Chapter Eight

Training and Education of Perpetrators

1. Introduction

The central focus of this chapter will be on the training and education of perpetrators. The training at the torture school during the Greek colonels’ regime (1967–1974) will serve as an illustration of an extreme version of how to train people to commit atrocities such as torture. During the colonels’ regime, the military police (ESA) in Greece was responsible for torturing alleged political opponents of the regime. This chapter will describe and analyse how carefully selected recruits from Greece’s regular army were deliberately trained to become torturers at the KESA training centre. This torture school is certainly not the only one of its kind but it stands out as a torture school whose training methods and effects have been carefully described and analysed (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros 1986; Haritos-Fatouros 1988, 1993 and 2003). These methods and their effects will be described and analysed in section 3 of this chapter. While studying the features of the Greek military police and the methods used at KESA it becomes apparent that there are (in addition to some important differences) many striking similarities between ordinary military organizations and ordinary military training on the one hand and the features and training that characterize this torture school on the other. There is however a difference of degree: the more specialized and elitist the corps, the more comparable its features and training methods are to what the recruits to the Greek torture school were made to endure (Cf. Haritos-Fatouros 2003, 188).

Apart from its central focus on the Greek torture school, this chapter will therefore also focus on features typical of military organizations and environments in general. Recruitment into and training by a military unit can be seen as the first step (the preparation phase) in the transformation process which can ultimately turn ordinary people into perpetrators and which will be discussed in the next chapter (see also Smeulers 2004, 241–243). At the outset it must be pointed out that ordinary military training does not in itself turn all recruits into potential perpetrators. It does however involve a reversal of morale and thus removes an important inhibitory factor, an important restraint to maiming and killing and in this way establishes an important
precondition to the use of violence and force. Whereas in ordinary life killing is seen as something wrong, in the army recruits are trained to kill (Dyer 1985 and Grossman 1995). A climate is created in which orders are to be obeyed unquestioningly; as such, it diminishes the ordinary moral restraints that keep people from maiming, torturing and killing a fellow human being. Examples of these kinds of organizations are the regular army, an elite corps, a quasi-military unit, the secret services, a death squad or the police. These organizations have very specific features and characteristics in common; they have their own rules and norms and make recruits go through a specific training period in order to adapt to these rules and to learn the skills needed in the army, police or special unit. Before going into the training given to recruits at the Greek torture school (section 3) this chapter aims to identify the specific features and characteristics of ordinary military organizations (section 2.1), the initiation rites symbolizing the transition from the ordinary world into the military (section 2.2) and the selection procedure and training (section 2.3) and a special section which is dedicated to the training to kill (section 2.4). In the conclusion special attention will be given to the significance of the similarities and differences between ordinary military training and the training given to the recruits at the torture school.

2. Military Organizations and their Environment

The following subsections describe the main features and characteristics, initiation rites and training methods of militarized organizations such as the army.

2.1 Features and characteristics

The army, like many other military organizations and institutions, is a world apart from the ordinary civilian world and society. It is a world in which everything seems to be different from civilian life and in which different norms and rules apply. The military world is a closed society, sealed off from the public and surrounded by an aura of secrecy. Military bases have huge fences and checkpoints that make it crystal clear to anyone who enters them that this is a different place: a world apart from the ordinary world. Military personnel stand differently, walk differently, talk differently and exchange different greetings compared to civilians. Their behaviour and appearance is mechanical and functional and stripped of individual and personal characteristics. Everyone wears a uniform, is known and recognizable by rank rather than by name. Recruits are supposed to act as a single unit not as a group of individuals. Members of the armed forces visibly stand out in society thanks