His expertise and extensive work with deep-rooted conflict has led to a insightful theoretical framework that further helps illuminate the inner workings of making a torturer in terms of the interpersonal dynamics at play. While this study uses their theoretical categories, it further draws from other social psychologists to further develop the concepts.

### Individual Psychological Factors

Grodin and Annas' (2007) study of Nazi doctors applies a variety of individual psychological factors to explain ordinary people being turned into torturers. The theories proposed by them, will be applied to the case of Abu Ghraib and include: dehumanization, splitting, numbing, and omnipotence. The category of "medicalization" they further propose will be omitted due to the nature of the particular case study. Kaminer and Stein (2001) stress the importance of taking individual factors into account, arguing that "while the individual characteristics of perpetrators are certainly insufficient to explain human cruelty on a mass scale, they cannot be ignored" (475).

Two forms of dehumanization have been identified by Bernard, Ottenberg, and Fritzl (1995), which are interrelated forms of shielding oneself against painful and overwhelming emotions. Self directed dehumanization entails a diminished sense of one's own individuality and human qualities. Object-directed dehumanization entails a misconception of others as lacking or deficient in those attributes that particularly characterize being human. They provide protection from both internal stress and external stress and, as Jackson observed, are mutually

reinforcing in terms of a “reduction of fullness of one’s feelings for other human beings (...) impoverishes one’s sense of self, and any lessening of the humanness of one’s self-image limits one’s capacity for relating to others” (1968, 666).

The concepts of splitting or “doubling” and numbing were first developed by Lifton (1968) in a study of Nazi doctors. He argues that splitting as a model of personality enables people to deal with trauma more effectively (Grodin and Annas, 2007). As they describe it, “For the perpetrator, splitting can be used to rationalize and justify his actions, and through reaction formation he can convince himself that he is doing good, or even that he is a hero” (640). Splitting is intrinsically connected to numbing, which allows the perpetrator to further distance themselves from the victim. Grodin and Annas quote Lifton (1986), who argues that “Psychic numbing diminishes the capacity to feel. Blocking feelings leads to extreme repression, including denial to the point of disavowal of what one perceives and de-realization to the point that the victim never existed in the perpetrators’ consciousness” (2007, 641).

Omnipotence, as Lifton (1986) argues, merges with sadism when it leads to abuse, while simultaneously causing a sense of powerlessness. Perpetrators will take pleasure in domination and control, “but they still need to eradicate their own vulnerability and susceptibility to pain and death” (Grodin and Annas, 2007, 641). The anxiety over powerlessness then merges into “pride at being part of their country’s war machine” (641).

In sum the individual psychological factors outline by Grodin and Anas (2007) all serve as a form of protection against trauma. Dehumanization, while shielding from internal and external stressors, leads to a diminishing in the capacity for relating to others. Splitting or Doubling, and numbing act to further deal with trauma and allow for rationalizing and justifying

actions, and repressing memories. Omnipotence, when leading to abuse also causes a sense of powerlessness, which is then subsidized by taking pride in one's group.

### Group Factors

Individual psychological factors are not sufficient for explaining acts of torture, primarily because these acts are committed as part of a larger group, and is included in the UN definition of torture. An act of torture can therefore not be solely committed by an individual, but must be committed by an individual or group in the service of an authority. The group factors that will be assessed in this study are derived from Grodin and Annas (2007) study of Nazi physicians and include obedience to authority, diffusion of responsibility, group behaviour, uniqueness of the group and training.

Obedience to authority is a driving factor in allowing for ordinary people to commit acts of torture and has been continuously debated since Hannah Arendt's (1963) concept of the "banality of evil." Stanley Milgram's (1961) experiments at Yale University uncovered that 65% of research subjects used, what they believed were dangerous levels of electro-shocks when experimenters told them to do so, believing that the authority figure would accept responsibility for the final outcome. Milgram proposes three categories of reasons for obeying/disobeying authority: (1) personal history of family/school background that encourages either obedience or defiance (2) a feeling of comfort derived from obeying authority (3) a sense of discomfort when disobeying authority (Milgram, 1961).

The idea of diffusion of responsibility is closely connected with obedience to authority and was put forth by Zimbardo as a result of his findings in the Stanford Prison Experiment. Zimbardo's (1972) experiment simulated prison life amongst college students, but became so violent that it had to be terminated early. Grodin and Annas (2007) argue that amongst the

findings, Zimbardo (1972) included that the “guards” placed all “responsibility for their actions on the researcher and the group as a whole, rather than accepting blame for individual actions (2007, 643).

Grodin and Annas (2007) argue that group behaviour tends to rely on three factors: (1) diminishing the conscious individual personality (2) focusing thought and feelings in a common direction and (3) unconscious dominance over reason and judgement. This leads to ordinary people being more effective torturers, particularly in the military, a hierarchically structured setting.

Adding the uniqueness of a group as a factor aids in painting a picture as to why groups participate in torture in the first place. When a group has a shared mystique and common values, members in turn develop camaraderie, a devotion to the organizational ideology and cause, and a sense that they are part of an elite. Taking pride in performing difficult and important tasks leads to complete subordination to the organization and after a certain level of indoctrination, prevents individual members from resisting participation in torture (Grodin and Annas, 2007).

Training is a crucial aspect in the formation of torturers and includes indoctrination and abuse, while carefully selecting members for (1) obedience to authority. Groups are then able to shape torturers by (2) screening for intellect, physical ability and positive identification with the political regime, which fosters (3) ideas of eliteness and othering, and (4) group binding via basic training, a set of initiation rites (including isolation from non-group members), and the imposition of new rules and values, as well as (5) the development of an elitist attitude and in-group language. Furthermore, training promotes (6) the dehumanization of the self and other, (7) harassment and intimidation to prevent logical thinking, as well as instilling instinctive

responses, (8) rewarding obedience and employing group violence, ultimately leading to the (9) desensitization to and routinization of violence (Grodin and Annas, 2007, 645-6).

In sum, all abovementioned factors identified by Grodin and Annas (2007) have to do with varying elements in which the group subordinates individuals. Obedience to authority leads to a diffusion of responsibility, which is further enforced by group behaviour. Individuals identify with the uniqueness of a group and through various aspects of training are then desensitized and routinized to violence.

### Mimetic Theory of Violence

Grodin and Annas (2007) theoretical framework, while excellent in explaining the individual and group factors that lead to torture, is insufficient, because it does not fully take the larger dynamic of interacting with prisoners in a context of war into account. To this end, adding a discussion on mimetic structures of violence further explains the behaviour of the perpetrators at Abu Ghraib.

Mimetic structures of violence put forth by Redekop (2002) refers to “a relationship that builds up in such a way that the parties in a relationship say and do things to harm one another” (161). It consists of mimesis, a term coined by the late René Girard (1987), which means reciprocity or imitation, both goes beyond an imitation of behaviour and includes an imitation of desires and other aspects of interior life. Mimetic structures of violence consist of the following six dimensions: past structures of violence are imitated; historical violent events are re-enacted; self and other reciprocally imitate each other’s violence; people imitate a classic pattern of violent interaction such as scapegoating; people follow the violent lines of a plot; and violent ideas, emotions, and behaviours are imitated. The violence that results from it takes various forms, including: control, force, extracting or taking something away from the other, diminishing

the self worth of the other, hurting or harming the other even to the point of death, cursing either ritually or wishing evil on the other, and withholding help (Redekop, 2002).

This qualitative study is based on the secondary analysis of sources, including The Taguba Report, The Schlesinger Report, The Fay Report, the Red Cross Report, the Criminal Investigation Department's investigation into Abu Ghraib, as well as the Court Martial Cases of seven soldiers accused and convicted under the UCMJ of charges related to dereliction of duty and prisoner abuse. The dependent variable in this study consists of torture at Abu Ghraib, while the independent variables to be analyzed include individual psychological factors, group factors, and mimetic structures of violence. The parameters of the study are directly taken from Grodin and Annas' (2007) study of Nazi doctors, as well as Redekop's (2002) mimetic structures of violence and are outlined below.

#### Individual Psychological Factors

- Dehumanization
- Numbing
- Splitting
- Omnipotence

#### Group Factors

- Obedience to authority
- Diffusion of responsibility
- Group behaviour
- Uniqueness of the Group
- Training

#### Mimetic Structures of Violence

- Past structures of violence are imitated
- Historical violent events are re-enacted
- Self and other reciprocally imitate each other's violence
- People imitate a classic pattern of violent interaction such as scapegoating
- People follow the violent lines of a plot
- Violent ideas, emotions, and behaviours are imitated

## **Coding**

Coding at the initial level took place on the level of the broad categories under study (Individual Factors, Group Factors, Mimetic Structures of Violence). The second round of coding then sought to refine these broad categories into their individual subcategories as outlined above. The evidence used in the paper was then selected based on three criteria:

(1) variations within a category. If the data reflected variations within a category, prominent examples were selected to reflect the various dimensions of a particular subcategory.

(2) clarity: the clearest example of a category was selected to be included in the final study as a representation

(3) contradictory evidence: if the data directly contradicted an argument made by a particular category.

The coded data was then applied to each factor under study, for the purpose of supporting the argument that the factors played a role in the making of ordinary people into torturers at Abu Ghraib, throughout chapter three to five.

## **Data**

The data used stems primarily from the government commissioned Taguba Report (2004), the Fay Report (2004) and the Schlesinger Report (2004), all three of which rely heavily on the CID military investigation (2004). In addition, in depth interviews featured in the award-winning documentary Standard Operating Procedure (2006) and the ICRC Report on Detention Operations in Iraq (2004) were used as well.

*The Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the treatment by the Coalition Forces of prisoners of war and other protected persons by the Geneva Conventions in Iraq during arrest, internment and interrogation* published in January 2004 outlines the

violations of the Geneva Conventions that the ICRC has observed during their visits to prisons operated by Coalition Forces, the steps they have taken so far to raise awareness of these issues, as well as a set of formal recommendations to address the violations.

The *CID Report – 7th Status/SSI – 0003-04-CIDI83130-6C/5C2B/5Y2B/5Y2D/5Y2E/5X1/5M3/5X5/5X7* headed by Pierron and Arthur, was published at the end of January 2004 and consists of the results of an in-depth investigation into alleged detainee abuse and mistreatment. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was notified by Specialist Joseph M. Darby of the 372nd Military Police Company deployed at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq, that guards working in the isolation area were abusing Iraqi security detainees. Darby further provided the department with a compact disk containing video footage and digital images depicting the offenses listed in the subsequent report. The investigation was flagged as “serious sensitive” due to the potential media interest in the matter. The report contains interviews with suspects, witnesses, and victims and includes 128 pages of sworn statements made between January 14th and January 27th 2004 of a total of 42 interviews with 36 persons. The report was released to the Department of Defense on January 28th 2004.

The *Article 15-6 investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade*, headed by Major General Taguba, and henceforth referred to as the Taguba Report, was commissioned on January 19th 2004, when Lieutenant General Ricardo S. Sanchez, Commander of Combined Task Force Seven (CJTF-7) requested that the Commander of the U.S. Central Command appoint an Investigating Officer in the grade of Major General or above to investigate the conduct of operations within the 800th Military Police Brigade. The investigation was requested in regards to the detention and internment operations by the Brigade from November 3rd 2004 up until January 19th 2004 and was launched because of “recent reports of detainee abuse, escapes from

confinement facilities, and accountability lapses, which indicate systematic problems within the brigade and suggest a lack of clear standards, proficiency, and leadership” (Taguba, 2004, 407). The report consists of reviews of previous reports, including MG Ryder’s report on prison and detention operations in Iraq dated from October 2003, the CID report into allegations of prisoner abuse outlined above, as well as a number of independent interviews.

The *Final Report of the Independent Panel to Review DoD Detention Operations*, chaired by James R. Schlesinger, and henceforth referred to as the Schlesinger Report, was published on August 24th 2004. The task of the Panel was review Department of Defense (DoD) investigations on detention operations, whether completed or ongoing, as well as additional materials and information deemed relevant by the Panel. The Panel’s aim was to assess the causes and contributing factors to problems in detainee operations and suggest corrective measures. Their methodology consisted of interviewing 24 high ranking military officials and reviewing a total of ten reports on the subject matter, in addition to CID investigations on detainee abuse. The report concludes that reform efforts are underway and that military services are now studying force composition, training, doctrine, responsibilities, and active duty/reserve and guard/contractor mixes. The report argues that due to the changing threat, intelligence activities, including human intelligence, is invaluable for the success of counterinsurgency missions. Furthermore, they stress the importance of recognizing that detention operations now serve the key purpose of not only removing enemy combatants from the battle field, but primarily for the purpose of intelligence gathering. They argue that incidents of detainee abuse have been relatively rare, yet need to be addressed in order not to undermine the mission and the moral of the troops.

The *AR 15-6 Investigation of the Abu Ghraib Detention Facility and the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade* was conducted by Major General George R. Fay, who was tasked with conducting an investigation in accordance with Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 into all relevant facts and circumstances surrounding the alleged misconduct on the part of personnel assigned or attached to the 205th Military Intelligence (MI) Brigade from August 15th 2003 to February 1st 2004 at the Abu Ghraib Detention Facility. The goal of the investigation was to determine (1) whether 205th MI Brigade personnel requested, encouraged, condoned, or solicited Military Police (MP) personnel to abuse detainees as preparation for interrogation operations; and (2) whether 205th MI Brigade personnel conformed with established interrogation procedures and applicable laws and regulations when questioning Iraqi security detainees. The investigation consisted of a review of available background documents and statements pertaining to the operations of the 205th MI Brigade at Abu Ghraib from a variety of sources, including all previous, and when possible, ongoing investigations. In addition, 170 personnel were interviewed and over 9,000 documents collected, catalogued, and archived into a database. The investigative team consisted of 26 personnel including investigators, analysts, subject matter experts and legal advisors. The investigation found 44 alleged instances of abuse committed by MP and MI personnel, as well as civilian contractors. On 16 of these occasions abuse by MP soldiers was encouraged, condoned or solicited by MI personnel. The abuse was found to be directed on an individual basis and never officially sanctioned or approved. Furthermore, the report found that certain individuals committed offenses in violation of international and U.S. domestic law, including the Geneva Convention and the UCMJ. Leaders in key positions failed to react appropriately when abuse was reported by service members, contractors, and the ICRC.

*Standard Operating Procedure*, directed by Errol Morris, was first released in 2008. The documentary is comprised of the pictures of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal and various witness reports from the soldiers involved who agreed to appear in it. The documentary seeks provide an account of what happened through the eyes of the soldiers and to demonstrate the scapegoating that occurred in the aftermath of the breaking of the scandal.

It is notable to point out at this point that the data used in the study has previously been used by other researchers (Lankford, 2009; Post and Panis, 2011; Mestrovic, 2007) and is therefore not thought to negatively impact the credibility of the study itself or any claims made as a result of the study. This project, however, differs vastly in its theoretical framework and scope from that of previous researchers. Unlike Lankford (2009), whose study focuses solely on the armed forces framework and dynamic in the transformation of ordinary people into cruel guards, the proposed study seeks to approach the issue from the individual and interactive angle as well painting a more comprehensive picture. Mestrovic (2007) on the other hand used the data from the court trials to show a bias in the judiciary system. Post and Panis (2011) rely on the data from both the court proceedings and the government reports to draw a comparison between Abu Ghraib and the Mi Lay massacre in terms of indoctrination. None of the authors, however, truly get to the heart of the question, which is what enabled the soldiers to torture at Abu Ghraib in the first place.

The particular research methods where chosen, because interviews and surveys where deemed inappropriate for the particular chase to be studied for a variety of reasons. This includes, legal barriers in obtaining the private contact information of U.S. citizens, financial restraints resulting from various interview locations across the United States, the issue of memory and providing adequate accounts of the facts; potential traumatization; as well as trust

issues, in terms of obtaining relevant information within a short period of time among other things.

This study consciously largely excludes institutional factors that have led to the Abu Ghraib torture scandal. The primary reason for this exclusion is that it has been extensively explained and criticized by previous authors. The involvement of the Bush administration at the highest levels of both the authorization, implementation and justification of torture has been explored in depth by various authors, including Mestrovic (2007), Danner (2004), and Lankford (2009). The failure to hold individuals responsible in this process and the structural failures within the U.S. military has also been explored at length by various authors, as well as a Senate inquiry and the Taguba Report. Little attention, however, has been paid to the various individual and group factors that have enabled this, as well as the interpersonal dynamic at the heart of torture, which is the gap in literature this study seeks to fill.

### **Critique of Methodology**

Grodin and Anas' (2007) framework was chosen in combination with Redekop's (2002) mimetic structures of violence to offer a comprehensive and interdisciplinary way of looking at the making of a torturer. Similar frameworks have been used by both Waller (2002) and Staub (1989) to investigate the perpetration of extreme forms of violence, which legitimizes the use of this particular theoretical framework for the purpose of this study, as will be demonstrated in this section.

Waller (2002) developed a model of extraordinary evil, which rests on the basis of three forces that shape the response to authority. He distinguishes between the actor, the context of the action and the definition of the target. When looking at the actor, he distinguishes between the ancestral shadow, that which makes us the same, and the identities of the perpetrators. Amongst

other things, he argues that the ancestral shadow causes a desire for social dominance, similar to Grodin and Anas' factor of group behaviour. Regarding the identities of the perpetrators themselves, his factors of cultural belief system, moral disengagement, and rational self-interest very much correspond with Grodin and Anas' individual psychological factors of dehumanization, numbing/splitting, and omnipotence. The context of the action, Waller argues, rests within a culture of cruelty. Much like Grodin and Anas' group psychological factors, he focuses on professional socialization, binding factors of the group, and the merger of the role and person. In regard to the definition of the target, Waller sees it as leading to the social death of the victims, which is caused by us-them thinking, the dehumanization of the victims, and the blaming of the victims. The us-them thinking and the blaming of the perpetrator are factors clearly present in mimetic structures of violence, both in terms of the forms of violence inflicted on the victims and the re-enactment of historical violent events, imitation of past structures of violence, and an on-going pattern of violence.

In his book *The Roots of Evil*, Ervin Staub (1989) explores the origins of genocides and other group violence, including torture. His framework, also touches on several factors used for the theoretical framework of this thesis and thereby further legitimizes its use. He argues that difficult life conditions lead to psychological consequences in terms of needs and goals. This corresponds with Grodin and Anas' (2007) individual psychological factor of re-establishing a sense of wanting to demonstrate omnipotence. Staub (1989) further argues that the psychological consequences then require ways of coping with them, which in turn corresponds with Grodin and Anas individual psychological factors of numbing and splitting. Staub (1989) sees the actions that follow to play out on a continuum of violence, which corresponds to Redekop's (2002) mimetic structures of violence. Staub (1989) also addresses the issue of the bystander, which

plays a role in Grodin and Anas' group factors of obedience to authority and diffusion of responsibility, but is a value-added concept that could be used in further research. Staub further argues that the societal-political organization of a group also plays a role in why and how people commit group violence, which is addressed by the factors of group behaviour, uniqueness of the group, training, and obedience to authority by Grodin and Anas (2007).

As has been demonstrated above, the theoretical framework used for the purpose of this study has various factors that have been used, albeit not concurrently or formulated in exactly the same way, by other authors in the field of social psychology of extreme violence to explain perpetrators behaviours and is therefore thought to be sound. It should be noted that this study focuses on the need to include a variety of factors, implying that no one factor is sufficient to explain the emergence of a capacity for torture. Rather than an in-depth study of any of the factors, this is an exploration of how they are all exemplified within the context of Abu Ghraib and how they interact together.

## Chapter 3: UNCAT, the Geneva Conventions, and liberal “Lawfare”

Before the analysis of factors involved in torture, it is important that we address the issue of whether and how the acts committed at Abu Ghraib can be understood as torture. While it is widely accepted by scholars that torture was committed at Abu Ghraib, there is a lack of discussion why it can be constituted as such. Furthermore, the court marshal trials at Fort Hood convicted the perpetrators of prisoner abuse and related charges, rather than torture, leaving unnecessary room for speculation on the matter. Additional vagueness is added by the literature on the social psychology of violence, as torture is generally discussed alongside genocide and ethnic cleansing as simply another form of extreme violence. For this purpose, this chapter seeks to analyze the case of Abu Ghraib in light of the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) and the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions. The first section will focus on how the case qualifies for torture and how it constitutes a clear violation of UNCAT and the Third and Fourth Geneva Convention. The second section will delve into the Bush administration’s justification of torture, while the third section will focus on liberal warfare and lawfare as the driving force behind the justifications and the reasons behind the perpetrators convictions for prisoner abuse and related charges, rather than torture.

### **UNCAT and the Geneva Conventions**

The United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) and the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions are the single most important set of documents governing the use of torture. This section will delineate how the offenses outlined in General Taguba’s report (2004) and the ICRC report (2004) on detention operations in Iraq that were found at Abu Ghraib detention facility clearly constitute torture per international norms.

## UNCAT

The United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) is based on three elements: The United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Being Subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. UNCAT consists of three distinct parts. The first part concerns itself with the definition, applicability and implementation of the Convention Against Torture. The second part defines the parameters of the UNCAT Committee, and the third part consists of the signatories to the Convention.

As stated in the previous chapter, the United Nations (1989) defines torture as:

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions. (Article 1, paragraph 1).

There are three parts to this definition. The first part is the type of suffering inflicted, the second, the intent of the perpetrator, and the third has to do with the authorization of the suffering and the capacity in which the perpetrator is acting.

In regards to the type of suffering inflicted, it is arguable that the events of Abu Ghraib fit into both the physical and mental categories mentioned in the definition and often times a merger of both.

In terms of the severe physical pain or suffering inflicted on detainees, General Taguba (2004) identified various instances, including the

punching, slapping and kicking detainees; jumping on their naked feet, as well as arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them, breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees, pouring cold water on naked detainees, beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair, sodomizing a detainee with chemical light and perhaps a broom stick, and allowing military dogs to bite a detainee. (16-18)

These findings are further corroborated by the Fay Report (2004) and the Schlesinger Report (2004). Many instances of physical pain or suffering further have a degrading dimension to them, in particular the sodomization of detainees as a form of sexual abuse.

In terms of the severe mental suffering inflicted on detainees, General Taguba (2004) identifies various instances in which this took place, including:

Forcing detainees to remove their clothing and keep them naked for several days at a time, videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees; forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing; forcing male detainees to wear women's underwear; forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped; positioning a naked detainee on a MRE box, with a sandbag on his head and attaching wires to his fingers, toes, and penis to simulate electric torture; writing "I am a Rapist" (sic) on the leg of a detainee alleged to have forcibly raped a 15-year-old fellow detainee, and then photographing him naked; placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainees neck and having a female soldier pose for a picture; taking photographs of dead Iraqi detainees. (416-417)

Some instances arguably qualify for both mental and physical harm, including: "a male MP guard having sex with a female detainee; using military work dogs (without muzzles) to intimidate and frighten detainees, and in at least one case, biting and severely injuring a detainee" (Taguba, 2004, 416-417).

The intent of the perpetrator as per this definition can take various forms, including obtaining information or a confession, punishment, intimidation, coercion or "for any reason" on the basis of discrimination. Several memoranda clearly delineate in the very least the intent of obtaining information: "the purpose of all interviews and interrogations is to get the most information from a detainee (...)" (DoD, 2003, 189).

The authorization of the act and the position of the perpetrator is also of paramount importance to the definition of torture. Rather than private citizens, the definition particularly targets government officials and private contractors. Members of the United States Armed Service clearly fall into this category, making the case of Abu Ghraib a clear case of Torture. In other words, whether every instance of torture was a form of eliciting information from the detainees is irrelevant as per the UNCAT definition of torture, as torture can further be employed for a wide range of other purposes including punishment, intimidation, coercion, or on the basis of discrimination.

### The Geneva Conventions

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is mandated by signatory countries to the Geneva Conventions to monitor the full application of and respect for the Geneva Conventions.

The ICRC Report, published in February 2004, found various instances of violations of the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions, regarding the “treatment of persons deprived of their liberty”. These include:

- Brutality against protected persons upon capture and initial custody, sometimes causing death or serious injury
- Absence of notification of arrest of persons deprived of their liberty to their families causing distress among persons deprived of their liberties and their families.
- Physical and psychological coercion during interrogation to secure information.
- Prolonged solitary confinement in cells devoid of daylight
- Excessive and disproportionate use of force against persons deprived of their liberty resulting in death or injury during their period of internment. (384)

The wording of detainees as “persons deprived of their liberty” was a strategic move by the ICRC for the purpose of not referring to prisoners of war, civilian internees, and other persons protected by the Geneva Convention to avoid determining a specific status of the persons in question.

Abu Ghraib is specifically mentioned in the report as one of the locations where these violations took place. The ICRC points out in their recommendations that

Torture and other forms physical and psychological coercion against prisoners of war and other interned persons for the purpose of extracting confessions or information is prohibited in all cases and under all circumstances without exception (Art.17 and 87, Third Geneva Convention; Art. 5, 31, and 32, Fourth Geneva Convention). (397)

In addition, they urge that “such violations of International Humanitarian Law should be thoroughly investigated in order to determine responsibilities and prosecute those found responsible (Art. 129, Third Geneva Convention and Art. 146, Fourth Geneva Convention)” (ICRC, 2004, 397).

In sum, the prohibition of torture is clearly laid out in the UNCAT, the Third and Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as the UCMJ. Furthermore, instances of torture have clearly been identified, and found support in the ICRC report on detention operations in Iraq during the period in question. This raises the question, as to why the perpetrators were not charged with torture in the aftermath of the investigations, which will be further explored in the next section.

### **Justifications for the use of torture**

In the aftermath of September 11th 2001, the Bush administration took various actions to ensure that the perpetrators are dealt with and that the events would not repeat themselves. Part of this effort, was a creeping effort to legalize torture for the primary goal of preventive action. Various memos have since been released, outlining these efforts and the justifications for them. The efforts were primarily targeted at discrediting both UNCAT and the Geneva Conventions considering the War on Terror, and based on the supremacy of the position of the Commander in Chief during times of War and the necessity of self-defence.

On January 18th 2002 President G.W. Bush publicly declared that the Geneva Conventions do not apply to the War on Terror. The justification for this was elaborated on by

the Office of the Legal Counsel and was three-fold: (1) it was determined that the President had the constitutional authority to determine this, (2) on the basis that Afghanistan is a failed State, and (3) because insurgents are not a government, but a militant, terrorist-like group. It was furthermore argued that this determination is applicable both to domestic and to international law. Powell's (2002) memorandum further lists several ramifications both in favour of and against taking this step of denying that the Geneva Conventions apply to this situation. Positive ramifications, he argues are that it "preserves flexibility" (Powell, 2002, 88) in terms of interrogation and detention practices, as well as potential future avenues of action, while it also "substantially reduces the threat of domestic criminal prosecution under the War Crimes Act (18 U.S.C. 2441)" (90). Among the negative ramifications listed are that the U.S. military would not be afforded protection under the Geneva Conventions either, widespread international condemnation, and the undermining of military culture by introducing an element of uncertainty (Powell, 2002, 88-90).

The UNCAT, as any international convention is subject to ratification by the respective signatories. The United States ratified UNCAT in 1994 (Heilprin, 2014). The Section of interest to this particular case is Section 2340A, which makes it a "criminal offense for any person outside the United States [to] commit or attempt to commit torture". The act of torture is defined as follows:

[an] act committed by a person acting under the color of law specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering (other than pain or suffering incidental to lawful sanctions) upon another person within its custody or physical control. (18 U.S.C §§2340-2340A)

Based on legal precedent from the medical field (West Va. Univ. Hosps., Inc. vs. Casey, 1991) assistant attorney general John S. Bybee (2002) in a memorandum to Alberto R. Gonzales argues that because the legal precedent treats "severe pain as an indicator of ailments that are likely to

result in permanent and serious physical damage in absence of immediate medical treatment” (119) and such damage must “rise to the level of death, organ failure, or the permanent impairment of a significant body function” (119). On this basis, he recommends that torture must therefore be treated the same, and “rise to a similarly high level – the level that would ordinarily be associated with a sufficiently serious physical condition or injury such as organ failure, or severe impairment of body functions – in order to constitute torture” (120). Furthermore, he argues that “the treaty (and hence the statute) prohibits only the worst forms of cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment”, which is based on further international precedent (133). One example cited is the case of Ireland vs the United Kingdom (1978), where the European Court of Human Rights concluded that the wall standing; hooding; subjection to noise; sleep deprivation; and the deprivation of food and drink, which were used in combination and over prolonged periods of time were degrading and inhumane but did not amount to torture (139).

An additional argument brought forth against the applicability of both Article 2340 of the United States Constitution, and by default UNCAT, is that Article 2340 is unconstitutional because it questions the authority of the Commander in Chief:

In order to respect the President’s inherent constitutional authority to manage a military campaign against al Qaeda and its allies, Section 2340A must be construed as not applying to interrogations undertaken pursuant to his Commander-in-Chief authority. As our office has consistently held during this Administration and previous Administrations, Congress lacks authority under Article I to set the terms and conditions under which the President may exercise his authority as Commander in Chief to control the conduct of operations during war. (Bybee, 2002, 203)

This power to detain and interrogate enemy combatants therefore arises out of his constitutional authority under conditions of war.

A further argument in defense of the use of torture is the argument of self-defence. As Bybee (2002) argues, “Standard criminal law defenses of necessity and self-defence could justify interrogation methods needed to elicit information to prevent a direct and imminent threat to the

United States and its citizens” (149). This defense finds its basis in “necessity”, which has been defined accordingly:

Conduct that the actor believes to be necessary to avoid harm or evil to himself or to another is justifiable, provided that:

- (a) The harm or evil sought to be avoided by such a conduct is greater than that sought to be prevented by the law defining the offense charged; and
- (b) Neither the Code nor other law defining the offense provides exceptions or defenses dealing with the specific situation involved; and
- (c) A legislative purpose to exclude the justification claimed does not otherwise plainly appear (Model Penal Code §3.02)

The arguments made by the United States Legal Department can therefore be summed up as follows: a disregard of the Geneva Conventions based on the status of the detainee, rather than the state’s treaty obligations, an alteration of the definition of torture on the basis of unconstitutionality of the 18. United States Constitution §§2340-2340A on the basis of supremacy of the Commander-in-Chief and the principle of self-defence.

### **Liberal Warfare and Lawfare**

It is crucial to note that these legal arguments and the contortion of the definitions surrounding torture and their applicability to victims is by no means an accident or unprecedented. Rather, it is a direct result of liberal warfare practices and what is now referred to as “lawfare.”

Liberal warfare relies heavily on legal discourse, and the War on Terror, is no different. In fact, many liberal military activists have spoken of “lawfare”: utilizing legal means to gain an advantage over an asymmetric opponent (Dunlap, 2001; Feith, 1985). Dunlap (2009) refers to it as “a resource that democratic militaries can – and should – use affirmatively” (35).

The arguments put forth by the Legal Counsel and the alteration of the definition of torture to accommodate the practice within the confines of legality are an excellent example of what Neuman (1996) refers to as anomalous zones, which “created in law, by law, outside of it,

or in an indeterminate unstable space bordering it show the margins – so often invisible – that can be extended to accommodate emergency situations” (Khalili, 2013, 66).

Linnartz (2008) argues that “Indeed, the struggle against terrorism has increased the demand for interrogational torture, thereby revealing the United States' failure to fully implement international norms against torture into its domestic law” (1486). However, as delineated above, the failure does not lie in a lack of implementation of UNCAT in domestic law, inasmuch as a systematic undermining and nullification of domestic laws under the pretence of Presidential authority and the principle of self-defence.

Ben-Eliezer (1998)’s account of the Israeli experience is strikingly similar, where the Geneva Conventions had to be sidelined, since article 17 of the Geneva Conventions do not allow for interrogations and trials. In other words, rather than viewing the domestic laws to apply to the treaty obligation of the Geneva Convention, it was applied to the situation of the detainee (Tira, 2010).

Khalili (2013) argues that “The certitude and density of legal discourse, the conventions of repetition and precedent, the insistence on the stability of rules and procedures in legal practice – all these conceal the extraordinary ancestries invoked and conjure legitimacy out of atrocity” (66). In other words, the legal discourse surrounding torture defers to an extent to the reality of these acts and the longstanding history they enjoy in Western civilization.

This ultimately resulted in the conviction of the perpetrators of Abu Ghraib for charges related to prisoner abuse, rather than torture, because the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) used for the court martial, is inherently tied to domestic laws, and therefore definitions. General Metz, the prosecuting judge appointed to the court martial process of Abu Ghraib, points out that the acts did not qualify as torture, because they did not meet the standards of levels of

damage to the victims that “rose to the level of death, organ failure, or the permanent impairment of a significant body function” (ACLU, Graner, 2004). In other words, lawfare was an important part in framing the acts of torture as justifiable. Dating back to 2001, one can assume that this condoning of torture was done at the very beginning of the War on Terror campaign, and most certainly prior to the incidents that occurred at Abu Ghraib.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The case of Abu Ghraib clearly meets the standards of the definition of torture as laid out by UNCAT and which has further been confirmed by the ICRC’s (2003) report on detention operations in Iraq. The perpetrators were not convicted of torture however, due to an alteration of domestic laws, justified by the supremacy of the Commander-in-chief during times of war and the statute of self-defence. This constitutes a clear example of lawfare, in which the domestic laws are altered to “even the playing field” in asymmetric warfare.

The case of Abu Ghraib will be treated as torture regardless of the legal justifications discussed above. Rather, the project seeks to understand what would bring people to commit these acts. However, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter the lawfare aspect of torture does play a role in the individual and group psychology, as well as mimetic structures of violence discussed in the subsequent chapters.

## Chapter 4: Individual Psychological Factors

Grodin and Annas' (2007) study of Nazi doctors applies a variety of individual psychological factors to explain ordinary people being turned into torturers. The theories proposed by them, will be applied to the case of Abu Ghraib and include: dehumanization, splitting, numbing, and omnipotence. Kaminer and Stein (2001) stress the importance of taking individual factors into account, arguing that "while the individual characteristics of perpetrators are certainly insufficient to explain human cruelty on a mass scale, they cannot be ignored" (475). This chapter will outline these factors and how they contribute to the making of a torturer in the case of Abu Ghraib, by providing examples from the data examined to exemplify each factor in the case of Abu Ghraib.

### **Dehumanization**

Research on the process of dehumanization first emerged in the aftermath of World War II and centred primarily on contexts of overt conflict and hostility. The process of dehumanization as a concept has been studied extensively and is characterized as a psychological process that strips the other of their group identity (Kelman, 1973), places them outside of normal moral considerations (Bandura et al., 1975), or highlights the divergence of values between the in and out group (Struch and Schwartz, 1989), and facilitates violence against said group. Two forms of dehumanization have been identified by Bernard et al. (1995), which are interrelated forms of shielding oneself against painful and overwhelming emotions. Self directed dehumanization entails a diminished sense of one's own individuality and human qualities. Object-directed dehumanization entails a misconception of others as lacking or deficient in those attributes that particularly characterize being human. They provide protection from both internal stress and external stress and are mutually reinforcing in terms of a "reduction of fullness of

one's feelings for other human beings (...) impoverishes one's sense of self, and any lessening of the humanness of one's self-image limits one's capacity for relating to others" (Jackson, 1968, 666).

Haslam and Loughan (2014) found that dehumanization takes place along a spectrum from blatant to mild. Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz, and Cotterill (2015) however, found that only "blatant dehumanization was generally the strongest and most consistent predictor of extreme outcome measures like support for torture" (924). They further argue that "the prevalence of blatant dehumanization in a population will likely depend on characteristics of the outgroup under consideration," in particular, in terms of the perceived level of threat posed to the ingroup by said outgroup (Kteily et al., 2015, 925). In the case of Abu Ghraib, this is of particular importance, as General Taguba (2004) pointed out in his report, the prison's proximity to civilian hubs posed an increased danger to the military personnel posted there and they frequently found themselves under direct attack, unlike other detention centres in Iraq, such as Camp Bucca.

Various researchers have further explored how groups associate specific social groups with animals, including Nazi propaganda depicting Jews as pests, Anti-Abolitionists depicting African Americans as apes, and Eastern Europeans openly referring to Roma as vermin. In this regard, Kteily et al. (2015) argue that "the categorical denial of membership in this most basic of superordinate identities - 'human' - signals otherness in a profound way that can have dire consequences" (902).

Dehumanization at Abu Graib took various forms, including treating prisoners "like animals" and depriving them from basic necessities, including clothing, bedding, food and water. The most striking example of dehumanization takes the shape of treating the detainees quite literally "like animals." Evidence of this is provided both by detainee statements, as well as

statements by U.S. service members present at the time. This type of dehumanization is rooted in a deeply held belief in the subjugation of animals, clearly present in both the detainees and the guards respectively. It arguably originates in patriarchal dualisms, where man is superior to nature.

One detainee recalls, that “Some of the things they did was make me sit down like a dog, and they would hold the string from the bag and they made me bark like a dog and they were laughing at me” (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 484).

When Sergeant Joiner was asked whether he ever saw “Gus” [a detainee] having to crawl around like a dog, he responded with “No that didn't happen on my shift,” implying that this did in fact happen and he was aware of it (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 518).

A further aspect of this dehumanization was the withholding of basic necessities. One detainee recalls that “they treated us like animals, not like humans (...) After that they left us for the next two days naked with no clothes, with no mattresses, as if we were dogs” (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 516)

Similarly, another detainee recalls during an interview that he was degraded by having soldiers ride on him:

Q: What were the guards doing while you were crawling on your hands and knees?

A: They were sitting on our backs like riding animals. (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 501)

Dehumanization at Abu Ghraib also took on a sexualized tone. Specialist Wisdom recalls an incident of precisely this nature when he was visiting the hard site for a prison transfer.

When I arrived at the ISO area I saw one prisoner on his knees with his mouth open and another prisoner masturbating with his penis in the prisoner on his knees face. Both of the prisoners were entirely naked. The only person I saw near these two prisoners was SSG FREDERICK. I called out for SSG FREDERICK, and he turned towards me and said "See what these animals do when we leave them alone for two seconds". (ACLU, CID, 2004)

The examples clearly show that dehumanization occurred at Abu Ghraib, and primarily took the shape of treating detainees like animals, including making them imitate animals and riding on their backs as though they were animals. Furthermore, prisoners were additionally dehumanized by being forced to masturbate and then being referred to as animals because they simply “couldn’t control their sexual urges.”

### **Splitting/ Doubling & Numbing**

The concepts of splitting or “doubling” and numbing were first developed by Rank and further elaborated on by Lifton (1968) in a study of Nazi doctors. Bostock (2010) argues that “Doubling is the division of personality into two functioning wholes that can operate independently, often serving a need for survival, but also allowing a granting of license to commit evil (...) Moreover, doubling can be seen as a collective phenomenon.” (280) Lifton (1968) argues for example, that “German vulnerability to doubling (...) intensified by the historical dislocations and fragmentations of cultural symbols following the First World War” (429). He further argues that splitting as a model of personality enables people to deal with trauma more effectively: “For the perpetrator, splitting can be used to rationalize and justify his actions, and through reaction formation he can convince himself that he is doing good, or even that he is a hero” (Groding and Annas, 2007, 640).

Arguably, the events of 9/11 have had a similar effect on the potential for doubling in the American public. The justification of acts of torture to the American public and the seeming acceptance and applause for stating that the Geneva Conventions are null and void in regards to the War on Terror can be seen as part of this doubling, especially once combined with statements such as standing for freedom, democracy, and American values. This effectively grants license to extreme violence, while still portraying ones’ own actions as good and heroic.

Splitting is intrinsically connected to numbing, which allows the perpetrator to further distance themselves from the victim. Lifton (1995) defines it as

A diminished capacity or inclination to feel. Hiroshima survivors remember witnessing at the time of the bomb terrible scenes of suffering – nothing less than a sea of death around them – but found very quickly that they simply ceased to feel. They spoke of “paralysis of the mind”, of “becoming insensitive to human death”, of being “temporarily without feeling”. This useful defense mechanism prevents the mind from being overwhelmed and perhaps destroyed by the dreadful and unimaginable images confronting it. (58)

In addition, Lifton (1986) argues that “Psychic numbing diminishes the capacity to feel. Blocking feelings leads to extreme repression, including denial to the point of disavowal of what one perceives and de-realization to the point that the victim never existed in the perpetrators’ consciousness.” (Grodin and Annas, 641)

Thus psychic numbing on a large scale following human catastrophe can be an important precondition for the often fatal decision to turn to a leader who may offer a radical solution perhaps disguised as hard measures. A community may be forced to turn to the use of doubling as it deals with the moral problems created as the true nature of the hard measures become apparent. (Bostock, 2010, 281)

Bostock’s argument in fact offers an explanation for much of the debate that took place in the aftermath of the revelation of Abu Ghraib in 2004. The most striking example of this is embodied by Sgt Wallin. In his interview with CID he recalls several incidents of abuse, including prisoners being made to wear female underwear, a detainee who “had a 2 ½ inch laceration on his chin, which ran along his jaw bone and required about 13 stitches. At the time I evaluated the detainee, I observed blood on the wall near a metal weld, which I believe to be the place where the detainee received his injury.”; and a particular incident where a detainee was slapped because he refused sustenance (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 472).

All of these instances constitute some form of abuse, with the latter one clearly constituting physical abuse. When asked if he had ever witnessed any form of abuse or heard of

any form of abuse, however, Sgt. Wallis argues that he has not. This constitutes a rather striking example of psychic numbing, as it denies reality entirely.

### **Omnipotence**

Omnipotence occurs on the group and individual levels. When a larger group feels omnipotent it then influences the way individuals perceive themselves. Lifton (1986) identified this tendency towards omnipotence in the American fabric at an early stage during the Cold War, and later again with the Bush administration and in the aftermath of 9/11. This tendency can be seen in the case of Abu Ghraib in several ways: firstly, in the way several perpetrators signed up for the military in the immediate aftermath of 9/11; in terms of justifying torture for the purpose of “preventing further harm” and retaliation to overcome a sense of powerlessness; and ultimately in acts of torture of a sexual nature.

On the national level, Lifton (2001) identified the danger as lying in the self-perception of being a superpower:

A superpower, by definition, transcends ordinary limits of power when, as today, there is only one nation so designated, its leaders and its citizens as well run the danger of feeling themselves to be part of something that is more than natural, that is mystical even omnipotent and deified (tendencies hardly absent from American history in general). Above all a superpower cannot be vulnerable, and any indication of vulnerability or weakness must be negated. (29)

The negation of this vulnerability took shape in “the Global War on Terror” campaign initiated by the Bush administration in an effort to root out those who have dared to question the immortality and omnipotence of the United States and its citizens. This particular sentiment drew a large number of people to fulfill, what can best be described as their “civic duty”, and sign up for the military in the aftermath of 9/11. Court records reveal that several of the perpetrators signed up for the military in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, including Graner, Ambuhl, England, and Davis. (ACLU, CID, 2004)

Omnipotence, as Lifton (1986) argues, merges with sadism when it leads to abuse, while simultaneously causing a sense of powerlessness. Perpetrators will take pleasure in domination and control, “but they still need to eradicate their own vulnerability and susceptibility to pain and death” (Grodin and Annas, 2007, 641). The anxiety over powerlessness then merges into “pride at being part of their country’s war machine” (641). Lifton (1985) describes Nazi doctor Mengele’s sense of omnipotence in his study of him:

His impulse toward omnipotence and total control of the world around him were means of fending off anxiety and doubt, fears of falling apart - ultimately, fear of death. That fear also activated his sadism and extreme psychic numbing. He could quiet his fears of death in that death-dominated environment by performing the ultimate act of power over another person: murder. (16)

In fact, one could go as far as to argue that this symbiosis of omnipotence and fear of one’s own mortality is built into the very fabric of torture. Going to extreme lengths to obtain information for the sake of prevention of further attacks is precisely what drove torture at Abu Ghraib, including the legal justifications that sanctioned them. There are several examples from the detainees and military personnel present at Abu Ghraib during the time of the offences that point towards evidence of omnipotence as an individual psychological factor in facilitating these acts of torture.

When asked to recall any instances of prisoner abuse and unusual behaviour, Sgt. Wallin recalls that he witnessed one detainee being struck by a military police guard and then continues to saying:

I do not think that SGT — struck the detainee out of anger but rather to show the detainee that his assaults upon the corrections personnel would not be allowed to go unpunished. Also, this detainee had made verbal threats on several occasions that he would kill members of the prison staff. (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 472)

The detainee making verbal threats towards the prison staff seemingly justifies the actions of the MP in Sgt Wallin's mind. The anxiety over powerlessness at these threats appears to therefore justify the domination that was exerted over the prisoner by striking him.

Furthermore, detainee statements also provide some further insight into this fear of vulnerability of the perpetrators: "The guards started to hit me on my broken leg several times with a solid plastic stick. He told me he got shot in his leg and he showed me the scar and he would retaliate from me for this" (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 524). The guard who showed the detainee his scarred leg from combat, thereby justifying his actions towards the detainee.

There were various acts of torture that one would instinctively classify as "sexual sadism," including several instances of rape. Witness statements of both soldiers and detainees corroborate that there were a large number of these instances and they have been found to be credible by General Taguba's Report (2004).

Rape and torture have in common that they are heavily shrouded in myth, in the popular sense of the term, including that rape is driven by sexual sadism of one form or another, much as how torture has been thought to be driven by sadism. While there are rapists driven by sadism, the psychological basis for rape has been tied to an urge to dominate (2002) argue that "Psychologically, rape is sexualized violence in which the perpetrator desires to dominate or control the injured party rather than to experience ultimate erotic fulfillment" (Pardue and Arrigo, 2008, 379-380). When taking this angle, and looking at rape as a form of domination, one can argue that it played an integral part in omnipotence as an individual psychological factor. Rape and other forms of sexual humiliation (e.g. forced masturbation; threat of rape, etc.) were used as a form of domination over the detainees to exert the perpetrators sense of omnipotence.

Omnipotence as an individual psychological factor of torture thus took on various shapes at Abu Ghraib. Driven by the enrolment into the armed forces in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, perpetrators exerted their sense of omnipotence under the pretext of preventing further harm and by raping and sexually degrading the detainees at Abu Ghraib prison.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In sum, there is significant evidence that points to dehumanization, splitting, numbing and omnipotence playing vital roles in the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib. Each of these individual psychological factors is intrinsically connected to the process that prompts an individual to turn into a torturer. Dehumanization of the other, leading to the dehumanization of the self, paves part of the way, but it is connected to splitting, numbing and omnipotence in that these factors allow the perpetrator to further distance themselves from their victim in such a way that they can still function.

Individual psychological factors, however, are not sufficient in explaining why ordinary people turn into torturers. None of the evidence suggests that any of the incidents of torture at Abu Ghraib were perpetrated by a single person at any given point in time. Rather, torture generally occurred in a group setting, not only within the obvious military setting, but as a group activity. It is therefore imperative that the next step in analysing the factors that contribute to turning ordinary people into torturers be that of group factors.

## Chapter 5: Group Factors

Individual psychological factors are not sufficient for explaining acts of torture, primarily because these acts are committed as part of a larger group. This is in part also reflected in the United Nation's definition of torture, in regards to torture having to be "inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity." An act of torture can therefore not be solely committed by an individual, but must be committed by an individual or group in the service of an authority. This chapter combines the theoretical categories laid out by Grodin's and Annas' (2007) study of Nazi doctors with the data examined on Abu Ghraib in order to demonstrate how ordinary people are turned into torturers via group psychological factors. The examples provided for each category serve to exemplify the theoretical categories. The group factors that will be assessed in this chapter include obedience to authority, diffusion of responsibility, group behaviour, uniqueness of the group, and training. In the following sections, each of these factors will be explored, in connection with the torture cases of Abu Ghraib. In addition, the chapter will briefly address the concept of "crimes of obedience," autonomy, and the moral question of the responsibility to resist.

### **Obedience to Authority**

Obedience to authority is a driving factor in allowing for ordinary people to commit acts of torture and has been continuously debated since Hannah Arendt's (1963) concept of the "banality of evil." Stanley Milgram's (1961) experiments at Yale University uncovered that 65% of research subjects used what they believed were dangerous levels of electro-shocks when experimenters told them to do so, believing that the authority figure would accept responsibility for the final outcome. Milgram proposes three categories of reasons for obeying or disobeying

authority: (1) personal history of family/school background that encourages either obedience or defiance; (2) a feeling of comfort derived from obeying authority; and (3) a sense of discomfort when disobeying authority (Milgram, 1961).

The court proceedings of Armin Cruz in 2004 provide some insight into the tendency towards obedience to authority. When an unknown Sergeant was asked in Cruz's Court Martial trial how Cruz treated his superiors he stated that:

I think he has an overwhelming respect for his superiors. I think that, in my opinion, just the time he was in HHD, I think he's kind of a reflection of his superiors. We've got some pretty good leaders, the first sergeant and company commander, at the time, the brigade commander and sergeant major, and then I was there. He did—he looked for approval from his superiors, and I would give him, you know, I would tell him, "Hey, you did a good job here." It was almost like, to me, it was like giving a kid a toy at Christmas. It just made him feel good knowing that his superiors said, you know, good things about him. (ACLU, Cruz, 2004)

Similar statements were made by an unknown Captain who also acted as a character witness for Cruz, when he was asked how he treats his superiors:

With dignity-and respect; it's never unwavering.' Whenever I've approached him, he's popped a salute right away. It wasn't something that was like, you know, very slow motion or anything like that. It was very popped, "Good morning, sir. Good afternoon, sir." It was always a greeting, very respectful. (ACLU, Cruz, 2004)

In other words, Cruz was well disposed toward obeying authority. In addition to this, however, the findings suggest that there are additional factors involved. It appears that screening for obedience to authority is not sufficient in achieving it. Rather, in addition to the factors named above, it further requires the systematic silencing of members of the group who speak out against the acts of torture they witness. This process of quenching any disobedience has been addressed by local employees – both the prison and military service members alike.

One of the translators working at Abu Ghraib was asked why he didn't report that what he felt was abuse of the prisoners, to which he answered that he thought it was his job to get the truth and didn't know who he would report abuse to (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 498-500).

Similarly, Sgt Provance reported that he was being systematically discouraged from speaking up against the torture that took place at Abu Ghraib:

Every time I said something about how I was worried about the treatment of the detainees, they would either say, they are the enemy and if I was out there they would kill me, so they didn't care. I'm glad that something is finally being done, it's kind of shameful what's been going on (Arthur and Pierron, 2004, 482)

These statements indicate, that while several soldiers knew that torturing prisoners was wrong and some attempted to put a stop to it, their attempts were either quenched by the chain of command, or by extension discouraged others from speaking out as well as they saw that speaking out would not put a stop to it.

Additionally, there are also examples of superiors stepping in to stop the torture from occurring, but whose orders were disobeyed, which may have in part been due to confusion surrounding the appropriate chain of command. Specialist Sivits recalls in regards to the events leading up to the pyramid pictures that

SFC SNYDER was upstairs in the office area, and I think he happened to look over the railing when SGT DAVIS was stomping on the detainee's foot. I know when he saw that, he immediately told SGT DAVIS to stop. When SFC SNYDER told SGT DAVIS to stop, he said it in a very commanding, stern voice. He seemed to be very angry because I have never heard him use that tone of voice before. To be honest, that's why I remember it, because when heard him say that, I was surprised to hear the tone of voice from him. I know that's the only incident that SFC SNYDER saw because he left shortly afterwards.

Q: When SFC SNYDER left, did the abuse continue?

A: Yes,

Q: In your mind, do you believe SFC SNYDER thought that no more abuse would continue and that what he witnessed was an isolated incident?

A: Yes.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because he is the Platoon Sergeant, and all his people respect him and do what he tells them. He told SGT DAVIS to stop, and I'm sure he thought that was the end of it.

(ACLU, CID, 2004)

In sum, while predisposition and screening towards obedience to authority, is certainly a factor in some cases, it is insufficient in explaining obedience to authority overall. There were several witness statements indicating that any disobedience or questioning of authority at Abu

Ghraib was systematically suppressed either directly, or in the case of the translator, indirectly. In addition, there are also examples of military personnel disobeying direct orders from their superiors in regards to stopping the abuse, as Sivit's statements indicate. As General Taguba (2004) points out in his report this may be symptomatic of a lack of coherence and leadership strength in the chain of command.

### **Diffusion of Responsibility**

The concept of diffusion of responsibility is important to explore in this context for three reasons: firstly, it explains why ordinary people can be turned into torturers by diminishing their sense of agency; secondly, it explains why a large number of individuals witnessed or were aware of the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib and did not step in to stop it from happening over a period of several months; and thirdly, it explains to a large extent why the perpetrators generally received very low court martial sentences considering the nature of the offence. Diffusion of responsibility is closely connected with obedience to authority and was put forth by Zimbardo as a result of his findings in the Stanford Prison Experiment. Zimbardo's (1972) experiment simulated prison life amongst college students, but became so violent that it had to be terminated early. Amongst the findings, he included that the "guards" placed all "responsibility for their actions on the researcher and the group as a whole, rather than accepting blame for individual actions" (Grodin and Annas, 2007, 643). In other words, individuals who act on their own feel more responsible for their actions than if the actions are performed in a group setting (LeBon, 1895; Zimbardo, 1970).

The findings provide mixed results, indicating that there may be additional factors involved. On the one hand, there are large numbers of individuals who both witnessed torture and were in the possession of the photographs and yet remained silent, arguably, because they did not feel responsible for the actions that occurred. On the other hand, however, all of the

individuals involved assumed responsibility for their actions in regards to confessing their actions to the internal investigators that were appointed months prior to the Red Cross Report (2004) and the scandal breaking on NBC. Overall, however, it can be said that there was a clear pattern of diffusion of responsibility at Abu Ghraib, taking the form of individuals not taking responsibility for their actions, as well as the bystander effect, and attribution theory.

One example of this diffusion of responsibility is a statement made by Lynndie England in the award-winning documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008). In an interview with the director Errol Morris about the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib she argues, “We thought it was unusual and weird and wrong, but when we first got there the example was already set. That’s what we saw. I mean, pff it was O.K.!” (*Standard Operating Procedure*, 2008, 00:10:10-00:10:30). England transfers all responsibility for the torture at Abu Ghraib to the group.

The phenomenon commonly referred to as the “bystander effect” is a direct extension of this. In fact, there is strong empirical evidence demonstrating that individuals are less likely to help a victim if there are other individuals present (Feidman and Rosen, 1978). The most notable social psychologist on the subject matter is Ervin Staub (1989) who, motivated by an urge to understand the Holocaust, helped theorize the relationship between perpetrators and bystanders “along the continuum of destruction” and noted the vital role bystander passivity had in encouraging perpetrators. Lynndie England and Megan Ambuhl both pointed out in *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) that pictures of the torture that was occurring at Abu Ghraib were widely circulated amongst the soldiers. Yet, other than Joseph Darby, they did not act to report the incidents. This suggests that the bystander effect may have played a role in why the torture kept going on for months. If soldiers were aware that others were in possession of the pictures

as well, why would they report it if no one else had. The perpetrators in turn may have felt justified or encouraged by their comrades' silence.

In addition, Bem's (1970) attribution theory argues that the same logic is applied when judging the behaviour of other individuals. Consequently, we attribute more responsibility to individuals acting by themselves than we do to those acting within a group setting. Feidman and Rosen's (1978) study confirms this hypothesis and found that there is indeed a "significant inverse relationship between the number of participants and the degree of attributed responsibility" (313). Furthermore, when they analysed archival data of prison sentences for convicted individual and group robbers, they found that "there was a diffusion of responsibility: criminals acting alone received significantly longer sentences than perpetrators who had committed a similar crime, but who had acted with others" (313).

In sum, diffusion of responsibility clearly occurred at Abu Ghraib, both in the sense that people did not take responsibility for their own actions, as well as in terms of the presence of the bystander effect and attribution theory. While some individuals placed the blame for their actions elsewhere, others never reported the incidents due to the bystander effect, and the prosecution of the case itself is an example of attribution theory, as the judge handed out low sentences because the individuals acted as part of a group rather than on their own.

### **Group Behaviour**

Grodin and Annas (2007) argue that group behaviour tends to rely on three factors: (1) diminishing the conscious individual personality; (2) focusing thought and feelings in a common direction; and (3) unconscious dominance by the group over the individual's reason and judgement. This leads to ordinary people being more effective torturers, particularly in the military, a hierarchically structured setting (Grodin and Annas, 2007). At Abu Ghraib group

behaviour was very much dominated by the counterinsurgency mission at stake and influenced by the military setting.

The conscious individual personality is severely diminished within a military setting, primarily because of its hierarchical structure and the basic training, which instils this diminishing of the individual personality significantly. This aspect is further expanded on in the section on training as a group psychological factor.

Additionally, the thoughts and feelings of the soldiers were focused on the mission: to find the bad guys and make them talk. While this already took place at the pre-recruitment phase, as many soldiers enrolled in the aftermath of 9/11, it was further exacerbated during training and deployment. Examples for this aspect of group behaviour come both from the Schlesinger Report (2004) and the interviews conducted with soldiers. What is particularly striking is the focus on intelligence collection for the purpose of preventing further attacks.

The Schlesinger Report (2004) argues that human intelligence collection has become increasingly important in the context of asymmetric warfare.

Massed forces and equipment characteristic of the Cold War era, Desert Storm, or even Phase I of Operation Iraqi Freedom relied largely on signals and imagery intelligence. The intelligence problem then was primarily one of monitoring known military sites, troop locations and equipment concentrations. The problem today, however, is discovering new information on widely dispersed terrorist and insurgent networks. Human intelligence often provides the clues to understand these networks, enabling the collection of intelligence from other sources. Information derived from interrogations is an important component of this human intelligence, especially in the Global War on Terror. (64)

Intelligence activities were without a doubt of vital importance in the counterinsurgency efforts themselves, in addition to the safety of Abu Ghraib. An intelligence officer recalls:

Abu Ghraib was hit by a mortar barrage, hit two Americans and about 16 others. We went to do an interrogation on the “wolf,” the cell leader of the group of people that mortared the prison (*Standard Operating Procedure*, 00:27:50-00:28:15).

The mission, in this sense was therefore not remote to the individuals involved, but rather very real with daily attacks occurring both outside the prison as well as on the inside.

Furthermore, group behaviour depends on the unconscious dominance by the group over reason and judgment of the individual. In regards to the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib, this is best illustrated by Jeremy Sivits who testified that he did not report the torture he witnessed to the Chain of Command, because he was asked not to, “I try to be friends with everyone. I see now where trying to be friends with everyone gets ya” (ACLU, CID, 2004). In Sivits's case, his loyalty to the group trumped his own reason and judgement.

Group behaviour at Abu Ghraib seemingly played an integral role and was therefore determined by the military setting itself leading to a diminished conscious individual personality, the counterinsurgency efforts and high threat levels creating a mission oriented mindset, as well as a loyalty to the own group creating an unconscious dominance by the group over the individual's reason and judgement.

### **Uniqueness of the Group**

Adding the uniqueness of a group as a factor aids in painting a picture as to why groups participate in torture in the first place. When a group has a shared mystique and common values, members in turn develop camaraderie, a devotion to the organizational ideology and cause, and a sense that they are part of an elite. Taking pride in performing difficult and important tasks leads to complete subordination to the organization and after a certain level of indoctrination, prevents individual members from resisting participation in torture (Grodin and Annas, 2007). This factor is embodied by an anonymous Lieutenant Colonel with the 800th Military Police Brigade stated in an interview that “I came here because I believe in what the president says and I believe in our way of life and that we can make a difference” (Taguba, Annex 48, 11).

The American military as a group are unique in that they share two common fundamental principles that are at the basis of what Grodin and Annas (2007) discuss: the concept of the citizen soldier and military professionalism.

Aristotle's notion of civil republicanism as a virtue demands that citizens take an active role in defending the polis (Mason, 2002). As Cake, (2009) argues, the "Roman and American notion of the citizen soldier draw their foundations from this concept of civic republicanism and virtuous service" (32). The mobilization of American citizens in the aftermath of 9/11 is an example of this call to virtue by citizen soldiers, while simultaneously having a shared cause and ideology. As pointed out in the Fay Report (2004),

A clear vote of confidence should be extended by the senior leadership to the leaders and Soldiers who continue to perform extraordinarily in supporting our Nation's wartime mission. Many of our soldiers have paid the ultimate sacrifice to preserve the freedoms and liberties that America and our Army represent throughout the world. (991)

This notion of sacrificing in order to preserve the values of the nations is an example of this concept of the citizen soldier.

American military professionalism rests on the notions of duty to country, support of the government of the day, and keeping the military at arm's length from the operations of civilian governance (Cake, 2009). Soldiers take pride in their profession and are highly specialized and trained as part of a larger organization, the military establishment. This becomes particularly evident in the Major General Fay's Report (2004) on the Investigation of Intelligence Activities at Abu Ghraib, where he states that

Leaders and Soldiers throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom were confronted with a complex and dangerous operational environment. Although a clear breakdown in discipline and leadership, the events at Abu Ghraib should not blind us to the noble conduct of the vast majority of our soldiers. We are a value based profession in which the clear majority of our soldiers take great pride. (991)

These two notions are fundamental when discussing group factors, as they are what makes the group unique, in a sense an what gives the individuals involved a sense of pride, shared values, camaraderie, eliteness and devotion to the group's cause and ideology. The following section on training will go further in depth on this subject matter, as it combines the various aspects previously discussed in the context of training.

## **Training**

Training is a crucial aspect in the formation of torturers and includes indoctrination and abuse, while carefully selecting members for obedience to authority. Groups are then able to shape torturers by screening for intellect, physical ability, and positive identification with the political regime, which fosters ideas of eliteness and othering, and group binding via basic training, a set of initiation rites (including isolation from non-group members), and the imposition of new rules and values, as well as the development of an elitist attitude and in-group language. Furthermore, training promotes the dehumanization of the self and other, harassment and intimidation to prevent logical thinking, as well as instilling instinctive responses, rewarding obedience, and employing group violence, ultimately leading to the desensitization to and routinization of violence (Grodin and Annas, 2007, 645-6). Several of these points have already been explored as either individual psychological factors in Chapter three or in the current chapter as group psychological factors. Furthermore, it is crucial to highlight that this section discusses training primarily in theory, due to the lack of information regarding the individual perpetrator's records of their basic training. Regardless, it is presumed that basic training in the U.S. military is fairly uniform and does not require additional individual data in this case. As pointed out by the Taguba Report (2004), the military personnel posted at Abu Ghraib was an amalgamation of various units and Brigades that did not have previous training experience as a group prior to deployment. Some aspects of training will therefore be discussed in regards to "on the job

training” in particular in regards to group violence. The following section will therefore only briefly address each of these points in connection to the case of Abu Ghraib as part of a larger discussion of torture and training in a military setting.

Lankford (2009) points out that “it appears that the U.S. military’s recruitment and training procedures set the basic foundation for torture” (389). The reasoning behind this is that military recruitment and training focuses largely on obedience to authority, dehumanization and other related factors. In fact, Staub (1989) argues that there is not necessarily a need for torture specific training. Rather, he writes, it “might be unnecessary in groups with well-established hierarchal systems (..) the relatively sudden onset of large-scale torture in Argentina suggests that military personnel, who were the perpetrators, did not need special training in obedience. Military training itself aims to produce obedience” (245). As addressed in the previous section devoted to obedience to authority, while there is evidence that some of the perpetrators were inclined towards obedience to authority, others did not feel comfortable with the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib, but were continuously discouraged from speaking out against it by the authorities involved. In addition, the only instances, where soldiers disobeyed orders by their superiors can likely be attributed to the confusion in regards to the chain of command at Abu Ghraib, as pointed out by General Taguba’s report (2004).

The screening for intellect, physical ability, and positive identification with the political regime, is another factor in the formation of the torturer in regards to training (Grodin and Annas, 2007). Charles Graner, for example had a college education and received sports scholarships, as testified by relatives during his court martial trial. In addition to these intellectual and physical ability screening factors, he arguably also positively identified with the political regime at the time, the Bush administration, as he, along with many of his colleagues,

enlisted shortly after 9/11 (ACLU, Graner, 301). In fact, Miles (2006) points out that military recruitment hit an all-time high in the aftermath of 9/11 with many recruits answering the call for an aggressive response against Al-Qaida.

As pointed out by Grodin and Annas (2007) this screening process then fosters ideas of eliteness and othering. In this case, the eliteness and othering took place against the backdrop of 9/11. As Marine Major Stewart Upton argued, the new recruits “feel like they are part of something important. They feel like they are needed in this Global War on Terror” (Miles, 2006).

The eliteness and othering initiated during basic training was then exacerbated in a detention facility context, particularly by General Miller, who firmly believed in the dehumanization of prisoners. As Adams (2006) points out

The normal inhibitions that might have prevented those who perpetrated the abuses from doing so may have been further weakened by a shared belief that the prisoners were somehow less than human — that getting information out of them was more important than protecting their rights and dignity as human beings. For example, in an interview with the BBC on June 15, 2004, Brigadier General Karpinski stated that she had been told by Major General Miller — who was later placed in charge of Iraqi prisons and had served as commander at Guantánamo Bay — that the Iraqi prisoners “are like dogs and if you allow them to believe at any point that they are more than a dog then you’ve lost control of them.” (691)

The shared belief that the detainees were less than human and needed to be treated like dogs has been addressed in the previous chapter, but its origin is nonetheless found in basic training itself, and was exacerbated in the theatre.

The initial selection process also fosters group binding via basic training, a set of initiation rites (including isolation from non-group members), and the imposition of new rules and values (Grodin and Annas, 2007). As Lankford (2009) points out group binding takes place during basic training in terms of performing tasks together as a group. In addition, Browning (1998) argues that

Basic training emphasizes the value of unity. Although there are many reasons to encourage strong relationships among soldiers, this also increases the pressure of individuals to conform to subculture norms. Within the military system, the decision to disobey an order – even one that is ethically questionable – becomes an act of abandonment against one’s peers, who will then be left to carry a heavy burden because of the slight. (Lankford, 2009, 390)

Group binding during basic training in regards to fellow soldiers, however, is insufficient in regards to the context of Abu Ghraib, as the soldiers posted there came from various different units and have often never trained together prior to deployment (Taguba, 2004). It is arguable, however, that basic training laid the foundation for this group binding process in terms of the “military family” and not necessarily particular fellow soldiers.

Furthermore, the selection process fosters the development of an elitist attitude and in-group language (Grodin and Annas, 2007). The military is particularly famous for in-group language, as soldiers are trained to use specific vocabulary and abbreviations to communicate with each other, both during basic training and throughout their professional development. Halbe (2011) characterizes the military as a “social network (Milroy 1987) and community of practice (Wenger 1998) with its own jargon (exemplified here by the use of acronyms (...)) as well as rules of conduct” (319). She argues that language in the military reflects both its strict hierarchy and its need for task specific precision:

(...) diversity is nicely demonstrated by the use of acronyms. Participants were asked to list the acronyms they use most frequently. Out of the total of 93 acronyms, only 16 were named more than once (e.g., NCO, Non-Commissioned Officer; PT, Physical Training; HBO, Help a Brother Out) and none more than four times, which illustrates not only the vast number but also the degree to which tasks are specific to different units even within one battalion. (317)

While, the use of language in the military reflects its particular culture, it also constitutes a form of in-group language as a non-member even within its own larger society (in this case American society) would not be able to grasp its understanding. This is in part reflected by the existence of websites dedicated to teach military jargon and abbreviations to civilian family members, such as

Military.com or Militaryfactory.com. The use of acronyms as a form of ingroup language is clearly present throughout the data in both this and the previous chapter.

Training also promotes the dehumanization of the self and other, which has been extensively explored in the previous chapter. In regards to dehumanization and training specifically, Lankford (2009) sees it as an integral part of preparing recruits for warfare.

In addition to promoting the dehumanization of the self and the other, training promotes harassment and intimidation to prevent logical thinking, as well as instilling instinctive responses (Grodin and Annas, 2007). This takes place during basic training, in order to not only make new recruits obedient, but to prepare them for the theatre of war. Grossman (1995) observed that this is the primary job of the drill sergeant: “Throughout training the drill sergeant will not tolerate a single blow or a single shot executed without orders (..) [which] merits the harshest punishment” (319). As Lankford (2009) argues, during basic training “orders are designed to be excessively strict, so that recruits get used to complete and total obedience, even when their orders seem irrational” (390). As all soldiers stationed at Abu Ghraib have undergone basic training we can assume that they have also undergone this harassment and intimidation techniques sought to instill instinctive responses.

In regards to rewarding obedience and employing group violence (Grodin and Annas, 2007), the climate at Abu Ghraib very much indicates that much of the torture occurred as a group activity. Insight into this is provided by Sergeant Provance, with a particularly striking example:

When I returned from leave in the middle of December I was eating at the chow hall at Camp Victory when I overheard SPC – and three other people talking about what's going on at Abu Ghraib. He was telling them about the things that the MP's were doing to the detainees. He said that he was invited to join in on these things, so he did. The MP's were using the detainees as practice dummies, like they would show each other how to knock someone out by knocking the detainee out. They did this while other detainee would

watch, when the other detainee would start to get scared, the MP's would calm him down, and then hit him in some other way. He was also saying that the MP's were telling him how to hit the detainees so that you didn't leave a mark, and telling him what instruments to use so that they didn't leave marks. (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 481)

His account was further corroborated by Specialist Joseph Darby, who when asked by other Military Police personnel would be in the Hard Site (Tier 1A and 1B) recalls that "I don't think the' would have any legitimate reason to be there, other than Cpl Grainer inviting them" (ACLU, CID, 2004).

Provance's account indicates that torture was employed as a form of pastime activity by various soldiers who in turn invited other to join them. Simultaneously it is also an example of on-the-job training, where individuals are taught by others in this case not only how to torture but also how to do it with leaving minimal physical evidence behind.

Obedience to the status quo was rewarded with praise. Particularly in regards to Graner, several witness statements agree that he was repeatedly praised by M.I. personnel for his handling of prisoners. (*Standard Operation Procedure*, 2008; ACLU, Graner, 2004)

The abovementioned factors ultimately lead to the desensitization to and routinization of violence (Grodin and Annas, 2007). Lankford (2009) describes this desensitization to and routinization of violence as the primary goal of basic training, geared towards preparing soldiers for a battlefield scenario. He argues that "during basic training, the military's recruits are systematically desensitized, which makes it easier for them to act violently in ways they would have previously found extremely difficult" (390). This is supported by Grossman (1995) who found that the fundamental lesson drill sergeants teach "is that physical aggression is the essence of manhood and that violence is an effective and desirable solution for problems that the soldiers face on the battlefield" (319). Arguably this desensitization to and routinization of violence is then enhanced the soldiers face the reality of combat in theatre. While Abu Ghraib was

technically not a combat zone, its close proximity to urban dwellings did make it a routine target for insurgents. As Davis recalls in *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008):

You're walking around in the compound. Next thing you know 'pew-boom-incoming' Everyone's yelling 'Incoming!' (...) You gotta run, 'thunk-boom. Boom-boom-boom. Goddamn, you getting mad, 'cause it's over and over and over again. After a while, the fear goes away and you just get angry. Like, damnit! Can we shoot back? (00:05:00-00:05:20)

In other words, the desensitization to and routinization of violence is initiated during basic training, but is further exacerbated once deployed in a combat zone. This is of particular importance in the case of Abu Ghraib, as many of the soldiers deployed there did not have previous training experience as a group, which would explain the group binding process via group violence.

### **Crimes of Obedience, Autonomy, and the Moral Responsibility to Resist**

In light of counterargument to the bad apple theory, arguing for holding the U.S. government accountable for their involvement in the torture scandal of Abu Ghraib, a discussion of crimes of obedience, autonomy, and the moral responsibility to resist is necessary in order not to offer an alternative perspective to these arguments without removing agency from the individuals involved. The term "crimes of obedience" originated in the work of Hannah Arendt (1963). Kelman and Hamilton (1989) define crimes of obedience as follows: "in civilian as well as in military settings, an act of obedience becomes a crime of obedience if the actor knows that the order is illegal, or if any reasonable person – particularly someone in the actor's position – 'should know' that the order is illegal" (47). In addition, Snow (1971) points out that "far more, and far more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than have ever been committed in the name of rebellion" (195). This in turn raises an interesting moral question, which is whether soldiers have the responsibility to resist orders. The Court martial trials in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib certainly argued and convicted under this moral obligation.

Group factors are intimately tied to the question of autonomy in this case. Ethical decision-making and its evaluation is inherently based on the assumption that actors are inherently autonomous. The concept is greatly discussed by Ricoeur (1966), who argues that while freedom is not primary, autonomy is. He argues that ethical decision-making consists of two aspects: the objective dimension, or the norm; and the subjective dimension, where a subject acts. The assessment of autonomy in the case of Abu Ghraib is problematic for a variety of reasons, and will be focusing our efforts on the two most pressing ones: the military setting and the fog of war. The concept of autonomy is in large part directly at odds with military training and hierarchy. As pointed out by Lankford (2009) in the previous section, refusing to follow orders, even unethical ones, leads to a moral dilemma in regards to the obligation towards the group.

The military setting itself has tended to further cloud the ethical judgments in this case. In the documentary, *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), Specialist Megan Ambuhl continuously argues that “We were just following orders.” This statement is a direct reflection of what Hannah Arendt (1963) calls, the “banality of evil”: petty functionaries just following orders not to be held accountable for their actions, because they had no choice. This takes away the agency of the subject, and by extension takes away their autonomy. A similar spin on the events is that, as one Sergeant put it, he “assumed that if they were doing things out of the ordinary or outside the guidelines, someone would have said something” (*Standard Operating Procedure*, 2008). This statement too takes agency and responsibility away from the actors.

Freewill, is mainly a metaphysical concept, but arguably it exists under extreme circumstances where ethical decisions must be made. They are reflected by the actions by one person in Abu Ghraib, in particular Sergeant Joseph M. Darby, who alerted authorities to what

was taking place. His actions triggered a CID investigation, as well as the Taguba Report (2004) and the various investigations that followed, including the Schlesinger Report (2004) and the Fay Report. Darby explained his rationale for reporting the incidents to the CID by saying

I thought about the pictures showing the prisoners in sexual positions and I thought that it was just wrong. When I learned CPL GRAINER was going to go back and work at the Hard Site, which is where the photos showing the prisoners being abused occurred, I knew I had to do something. I didn't want to see any more prisoners being abused because I knew it was wrong, So I created another Compact Disk with the photos showing the prisoners being abused and wrote an anonymous letter and gave it to CTD. (ACLU, CID, 2004)

Ethical transformation and evaluation has to do with what is already there, and he was able to make a decision that went against what is already there.

Autonomy and resistance are two complex subjects, which are only able to be marginally discussed here, but form the basis of ethical decision-making and evaluation. While it is arguable that in day-to-day life, we may not always be fully autonomous, we certainly are in extreme situations that defy the realm of normal human interaction. In other words, the actors involved in Abu Ghraib were autonomous, with the ability to resist, based on the circumstances, and chose not to. This choice is what made their conduct unethical. The prosecution of the case may have been scapegoating, as will be discussed in chapter six. However, this does not change the ethical dimension of the actors involved.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Group psychological factors, as laid out by Grodin and Annas (2007), play an integral role in shaping torturers and can successfully be applied to the case of Abu Ghraib, as demonstrated in this chapter via the numerous examples given from the data examined. As this chapter demonstrates, some factors are screened for in the recruitment process, while others are instilled during basic training and further enhanced with experience in a combat zone. The

military context of the group in question is of particular importance, as it facilitated the transformation of ordinary people into torturers via its strict hierarchy and demand for unquestioning obedience. Yet, it is not sufficient in explaining why torture occurred at Abu Ghraib. Torture, unlike killing, has a strong interpersonal component to it that requires repeated interaction with the victim, particularly in a detention environment. This interpersonal dimension of torture will be addressed in the following chapter via mimetic structures of violence.

## Chapter 6: Mimetic Structures of Violence

Grodin and Annas (2007) theoretical framework, while excellent in explaining the individual and group factors that lead to torture, is insufficient, because it does not fully take the larger dynamic of interacting with prisoners in a context of war into account. To this end, adding a discussion on mimetic structures of violence further explains the behaviour of the perpetrators at Abu Ghraib by looking at the interpersonal dynamics between guards and prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

Mimetic structures of violence put forth by Redekop (2002) refers to “a relationship that builds up in such a way that the parties in a relationship say and do things to harm one another” (161). It consists of mimesis, a term coined by the late René Girard (1987), which means reciprocity or imitation. Mimetic structures of violence consist of the following six dimensions: imitation of past structures of violence; re-enactment of historical violent events; self and other reciprocally imitate each other’s violence; imitation of a classic pattern of violent interaction such as scapegoating; people follow the violent lines of a plot; and violent ideas, emotions, and behaviours are imitated. The violence that results from it takes various forms, including: control, force, extract, diminish, hurt, curse, and withholding help (Redekop, 2002).

This chapter seeks to combine the theoretical concept laid out by Redekop (2002) with the data examined on Abu Ghraib in order to demonstrate how ordinary people are turned into torturers within a context of mimetic structures of violence. The examples provided in this chapter serve to exemplify the theoretical framework and its applicability to case of Abu Ghraib for the purpose of providing a deeper understanding into the dynamics of torture in this particular case.

Each dimension will be discussed in connection with the case of Abu Ghraib, followed by an exploration of the forms of violence employed at Abu Ghraib. Mimetic structures of violence at Abu Ghraib, however, cannot be seen in isolation to the outside world. Therefore, each section will also seek to draw relations to the wider social dimension involved.

### **Re-enactment of Historical Violent Events**

Historical violent events play a significant role in mimetic structures of violence in terms of a mythology of the past that is used to legitimize the violence, perceived historical injustices, and recurring violent episodes of the past (Redekop, 2002). At Abu Ghraib the re-enactment of historical violent events took place in the larger societal context. When observing the Iraq War overall, we can observe two dimensions to the historical violent events: (1) a mutual rhetoric concerning the Crusades and (2) the U.S. domestic debate over whether the Iraq War resembles WWII or Vietnam. This in turn transferred itself into some individuals expressing sentiments that were similar to those expressed by soldiers during the Vietnam War.

One type of rhetoric that should not be dismissed too easily and one that both sides shared, and that has recently resurfaced with the rise of Al-Qaida's sister organization ISIL, concerns the age of the Crusades. This rhetoric has been inflammatory on both sides of the equation. Napoleoni (2003) argues that "since September 11, the rhetoric in Washington has been that of a holy war, a crusade fought not to free the Holy Land in the name of Christ, but waged in defense of humanity under the banner of democracy" (54). This, in addition to a pre-emptive strike doctrine has in turn bolstered the belief in the Middle East that the war against Iraq is yet another chapter of the Crusades, an attempt to bring down the splendid Arab civilization (Napoleoni, 2003).

In the case of Abu Ghraib, the re-enactment of historical violent events from the United States' viewpoint has a further dimension, which is two-fold, and primarily takes place in terms of the domestic societal context. We must take into consideration both the Bush administration and its critics' re-enactment of history, which differ radically. Schuman and Corning (2006) argue that "the Bush administration has regarded the Iraq war as part of the war on terror and sees the war on terror as comparable in scope and importance to World War II (Bush 2001)" (78). Record (2010) further argues that in the United States both sides of the debate surrounding the Iraq War invoked historical analogies in order to support their respective cases.

The Bush administration invoked the Munich analogy, comparing Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler; it argued that war was inevitable (a self-fulfilling prophecy if there ever was one), and that it was better to fight Saddam Hussein before he acquired nuclear weapons than after. Administration spokesmen also cited the Allied liberation of France in 1944 as reassurance of the popular welcome U.S. forces would receive from an Iraqi people grateful for their new freedom. As the years passed and the war continued with no end in sight, the White House emphatically rejected the possibility of a Vietnam-like defeat. It preferred instead the analogy of Korea, where the United States, having saved South Korea from a Communist takeover, retained powerful military forces in the country and provided the security framework for South Korea's evolution into an economic powerhouse and political democracy. (567)

Record (2010) then goes on to point out that the analogy does not hold, not only due to the lack of magnitude in victims left behind by Saddam Hussein and his Baathist party's reign, but in particular due to the course of events that followed in the aftermath of the invasion.

In contrast, critics of the Bush administration see the insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan and the heavy losses suffered to project the memory of the Vietnam war. Schuman and Corning (2006) argue that "critics of the Iraq war have viewed it as at best a distraction from the war on terror and as a morass similar in important ways to the Vietnam War (e.g., Krugman 2004)" (78). This view is further supported by Record (2010) who argues that

as in Vietnam, the United States has stumbled into a bloody, protracted, and unpopular war against an elusive, irregular enemy. There is also the similarity of U.S. security challenges: as in Vietnam, success in Iraq will depend upon fostering the creation of both

a politically viable indigenous government and professionally effective military and police forces. (567-568)

The Vietnam analogy therefore appears to be the dominant one, not only because of the clear analogies between the two cases, but also, as Schuman and Corning (2006) point out due to the “cohort effect” by which in sum more individuals drew an analogy between the Iraq and the Vietnam war than Iraq and WWII because of “the cohort” effect, which suggests that because Vietnam was closer in proximity in time, people remember it more vividly due to their own experience.

On the individual level, soldiers being deployed to Vietnam already considered themselves dead. Similar sentiments were expressed by soldiers being deployed to Iraq. As an intelligence officer stated, “You got to consider yourself dead. And then you can do all the shit you got to do. I wouldn’t recommend a vacation to Iraq anytime soon” (*Standard Operating Procedure*, 2008, 00:00:45-00:01:02).

In sum, historical violent events were re-enacted in that the Iraq war imitated historical violent events in terms of the Crusades, on both sides and the Vietnam and Second World War on the side of the Americans. The structures that underlay these historical violent events were then in turn imitated, as will be discussed in the following section.

### **Imitation of Past Structures of Violence**

Each side to the conflict imitates past structures of violence, although seemingly from different perspectives. On the larger societal scale, imitation of past structures of violence on the part of the Americans is linked to the Vietnam war, as well as drawing from the experiences made by their Israeli allies. The insurgents on the other hand are reminded of previous invasions particularly by the Soviets and Bush Senior, as well as the Crusade era, imitating previous

uprisings. On the individual scale, imitations of past structures of violence take the form of reminding prisoners of Saddam Hussein's regime.

When discussing past structures of violence, it is crucial to not overlook the longstanding history of torture and counterinsurgencies in the Western tradition, and American history in particular. As addressed in Chapter four, many of the individual psychological factors are similar to the ones that arose during the Cold War era and many authors have drawn comparisons between the war in Iraq and the failures of the Vietnam War, as pointed out in the previous section, each seemingly impossible to win. In addition to the past experiences of the Vietnam War, counterinsurgency efforts have relied heavily on the knowledge and experiences of allied nations, including Israel.

The justifications for torture laid out in chapter three are strikingly similar to the ones employed by Israel during the first intifada. In addition, the legalization of various forms of torture by changing its definition in domestic law, has also been replicated from the Israeli example. In addition, due to a shortage in trained interrogators, the subcontracting of interrogation operations has involved several Israeli subject matter experts (Jones, 2009). As Jones (2009) points out, one of the soldiers who returned from Abu Ghraib averted the media

to one of the most controversial aspects of the Abu Ghraib scandal, namely, the question of foreign, i.e. Israeli, influence at the heart of the torture scandal. Israeli influence at the middle of the chain of command was a topic that even the usually fearless Seymour Hersh suppressed until Brig. Gen. Janet Karpinski, commandant at Abu Ghraib, fearing that she would be made the fall guy for the entire operation, announced that she had Shin Bet agents working at her prison but not under her command. America's involvement with torture was, it turned out, a function of America's involvement with Israel. (26-31)

Evidence of foreign involvement, although without pointing fingers, is corroborated by both the Schlesinger Report (2004) and the Fay Report (2004).

Simultaneously, Al-Qaida and its form of militant jihadism was in no way a new phenomenon. Rather, the violent resistance to the invasion by Western civilizations in its current

form goes back decades, while the original roots of resistance to Western invasion and oppression arguably go back to Saladin during the times of the Crusades, as discussed in the previous section. This re-enactment of past structures of violence can be seen in Bin Laden's speech to the American people in 2004, published in full by Al-Jazeera. Bin Laden recalls witnessing the images of the bombing of Lebanon and the countless victims as his turning point, which he describes as producing an "intense feeling of rejection of tyranny, and gave birth to a strong resolve to punish the oppressors" (Al Jazeera, 2004). This, he argues led to the idea that Al-Qaida should

punish the oppressor in kind and that we should destroy towers in America in order that they taste some of what we tasted and so that they be deterred from killing our women and children. (...) This means the oppressing and embargoing to death of millions as Bush Sr did in Iraq in the greatest mass slaughter of children mankind has ever known, and it means the throwing of millions of pounds of bombs and explosives at millions of children – also in Iraq – as Bush Jr did. (Al Jazeera, 2004)

He further argues that Al-Qaida and its subsidiaries had previous experience in organizing insurgencies and fighting oppression:

This is in addition to our having experience in using guerrilla warfare and the war of attrition to fight tyrannical superpowers, as we, alongside the mujahidin, bled Russia for 10 years, until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw in defeat. (...) So we are continuing this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy. Allah willing, and nothing is too great for Allah. (Al Jazeera, 2004)

Imitating past structures of violence from the perception of Al-Qaida therefore meant forming and directing a renewed insurgency, as the previous ones that had fought against the Russians during the Cold War era.

In regards to the civilian detainees on the other hand, Abu Ghraib has served as a reminder of Saddam Hussein's regime. One prisoner recalls in his statement to CID,

All the guards excluding Grainer and Davis are very good with the prisoners and the prisoners like them and respect them and are very happy with them. They give a good image of the United States and they prove by their good treatment the big difference between the Baath Party and the United States. (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 511)

While the detainee clearly differentiates between the Baathist Party and the U.S. occupation, the very fact that he makes this analogy indicates in and of itself that he is reminded of past structures of violence within the Iraqi detention system.

### **Reciprocal Imitation of Each Other's Violence**

Redekop (2002) argues that mimetic structures of violence “determine the nature and Self-Other dynamics that, in turn, can intensify or ease the power of these structures. In mimetic structures of violence, Self-Other dynamics of both sides aim to diminish the well-being of the other with each Self aggrandizing itself at the expense of the Other” (169).

At Abu Ghraib, the Self-Other dynamic of reciprocally imitating each other's violence, was seemingly common place and at times intensified and resulted in assaults or prison riots and in turn torture. To illustrate this, two examples will be explored from the data under examination: an incident involving a Syrian detainee, and an incident that occurred during a routine interrogation.

The first incident we will be exploring concerns a Syrian foreign fighter that had been detained some months prior to the incident. On December 12th or 13th 2003, Abu Ghraib received

a Syrian foreign fighter and self-proclaimed Jihadist who came to Iraq to kill Coalition troops. (...) [He] stated the Soldiers supposedly retaliated against him when he returned to the Hard Site after being released from the hospital following a shooting incident in which he attempted to kill U.S. Solders. (...) [He] had a pistol smuggled in by an Iraqi Policeman and used that pistol to try to kill US personnel working in the Hard Site on November 24th 2003. (Fay Report, 2004, 1081)

After his release from the hospital the detainee was reportedly beaten, had phosphoric light poured over him and threatened with torture and rape on several occasions (Fay Report, 2004, 1081).

This incident demonstrates the reciprocity violence took at Abu Ghraib. On the hand, a detainee motivated by the larger social paradigm of resisting Western oppression attempted to kill several soldiers both outside and inside the prison complex. Upon his release from the hospital, the detainee was then tortured by the guards, who imitated the violence that had previously occurred in a seemingly vicious cycle.

Another example of the reciprocal imitation of each other's violence comes from an incident surrounding a routine interrogation, which shows the slow but steady increase of mimetic violence. On November 16th 2003 a routine interrogation went underway that ended in a detainee being stripped naked and walked back to his cell in said state.

Soldier-29 felt the detainee was "arrogant" and when she and her analyst, (...) 'placed him against the wall' the detainee pushed (...) [the analyst]. Soldier-29 warned if he touched (...) [the analyst] again, she would have him remove his shoes. A bizarre tit-for-tat scenario then ensued where Soldier-29 would warn the detainee about touching (...) [the analyst], the detainee would 'touch' (...) [the analyst], and then had his shirt, blanket, and finally his pants removed. (...) While nudity seemed to be acceptable, Soldier-29 went further than most when she walked the semi-naked detainee across the camp. (Fay Report, 2004, 1091)

This incident further demonstrates the reciprocal imitation of violence at Abu Ghraib prison. The detainee and the soldiers involved entered into an increasing cycle of violence geared towards humiliating and debasing the other.

The reciprocal imitation of each others violence leads to the self-aggrandizement at the expense of the other, as pointed out by Redekop (2002). An example of this is provided by Lynndie England, who, when asked, what the overall mood was during a separate incident of torture, told the Army's Criminal Investigation Department (CID): "We would joke around, everyone would laugh at the things we had them do" (ACLU, 2004). England's statement illustrates this sense of self-aggrandizement at the expense of the other, with no regard for the other's well-being.

In sum, the evidence suggests that the reciprocal imitation of each other's violence took place at Abu Ghraib, in that detainees would attempt to resist orders or even kill service personnel, which in turn would severely humiliate or torture the detainees in physical ways, in a slowly increasing and vicious cycle of violence, where each side would aggrandize itself at the expense of the other.

### **Imitation of Violent Ideas, Emotions, and Behaviours**

Mimetic structures of violence further prevent people from acting rationally. Rather, they are driven by violent ideas, emotions and behaviours, that "in isolation, or outside of such a structure they would consider completely against their basic beliefs and values" (Redekop, 2002, 164). Individuals within these structures become obsessed with either engaging in violence or preventing their own victimization. Redekop (2002) further elaborates that

Mimetic structures of violence give a strong interpretive spin to everything that happens. Each gesture on the part of the Other is suspect and interpreted as something intended to ultimately do harm. (...) Negative emotions – such as anger, fear, hatred, and resentment – dominate. (164)

War is a high stress situation, where emotions run high, and the choices made are not always rational in and of themselves but are driven by emotions. This particularly applies to the War on Terror and the subsequent invasion of Iraq. 9/11 had left deep scars in the minds of the American public and the soldiers tasked with protecting them. This has been discussed throughout the previous chapters, in particular in individual and group psychological factors, and constituted a driving factor behind the recruitment of service members, as well as the actions and rhetoric of the US government. This section will argue that the justifications behind torture discussed in Chapter three of the thesis constitute such an imitation of violent ideas, emotions and behaviours, in addition to focusing on one particular example of torture at Abu Ghraib that

exemplifies this factor both from the side of the insurgency and the side of the American soldiers involved on the individual scale.

Bin Laden had argued in his speech to the American people, that the attacks on the twin tower came as a response to the violence perpetrated by the American and Israeli governments across the Middle East (Al Jazeera, 2004). In turn, the justifications for torture drafted by Bybee (2001) in response to the attacks on the twin towers on September 11th 2001 constitute an imitation of violent ideas, emotions, and at Abu Ghraib, behaviours, in that they violate the idea of the dignity of human life. Bybee (2001) stated that in light of the disregard of Al-Qaida for American life, Al-Qaida and Taliban fighters by extension had no right for consideration by the American justice system.

In regards to the individual scale, the Fay Report identified an incident of abuse on October 25th 2003 that involved three detainees being “stripped of their clothing, handcuffed together nude, placed on the ground, and forced to lie on each other and simulate sex while photographs were being taken” (1074). This involved various soldiers, including but not limited to Graner, Frederick, England, and Harman. According to witness statements, the abuse occurred because the three detainees were suspected of having raped a young male detainee (Fay Report, 2004, 1074). This incident illustrates the imitation of violent ideas, emotions, and behaviours in that the young boy was allegedly raped by these three men who inflicted pain and suffering on their victim. The service members in turn imitated the violence they allegedly inflicted on their victim, by forcing them to perform sexual acts on each other.

In sum, the evidence suggests that the imitation of violent ideas, emotions and behaviours played a role as to why torture occurred at Abu Ghraib. This took place both in the context of 9/11 itself and the subsequent legalization of torture by violating the idea of the sanctity and

dignity of human life. In addition, it arguably also played a role on the individual scale, in particular in the incident where detainees allegedly raped a young boy and where subsequently sexually abused and degraded.

### **Imitation of a Classic Pattern of Violent Interaction: Scapegoating**

Scapegoating is a further mimetic structure of violence. In this case, the mimesis involves persons in the crowd imitating one another in a joint violent action against the scapegoat (Redekop, 2002). He further argues that scapegoating constitutes a structure characterized by differentiation, in terms of the Other turning into an 'it' for the Self. The other is then "objectified, dehumanized, and demonized and needs to be removed. Violence is projected onto the scapegoat who is seen as the source of the violence" (168).

Girard (1989) wrote extensively on scapegoating and defines it as follows:

That strange process through which two or more people are reconciled at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs, or frightens the scapegoaters. They feel relieved of their tensions and they coalesce into a more harmonious group. They no have a single purpose, which is to prevent the scapegoat from harming them, by expelling and destroying him. (49)

This blaming of a third party that serves the reconciliation of the in-group is further elaborated on by Lukes (1985), who explains this mechanism of scapegoating as follows:

When society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortune and those against whom opinion already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. (345)

Scapegoats are thereby generally people who are "expendable to society," in terms of either being responsible for an event to a certain extent, or in terms of already being marginalized from society.

This is further corroborated by Durkheim (1912, 1995), who argues that "this victim will naturally be sought outside, for an outsider is a *subject minoris resistentiae*; since he is not

protected by the fellow-feeling that attaches to a relative or a neighbour, nothing about him blocks and neutralises the bad and destructive feelings aroused by the death” (404).

In addition, Durkheim (1912,1995) also directly links scapegoating to torture. He argues that scapegoating occurs to ease one’s own pain, and has the side-effect to having a tendency to torture the scapegoat.

When the pain reaches such a pitch, it becomes suffused with a kind of anger and exasperation. One feels the need to break or destroy something. One attacks oneself or others. One strikes, wounds, or burns oneself, or one attacks someone else, in order to strike, wound, or burn him. Thus was established the mourning custom of giving oneself over to veritable orgies of torture. (404)

The imitation of a classic pattern of violent interaction at Abu Ghraib takes its most notable form in scapegoating, both in terms of the war in Iraq overall and the torture that took place, as well as the court martial trials themselves. While the overall treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib certainly qualifies as scapegoating in and of itself, several incidents further illustrate a more nuanced incident-based scapegoating. Mestrovic (2006) neatly summarizes scapegoating at Abu Ghraib as follows:

With regard to the present discussion, it seems that all of Iraq became a scapegoat for the pain and sorrow of 9/11; the prisoners at Abu Ghraib became scapegoats for the US Army’s frustrations; and the so-called seven rotten apples became the scapegoats for the Army’s and American society’s frustration, pain, shame and other suffering.” (Mestrovic and Coldwell, 2006, 153)

This section examines how both the War on Terror as serving a scapegoat mechanism, and examine an incident of scapegoating at Abu Ghraib, as well as elaborate on the scapegoating of the perpetrators of which evidence is found both in the Fay (2004) and the Schlesinger (2004) Reports.

As argues in Chapter four and five, the events of 9/11 deeply impacted the American public and lead to mass recruitment in its aftermath in order to regain a sense of control and to eliminate enemy forces. The War on Terror, and the Iraq war in particular, constitute a form of

scapegoating in and of themselves. Smith and McKee argue that Sullivan et al. studied people's attitudes towards enemies and scapegoats and found that extremely negative evaluations of these out-groups serve as a way for the in-group to deal with its existential anxiety. They further argue that

Harsh judgments of the outgroup can increase our self-esteem, group identity and sense of control because we have transferred our existential anxiety to an outgroup target. They [Sullivan et al.] further propose that the consequences and targets of people's existential anxiety depend upon the larger social context. (Smith and McKee, 2015, 250-51)

In other words, the War on Terror and the Iraq war served a scapegoat function to reinstate social cohesion in the American context.

One clear example of scapegoating comes from the CID Interview with a detainee, who recalls, that while he was being tortured, a service member made clear to him that he was being victimized as a result of him having been injured while on patrol, in a clearly unrelated event. "The guards started to hit me on my broken leg several times with a solid plastic stick. He told me he got shot in his leg and he showed me the scare and he would retaliate from me for this" (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 524). As such, the service member was using the detainee as a scapegoat to reassert his sense of control over his environment.

Another aspect of scapegoating is that of the perpetrators involved at Abu Ghraib becomes abundantly clear both in Major General Fay's Report, as well as the Schlesinger Report, where each sharply criticize the soldiers involved as bad apples within the system. The Fay Report (2004) states that

Clearly abuses occurred at Abu Ghraib. There is no single, simple explanation for why this abuse at Abu Ghraib happened. The primary causes are misconduct (ranging from inhumane to sadistic) by a small group of morally corrupt soldiers and civilians, (...). (989)

The Schlesinger Report (2004) is even more damning in its assessment of the perpetrators, arguing that

The events of October through December 2003 on the night shift of Tier 1A at Abu Ghraib prison were acts of brutality and purposeless sadism. We know that these abuses occurred at the hands of both military police and military intelligence personnel. The pictured abuses, unacceptable even in wartime, were not part of authorized interrogations nor were they even directed at intelligence targets. They represented deviant behaviour and a failure of military leadership and discipline. (5)

Mestrovic, who was present during the court martial trials further corroborates that scapegoating most certainly took place in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib, culminating in a kangaroo court seeking to bury the incident (Mestrovic, 2006).

In sum, scapegoating in the sense of an imitation of a classic pattern of violent interaction did occur at Abu Ghraib. Evidence suggests that scapegoating took place both in the context of the Iraq war and the War on Terror itself and the torturing of detainees at Abu Ghraib, as well as during the court martial of the perpetrators of Abu Ghraib.

### **Following the Violent Lines of a Plot**

Redekop (2002) argues that mimetic structures of violence can be seen as a *mythos*, in an Aristotelian sense, a plot of a story imitating the structures of human action. The *mythos* of mimetic structures of violence is unique to each situation and unfolds over time just like a plot of a story (161). The historical re-enactment of historical violent events displaying themselves in the imitation of past structures of violence and violent ideas, emotions and behaviours, scapegoating and self-other dynamics mean that the events that play out in mimetic structures of violence often look like the individuals involved follow the violent lines of a plot. To illustrate this, this section will focus on two particular incidents of torture at Abu Ghraib, that have been used in previous sections.

It is vital to note that each incident of torture at Abu Ghraib did not occur in isolation, but rather as a series of events that then form said plot. In the incident where three prisoners were forced to perform sexual acts on each other, this occurred in the wider context of the prisoners

allegedly raping another young detainee. This appeared to have aroused a sort of moral outrage in the guards who in turn inflicted violence on the detainees (Fay Report, 2004).

Another incident involved a foreign fighter who had been captured upon attempting to kill allied troops, and once in custody managed to obtain a pistol and attempted to kill his guards. He in turn was shot and once released from the hospital tortured by said guards (Fay Report, 2004, 1081). Again, we can see a pattern, in terms of the plot of a story unfolding.

In sum, the evidence suggests that torture at Abu Ghraib can be seen as unfolding much like the violent lines of a plot, when looking at particular incidents. There is always a background to each incident that then plays out like a story of human actions.

### **Forms of Violence**

Redekop (2002) argues that violence is to be used in the sense of taking “away from the well-being of someone. This can include something that causes death, physical injury, or psychological damage, prompts negative emotions, or results in a wounded spirit” (162-3). There are various forms of violence involved in mimetic structures of violence, including: control, force, extract, diminish, hurt, curse, or withhold help. The torture of Abu Ghraib neatly fits into all of these categories, both in terms of the violence inflicted by the perpetrators and that inflicted by the insurgency and the prisoners themselves. This section will be discussing the various forms of violence deployed at Abu Ghraib and provide an example for each from the data examined.

Violence as control “keeps people from achieving their ends, holds them back and puts obstacles in their way” (Redekop, 2002, 163). As a detention facility, Abu Ghraib embodies control in and of itself, as the incarceration of individuals prevents them from achieving their

ends. In fact, the idea of incarcerating enemy combatants in order to remove them from the battle field is the very epitome of violence as control.

Violence as force “inflicts goals, actions, or behaviours on people. It makes people subservient, doing what they do not wish to do. It is the work of extortion and brutality. It forces people to choose between two unacceptable options, as when women are forced to choose between unwanted sexual activity and seeing their children hurt” (Redekop, 2002, 163). One such example comes from the account of a detainee who recalls that

After this they make H. stand in front of me and they forced me to slap him on the face, but I refused because he is my friend. After they asked H. to hit me, so he punched my stomach. I asked him to do that, so they don't beat him like they had beaten me when I refused to hit H. (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 516)

These two friends were put in a position where they were forced into a situation where they had no choice but to hurt each other for the amusement of the guards in order to avoid further violence from them.

Redekop (2002) further argues that “violence extracts from people what they cherish. It may be the theft of possession or it may mean the extraction of information through torture, trickery, or treachery” (163). Violence as extraction was the primary goal at Abu Ghraib: to make them talk in order to prevent further attacks, and further American lives lost.

Violence further “diminishes people. It makes them lose face, humiliates them, and removes all dignity and self respect” (Redekop, 2002, 163). One of the most prominent examples of this is the apparent practice of making detainees wear women’s underwear, occasionally on their heads. As the Fay Report (2004) argues “These cases appear to be a form of humiliation, either for MP control or MI “ego down” (1089).

A further form of violence is that of hurt. Redekop (2002) argues that “it maims them, burns them, makes them bleed and kills them. With the physical hurt comes the inner hurt of

being deceived or betrayed” (163). Violence as hurt is two-fold at Abu Ghraib: on the one hand soldiers are continuously under threat, while fellow soldiers are being targeted both outside and inside the compound. On the other hand, detainees are both under threat from the outside and from their prison guards on the inside. One example of violence as hurt, in its mimetic form, is recalled by Sgt. Wallin in his interview with CID:

Later during my tour I also observed SGT – slap the face of a detainee we called “Jihadi Jerry” or “Gus”. I believe his name was H-. This detainee, who was in cell 1B, had taken several swings at Sgt – and was often times placed in restraints. (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 472)

This statement makes clear the dual nature that hurt can take. On the one hand, the Sergeant in question was assaulted by a detainee who sought to hurt him, while he himself then inflicted hurt on the detainee by slapping him in retaliation.

Violence can also take the form of cursing the other. As Redekop (2002) argues “Curses involve a desire to see the other harmed. It imagines and desires ill for the Other. Curses have a verbal dimension of demanding that harmful things happen to the object of the curse” (163). Sergeant Wallin recalls that one of the detainees had repeatedly cursed the prison staff. He stated in his interview with CID, that “(...) this detainee had made verbal threats on several occasions that he would kill members of the prison staff” (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 472). This example demonstrates the verbal dimension of cursing, with the detainee wishing death upon the prison staff.

Similarly, detainees remember being cursed by their guards during their internment at Abu Ghraib. One detainee recalls that during a particular torture incident he was subjected to, that “No one showed us mercy. Nothing but cursing and beating” (Pierron and Arthur, 2004, 516).

As Redekop (2002) argues “violence can further take the form of withholding help from someone who is suffering” (163). This too was a common form of violence employed at Abu Ghraib and, from as gathered from the available data, only employed by the soldiers working at Abu Ghraib. The Fay Report (2004) argues that in one particular incident of torture, a medic was called in to assist a detainee who had been knocked unconscious and witnessed a pile of naked detainees who had been arranged into a human pyramid. The medic, however, failed to report the abuse to the chain of command. In addition, another service member who saw pictures of the abuse afterwards and on one occasion, unrelated to this incident, witnessed Graner slap a detainee, “stated that she didn’t report the picture of naked detainees to MI because she did not see it again and also did not report the slap because she didn’t consider it abuse” (Fay Report, 2004, 1079).

In sum, Abu Ghraib represents all forms of violence identified by Redekop (2002) as playing a role in mimetic structures of violence in this particular case. While some were only perpetrated by service members, including control due to the nature of the setting, others were equally perpetrated by service members and prisoners alike.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The evidence suggests that mimetic structures of violence played a role at Abu Ghraib, both in terms of the wider societal context influencing the actions on the ground, as well as the individuals involved. Torture at Abu Ghraib occurred because the individuals involved mimetically imitating each others violence as illustrated in the previous sections. This framework is vital to understanding both the wider historical and societal context, as well as the actions of the individuals involved in order to make sense of the torture that took place there.

## Chapter 7: The Making of a Torturer

The research problem in question, as pointed out in the introduction, falls under the purview of the social psychology. While much research has been dedicated to this topic, little effort has been devoted to applying them to the case of the perpetrators of Abu Ghraib. The question this thesis seeks to answer is Why did ordinary people become torturers at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003? The hypothesis is that a combined framework of individual psychological factors, group factors and mimetic structures of violence led to ordinary people being turned into torturers at Abu Ghraib. The question of how ordinary people come to be turned into torturers, as the previous chapters have indicated, is a highly complex one. This chapter will therefore focus on the hypothesis itself and attempt to point out how these factors in combination with each other shape an individual into a torturer at Abu Ghraib. This chapter will provide a narrative of how ordinary people were turned into torturers in a more comprehensive way, providing a synthesis of the points made in the previous chapters. It is comprised of four parts. The first part briefly addresses the point that the perpetrators involved were ordinary people. The second part, focuses on the historical background and its connection to the individual psychological, group psychological and mimetic structures of violence factors. The third part, looks at the army as an institution in terms of recruiting for specific factors and training for factors that influence ordinary people being turned into torturers. The fourth section focuses on the specific environment in terms of Abu Ghraib as a detention facility.

### **Ordinary People**

The dominant rhetoric in the aftermath of the revelation of the torture scandal at Abu Ghraib, was the ‘bad apple theory’: that the army had unfortunately been infiltrated by a few morally corrupt and sadistic individuals who then tortured detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq

and extensively documented their escapades. Evidence of this can be found in the Fay (2004) and the Schlesinger (2004) reports, which were commissioned in the aftermath of the scandal to investigate the causes behind the events that took place. The Taguba Report (2004) on the other hand makes no such claims, and Zimbardo's study of the perpetrators in 2007 found no pathological sadistic inclinations or other pathologies. These findings are very much in line with the scholarship that had been done on the perpetrators of previous atrocities, including the Holocaust (Grodin and Annas, 2007; Lankford, 2009), the Mi Lay massacre (Post and Panis, 2011) and others (Haritos-Fatouros, 2003). Rather, what occurred at Abu Ghraib was an amalgamation of factors, many of which are consciously screened for during recruitment and further enforced during military training alongside historical and environmental factors.

The definition of torture in the UNCAT stipulates that it involved severe pain and suffering, be it physical or mental, which when analyzing the various forms of mimetic violence (Redekop, 2002) that occurred and the forms of violence laid out by the Taguba Report (2004) undoubtedly occurred at Abu Ghraib. In addition, the intent of the perpetrator can take various forms as per this definition, including the eliciting of information, punishment, intimidation, coercion or discrimination. In other words, the widespread discussion in the literature as to whether torture was directed at the highest level or directed or encouraged by MI for the purpose of "softening up" the prisoners is irrelevant as per the UNCAT definition. Furthermore, it stipulates that the perpetrator must be a public official or directed or instigated by a public official (UN, art.1, para.1) As the perpetrators of Abu Ghraib were members of the armed forces, and as such public officials, this case further qualifies for torture.

The institutionalized aspect of torture has therefore been largely excluded, not only because of the bulk of literature available on the topic, and the irrelevance of the institutionalized

aspect in regards to the definition of torture, but also because the aspect of crimes of obedience and the question of autonomy. The perpetrators involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal, still acted autonomously and therefore bear the moral responsibility for their actions. The thesis therefore focuses on the question of whether specific factors that had previously been identified in the literature in regards to other cases play a role in turning these ordinary individuals into torturers at Abu Ghraib in 2003.

### **Historical Background and its Impact on the Public**

The deliberate crashing of airplanes into the twin towers on September 11th 2001 alongside other critical infrastructure was in no doubt a historically significant event in the mind of the American public, and Western civilization overall. The mindset that followed it, however, was in no way new, as Lifton (2001) argued. Rather, it brought back a mentality that dominated during the Cold War period and the Vietnam War in particular. Among these is a sense of omnipotence that was put into questions with the attack on home soil, which in turn led the public to regain that sense of omnipotence in light of the attacks. Lifton, (1986) observed that a similar pattern emerges when looking at the sentiments during the Cold War and nuclear armament.

This questioning of the American public's sense of omnipotence, led to an imitation of violent ideas, emotions and behaviours in the aftermath of 9/11, culminating in lawfare in terms of the justification and legalization of torture within American domestic law and an announcement as to the inapplicability of the Geneva Conventions in the Global War on Terror.

The rhetoric in the months and years following 9/11 pointed towards a re-enactment of historical violent events, in regards to the Vietnam war, as well as World War II and the Crusades of the Middle Ages. Redekop (2002) argues that historical violent events play a

significant role in mimetic structures of violence in terms of a mythology of the past that is used to legitimize the violence, perceived historical injustices, and recurring violent episodes of the past.

The re-enactment of historical violent events then lead to an imitation of past structures of violence on both sides of the equation (Redekop, 2002). Imitating past structures of violence for Al-Qaida meant forming and directing a renewed insurgency, as the one who had previously fought against the Russians during the Cold War era (Al-Jazeera, 2004). On the other hand, the Americans were drawing from their experiences in Vietnam and other prior counterinsurgency efforts by their allies, including Israel (Napoleoni, 2003; Jones, 2009). On the individual scale, Abu Ghraib reminded detainees of the torture that occurred during Saddam Hussein's regime (Pierron and Arthur, 2004).

The war in Iraq and the Global War on Terror is in and of itself a form of scapegoating, in an attempt to reinstate social cohesion in the aftermath of 9/11. As Sullivan et al. argue, "Harsh judgments of the outgroup can increase our self-esteem, group identity and sense of control because we have transferred our existential anxiety to an outgroup target" (Smith and McKee, 2015, 250-51).

The justifications for acts of torture to the American public and the seeming acceptance and applause for declaring the Geneva Conventions null and void in the War on Terror can be seen as an example of splitting or doubling. This is a collective phenomenon of a psychological process, that serves to deal with trauma more effectively (Lifton 1968; Bostock, 2010). As Grodin and Annas (2007) put it "splitting can be used to rationalize and justify actions, and through reaction formation [a perpetrator] can convince himself that he is doing good, or even that he is a hero" (640). The declaration of the Geneva Conventions as nonapplicable in the

aftermath of 9/11 in combination with statements concerning the defense of American values effectively grant license to extreme violence in the name of goodness and heroism.

### **The Army**

In addition to these events that deeply impacted the minds of both the public overall and the individuals involved, many then entered into the service of the United States Army. The following section will, due to the military context of the torture scandal of Abu Ghraib, focus on this institutional setting, and address various individual psychological, group psychological, and mimetic structures of violence that facilitate the making of a torturer.

The United States army as a group is unique in the sense that its members adhere to two fundamental notions: military professionalism and the citizen soldier. The mobilization and spike in recruitment in the aftermath of 9/11 is an embodiment of this notion of the citizen soldier. Civil republicanism as a virtue demands that citizens take an active part in the defense of the polis (Mason, 2002). The evidence of Abu Ghraib suggests that the belief in the ideology of the Bush administration and the American way of life further played a role in this. In addition, American military professionalism demands duty to country and support of the government of the day, as Cake (2009) points out. Soldiers thereby take pride in their profession and are highly specialized and trained as part of the military establishment. Evidence of this can be found in MG Fay's Report (2004), where he argues that "We are a value based profession in which the clear majority of our soldiers take great pride" (991). Grodin and Annas (2007) have argued that the uniqueness of the group play a role in the formation of torturers, in that when a group has a shared mystique and values, members in turn develop camaraderie, a devotion to the organizational ideology and cause, as well as a sense that they are part of an elite. Individuals completely subordinate themselves to the organization by taking pride in performing difficult

and important tasks and after a certain level of indoctrination find themselves incapable of resisting their participation in torture (Grodin and Annas, 2007).

The military setting further influences group behaviour in that it leads to a diminished conscious individual personality. In addition, the loyalty to the group that is nurtured within the army further created an unconscious dominance over the individual's reason and judgement. This led to some not speaking out against the torture because as Jeremy Sivits put it "I try to be friends with everyone. I see now where trying to be friends with everyone gets ya" (ACLU, CID, 2004). In Sivit's case, his loyalty to the group trumped his own reason and judgement. As Grodin and Annas (2007) argue, group behaviour relies on diminishing the conscious individual personality and creating an unconscious dominance of the group over an individual's reason and judgement, thereby facilitating the engagement in torture.

The screening of new recruits in the U.S. Army includes obedience to authority and has arguably played a role at Abu Ghraib. Armin Cruz, for example, was characterized by witnesses during his court martial as having "an overwhelming respect for his superiors" (ACLU, Cruz, 2004) and continuously treated them with "dignity and respect" (ACLU, Cruz, 2004). Migram's (1961) research further indicates that it plays a significant role in why people engage in atrocities.

Torture was further influenced by aspects of recruitment and basic training within the U.S. Army. Training, in particular basic training, sets the foundation for torture (Lankford, 2009). Charles Graner's court martial records (2005) reveal that he had a college education, a sports scholarship, and enlisted shortly after 9/11, as several of his colleagues did. As Staub (1989) found, torture does not require specific training per se, but rests largely on the notion of obedience to authority, which is screened for and reinforced during basic training. Initial

screening processes also involve intellect, physical ability and positive identification with the political regime (Grodin and Annas, 2007). Marine Major Stewart Upton stated that new recruits felt that they were a part of something important and where needed in the Global War on Terror (Miles, 2006). This suggests that that training also fostered an idea of eliteness and othering (Grodin and Anas, 2007). This was further exacerbated at Abu Ghraib, with General Miller's belief that detainees must be treated like animals in order to control them (Adams, 2006).

The group binding process arguably occurred in relation to the "military family", rather than particular fellow soldiers. Major General Taguba (2004) pointed out that he service members from various units at Abu Ghraib generally did not train together prior to deployment. Lankford (2009) further points out that group binding takes place during basic training in terms of performing tasks together as a group. It is therefore arguable that group binding in terms of basic training, a set of initiation rites, and the imposition of new values proposed by Grodin and Annas (2007) as a factor in the creation of torturers, played a role at Abu Ghraib. Language in the military, including jargon in the form of acronyms, is a reflection of its strict hierarchy and need for task specific precision (Halbe, 2011). Grodin and Annas (2007) have identified the development of an elitist attitude and in-group language as a factor in the training processes that form torturers.

Basic training also contributes to dehumanization, obedience, and routinization of violence – all of which contribute to a capacity to torture. Lankford (2009) sees dehumanization as an integral part of preparing recruits for warfare, a factor that according to Grodin and Annas (2007) plays a role in the formation process. Lankford (2009) further sees basic training as an exercise in obedience: "orders are designed to be excessively strict, so that recruits get used to complete and total obedience, even when their orders seem irrational" (390). This is exemplary

of the promotion of harassment and intimidation to prevent logical thinking, and the instilling of instinctive responses, which Grodin and Annas (2007) argue, play a role in the formation process. The primary goal of basic training has been identified as the desensitization to and routinization of violence to prepare recruits for a battlefield scenario (Lankford, 2009). This is further supported by Grodin and Annas (2007) who see it as the ultimate outcome in the training of torturers.

The aftermath of the breaking of the torture scandal on NBC news, including the Fay Report (2004) and the Schlesinger Report (2004) further indicate that the perpetrators were scapegoated, resulting in court martial trials and convictions. Major General Fay's Report (2004) and the Schlesinger Report (2004) each sharply criticize the soldiers involved as bad apples within the system. Mestrovic, who was present during the court martial trials further corroborates that scapegoating took place in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib, culminating in a kangaroo court seeking to bury the incident (Mestrovic, 2006). Scapegoating as a mimetic structure of violence, where persons in the crowd imitating one another in a joint violent action against the scapegoat (Redekop (2002). He further argues that scapegoating constitutes a structure characterized by differentiation, in terms of the Other turning into an 'it' for the Self. The other is then "objectified, dehumanized, and demonized and needs to be removed. Violence is projected onto the scapegoat who is seen as the source of the violence" (168). The court martial trials in a sense served to scapegoat the perpetrators and purge them both from the army itself and American society at large.

### **The Prison Environment – Abu Ghraib**

As argued above, the historical events and their impact on the public was widespread and many who serve in the armed forces do not commit torture. The prison environment itself is

likely to have played a role in facilitating additional factors needed to turn ordinary people into torturers.

The humiliation and violence suffered by several detainees at Abu Ghraib was further found to be a result of dehumanization, a psychological process that stripped the other of their group identity (Kelman, 1973), placed them outside of normal moral considerations (Bandura et al. 1975), and highlighted the divergence between the in and the out group, and ultimately facilitated violence against said group. The dehumanization of the other then leads to the dehumanization of the self (Jackson, 1968), and acts as a barrier against outside stressors and overwhelming emotions (Bernard et al., 1995). Dehumanization likely played a role at Abu Ghraib due to the high threat level it faced from its proximity to urban dwellings. Kteily et al. (2015) found that blatant dehumanization, fueled by a perceived high threat level increases the likelihood for support for extreme outcome measures such as torture. At Abu Ghraib, prisoners reported having been treated “like animals” (Pierron and Arthur, 2004) and deprived of basic necessities such as clothing and bedding (Pierron and Arthur, 2004).

Service members who witnessed torture at Abu Ghraib did not necessarily perceive it to be abusive, even after describing the acts performed. This can be linked to splitting, a psychological factor linked to numbing that allows the perpetrators to further distance himself from their victims. Lifton (1995) defines it as a ‘diminished capacity to feel’, which in extreme cases can lead to denial to the point of disavowal.

The war in Iraq against a growing insurgency further put into questions the individual’s sense of omnipotence, with colleagues dying on a regular basis both outside and inside the prison. The sexual degradation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib can be best explained using this individual psychological factor. Lifton (1986) argued that when omnipotence leads to abuse, it

merges with sadism, while simultaneously leading to a sense of powerlessness. Furthermore, while perpetrators take pleasure in control and domination, they still seek to eradicate their own sense of powerlessness. This anxiety then leads to taking “pride in being part of their country’s war machine” (Grodin and Annas, 2007, 641). The evidence suggests that omnipotence played a role at Abu Ghraib in terms of soldiers exerting their sense of omnipotence under the pretext of preventing further harm and by sexually degrading the detainees.

The counterinsurgency efforts and high threat level at Abu Ghraib due to its proximity to urban dwellings and the frequent mortar attacks, lead to a mission oriented mindset, which influenced the group behaviour at Abu Ghraib. This included a focus on intelligence collection to prevent further attacks, as pointed out by the Schlesinger Report (2004). As Grodin and Annas (2007) argue, this focusing of thoughts and feelings in a common direction influences group behaviour and leads to people being more effective torturers.

Those who sought to speak out against the torture at Abu Ghraib were either directly discouraged from doing so or discouraged by proxy. In addition, there are some examples of soldiers disobeying direct orders from their superiors in regards to stopping the torture. As Major General Taguba pointed out in his report, this may have been due to a lack of coherence in leadership as a result of the merging of MI and MP operations at Abu Ghraib during that time period (Taguba, 2004).

Another factor that seemingly played a role at Abu Ghraib was that of diffusion of responsibility. Zimbardo’s (1972) Stanford Prison Experiment indicated the role this factor plays in facilitating atrocities. Lynndie England’s statements in *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) along the lines of “the example has already been set” by the time they had arrived at Abu Ghraib corroborates the role this factor played at Abu Ghraib. It is notable that the evidence suggests

that some individuals did take personal responsibility for their actions, but many others acted as bystanders to the events and never reported the incidents they witnessed. As Staub (1989) points out, bystanders are instrumental for allowing atrocities to occur in that they subconsciously encourage the perpetrators by their silence. In addition, the court martial proceedings and subsequent relatively low sentences can further be seen as a result of the diffusion of responsibility. Bem's (1970) attribution theory argues that less responsibility is attributed to individuals acting in a group setting such as Abu Ghraib.

Abu Ghraib further experienced incidents that suggest that the reciprocal imitation of violence in terms of mimetic structures of violence took place. Redekop (2002) argues that mimetic structures of violence "determine the nature and Self-Other dynamics that, in turn, can intensify or ease the power of these structures. In mimetic structures of violence, Self-Other dynamics of both sides aim to diminish the well-being of the other with each Self aggrandizing itself at the expense of the Other" (169). Detainees would consciously resist or disobey orders or attempt to kill service personnel, which in turn resulted in severe humiliation or other forms of torture in a slowly increasing and vicious cycle of violence, where each side would thrive on aggrandizing itself at the expense of the other.

In addition to scapegoating occurring within the context of the War on Terror and the war in Iraq, as well as of the perpetrators themselves, scapegoating also took place at Abu Ghraib in terms of being directed at the detainees. The evidence suggests that scapegoating in the mimetic sense did play a role at Abu Ghraib, with an example of a service member who had been injured in an unrelated incident, was using a detainee as a scapegoat to reassert his sense of control over his environment.

Sergeant Provance recalls that other soldiers would be invited to join in the torture at Abu Ghraib and would practice hitting detainees without leaving marks (Pierron and Arthur, 2004). Simultaneously, several witnesses argue that Charles Graner was continuously praised by MI for his handling of the prisoners (*Standard Operating Procedure*, 2008; ACLU, CID, 2004). Grodin and Annas (2007) point out that rewarding obedience and employing group violence is an important factor in training torturers. The primary goal of training in achieving the desensitization and routinization of violence was arguably initiated during basic training and further exacerbated in the theatre, in particular due to the location of Abu Ghraib. Davis recalls the initial fear and chaos he observed at Abu Ghraib with mortar attacks and how at some point he became desensitized to it and thought to himself, “Damnit! Can we shoot back?” (*Standard Operating Procedure*, 00:05:15-00:05:20)

As can be observed throughout this chapter, the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib did not occur in isolation, but rather as a series of events that imitate the violent lines of a plot. Redekop (2002) argues that mimetic structures of violence can be seen as a mythos, in the Aristotelian sense of the word, a plot of a story imitating the structures of human actions.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Overall the evidence examined in the case of Abu Ghraib corroborate the hypothesis that individual psychological and group psychological factors laid out by Grodin and Annas’s (2007) study played a role in the turning ordinary people into torturers at Abu Ghraib, Iraq, in 2003. In addition, the theoretical framework of mimetic structures of violence have also seemingly played a role in the formation of torturers. Ordinary people in public service tortured at Abu Ghraib. This took place both in terms of the background of 9/11, the Vietnam War and the Crusades, as

well as in the specific group that is the U.S. army, in addition to the specific setting of Abu Ghraib.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This concluding chapter will offer a summary of the previous chapters, as well as a synthesis of the findings and significance of the study. In addition, the limitations and future implications of this study will be addressed.

### **Summary of Chapters**

Chapter one introduces the research project, providing the background to the study, as well as a brief literature review of the field of social psychology and torture. In addition, it delineates the ontology of the project and provides a brief overview of the chapters. The second chapter then focuses on the methodology of the project, including the theoretical frameworks used, the parameters of the study, and the background to the data used and how it was coded and applied. Chapter three examines the United Nations Convention Against Torture and the Geneva Conventions, arguing that torture did occur at Abu Ghraib and was justified by the United States as part of a liber lawfare strategy. Chapter four examines the dehumanization, splitting and numbing, as well as omnipotence as the individual psychological factors outlined by Grodin and Annas' (2007) study of Nazi doctors in relation to Abu Ghraib. The chapter argues that evidence suggests that all three factors played a role in turning ordinary people into torturers at Abu Ghraib. Chapter five examines group psychological factors, as outlined by Grodin and Annas study (2007), arguing that the data under examination suggests that each factor did in fact play a role at Abu Ghraib. Chapter six examines Redekop's (2002) theoretical framework of mimetic structures of violence and argues that the witness statements and reports on Abu Ghraib suggest that they played a role in creating the torturers at Abu Ghraib both from the larger societal viewpoint and from an individual standpoint. Chapter seven provides a focused summary in terms of a narrative of how ordinary people were turned into torturers at Abu Ghraib. Chapter

eight provides a summary of the chapters, the findings of the study and its significance, as well as its limitations and implications for future research.

### **Findings**

The findings of the study suggest that the transition of ordinary people into torturers at Abu Ghraib occurred through various individual and groups psychological factors, as outlined by Grodin and Annas (2007) study. Although the context of the study may differ, in that this study examines U.S. service personnel in the context of the Global War on Terror, and Grodin and Annas examine Nazi doctors during the Holocaust, it concludes that the framework appears to be transferrable. Furthermore, the study found evidence that suggests that mimetic structures of violence played a role in the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib in 2003 by creating a vicious cycle of violence between the guards and the detainees, as well as the United States government overall and the insurgency. The hypothesis initially proposed holds in collaboration with the data evaluated from various investigations into the incidents.

### **Limitations and Critical Reflection**

The study is limited to the convicted perpetrators of torture at Abu Ghraib prison from 2003-2004 due to the lack of in-depth interviews and reports on the wide-spread incidents of torture elsewhere in the theatre. Furthermore, the study does not address the issue of private military contractors or the CIA involvement, for the same reasons given above. While there have been a handful of court cases involving private military contractors, all claims were dismissed by the courts. The study also does not seek to address the implication of high level government officials as this has been addressed in length by previous studies.

A further limitation of this study is that it does not provide a profile for each individual perpetrator. This was not possible due to the limitations within the data available. The

implications of this is that the study therefore does not account for how each factor weighs in relation to others or how strongly each factor is represented within this particular case. Rather, the study is limited to demonstrating that each proposed factor played a role at Abu Ghraib. The study nonetheless represents a distinct contribution to the scholarship on social psychology, torture, as well as the specific case of Abu Ghraib.

As has been demonstrated by this thesis, torture is a highly complex act, which involves a variety of factors, some of which have been explored and demonstrated to potentially having played a role in the case of Abu Ghraib. It has also sought to demonstrate that the factors outlined in the previous chapters are in and of themselves not sufficient in explaining torture. Rather, it is the coming together of the various factors that gives some idea as to why individuals become involved in these acts. By no means, does this work mean to give an exhaustive explanation for this behaviour, but it does provide a useful theoretical framework for explaining why ordinary people end up committing acts of torture.

### **Implications and Future Avenues of Research**

There are several implications to this project in terms of practitioners in the field, for both humanitarian workers and the military and its contractors, as well as academia, regarding the theoretical framework, methodology, and future avenues of inquiry.

For humanitarian workers involved in torture settings, the results of this study allow for a greater understanding of the social factors that are involved in creating a torturer and hope to lead to greater understanding and a more compassionate and fruitful approach in trying to end the practice itself. In regards to the military and private contractors, the implications of this study can lead to greater insight into the psychological factors and dynamics that lead to torture and

provide avenues for reform. One example would be to counteract some of the psychological factors that underpin torture during basic training.

In regards to the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study, there are several implications. The study contributes to them, by adding a further case study both for psychological and group factors facilitating torture and in regards to mimetic structures of violence. Furthermore, the findings of this study corroborate and thereby further validate the theoretical frameworks. This in turn could encourage other researchers to use these theoretical frameworks and apply them to other cases to see if they hold. Each of the factors could be the basis for further research as could the nature of the relationships among the factors.

In terms of the methodology used, the study demonstrates that research on this topic can rely on primary sources collected by third persons for alternate purposes. Evidence is particularly difficult to obtain in the study of torture. This should encourage others interested in this topic to potentially replicate this methodological approach to data. It is notable, however, as pointed out by the limitations of the study, that further studies on the case of Abu Ghraib in particular could focus on addressing the issue of the weight of each factor, by using in-depth interviews with the individuals involved.

Other future avenues of research include doing more research around lawfare and the moral implications that come with it. This includes the UNCAT's prohibition of extradition to countries that will use torture and could likely be justified in a similar way as the United States government justified torture in the wake of 9/11.

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