

Dehumanization at the Abu Ghraib

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"The guards started to hit me with my broken legs"(p.227, Danner, 2006) and "one of them would rape me" (p.227) were the words of Ameen Sa'eed al-Sheikh, a special interest detainee.' Ameen Sa'eed al-Sheikh was an Iranian citizen who was unfortunately imprisoned during wartime on 7 October 2003. He was sentenced to the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, where American soldiers practiced cruel acts of violence and physical abuse toward the Iraqi detainees (Danner, 2006).

Several studies have documented abuses, dehumanization, and degrading punishment of Abu Ghraib prisoners. For example, Mark Danner's (2004) case of Assad Hanfosh, who noted that the guard "hit me with his hand" and "stripped me naked" (p.233). Willis (2004) argued that the assaults inflicted on the prisoners were a result of a social psychology experiment. Thus, in agreement with Mark Danner's (2004) reports, Willis added that the social psychology experiments helped to explain the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and concluded that their environments were the results of the US's blatant behavior towards the prisoners. While Arnold (2004) observed that the assaults inflicted by the military police guard force were deliberate, Mark Danner (2006) noted the cruelty at the Abu Ghraib prison and argued that the US government should be held accountable for its actions. Meghana Nayak (2006) has also documented "dehumanization" after the 9/11 attacks, detailing the violence practiced by the authorities.

The incidents at the Abu Ghraib prison portrayed modern torture. This research applies the concept of Meghana Nayak's "dehumanization" to Abu Ghraib. The paper argues that the prisoners experienced degrading pain and cruelty in the form of dehumanization at Abu Ghraib. First, the study applies the dehumanization model by Meghana Nayak to the prisoner's testimonies at Abu Ghraib. Afterward, the paper elaborates on dehumanization based on (as depicted by) some leaked photographs of the prisoner's experiences. Finally, the research emphasizes how the social psychology experiments helped to explain the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

Background: The United States And The Abu Ghraib Scandal

American citizens were also adversely affected by the Iranian war of March 2003, and this was evidenced by some photos leaked to the public in April 2004 that exposed the Abu Ghraib scandal (Danner 2004). Some CDs "containing hundreds of images of abuse"(P.277, Danner 2004) that described the awful experiences of the Abu Ghraib prisoners were exposed by Joseph M. Darby (a specialist). The Abu Ghraib prison, which was a US Army detention center for captured Iraqis from 2003 to 2006, had been turned into a torture chamber by the US soldiers. They violated the fundamental human rights of the detainees during the war by torturing and abusing them through

acts such rape and forced nudity, among many others, that Danner argued were a result of leadership failures at almost all departmental levels.

Bush's administration stated that the incidents were isolated, but in opposition, organizations including the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch unanimously described the abuses as a "pattern of torture and brutal treatment (Danner, 2004). The media were also fundamental role players in exposing the controversial scandal that no one wanted to own, be held responsible or answerable to the law for the failures. It was rumored that Rumsfeld himself initiated some harsh levels of abuse on the prisoners, but he ironically made a press statement openly distancing himself from knowledge of the terrible Abu Ghraib scandal (Danner, 2004). Danner criticized the military's inhumane actions, saying that they were inconsistent with national values as well as with the military teachings.

Method: Orientalism And Dehumanization

Meghana, a feminist and political theorist, in her work "Orientalism and 'Saving' US State Identity after 9/11," criticized the Bush administration, arguing that they rampantly employed gender-based and racial violence to preferably 'save' US identity. The feminists categorized racist gender as either white or black (Meghana Nayak, 2006).

Nayak, taking after Said, defines Orientalism as the systematic categorization of races into the 'West,' which is perceived as a rational, developed, and superior people, and the 'Orient' is thought to be an aberrant, undeveloped and inferior race (P.44). Similarly, disagrees strongly with G.W. Bush's idea of promoting of hyper-masculinity which was based on the perception that the 'Orient' posed a threat to US identity and therefore making it prudent to endorse elements of masculinity (P.43). Nayak shares Ashis Nandy's redefinition of the idea of hyper-masculinity to refer to "reactionary masculinity"(P.43).

Additionally, Nayak (2006) condemns vehemently the inhumane acts against the prisoners, emphasizing the dehumanization and sexual commodification by the American soldiers. Nayak describes dehumanization as a form of gender-based racial violence that categorized people as either "collateral damage", "conditionally worthy", or "dangerous" (p.50). All these attempts to target a group of the population for elimination were motivated by nothing more than Self-causes hatred. Nayak is of the opinion that "Bush's 'war on women'" (p.53) was an act of violence that equally portrayed dehumanization.

Dehumanization At Abu Ghraib: Prisoner's Testimony

The prisoners' dehumanization at Abu Ghraib was described by Nayak (2006) as a form of gender-based racist violence that encouraged extrajudicial killings and devaluation of human life. Dehumanization is defined as the process of depriving a person or group of people of positive human

qualities. Meghana Nayak established that the events of 9/11 were hate crimes and violence such as “physical brutalization” (similar to Danner’s 2006) case of Ameen Sa’eed al-Sheikh) that recorded, “The guards started to hit me on my broken legs”(p.224). Meghann Nayak argued that hypermasculinity promoted dehumanization against Arabs and Muslims. She noted the sexual violence. In agreement with Nayak’s reports, Danner (2004) also described an equivalent experience as a “special interest detainee,” as portrayed in the case of Ameen Sa’eed al sheik, who reported that the guard “stripped me naked”(p.227).

These Cruel acts are dehumanizing because they “erase agency based on gender and race”(p.5, Meghanna Nayak(2006). Rather than invoking the proper discipline, they objectify humans, specifically the Arabs and Muslims.

Dehumanization At Abu Ghraib: The Photographs

Illegal interrogation practices and reports of abuse released to news stations and the internet were seen in the photos of U.S. soldiers posing with naked and hooded Iraqi captives at Abu Ghraib(Mark Danner, 2004). Danner noted that the photos released by Graner Jr, a military police officer, depicted torture behind the prison walls as the prisoners were captured unfairly, harassed sexually, and treated like animals. According to Danner, leaked photos were also released on some CDs after a shooting incident that conveyed evidence as he reported that the soldiers were “abusing the prisoners, many of them naked.”(p.215, dinner 2004). Naked photographs of prisoners engaged in simulated sexual acts were revealed. Deceased prisoners in sexual poses, as seen in the testimony of Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, who noted that the guard put electric wires “on my penis” and “was describing some poses he wanted me to do”(p.230). As seen in the photos, The naked prisoners were told to do ridiculous things like making human pyramids, lying on top of each other, and even writing on them. There have been cases of prisoners who were asked to strip and ended up being raped by guards and soldiers.

The events that occurred within Abu Ghraib jail are representative of modern torture that continues to torture the minds and souls of its victims. Danner noted another similar experience with a detainee that was tied up, maltreated, and assaulted, as seen in the case of XYZ who noted that the guard reported that the soldiers were making humor out of the tortured prisoners, as seen in the case of Thaar Salman Dawod who reported that the guards were “watching and taking pictures” and “laughing at the prisoners”(p.231). Danner also noted a similar case of soldiers attempting to take silly photos of the prisoners in an attempt to make humor, as seen in the testimony of Abdou Hussain Saad FALEH, who reported that the guard “took some pictures of me”(p.230). Also, as seen in the case of Thaar Salman Dawood, the guards were beating two prisoners and “taking pictures from top to bottom”(p.231). As they were breathing, guards were also forcing prisoners to strip down completely naked.

Photo evidence

A baton-wielding US soldier appears to be ordering a naked detainee, covered in a “brown substance,” to walk a straight line with his ankles handcuffed. In what appears to be a hallway, a hooded detainee seems to be handcuffed in an awkward position atop two boxes. The frame seems to show the prisoner’s ankle cuffed to the door handle behind him. (p223). A US soldier gives the “thumbs up” sign as she appears to be stitching up a prisoner’s leg wound. It is unclear whether the injury was from a dog bite. (pg220). A US soldier with his right arm and fist cocked appears prepared to strike one detainee in a pile of the detainee (page 221). Along with a prison walkway, a hooded detainee seems to have collapsed with his wrists handcuffed to the railings (page 221), smiling and giving the thumbs-up to the camera. “In these photos from Abu Ghraib, you have everything that the Islamic fundamentalists believe characterizes Western culture, all nicely arranged in one hideous image-imperial arrogance, sexual depravity, and gender equality” (Ehrenreich, 552); the soldiers saw abusing the prisoners in the photos were charged with maltreatment, aggravated assault, battery, and those proven to have done the most torture were sentenced to prison.

Decoding The Social Psychology Experiments

This dehumanization was facilitated by the military chain of command; Claudia Wallis (2004) argued that social psychology experiments could explain the Abu Ghraib Prison Scandal. Wallis thinks there is enough evidence from these experiments to claim that in specific environments, the typical person is capable of the acts of cruelty exercised at Abu Ghraib prison.

The underlying reasoning of Willis suggests that the US soldiers involved in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal were ordinary people such as ourselves, and the only explanation for their actions is the environment/situation. I think this strongly supports her thesis; there was no evidence of any of the individuals being “bad apples,” so the situation and environment seem like logical motives for their actions. I also think Claudia Willis has a strong empirical argument. Although the guards in the Stanford prison experiment were not bad apples, they exhibited cruel behavior (similar to the testimony of al-Zaydi, who reported the guard “beat me”(p.240, Danner, 2004). This speaks volumes about the potential cruelty of the Stanford correctional officers if put in Abu Ghraib. I think they would commit the same atrocities as the US soldiers. Provide evidence like quotes from guards.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Ameen Sa’eed al sheik experienced degrading pain and cruelty in the form of dehumanization at Abu Ghraib’s social experiments. This paper has decoded the social psychology experiments and the issues affecting the Abu Ghraib scandal. From all of this, future prevention strategies can be made to change these dangerous situations rather than trying to change the person who committed them. These practical strategies can counter gendered and racist violence that

reminds the public that one cannot simultaneously pay their respect to the 9/11 victims and save its own identity (p.58, Nayak, 2006). Changes need to happen within our army and defense department for the United States Army to have dutiful prisoners of war camps.