

THE NORMALIZATION OF TORTURE

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES ON GUANTANAMO BAY



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Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction	3
1.1 <i>The Institutionalization of Torture</i>	3
1.2 <i>Normalization through Narratives</i>	4
1.3 <i>A New Research Perspective</i>	5
Chapter 2. Literature Review	7
2.1 <i>Why Does Torture Persist in Democracies?</i>	7
2.2 <i>How is Torture Normalized?</i>	10
2.2 <i>Research Question</i>	11
Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology	13
Chapter 4. Narrative Structures.....	14
Chapter 5. Case Study	17
5.1 <i>The Setting</i>	18
5.2 <i>The Characters</i>	20
5.3 <i>The Plot</i>	22
Chapter 6. Discussion	23
Chapter 7. Conclusion	26
Bibliography	28

Chapter 1. Introduction

Between the years of 2005 and 2015, jihadists killed 94 people in the United States (Bergen et al 2015; Schlenger et al 2002). To give a comparison: 40,000 people were killed by car accidents in 2015 alone (Boudette 2017). However, when asked what they were most afraid of dying from, the average American's number one answer was a terrorist attack. While contradictory to statistics this fear is fuelled by a series of stories, myths and specific types of rumors. These accounts are not necessarily based on logic, reason, or actual numbers but are heard through the grapevine and spread across almost every aspect of an American's life. Since the dawn of civilization, tales and stories have been foundational to all human experiences. They educate us, connect us and ultimately aid us better understand and define ourselves and the collective group we belong to by shaping both our individual identity as well as our collective one. Furthermore, because we use storytelling, narrativity and discourse as key elements to our identity and as ways to think and talk about a subject, they also dictate the ways in which we act in relation to that same subject (Karlberg 2005). This research will focus on one particular event that quickly became foundational to America as a nation and a basis of legitimacy for many of its actions: the events of 9/11. Since the attacks, Americans' fear of terrorism has magnified and while various different explanations have value, this work will argue that it is in large part due to the stories surrounding this crucial event. As Marc Siegel puts it: "Terrorism is everywhere. Only it isn't. Terrorism is not a more common event than deaths through cancer or traffic accidents, through homicides or drug taking. But it *feels* different. That is the power of a discourse" (Croft 2006: 286). Because of its scope and importance, narratives about 9/11 spread across the nation, particularly to assist in justifying practices that could be considered immoral and violating basic human rights such as torture. The ways in which discourse shapes perception is the crux of this study and the normalization of torture will be its case study.

1.1 The Institutionalization of Torture

In our day and age, no one would be particularly surprised that the use of torture is widely practiced even within democracies (Rejali 2007). The state's use of extraordinary means of violence is far from new and has been employed by many nations over the years (Rejali 2007). Formal restrictions against torture are included in the UN Convention against Torture, but can also be found in the Geneva Conventions, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the law of armed conflicts (Devlin 2012). Furthermore, many countries that have ratified these

international agreements have themselves prohibited its use in their domestic laws. Despite these condemnations, US officials have acknowledged the use of extreme violence as official information gathering techniques and several influential Americans have come to justify its use and advocate for its legalization (Jackson 2007; Rejali 2007). In the context of the “war on terror”, the practice of torture became an institutionalized reality within American counterterrorism policy when President Bush put in place Camp Delta at Guantanamo Bay (Bassiouni 2005). His administration came to the conclusion that the Geneva Conventions as well as the other international prohibitions against its use did not apply to combatants captured in Afghanistan (Taliban and Al Qaeda) (Bassiouni 2005). These interrogation methods included waterboarding, extended sleep deprivation, standing in stress positions and the rectal feeding that occurred when detainees went on hunger strikes (Crook 2009). The institutionalization of these enhanced interrogation techniques has resulted in the deaths of more than 200 detainees and an estimate of several thousands tortured individuals in American custody (Bassiouni 2005: 389). America’s public attitudes have manifested a certain level of tolerance towards these practices (Jackson 2007). For example, 10 years after the September 11th attacks, 56% of Americans supported President Bush’s response to the attacks, and 76% believed that the torture of terrorism suspects could be justified in order to obtain information (Pew Research Center 2011). Today, the American population is divided “with 48% stating that there are some circumstances under which the use of torture is acceptable in U.S. anti-terrorism efforts” (Pew Research Center 2017). Thus, in order to guarantee continuity, protection and strengthening of the most basic of human rights within our international system, it is primordial to understand how a violating practice such as torture was made not only to be tolerated but in many cases accepted and even justified within a democratic society. The US’ stance on torture could lead to a more normalised perception of the practice by other states and ultimately could weaken the international human rights system (Fitzpatrick 2003; Skogly 2009). Understanding how this normalization occurs gives us the basis on which this torture reality can be challenged and deconstructed. It will be argued that it is through the use of narrativity and discourse that this reality is made possible.

1.2 Normalization through Narratives

This research will not aim at providing an exhaustive study on the effectiveness, legality, morality or even use of torture, rather, the principal goal will be to understand the normalization of such a controversial practice. The previous section served as a starting point to understand

where the practice originated from during the “war on terror”, before analysing how it was made banal within the American society.

In order to better understand the continuing practice of torture, it is important to realize the power of the linguistic structures in which we not only speak, but also think and act. This study does not wish to be about torture alone but rather to say something about the significance of discourse and narrativity and to understand how entrenched in our lives these elements are and the power they detain. Language is never just a representation of the world we live in; it is also constitutive to that world. Language constructs the way we think and therefore the way we act. In that sense we should always take into account the concepts of speech acts and subsequently performativity of language. The thesis will be focused on the work of Hayden White, a philosopher of history who discusses the way in which historical narratives tend to follow story classical narrative structures. White would subscribe to the idea of Louis Mink that “stories are not lived but told,” and takes this position as a starting point for his work. This research applies this idea not on historical study, but on political narratives in society. It therefore shows how torture is made acceptable by giving it a comprehensible position in existing narratives. Thus, the following will be the research question: **In the post 9/11 era, how have political narrative structures contributed to the normalization of torture in Guantanamo Bay?**

1.3 A New Research Perspective

This research chooses to employ White’s narrative structures as a theoretical framework to undertake a cross-disciplinary analysis by bringing in together historiography and critical terrorism. Choosing White’s analysis allows for a linguistic and literary approach to be added to a field dominated by theories and models from social sciences. Furthermore, it distances the analysis from a moral debate to a more practical one, by focusing on “how it works”. The thesis will apply critical discourse analysis (CDA) to presidential political discourses as they essentially create the social legitimacy necessary for the existence of the reality that sustained the continued use of torture. CDA assumes that far from being neutral, discursive practices exercise their power by contributing to the creation and reproduction of a particular social reality (Jackson 2005). The methodology will be applied to a qualitative comparative analysis of Bush and Obama’s administrations and will aid in determining which of Hayden White’s narrative structures is most appropriate to each administration. While the research will predominantly focus on the normalization of torture through White’s narrative structure it does not aim at eliminating other perspectives, but instead at adding a new perspective to both the

field of critical terrorism and historiography. Indeed, given the humanities approach of the research, as opposed that of a social science one, the goal is to understand language, unique circumstances, historicity and contextuality without indiscriminately following any model. While many explanations for the persistence of torture may have value, analyzing it through White's lenses allows for novelty to the academic scholarship.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

While many thought the end of the Cold War, the fall of a number of dictatorships and the diffusion of democracy would diminish the use of torture, this was certainly not the case (Rejali 2007). In the last five years, Amnesty International has reported on torture in 141 nations around the globe, making up three quarter of the world (Amnesty International 2017). Given that 123 nations considered themselves democracies, it is safe to say that torture is still very prevalent within the most popular system of governance. Thus, regime type does not explain why it continues to be practiced and the question of how torture and democracy coexist arises (Rejali 2007). Even though the effectiveness of this interrogational method is questionable, democracies that formerly banned the practice continue to use it, particularly in the 9/11 aftermath (Kearns 2014). The following chapter reviews the current research on the reasons behind the use of torture by the US-government given the legal prohibitions and the human right political culture surrounding it. This literature review investigates the main theories to the continued practice of torture in order to establish a gap in the scholarship and to justify the main research question of the study. The importance of this chapter lies in the necessity to establish where in the current academic scholarship the main argument of this research fits in. Furthermore, this will lay the ground for the theoretical framework that will structure this thesis as well as serves as a justification for the relevance of such research. The thesis will demonstrate how stories, tales and rumors play a primordial role in the legitimization of torture. These stories will later be deconstructed to show the argument that they rely as much on narratives and emplotment structures, sometimes more, than they do on concrete and objective threads.

2.1 Why Does Torture Persist in Democracies?

Rejali identifies three circumstances in which democracies tend to utilize torture: unsound judicial practice, when there is a public fear of crime or breakdown in civic order, and in situations of national security threat (Rejali 2007). The last two incidences apply best to the fight against terrorism the US is experiencing where torture occurs because “national security bureaucracy overwhelms the democratic institutions that were designed to control it” (Rejali 2007: 22). The aim of this research will not be to indiscriminately follow a pre-existing theory or model, but rather to debate, compare, and most importantly question the current ones within the academic scholarship. Scholars as well as policymakers generally put forward the following two reasons: the interrogational and deterrent argument, as to why torture persists in

democracies as a counterterrorist technique when they are faced with national security threats and important public fears (Kearns 2014). This might help explain why certain democracies torture while others refrain from doing so (Rejali 2007). The following section will explore the literature on these two arguments and point out alternative explanations that are currently under-researched.

Firstly, the interrogational argument supports the use of torture in order to extract information; states may use torture in the hopes of gaining knowledge about future attacks (Dreshowitz 2002; Ignatieff 2004; Conrad et al 2014). According to Wantchekon and Healy, this practice can be a rational action to collect information for both the state and the individual under torture (Wantchekon and Healy 1999). As a counterterrorist tactic, when information is lacking, torture can seem attractive, even to democracies, because it is fast and low-cost (Conrad 2014). This argument illustrates the famous ticking time bomb metaphor first conceptualized in Jean Larteguy's fiction novel of 1960 (Kovarovic 2010). Under this exception, states that have formerly prohibited the use of torturous methods may use such techniques when faced with a large-scale and imminent crisis (Kovarovic 2010). This argument presupposes that the tortured individual has information that can only be obtained through the extreme use of violence and will ultimately aid the state in preventing a catastrophe (Kovarovic 2010; Tindale 1996). Since the "war on terror" began, the Bush Administration often invoked the ticking time bomb metaphor to justify the state's use of torturous methods against individuals suspected of terrorism (Devlin 2012; Kovarovic 2010). Politicians such as Mark Thiessen, a prominent official under the Bush administration, claimed that the enhanced interrogations of Khalid Sheik Mohammed provided useful information that prevented a terrorist attack in California (Conrad 2014). In his own words: "Without enhanced interrogations, there could be a hole in the ground in Los Angeles to match the one in New York" (Thiessen 2009). However, because torture does not ensure the accuracy of the information collected it has proven to be a poor interrogational method and most terrorism expert would discredit this first argument (Carlsmith and Sood 2009; Janoff-Bulman 2007; Kearns 2014). A tortured individual will often say anything and divulge false information to end their suffering (Richard et al 2011). Most historical cases show us that using physical coercion as an interrogational tool interferes with cognitive processes such as memory and its frequent use leads an interrogator to lose their broader investigatory skills (Richard et al 2011). For instance, Mark Thiessen's claim mentioned above has been refuted by the Senate Intelligence Committee Report. Kearns argues that up to today, there is far more evidence that supports the claim that torture is ineffective

than there is that contradicts it (Conrad 2010). And if torture is not able to extract accurate information, then the interrogational argument has no merit (Kearns 2014). Then the question remains; why does torture persists if not for effective interrogational purposes?

Secondly, torture may also be used as a deterrent technique aimed at discouraging similar acts of terror by raising the cost of participating in such form of violent activity (Dershowitz 2002). Classical deterrence theory views crime as a choice, where costs and benefits are weighed against each other (Crenshaw 2001). Authors such as Dershowitz assume the rational and self-interested nature of terrorist and conclude that terrorist's punishment through torture dissuades others from engaging in similar actions (Dershowitz 2002). Meaning that by increasing the cost of the crime, the state deters its occurrence. This type of justification can only be used if the state views terrorists as rational actors. However, other scholars argue that terrorists, unlike criminals, do not act in such a manner and are more concerned with the larger goal of advancing their cause than they are with individual goals (Dugan, Lafree and Piquero 2005). And research on this justification has mostly focused on the individual gains and not the ones at the collective level (Dugan and Chenoweth 2012). To date, the discussion on the effectiveness of torture as a deterrent method has been largely theoretical, as empirical research on the subject is quite difficult to acquire (Kearns 2014). However, several scholars have also found that torture does not only fail to deter terrorism, it also contributes to its increment (Dugan, Lafree and Piquero 2005). Indeed, while a large portion of the scholarship focuses on terrorist radicalization from the side of the non-state actors, the government's actions also often lead to greater radicalization. Images of tortured individuals become important recruitment tools fulfilling the exact opposite goal intended. Additionally, when the public becomes aware of the state's use of torture as a responds to terrorism, its legitimacy and its authority is questioned, particularly in democracies. This in turns aids the terrorists' cause more than the state's, because it fulfills their goals (Santucci 2008; Hafner-Burton and Shapiro 2010).

Alternative explanations that receive little attention in the academic scholarship are routine activities and obedience explanations. According to Cohen and Felson, human rights violations occur during routine activities when the opportunity arises for an offender to gain some information and that there is little monitoring (Cohen and Felson 1979). This would explain for instance, that even though torture was prohibited in Abu Ghraib by the Army interrogation training, some interrogators still routinely used it (Lagouranis and Mikaelian 2007). However, in the case of Guantanamo, this argument would not be justified since the authorizations to use

the enhanced interrogation techniques did not occur because the chain of command failed (Hooks and Mosher 2005) but instead came all the way from the Bush Administration. Thus, torture might still persist because democracies order and authorize it (Kearns 2014). Another explanation argues that instead of being routine activities, torture might occur because of obedience. This ties in with Milgram's famous experiment that demonstrated that obedience is a foundational component to the human condition (Milgram 1963). And some authors even claim that this obedience to authority might be higher in cases of torture (Wantchekon and Healy 1999). This argument would fit into the understanding of why torture persists in the case of Guantanamo Bay (Levinson 2003; Milgram 1963). Illustrating this obedience argument is the work of Crelinsten who argues that in order for torture to occur within any type of regime, individuals conducting these violent interrogation methods need to be properly trained and "techniques designed to supplant normal moral restraints about harming (innocent) others and to replace them with cognitive and ideological constructs that justify torture and victimization and neutralize any factors that might lead to pangs of conscience or disobedience to authority" (Crelinsten 2003: 295). This explanation would help explain the Guantanamo's case since it was a policy at a higher level that instructed the guards at the camp to use torture. However, this alone will not succeed in creating a reality that normalizes the use of torture it is merely a "symptom" of a wider type of phenomenon occurring. In order for torture to occur systematically and routinely within a given state, not only do torturers need to be trained but all aspect of society, whether explicitly or not, must reflect this position (Crelinsten 2003).

2.2 How is Torture Normalized?

Thus, while it is important to assess the reasons for why torture is used as a counter terrorist technique establishing why there has been (little) public outrage of this clear violation of human rights is also primordial. The fact that torture is tolerated even supported by the public makes it even harder to understand the link between prohibition and practice (Kearns 2014). While many factors may contribute to this normalization, this thesis will predominantly focus on the use of language through discourse and narrative to justify and normalize torture within a democracy. There is a certain increase in the literature on the public language of the war on terrorism (Jackson 2007), however this field is still under-researched. Up to today, few link the normalization of torture and the public language used in a society. Crelinsten argues that a torture reality is created by the employment of a new language and vocabulary that allows social relations to be redefined (Crelinsten 2003). He argues that torture was made possible

and acceptable despite universal prohibitions in a closed society where certain members were considered enemies (Crelinsten 2003). Jackson's work applies Crelinsten's model on torture in the "war on terror" by analyzing how US elite political discourse creates the necessary conditions for the normalization of the "torture policy" (Jackson 2007). He argues that the widely practice of torture by the American government can be explained by "the construction and maintenance of a new torture-sustaining reality founded on a set of widely disseminated and continuously reproduced narratives" (Jackson 2007: 368). Murphy's work reflected the ways in which through the choice of genre, language and visual imagery, the Bush administration was able to create a specific interpretation of the threat of terrorism and the most effective response to it (Murphy 2003). Similarly, Silberstein demonstrated how the public discourse changed dramatically in the aftermath of 9/11 (Silberstein 2002). The "war on terror" has created a specific type of political language of counter-terrorism with its "own assumptions, symbolic system, rhetorical modes and tropes, metaphors, narratives and meanings, and its own exclusive forms of knowledge" (Jackson 2007). However, there is a certain lack of literature in the research of the role public political discourses play in maintaining the sufficient conditions for the normalization of torture (Jackson 2007). This lack in research can be explained by the public-political failure to accept the long-standing torture policy in various American facilities (Jackson 2007).

2.2 Research Question

The uncertain efficacy of the interrogational and deterrent argument make them questionable justifications for the continued use of torture within democracies. This chapter has argued that in order to thoroughly comprehend the persistence of the practice, the academic scholarship should pay more attention to under-researched explanations such as the alternative ones mentioned above.

The research will add a new perspective to current academia by contributing to this gap and examining how a society can be brought to perceive the use of torture as banal and normal (Crelinsten 2003). Firstly, to Crelinsten's study by narrowing the case study to one specific regime type, a democracy, and delving more into the post-9/11 era. Furthermore, the research contributes to the literature by not solely exploring the discourse that might create a torture accepting society but how language can also challenge or deconstruct an already built narrative, with Obama's promise at the beginning of his term to close down Guantanamo. Additionally, the thesis will bring some novelty to the field by analyzing the normalization of torture through

the idea of the importance and inescapability of narrative structures developed by historian Hayden White. White's analysis – which will be explained more in depth in chapter 4 – is not to be understood as a model but rather as latent structures that can be observed in every account and narrative. A torture policy was only made possible because of a greater and dominant narrative that was being held on the “war on terror”. The research's starting argument is that torture within a democracy does not persist because of its efficiency, but because a whole society can be “manipulated” through discourse into thinking it does. Language constructs the way we think and therefore the way we act. The thesis will explore how language, particularly political and bureaucratic language built the torture reality. Thus, the main research question reads as follow:

In the post 9/11 era, how have political narrative structures contributed to the normalization of torture in Guantanamo Bay?

Understanding how elite discourses can shape society to be accepting of practices that violate fundamental values allows us to gauge ways in which this sort of discourse can be challenged or even deconstructed. The research will compare and contrast the “war on terror” political speeches made both by President George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The piece will argue that these elite discourses, constructed by the administration in power were further reproduced by the media and popular culture and made the torture reality possible.

Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology

For the purpose of this study, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is being used as a research methodology. This methodological tool's aim is to analyze, describe and interpret the relationship between language and society, particularly how discourses contribute to the creation of unequal power relationships (Rogers et al 2005). Given the theoretical framework chosen, it appears as one of the most suitable methodologies to utilize. CDA will be applied to a qualitative comparative analysis of both administration's period and will aid in determining which of Hayden White's narrative structures is most appropriate to each administration. This chapters justifies the selection of CDA as a methodological framework and analytical tool.

There is a type of hermeneutical relationship between discourse and social structures, one in which the latter both shaped and is shaped by the former. CDA assumes that far from being neutral, discursive practices exercise their power by contributing to the creation and reproduction of a particular social reality (Jackson 2005). For instance, the hermeneutical aspect can be observed because a torture reality was *created* by the political sphere, and in turn the media and popular culture *reproduced* it and gave it its hegemonic power. This research attempts to uncover how narrative structures, such as the ones laid out in the next chapters, resonate within society and aid in the legitimization of torture. The critical component of CDA lies in its normative nature to effect positive social change (Fairclough 1992; Jackson 2005). Critical discourse analysis aims at exposing ways in which language contributes to power abuse, inequities and oppressions (Fairclough 1992; Van Dijk 2011). This methodological tool aims at revealing how dominant forces may present a reality favourable to their interest but at the cost of others (Luke 2008). In this case, how language through narratives can aid in creating or deconstructing a reality where extreme political violence is normalized in times of crisis.

This comparative speech analysis will focus solely as primary sources on the Presidential political speeches made by the two first administrations of the "war on terror". The findings presented in chapter 5 are a result of a close reading of a selection of such speeches. Both Bush and Obama's Presidential speeches were chosen based on the relevance to the "war on terror" and the mention of enhanced interrogation methods and Guantanamo. A total of 10 speeches were retrieved from the White House's official website, with 5 from Bush and 5 from Obama collected for analysis. The aim will be to unlock the core language of the torture reality, embedded in the "war on terror" narrative.

Chapter 4. Narrative Structures

The events of September 11 are now part of the national and international recent history and many believe that they are so obvious that they do not call for an explanation as they speak for themselves (Jackson 2009). However, no matter how self-explanatory national events may seem, they obtain their meaning through “processes of interpretation that are usually organized and driven by powerful social actors with their own interests” (Jackson et al 2011: 62). The 9/11 events alone do not suffice to create a reality in which torture can be seen as a legitimate and acceptable reality. As established in the literature review chapter, an entire set of discourses about the events has to be created, one in which policies and action that support and allow torture are seen as a natural progression to fulfil the counterterrorism agenda. This understanding would ascribe to historian Hayden White’s theory of historical accounts. Indeed, White argues that a historian does not simply summarize facts and events from the past but always adds a certain structure in order to make historical events intelligible (White 1973). Most theorists of historiography would contend that all accounts of history contain a certain degree of interpretation (White 1973). This occurs because history “is both too full and too sparse” (White 1973:281). The historian must select historical facts from a wide range, order them and fill in the gaps by speculating on information he might not possess (White 1973). White’s historical narratives structures explained below will serve as theoretical basis to this thesis.

The idea of narrative structure rose to popularity in the mid-to-late-20th century, when several structuralist literary theorists such as Roland Barthes, Vladimir Propp, and Northrop Frye famously argued that all human narratives have a strong structural element in common (Paul 2011). One of the most important source of inspiration for Hayden White, was Louis Mink’s ground-breaking article of 1970 (Paul 2011: 84). In it, the author argued that the point of these narrative structures was not understanding “how the story ends” but rather to help the reader “grasp together” a series of past events (Paul 2011: 84). Mink argued that the goal of the historian’s work is to get the reader to view the story in a way “in which the beginning and ending are all encompassed in a totum simul view” (Paul 2011: 84). These narrative structures provide insight into the *point of it all* (Paul 2011). According to White, this represents an added interpretation he names “narrative structure” and allows the researcher to give meaning to the past and not simply communicate bare knowledge (White 1973). However, unlike Mink, White would argue that the act of comprehension could not take a multitude of endless forms but

instead came in a limited number (Paul 2011). According to him, the human imagination is not unlimited, but bound to four modes of narratives inspired by Northrup Frye's four archetypal classical plots (Paul 2011). Based on this observation, White develops a theory on history by positing that each historian makes a moral choice of narrative structure when writing about history (White 1973: 8- 9). The author distinguishes four literature genre available to the historian: the Romance, Comedy, Tragedy and Satire one (White 1973: 8- 9). In the romantic plot, historical events are told in a way in which good triumphs over evil (White 1973: 8- 9). The comedy narrative understands history as a society composed of an array of different forces opposing each other initially but that ultimately reconcile (White 1973: 8- 9). The tragic plot perceives history as a story in which ideals are destroyed but where humans learn about the inescapable limits of reality (White 1973: 8- 9). Finally, the satirical narrative believes that historical events are deprived of meaning and that all three other forms of narratives are mistaken (White 1973: 8- 9).

This thesis posits that plot and narratives are not solely prevailing in the historian's work but can be found all around us. As White puts it "so natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report of the way things really happened" (White 1980: 5). Narratives are to be comprehended as a meta-code through which transcultural understandings are communicated about a shared reality (White 1980). When events as unsettling as 9/11 happen, which essentially put in motion the creation of Guantanamo, the public looks up to the media and political elites to make present events comprehensible. Thus, just as a reader looks to the historian's work to make the past intelligible, so does a society look up to its political elites to make events understandable. This research maintains that the way in which these elites respond to their citizens is grounded in a particular set of narrative structures comparable to White's emplotment theory. In some instances, these narratives can be chosen by society's elites to fulfill specific goals. Although the exact intent of Bush and Obama's language strategies is near impossible to tell, it is interesting to look at this layer in their language that is not - or only seldom - explicitly discussed. Indeed, it would be hard to truly gauge whether there is an explicit and intentional programmatic attempt by politicians to convey a narrative. This is not the question the research is seeking to answer, instead the goal is to analyse and explore the presence of narrative structures.

In appearance, both administrations had fundamentally different strategies in mind when it came to responding to terrorism and ways to frame this "war on terror". In the wider counter-

terrorism narrative of Bush's administration was to make the use of torture seem justifiable and a normal way to respond. And Obama administration's goal was to undo this torture reality. However, this intended goal ultimately did not see the light of day, as Guantanamo is still open up to today. In every war the US has fought, there has been cases of prisoner abuse at variant level, however, the Bush administration is unique in its formal embracement of the abuse and for setting aside the principles of the Geneva Conventions (Hooks and Mosher 2005). During his campaign, Obama promised that his administration would take a different approach to the counterterrorism strategy by taking a step back from most of Bush's policies and rhetoric (McCracken 2011). He vowed to effect ideological change by "restoring the standards of due process and the core constitutional values that have made this country great", by upholding these standards "even in the midst of war, even in dealing with terrorism" (McCracken 2011: 782). This is why, at the very beginning of his term he ordered the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and the use of enhanced interrogation methods, what he considered to be one of the greatest objectionable aspects of the previous administration (McCracken 2011). The goal was to take a more morally acceptable stance by not repeating but repairing the excesses from the previous administration while still prosecuting the war against terrorism (McCracken 2011). Out of the four narrative structure presented above, the research's hypothesis will argue that while both administration's period had different perception of how to combat terrorism, particularly with regards to the use of universally condemned techniques such as torture, both of them ultimately utilized a similar discursive structure, closer to the Romance one. As a result, their explicitly formulated frames connect to implicit perceived narrative structure.

Even though a number of narrative lenses can be used to analyze the torture policy language within the US society, this research chooses to employ White's narrative structures as a theoretical framework to undertake an interdisciplinary study by combining both the fields of historiography and critical terrorism. Since the goal of the study is to understand how the normalization of torture occurred through language, establishing what type of counterterrorism narrative structure each administration period was grounded in is essential. The events of 9/11 although recent, are also historical. Representing the past, even of only a few years before, is a delicate task. Through the use of discursive formation, genre and language, both administrations were able to fashion a particular explanation of the threat which led to the most appropriate response to it.

Chapter 5. Case Study

In order for the torture policy to see the light of day in a democracy that perceives the practice as violating foundational human rights, the Bush administration had to first deconstruct the existing social reality, where conventional morality prohibits its use, and replace it with a new reality where torture is made possible (Jackson 2007). This process of deconstruction and reconstruction requires the use of powerful and important discursive formations. Narratives are central in reality construction as they aid legitimize and justify policy formulation such as the use of extraordinary methods (Croft 2006). In the post-9/11 era, a series of such narratives were created to support the US's counterterrorism campaign under the umbrella of the "war on terror". These discourses particularly aided in the justification of controversial counterterrorist measures such as the enhanced interrogation program. However, by the end of Bush's term, the public was growing more and more disillusioned with such policies. Thus, both during his campaign trail and presidency, Obama puts considerably efforts to mark a clear departure from Bush and make change central to his rhetoric. However, this thesis argues that more unites their discourse than separates it; Obama ultimately ended up reproducing a similar narrative. This research wishes to highlight that while Obama frequently stressed his departure from this rhetoric that caused such excesses, more similarities than difference can be observed in his own discourse. In order to demonstrate the emergences of the "war on terror" discourse as well as Obama's reproduction of it, this study will use Hayden White's emplotment structure to show that political narratives always connect to his classic plots. The chapter will argue that while the legitimization and stance on Guantanamo of both Presidents might have been distinct, they both ultimately grounded their speech acts in White's romantic mode of emplotment. This study does not debate the question of intentionality, whether Bush or Obama were aware of these narrative structures employed is not the point of the research. Rather, this thesis wishes to reveal White's plot structure in a political speech setting.

Bush's and Obama's political speeches will be analyzed through three literary features essential to any story: setting, character and plot. All of these literary elements rely on structure and are of assistance in understanding how narrative structures are dominant in their speeches. These three features will divide the chapter with the aim of deconstructing both Presidents' political speeches since the attacks of 9/11 and demonstrate how the romantic plot is operational at every structural level of their narrative, particularly in supporting the normalization of the enhanced interrogational techniques used at Guantanamo.

5.1 The Setting

In any story, the setting serves as a foundation to the events that will unfold by providing their location and timeframe. With the case of the US “war on terror”, this setting was clearly established in the three days following the attacks of 9/11. In one of the most important discursive moves made by the Bush administration the attacks of 9/11 were reframed, from acts of *terrorism* and *political violence* to acts of *war* (Jackson 2005). Jackson notes that the morning of the attacks, at 9.30am, President Bush first referred to the event as an “apparent *terrorist attack*” (Bush, 11 September, 2001a; Jackson 2005). The same day when addressing the public he said: “Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly *terrorist acts*” (Bush, 11 September, 2001b). He continued by calling them “acts of *mass murder*” and “despicable acts of *terror*” (Jackson 2005). However, only three days later, a grammatical shift occurred and the administration began to reconstruct the events as acts of “*war*” rather than terrorism or criminal ones (Jackson 2005). The shift happened almost simultaneously as Bush started to change his words and state: “*War* has been waged against us by stealth and deceit” (Bush, 14 September, 2001). He continued the next day with “There has been an act of *war* declared upon America (...) a group of barbarians have declared *war* on the American people” (Bush, 15 September, 2001). A setting may engender a particular set of rules or expectations that the audience may be familiar or not with. In the case of America, war is a setting the American population is quite familiar with. On account of their history, Americans can understand how rules protected and promoted during peacetimes can be transgressed in times of war for a greater good. Framing the attacks as acts of war allows the government the right to justified self-defence (Jackson 2007). This linguistic shift gives the state a certain degree of freedom of action, to act in ways that may not be accepted or tolerated in peace times but viewed as legitimate in war times (Jackson 2005). Additionally, this grammatical qualification debuts the famous phrase of “war on terror” that is still so prevalent today. Just as the setting dictates the nature of the narrative, it also gives an indication on its timeframe. Time directs the narrative and gives it a beginning, middle and end. In the Bush rhetoric, 9/11 serves as the origin story to the “war on terror”, a fact that is frequently emphasized as a reminder to justify certain actions that may be out of line.

Although, the Obama administration discontinued the expression “war on terror” as then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated: “The administration has *stopped using the phrase* and I think that speaks for itself” (Solomon, March 31, 2009), the war framework was still perpetuated in Obama’s rhetoric. This was done by stressing another element central to Bush’s

rhetoric, the “newness” of the war that called for new tools of defence. Indeed, under Bush, the war was classified as a special one, different from previous ones (Jackson 2005). Donald Rumsfeld would say: “I’ve therefore characterized this conflict, this campaign, this so-called war, as being *notably different* from others” (Rumsfeld, 7 October, 2001) “this *new* war will be a conflict without battlefields and beachheads, in short, an *unconventional* war” (Dam, 22 October, 2001). Emphasizing the uniqueness and novelty of the threat allows the government to justify the use of new modes of self-defence by maintaining that a new paradigm is required, one where old restrictions have less power and relevance (Pilecki et al 2014). Thus, even though methods such as the enhanced interrogations ones go against the Geneva Conventions, this new war calls for a new paradigm and mind-set (Jackson 2007). Obama’s May 21, 2009 speech became noteworthy for his explicit desire to depart from many of the excesses of the previous government, as he states that: “the policies that I’ve proposed represent a *new direction* from the last eight years” (Obama, May 21, 2009). However, quite paradoxically, it is also in that same speech that he reaffirms some of Bush’s main foreign policy measures that were used to justified excesses such as torture. The same argument of uniqueness of the war can be observed in Obama’s speech: “After 9/11, we knew we entered a *new era*, the enemies who did not abide by any law of war presented new challenges to our application of the law; that our government would need *new tools* to protect the American people, and that these tools would have to allow us to prevent attacks instead of simply prosecuting those who carry them out” (Obama, May 21, 2009). Thus, even though the 20th century saw many occurrence of international terrorism, both Presidents presented this war as a fundamentally new framework, one in which the old techniques – that did not manage to prevent 9/11 - had to be altered.

Both Presidents point to the inadequacy of the legal juridical system against this new threat and the need to place terrorism in a war discourse (Pilecki et al 2014). Obama echoes Bush’s arguments when he states that “after the chaos and carnage of September 11th , it was not enough to serve our enemies legal papers. The terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States and war is what they got” (Bush, January 20, 2004). This argumentation – of stepping out of the legal framework – was at the basis of the justifications for the torture policy: “I can say that questioning the detainees in this program has given us information that saved innocent lives by helping us stop new attack” (Bush, September 6, 2006). In this understanding, the moral supremacy of security is held above all other values and principles including legal consideration as Obama states that: “America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country” (Bush, January 20, 2004). While Obama does not approve of the

enhanced techniques and frequently works to ban them by qualifying them as “counterproductive to the fight against terrorists” (Obama February 23, 2016), he employs in his speech the same arguments that led to such harsh counterterrorist measures. Emphasizing the war setting, allows them, as Jabri stated, to employ “behaviour that is unacceptable in peacetime but that becomes legitimate in times of war” (Jabri 1996:6). The use of this particular setting of war is central to any romantic mode of employment. Indeed, by qualifying the events as “acts of *war*”, their rhetoric is necessarily calling for specific types of actors that will set the scene for the rest of the narrative.

5.2 The Characters

Unsurprisingly, characters are essential to any sort of narrative; they are the actors that play out the action and navigate through the setting. The setting directly influences the sort of characters that will be found in a story. The romantic plot is prevalent in the “war on terror” narrative because a war setting necessarily calls for two types of characters: winners and losers, heroes and villains. This dualist conception of actors is characteristic to the romantic genre; where a hero attempts to conquer a villain, or a vice, with the ultimate goal being his “transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it” (White 1973: 9).

One of the strongest elements that led to the enforcement of the enhanced interrogation techniques and also unites Bush and Obama’s rhetoric is their characterization of the terrorist figure. This depiction and separation between good and evil, hero and enemy is done in a categorical manner. On the one hand, America, the hero of the narrative, is depicted as good, dependable and peaceful, simply put as a freedom defender seeking to bring a ruthless and mad enemy to justice (Jackson 2007). This is a clear example of Northrop Frye, scholar that inspired White’s four archetypical plots, that describes the hero as superior in both degree and environment (Paul 2011). Furthermore, victims of the attacks also underwent a discursive shift from “terrorist victims” to “combat casualties”. This can be illustrated with Donald Rumsfeld awarding the armed forces victims of the attacks with war medals as if they were killed in combat in an official military operation (Jackson 2005). “They were *combat casualties* (...) The members of the armed forces that were killed or injured in the September 11th attack will receive the Purple Heart. As you know the Purple Heart is given to those killed or wounded in combat” (Rumsfeld, 27 September, 2001). However, on the other hand, terrorists are portrayed as the villains, mad, inhumane, ruthless and stripped of any rational or genuine political

grievances they may have and thus, painted as underserving of the same rights civilians benefit from (Jackson 2005). Two important steps are required for this understanding of terrorists. Firstly, the attackers have to be portrayed as so powerful that the use of extraordinary violence is justified (Jackson 2007). Terrorist are depicted by both Presidents as presenting a threat that is so important in scope and severity that the only rational way to respond is with that same scope and severity (Pilecki et al 2014). In this manner, Bush justifies the use of torture while Obama bans the use but not the necessity of powerful techniques that may be morally condemnable. Secondly, the enemy must be completely dehumanized to render them unworthy of human rights (Jackson 2007). Unlike normal soldiers, terrorists are not recognised fighters but rather “unlawful” combatants (Jackson 2005). Terrorists are evil because of the way they continuously murder innocent women and children. Bush states “No enemy is more ruthless in Iraq than al-Qaeda. They send suicide bombers into crowded markets; they behead innocent captives and they murder innocent troops” (Bush, , July 24, 2007). This discourse continues during Obama’s presidency: “And where terrorists offer only the injustice of disorder and destruction, America must demonstrate that our values and our institutions are more resilient than a hateful ideology” (Obama, May 21, 2009). This evil terrorist figure is amplified by the apolitical character both Presidents assign to the terrorist. Both Bush and Obama justify their counterterrorism campaign by stripping the terrorist’s action of any political motivation or condemnable morality their form of violence may possess. Not only is the terrorist evil and an enemy to America and its allies, the terrorist is also violent purely to be violent. “Terrorist - violence is not a means to an end; rather, it is sought after as an end in itself” (Pilecki et al 2014: 291). In this understanding Bush will state that: “they embrace tyranny and death as cause and creed” (Bush, January 29, 2002). The only goal that is mentioned is their desire to destroy Western values, which are often presented as humanity’s most precious values. Obama stated that “The advance of liberty is opposed by terrorist and extremists” (Bush, January 28, 2008). Another common trend is to portray the terrorist as mentally unstable and psychotic, for example Bush stated that: “the depth of their hatred is equalled by the *madness* of the destruction they design” (Bush, 29 January, 2002). When in actuality most studies have found that “the most outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality” (Crenshaw 1981: 379). The consequence of such a portrayal is that it delegitimizes the terrorists and categorizes them outside the “legitimate political actor” category by stressing their non-political motivation (Pilecki et al 2014). The point here is to create an enemy so heinous and inhumane that extraordinary and large-scale violence direct at them seems perfectly normal (Jackson 2005).

5.3 The Plot

The plot in this instance refers to the events of the story, the manner in which the storyline unfolds. Essentially, the plot is a sequence of events involving characters in conflict situations. The romantic mode of emplotment asks for a particular type of storyline, one in which light conquers darkness and good defeats evil (White 1973: 8-9). White frequently compares this genre's structure to that of dramas associated with the Grail legend or the story of the resurrection of Christ in Christian mythology (White 1973: 8-9). In essence, the romantic mode of emplotment relies on three elements: character, desire and conflict. Put together, it is about a captivating hero pursuing some compelling desire, and who faces seemingly insurmountable obstacles achieving it. However, as opposed to the Satire narrative structure, these obstacles are always transitory and temporary with the hero being ultimately victorious over them (White 1973: 8-9). In this understanding, the heroes' victory over evil is close to undeniable because of the nature of the protagonist. This romantic structure can also be observed in both Presidents' "war on terror" rhetoric. Indeed, their contrasting linguistics' portrayal of the Good American vs the Evil Terrorist is the base to the legitimacy of their counterterrorist strategy. As a result, this depiction allows identity to be perceived as the foundational aspect of human action rather than deliberation (Jackson 2007). Thus, because of America's status of hero, the public might react with more leniency to their human rights transgressions as they perceive them as contributing to fight for the greater good. Additionally, the nature of the enemy makes it impossible to imagine a compromise between the hero and his adversary. This characterization of pure evil, of violence just for the sake of violence stripped of any rationale or logic further confirms the romance emplotment structure. As opposed to the comedy narrative structure, where opposing forces after initial conflict reconcile, the romantic mode asks for a winner and a loser, a complete defeat of the enemy (White 1973: 8). To give an example, in the story of the resurrection of Christ, Jesus does not seek to make a deal with Satan but rather to defeat him. On a similar note, the "war on terror", neither Bush nor Obama make compromising a part of their discourse. In fact, all of their efforts turn to the opposite direction. This romance narrative encourages the idea that America, the hero, will ultimately be victorious because of the nature of its identity and thus large-scale violence against its enemy is necessary.

Chapter 6. Discussion

These discursive constructions discussed in the previous chapter reconfigured and portrayed the events of 9/11 in a way that allowed policymakers to justify their actions and give them a great deal of flexibility as well as social consensus to enact policies such as the torture one. Torture is not justified through cost and benefits argument but rather by these narratives woven into society.

The “war on terror” romance narrative caught on and gained popularity, particularly in the early and middle stages of Bush’s term, he was able to enact almost every policy intended with high levels of support. Additionally, this romantic dominant discourse was also reproduced in many aspects of the everyday life of Americans such as in churches, schools, the media and the entertainment industry which all amplified the core narrative of the “war on terror” (see Croft 2006). A hermeneutic effect could be observed as these different mediums would in turn also influence the political agenda by shaping their perception of the counterterrorist campaign. Within popular culture, torture is often presented as a reasonable option, with the example of TV-shows such *24* and *Homeland*. The popularity of such a discourse was also made possible by the familiarity most Americans had with the romance narrative structure. Indeed, “the heroes’ transcendence of the world” form of narration is one of the most widespread within the storytelling world, with books, TV-shows and movies frequently employing it. Thus, this form of narration is prevalent in the political world as much as it is in other fields. By choosing this literature genre of “war on terror”, this way of looking at the world and understanding it, the US manages to normalize the use of extreme violence against specific individuals deemed underserving of the same rights as the rest of the world. Towards the end of Bush’s term, many started to question the “war on terror”, particularly the enhanced interrogation methods program, the existence of Guantanamo and the highly contested Iraq invasion. However, deconstructing such an embedded narrative has proven difficult.

Two days after taking office, President Obama signed two important executive orders, the first banned the use of enhanced interrogation methods and the second ordered the closing of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. Towards the end of Bush’s term, there was social and political feeling of discontent with the US counterterrorist strategy, particularly in regards to the human rights violations occurring in Guantanamo. And since Obama was elected on a promise of significant change, it was his main rhetoric during his campaign trail and what his supporters expected from him. Unsurprisingly, once he took office this narrative of change and

departure from the previous office had to remain central in order to keep his word and not disappoint his electors. This new direction focused especially on ending the enhanced interrogation program as he states here, a direction: “that *rejected torture* and one that recognized the imperative of *closing* the prison at Guantanamo” (Obama May 21, 2009). Thus, throughout his Presidency, marking a clear separation between his administration and the previous one was a main theme in his rhetoric. However, the previous chapter demonstrated that there were noteworthy discrepancies in his rhetoric of change which was ultimately grounded in the same romantic plot as Bush. Obama’s electors were eager to see a revolution in policy. And while he managed to ban the enhanced interrogation methods, which was a step in the right direction, a closer look at his discourse ultimately reveals a reproduction of Bush’s rhetoric. This has of course created a sense of disappointment for many of his supporters as they now look at his campaign claims as “empty promises designed to placate the left and deflect attention from the President’s determination to maintain and deepen the war on terrorism footing adopted by his predecessor” (McCrisken 2011: 791). As Bachevick states: “The candidate who promised to ‘change the way Washington works’ has become Washington’s captive” (McCrisken 2011). However, it could also be argued that it was near impossible for Obama to change such institutionalized policies and narratives because abandoning them would generate too great of a cost. This is referred to as the national-security industrial complex (Gerges 2012; Jackson 2011). In this framework, Gerges and Jackson argue that the “war on terror” discourse is so ingrained into America’s psyche that even a President elected on the idea of change could not undo it (Gerges 2012; Jackson 2011).

The romance “war on terror” narrative emerged under the Bush administration and made 9/11 its origin story. It was far from revolutionary but based on past familiar discursive formations embedded in American culture and identity. The narratives were not new but simply fashioned in ways to legitimize and anchor their political strategies and policies. The Good American and Evil Terrorist depictions come from a long-standing narrative of the good America, a freedom and human rights defender that has been part of American identity and history since its creation. However, with scandals such as the Abu Ghraib one, where pictures of prisoners abuses were leaked, this established American image was threatened to be overturned. Even though most Americans were not blind to the torture reality, with a large part of the American population supporting its use, seeing the leaked images and the guards’ abuses made reality seem closer. The United States’ perception of itself had to be reinvented and reaffirmed in order for policy support to be maintained since a contradiction between the nation’s perception of itself and its

actions started to emerge. The image of America as the greatest defender of freedom, justice and law – the hero of the plot - could not be reconciled with such images. In the same manner as Bush, Obama had to utilize discourse and language to reaffirm and re-give America this identity which is so rooted in its history. However, in order to do this, a strong revolution in management - or at least the perception of it - had to be undertaken. Thus, as Bush utilized the good versus evil narrative structure to dehumanize terrorist enemies, so does Obama employ a dualism, this time between himself and Bush, to distance his policies and rhetoric from that of his predecessor. This polarising of policies was essential to legitimize his Presidency, particularly with both the growing domestic as well as international discontent the public had of Bush's counterterrorist policies.

Ultimately, if one was to compare their discourses and policies solely based on the enhanced interrogation program, one could conclude that their campaigns were drastically different. That being said, the use of torture in Guantanamo was simply a symptom of a wider set of issues initiated and justified by the romantic "war on terror" narrative. Many other extreme anti-terror measures occurred and still continue to persist because of this narrative, such as drones strikes targeted at civilians, indefinite detention, preemptive war and domestic surveillance (Pilecki et al 2014). With his ban on torture, Obama only partly - and poorly since Guantanamo is still opened - cured a set of symptoms but not the root of the disease. In order to stress the departure from his predecessor, Obama often emphasized the differences between himself and Bush but omit some of their similarities and continuations in counterterrorism. This ingrained narrative portrayed the 9/11 attacks as acts of war and thus justified the use of unilateral force against its enemies and civilian death as collateral damage. However, through discourse and narrative structures, the 44th President was able to sell his policies as an anti-thesis to Bush's to give the perception of greater departure than the reality of his actions. Essentially, Obama employed his discourse on torture and Guantanamo as a discourse in itself to deflect from other extraordinary use of violence to distance himself as much as possible from Bush and give the impression of drastic change. He camouflaged political continuation through carefully chosen language and discursive formations. However, once again since the true intention of these politicians is impossible to gauge, Obama's political continuation may be caused by the national-security industrial complex mentioned above where "the war on terrorism may have taken on a life of its own and any administration would find it extremely difficult to unmake or alter to any significant degree, even if they wanted to" (Jackson 2005: 324).

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The power of discourse and narratives is undeniable. They affect how we live our lives, they determine who we are, who we love, and who we hate. They shape our perception of the world and the perception the world has of us. They are created and generated in an array of different places by elites in social power. This study chose to focus predominantly on two particular political elite figures that have been some of the most important and key players since the beginning of the “war on terror”. As argued in the previous chapters, more unites their discourses than separates it. Both of their narratives ultimately contributed to the creation of a reality where the United States is fighting a war that justifies abuses because of the importance they give to the moral and legitimate nature of their war. These discursive formations are part of the wider narrative that led to the normalization of extreme anti-terror measures which caused the banality of torture in Guantanamo. Both Bush and Obama grounded their political rhetoric in White’s romantic mode of emplotment. Thus, to answer the main research question political narrative structure have contributed to the normalization of torture in Guantanamo Bay in two important ways. First, by establishing a setting that would legitimize and allow such harsh anti-terror measure such as torture. A setting in which, the juridical system and morality are often superseded by security. And furthermore, by depicting the terrorist figure as a separate category of political actor, one that is characterized by its evil nature and apolitical motivation that renders them underserving of just and legal treatment. Paradoxically, Obama emphasized his politic of change and departure from Bush in his rhetoric, but ultimately produced the same romantic discourse that contributed to the normalization of torture. Whether Bush or Obama’s intentions were malicious or true, that is not the point of analyzing discourse, but rather as Croft puts it to “understand what is done through particular accounts” (Croft 2006: 43). The aim of the study was to highlight the existence of these narrative structures even though neither politician investigated ever explicitly or intentionally mentioned the idea of using them. As a result, their intentionality or non-intentionality remains unknown. However, given their polarizing differences in parties with the conservative-leaning Bush and the liberal-leaning Obama, an assumption can be made that they connected to deeper narrative structures, pre-existing ones within American identity, in an unintentional manner, more out of tradition and familiarity than strategy. Today, this romantic narrative persists to exist and this is why further research in the field of counterterrorism discourse is essential. This study was far from exhaustive and to narrow the research only focused on Presidential political speeches where other channels of diffusion and reproduction may also have been relevant, such as the media

and the cultural sphere. Ultimately, discourses and narrativity are so entrenched in our way of living and seep into every aspect of our every day life, leaving endless room for its study and research. While the torture reality might have ended, other human rights abuses are happening in the name of the fight against terrorism. Particularly, today with the new change of administration and the ever present terrorist threat discourse. Torture is just a symptom of a wider phenomenon and if not careful, the power of discourses and narratives can blind the public to the realities of the excesses of the war of terror.

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