



**DURING AND AFTER THE WAR: EXAMINATION OF
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DRIVING FORCES WHICH LEAD TO
VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

by

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I hereby declare that all the data used in this work have been obtained and processed according to the rules of the academic ethics as well as the laws that govern research and intellectual property. I also declare that, according to the above-mentioned rules, I quote and refer to the sources of all the data used and not constituting the product of my own original work.

Eleni Nefeli Paraskevopoulou

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script that begins with a large, looped initial and extends into a long, horizontal tail.

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“The starting point for the understanding of war is the understanding of human nature”.

S. L. A. Marshall, Men Against Fire

Abstract

The purpose of the present study has been to detect the combatants' mental processes which occur during their participation in armed conflict and enable otherwise ordinary people to commit atrocities in the military setting, as well as to explore the corresponding psychological aftermath of such acts in the lives of the perpetrators. To do so, a review of the current literature was conducted and the provisions governing the relevant violations of International Humanitarian Law were analyzed. Subsequently, a bibliographic research on the relevant psychological theories addressing one's internal processes during and after conflict was undertaken, proving that psychological mechanisms that dictate one's detrimental and illegal conduct in combat exist and result in one overcoming their innate resistance to inflict harm on another human. These procedures include desensitization during the training, as well as rationalization, group absolution, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, dehumanization, obedience to authority, moral disengagement and distance acting in conjunction with one another in combat. Nonetheless, these facilitators of violence were found to leave a traumatic impact on the perpetrators which can emerge while on the battlefield or some time after one's participation in war and has been proved to be more devastating than the posttraumatic stress of the victims. In order to halt this downward spiral, it is significant to modify the military training tactics, reinforce the Law of War and the sanctions corresponding to the violations thereof and enhance the soldiers' process of rationalization and acceptance through the consolidation of medical, psychiatric, psychological, and social networks and research on the most effective treatment methods.

Key words: combatants, International Humanitarian Law, torture, PTSD, murder, perpetration-induced traumatic stress, moral disengagement, dehumanization, moral injury

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Abbreviations	5
Chapter I - Introduction	6
Methodology	7
Chapter II - Regulation of conduct of armed conflict: From ancient to modern times	9
II.1 - Historical Overview	9
II.2 - Legal Overview	11
Chapter III - Before the war	20
III.1 - Military training and indoctrination	20
Chapter IV - During the war	24
IV.1 - Killing	25
IV.2 - Authority-related processes	26
IV.3 - Group absolution	30
IV.4 - Physical and emotional distance	35
IV.5 - Torture	41
IV.6 - Rape	44
<i>Sanctioned massacres and the case of the Holocaust</i>	49
IV.7 - Destruction of Monuments	52
Chapter V - Psychological effects on the combatants	54
V.1 - During participation in armed conflict	54
V.2 - After participation in armed conflict	57
<i>Participation in the Vietnam War</i>	68
Chapter VI - Conclusion	71
Annex	74
List of References	75

List of Abbreviations

AP I: Additional Protocol I of 1977

AP II: Additional Protocol II of 1977

GC I: Geneva Convention I of 1864

GC II: Geneva Convention II of 1906

GC III: Geneva Convention III of 1929

GC IV: Geneva Convention IV of 1949

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

IHL: International Humanitarian Law

POW: Prisoner of War

PTSD: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

PITS: Perpetration-induced Traumatic Stress

WWII: World War II

Chapter I - Introduction

“It was not Hitler, Goering, Goebels, Himmler and all the rest of them who took me away and beat me. No, it was the cobbler, the neighbor, the milkman. And then they got a uniform, a bandage and a hat, and then they were the master race”.

Karl Stojka (1931-2003), Auschwitz survivor

The tragedy of modern warfare is that civilians rather than troops make up the majority of the dead (Aquino et al., 2007, p. 385). War has been afflicting societies all over the world until this very moment, causing incalculable damage to great parts of humanity in a direct or indirect manner. Thus, it is urgent to halt it. To do so, it is necessary to confront it, and with the purpose of confronting it, it is essential to first understand it. War is a uniquely multifaceted phenomenon, and as such it has been subject of research for multiple fields of study. Scholars from multiple fields have examined closely its root causes, its course and its aftermath from various standpoints, such as those of History, Law, Politics, Sociology, Geopolitics, Psychology, Economics, Anthropology and Ethics as well as the relatively new interdisciplinary field of War Studies. In the field of Psychology, however, the largest body of research has focused on the ramifications of armed conflict on the combatants' and civilians' mental health. The focus on the psychological implications of armed conflict on the individuals has been of utmost importance since it has enabled the effort of specialists internationally to create action plans so as to provide help on the battlefield as well as to the civil societies involved but conversely, it has not attempted thoroughly to explain the reasons behind the perpetration of atrocities.

While some prominent scholars in the field of Psychology have studied groups of or individual mental processes that occur in wartime, others have focused on the military training processes that prepare the soldiers to be eligible to commit atrocities. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of studies refer to the enabling factors of killing and torture and not to other war crimes. In recent times, David Grossman's research on killing has managed to link the training processes with the enabling factors of atrocious acts. In his book "On killing", which has become a required reading for numerous law enforcement agencies (Grossman, 1995/2009, p.

xv), he manages to assemble all the killing enabling factors and to develop an equation that illustrates the ensemble of components that affect the perpetrator's decision to overcome his natural resistance to kill (*ibid.*, p. 187). Lt. Col. Dave Grossman is a widely respected academic, author, soldier and speaker and one of the leading authorities on human aggression, the causes of violence, and violent crime who has used his expertise to develop a brand-new branch of science known as "killology"; a term he coined to refer to the psychological and physiological effects of killing and combat on the human psyche (Grossman Academy, n.d.).

It is argued that, overall, not enough attention has been drawn to the psychological factors that are enabled during one's actual participation in the armed conflict and which facilitate one's perpetration of horrendous acts. This study aims to shed light on the phenomena that come into play during the combatants' participation in armed conflict and the corresponding psychological after-effects and to provide valuable insight to the topic by gathering already existing research findings together and studying the cases of the Holocaust and the war in Vietnam, thereby creating a more concrete understanding of civilians' transformation into violent combatants who break the Law of War and how this affects their mental health. Since war is a group activity, the emphasis is put in theories of social, sociocognitive and cognitive-behavioral theories of Psychology. This will hopefully facilitate the establishment of more accurate sanctions depending on the nature of each crime committed in wartime, as well as the assistance that the mental help that combatants need to receive upon their integration back to civilian life.

Methodology

The main research objective of this dissertation is to study the psychological processes of legitimate combatants which lead them to commit atrocities in combat and their repercussions on the perpetrators' lives after deployment. Even though each part of the topic is covered up to a certain extent in the primary literature, it is proposed that a review of the literature under this scope will expand on the current literature and form a new synthesis by bringing multiple different studies together.

Initially, a historical overview of the attempts to regulate war in the past is being provided so as to demonstrate the everexisting need to set boundaries on the conduct of hostilities in the course of history. The cornerstone of these attempts is the constitution of the Law of Armed Conflict, according to which combatants' hostile acts are considered as major violations and are recognized as such internationally. Following a qualitative analysis in the subsequent part of this research, the relevant provisions of International Humanitarian Law are cited and insight is provided so as to clarify which actions committed by the soldiers constitute violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The qualitative research that follows in the ensuing chapters examines the psychological spectrum of processes that are inculcated in the combatants during their training, enacted in the battlefield and backlashed when the war is over. The main theories that are under examination are those of Social Psychology, Sociocognitive, Cognitive and Behavioral Theory.

This analysis is inductive and innovative in that it portrays comprehensively all of the aforementioned sources. Despite that, it is susceptible to limitations, as is the case with the majority of studies. It is therefore suggested that future research could resolve the two main limitations of this study. On the one hand, according to the author's viewpoint, there is insufficient prior research on the subject in a comprehensive manner that would link the processes of military training with the combatants' atrocities in the battlefield and the subsequent backlash of their actions after their participation in combat. Furthermore, analysis of the totality of mental processes that lead the soldiers to cause harm is also scarce. On the other hand, time constraints embedded in the procedure of writing the present thesis do not allow for an even more analytical review of the literature, therefore further research, such as a longitudinal study, is recommended so as to elaborate more extensively on this research issue.

Chapter II - Regulation of conduct of armed conflict: From ancient to modern times

II.1 - Historical Overview

Despite the fact that there have always been conflicts in human history since the dawn of time, the idea of humanity in warfare has been absent for many millennia. Starting in the prehistoric era and continuing for generations later, all of the loser's available possessions, including their wife, offspring, domesticated animals and personal belongings were to be taken by the victor in battle (Levie, 2000). Attempts to regulate the conduct of hostilities can be traced back to ancient times, as in the Code of Hammurabi, king of Babylon, who outlined his nation's rules establishing a code of conduct in times of conflict around 1750 BC (King, 2008), the Bible and the Koran (Levie, 2000) and later on Sun Tsu's "The Art of War", which is considered the oldest military treatise in the world, dating back in the 6th century BC (Sun Tzu, 2000).

In modern times, the triggering event that would beget a series of attempts aiming at safeguarding individuals from the perils of war was the observations of Henri Dunant, a Swiss humanitarian, who arranged the first emergency relief services for the injured French and Austrian soldiers after having witnessed the atrocities of the Battle of Solferino in June 1859. His efforts eventually led to the founding of the Red Cross which, along with the Red Crescent, constitute an international organization for humanitarian purposes with national members in almost every country to this day (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). In parallel, the need to legally protect individuals from the perils of war became apparent and a series of actions towards this direction led to their amalgamation under the term "International Humanitarian Law", also known as "Law of War" (*ius in bello*) or "Law of Armed Conflict" (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2004). According to the definition provided by the ICRC, "International Humanitarian Law is part of the body of international law that governs relations between States. IHL aims to limit the effects of armed conflicts for humanitarian reasons. It aims to protect persons who

are not or are no longer taking part in hostilities, the sick and wounded, prisoners and civilians, and to define the rights and obligations of the parties to a conflict in the conduct of hostilities” (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2010).

The first attempt to establish explicit humanitarian laws that would apply in times of war was the so-called Lieber Code, written by Professor Francis Lieber and revised by a board of officials, which was published as General Orders No. 100 of the Union Army in 1863 and provided for the protection of individuals and particularly of women, of religion, the arts and sciences, fair treatment of captives of war and punishment of crimes against the citizens of enemy countries (General Orders No. 100: The Lieber Code, 1898). While not applicable to other nations, this Code was a landmark legislation that provided a springboard for subsequent global initiatives (Levie, 2000). The Geneva Conventions, the first of which was ratified in 1864, serve as the foundation of IHL. Prior to that, the laws that had been governing how war should be conducted were based on custom and tradition and were regional, or merely temporary. In the subsequent century and a half, the corpus of international humanitarian law expanded.

The Geneva Convention was revised in 1906 and 1929 to set additional guidelines for the protection of prisoners of war and to enhance the circumstances for ill and wounded soldiers on the battlefield. The Hague Conventions, which primarily attempted to regulate the conduct of warfare, were also ratified in 1899 and 1907. The four Geneva Conventions as we know them today were established in August 1949; This time, in tune with the horrific events of World War II, they also encompassed the protection of civilians (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2010). The Geneva Conventions were supplemented by protocols in 1977 and 2005 and further international conventions and protocols addressing a range of topics were introduced (*ibid.*). In light of the adoption of the two Additional Protocols of 1977, which modified the laws governing conduct of hostilities, the rigid distinction between "Hague Law" and "Geneva Law" became no longer applicable (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2018, p. 5).

The aforementioned series of events resulted in the amalgamation of the corpus of International Humanitarian Law that places legal limitations internationally

nowadays and which is being discussed in the following section. The provisions mentioned below aim to clarify what is considered as a legal violation in times of armed conflict so as to set the ground for a better understanding of the psychological processes of the soldiers that produce it.

II.2 - Legal Overview

International Humanitarian Law is a body of law which aims to mitigate the negative impacts of armed conflict from a humanitarian perspective. In practice, it limits the tools and techniques of combat while protecting those who are not or are no longer taking part in the armed conflict. International Law, the corpus of regulations controlling interactions between States, includes the Law of Armed Conflict. Treaties or conventions between States, as well as general principles and rules of custom (i.e. State practices viewed as legally enforceable by those States) are all examples of sources of international law. The Law of War does not, however, address the question of whether a State may actually employ force; This is covered by a significant but separate area of international law that is outlined in the United Nations Charter (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2004).

Custom, together with international treaties, constitute the two primary sources of a state's rights and duties (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2018, p. 18). The four Geneva Conventions constitute a significant part of IHL since they have been accepted as binding by almost all States worldwide, along with their Additional Protocols concerning the protection of victims of military conflict. Other conventions accepted globally forbid the use of specific weapons and combat techniques and safeguard particular groups of individuals and objects. Numerous clauses of international humanitarian law have become recognized as customary law (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2004) and are therefore applicable to both state and non-state actors (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2018, p. 18).

Although many of the articles of international humanitarian law are also applicable to individuals, they are primarily designed for nations and other participants to a war (such as armed organizations). States are required to uphold the rules, to put an end to any infractions, and to prosecute or extradite anyone accused of serious breaches of international humanitarian law, particularly war crimes. The international community, which has the authority to delegate jurisdiction to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, is charged with ensuring that war crimes are not left unpunished if a state is unwilling or unable to look into allegations of war crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. In addition, the world community has established international special courts to try crimes committed during particular conflicts (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2018, p.6).

This international system of protection delineates the conduct of warfare by providing specific guidelines for the participants and non participants to the conflict. One of the core tenets of IHL is the prohibition against inflicting unnecessary suffering which places restrictions on the methods and tactics of war. Only the minimum amount of force required to place combatants hors de combat ought to be employed (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2018, p. 47). There are further particular protections, such as those concerning women who serve in the military forces. For instance, women who are prisoners of war must remain apart from men and must be under the direct oversight of other women (*ibid.*, p. 50). Armed forces personnel or civilians who are ill or injured and who abandon all hostile acts are referred to as wounded or sick and are granted special protection. This criteria, however, excludes from eligibility a combatant who is injured yet nevertheless wields a weapon (*ibid.*, p. 50).

As *lex specialis*, IHL has precedence during armed conflicts (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2018, p. 27) and its violations are treated as serious and therefore as war crimes if they endanger protected individuals or objects, or if they violate fundamental values, according to an inferential examination of the list of war crimes contained in numerous treaties and international instruments, in addition to national case law and legislation. The preponderance of war crimes include death, injuries, property theft or destruction. Nevertheless, to qualify as a war crime, an act

may not necessarily need to cause actual harm to people or property (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005/2009, Rule 156, p. 569).

More precisely, war crimes constitute “grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949” and include, inter alia, “wilful killing (ICC Statute, Article 8(2)(a)(i)), torture or inhuman treatment [...] (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(a)(ii)), wilfully causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or health (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(a)(iii)), and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly [...]” (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(a)(iv)). Moreover, they refer to “other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, within the established framework of international law [...]” (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(b)), such as “(i)ntentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities” (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(b)(i)) and also against “[...] civilian objects [...] which are not military objectives (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(b)(ii)), [...] personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in a humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping mission in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations [...]” (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(b)(iii)) and against “[...] buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives [...]” (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(b)(ix)). “Killing or wounding a combatant who, having laid down his arms or having no longer means of defense, has surrendered at discretion” (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(b)(xi)) is also prohibited, along with “(p)illaging a town or place, even when taken by assault” (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(b)(xvi)) “(c)ommitting rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy [...], enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence also constituting a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions” (*ibid.*, Art. 8(2)(b)(xxii)).

States have the obligation to “investigate war crimes allegedly committed by their nationals or armed forces, or on their territory, and, if appropriate, prosecute the suspects (and also) other war crimes over which they have jurisdiction and, if appropriate, prosecute the suspects” (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005/2009, Rule 158, p. 607). At the same time, States “have the right to vest universal jurisdiction in their national courts over war crimes” (*ibid.*, Rule 157, p. 604). “The armed forces of a party to the conflict consist of all organized armed

forces, groups and units which are under a command responsible to that party for the conduct of its subordinates” (*ibid.*, Rule 4, p. 14). Combatants are defined as “all members of the armed forces of a party to the conflict (with the exception of) medical and religious personnel” (*ibid.*, Rule 3, p. 11). On the other hand, “the civilian population comprises all persons who are civilians” (Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 1977, Art. 50(2)) [hereinafter AP I] and “shall enjoy general protection against dangers arising from military operations” (*ibid.*, Art. 51(1), “unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities” (*ibid.*, Art. 51(3)).

The cornerstone principle of International Humanitarian Law is the principle of distinction, according to which “(i)n order to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, the Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives” (*ibid.*, Art. 48). Accordingly, “the civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack [..]” (*ibid.*, Art. 51(2)) and attacks must only be directed against military objectives. “In so far as objects are concerned, military objectives are limited to those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage” (*ibid.*, Art. 52(2)).

The second principle of great significance regulating armed conflict is the principle of proportionality, according to which “an attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated” (*ibid.*, Art. 51(5)(b) and Art. 57(2)(a)(iii)) is prohibited. The third rule governing the conduct of warfare refers to the principle of precaution in attack and against the effects of attacks, on the basis thereof “constant care must be taken to spare the civilian population, civilians and civilian objects. All feasible precautions must be taken to avoid, and in any event to minimize, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects” (International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005/2009, Rule 15, p. 51) and “to protect the civilian population and civilian objects under their control against the effects of attacks (*ibid.*, Rule 22, p. 68).

According to the Law of Armed Conflict, it is prohibited to attack persons who are recognized as hors de combat. “A person hors de combat is: (a) anyone who is in the power of an adverse party; (b) anyone who is defenseless because of unconsciousness, shipwreck, wounds or sickness; or (c) anyone who clearly expresses an intention to surrender; provided he or she abstains from any hostile act and does not attempt to escape” (*ibid.*, Rule 47, p. 164).

People who are entitled to particular protection are referred to as “protected individuals” under the 1949 Geneva Conventions. “They include the wounded, sick and shipwrecked, prisoners of war, civilians on the territory of the enemy and under its control, and civilians in an occupied territory”. Typically, women and children, foreigners, refugees, and stateless people who are on the territory of a party to the conflict are considered as protected persons along with medical and religious personnel, relief and civil protection personnel (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2018, p. 43).

Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, in addition to particular articles of all four Conventions, specify that civilians and people hors de combat must be treated humanely (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005, Ch. 32, §1); (First Geneva Convention [hereinafter GC I], Art. 12, §1, *ibid.*, §143); Second Geneva Convention [hereinafter GC II], Art. 12, §1, *ibid.*, §144); Third Geneva Convention [hereinafter GC III], Art. 13 (*ibid.*, §208); Fourth Geneva Convention [hereinafter GC IV], Art. 5 and 27, §1, *ibid.*, §§82–83). The Geneva Conventions' Common Article 3 forbids "violence to life and person, in particular murder of any type" against civilians and those hors de combat. The "wilful killing" of protected individuals is considered a serious violation of all four Geneva Conventions (GC I, Art. 50, *ibid.*, §662; GC II, Art. 51, *ibid.*; GC III, Art. 130, *ibid.*; GC IV, Art. 147, *ibid.*). Murder is defined as a war crime under the Statute of the International Criminal Court with regard to both international and non-international armed conflicts as well as under the Statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia, for

Rwanda, and of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (ICC Statute, Art. 8(2)(a)(i) and (c)(i); ICTY Statute, Article 2(a); ICTR Statute, Article 4(a); Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Article 3(a)). Its prohibition was further established by Additional Protocols I and II (AP I, Article 75(2)(a); AP II, Article 4(2)(a)).

Another prohibition of great value in International Humanitarian Law is that of torture. More concretely, “torture, cruel or inhuman treatment and outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment” of civilians and persons hors de combat are prohibited according to Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions (Geneva Conventions, common Article 3 (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005, §984), as well as by specific provisions of the four Geneva Conventions (GC I, Art. 12(2), *ibid.*, §985; GC II, Art. 12, *ibid.*, §986; GC III, Art. 17(4), *ibid.*, §987, Art. 87(3), *ibid.*, §988 and Art. 89, *ibid.*, §989; GC IV, Art. 32, *ibid.*, §990).

Moreover, “torture or inhuman treatment” and “wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health” constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions (GC I, Art. 50, *ibid.*, §991; GC II, Art. 51, *ibid.*; GC III, Art. 130, *ibid.*; GC IV, Art. 147, *ibid.*) and are war crimes under the Statutes of the International Criminal Court, of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (ICC Statute, Art. 8(2)(c)(i) and (ii) (*ibid.*, §§1007-1008); ICTR Statute, Art. 4(a) and (e) (*ibid.*, §1028); Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Art. 3(a) and (e) (*ibid.*, §1009). The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia concluded that “the definition of torture under international humanitarian law does not comprise the same elements as the definition of torture generally applied under human rights law”. Particularly, the Tribunal held that “the presence of a state official or of any other authority-wielding person in the torture process is not necessary for the offence to be regarded as torture under international humanitarian law” and defined torture as “the intentional infliction, by act or omission, of severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, in order to obtain information or a confession, or to punish, intimidate or coerce the victim or a third person, or to discriminate on any ground, against the victim or a third person” (ICTY, Kunarac case, Judgment, *ibid.*, §1332).

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, as well as regional human rights bodies, have determined that rape can qualify as torture (see, e.g., ICTY, Delalić case, Judgment (*ibid.*, §§1328 and 1731); European Court of Human Rights, Aydin v. Turkey (*ibid.*, §§1344 and 1741)). Rape, as well as other forms of sexual violence are prohibited under International Humanitarian Law. While rape and other types of sexual assault are not specifically mentioned in Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, it does outlaw "violence to life and person," which includes cruel treatment and torture as well as "outrages upon personal dignity" (Geneva Conventions, common Article 3, *ibid.*, §1555). Protection from rape, forced prostitution, and other forms of indecent assault is mandated under the Fourth Geneva Convention and Additional Protocol I for women and children (CG IV, Art. 127(2), *ibid.*, §1556; AP I, Art. 76–77, *ibid.*, §§1560-1561). The expressions "outrages upon personal dignity" and "any form of indecent assault" refer to any kind of sexual violence and in effect, it has been established that both men and women, as well as adults and minors, are equally protected by the law against sexual violence (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005/2009, Rule 93, p. 327).

Corporal Punishment (GC III, Art. 87(3), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005, Ch. 32, §1353); GC IV, Art. 32, *ibid.*, §1354); AP I, Art. 75(2)(iii), *ibid.*, §1356); AP II, Art. 4(2)(a), *ibid.*, §1357), is also prohibited under the International Humanitarian Law, together with "mutilation, medical or scientific experiments or any other medical procedure not indicated by the state of health of the person concerned and not consistent with generally accepted medical standards" (*ibid.*, §1407; GC III, Art. 13, *ibid.*, §1410); GC IV, Art. 32, *ibid.*, §1412; AP I, Art. 75(2), *ibid.*, §1414; AP II, Art. 4(2), *ibid.*, §1418). Furthermore, mutilation constitutes a war crime in both international and non-international armed conflicts under the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC Statute, Art. 8(2)(b)(x) and (e)(xi), *ibid.*, §1421).

Inanimate objects that are significant to humanity's cultural heritage are considered cultural property, as are the structures where they are preserved or exhibited. Cultural property is granted special protection in the case of a military conflict per international law. The exploitation of cultural property to further military objectives or as a target of retaliation is illegal in addition to hostile activities against it. Only extreme military situations are allowed to constitute an exception. A distinguishing

symbol is used to identify protected artifacts. The Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954 and its two Additional Protocols define how cultural property is to be handled (*ibid.*) and pillage (alias plunder) is also prohibited under the law of armed conflict (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005/2009, Rule 52, p. 182).

Each party to the conflict is required to uphold and assure the upholding of international humanitarian law by its armed forces and other individuals or entities acting in fact on its orders, under its direction, or under its control (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2005/2009, Rule 139, p. 495) and this duty to uphold and maintain compliance with international humanitarian law is independent of reciprocity (*ibid.*, Rule 140, p. 498). A State is accountable for any violations of international humanitarian law that are attributable to it, which include those committed by its organs, such as its military forces (*ibid.*, Rule 149, p. 530), while individuals who commit war crimes are to be held criminally accountable for them (*ibid.*, Rule 151, p. 551).

The Nuremberg Trials, in which the International Military Tribunal convicted and prosecuted former Nazi leaders for war crimes (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018), determined that a soldier's duty to obey commands does, in fact, have a highly defined upper limit. The court's rulings established that a soldier who commits war crimes is not entitled to immunity by pleading to a state's authorities. (Montrose, 2013, p. 328). Because of the deliberate choice they have made, soldiers who choose to carry out immoral orders are guilty of the crime, given that they can nevertheless exercise self-influence to make a different decision when presented with a situational motive to act immorally or cruelly (Bandura, 2002, as cited in *ibid.*). This equally applies to officers who, even though not committing the illegal acts, are nonetheless responsible for formulating them into military orders (*ibid.*). Commands that are lawful are both legal and moral. If the soldiers know that an order coming from a legitimate authority is unlawful, they are required to ignore it otherwise they give their assent to the unlawful act by carrying it out thus rendering themselves accountable for it (*ibid.*, p. 329). The legal precedents for the Nuremberg Trials form part of the international law and as such establish a soldier's obligation to uphold

their moral principles and refuse to follow orders that they are aware are illegal (*ibid.*, p. 329-330).

Military reality, however, has shown that during the conduct of hostilities, combatants will obey orders to kill weaponless nonbelligerents (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986, p. 247). In the succeeding chapter the military training that converts ordinary citizens to soldiers is analyzed so as to shed light on the processes and techniques used during the combatants' indoctrination. This information bridges the gap between the reality of a citizen and that of a soldier and provides valuable insight on the bases of behavior inculcated in the recruits. As stated before, the aim here is not to lessen the weight of the perpetrators' barbarous acts, but to attempt to collect all the components that altogether lead to the commission of such atrocities.

Chapter III - Before the war

“I gave them a good boy and they made him a murderer”.

Mother of one of the My Lai perpetrators

Instrumental aggression is described as “aggression that is intentional and planned” (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014, as cited in Breyer, 2018). Thus, war is considered to be “instrumental” in the sense that it pursues the satisfaction of a group’s needs, thereby constituting aggression as a means to an end (Breyer, 2018, p. 163–165). To distinguish between murder and killing in combat is a really daunting task (Grossman, 1995/2009, p.197). The fact that Vietnam, and later Iraq and Afghanistan would turn out to be such traumatic combat experiences was a consequence of the nature of guerilla warfare, where the principle of distinction between combatants and non-combatants was many times unclear (ibid., p. 198).

A lot of research in the field of psychology has been conducted with the purpose of providing an explanation behind the reasons why ordinary citizens accept and support war and the detrimental actions that it involves. These encompass theories of aggression on the basis of instinctive and socio-biological models, situational interpretations like submission to authority and role expectations, as well as cognitively guided theories that highlight the importance of one’s beliefs about the world and self-regulatory mechanisms (Aquino et al., 2007, p. 386). It should be noted, however, that an individual’s transformation from citizen to combatant does not occur directly on the battlefield; It starts during the course of the preceding military training (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 13).

III.1 - Military training and indoctrination

In modern times, training and conditioning tactics aim at overcoming the resistance to inflict harm by creating more and more effective techniques (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 13). Thus, a closer investigation on the military training techniques

can provide valuable insight on the processes that enable an ordinary individual to commit atrocities on the battlefield. In WWII, the main concern in modern warfare gradually evolved and shifted from the importance of one's perception of the enemy towards that of one's own soldier. This meant that it became vital that the resistance to killing observed in previous armed conflicts had to be reduced so that one's attacks would be more effective. This was achieved by the use of desensitization, denial defense mechanisms and conditioning in the military (*ibid.*, p. 253).

Desensitization refers to the drilling occurring during military training, as well as various euphemisms that would create a sort of normalization for the atrocities committed (*ibid.*, p. 254), whereas denial defense mechanisms are unconscious and assist the combatant to deal with traumatic experiences (*ibid.*, p 257). Conditioning, albeit unintentionally introduced as a technique in army training (*ibid.*, p 255), has been the single most effective parameter in defeating one's resistance regarding killing. Here, the goal is to establish an automatic "quick shoot" mastery by association of rewards to behaviors (*ibid.*). For that to happen, B. F. Skinner's operant conditioning methods are used; The bull-eye targets of the past have been replaced with man-shaped targets that drop immediately when shot at, thereby offering instant feedback to the shooter. When the target is hit, positive reinforcement in forms of rewards and privilege is provided to the recruits, so that a connection can be created between praise and recognition and on the one side and killing on the other (*ibid.*, p. 177). Ultimately, every feature of killing is being rehearsed and visualized, apart from conditioned (*ibid.*, p 255). These conditioning techniques, together with continuous drilling from the military leaders, assist the soldier to gradually surpass his innate resistance to killing (*ibid.*, p.178). The indisputability of the authority is indoctrinated during the course of military training and is further established by the hierarchical military system, thereby reinforcing the soldier's overcoming his natural disinclination towards killing (*ibid.* p. 40-41).

In terms of behavioral psychology, the "conditioned stimulus" is the human-like figures popping up, the "target behavior" is the instant response to shoot at the target and "positive reinforcement" is provided as immediate feedback when the figure drops. The successful shots are then traded for marksmanship badges which provide in turn various kinds of reward or privilege (*ibid.*, p. 255-256). It is interesting to

note that this training program together with participation in armed conflict may enable the shared feeling of guilt even to someone who has not ever killed; As it seems, the training that allows an ordinary person to become a killer is enough to make him feel like he actually did once the conflict has ceased (*ibid.*, p. 262).

Essentially, the purpose of military training in modern times is to enable ordinary, non-aggressive people to kill almost automatically (*ibid.*, p. 177). Studies on army training indoctrination have focused primarily on the processes that enable soldiers to kill and torture. Nonetheless, given the barbarous nature that the combatants' atrocities share, one can comprehend how research findings on the field can be generalized so as to explain crimes with similar characteristics. Yet, it should be mentioned that some claim that the combatant's predisposition also plays a vital role in his decisions on the battlefield (*ibid.*, p. 177), even though, in accordance with the findings of Gibson and Haritos-Fatouros (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986) who studied the training process of the Greek military police personnel who was in charge of torturing the detainees during the military regime of the years 1967-1974, there was found no background of criminal conduct of the subjects prior to their enlistment in the armed forces and the researchers demonstrated that delinquent behavior can actually be taught (*ibid.*, p. 247).

There are certain standards that influence the selection of the recruits to be accepted in the training process. First, what was of utmost importance according to the conclusions of Gibson and Haritos-Fatouros (*ibid.*) was the assessment of the physical strength, as well as the intellectual and political characteristics of the trainees; This last attribute would assert that the future torturers would have an offensive predisposition towards their victims. In addition, the use of binding methods was observed. These included brutal initiation rites, whose aim was to seclude the trainees from society and familiarize the newcomers to a new social reality different from the one to which they were accustomed. Also, the elitist standpoint which was being taught, along with "in-group" language would further accentuate their divergence from the general population (*ibid.*, p. 248).

More methods were utilized with the purpose of minimizing the recruits' susceptibility to disobey. To begin with, the accusation and dehumanization of the

victims was a technique the trainers utilized so that torturing the detainees would appear as less distressing for the trainees. Another routine embedded in the training program mandated the incessant bodily and psychological harassment of the trainees themselves in order for their rational reasoning to be averted, leading to the recruits' spontaneous reactions toward the captured enemy. Rewarding the obedient members of the corps and castigating the insubordinate ones was another common strategy paired with social modeling, i.e. forcing the members to witness their partners inflicting harm and being rewarded for that. This systematic desensitization to dreadful violent acts by successive exposure would result in the normalization of the violence by dismantling any previous moral objections (*ibid.*).

The aforementioned training tactics are now considered as universal and can be encountered in any military training practice whose goal is to indoctrinate infantries in the perpetration of atrocious acts (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986, p. 249). Even though weapon technology is the principal determinant of the character of war in general (Goldhamer, 1979, p. 24), nowadays armies all over the world use nearly identical weaponry, equipment and training processes, thereby rendering it almost impossible to determine who has the dominant power of the armed conflict (*ibid.*, p.57). All in all, both in basic and advanced combat training, imposed military culture emphasizes the establishment and maintenance of group cohesion, eliminating individuality and establishing group dependency. One learns that collaborating with others and obeying orders from superiors are both necessary for survival. Thus, basic military training instills a mix of horizontal solidarity and vertical obedience, which is then reinforced in combat operations (Eyerman, 2018, p. 172).

Chapter IV - During the war

“It’s easy enough to teach a man to shoot a gun: the problem is to make him willing to get into situations where guns are being shot and to remain there long enough to do some shooting of his own”.

B. Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*

Ralph K. White, a prominent figure of the psychology of peace and conflict, describes war as the result of “misperception”, claiming that the average person does not possess an innate capacity to take a life; Instead, this ability is developed through hate and fear and comprises the rationalization of one’s war-like behavior together with the demonization and underestimation of the enemy. In combat, rationalizing one’s own behavior turns out to be necessary so as to provide the combatants with a reason to fight and a justification for murder (White, 2004, p. 399) and along with displacement and diffusion of responsibility constitute a set of factors that enable ordinary people to engage in atrocities (Bandura, 1999, p. 196; Bandura et al., 1975, p. 255). Supplementarily, the demonization and underestimation of the enemy create the notion to the soldiers that attacking is the only possible course of action in wartime, thus resulting in producing innumerable unnecessary deaths - a pattern which has been substantiated time and again in ancient and recent history (White, 2004, p. 399).

Early on in a person's development, societal pressures and external rules govern behavior to a considerable extent. However, people embrace moral norms during the consequent socialization process during which these act as both a foundation for self-condemnation and as a guidance regarding moral behavior (Bandura, 1999, p. 193). More precisely, they evaluate their behavior and the situations in which it occurs, assess it in light of their moral standards and the consequences, thus resulting in them undertaking activities that increase their sense of self-worth while abstaining from conduct that would generate self-condemnation (*ibid.*, p. 193-194).

It should be noted, however, that fear is a key component residing in the set of emotions one experiences when participating in atrocities. It cognitively affects soldiers, unconsciously forcing them to stop thinking with their forebrain

(Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 8) - the region of the brain responsible for processing of information related to complex cognitive activities, sensory and associative functions, and voluntary motor activities (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015) and start thinking with their midbrain - a part of the cerebrum undifferentiated from that of an animal's brain (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 8).

In general terms, moral standards regulate one's conduct once they are activated but are not identical in every situation. Selective activation and disengagement of personal control allow individuals with the same moral standards to engage in various sorts of behavior depending on the situation. There are several social and psychological techniques that may be used to disengage moral self-sanctions from cruel behavior. These disengagement techniques refer to the reassessment of the conduct so that it is no longer considered immoral, the diffusion of responsibility of the perpetrators, the redefinition of the consequences and the perception of the victims (*ibid.*, p. 194).

IV.1 - Killing

When compared to killing in peacetime, moral judgements concerning killing in wartime are vastly different (Watkins & Laham, 2018, p. 447). However, in combat settings, to distinguish between murder and killing has become a really daunting task (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 197). With the purpose of understanding killing, one first must comprehend the depth and essence of people's resistance to kill their fellow humans (*ibid.*, p. 2). In wartime, the well-known fight-or-flight model has been misapplied according to Grossman's view, since it does not sufficiently explain intraspecies conflicts such as warfare. In nature, the initial choice of action in battles of the same species is divided between flight and posture. If the posturer is not able to deter the opponent, the following decisions are either fight, flight or submission; the former scarcely leading to death (*ibid.*, p. 5-6). The addition of posturing and submitting to the fight-or-flight model creates a more wholesome understanding of how combatants act in wartime (*ibid.*, p. 8). Posturing has been largely utilized throughout military history, dating back to the plumed helmets and

shined panoplies of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the roars of the Greek phalanxes and the howling Scottish bagpipes up to the Napoleonic gunpowder's superior noise (*ibid.*, p. 8-9).

As a natural inclination, resistance to killing has long existed but it was not until recently that it was studied for the first time. Ardant du Picq was the pioneer to document soldiers' tendency to fire harmlessly and many followed to corroborate his findings (*ibid.*, p. 9-10). The calculated miss he had observed was regarded as a very subtle form of insubordination (*ibid.*, p. 14) and paved the way for further research on the topic. In modern times, people's resistance to kill is thought of as an amalgamation of intuitive, logical, circumstantial, inherent, social and cultural components (*ibid.*, p. 40). According to Grossman's conclusions, factors such as moral and cultural distance, group absolution, close proximity and obedience-demanding authorities combined have an outstanding effect on the soldier who finds himself in need to strike a balance between following them and thus overcoming his resistance to killing or rather disobeying them and consequently being instantly renounced from his nation, leaders and peers - if not worse (*ibid.*, p. 212). These factors are being analyzed below so as to establish the conceptualization of illegitimate killing in the battlefield.

IV.2 - Authority-related processes

Institutional structures such as the military may enable the redefinition of a harmful act as legitimate (Milgram, 1965, p. 71). In such a context, only a limited minority of people have the skills to defy authority, even when the harmful impacts of their task become apparent and they are ordered to engage in behaviors that are inconsistent with their core moral principles. This has been illustrated in the results of the well-known Milgram's experiment, a set of social psychological tests carried out by psychologist Stanley Milgram at Yale University, in which research participants from a variety of vocations and educational levels were tested on their readiness to follow instructions that went against their personal moral convictions from an authority figure. The participants were made to believe that they were helping a different

experiment in which they had to give a “learner” electric shocks. Unexpectedly, the experiment revealed that a very high percentage of participants would follow the orders since these artificial electric shocks rose to proportions that, had they been real, would have been lethal. More precisely, it was concluded that, although the participants did not find pleasure in causing harm, they frequently liked the feeling that they experience when they please the experimenter (Milgram, 1973, p. 76).

The authority factors that influence the attacker’s choice include the proximity of the authority figure to the subject, the killer’s subjective respect for the authority figure, the intensity of the authority’s demands for the killing and the legitimacy of the authority figure’s authority and demands (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 144-145). The proximity of the authority who commands the commitment of the act has been found to greatly affect the perpetrator’s obedience or disobedience (Milgram, 1965, p. 66). In cases where the authority demands the illegal killing, the closer the authority is located to the perpetrator, the more possible it is that he will kill the victim. For that to happen, the leader should be respected and established and should have gained the combatants’ compliance. Apart from the importance of the military leader’s proximity to his soldiers for his order - albeit illegal - to be executed, the intensity of his demands also greatly influences the reaction of his team. The more legitimate the authority and the orders, the more likely it will be for the soldiers to follow his demands (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 144-145). This indicates how individuals who are considered as decent in their everyday life may end up committing atrocious acts under the condition that they are ordered to do so from an authority that they consider to be legitimate (Milgram, 1965, p. 75).

The core of obedience is that a person learns to no longer see himself as the master of his own acts, but rather as the tool for carrying out another else's intentions. All of the crucial aspects of obedience follow once this pivotal change in perspective has taken place. Be that as it may, the most significant repercussion is that the individual feels accountable to the authority commanding him but does not feel accountable for the nature of the activities that the authority directs (*ibid.*, p. 77). Morality is not lost; Rather, it takes on a completely different perspective as the subordinate individual experiences pride or humiliation based on how well he has carried out the tasks assigned to him by authority (*ibid.*).

Language offers several expressions to describe this morality, like “loyalty” and “duty”, which all have strong moral connotations and allude to how well a person upholds his duties to authority; They don't relate to the “goodness” of the individual in general, but rather to how well a subordinate performs the duties assigned to him. This provides an explanation on the most common justification given by someone who commits a horrible act claiming that they were only fulfilling their duty. It has been found that it is necessary for someone to believe that their behavior stems from “the self” in order for them to feel accountable for it. In the Milgram case, since the experimenter lacks the authority to enforce his demands and because of the fact that participation in a psychological experiment hardly elicits the sense of urgency and dedication encountered in warfare, one should anticipate that the experimenter's authority will be significantly lower than the one that actual military authority figures possess (*ibid.*).

Although a salient body of research on obedience has demonstrated its situational determinants and their domineering effect on human behavior (Blass, 1991, p. 399), various studies have considered closely the personality traits that may affect one's obedience or disobedience to authority, notwithstanding the difficulty of some to create a meticulous framework of personality variables (*ibid.*, p. 402). Among the findings, authoritarianism (see Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950, p. 228) figures prominently as a personality syndrome closely linked to obedience to authority. Other variables include Rotter's construct of interpersonal trust (see Rotter, 1971), moral development (see Kohlberg, 1971), social intelligence (see Burley and McGuinness, 1977), hostility (see Haas, 1966) and personal beliefs (Blass, 1991, p. 403).

This long-standing dichotomy between personality and social factors has been progressively superseded by interactionism - a view which regards human behavior as an outcome of both personal and situational elements (see Ajzen, 2008). The interactionist theory dictates that there are some moderator variables present between idiosyncrasy and circumstances which constitute human behavior predictable. These are divided into situational and dispositional variables: the former pointing out designating characteristics of circumstances that influence the

personality and the latter indicating personality traits that affect social behavior such as the obedience to authority (Blass, 1991, p. 406).

The situational moderators include the distinction between strong and weak situations, according to which strong circumstances are less predictive of personality traits, the division of situations into chosen and enforced and the level of self-awareness. Inferentially, enforced situations along with those that distract the human's attention will in all probability produce psychological inhibiting mechanisms. On the other hand, personality moderators involve cross-national differences together with the characteristic of consistency as opposed to that of variability: consistent personalities are expected to sustain coherent levels of obedience unlike their counterparts, regardless of the possible alterations in the external setting. Although many conclusions have been drawn on the aforementioned personality characteristics, it should be noted that, in general, these personalities are found within the spectrum of normal behavior (*ibid.*, p. 406-407).

Milgram in his studies divided his explanations on people's obedience or disobedience to authority into three categories. First, he suggested that personal history, family and school backgrounds that promote or condemn subordination may affect one's stance, along with "binding" factors, which refer to existing occurrences that make individuals feel at ease when they act obediently. Lastly, he referred to moral strain which reflects unpleasant sentiments resulting from disturbing experiences linked to subordination. According to the outcomes of his research, in the instances where the binding elements are dominant in comparison to the strain, subjects will tend to be obedient, while the reverse situation would give rise to insubordination. Despite the importance of these outcomes in an experimental context, Milgram's conclusions do not seem to elucidate unauthorized violence in armed conflict (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986, p. 247).

Research has indeed shown that if a legitimate authority assumes responsibility for the results of their actions, individuals will act in ways they would typically renounce (Bandura, 1999, p. 196). Even though the findings that link displacement of responsibility with obedience to authority provide valuable insight to the topic, it should be noted that real life conditions vary slightly from these conclusions in two

regards; First, responsibility is scarcely accepted so directly as in the experimental environment. Secondly, group members loyal to the authority above them do not dispose entirely of their responsibility. On the contrary, dedicated obedient subordinate members possess a strong feeling of responsibility that is entrenched in ideology (*ibid.*, p. 197). This indicates that a distinction should be made between two types of responsibility: the one refers to the duty to one's superiors and the other refers to a member's accountability for the consequences of their conduct (*ibid.*, p. 198).

IV.3 - Group absolution

The factor that research has indicated as dominant in enabling soldiers to commit atrocities in the battlefield is that of group absolution (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 149). In Grossman's equation of components (see Annex) that affect the perpetrator's decision to overcome his natural resistance towards killing, group absolution includes the subject's identification with the group, the proximity of the group to the subject and the intensity of its support for the perpetration of the act, the number in the immediate group, as well as its legitimacy (*ibid.*, p. 188). Indeed, peer pressure or, according to Ardant du Picq, "mutual surveillance" is of utmost importance in situations of group bonding under such adverse circumstances (*ibid.*, p. 150). Additionally, research in social psychology theory has corroborated that individuals tend to favor the group in which they belong and to ascribe immorality to outgroups; This malevolent attribute allocated to the opponent promotes a feeling of emotional intolerance that functions in concert with cognitive processes. This, in turn, prompts a willingness to cause damage to the enemy (Fiske et al., 2004, p. 1482).

In addition to the above, being a member of a group provides to the soldier a sense of anonymity and diffusion of responsibility that contribute to the commission of a horrendous act that he would not engage in as an individual. This anonymity, paired with a feeling of accountability to one's group, forms a strong interaction that has been found to further enable violence (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 151-152). An important concept in comprehending group behavior is that people sometimes act in

ways they wouldn't normally do when in a group of significant others (Eyerman, 2018, p. 173). When accountability is veiled by group instrumentality, subjects act more punitively as opposed to when subjects are personally accountable for the severity of the suffering inflicted on others (Bandura et al., 1975, p. 266). Under the condition that the perpetrator bonds and identifies with his peers, enabling of violence will be strong in proportion to the number of the group's members and their psychological bond to one another (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 153). After all, in combat settings, one's compliance to their unit is equivalent to their survival, while ostracism for them equals death (Fiske et al., 2004, p. 1482).

Diffusion of responsibility entails various methods of obfuscating personal moral agency. Division of labor illustrates that the segmentation of an enterprise's activities leads to the routinization of each member's task and renders them eager to start focusing on the operational specifics of the activity assigned to them and their effectiveness instead of contemplating on the morality of what they have undertaken. When one is simply an intermediary link in such a series of activities, it is simple to dismiss their own responsibilities (Milgram, 1973, p. 77; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365). The process of routinization regards one's engagement in an action without thinking about its ramifications or taking part in the decision-making process (Bandura et al., 1975, p. 255). The factors that initially would demotivate the individual from participating become the same forces that will incentivize his involvement once he has committed to the situation (Lewin, 1947, as cited in Kelman, 1973, p. 46). In such circumstances, constant authorization frees the individual from personal restraints by renewing the justification. The routinization manages to significantly decrease any moral constraints by reducing the decision-making and also to enable the avoidance of the consequences by the distribution of tasks so that each participant will concentrate on the technicalities of his tasks instead of their substance (Kelman, 1973, p. 46; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365).

According to the social cognitive theory, moral agency is rooted in a self-regulatory system that performs three main subfunctions. These include the subfunctions of self-monitoring, judgment, and self-reaction (Bandura et al., 1996, p. 364). In this regard, moral justification refers to the cognitive reconstrual of a certain

reprehensible behavior so that it is no longer viewed as harmful and implies that ordinary people will inflict harm only when convinced about the moral imperative governing their actions (Bandura, 1999, p. 194; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365). This process is observed frequently in military contexts where citizens are converted into dedicated fighters not by the alteration of their moral standards and personalities, but by the simple redefinition of the morality of harmful behavior in juxtaposition to the one of their adversaries which are normally portrayed as morally inferior (*ibid.*, p. 195).

Another tool that enables moral disengagement through cognitive restructuring is euphemistic labeling (Bandura et al., 1975, p. 254; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365). The perpetrators of atrocious acts use language to describe their actions in a way that shapes a completely different understanding about their harmdoing thereby redefining it as respectable and minimizing personal responsibility for it. One way that this is achieved is by the use of sanitizing language that conceals the abhorrence of their activities. Moreover, the use of passive voice in the description of such horrendous events removes from the wrongdoers the responsibility of their actions since it presents them as having occurred due to unspecified powers and not by individuals. For instance, soldiers do not “kill”; Instead, the enemy is getting “knocked over”, “wasted” or “taken out” and even the bullets and weapons of war receive benign names (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 91). The understanding of the offenders is further shaped by the technical jargon of sanctioned operations which is often utilized improperly to provide legitimacy to illegal ones (Bandura, 1999, p. 195).

Another form of reconstructing atrocious acts so that they are viewed as respectable is through palliative comparison on the basis thereof actions are to be understood depending on the ones that they are compared against. The likelihood that a group's destructive behavior may be considered as righteous increases when contrasted with others' even more abhorrent acts or when compared with nonviolent alternatives that are deemed as inadequate. What is more, some may use advantageous comparisons with existent or foreseen menace coming from their opponents as a justification to cause damage under the claim that it is insignificant compared to the

one that they avert. However, this exonerating comparison is clearly subject to bias (*ibid.*, p. 196; Bandura et al., 1975, p. 254; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365).

The combination of the aforementioned cognitive reframing techniques is significantly potent in enabling moral disengagement since not only it removes self-condemnation upon the commitment of atrocities, but it also instills a sense of self-approval and pride (*ibid.*, 196; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365). According to the social learning theory, self-reinforcement greatly affects the mechanisms that regulate aggressive behavior. After acquiring the norms of behavior that are expected from them through modeling and targeted reinforcement, subjects are able to create repercussions that will in turn exert influence on the expected behavior (Bandura et al., 1975, p. 254). In short, one's external, vicarious, and self-created ramifications regulate self-inhibition regarding harmful acts. While self-evaluative responses are the internal inhibitors of violent behavior, external and witnessed punishment serve as social deterrents of action (Bandura et al., 1975, p. 268).

Generally, in societies where combat roles are perceived as a symbol of good citizenship, dissociative mechanisms are activated so that the combatants can execute their tasks without paying attention to their internal contradictions (Tekoah & Harel-Shalev, 2014, p. 32). Dissociation can be divided into peritraumatic and persisting; The former refers to an intense sense of detachment and emotional distancing during the exposure to the stressors and it is considered as a technique of psychological adaptation, while persisting dissociation is a psychopathological term that diminishes emotional responsiveness and thereby hinders the resolution of the traumatic experience (*ibid.*, p. 28).

Another way in which responsibility is dispersed is through group decision making. No particular member will feel responsible when everyone shares the responsibility. Consequently, any damage caused by a group of people may always be partially ascribed to the actions of others (Bandura, 1999, p. 198). Therefore, when the input conditions decrease one's own self-observation, appraisal, and anxiety about one's own perception by others, emotions and impulses that are typically under cognitive control are more likely to be expressed. In short, what happens is that inappropriate

behavior that deviates from accepted standards of appropriateness gets "released" under the right circumstances (Zimbardo, 1969, p. 251).

Deindividuation is a term that refers to a complex, theorized process in which a number of prior social circumstances result in altered self-perceptions as well as perceptions of the other, thereby lowering the threshold for typically constrained conduct (*ibid.*) and resulting in people losing their sense of self (Singer et al., 1965, p. 356). When restraints on undesired behaviors are reduced or eliminated, the behaviors are released, and any benefits that result make the group and environment that led to the deindividuation appealing to the individual (*ibid.*). Operations that reduce distinctiveness would contribute to deindividuation (*ibid.*, p. 357), however, this is not to suggest that deindividuation always results in nonconformity; rather, it is to state that, in these specific situations, reducing social anxiety causes the appearance of socially unacceptable conduct that is typically referred to as nonconforming (*ibid.*, p. 357-358), given that individuals themselves are where the constraints are located (*ibid.*, p. 365). Nonetheless, it is possible that deindividuation may occur without one's loss of identification (*ibid.*, p. 375). At all events, the individuated members, exposed to and engaged in socially unacceptable conduct without benefiting from it, should conversely grow to despise the circumstance and the group, just as the deindividuated participants should grow to prefer both (*ibid.*, p. 376).

Deindividuation is characterized not only by the conduct of a socially unacceptable behavior but also by the ensuing preference for the deindividuated environment. Despite that the environment's social and cognitive qualities must be suitable for performing these behaviors even when internal limitations are minor (*ibid.*, p. 376), deindividuation is only a group phenomenon to the degree that the group offers a suitable setting and the models for imitation and transmission of behavioral patterns (*ibid.*). Even in situations when joining a group is forced, such as in a conscripted army, stringent clothing and conduct codes and harsh punishments for nonconformity lead to the loss of individuality. Although individuals may still be distinct inside such a group, it becomes necessary that each member loses their individuality so that they can appear as a collective, observable entity. In order to encourage individuals to comply, one common tactic is with the use of a recognizable

uniform which represents the group and simultaneously diminishes individuality (Zimbardo, 1969, p. 302). Even though the initial purpose of uniforms was the distinction of soldiers in the battlefield (Goldhamer, 1979, p. 92), wearing a uniform during battle has had an additional instant effect: that of making a crowd “solid, dignified and impersonal” (T. E. Lawrence, 1935, as cited in Goldhamer, 1979, p. 93).

In contrast, in cases such as the volunteer army, a participant is not particularly concerned with the group's need to reduce individual disparities. The reason a person joins a group is usually because they appreciate one of the organization's norms rather than to become deindividuated and they are aware that maintaining one's anonymity is more of a tool than a goal (*ibid.*). The subsequent lack of individual member differentiation inside a distinctive group is further achieved by uniformity of appearance. However, the group's overall power and influence depend on the members' conviction that each of them is an equally valid representation of the group's standards, despite the fact that certain members may have a strong sense of personal identity inside the organization. The group must demand from its members uncompromising adherence to its rules because it acquires power to the degree that its members sacrifice their individuation to the distinctiveness of the group as a whole. This means that it cannot permit any individual divergence in order to maintain its shared identity (*ibid.*, p. 303). The conformity to a group typically requires presumptions on the members' internal ideas and the driving forces behind their conduct. It is suggested, therefore, that a classification system aiming at understanding conformity should be able to make the appropriate distinctions, such as distinguishing between conformity resulting from compliance and conformity resulting from persuasion (Singer et al., 1965, p. 377).

IV.4 - Physical and emotional distance

Another set of factors of substantial impact to the attacker's action is that of distance concerning the victim: physical as well as emotional (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 188) since both elements are equally potent in allowing the assailant to negate the victim's humanity (*ibid.*, p. 158). Physical distance refers to the proximity of the aggressor to

the victim and emotional distance entails cultural, moral, social and mechanical distance. On the one hand, physical distance seems to greatly affect the soldier's reflexive response right after he has killed. Even though the act of killing is normally automatic, it is followed by a period of "euphoria and elation" which precedes the period of "guilt and remorse" (*ibid.*, p. 111-112). Appetitive aggression is a term that refers to this experiencing of positive feelings that follows the commission of violent acts and has been indicated as a deterrent against trauma in veterans (Meyer-Parlapanis et al., 2016, p. 1).

Appetitive aggression in this context can be understood as interlinked with a sentiment of pleasure, since it is greatly affected by multiple sensorial components such as smell, sight and sound that impact the individual's neurological reward system. Research findings illustrate that males and females are equally capable of experiencing the commission of atrocities as pleasurable and thus establish that there are no sex differences in appetitive aggression while they suggest that aggression is to be more connected to the level of violence committed instead (*ibid.*, p. 6-7). These two periods are influenced significantly by the distance between the killer and the victim, taking into consideration that the further the distance, the easier it will be for the perpetrator to deny that it was him who is responsible for the victim (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 111-112).

Deaths resulting from bombing attacks are mitigated from the quintessential element of distance. They epitomize detached acts of aggression where any loss of life that results from them seems involuntary and incidental. This is further illustrated by the military understatement "collateral damage" which refers precisely to these phenomena (*ibid.*, p. 106). On the contrary, killing from up close brings the attacker in the position to face his victim and this consequently makes it easier for him to identify with the victim. In these circumstances, non-killing situations are not an unusual occurrence (*ibid.*, p. 118). Nonetheless, in occasions where the target is trying to escape, a chase instinct identical to that of animals seems to be activated. This, along with the fact that close proximity to the victim can be denied when the perpetrator does not see the victim's face, can be considered as enabling elements for the kill. The same mechanism applies to executions with the use of hoods or blindfolds to the victims: the psychological distance that is created by the simple fact

that the attacker does not have to look at the face of the target safeguards the mental health of the executioner by facilitating the succeeding process of negation, rationalization and acceptance of the act since it makes it easier to deny the victim's humanity (*ibid.*, p. 127-128).

Especially in military contexts, proximity of the victim is linked, on the one hand, to the perpetrator's feelings of empathy and relatedness (Milgram, 1965, p. 63), as well as to feelings of guilt and shame that may arise in cases where the recipient of the atrocious act is observing from up close the offender's course of action (*ibid.*, p. 64). The execution of enemy prisoners of war or civilians particularly refers to the killing from a small distance of someone who does not represent an immediate or significant threat to the perpetrator. In such cases, the effect of the kill is exceedingly distressing given that the person committing it is doing so almost exclusively due to external incentives and not internal ones. This results in the disruption not only of the wrongdoer's attempt to negate the victim's humanity, but also of his effort to reject his own guilt for the kill (*ibid.*, p. 203). Such an execution, despite being a frequent action, is also a counterproductive one since it tightens the opponent's determination and renders him unwilling to surrender. The reader should bear in mind that the perpetrator must first negate the humanity of the enemy in order to be able to kill him at close range whereas surrender demands the exact opposite: that the potential killer acknowledges and has mercy for the other's humanity. Practically, in such heated moments, a surrender imposes an unconditional, very challenging emotional turnaround for both sides, where the party which is being attacked is obliged to choose between posture and fight on the one hand and surrender on the other - the latter making him eligible to be killed (*ibid.*, p. 201-202).

Racial or ethnic differences create a cultural distance element that enables the dehumanization of the victim (*ibid.*, p. 160). Dehumanization signifies the behavior or process that subverts the humanity and individuality of others. As such, it occupies a prominent place in intergroup violence since it frequently heralds moral exclusion of stigmatized groups. In general terms, a person cannot cause serious damage to another without dehumanizing the victim first. By doing so, the perpetrator rationalizes and justifies the suffering he inflicts (Hall, 2018, p. 97-98). It follows from here that the more the soldier identifies with his victim, the harder it is

for him to kill (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 164). The dehumanization process strips from their victims their identity and community - two major components that constitute the value of each individual (Kelman, 1973, p. 48) and, along with the use of euphemisms, the commission of atrocities is further reinforced, thereby creating a vicious circle of violence that facilitates more horrendous acts (*ibid.*, p. 50). The victimizer himself becomes gradually dehumanized as well, since the more he performs his tasks the easier it is for him to neglect his moral restraints (*ibid.*, p. 51).

Moral distance incorporates the condemnation of the enemy's guilt along with the retaliation for it on the one hand, as well as the affirmation of the legitimacy of the attacker's cause on the other (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 164). Following this rationale, atrocities can be rationalized as a simple "administration of justice" (*ibid.*, p. 165). Allocating blame on one's opponents gives rise to moral disengagement in two different manners. On the one hand, the perpetrators may perceive themselves as innocent victims led to act cruelly because they have been coercively provoked, thus believing themselves to justifiably act defensively in response to hostile instigations. Retributive behavior is therefore justified as a defensive response to aggressive provocation. In such cases, conflictive exchanges can include mutually escalating activities. What is more, offenders may rationalize their acts by ascribing the blame on imperative circumstances, thereby reassuring themselves on the rectitude of their pernicious activities (Bandura, 1999, p. 203; Bandura et al., 1975, p. 255; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 366).

Finally, the element of social distance refers to a practice of long duration that considers a certain class of people as less human than others in a socially stratified context (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 160), whereas mechanical distance represents a type of psychological distance by dint of technological advancement (*ibid.*, p. 169). Social distance allows the offenders to disregard the recipients of their actions as equally human, since in that case, the subsequent feelings of empathy and social obligation would impede them from perpetrating inhumanities (Bandura, 1999, p. 200).

Similarly, mechanical distance explains why naval and aerial combat do not present the same psychological difficulties for the combatants. In both cases, the majority of

them will not have to kill the enemies from up close and directly and, at the same time, nobody will try to personally kill them. Intellectually, they have the capacity to understand that they are fighting humans and humans are fighting them but, given that they will not have to attack individually, they can emotionally deny it. Also, attacking someone through radars creates another type of leverage for the attackers (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 58). Night-vision apparatus, together with weapons and other equipment that depict the victim as an almost unreal objective further assist in the dehumanization of the target (*ibid.*, p. 160). In other words, these are psychological and mechanical distances that have a protective power for the combatants (*ibid.*, p. 58). The same strong mixture of these protective factors, namely mechanical and physical distance as well as group absolution is to be observed in artillery, missile and bomber crews (*ibid.*, p. 108).

Another category of killing enabling elements refers to the target attractiveness of the victim and consists of the means, opportunity and motive for the kill (*ibid.*, p. 188). More concretely, the bigger the tactical and technological advantage produced by a kill, the more likely it is that the combatant will commit it (*ibid.*, p. 172). At the same time, the relevance of the victim and the payoff in terms of the enemy's loss as well as the perpetrator's gain plays a decisive role in the assailant's choice of action (*ibid.*, p. 173). In this circumstance, a potential victim who is either a civilian or a person of hors de combat status normally is not linked to relevance or payoff since the rationalization that would follow the kill is much more challenging than a legitimate combat kill (*ibid.*, p. 174). Especially in cases of defenseless women and children being present in the conflict setting, legitimate combat action may easily convert into an unhindered series of horrendous acts (*ibid.*, p. 175) which infiltrates the realm of murder (*ibid.*, p. 174).

Overall, moral disengagement of otherwise considerate individuals is a progressive practice. At first, they engage in more subdued forms of aggression that they can bear with some discomfort. Gradually, the activities assigned to them become routinized while the subjects may not even notice their transformation. During this progressive desensitization process, repeated acts of aggression erase self-reproach and suffering (Bandura et al., 1975, p. 256). As a result, the assailants end up performing atrocities that in the past would be inconceivable to them (Bandura, 1999, p. 203). However, in

such complex situations, none of the aforementioned determinants alone could explain efficiently the behavior of the wrongdoers.

According to the social cognitive theory, personal as well as sociostructural factors function codependently in the conduct of hostilities (*ibid.*, p. 207). The soldier is not only forced to refuse his shame and the humanity of his victims, but he is also obliged to believe that what he is ordered to do is right and that the atrocities he will commit constitute evidence of his moral, cultural and social superiority over his victims. It is noteworthy that his entire mental health depends solely on his own belief of the righteousness of his actions and this explains why he will find himself fiercely repressing his own doubts and at the same time condemning anything that would menace his stance (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 212). After all, the leaders who mandate these atrocities rely heavily on those who execute them, given the fact that only if their mission succeeds they will not have to be held accountable for such actions (*ibid.*, p. 213).

In order to ensure the endurance of the commission of atrocities by any recruited group of soldiers which is obliged to execute them, a basis for its legitimacy needs to be set. By way of illustration, this can be an authority of a state or a state religion. Forcing these soldiers to perpetrate such barbarous acts turns out to be less problematic in comparison to making them grasp their atrocities as empowering and bonding procedures. Once they manage to feel empowered by their crimes, a vicious circle is created which in turn further dehumanizes their victims and ends up enabling the perpetrators even more (*ibid.*, p. 216-217).

Only in the case that the members of a group are ready to devote themselves completely to the grotesque logic of the atrocity will they gain even the fleeting advantages of it. In any other circumstance, they will find themselves instantly confused and debilitated by their own deception and self-contradiction (*ibid.*, p. 229). The fundamental mechanisms that prevent such a phenomenon from occurring during the execution of such cruel acts are the diffusion of responsibility and the group absolution of guilt. On the one hand, any member of such a military system can diffuse the responsibility of their horrific actions among their superiors and/or peers and on the other, peer pressure is interlinked with group absolution. The

combination of these two renders it almost impossible for the soldier to avoid engagement in the atrocity. Another factor of importance that is oftentimes ignored is that, in such situations, the value of life is so belittled that the soldiers end up sensing feelings of numbness and learned helplessness and thereby normalizing barbarity (*ibid.*, p. 227; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365). Moreover, adverse incidents such as the deaths of comrades may produce sentiments of anger that can further enable violence (*ibid.*, p. 179). Only rarely will someone have the moral fiber necessary to reject the obedience-demanding authority above them or the peers beside them (*ibid.*, p. 226). However, the subsequent trauma that the assailant will have to confront during the rationalization process that follows the act is proportional to the amount of resistance he will have to overcome (*ibid.*, p. 193-194).

IV.5 - Torture

Torture is a multifaceted phenomenon framed by historical and cultural contexts (Anderson & Nussbaum, 2018, p. 44). In most instances torturous practices have been used by institutions such as states, police forces and the military (*ibid.*, p. 7) so as to gather intelligence (*ibid.*, p. 8) even though now it has been established that rapport-building tactics are a considerably more beneficial and trustworthy method of obtaining valuable information (Gorman & Zakowski, 2018, p. 52-53). With the purpose of comprehending torture, one should bear in mind that, similarly to the act of killing, the motivation to inflict such harm does not come naturally to the perpetrator; Instead, it is taught from people who have previously tortured (Rejali, 2007, as cited in Anderson & Nussbaum, 2018, p. 7). This in turn prompts a willingness to cause damage of both an active and passive nature: soldiers become prone to inflict physical pain but at the same time to degrade and scorn the enemy (Fiske et al., 2004, p. 1482). It is apparent, however, that not everybody will comply with a dictate to inflict pain to another human (Gorman & Zakowski, 2018, p. 56).

According to the socio-cognitive model, individuals employ moral disengagement through various mechanisms which allow them to cause damage to others while at the same time maintain a positive image of the self and reduce feelings of remorse

(Aquino et al., 2007, p. 386). However, without considering the significance of self-definition, research on moral disengagement processes offers only a partial understanding of the psychological processes that enable people to act inhumanely (*ibid.*, p. 391). Following this theory, an individual develops a moral personality when they define themselves morally and place moral principles at the center of who they are. This suggests that the activation of mental representations of the self is crucial for pondering social information and yielding plans for action (*ibid.*, p. 386). Subsequently, the idea of moral identity is a crucial psychological mechanism that turns moral principles into actions (*ibid.*, p. 391).

The motive of the torturer behind their stance towards the victim axiomatically entails a dehumanizing component instead of an urge for punishment (*ibid.*, p. 53). Arguably, a sense of empathy or identification with the detainee would be contradictory to the infliction of harm (*ibid.*, p. 54). Causing such damage results not only in the distortion of perception of the helpless other but also that of the self-perception of the abuser and this enables further degradation of the captive. This vicious circle abides uneventfully across from society's indifferent bystanders and is being in turn reinforced by various moral disengagement techniques that the torturers involuntarily apply, along with their inhibiting obligation towards the omnipresent obedience to authority above them (*ibid.*, p. 55).

There are multiple explanations for the use of torture that seem to interreact and there has been no evidence supporting the idea that these factors are reciprocally excluded. They can be summed up as follows: Military training, poor discipline, loyalty to peers and the subsequent deindividuation, along with racist beliefs and feelings of fear, rage and vengeance may explain the use of torturous practices. Moreover, obedience to authority and diffusion of responsibility that characterize the military system can also lay the foundations of normalization of the usage of torture towards the enemy detainees (Einolf, 2018, p. 138-139). This eagerness to inflict pain, however, pertains to a sense of morality of the individual in armed conflict which may differ from the same person's moral rationale in civilian life (*ibid.*, p. 135).

The social environment of war involves particular interaction types, namely hierarchical and horizontal ones among the soldiers, antagonistic against the

adversaries, as well as military-civilian distinctions. These relationships that are observed in battle environments can affect the opinions of non-participants regarding the value of harm produced in such contexts (Watkins & Laham, 2018, p. 2). In circumstances where antisocial conduct is shared with others, where conditions obfuscate the connection between an action and its repercussions and a leader is prepared to take total accountability, the responsibility one feels for the results of having engaged in antisocial behavior may become negligible and the existence and size of a group, apart from providing member anonymity and shared accountability, may also serve other purposes such as representing an example for conduct, creating physical activity that is stimulating in itself, or inciting behavior in a certain direction or toward a specific object. This process of deindividuation is described here as an intra-individual one, despite the fact that social phenomena might affect it (Zimbardo, 1969, p. 256).

There are two ways that feeling irresponsible for one's actions might induce conduct that is often constrained. On the one hand, one is not held accountable for his acts if others are held accountable for them and, on the other, one may refrain from considering the morality of an action in situations where someone else assumes the responsibility (Diener et al., 1975, p. 337). The crucial factor here is the gradient of rewards and constraints for each person's response; even in the most depersonalized of settings, some persons may still be subject to internal restrictions (Singer et al., 1965, p. 376) and sanctions that co-exist simultaneously with the social, external sanctions (Bandura et al., 1996, p. 365).

Factors that facilitate the use of torturous practices include the denial of the victim's humanity since the victims are being divested of their clothing and dignity, the assurance concerning exemption from punishment, along with one's affirmations of moral integrity and cultural or ideological supremacy, and the pretext of abiding by commands of the ones above - even though this latter justification was globally repudiated during the Nuremberg Trials after World War II (Gorman & Zakowski, 2018, p. 56-57). In times of combat, dehumanization has been of major importance in enabling the commitment of horrendous acts by influencing the perpetrators' self-censure (Bandura, 1999, p. 199; Bandura et al., 1975, p. 255; Bandura et al., 1996, p. 366), paired with the perpetrators' minimizing, ignoring or misconstruing

the consequences. When the perpetrators are cognizant of the harm that they inflict, self-censure and distress function as self-restrainers (*ibid.*).

Torturers provide various moral justifications for their actions. These include the argument that “the end justifies the means”, the thought that the interrogation methods they use do not really amount to torture and, most importantly, delegitimization (Einolf, 2018, pp. 137-138). Delegitimation is not a legal term, but one which describes the process of how the perpetrators come to perceive their enemy as not qualifying for the protections set by law or custom. As a consequence, they do not regard their castigation as a cruel act, but as deserved retribution, befitted to their victim’s misconduct (*ibid.*, p. 136).

The work of the psychologist Martha Huggins with Brazilian torturers contributes to the understanding of the perpetrators’ own perception of morality regarding their actions. Torturers who considered themselves as “good” believed that they were “well-trained, self-controlled and skilled professionals” who practiced torture with the aim of protection of their state, in contrast to immoral torturers who “gained sadistic pleasure from torture or failed to control their feelings of anger during interrogation” (Huggins, 2002, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 137). Expanding on the self-perception of torturers, false consensus is an important relevant term which refers to the fact that the majority of people presume that no matter what they do, others would do the same (Mullen, 1985, as quoted in Fiske et al., 2004, p. 1483). On that account, lower-ranking soldiers, apart from following their superiors’ orders, can also commit cruelties which they believe that their commanders would dictate in the light of their apprehension of the authority’s general intentions. Nonetheless, the combatants’ actions remain constantly intentional, even though they may not always be conscious that these same acts are wrongful (*ibid.*).

IV.6 - Rape

Although war rape has never been regarded as appropriate military conduct and cannot be simply justified by invoking the fog of battle, war and rape have always

been closely associated. Women have historically been regarded as legal war spoils, and raping women who are connected with an adversary is a frequent degrading and humiliating strategy. Nevertheless, during the military training, soldiers are instructed to kill, they are not trained to rape (Eyerman, 2018, p. 176).

The dynamics of the unit vary between killing and raping. In cases of rape, weaponry is typically not used and must be set down in physical contact. Furthermore, mass killings may not always involve gender, but rape is a highly private act of dominance that is heavily influenced by gender. Nonetheless, public confessions of rape appear to be less tolerated and more vilified than the murdering of innocent people, despite the fact that group pressure and violent manifestations of masculinity may be acceptable features of the male-dominated military environment (*ibid.*, p. 176). It would appear less plausible to shift accountability for rape than for the death of non-combatants from the individuals to the group and up the command hierarchy. Individual combatants are required to be aware of and adhere to the guidelines for acceptable conduct with regard to women, even if commanders ultimately bear accountability for the actions of individuals under their charge (*ibid.*).

Rape is much more of a manifestation of other, nonsexual desires than it is of sexual desire (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979, p. 5). It is typically a desperate behavior that arises from people's inability to cope with life's responsibilities and obligations because they are emotionally fragile and insecure. The perpetrator's connections with others are expected to lack mutuality, reciprocity, and a true feeling of sharing, and it is expected from him to exhibit little warmth, trust, compassion, or empathy. Even though he makes the horrific decision to commit rape when under pressure, his intelligence seems to be unimpaired. In a final effort to cope with the pressures of agony and helplessness which he believes that will destroy him, he turns to rape. He frequently worries that he is giving up control and might go mad. The results of his actions, whether they affect him personally or other people, are meaningless at the time of the commission of the atrocity. Because of this, he is not deterred at that moment by any rational factors like sanctions, shame and harm of his victim (*ibid.*, p. 6).

Under extremely unusual situations, such as during times of war, some males who typically would never conduct a sexual assault may commit rape, even though the probability that such a person will commit rape repeatedly is relatively rare. However, there are some individuals who find it extremely challenging to satisfy the typical demands of life, especially during their participation in combat. For these people, the strains that one typically learns to endure are intolerable and overwhelming. The risk of their committing the same crime repeatedly is relatively high and according to the relevant findings is attributed to the overwhelming stress, their incapacity to handle displeasure, and their need to engage in intercourse so as to express their inner pain (*ibid.*, p. 7).

Rape plays an inextricable role in the process of dehumanization and domination of the enemy and has served during the course of history as a powerful means of empowerment and group bonding to the detriment of others, especially in cases of gang rapes (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 213). As with mass killings, gang rapes should not be thought of as illogical acts of violence but as a vile potent mechanism of group bonding and criminal enabling which oftentimes serves the leader's ulterior motive to the harm of vulnerable groups - especially women (*ibid.*, p. 213-214). Similarly to individual rape, gang rape uses sex as an outlet for rage and strength to reconcile for feelings of worthlessness, despair, and vulnerability as well as to exact revenge on the perpetrators for their shame, animosity, and irritation. This action has several goals. The sensation of rapport, camaraderie, and collaboration with the fellow culprits, however, is one of the distinctive aspects of gang rape. The perpetrator is interacting with the other offenders through the victim. He is acting or behaving in a way that he believes is expected of him through participating in a group activity and validating himself (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979, p. 115), since criminals compete in antisocial behavior and the sexual attack committed by the rapist gang is seen as the result of both personal motivations and group dynamics (*ibid.*, p. 116).

Rape is a complicated, multifaceted act that has several psychological benefits for the perpetrator and it bears mentioning that it has been found that the dynamics of males who rape other men are comparable to those of men who rape women. None of the sexual attackers have been forced to rape in order to satisfy their sexual needs (*ibid.*, p. 126). It then comes as no surprise that the parallels between male and

female rape in terms of the offense's traits, the offender's dynamics, and the victim's experience outweigh the differences (*ibid.*, p. 140). However, given that females are not physically as aggressive as males, women are significantly less likely to commit rape than males are because it is an aggressive act (*ibid.*, p. 187). Essentially, a woman can be prosecuted with rape if she assists or abets a male in carrying out the attack and only seldom will the victim also be sexually assaulted by the woman as well (*ibid.*).

The acceptability of interpersonal violence and sex role stereotyping, as well as mistrust of the other sex (adversarial sexual ideas), have all been found to be substantially correlated with attitudes about rape thereby converting it in a logical and psychological outcome of a culture that stereotypes sex roles as competitive, dominant-submissive, and antagonistic. Respectively, if sexual discrimination is considered as a prerequisite for selecting women as prospective sexual victims, endorsement of physical aggression may be the attitude that frees such an assaultive action (Burt, 1980, p. 229).

As mentioned earlier, it has now been established legally that rape amounts to torture. This is further supported in the majority of cases, where the psychological damage resulting from rape has been found to surpass substantially the bodily harm. For the victim, far more detrimental than the fear of dying and incapacitation is the powerlessness, horror and devastation caused by the exceeding hatred of the perpetrator that will make him act so abhorrently toward another human being (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 76). This renders rape more stigmatizing, difficult to discuss, and difficult to orchestrate for its perpetrators as well, since its ramifications are catastrophic on both a moral and psychological level: "Psychological impairments to the survivors are sometimes lifelong. Similarly, when a combatant commits rape or rape-murder a part of his conduct, he causes permanent harm to himself" (Shay, 1995, as quoted in Eyerman, 2018, p. 176).

In reality, receiving admiration in military culture has been coupled to displaying one's masculinity, which in that environment might be shown by aggressive deeds, such as murder and sometimes even rape. According to Singer, a combatant feels the urge to uphold the standards of the soldiers he fights alongside in combat, even if

doing so requires committing atrocities, because otherwise he will feel humiliated (Singer, 2004, as cited in *ibid.*). Unfortunately, even though perpetration of rape may be officially prohibited and punished by current military law, it has occasionally been promoted inside military organizations where combatants pushed one another and felt intense pressure to partake. Not doing so, for them, would have been disgraceful (Eyerman, 2018, p. 177), however, perpetrating rape more often than not would result to feelings of guilt and shame.

Tragically, the overall number of civilian combat fatalities has never included rape victims or victims of sexual assault. They are separate from the murders and a component of the travesty of war. Since both the individual soldiers and the military institution they represent have been defiled by the perpetration of such atrocities, the perpetrators are expected to feel guilt (*ibid.*, p. 176-177). In contrast, shame is linked to how individuals perceive others and, thus, to self-esteem. By accepting responsibility, admitting wrongdoing and making a confession, one can alleviate guilt, which is connected to actions and what has been done. Shame is more difficult to overcome and frequently results in violent behavior (*ibid.*).

As stated earlier, appetitive aggression refers to the experiencing of positive feelings of the perpetrator that follows the infliction of harm. Interestingly, this factor has been found to be a strong indicator against PTSD in war veterans (Meyer-Parlapanis et al., 2016, p. 1). In combat, appetitive aggression appears as a reactive aggression which is a spontaneous, violent behavior that stems from a perceived or real threat, combined with a hostile behavior originating in a sense of innate reward upon the infliction of harm. It has been argued that this reaction may result from one's attempt to adapt in such perilous circumstances and it has been established that not only it prevents the development of post-traumatic stress disorder but it also allows the soldiers to be more functional, gain prestige within their corps and adjust more efficiently to the violent tasks assigned to them (*ibid.*, p. 2). Ultimately, the character of the combatant affects his actions on the battlefield. Even though a large body of research has demonstrated that a genetic predisposition for aggression exists, environmental factors paired with an absence of empathy for others can lead to a full development of the predisposition toward aggression (*ibid.*, p. 182).

During the course of history, all the aforementioned crimes have been committed in the context of war to a bigger or lesser extent, however these tragic events were observed on an unprecedented scale of inhumanity and horror on some occasions. Such an appalling situation was undoubtedly the Holocaust which is being analyzed below, in an effort to comprehend how such an enormous amount of individuals ended up perpetrating barbarities whose magnitude was until then unheard of.

Sanctioned massacres and the case of the Holocaust

Sanctioned massacres refer to acts of systematic and indiscriminate mass violence against defenseless civilians (Kelman, 1973, p. 29) that form part of a deliberate policy aiming at the extermination of a certain group of people (*ibid.*, p. 30). Research on this topic reveals that, with the purpose of understanding the psychological motives that enable the commission of atrocities it is necessary to understand the powerful forces that reduce the resistance to violence, namely the processes of authorization, routinization and dehumanization (*ibid.*, p. 25). Violence that is genocidal in character usually is directed at groups of particular ethnic, religious or national terms with the ultimate goal being their destruction (*ibid.*, p. 31). These groups have not instigated this violence and appear physically weaker than the attackers who target them because their destruction may seem useful or their continued existence may obstruct the execution of certain policies (*ibid.*, p. 32). The form of aggression expressed in such cases is normally justified on the basis of self-defense against potential attack (*ibid.*, p. 33).

The Holocaust has been mistakenly perceived as an absurd massive killing of innocent people, whereas in fact it was not. Instead, there was an evil powerful logic behind it which one has to comprehend in order to confront it. What happens with the people who engage in such atrocities in general is that they give away their future for a short benefit in the present. This gain for them, however, is powerful and real (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 208-209). Thus, participation in mass killings and executions of this sort can instigate mass empowerment (*ibid.*, p. 211). However, research on Nazism has demonstrated time and again that atrocities were oftentimes

enacted by simply committed bureaucrats assiduously abiding by commands (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986, p. 246). Although one can question the exact parallels between the actions of Milgram's subjects and those of the Nazis under Hitler, the obedience studies have clearly contributed to a continued awareness of the Holocaust and to attempts at understanding its causes (Blass, 1991, p. 409).

Erich Fromm, one of the most prominent psychologists of the 20th century, conducted an in-depth analysis of humans' relationship with freedom and drew special attention to the social and psychological factors that gave rise to Nazism. In his conclusions he affirms that the culture in all societies is ascertained but the most powerful groups due to the fact that they axiomatically have the authority to control, inter alia, the educational system and press and thereby indoctrinate their convictions to their citizens. Additionally, he attributes their influence to the masses to the extraordinary prestige they may seem to possess which may prompt the lower classes of the population to endorse and reproduce and relate psychologically to their values (Fromm, 1941, p. 97). As a consequence, a link is created between the ideology of Adolf Hitler and that of his followers.

Fromm asserts that social and psychological phenomena are closely associated (*ibid.*, p. 116) and this is due to the fact that it is the exact same psychological mechanisms operating in individuals that one can observe operating in the social process, since the manner in which individuals function separately is identical to the way they would as being parts of a group; the only difference being that in the latter case the same occurrence happens on a larger scale (*ibid.*, p. 118).

According to Fromm, negative freedom ("freedom from") is distinct from the positive kind of freedom ("freedom to"), since the former represents an escape from existing boundaries while the latter is of a more active nature and dedicated to creation. He finds that negative freedom is embedded, inter alia, in authoritarianism. The authoritarian character incorporates one's propensity to renounce the individual self and to blend in with external groups or abstract ideas in order to obtain the strength that the self alone is devoid of. This fusion takes shape in the form of submission and domination that designate the authoritarian personality (*ibid.*, p. 122) and they both aim at helping the person flee from his insupportable sense of loneliness and

powerlessness (*ibid.*, p. 130). Masochistic strivings tend to instigate obedience to factual or alleged orders from higher forces (*ibid.*, p. 122) while sadistic tendencies provoke the exact same dependence in an inverted way: The strength that the sadist feels is based upon the presence of the victim (*ibid.*, p. 125).

Despite the fact that sadistic and masochistic drives occurring simultaneously may seem a contradiction, in essence they are both developed from the same need originating in the unbearable loneliness and powerlessness of one's self (*ibid.*, p. 136). Following this theory, the sado-masochistic character is closely linked with authority, since on the one hand they show admiration for it and show a tendency to submit to it and on the other they want to be an authority themselves and have other people submit to them (*ibid.*, p. 141). In this hierarchical system, everybody had someone above them to whom they would submit and at the same time, they had somebody underneath over whom they would feel power. Hitler used various rationalizations for his actions and this led to his followers sharing the feeling of sadistic satisfaction (*ibid.*, p. 194). The Fascist system declared itself to be authoritarian because of the significance of authority as a key role to its political and social structure. The term "authoritarian character" portrays the personality pattern which constitutes the human basis of Fascism (*ibid.*, p. 141).

Recent research on the topic has shown no correlation between sadist inclinations and perpetration of such atrocities like in the case of Holocaust (Kelman, 1973, p. 35). Sadistic behavior is rather seen as a result of one's involvement in mass violence and the dehumanization it produces and not as a predisposition trait that evokes it (*ibid.*, p. 36). In these contexts, authorization of atrocious acts is seen as providing an automatic justification for their execution. What is perceived by the participants as their ultimate moral obligation is the duty to execute their superiors' demands despite their personal moral scruples. As a consequence, the individual cannot perceive himself as personally accountable for his actions but only as an extension of the authority (*ibid.*, p. 39). The military's hierarchical structure further solidifies the indisputable nature of authority, which is ingrained during training (*ibid.*, p. 40-41), however, it should be noted that The Nuremberg principles, however, regarded the claim of "following superior orders" as an attempt to escape the incrimination related to war crimes (Bosch, 1970, as cited in Kelman, 1973).

Another perspective on “Hitler’s willing executioners” is illustrated in Goldhagen's homonymous book, where he rejects various explanations that others (see Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 1992) have attributed to the atrocities of the Holocaust. First, he dismisses the claim that Germans were forced to kill Jews since, according to the Nuremberg Trials, there has not been a single case indicating that a German would be killed for refusing to kill Jews. Goldhagen goes on to invalidate the importance of peer pressure and the argument of ordinary men being placed in extraordinary circumstances and insists that the individual’s will is stronger than the group’s (Alford, 1997, p. 720). He depreciates the power of obedience claiming that those who serve it are being offered the chance to actively canalize and convey society’s sadism and eagerness for destruction (*ibid.*, p. 735). Moreover, he negates the fact that the bureaucratic fragmentation of the tasks would be so robust so as to impede the perpetrators’ awareness regarding their actions (*ibid.*, p. 721) and concludes that all of the aforementioned justifications would disavow the humanity of the culprit and his wilful decisions (*ibid.*, p. 722).

As it has been illustrated, various explanations from divergent standpoints have attempted to shed light on the reasons that led ordinary people to commit atrocities of such a massive scale like in the Holocaust. Again, the connecting elements between crimes of genocidal character and of lesser extent appear to be the ones described throughout this chapter and are to be studied together with the socioeconomic and political aspects of each era. This will under no circumstances underestimate the extent of such tragedies but will help one understand, as objectively as possible, the multitude of reasons that gave rise to these phenomena. Before moving on to the examination of the psychological ramifications of these actions for their perpetrators, a brief analysis on the destruction of monuments concludes this chapter with the purpose of making apparent the fact that not all war crimes harm physically their victims but also emotionally.

IV.7 - Destruction of Monuments

The fact that the theater of war has been shifted progressively from remote battle zones to cities raises new issues on the observance of International Humanitarian Law and, more concretely, on the distinction between civilian objects and military objectives. Armed conflicts situated in urban battlefields take advantage of the vulnerability of the civilian population so as to destabilize the opponent (Amana, 2022, p. 250), since civilian casualties become unavoidable and many non-combatants end up either suffering or being forced to be displaced (*ibid.*, p. 246). Furthermore, civilian establishments obstruct the attacking of strictly set military objectives and some structures susceptible to double usage like bridges and electricity installations become military targets (*ibid.*, p. 248); hence, warfare in cities renders the implementation of the principles of distinction and precaution and, subsequently, the overall application of IHL difficult if not impossible (*ibid.*, p. 247-248).

The objective on which the destruction of monuments is primarily founded is that of provocation, repression and obliteration of the ideologies and emotions attached to these historical structures taking into consideration their symbolic function in all societies (Sanni, 2021, p. 1187). Devastation of historical sites has been used as a war strategy throughout human history not only as a means of conquest but also as a medium aiming at erasing the cultural memory of a society. Although destruction of cultural monuments has recurrently been targeted at pillage and looting (*ibid.*, p. 1190), it may also be observed on the ideological basis of demolishing sites of religious and/or political importance with the goal of debilitating the enemies and their connection with their past (p. 1188).

The analysis of the crimes listed in the previous sections does not represent an exhaustive list of all the atrocities taking place in combat but attempts to consolidate the factors that convert simple citizens to violent soldiers who violate the Law of War. As will be discussed below, the participation in armed conflict may produce acute psychological damage to the soldiers while on the battlefield and their perpetration of horrendous acts will most likely bring about detrimental

repercussions to their mental health short or long after their return in the civil society. Thus, the subsequent chapter is dedicated to the study of these mental procedures and the therapies that have been found to be applicable, even though the literature on the latter remains scarce.

Chapter V - Psychological effects on the combatants

“In order to come to terms with fear, we need to understand what it signifies and what it rejects. It signifies and rejects the same fact; a world in which murder is legitimate and human life is considered futile”.

Albert Camus, Neither Victims Nor Executioners

V.1 - During participation in armed conflict

There are other factors that accumulate and may result in the soldiers' nervous and psychological disorders while he is still on the battlefield. These are responsible for the scheme of exhaustion bearing down on the combatants and include the incessant biological arousal which results from the endless fight-or-flight state, the continuing sleep deprivation, the lack of nourishment and the confrontation of the forces of nature which soldiering incorporates by its very definition (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 68), such as extreme conditions of heat, cold, rain, insects and other living elements, as well as the sensory deprivation of darkness (ibid., p. 72). The acute mental adverse effect of the continual engagement in a fight-or-flight situation is to be observed in the body's sympathetic and parasympathetic function. The first one is responsible for guiding the bodily energy reserves for action, while the second is in charge of the digestive and restorative procedures. In such draining circumstances, the sympathetic system musters every bit of energy so as to ensure survival and, once the danger is over, the parasympathetic system that has been dormant until then rebounds. This backlash is experienced as an overwhelming fatigue and torpidity by the soldier (ibid., p. 69).

After two months of continuous participation in combat, 98% of the surviving combatants are expected to have become psychiatric casualties. The remaining 2% who are able to withstand this long exposure in combat shares a common propensity towards an “aggressive psychopathic personality” (Swank and Marchand, 1946, as cited in Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 43-44). However, this length of exposure was only to be encountered in the battles of the previous century, given the restrictions of tactics and weaponry (*ibid.*, p. 44). Richard Gabriel, in his book “No more heroes” (largely taken from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual and “Military Psychiatry: A Comparative Perspective”) studies the various manifestations of psychiatric casualties during armed conflict, the most prominent of which are illustrated below.

Fatigue cases refer to symptoms of mental and corporeal weariness which result in a gradual animosity and overt irascibility paired with palpitations, augmented sweating and hypersensitivity to sound. These symptoms pave the way for increased breakdown and the only way applicable treatment is removal from the battlefield and relaxation. Prolonged fatigue may convert into Confusional states which represent a psychotic form of detachment from reality. Here, manifestations include manic-depressive mood swings, delirium and a psychotic dissociation from reality which render the soldier unable to recognise who and where he is. Among these symptoms, Ganzer syndrome is frequently observed, where combatants will behave jokingly in an attempt to avert their feeling of horror through humor. In such cases, the level of distress varies from neurotic to plainly psychotic (*ibid.*, p. 45).

Regardless of the symptoms observed in such cases, it is of utmost significance to point out that it is the human brain which generates these manifestations in an effort to flee the horror of war. Another relative example is that of Conversion Hysteria, which may manifest itself in the course of the conduct of hostilities or long afterwards. It may appear as the soldier’s incapacity to know where he is or to be able to function at all, occasionally becoming amnesic and it resembles Obsessional and compulsive states, apart from the fact that, in the latter, the combatant is cognizant of his symptoms’ psychological origins. Nonetheless, he is unable to regulate his bodily symptoms which consist of, inter alia, trembling, tics and palpitations. Subsequently, he will presumably seek a way out of his bodily symptoms in some sort of hysterical reaction.

Other cases of psychological manifestations enclose anxiety states and character disorders. Anxiety cases take the form of complete exhaustion and agitation that under no circumstances can be alleviated. Oftentimes, manifestations consist of nightmares, shortness of breath, faintness and blurred vision among others and may develop into complete hysteria. Another common anxiety reaction is PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder) which manifests itself after the participation in conflict and is further analyzed in the following chapter. On the other hand, character disorders can take shape in various forms, in all of which the result is a dramatic alteration of the soldier's fundamental personality. These include obsessional traits - where the soldier becomes engrossed in certain things or actions, paranoid trends coupled with irritability, anxiety and depression, schizoid trends that result in hypersensitivity and detachment, epileptoid character reactions paired with recurrent outbursts, as well as an excessive attachment to religion. All the above lead to the degeneration of the soldier's personality into a psychotic one (*ibid.*, p. 47-48). However, military reality implies that psychiatric casualties are not to be treated so as to return to their normal life but, instead, to the battlefield (*ibid.*, p. 48)

In general terms, a soldier who has a combat stress reaction, previously known as battle fatigue or shell shock, is rendered incapable of performing his or her duties as a result of a series of brief psychological and physical symptoms that are a typical response to extreme stress. This sort of stress has been recorded by all branches of the armed forces, and it is known to subside with rest, brief relief from combat stress, exercise, and social interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, as cited in Smith et al., 2014, p. 791). Accordingly, it is predicted that the combatant will be ready for duty within 48 to 72 hours after receiving treatment as near to the front line as possible and as soon as symptoms arise (Manguno-Mire et al., 2007, as cited in *ibid.*).

Male and female warriors' impressions on their experience vary significantly during and after their participation (Tekoah & Harel-Shalev, 2014, p. 26). Research has shown that nonkilling soldiers such as military personnel and officers (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 63) will suffer significantly fewer psychological implications in comparison with their peers whose task is to kill (*ibid.*, p. 62). The element of appetitive aggression may produce difficulties in the transition of the veterans back

to normality. For example, some individuals may try to act violently in the civilian context as a means to reproduce the rewarding reaction (Meyer-Parlapanis et al., 2016, p. 2). This highlights the importance of studying appetitive aggression which is thought to facilitate the distinction of individuals who are at risk, illustrate more clearly the multifaceted phenomenon of participation in armed conflict and indicate even more accurate treatment methods (*ibid.*). The following section aims to collect the existing knowledge on the traumatic impact on soldiers after they return.

V.2 - After participation in armed conflict

The trauma that follows the realization of what one has done to their fellow human is maybe the most unbearable ramification of one's atrocious act (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 224). The dominant elements that can predict the intensity of the soldier's post-traumatic response are the magnitude of the initial trauma and the social support network system accessible to the distressed soldier (*ibid.*, p. 288). The first time that the detrimental psychological aftereffect of war was observed was during World War I under the term "shell shock" and its symptoms included "fatigue, tremor, confusion, nightmares and impaired sight and hearing" (Jones, 2012). Since that point in time, the necessity for psychological assessments of the soldiers gradually became apparent, instigating researchers to delve into this mental disorder in an effort to cure it. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), "trauma- and stressor-related disorders include disorders in which exposure to a traumatic or stressful event is listed explicitly as a diagnostic criterion. These include [...] posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), acute stress disorder, and adjustment disorders" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 265).

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) refers to, inter alia, the manifestations of a long-lasting battle stress reaction that develops months or even years after exposure to warfare (Smith et al., 2014, p. 791). More concretely, the diagnostic criteria for PTSD include, among others, "(e)xposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: Directly

experiencing the traumatic event(s), witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others [...] (and) experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s)". Furthermore, the presence of one (or more) of the following intrusion symptoms associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred is required: "Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s), recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dream are related to the traumatic event(s), dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks) in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring [...], intense or prolonged psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s) and marked physiological reactions to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s) [...]" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271).

Other criteria include "persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s)", "negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s) [...]" (*ibid.*) and "marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event(s)", such as "irritable behavior and angry outbursts (with little or no provocation) typically expressed as verbal or physical aggression toward people or objects, reckless or self-destructive behavior" and exaggerated startle response (*ibid.*, p. 272). However, it should be noted that for the diagnosis to be established, the disturbance should last for more than one month and cause "clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning". It bears mentioning that the disturbance should not be "attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g. medication, alcohol) or another medical condition" (*ibid.*).

Nearly all of the research on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) until today has been conducted on individuals who have, in some manner, experienced trauma. The classification and diagnosis of PTSD were made possible by Vietnam War veterans (MacNair, 2002, p. 64) and it has since been extended to sufferers. Nevertheless, even though war veterans initially gave rise to the notion, extending the term to those who inflict the damage has not been widespread. Even yet, there has not been much discussion of the possibility that murdering or causing any other form of serious

harm is a type of trauma that might result in PTSD. This negligence has at least three primary causes. The first is showing sympathy for the veteran and denying that he has any cause for regret. Another is the urge to hold the adversary accountable for any harm done to the veterans rather than the nation that sent them to battle. And then, what is of particular relevance to this study is the propensity towards those who are perceived as completely devoid of public compassion, like torturers, executioners or Nazis. Admittedly, it hardly occurs to most people to acknowledge that such persons are in distress (*ibid.*, p. 63).

Contrary to past versions, the DSM-5 does consider the idea of perpetration as a cause of trauma in its discussion section that comes after the definition. The causative trauma does not appear to involve participation but does not seem to exclude it either, under the condition that the event has been “beyond the sphere of ordinary experience”. This was intended to discern between actual traumas and individuals exaggerating minor irritations, but it proved ineffective in settings like war, when trauma is a common occurrence (MacNair, 2015, p. 314). The list of factors has been broadened to also include “for military personnel, being a perpetrator, witnessing crimes, or killing the enemy” as additional aggravating components (*ibid.*, p. 315).

In the few cases when the killing factor has been studied, it has been shown that the subsequent PTSD is more acute than PTSD from other causes (MacNair, 2002, p. 64). Grossman noted that several studies have revealed that only a tiny percentage (approximately 15–25% of soldiers) have really killed in battle throughout history. In an effort to increase this rate, the military incorporated operant conditioning in the training procedure and proved to be successful, given that in the American fight in Korea and Vietnam, the rate increased to around 55% and 90%, respectively. According to Grossman, the use of operant conditioning in training offered little to no protection against the onset of PTSD, and the increased rate of killing may assist to explain why PTSD seems to affect soldiers who served in Vietnam more frequently than other veterans (*ibid.*, p. 64). It bears mentioning that scores were higher for individuals who claimed to have actively participated in the execution of civilians or POWs than for those who claimed to have only witnessed such crimes (MacNair, 2002, p. 69).

Perpetration-induced traumatic stress, alternatively termed participation-induced traumatic stress (PITS) is the term for these PTSD symptoms, including any symptoms without necessarily indicating a complete condition (MacNair, 2015, p. 313) that applies to the individuals who have inflicted the trauma (*ibid.*). In studies conducted with Vietnam veterans where the participants were divided into two distinct categories, the group that admitted that they had killed repeatedly scored higher in PTSD symptomatology. They presented higher scores in intrusive imagery, such as disturbing nightmares, flashbacks, and thoughts and violent rage outbursts and a sense of estrangement, disintegration, and hypervigilance also tended to be higher among them (MacNair, 2002).

Compared to other types of trauma, persons who have committed murder experience more patterns in their dreams. Normal post-traumatic nightmares often involve dreams that merely replay the distressing experience in the brain like a video. Additional patterns for individuals who have killed include trying to modify the course of the original incident, being blamed or tortured by those that one has murdered, or changing the initial occurrence by being exposed, in danger, or the victim of the crime. One may also be killed in more everyday situations, or they may even split into two so that they are both the perpetrator and the victim within the same dream (MacNair, 2015, p. 316). Moreover, the concept of addiction to trauma is another post-traumatic reaction that necessitates a substantial amount of research. This originally came about as a result of observations of abused individuals staying in or returning to harmful environments. Extending the notion to the abusers themselves might provide insight if perpetrating abuse is equally (or more profoundly) mentally destructive to the perpetrator (MacNair, 2011, p. 3). It should be noted that, even though the pioneering study on perpetration-induced trauma initially focused on killing situations, it has also been extended to a variety of violent acts.

The likelihood of developing suicidal thoughts, depressive symptoms, and PTSD is significantly raised in soldiers who murder someone - or believe that they did (Cesur et al., 2011, p. 2). In considerations of military psychology, the phrase "moral injury" has recently gained popularity. It is described as "lasting psychological, biological,

spiritual, behavioral, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” (Litz et al., 2009, as cited in MacNair, 2015, p. 315). The cause of perpetrator trauma is moral harm, which necessitates humanizing the victim and admitting that one has behaved immorally toward another person. Sherman’s definition of moral injury refers to “experiences of serious inner conflict arising from what one takes to be grievous moral transgressions that can overwhelm one’s sense of goodness and humanity.” (Eyerman, 2018, p. 178). Despite the fact that PITS includes post-event manifestations, moral injury refers to an aspect of the occurrence that deeply disturbs the conscience, adding guilt to the PTSD symptomatology. Thus, moral injury can very easily result in PITS. In this case, however, the person must believe the occurrence to be a morally contentious one (MacNair, 2015, p. 315). Taking a life in combat may generate moral conflict, as well as feelings of humiliation and remorse that may be particularly damaging over the course of a person's lifetime (Maguen et al., 2009, p. 435).

The psychological and physical impact of war trauma on many combat veterans has lingered throughout their lives, having an impact not just on themselves but also on their families (Smith et al., 2014, p. 791). The reader should bear in mind that a vicious circle of violence may develop as a result of a number of PITS symptoms. For instance, hostile outbreaks might trigger a pattern of family abuse. Cycles of violence can also be sparked by signs like social alienation, separation, or estrangement. Violence is also widely recognized to be caused by concomitant alcoholism. The treatment of the above should therefore be considered as aiming at violence-prevention for society as a whole, not only as targeting the alleviation of the symptoms of the individuals who are suffering (*ibid.*, p. 318).

The study of various therapeutic modalities is currently in its early stages. While certain therapies, particularly Eye-movement Desensitization and Retraining (EMDR), have shown some effectiveness, others, including prolonged exposure (PE), which involves gradually desensitizing patients to traumatic memories, appear to be counterproductive. As a solution to this issue, traditions of atonement and bearing witness have historically arisen (see Foa & Meadows, 1997). Some combat veterans report finding it comforting to learn that these PTSD symptoms are really rather

common; they then recognize the symptoms as being caused by the circumstances rather than an indication of insanity (MacNair, 2015, p. 318).

A frequent therapy strategy includes processing the event in several ways, which is also the optimal approach for future learning. However, there are variations in the intensity and symptomatology when active involvement was the main stressor, and they allow for alternative therapy to be more or less effective when compared to other PTSD patients (MacNair, 2015, p. 315). Symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, peritraumatic dissociation, functional impairment, and aggressive conduct in the majority of cases have been linked to murdering. When assessing and treating veterans, it is crucial to take their experiences of killing in battle into consideration (Maguen et al., 2009, p. 443) since, in addition to the effects of atrocities, military personnel may experience haunting and debilitating effects from self-defense killing, offensive operations, counterinsurgencies, responsibility for friendly fire-related deaths, or actions that unintentionally cause collateral civilian deaths. This is often observed after their returning to civilian life and being forced to reconcile these socially unacceptable war-related behaviors with their pre-war self-concepts (*ibid.*, p. 436).

When people who conduct acts of violence feel another "high" from doing so, they will continue to engage in violence. A "combat high" is created when battle is easily accessible as a method of feeding this addiction, which leads to more violence than expected. Withdrawal symptoms may appear when one returns to society, and the desire to experience a "high" may motivate one to engage in street crime or domestic abuse. Alternatively, it might just be the discomfort of withdrawal symptoms, which, notwithstanding any pleasure that might have accompanied the trauma's infliction, are what demonstrates the presence of an addiction based on a trauma (MacNair, 2015, p. 316).

It has been found to be beneficial for the veterans to comprehend how common their experience is. The disconfirmation of a patient's sense of distinctiveness in the group therapy session, particularly in the initial stages, is a strong source of solace for many war veterans who suffer alone. Patients report feeling more connected to the outside world after hearing other participants share stories similar to their own (*ibid.*, p.

317). Specifically for individuals who have murdered in battle, Maguen and colleagues (2010) report that they have created a six- to eight-session therapy program, which is intended to augment -and not replace- existing evidence-based therapeutic treatment. Until the moment of writing, there have been no other therapists to publish clinical studies so as to determine the most effective course of treatment, according to the literature (see Maguen & Burkman, 2013).

Altruistic actions can also be very helpful for combat veterans. However, like in all of these circumstances, additional study is required. Recently, there has also been some speculation that Time Perspective Therapy, which uses a technique of thinking through the past, present (both negatively and positively), is said to have also yielded positive outcomes (see Zimbardo, Sword, & Sword, 2012). There is insufficient data to indicate relative efficacy for other widely used kinds of therapy, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy used alone or medicine administration. Understanding the differences between traumatization from various sources is urgently needed by researchers and therapists in order to determine the best treatment procedures to use when involvement in violent behavior is the etiological stressor (MacNair, 2015, p. 317).

Clinicians' investigation on violent actions and treatment implementation, such as cognitive-behavioral anger management, is expected to be facilitated through a clearer understanding of the importance of evaluation for murdering behaviors. To fully grasp a pattern of mental health symptoms that manifest in reaction to killing, depression may have to be analyzed in association with other manifestations. Furthermore, recollection biases should be considered, including the likelihood that recall is impacted by the symptomatology the subject is currently experiencing; Taking personal responsibility for another person's death may be a matter of perception instead of an actual evidence of murder (Maguen et al., 2009, p. 442-443).

In addition, it is urgent to distinguish between therapies that may be beneficial for those with other kinds of PTSD and those that may be contraindicated for those with PITS. The "prolonged exposure" or "flooding," which involves repeatedly reminding the patient of the trauma to desensitize them and let the traumas lose their hold, is

most effective when the traumas were inflicted on the patient. “In particular, PTSD sufferers whose traumatic memories are about being perpetrators rather than victims may not benefit from [Prolonged Exposure as a treatment] and perhaps will even deteriorate from such treatment” (Foa & Meadows, 1997, p. 475, as cited in MacNair, 2015, p. 317-318). Similarly, the expressive writing approach, which has been so beneficial for helping individuals process what has been inflicted upon them, would not be useful to those who are inflicting the harm (*ibid.*, p. 318) In any case, the essential foundation for identifying significant mental illness is the distinction between truth and distortion (Coleman, 2015, p. 6).

The countries weighing the costs of going to war should take treatment for all forms of PTSD into account as a continuing post-war expense that lasts decades after the conflict is ended because PTSD is already widely known to be a prevalent postwar condition for veterans. The additional expenses of domestic violence and street crime, which cannot be directly linked to the conflict but yet result from it indirectly, will also contribute to the psychological, as well as financial toll of these societies (MacNair, 2015, p. 318). Even though PTSD manifestations can contribute to an increase in street crime and domestic violence, on a personal account it is also plausible that engaging in those violent acts can either induce or even intensify the individuals’ symptoms. Thus, the requirement for treatment of such people is crucial whether dealing with prison populations or the criminal justice system prior to incarceration (*ibid.*).

Giving the veterans the counseling they require to prevent the symptoms from prompting them to conduct other acts of violence is a key component of violence prevention. Treating the underlying source of the problem is likely to be significantly more effective in preventing reoffending than incarceration according to some studies. Nevertheless, more information and study on PITS would be valuable in this endeavor, which seeks to transform the criminal justice system by implementing alternatives to incarceration as well as more humane correctional practices (*ibid.*, p. 319).

Admittedly, prison time alone will not be enough to change the personality flaws that motivated an offender to perpetrate such crimes. Therefore, in addition to security

precautions, the medical and behavioral sciences complement the framework of assistance in treating the psychological disabilities in the offender that cause him to put others' safety in danger when faced with certain stressful conditions (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979, p. 193).

Assessment is the first fundamental stage in any rehabilitation procedure. It refers to the process of clinically evaluating the offender in order to determine the factors that contributed to the commission of his crime, including the characterological characteristics or traits of the offender, the emotional or psychological problems that were experienced or expressed in the offense, and the situational circumstances that stimulated or supported such acts. It also refers to the extent to which these same factors are still present in both the offender and the victim (*ibid.*). Clinical counseling with perpetrators of rape may help to some extent, but fundamental social reforms are necessary to address the major issue of sexual assault in our culture. Rape, as well as other crimes, is not solely a therapeutic problem. Instead, it is a social, economic, legal, cultural, and political issue that calls for cross-disciplinary and interagency collaboration (*ibid.*, p. 223).

War is still an ongoing phenomenon and it is necessary that all States involved provide for their soldiers' needs before and after their participation. A great set of guidelines "for Further Consideration and Action" was proposed by the Concerned Clinicians and Researchers Network in 2015 and refers to a framework based on the following pillars: Programs and Policies for Direct Interventions, Database Creation, and Professional Development (Coleman, 2015, p. 4). To begin with, it is recommended for the societies to promote the separation of programs mainly designed to support active soldiers and their families from those that provide treatment, education, and research for veterans and establish a therapeutic setting devoid of military symbolism for outreach and care provision, in which ex-soldiers who do not wish to have any reminders of life in the military can be brought in and taken care of (*ibid.*).

It is crucial that any complete mental health and readjustment strategy after deployment shifts from a conventional focus on personal life threat and loss to a broader focus that specifically assesses violence-commission experiences. At the

same time, it is necessary to evaluate the effect on each veteran individually in a considerate and caring manner (Maguen et al., 2009, p. 441). In order to promote the healing of the ex-soldiers, it is suggested to implement specific victim-offender reconciliation techniques in which veterans may experience the rehabilitative, redemptive power of forgiveness, much as restorative justice benefits a particular segment of offenders and those they have harmed. Veterans of the Vietnam War who visited Soldier's Heart and Veterans for Peace Friendship Village in Vietnam have testified about their experiences, and they provide helpful information that shoulders this concept. In addition to that, the establishment of programs that help veterans regain their lost feeling of community and belonging is encouraged, based on the idea that love and work are essential for finding purpose and fulfillment in life (Coleman, 2015, p. 4). The creation of social justice movements where civilians and veterans work together having understood that neither group can change the status quo on their own is of paramount importance, given that such initiatives may also open up a useful channel for cultivating among civilians a deeper regard for and comprehension of the lives and goals of veterans (*ibid.*, p. 5).

Another set of suggestions aiming at the amelioration of the veterans' life post-combat refers to the creation of databases. More precisely, taking into account the warning suicide rate of ex-soldiers, it is significant to conduct rigorous investigations into the precise number of veteran suicides, along with the development of uniform, high-validity national mortality monitoring systems (*ibid.*, p. 6). In parallel, it is crucial to produce comparable sources of information with aggregate recruiting data segmented by cohorts displaying significant contrastive characteristics and to collect information on individual theaters of operations that may incorporate data about the characteristics of the population of the area and specifics of military engagements and other activities, in order to enhance the understanding of therapists (*ibid.*).

Research on female veterans has illustrated the need for social support in the post-deployment period. Even though female veteran populations are substantially fewer than their male counterparts so as to draw statistically significant conclusions, the existing body of evidence indicates that gender affects unit morale which, in turn, appears to have a powerful influence on the warriors' mental health (McGraw, 2016,

p. 81). Female soldiers reportedly experience less exposure to battle, its adversities and its aftermath; However, they report more often than men a high sentiment of threat and mental health issues. Additionally, there seems to be a powerful connection between self-reported poor social support and post-traumatic symptoms (*ibid.*). It should be noted that females who work in primarily male positions may face difficulties regarding the acceptance of their groups and this could have a negative impact on their mental health during and after their participation in the combat where group bonding is of essential value for one's mental well-being (*ibid.*, p. 82) besides one's survival (*ibid.*, p. 84).

Women in armed conflict have to face a double danger; Apart from the conventional perils of the battlefield, they also have to integrate into a masculine environment where sexual violence and harassment from colleagues are not a rare occurrence (Daphna-Tekoah et al., 2021, p. 3). In countries such as the United States, a large number of female veterans face unemployment more often than male veterans, whereas in countries such as Israel where the draft is obligatory and thus normalized, veterans reportedly face much fewer difficulties in their transition to civilian life (*ibid.*, p. 4). However, even in countries where women are incorporated in combat military roles, research shows that they also face difficulties continuously since they find themselves obliged to prove that they are worthy of their roles in respect of their personal competencies as well as broader gender struggles (*ibid.*, p. 6).

After all, too many soldiers are enduring excruciating psychological pain. Veterans' social alienation is said to be caused by a buildup of wartime experiences that result in a severe decline in confidence in interpersonal connections on all levels—institutional, societal, and personal (Coleman, 2015, p. 1). With the purpose of ameliorating this situation, further research on national and international level is required so as to pave the way for fewer casualties and much-needed rehabilitation of the veterans' mental health (*ibid.*, p. 7). The present chapter is concluded with the reference on one of the most detrimental war experiences for the combatants, Vietnam War, which was globally recognized as a traumatic experience for those who participated in it and the reasons for this are mentioned below.

Participation in the Vietnam War

“ [...] America’s motto there in Vietnam is ‘Win in Vietnam,’ and in Mylai there was no other way to do it. America had to kill everyone there.”

Lieutenant William Calley, the only United States soldier convicted of a war crime during the Vietnam War (Oliver K., 2006, p. 117).

The rationalization that follows the infliction of harm, and especially killing, is a process interwoven in the development of the subsequent trauma. In Vietnam, almost everyone participated in the rampage, and a few committed systematic rape and murder (Eyerman, 2018, p. 171). The killing has been explained through the lens of group dynamics and group pressure. Almost everyone participated, not just because they felt compelled to fit in but also because it was a fundamental aspect of what it meant to belong to these specific groups (*ibid.*, p.172-173). American troops experienced the war in Vietnam in a way that proved to be extremely detrimental for their mental health and that presented great dissimilarities in comparison to previous conflicts. This was evident primarily in the post-war period, where soldiers would have normally received awards and medals as a type of affirmation and praise from their society (Grossman, 1995/2009, p. 265). Instead, Vietnam veterans were condemned in their society and ended up being verbally and physically attacked upon their arrival (*ibid.*, p. 280). Another important factor for the combatants’ mental health is the continuous presence of older, mature comrades which serve as “role models and stabilizing personality factors in the combat environment” (*ibid.*, p. 265). What happened in Vietnam was that, on the one hand, the recruits were notably younger than in any previous war in American history and, at the same time, they had no one significantly more experienced to consider as a role model in this developmentally crucial phase of their lives (*ibid.*, p. 267). Another discrepancy of particular relevance to this study was the abstinence from the abidance to the International Humanitarian Law - given that much of the conflict was conducted against insurgent forces - which resulted in high numbers of atrocities and civilian casualties and consequently led to increased trauma (*ibid.*, p. 269).

The absence of rear lines and clearly identified secure zones enabled an accumulation of the stress of the battle from which there was no escape (*ibid.*, p. 270).

Nevertheless, an enormous amount of trauma was linked to the relationship between the combatants. As a rule, soldiers would not undergo the training and conscription procedures as units but as individuals (*ibid.*, p. 270). The rotation policy that the US Army used resulted in considerably fewer psychiatric casualties in the battlefield. Despite that, its subsequent lack of group bonding created a long-lasting sentiment of loneliness to the soldiers (*ibid.*, p. 270-272). Following that, the veterans did not experience the customary decompression period of returning units that traditionally served as a purification ritual for the soldiers. Their short and lonely return would prove to represent another compounding element of the resultant trauma (*ibid.*, p. 273-274) and induce in them the survivor's guilt (*ibid.*, p. 278).

Finally, the administration of sedatives in Vietnam was an unprecedented occurrence that, however, would not preclude the combatants' self-prescription of alcohol, marijuana, opium and heroin with the ultimate goal being stress reduction. Great emphasis should be placed on the fact that the administration of drugs during the exposure to the stressors would inevitably hamper the resulting trauma, taking into consideration that it would either halt or substitute the construction of efficacious coping strategies (*ibid.*, p. 272-273). More than a quarter of Vietnam veterans who sought help from a therapist demonstrated concern about harm they had caused during their service. More concretely, they reported emotions of "anxiety, guilt, depression and an inability to carry on intimate relationships". Accordingly, Greek ex-torturers reported "nightmares, irritability and episodes of depression" (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986, p. 251).

In general terms, it is critical for the societies, commanders and families to comprehend the veterans' vulnerability and urge for acceptance, recognition and reassurance after their return (*ibid.*, p. 296). The military should provide for the group integrity necessary for the soldiers' mental health and also provide for the cooldown periods much-needed for the returning veterans. What is more, medical, psychiatric, psychological and social networks should be established around the pivot of facilitating the rationalization and acceptance process of the soldiers (*ibid.*, p. 297). A hopeful indicator aimed at the amelioration of the war's horrendous aftermath concerning the atrocities committed under command is the U.S. Army's formation of the compulsory annual training program in Geneva Convention and the

Law of Land Warfare where recruits are taught which commands are illegal and how to disobey them, marking the first time in military history where soldiers are being taught to disregard orders (*ibid.*, p. 346).

Research findings have established the importance of military cultural norms which may inculcate ex-soldiers with the idea that psychological trauma is considered as “weakness” thereby demotivating them from reaching out for help. A growing amount of evidence supports that rates of assault of female soldiers are high both in professional and mandatory military service contexts, the variation between the two being encountered in the rates of reports that seem higher in professional army settings. The transition is reportedly easier for women in countries where their participation is normalized and this results in fewer reports of feelings of isolation upon the transition period (*ibid.*, p. 12).

It is suggested that, upon the veterans return, the focus should not be directed only on the diagnosis of psychopathological symptoms but also on the veterans’ need to be heard, since their personal detailed narratives present an in-depth description of the challenges and traumatic experiences they had to confront. Thus, professional discussions in closed groups could provide a safe space for them to open up about the difficulties embedded in their service (*ibid.*, p. 13). This concept is expected to prevent the recurrence of further violence and help alleviate the unbearable pain of experiencing - and even more perpetrating - such atrocities.

Chapter VI - Conclusion

To sum up, this research has traced and explored the manner in which ordinary people end up committing atrocities during their participation in armed conflict thus violating the Law of Armed Conflict. Taking into consideration that, tragically, war is a phenomenon developing until this very moment, it is indispensable to examine the experience and rationale of its participants. It is suggested that, by contemplating on the actual mechanisms that lead the combatants to perpetrate horrendous acts and the subsequent effects on their mental health, light will be shed on the vicious cycle of violence that accompanies their actions. This collection of information is expected to instigate counter-actions aiming at preventing further violence from occurring, thus safeguarding the mental and physical health of the perpetrators and the victims.

In order to create a more wholesome understanding on this problematic occurrence, the relevant provisions of IHL were initially mentioned, with the purpose of establishing the legal limits which soldiers may overpass during their participation in battle. Then, the military training procedures illustrated the manner in which ordinary citizens were transformed into violent soldiers before their actual participation in combat. The desensitization imposed on the recruits, paired with operant conditioning methods and ritual-like systemization of behavior, enable the combatants' subconscious denial defense mechanisms and prepare the soldiers for the new reality of the battlefield. The principles of group dependency and obedience to authority inculcated in training are then reinforced, since they become necessary for one's survival during their participation in hostilities.

Fear penetrates the mental processes of the combatants throughout their participation in armed conflict and overshadows their cognitive thinking. Whether the soldiers will end up committing atrocities is influenced by processes such as rationalization, displacement of responsibility, group absolution, obedience to authority and physical and emotional distance towards the victim. However, personal elements contribute as well and, together with situational factors, will ultimately dictate one's actions in the heat of battle. It is possible that this multidimensional moral disengagement results in traumatic ramifications on the

soldiers' mental health even during their presence in the battlefield. This is attributed to the human brain's efforts to escape the horrors of war which is further hindered by practical obstacles, such as lack of sleep and nourishment that are responsible for a constant biological arousal.

The probability of experiencing posttraumatic symptoms, depression and suicidal ideation remains after one's participation in war. Interestingly, studies have indicated participation-induced traumatic stress of the offenders to be even more detrimental than the victims' posttraumatic stress symptomatology and to be an indicator of further violence on some occasions. Notwithstanding that the research of the most effective therapeutic modalities is currently in its early stages and that some PTSD treatment methods have already been considered as counter-indicative, it has been shown to be helpful for veterans to see how widespread their situation is.

The treatment of the offenders is vital but in no circumstances is it suggested to replace the sanctions that correspond to the crimes committed. Effective treatment methods are necessitated so as to tackle the perpetration-induced stress of the offenders and subsequently prevent further violence from occurring in their families and societies after their deployment. For this to happen, further research regarding the therapeutic methods applied in such contexts is recommended, as well as an alteration of the military indoctrination during the training and the participation of the soldiers in combat, paired with the revision and adaptation of the pertinent sanctions.

Overall, war is still affecting societies globally and has had adamantly detrimental effects on either side of the conflicts throughout history. The author argues that a more comprehensive approach on the psychological mechanisms taking place during preparation and subsequent participation in combat may provide valuable insight on the most effective mechanisms with which societies globally will be able to counter this devastating phenomenon and provide to every individual affected with a chance to heal. This study has attempted to assemble information on the elements that transform ordinary citizens to violent combatants who perpetrate horrendous acts, however it is admitted that the literature is scarce in comparison to that regarding the victims of these same acts. With the purpose of preventing more violence from

occurring, it is time that the societies focused their attention on the offenders as well; Ultimately, there will always be victims as long as they keep creating victimizers.

Annex

Grossman's equation of killing enabling factors

Demands of Authority



- Proximity of Authority
- ← Respect for Authority

- Intensity of Demand for Kill
- Legitimacy of Authority

Group Absolution



- ← Identification with Group
- Proximity of Group

- Intensity of Support for Kill
- Number in Immediate Group
- Legitimacy of Group

Predisposition of Killer



- Training/Conditioning
- Recent Experiences
- Temperament

Total Distance from Victim

- Physical Distance →
- Emotional Distance →

- Cultural
- Moral
- Social
- Mechanical

Target Attractiveness of Victim



- Relevance of Available Strategies
- Relevance of Victim
- Payoff
 - Killer's Gain
 - Enemy's Loss

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