

Portrait of the Torturer in the 20th Century

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1. "Elite" psychology. Nicknames and "mystique." The rhetoric of legitimating and ennobling the profession of modern torturer. The cult of machismo. "Christ's vicars." The new "cannibals."

Torturers will often claim that they do not cause suffering deliberately; that they merely punish according to orders; that they simply execute whatever commands they are given, since this is their job requirement. Even when uncontaminated by the "joy" of torture, torturers remain what they are: executioners. Neither (necessarily) sadistic, nor degenerate executioners; neither monsters, nor beasts (Todorov, 1996). This is how I must proceed with outlining a portrait of the torturers: they belong to a special category, claiming their pedigree not merely as descendants of *maleficium* producers, but also as representatives of a false elite. Thus, in order to legitimise torture as a practice, a particular political regime and its torturers envisage themselves as a professional category, an elite body. Everything ranging from torture training (delivered by "specialists" from foreign countries) to the specific rituals and jargon (for diverse torture practices) which are deliberately cultivated by the torturers evinces their aspiration to acquiring the status of professionals in their field.

Interrogators have various nicknames, which, like in the case of torture methods, impart a camouflaged, codified identity. The intended effect is twofold. On the one hand, the torturer's identity is protected, making official punishment impossible. Rather than bearing their real names, torturers adopt nicknames (e.g. "The Moustache") and instead of making explicit reference to their torture methods, such as forcing their victims to ingest their own urine, they prefer the more allusive "breakfast." This is an attempt to dislodge torture and the torturer's identity into a safeguarded metareality. These pseudonyms are therefore terminological shields. On the other hand, they reveal the torturers' aspiration to warrior caste or military elite membership; they are insignia of power, nominal badges whereby the "enemy can be confronted." By way of illustration, I have selected, from the myriad of nicknames I have come across, the most suggestive ones: "The Hound," "The Fighter," "The Butcher," "The Executioner," "The Priest" (he was obsessed with torturing priests), "The Cobra," "The Jackal," "The Cougar," "The Monsignor," "The Lightning," "The Female Voice," "The Artist," "The Champion," "The Viper," "The Shark," "The Tiger," "Kill-All," "The Wizard," "The Hyena," "The Vampire," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Maradona," "Marijuana," "Chocolate," "Tarzan," "Pardaillan," "Hercules," etc. Sometimes torture methods are also referred to circuitously. For instance, "The Black Slave" (sodomy with a hot iron) from several Arab countries; or "Jesus Christ" (crucifixion), often used in South America. All these nicknames and pseudonyms either attest to the specific feature of a certain torturer (level of brutality, pain-inducing "artistry"), or aim to rank him in the proximity of famous personalities. In the latter case, the effect is downright preposterous. These warrior appellatives are counterfeit since torturers do not wage just war against other combatants; they merely defy and disparage powerless minds and bodies. This allows for the would-be military caste to which torturers claim allegiance to appear as fake and unwarranted. Torturers are ultimately devoid of any heroism: they torment essentially defenceless people. A rather different account from that of the classical warrior, who engages in direct confrontation against another warrior or against a "monster," for this act of bravery can ensure his prestige as a man of arms. Torturer (or torture) nicknames are no twentieth-century invention; they have always been in use, even though in the past they were part of the jargon peculiar to a certain guild among other guilds (the executioners), and were not conceived as means of acknowledging an arrogant subculture.

In the Ancient and Medieval periods, executioners were dark figures: bearers of ill luck, they were invariably subject to stigmatisation. Unlike their forbears, twentieth-century torturers turned this stigma into a badge of honour. Similarities did remain. Just like the executioners of yore had had to evince their craftsmanship by applying exquisite techniques to their victims' bodies, twentieth-century torturers had to know how to torture their victims without killing them: "professional" perfection implied traceless torment. In the past it had often happened for an executioner who did not master the

skills of death infliction (in all its forms) to meet his death at the hands of an unruly mob. In contrast, twentieth-century torturers could, by and large, be punished if they murdered their victims (accidentally or deliberately); their behaviour was considered, at most, excessive, and rewards were not ruled out.

In the past, when applying torture, it had been customary for executioners to wear masks, since, acting as “ecclesiastical instruments,” they had to cover their faces to remain integrated within the Christian community. It was only thus that they could partake, bare-faced, of the Eucharist ceremony (*Domination et torture*, 1978: 17). In the twentieth century, those who had their heads covered, throughout their ordeals, were usually the victims, so as to prevent them from recognising their torturers afterwards. In certain situations, executioners did not avoid being seen, insisting on the idea that they must have a physically definite identity in front of their victims. What emerged in the latter case was actually the torturers’ arrogance, derived from being in charge of these procedures. The limits of torture were not dictated by the victims’ health state, but by the intended number of victims and confessions. There were also cases when torturers aimed at disfiguring their victims. It was their faces and not their bodies that had to be destroyed if torturers resented being looked at. The victims’ faces could be flayed off, though the usual practice required tumefaction: eyes, noses, mouths swelled up and turned into amorphous, shapeless flesh. Disfigured faces granted torturers sufficient satisfaction since, for a while, they could no longer be gazed at and could continue to feel blameless. The victim’s eyes, nose and mouth were mere dark, gory holes. To complete the picture, teeth got broken or chipped off, and tongues got bloated or cut off. At other times, torturers could wear cagoules, for the aforementioned reasons: for camouflage (protection); as a disavowal of the act of torture; or as a token of power. At the end of the nineteenth-century, hard-line policemen in Algeria would dress up as Ninjas, in order to lend a more theatrical touch to their appearance, or to legitimise their appurtenance to a long-standing tradition of caste “warriors.” What I have detected both in the case of the torturer who conceals his face and of the one who insists on revealing it, is a general Medusa complex. The latter wants to be seen and to inspire fear, either because he is licensed to kill or because he arrogantly envisages himself as belonging to the “elite.” The one who covers his face does it either out of cautiousness or out of the shame of being the Medusa. Exposed in plain view to his victim, his face risks being reflected by the latter in a mirroring gesture that might prove, symbolically speaking, fatal to the torturer: the Medusan gaze, which is his own, would turn against him. As if acknowledging the Medusa complex, one torturer cautions his victim: “Do not look at me! If you do, you will be dead” (Bacry & Ternisien, 1980: 146). Concealing the torturer’s face behind a mask (or blindfolding the victim) is reminiscent of the way in which, in the Old Testament, God cannot be seen, since he is a Voice, and not a Body. Should God’s face ever be sighted, the trespasser would incur instant death. Besides signalling caution and a false elite spirit, the torturers’ camouflage also reminds of God’s all-powerfulness from the Old Testament: the God whom humans, except, perhaps, for the initiates, were forbidden to see. Twentieth-century torturers took full advantage of this idea of omnipotence.

Destructiveness is a characteristic of human behaviour; animals manifest a purely natural predator instinct. Erich Fromm has studied man’s evolution from the prehistoric hunter figure, endowed with a minimum of destructive propensities, to modern man, increasingly inclined towards destructiveness and cruelty (in concurrence with the rising prominence of the State). Human aggressiveness has registered, throughout time, a shift from a defensive to an offensive stage. By way of illustration, Fromm substantiates his argument with several analyses of prototypal tutelary figures who governed violent practices in the twentieth century (without necessarily indulging in torture themselves): Stalin (marred by non-sexual sadism), Himmler (characterised by anal-possessive sadism) and Hitler (considered to represent a clinical case of necrophilia). A psychoanalytical perspective on these grey eminences of repression, who, as spiritual leaders, exerted a decisive influence on less well-known torturers, reveals why the latter, even though a minority, gave vent to excesses and abominable cruelties of sorts. For the repressive automatons, destructiveness meant obedience to the “hypnotic charisma” of a dictator’s authority. The real, flesh-and-blood torturer can be seen as *homo faber violens* – at least, this is what he evolved into throughout the twentieth century.

The torturers' language is perverted: it is also due to the linguistic factor that the members of the repressive apparatus acquire omnipotence and feel legitimate in their pursuits. In Argentina (and elsewhere) a directive phrase that was often used in torture chambers sanctioned the extensive use of violence, which could be applied in every which way: "If [the victims, *our addition*] can, they will sing; if not, they will bear the pain" (Rodriguez Molas 1985: 233). Gross humour was also part of this specific jargon: confessions extracted through torture were called "operas" or "tangos," while talking under duress was known as "singing." This jargon also had a distancing function relative to common speech, since it was regarded as a marker of linguistic pride. To one of the victims tortured in Greece at the time of the Colonels' dictatorship the torturers' lingo sounded like an unintelligible African dialect: both that particular torture and the instruments used for its enforcement had incomprehensible names (Korovessis, 1970: 13).

In relation to their victims, torturers exhibit a certain refinement in the art of inflicting pain, as well as an exulting omnipotence: *I am the one at whose hands may perish those who refuse to talk, I am the destroyer of souls, I am he who tortured and killed X, I will make anyone talk, I am the one who breaks bones, I am the one who will make you forget who you are.* Boasting arrogance evinces an aspiration of belonging to the caste of "experts." Furthermore, it may also signal a perverted warrior's *furor*. As I have argued before, torturers do not engage in honest combat, but in deplorable, cowardly assaults. They are enjoined to act professionally and look for the *Achilles' heel* of their victims. They are also very much aware that if they are to successfully enforce (physical or psychological) torture, whether for shorter or for longer periods, they must find the right formula for their victims' anxieties and fears, avoiding at all costs to bring about their death, which would render their own professional skills inappropriate and amateurish. *We are not sadists*, torturers will often claim, *we are "scientists" and "doctors."* Torture is the ultimate instrument of these "elites." *We are no monsters, we are a professional "caste."* This defensive and, at the same time, haughty rhetoric aims to justify torture. Those who practise it purportedly form a noble institution (the Army, the National Security Services). At other times, torturers may see themselves as "engineers," that is technicians of suffering, a categorial label invested with outright prestige. Torturers will always insistently make reference to this status, since they resent being perceived any differently than "scientifically" legitimised. When victims ask their torturers to kill them and put them out of misery, the latter will often reply contemptuously: "What do you take me for? An assassin? I am a torturer." The explanation may also sound somewhat dissimilar: "I am not a torturer, I am an Inquisitor" (the victim would obviously stand for the Antichrist). "Caste" membership grants torturers the impression that they possess exclusive knowledge of the most arcane mysteries of the body and the mind. Other torturers, who prefer "softer" methods, consider themselves to be "father confessors." In both cases, the idea of belonging to an elite is obsessive. Masuy, one of the infamous French torturers during the Nazi occupation, claimed that the reason why he applied "the submarine" to his victims was not cruelty, but sheer "experimental psychology." He consistently declined to admit that he was a torturer, posing as an experimentalist instead! Moreover, he even had the audacity to demand his victims (sparing partners) not to bear any grudge against him after the end of the "game" (torture session). In Masuy, Alec Mellor bitterly comments, "modern torture found its first theoretician, and this inhuman century most certainly had the doctrinaire it deserved" (Mellor, 1961: 272).

Torturers wish to be seen as technicians of pain, deluding themselves that their acts could thus be condoned. From this vantage point, the ordeals of their victims appear impersonal; moreover, theirs is not just another regular job, but a genuinely scientific profession. An interrogator will "possess an entire system of primitive or sophisticated instruments, which can be manipulated with all the more skill (leaving as few visible traces as possible) if the system is scientific: this will allow torturers to increase or decrease, extend or expand, at will, the range of pain they can inflict" (Vialatoux, 1957: 65).

In several primitive African states, the torturers' status included magical abilities alongside punitive attributes. The chief of the secret police in Guinea (personally involved in acts of torture) was also placed at the top of the hierarchy as "chief of magic" and as the "grand wizard." As a "magician," this torturer understood his subjects' ordeals in terms of human sacrifices. His major aim was not to cause physical injury to the victims, but to "de-brain" them, so that they could be inoculated with an

alternative mentality – all in all, a kind of brainwashing (Koumandian, 1984: 42-43, 48-49). As a “wizard,” he was more concerned with the spiritual and mental, rather than the bodily aspects of his victims. However strange this may sound, this outlook made them recognise their forced ingestion of urine or faeces as part of the magical practices controlled by the repressive apparatus.

In South America, the torturer’s self-emphasis was, to some extent, related to machismo (the exaggerated cult of masculinity; the term is derived from the Spanish *macho*, meaning male). Consubstantial with the views espoused by the establishment, the torturers (secret police or army agents) exalted masculinity as the governing state principle. Victims could include women, children or the elderly, and there was simply no need for names to be attached to them. The prototypal torturer was gendered invariably as *Male*: he was the default representative of the human species, and the entire world was divided accordingly, into the race of men and the rest of humanity. South-American torturers turned their status into a religion, and the cult of masculinity acquired the overtones of a fanatical “priesthood” (*Domination et torture*, 1978: 20-22).

Another feature that makes torturers fantasise about belonging to an elite is the relationship they establish with their instruments, particularly in the case of electroshocking machines. An Argentinean torturer, for instance, explained the workings of the *parilla* (the electric grill) as an art of “frying” the convicts in the presence of other famished detainees, who were forced to “cannibalise” upon the tortured olfactorily. The same torturer provided an enthusiastic account of how the electroshocking machine worked: this instrument gave him great satisfaction, conferred him the insignia of power and represented more than his own equal: it was a technical deity, a superwoman (even though there need be no explicit sexualisation of the instrument). In actual fact, the machine “assumed” his own blame; hence, his respect and admiration for its technical performance (Rodriguez Molas, 1985: 165). The torturer’s admiration for exquisite torture and extermination devices (the gas chambers) came to the fore during the Nazi period. Another relevant argument for the torturers’ elite aspirations is that they may consider themselves to be the creators of a world running parallel to reality. One of the Argentinean victims recounts about the squalid spaces where his ordeals unfolded, while the torturers were boasting in the press about working in extremely sophisticated and well-equipped environments. Obviously, a sham pretence, meant to give them credence and to set forth the idea that they had it in their powers to change the world at will. What they craved more than anything else was elite membership; hence, the impulse to render torture spaces “more sophisticated,” by way of deceitful representations (Timerman, 1981).

Torturers will often claim that they want to find out the truth straight from the victims’ mouths. But then, the Truth, as Pontius Pilate also noticed, is relative. What is the Truth? The Truth, spelt with a capital T, so much desired by torturers, is often no more than a victim’s false testimony, given for no other reason than the cessation of pain. The Truth is not *the* truth, but just about anything. Torturers are fully aware of this, which makes “the Truth” a fake notion. When they do not aim for “the Truth,” torturers claim to possess it already. Therefore, the reason why they torture their victims is that the latter will insist on telling them “lies.” In this “temple” of Truth, lies (which may also include silence) are synonymous with defiance. In actual fact, torturers want to be revered as sacerdotal guardians of would-be Truths, given that this symbolic code may ennoble the executioner’s profession. While giving self-incriminating statements, which are part and parcel of “brainwashing” techniques, victims are not necessarily harmed in any physical way, but surrounded and besieged by a chorus of torturers, incessantly yelling and harassing them: “Confess!,” “Talk!,” “Louder!.” Tossed from one screaming, bellowing, shouting or commandeering interrogator to another, one such victim was coerced to give “True” confessions. The torturers’ voices were accompanied by a facial mimic that was suggestive of class hatred. These tormenting shrieks would enter the victims’ memory, like a brain-implanted sound device. The harassing torturers’ technique was contrapuntal. Brainwashing victims were projected as “great sinners” to be surrounded by “saints,” who were only too willing to right the former’s wrongful conduct. This corrective technique was psychological in effect. It consisted in shouting slogans and “purifying” verbal rituals which all converged into a massively and spectacularly orchestrated performance. Nor were the dead, at times, exempted from such rituals. There were registered cases when suicidal victims were indoctrinated posthumously, through re-education sessions. “Talk!, Talk!,” the victim was enjoined. This was not the Biblical *logos* that had

instantiated the world, but a reversed *logos*: the untrue, decayed word. Confession had come to approximate the perverted *logos*. At first, verbal suicide prevailed: the re-educators' ambition entailed that only self-incriminating confessions were considered acceptable as the re-educated *students'* sacrificial offerings. Linguistic violence and demagogical yells were prerequisites for Chinese versions of re-education. Aggressive, harassing loudness would break down the victim's aural and psychical resistance. The victim's ears were the main organs that needed to undergo correction, in a sort of internal, psychic-corporeal remoulding. It was not the brain that bore the brunt of re-education as such, but the ears, which heard, interiorised and transported those shrieks to the brain. The Chinese turned their victims' ears into gateways to the self: the aim envisaged was the creation of confusion, bewilderment, and aboulia. Confession would gradually come to life inside, though it took some time before being verbalised. Its birth resembled the labours of a pregnant woman: confession became the "offspring" of the victims and their torturers. Aggressive sound assaults were nothing but snippets of linguistic rape. The victim's "filthy," "evil" brain was eventually replaced with a "new," "cleansed" brain (Mr. Anonymous, 1985; Ruo-Wang & Chelminski, 1973).

Torturers will relentlessly picture themselves as endowed with absolute knowledge. "I know everything there is to know about you," they might tell their victims, who will most often then not reply: "I know not what I have done." The torturers' psychology depends upon extracting confessions from their victims. This accounts for the threats proffered during actual torture scenes, when bodily entrails risk gutting out in the most grotesque of manners: interrogators menace to make their victims throw out everything that they know, or to press their stomachs until intestines burst out through their mouths (Becket, 1970: 30). This induced, internal outburst seems to satisfy the torturers, since it draws an analogy with the idea of gestating and delivering the Truth. The victims' forced confessions comply, indeed, with this fallacious truth: they seem more like bodily waste than confessions proper.

The torturers' "mystique" also plays an essential part. The SS mentality, on which much has been written, was circumscribed by a heroic nationalist aura, inflected with Teutonic concepts (Kogon, 1979: 30). The first SS members were selected from amongst the intelligentsia, with middle-class elements being gradually added to their ranks. Eventually, low-class fanatics were also lured with the promise of military caste membership. It was an almost sacred ritual order, within which SS members functioned as the guardians of post-messianic incarnation, which the Führer epitomised. At Göring's suggestion, the Nibelungian mystique also began to be used by the Nazis for propaganda purposes. Himmler is said to have been inspired by Ignatius de Loyola's conduct rules in *Spiritual Exercises* when he created the SS "elite" (Wormser-Migot, 1968: 406-8). It is nevertheless erroneous to examine the Nazi torturers through such spiritual lenses, all the more so since during the last period of mass atrocities, they were exclusively recruited from the lower classes. Most of them were automatons, with a few beastly individuals tarnishing their ranks. The formula of superhuman "Nietzscheanism," cultivated by the Nazi doctrinaires, was largely ignored by flesh-and-blood torturers. Their kinship to the inquisitors had an altogether different nature. The Nazi torturers (and not only) saw Jews, Russians, Poles and Gypsies as forming subhuman races which embodied Evil and which, therefore, had to be slowly and thoroughly punished so as to confess to their "sins." To this end, the Nazi concentration camps were designed as "expiation altars" (Feig, 1981: 93): the very same goal that Inquisitors of yore had also pursued.

Another proof of the twentieth-century torturers' boundless pride was that they pictured themselves as the divine amanuenses of religious-political order, and as "Parces" presiding over the destinies of others. Such arrogance characterised torturers throughout the world, but acquired aberrant connotations in South America and, above all, in Argentina. "Only God can give life and take it away," one torturer emphatically told his victim, "but God is busy elsewhere, and we're the ones who must fulfil this task in Argentina" (Timerman, 1981: 31). In fact, for all torturers "God is elsewhere," which implies that God can actually be replaced, if necessary, through a quasi-metaphysical act of usurpation. *You are no one, you're a nobody, and you're a rat: we are God* – this is the meaning of the torturers' rhetoric. In French-occupied Algeria, one of the members of the repressive apparatus placed himself in the position of God-Allah, forcing certain Arab detainees to proclaim his divinity and to lick his feet in adoration (Benzine, 1962: 45). At other times, racial hatred was the engine of torture. Grotesque situations could occur: in Mauritania, although both the torturers and their victims were

black, the latter were considered to be “dirty niggers” or “Jews that deserved to die”! The case of the Greek interrogators (at the time of the Colonels’ dictatorship) cannot be overlooked: what they claimed to be defending through torture was Hellenic Christianity! The arrogance some of them espoused measured up to their doctrine: *I am X whom entire Greece is afraid of* or *We [the torturers] shall create Great Greece. We shall conquer Constantinople*. In other words, the torturers were the “authentic” Greeks, while the victims were the “impure” Greeks (Amnesty International, 1977a: 28-9). At the end of the twentieth century, torturers in Algeria considered themselves to be the eradicators or exterminators of Islam: fundamentalist Muslims were “demoniacal” and “infested,” and the purpose of torture was to cure that “disease.” The torturers’ punitive “mystique” also played a crucial role in Argentina. One torturer, for example, told his victim: “I talk to Jesus every night. If He says that you must live, you *shall* live. If not, I will send you to heaven” (Paoletti, 1987: 151). Another “mystical” torturer, known for wearing a scapular on his chest, haughtily assumed the function of a purifying inquisitor, who would go to extreme lengths to get the “demons” out of the political detainees: “I am the hand that executes God’s commands, life and death are entirely in my hands, and you [the victims] are travelling dead souls” (*idem*: 197). Another torturer would have his victims pray in a style that mimicked mystical delirium. The ceremonial application of electroshocks was sometimes performed by hysterical, excited tormentors, who thought their victims were enemies of Divinity. Nonetheless, it was evident that the torturers had usurped God: “we are superhumans and supergods” (*ibid.*: 307).

In South America, the “Catholicism” of the Juntas was adapted to the nationalist, anti-communist ideology; consequently, it was deprived of its religious content, in order to be ideologically exalted. This explains why, although they pretended to be fervent Catholics, torturers would not limit themselves to inflicting suffering onto atheists, but would also torture priests, nuns, theology students and other categories of Christians (it needs to be noted that certain collaborationist priests assisted the Juntas). The case of South American torturers was closest to the inquisitor typology, and Argentina was the most likely country to enforce this “model.” Here the members of the repressive apparatus envisaged themselves as “Christ’s vicars,” construing repression (and torture) as eschatologically-oriented “purification.” The Junta clamoured missionary ambitions, revolving around polarised symbols such as the Antichrist (the communists) and the *corpus mysticum* that the Junta itself embodied. Its violent Catholicism was extremely politicised. An outstanding member of the Argentinean government declared: “God has ruled that the Junta take it upon its shoulders to project the future.” The utopia of the despotic machine was to bring about the “Natural Christian Order”! This may explain why those considered subversive were “sinners” against God, that is, against the Junta as a representative of the divine authority on earth. I shall repeatedly make reference to this mythological argument, which belongs to Frank Graziano (1992, 11-13). Playing the role of “crusaders” against Bolshevism, the representatives of the Junta launched accusations of lese-majesty against God; the violence of the repression was justified as the right retribution for an “offence” brought against divinity. However, positing themselves as a *corpus mysticum*, the Junta members themselves insulted God, by usurping and murdering Christ. In this sense, the tortured victims, who were not necessarily crucified, and the “disappeared” were the Christic sufferers. Like Dostoevski, Graziano also considers that the Argentinean Junta (in its position as Grand Inquisitor) would have crucified Christ, had He descended amongst the people once again. In Argentina, Catholic violence exhibited through acts of torture engendered paradoxical situations. A tortured woman, for instance, was reprimanded for having been seen wearing the sign of the “bearded man,” i.e. of Christ. A priest was accused of having observed the Christic precept of loving the poor. In both cases, the torturers, who were fanatical Catholics, felt religiously betrayed by their victims, who had not observed the path of the violent, doctrinarian Catholicism endorsed by the Junta, but that of Christian love for one’s fellow human beings. Like in the times of the Inquisition, torture was, implicitly, a religious ceremony meant to “purify” the subversives and to exorcise Evil. According to the repression organ, it was only through torture that their souls could be recuperated and made to rejoin the “bosom of Catholicism.” What did not seem to matter were their injured bodies. Moreover, Argentinean torturers claimed their inspiring roots to lie much further back in history: they would forewarn their victims that the Romans had been “civilised” by the first Christians through the bloody spectacles staged in public arenas, boasting that modern ceremonies would outdo the ordeals of the first Christians.

In all the spaces governed by the communist ideology, on the other hand, an anti-mystical strategy prevailed, given that the torturers were atheists, and their victims were (largely, though not exclusively) Christian. Communist torturers indulged in torture rituals and ceremonies based on blasphemy and apostasy. One of the most shocking cases was that of the re-education techniques applied in Pitești Jail between 1949 and 1952. At Christmas time or at Easter, sacrilegious spectacles of physical and mental torture were put on in this Romanian prison: “baptism” and “mass” with urine, crucifixion, going through Passion Week on one’s knees, sleazy carols and requiems, miming coition with a totemic phallus representing Christ or with an effigy of the Virgin Mary (cf. Ierunca, 1990: 37-9; Cesereanu, 1998: 153-4). The victims saw their torturers as devil-ridden; this explained their irreverent excesses. The communists, nevertheless, generally preferred classical techniques; religion was, indeed, seen as the “opium of the people,” but was rarely subjected to the same degree of sophisticated distortion as in Pitești or in several other similar prisons.

Symbolically devouring, through torture, the victim’s body, the torturer appears as a “cannibal.” This idea is sometimes conveyed in testimonial memories. Stalin, the “Pharaoh” of extermination channels, was often granted the insignia of the Great Cannibal or the devouring Father, who had instituted famine as a genocidal strategy. Whereas he stood for the Great Man-Eater, his acolytes (members of the Gulag authorities) were the little man-eaters (Glucksmann, 1991: 27, 28). A story circulated in the Iranian prisons about a boy who had passed away during torture. When, shortly after the boy’s assassination, the other political detainees were given chunks of meat in their otherwise scanty meals – an altogether unusual event – they symbolically projected that feast as the flesh of the murdered youth. From that moment onward, none of the prisoners would eat any longer. Because of the very fact that the torturers and their leaders (at that particular time, the Shah) were perceived as “cannibals,” the detainees refused to be like them (Baraheni, 1977: 63). Confessions about related acts of ritualistic cannibalism came from Cambodia, where torturers would consume their victims’ livers. According to their faith, it was in that particular organ that a man’s power and courage resided. Cannibalising upon a victim was deemed to increase the torturer’s power (Stuart-Fox, 1985: 145). A collective case of symbolic “cannibalism” was that of the mutilations inflicted upon the bodies of the “disappeared” (*los desaparecidos*) in South America (and Argentina, in particular). Besides being tortured even beyond death, these victims were not entitled to a decent burial. Their bodies would have provided, before anything else, evidence of the torturers’ violence; moreover, they were considered, even in after-life, to represent State property. The practice of mutilating the victims’ corpses had also been known in the past. The convicts’ carcasses would be dragged through the city, beheaded and dismembered; body parts and limbs would be either exposed at the town gates or left to be devoured by dogs and prey birds. Just like torture itself, the victims’ bodies also belonged to the “masters.” In Argentina, the battle for recovering the bodies of the “disappeared” was fierce. Argentinean Antigonas, known as the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, clamoured, through their protest marches, the right of families to mourn over the bodies of their loved ones and to carry out the required burial rituals. With very few exceptions, the repressive apparatus (under the tutelage of the Junta) refused to return the mutilated bodies: they had already been “cannibalised.” The “disappeared” were subjected to a sacrificial rite officiated by the Junta, through the agency of its torturing “priests.” The sacrifice was meant to propitiate neither the Christian God, nor the Sun (like in the Aztec ceremonials), but a Baal counter-deity, adapted to the fanatic Catholicism of the Argentinean leaders. The Church, unfortunately, partially endorsed the Junta’s repression programme.

Milovan Djilas (1986: 33) has argued that political imprisonment functions as a substitute for the ascetics’ desert. He actually restates the fact that all the world’s religions and their prophets came to maturity in the desert by learning to withstand satanic temptations. If the Devil was aware of temptation techniques, speculating and taking advantage of the frailty and hesitant natures of God’s chosen ones, in political prisons this role is played by the judges and the prosecutors. I would also add here the category of torturers, since they will stop at nothing in their attempt to entice their victims, submitting them to physical ordeals if their offers should be rejected. To a much larger extent than the judges, the prosecutors involved in political trials, or even the guardians, it is the torturers whose condition approximates that of satanic tempters. Their enticements are concrete, palpable means whereby, if accepted, torture can be interrupted or avoided altogether (*tell me who the other conspirators are, and you will not be tortured; tell me that X and Y have planned a coup d’état, and*

your family will not have to undergo pain.) This erudite formula (Satanic tempters) seems, unfortunately, to spiritualise the torturers of the twentieth century. The Satanic nature of modern-day interrogators has little left of the rhetorical threats and temptations proffered by the Devil of the Christian tradition. Theirs is a perfectionist Satanism, one that is difficult to locate in any pattern of devilism, given the fact that it sometimes poses as fervent faith. The tortured victims, in their turn, are not martyrs proper. Albeit notions of martyrdom do prevail, it is not as if the victims lent their bodies to torture of their own accord: they are ensnared into physical ordeals by their torturers. In days of yore, the Inquisitors had considered that those victims who died without having confessed to their sins were consigned to the Devil. Twentieth-century torturers reached another level: they were the Devil themselves. Through confession, either willingly given or extracted by force, their victims were also partly, though forcibly, “devilised.”

2. *The formation and training of torturers. "Masters," "novices," and human guinea pigs. Rites of passage. Corpse obedience. Child-torturers*

There are two main types of torture training: theoretical (through interrogation textbooks) and practical (either through "lessons" recommended by foreign specialists/*masters* or through the *novices'* military training, spiced up with torture episodes). Textbooks have been produced in all the countries that have practiced political torture, a rather predictable development since the Inquisition itself possessed such a manual. Modern textbooks define torture and its aims, list the torturers' duties and describe the ceremony of torture (designed to make death slow and painful). The state simply cannot afford to condone incompetence in its torturers! The responsibility of torture falls both with the actual executioner and with the grey eminency who orders it. In so far as torturers are concerned, they conduct torture even when no information is at stake: not necessarily out of pleasure, but because this comes with their job or special training, or because they are consumed with the professional urge to obtain information from their victims, *no matter how*.

The first step in forming modern torturers is their recruitment. Except for very few cases, when they are coerced "to enrol" and are threatened with their and their families' execution, or with any other pressure constraints (should they refuse), the majority of the future torturers are recruited according to their ambition and zealous commitment to a successful career, as well as to the enthusiasm they display in their "work." Training sessions are also useful for sorting torturers out. What really matters is not so much their degree of bestiality or cruelty, but their unflinching obedience to the superiors' orders. More precisely, their "cadaver obedience," as one of the grey eminencies of the Nazi repression, Adolf Eichmann, called it (Arendt, 1964). If torture and punitive regimes turn victims into living cadavers, their torturers are also living cadavers through their perfect, mechanistic obedience, either from the very start or as a result of their training. A certain degree of narcissism can be discerned in this blind submission to authority, since, by reflecting themselves in the Power that issues them orders, torturers exalt their own impunity. Membership to highly specialised groups confers them exalted notions of power over their fellow human beings. Their recruiters rely on the would-be torturers' lack of culture and training, as well as on their lower social background. There are, of course, cases when torturers are refined and cultivated individuals, but they tend to be a minority.

Cheka torturers did not benefit from any training, even though in various areas they prevalently resorted to certain types of torture: impaling, scalping, skin-flaying, mutilating (Leggett, 2000); the savagery with which they tortured their victims also depended on their degree of intoxication, since, at least in certain areas, Cheka members were officially known as keen drug abusers (Courtois et al., 1998). Later on, Russian mercenaries acting against the civil population in Chechnya would follow in their footsteps. Under the Stalinist regime, soviet torturers attended occasional "specialisation" courses. The Nazis promoted, in their turn, but more covertly, specialisation sessions for the torturers. During the latter half of the twentieth century torture training consisted in documentary films or in the "lessons" that "masters" delivered on guinea-pig victims: such detailed accounts of tortures provided scope for the novices' mental instruction, since they were focused almost entirely on torture instruments and on the act of torture itself, rather than on images of victims. South America practised live "lessons," attended by dozens of novices, with the victim being used as "teaching material." Instructors could be domestic or foreign. American coaches, for example, were famous grey eminencies of torture. Expertise exchanges between neighbouring countries were quite customary: in Chile and in Argentina, Brazilian instructors trained torturers. They could be schooled abroad as follows: for physical torture, in various military forts across the United States; for psychological torture, in Great Britain, etc. The implication of the United States was evident in the *coup d'états* from South American countries and in the logistic and individual training of torturers. North-American instructors did not actually torture victims themselves, but supervised it and provided their students with expert analyses in the interrogation chambers (Langguth, 1978).

After such training, torturers got accustomed with their profession, reaching in time performance and "overspecialisation." For instance, a Chinese guardian-torturer managed 39 ways of (painfully) handcuffing a convict. A military officer from Uruguay offered practical classes in torture.

In Stalinist and post-Stalinist Moscow (and elsewhere), institutions with a medical or police profile trained “students” in mastering the brainwashing technique, sometimes under the guidance of Chinese experts. The methods consisted in psychically harassing the victim, during repeated sessions (in waves) that were supposed to incur the victim’s mental collapse. This technique entailed destroying the victim’s identity and building another identity, under the re-educators’ strict supervision. Two were the key elements that torturers were supposed to handle perfectly in re-education: determining the victims to internalise the guilt of their previous existence, and to understand the re-educators’ mission of “saving” them from themselves. This technique was popular with the Koreans and the Vietnamese (against American prisoners) and with the Arabs who took hostages from Western countries, Americans in particular. In their turn, the Americans possessed advanced medical techniques that allowed them to know exactly the stages hostages underwent: all the embassy employees and the CIA members had psychological profiles that detailed or predicted their reactions to torture (Thomas 1998, 55-56).

In other areas of the world, torture training was much slower and more hazardous. In Argentina, guardians were taught, from a very early age, martial arts, had *Papillon* as compulsory reading, and were indoctrinated to hate political detainees. Not all the guardians became torturers, but the majority did (Rodriguez Molas, 1985: 219). Torturers could specialise in applying a certain type of blow: to the stomach, to the neck, to the head, the testicles or the kidneys. Some could be “lung blowers”; others might specialise in genital torture, or become “ear experts,” excelling in the “telephone” technique; yet others could become masters of insomnia. Trainings made little difference between torturers who were potential sadists and those who were mere automatons; the latter, however, were craved by all the political regimes. This can account for the fact that “Kill-All,” one of the legendary Somozist torturers in Nicaragua, would not enforce any of the “refined” techniques he had been inured to during his training in the United States. His predilect techniques (consistent with his extremely aggressive character) included rape and mutilation of the genitals, which he would then throw to the dogs. In the Serbian camps from Bosnia-Herzegovina, there were both amateur torturers, who had undergone no instruction at all, and military specialists, who would raid the camps at the weekend and engage there in colossal “blood orgies.” The “experts” would cynically flaunt their torture expertise: one such “professional” would declare that on his twenty-fifth anniversary he had only yet killed twenty-three Muslims (Hukanovic, 1996: 52). Torturers in Iran specialised in forcing their victims to engage in public disavowals, which were taped on camera and seemed to be directed in a similar vein to the great Stalinist trials.

Psychological components are essential to torture training. Five are the most important ones: 1. the capacity to dehumanise the victim; 2. insensitiveness to cruelty (the eradication of any ethical response, such as decorum, horror, revulsion, and shame); 3. robot/ cadaver obedience (a torturer need not think, but act); 4. impunity; and 5. political, psychological and financial omnipotence (*La tortura en América Latina*, 1985: 36-8). The political regimes that employed torturers would inoculate them with the idea that their victims were trash, the mere refuse of humanity. Indoctrination (as an ideological engine) and hatred (as an ontological engine) were key factors in accustoming torturers to their profession. The slogans of the Khmer Rouges were conceived as catalysts and means of legitimating torture itself: “He who is putrid inside must be healed;” “What is rotten must come off;” or “Cutting off just one weed is not enough; one must destroy its very roots” (Heng & Demeure, 1992: 108). American soldiers who fought in Vietnam were also indoctrinated with the idea that the Vietnamese were “subhuman” or “nonhuman.” Twentieth-century torture indoctrination resumed the idea of master-slave and teacher-student relationships: “teacher-masters” were on a mission to correct (through torture) their “student-slaves.” Furthermore, what influenced the torturers’ predilections or vocation were: their childhood family milieus (a paternal authority figure would leave significant marks); their degree of civilisation; and the political context. Psychologists maintain that torturers tend to be overwhelmed by the Superego, which may comprise the slogans that were inoculated in their minds, the schools where they received training, and the type of education they were exposed to in their families. The Superego operates in conjunction with an “elite” spirit, induced through a sort of Pavlovian conditioning. Its main underlying factor is ideological. Amnesty International, an organisation that has consistently monitored the spreading of the phenomenon of torture worldwide, claims that the reason why torturers engage in acts of torture is that they often experience guilt and see

their victims as accusers. When victims are downgraded, being forced, for instance, to consume excrements, torturers feel justified in torturing them, since the latter are seen to have regressed to the condition of “trash.” Torturing a “nothing” removes all traces of guilt in a torturer: he is merely subjecting that “nothing” to what it justly deserves (Amnesty International, 1973: 63). A torturer would declare about his victim that he was not human, and that nothing could be done about him (*Torture in Turkey & Its Unwilling Accomplices*, 74).

Another feature shared by twentieth-century torturers is bringing their victims to an anal psychological stage. From the Soviets and the Nazis to the fin-de-siècle torturers, the characteristic address to their victims insisted on the idea of the latter representing “shit” or “excrements,” as well as “trash” and “refuse.” Through this transformation into faeces, victims were forced to regress to an infantile stage, that of the child who was harshly punished by its father. This psychological stage (contaminating also the victims’ corporeality) involved having victims defecate on themselves whenever they were unable to comply with the strict waste-discharge schedule imposed by the guardians. When they were officially permitted to use a toilet, prisoners had to report ending such physiological acts. There were, however, individual privies, where discipline was more lenient, and common privies, which compelled prisoners to do their necessities in an orderly manner. Mass queuing and lack of intimacy were customary. A collective regression to the anal stage was thus induced (Bettelheim, 1967: 132-3).

Torture demonstrations, whose time span could be contracted or expanded, were accompanied by explanations as to the advantages and drawbacks of each technique. A theatrical effect was sometimes created: the “novices” who studied victims under torture amused themselves, watching the lesson as if it were a performance. What I must insist on here is that there were cases of torturers who had significant difficulty in becoming inured to their status. The torture training sessions made some weep secretly; others had nervous breakdowns, or accepted to be tortured themselves in order to become immune to suffering. Gradually, though, they could become accustomed to it. By the end of the training stages, nothing seemed to matter any longer: neither shame, nor remorse, just the mechanism that seemed to be working. There were also cases of torturers (famous or more obscure repenters) who gave up their profession through public disavowal.

Prisons, camps and detention spaces in general were considered to be ideal torture training locations, even though torture was generally applied prior to the victim’s trial, while the latter was remanded into secret police custody. Whenever “novices” failed to execute torture by the book, their “masters” would correct them, offering them live demonstrations as to how proper procedures should unfold. Listed amongst the goals of the Nazi camps were the training of the Gestapo personnel and the possibility of conducting laboratory experiments on the varied samples of humanity incarcerated in the camps. Alec Mellor mentions, in this respect, a certain Nazi school where Gestapo members took specialised courses, among others, in human physiology (1961: 231). Irrespective of the regime, torture techniques entailed two stages: “soaking” the victim wet (causing the victim’s physical and psychological breakdown) and the so-called dry, chilly torture, when the victim had already been internally crushed. The term “soaking” is suggestive: the victim’s “solid” body (coherent, self-contained) had to be “liquefied” through torture, painfully “soaked” in its own bodily fluids (blood, urine, saliva).

The second practical element that training presupposes is the initiation through pain that torturers themselves undergo, in order to become dehumanised, during their military stages. Guardians from the Nazi camps were, before everything else, used on the battlefield and inhumanly treated in the barracks regime, up to the point when, after being adequately broken in and abused, they underwent “re-qualification” as guardians in the concentration camps. Here they were allowed to discharge their violence, to whatever extent and in whatever manner, against the detainees. These guardians would not advance in rank unless they produced unquestionable evidence of their brutality (Kogon, 1979: 31). The authorities generally aspired to brainwash their soldiers, to render them capable of inflicting pain under any circumstances. Such was the case of the Greek torturers during the Colonels’ dictatorship. Their training would commence through an initiation ceremony during which the “novices” were beaten up and were kept kneeling in front of the Junta symbol. Taking oaths of allegiance was compulsory: after a three-month period, the initiated received a special cap. During

their training stage, the would-be torturers had their loyalty, obedience, psychological stamina and practical abilities scrupulously verified. The idea of an omnipotent elite troop helped with the novices' indoctrination. What was essential was the *kapsoni* treatment that the future interrogators received: the obligatory beating they had to undergo. A former torturer, who had experienced such training, confessed that they had had to learn to enjoy pain (Crelinsten & Schmid, 1995: 137, 142). The training of the Greek torturers was perceived as a rite of passage: the group was a "family," and the group's leader was seen as the "father" of that family. The instigators of this experiment relied on the fact that the would-be torturers could never forget the excruciating pain endured by their bodies and minds in the training centres, and that this sort of stigmatisation would compel them to enforce those very same tortures on others. Many of the Greek executioners who later underwent trial pleaded guilty so as to avoid being tortured themselves: torture was justified as a self-defence and survival strategy. A grey eminency also declared in court that training was conceived of such a manner as to bereave torturers of their moral and psychic integrity but not to annihilate their human personality (Amnesty International, 1977a: 35, 38, 51). At first, Greek torturers received instructions to avoid leaving any conspicuous traces of torture, but during the last stages of the Colonels' dictatorship, they were encouraged to imprint their "stamp." Torture was a "hot iron" which stigmatised the victims and terrorised the population. A similar situation occurred in South Africa, where the recruits' physical regime was ritualistically imbued with beating and humiliation. They were forced to use a very violent jargon and, either before or after their own torture, to witness the "pedagogical" suffering of their fellow torturers (Foster, Davis & Sandler, 1987: 169-171).

The employment of children or teenagers as torturers was another innovation that the twentieth century brought about. In the Nazi camps there were cases of orphans taken under the protection of the guardians, who taught them how to torture. Such cases were, nonetheless, incidental. On the other hand, in Nicaragua, as well as in certain African and Asian countries, children who tortured played a very special part. During the Somoza regime, the Nicaraguan police apparatus recruited children and adolescents who underwent mental training and preparation with a view to becoming skilled torturers. The youngest recruits were juvenile delinquents, no older than five or six; they turned torturers through Pavlovian reflex methods. These collaborators of the repressive apparatus were nicknamed "Somoza's dogs." The children's training entailed their becoming accustomed to killing poultry (and drinking their blood) and slaughtering female dogs with litters. Instruction was aimed at developing an obedience that was easily manipulable. Adult victims (the Sandinists) would cave in much faster if they were tormented by juvenile torturers. Two journalists managed to interview one such underage (mentally retarded) torturer, who had specialised in eye removal and tongue mutilation. After the fall of Somoza's regime, the Sandinist government attempted to recuperate the young torturers with the aid of psychologists and social workers (Reimann & Rivas Sanchez, 1988: 195, 197, 223, 239); however, those who could truly be recuperated were rather few.

I have no knowledge, judging from the bibliography I have examined, of any centre dedicated exclusively to torture training for women. Women-torturers, nevertheless, did exist.

3. *The Skilful Torturer's Handbook*

During the twentieth century several torture manuals (referred to as interrogation manuals) were in circulation, but the practice actually dates back to the Inquisition. I shall not dwell here on an inventory of such manuals. Instead, I shall focus exclusively on Richard W. Krousher's *Physical Interrogation Techniques*, a book whose grotesqueness I have found to be rather vexing. In a simultaneously serious and cynical vein, the author sets about describing, with a thoroughness that verges on the absurd, *how, how much* and *where* torture should be inflicted on a human being so as to become effective. Krousher's handbook is applicable, hypothetically, to prisoners (of war) and to terrorists; there is even a suggestion that it could also be valid for other categories as well. The aim of torture is outlined from the very beginning: information extraction. It is true, though: the author does forewarn the reader that the victim undergoing torture might just as well confess to the torturer whatever the latter desires to hear. The confession might stray from the truth, but that is a risk any act of torture involves. The author also reveals another point: it is recommended that torture should be applied only to "hostile subjects."

Rather than analysing Krousher's manual of torture, I am going to describe this book, which is, paradoxically, symptomatic of the end of the twentieth century. It is paradoxical because torture had been officially abolished; and yet it is symptomatic since the end of the century was marked, despite all expectations, by spectacular outbursts of violence. Krousher's handbook begins with a series of theoretical guidelines for the torturer, who is advised to be cautious, not to lose face in front of his victim, to proffer threats only insofar as he is capable of carrying them out. It is crucial then to assess the subject of torture: every detail (whether it be related to the victim's cultural, familial, sexual, dietary or religious profile) should be considered carefully: victims will respond differently to aggressive treatment. Some will cave in to insults, but not to violent physical torture, while others will bear any possible humiliation but are more responsive to electroshocks. A torturer-interrogator should take into account the limits of suffering his victim can endure, since the latter's death would be counterproductive: information should be "squeezed out" in a professional manner. Traces of torture should be well camouflaged. And here comes yet another observation: torturers should be capable of inflicting intense pain without killing or maiming their victims. Watch out!, Krousher cynically presages, some victims will blacken or bruise more swiftly than others, as skin reactions are rather different from person to person. Humiliations and threats have their well defined role, the example that the author resorts to being that of sexual perversions against an individual in whose culture such acts are taboo.

The handbook continues with a description of various techniques and of three types of physical torture: forced self-torture, passive torture, and active torture. With the exception of genital torture, all the other techniques are applicable to both women and men, the author points out. Examples of humiliation techniques are provided: aggressive denudement (the tearing off of garments); ridiculing the body; verbal humiliation (sexual and religious defilement); shaving off the victim's beard and hair, including the pubic area (plucking and scorching are preferred to shaving as cultural humiliation techniques); spitting and urinating on the victim; transposing the victim into a faecal regime (the author remarks ironically that no one will die from ingesting faeces, unless they are contaminated with parasites); in an advanced stage of mortification, various sexual acts with the victim are preferable, if they fit in the victim's culture (sodomy or oral sex). Krousher nevertheless warns here against torture that might fulfil the victim's erotic fantasies!

What is also important is the manner in which the victim is tied up and immobilised so as to be satisfactorily tortured. The punitive space must also be granted special attention (cages, holes, trees from which the subject must be hung). The torturer should be well aware of the exact duration of the ordeal so as not to murder the victim amateuristically. Forced self-torture brings about muscular exhaustion through genuflections, push-ups, crawling on one's knees, stationary running, and kneeling, hands up, on a broomstick or on pebbles. The torturer should correctly evaluate the victim's character and anxieties so as to know how to impose self-torture on the latter. The opposition light-darkness can be deftly employed even if the torturer only has access to rudimentary tools (rags, bags or sacks). Certain tortures require that victims see what is being done to them. Sometimes it is

recommended that the victims' eyelids be sown together, preferably during sleep, so that their struggle will not hamper their torturers! Pairs of opposites (hot/cold or loud/silent) are also highly efficient, as are fetid smells, starvation or thirst. The victim's breathing may be controlled through various suffocation techniques (the author cynically adds here that should torturers mess up and choke their victims excessively, they should also apply to them mouth-to-mouth resuscitation).

Special attention is granted to methods of penetrating the victim's bodily orifices. Truncheons, boot fronts, fingers, phalluses (Krousher cautions torturers to beware lest they should get bitten), water and pipes may be inserted into mouths. The anus, the urethra, the nose and the ears are also appealing orifices. The author recommends a special technique (of Nazi extraction, apparently) for the urethra: inserting a thin glass stick, and then hitting the penis so as to smash the glass inside. To prevent infections and casualties, any objects penetrating the victims' bodies should be sterilised, the author insists. Lesions inflicted through scratching and grating, preferably applied to the buttocks, rather than the face, the abdomen or the genitals, are methodically catalogued. It thus becomes clear that torturers should be able to anticipate the injuries wrought onto their victims' bodies.

Fist and foot blows should be carefully considered and proportionately applied. The author describes the virtual victim's anatomy, pinpointing the areas where injuries can be inflicted and the time span allotted to beating; particular consideration is given to genital aggression. Third-degree burns can be induced naturally, through sun exposure, or artificially, with wax, chemicals, electricity, cigarettes (these are the torturers' favourites, because they are cheap), lit matches, charcoal lamps, hot irons, radiators, petrol or steaming water. Krousher adds a "spicy" comment to each type of burning, particularly if it targets the genital areas. He also specifies safety regulations regarding electrical torture (the most widespread) and provides detailed explanations of various utensils and their appropriate usage. Emphasis is laid on the technique of crushing, which lends itself to a gradual application, being extremely effective during interrogation. Any kind of fasteners, clothes pins, tweezers, pincers (again, genital torture is granted special attention), screws (for the fingers), or weights can be used here. Testicles can be crushed manually: obviously, no extraordinary equipment is necessary, and all the anatomical resources for inflicting torture are explored, including the torturer's fingers. The victim, it is urged, should be faced by the torturer, who can thus study the former's reactions as well as respond adequately to situations such as the victim's falling unconscious or evicting bodily waste!

Mutilations can be carried out with the use of needles, blades, sharp objects (the torturer is enjoined to use his own imagination), hand-crushing hammers, nail-pulling pliers, and tooth drills. Amputations should be performed at leisure; there is no need for hasty dissections. Facial mutilation and castration (the descriptions provided are abominable) are highly recommended. In the last stages, victims may be forced to cannibalise upon their own dismembered limbs and organs! For animal-assisted torture, Krousher suggests the use of insects (ants, mosquitoes, flies, bees, wasps and spiders) and rodents (for gnawing at the victim's feet, hands, head and genitals).

The reason I have presented Krousher's handbook is not to repel the reader, but to prove the way in which torture was perceived in the twentieth century: both as a "science" and an "art." The author's cynical advice and recommendations, as well as his indications as a technician of torture pertain, unfortunately, to a concrete reality, which, should we ignore it, we would do nothing more than hide our heads in the sand like ostriches do. As far as I am concerned, this is the book which, when I read it, gave me the most acute sense of perplexity and helplessness.

4. *Categories of torturers. Instigators and executors. Robotic, careerist and refined torturers. The question of sadism. "Granddaddies." Schizoidia or adaptation? The woman commissar.*

In the twentieth century, vicious torturers tended to be outnumbered by "robotic" or skilled executors. Sadists came last in the multiple typologies of torturers. Stanley Milgram's experiment makes this point unequivocally clear: almost anyone can become a torturer (irrespective of one's gender, culture, ethnic appurtenance, or religion), even though obeisance to authorities is largely accountable for this proclivity. Generally, torturers will try to avoid killing their victims, as a token of their "professionalism", but some may fall prey to human error, excess or vice. The diversity of torturer categories (neurotic, hysterical, lunatic, violent, idiotic, turbulent, the "confessor" or the "scientist") reflects the variety of labels through which their victims are also pigeonholed into identities like: the terrorist, the delinquent, the dissident, the traitor, the rat, the scum, or nobody. Sometimes the profusion of classification criteria is bound to engender confusion. Thus, several female psychiatrists in Chile have grouped the torturers who were active during the Pinochet regime into seven categories: 1. the ferocious (and often depraved); 2. the grotesque (go-getters, who torture irrationally); 3. the competent (those who are rather scrupulous about their torture techniques); 4. the despotic; 5. the judicious (disgusted with torture, yet continuing to practise it and adapting their techniques to their victims); 6. the tolerant; and 7. the servile (Reszczynski, Rojas & Barcelo, 1984: 174-183). Such a taxonomy is not operational because it discriminates excessively between nuances.

The instigator-executor couple has its own importance on an infernal scale. The former is often interested in investing torturers with dark, terrifying myths, which then circulate among the victims. Executors, on the other hand, are manipulated into experiencing a sense of power only when they inflict suffering. Amongst the interrogators, however, there is always an impeccably dressed gentleman, wearing a suit and a tie, who will ask questions in a subdued voice or simply assess the torture procedures. In certain countries, there even existed a propaganda project whereby the most fearsome tormentors would be moved around carceral spaces to disseminate those "myths" of terror. The instigator-executor couple was visibly used in Vietnam, for instance. Here the interrogator was a sort of marsupial kangaroo: both the "brains" behind torture and a bureaucrat, his upper and lower limbs were various thugs, petty soldiers, rope tiers, or bamboo-shoot flagellators he manoeuvred at will. He was well aware that he would have to grill the victim (usually an American prisoner) until his questions, absurd or not, invaded the latter's mind. This interrogator-torturer (for he himself dallied with torture occasionally) had ample time to conceive the interrogation as a competition between himself and his victim. Boredom was never a possibility.

The first type of torturer, the "robot," acts on command and is almost always supervised and activated by an attending instigator. Robotic torturers are only interested in carrying out their tasks, acting in a depersonalised and automatic manner. Guided by the architects of torture, they are sheer thrashers, mechanical puppets. Sometimes working in a team, they alternate their violent gestures with those of their more "refined" companions, so as to confuse their victims. Falsely construed as blood-craving torturers, the Nazi executioners also belonged, in their vast majority, to the robotic category. Neither fools, nor murderers by definition, the Nazi torturers were like machines that, on cue, could kill and inflict pain indefinitely. The most shocking detail about the "robots" is the fact that they are much less beastly than their victims might imagine them to be. If they torture, it is not because they are sadistic, but because this is their job (though, of course, they are by no means exempt from blame). They are perfectly accommodated to this role and know exactly what they are doing, which fractures the very concept of their humaneness. Torturers are human, not in-human: how could victims come to terms with such a notion, which is likely to extricate executioners from the absolute hierarchy of Evil? (Bettelheim, 1967). While programmed by grey eminencies, the "robots" do not debar their victims from veritable "Valpurge nights." Besides the Nazi torturers, the Chinese or the Vietnamese reeducators also fit in this majority category of "robots." Impassive like broken records, they ultimately sought to annihilate their victims' will through harassing, mechanically repeated and mind-piercing words. "Robots" are not in the least concerned with the absurdity of the artificial confession awaited from their victims, but with its extraction. Brainwashing is their preferred method, considering that they also act like brainwashed automatons. Mao Zedong was unfortunately right in claiming

triumphantly that their prisons were in actual fact farms and factories; they were indeed so not only for the detainees but also for their reeducators. When causing pain, a “robot” will strike rhythmically, without excitement or anger. His contrapuntal blows will have a druglike effect. “Robots” may also rank high in a hierarchy. This was the case of the grey eminencies in Nazi Germany, whose blind, unquestioning compliance with strict orders and disciplinary rules had led to the extermination of the so-called “sub-races.” This case of the *banality of Evil* has been analysed by Hannah Arendt (1964) and by Gitta Sereny (1974).

The second type of torturer (the careerist) may appear affable: in reality, he is sectarian and vainglorious. Usually pretending to be an intellectual, he can be ironical, witty or humorous, but these characteristics do not prevent him from inflicting torture. His dangerousness derives from his pliability into the category of the conceited fool. In the victims’ jargon, he is known as the “scoundrel.” He has no scruples, offering his services to anybody, including his former victims, should they reach positions of power. Self-centred, he masquerades as extremely zealous in order to advance hierarchically. Careerist torturers appear personally committed to successfully executing their tasks, and manifest acute ingenuity, even originality. Torture is not just any other job for them; nor do their whole lives revolve around it. Ambition makes them creative, so as to prove worthy of promotion and to be highly valued by their superiors. The way they treat their victims is callous in the extreme: for the Argentineans, women who had their vaginas electrocuted and their psychological stamina tested through vulgar language were mere resilient “mares.” Israeli torturers (who voluntarily enlisted their services for well-paid jobs) were also career-oriented: they accepted, without any scruples, the convention of terror. Later on they could develop a taste for torturing such “abject objects.” Careerists are torturers without a guiding ideology: this they may disavow at any point, depending on their new masters. Chameleonic, they can adapt to any punitive situation. One of the Brazilian torturers, nicknamed “The Bottle-Opening Doctor,” became skilled at obtaining even the last shreds of evidence from his victims, out of his sheer desire to be respected and acclaimed by his fellow executioners (Langguth, 1978: 163). Careerists may also query the political subtext of torture, offering their services to their victims, should the latter be willing to pay for a more lenient treatment. This is perhaps the feature that really triggers repulsion: their corruptibility and venality, their unquenchable financial drive (supplementing the characteristics they have in common with any other torturers, such as their propensity for violence, their aspiration for “elite” membership and their ideological indoctrination.)

The third category is that of the refined torturers, the self-proclaimed “men of science.” According to some, these are the most dangerous, given the psychological interest vested in their victims and in their suffering. Their torture techniques are ingenious but also perverse. Refined torturers search for the most appropriate ordeal for their victims, which will cause them the most unbearable tension and anxiety. Musicians, for example, will have their fingers injured (to instil in them the fear that they might never be able to play again); clericals will be subjected to humiliation or to blasphemy. Refined torturers prefer psychological torture when they consider their victims to be prominent political convicts, reserving physical torments for the more ordinary political detainees. While they tend to be intellectuals and prefer torturing other intellectuals, they can, nonetheless, be rather brutal when it all comes to a demonstration of power and pride. American soldiers who were taken prisoners in Vietnam testified that they were not so much tortured for the information they could provide as for their torturers proving they were capable of extracting that information. In the final stage, if there was one, torturers, who had used the most sophisticated psychological techniques, would sit (like in a primitive ritual) on their victims’ heads, relishing their triumphant victories. The Vietnamese aspired to be perceived as both masters of pain infliction and dispensers of death: they were interested not so much in tormenting their victims’ live bodies, as in irretrievably ravaging their dead souls. Their ultimate goal was to determine the American prisoners to ask for forgiveness from the Vietnamese people. One of the most controversial cases of refined torturers was that of Alfredo Astiz, an Argentinean interrogator with a seraphic mien, nicknamed the Blond Angel of Death, who devoutly believed in what he was doing, without sadism or cruelty, but with monstrous exactness.

Torturers can be sadistic *and* detached. Sadists do not necessarily manifest themselves in a “primitive” manner; they do not have to have gangster figures, nor are they by nature mentally

retarded. Sadism often derives, however, from their complexes and almost invariably lends itself to psychoanalysis. Sadistic “robots” are among the most hazardous psychological compounds: ferociously combining the above-mentioned elements, they are capable of inflicting torture even on children. Actually, children and women are more likely to trigger bestiality in their torturers: in their cases, victim psychology is more conspicuous than it is for male subjects. Sadists often derive sexual gratification from torture. Some Nazis experienced this when inflicting the punishment known as “twenty-five floggings to the arse.” Dogs trained to maim the genitals reveal their owners’ psychical deformation. One American prisoner in Vietnam confessed to having seen his torturer masturbating and injuring another man at the same time. Female victims often face limit-situations, being forced to touch their torturers’ genitals or to have oral sex; women will also often be gang-raped by their executioners. Argentinean victims have sporadically mentioned soft-voiced torturers who would fondle their victims’ genitalia before hurting them. Torture is like a drug sadists cannot dispense with: they give off moans of pleasure at the agony they cause. The sight of their victims’ blood and their screams work like “aphrodisiacs.” When they act in a gang, they strike their victims like “ravenous sharks” (*El presidio político en Cuba comunista*, 1982: 197-8). Their frantic enthusiasm gives them away. There may even be occasional bestiality contests: who ranks topmost in terms of cruelty and savagery? Apparently a reward for the torturer’s consummate “artistry,” his victim’s scream may decisively boost his retaliatory fervour. Bestiality can also be stimulated through alcohol (or the consumption of other drugs). For some sadists, victims serve as “punching sacks.” It remains a vexing question to determine exactly where one might place, on a scale of sadism, the doctor who, with the help of a teaspoon, electrocuted the fetuses inside their mothers’ wombs, or the one who had a four-month old baby undergo electric shocks in order to make its mother confess.

Several psychologists of torture (Samojedny, 1986: 582-4) have devoted laborious studies to torturers, detecting several types of psychopaths: hysterics, perverts, sado-masochists, homosexuals, morbid perverts and paranoids. Even if this were the case, to demonise all torturers would be far-fetched. Not all of them resort to sexual aberrations, nor are they all excited by their victims’ suffering. Quite on the contrary, these represent only a minority. Their extravagant characteristics are mentioned in testimonial narratives. In Nazi Germany sadistic torturers were blamed, and sometimes punished, not because the regime was by definition non-violent, but because unauthorised sadists were not acceptable. The Nazis appreciated robotic rather than deranged executants; hence, their resentment of emotional excess in torture. They repudiated the sadists’ unruliness and intractability. The authorities were mostly concerned with disciplining the torturers and licensed murderers from their camps.

The case of the Nazi torturers occupies a special place in the phenomenon of horror, which is attested by the enormous bibliography dedicated to them. In the immediate aftermath of WWII, analysts excelled at portraying them in “dark” colours, only to gradually relinquish demonising the Nazis in the following decades. Researchers have attempted to make a robot portrait of the Nazi criminal, based on the Rorschach test, starting from the individuals who underwent trial at Nuremberg. In time, the Nazi prototype has successively been included in the sphere of psychopathy, of normality, or half-way between sanity and insanity. After considerable debates, the conclusion has been that, psychologically speaking, the Nazis came closer to the level of normality than of psychopathic abnormality. Most of the analysts have rejected, however, Hannah Arendt’s interpretation whereby Nazi criminals were “banal executants of Evil” (Gerald L. Borofsky & Don J. Brand in Dimsdale, 1980: 359-402). The most widely circulated theory was that of the torturer’s schizoid split of personality, a theory that was also deemed valid for Nazi criminals, among others. From this vantage point, a torturer represented a creature with two souls: that of the father figure or the affectionate son, and that of the tormenter. This grid of analysis was applicable from the Nazis to the French soldiers in Algeria, or from the North American “good guys” in Vietnam to the South-American torturers. The cases of Nazi schizoidia have been the most controversial. On the one hand, they *would* torture their convicts; on the other, they could also be transfigured by the classical music their victims played for them or by the quaint delicacy with which they tended to the flowers in the camp gardens. Most of these warlords of terror suffered from a split personality syndrome (their intimate life was an altogether separate matter from their service to the state), or from a depersonalisation complex, having channelled out or repressed any possible scruples. The case of Franz Stangl, camp commander at Treblinka, has been outstandingly analysed by Gitta Sereny. This was not the case of a torturer *per se*,

but of an officer who took a rather bureaucratic understanding of his position as administrator of extermination. Stangl was not dehumanised from the beginning; he became a “robot” the moment he perceived the mass of his victims as a “shipment.” In South America, the Nazis’ successors did not fall behind their “masters,” having inherited everything from them, including their split personality. On the contrary, there were situations when they outdid them. There was a torturer in Brazil who would torture by day and would offer Bibles to his victims at night time, to save their souls. When asked how it was possible for such a fervent believer to commit acts of torture, his answer was “I bring hither the word of God, but since you will not hear it, I must use a different language” (Fon, 1979: 12). In this case, schizoidia combined with the Catholic fanaticism characteristic of South-American torturers.

One of the most pertinent analyses of Nazi torturer psychology is that undertaken by Henry V. Dicks, who outlines functional groups in terms of their violence and brutality: SS members proper; zealous members of the Political Police and of the *Einsatzgruppen* (groups with special missions); and camp guardians, inured to cruelty since their military stages, based on strategic humiliation and aggression. Dicks psychoanalyses the aggressive Nazi mindset. Starting from interviews with key individuals, he classifies the conscious and subconscious factors which determined the Nazis to become cold-blooded killers, torturers and blind executors. The conscious factors listed by the author include: “cadaver obedience,” idealised into a virtue; absolute loyalty in fulfilling orders; various past mortifications (at the level of the family, social class or nation), which demanded vengeance; identification with the Power structures; the assumption of an ideal of tough masculinity; sadistic pleasure in cruelty.

The unconscious factors are divided into two tiers. At a projective level, victims are despised as subhuman; they are demonised as a “plague” that must be eradicated (the aggressor projects into his victims both the image of his threatening Father and his parricidal hatred). To these is added the dread of the cruelty his superiors might unleash against him. At a depressive level, terror is the negation of guilt or a paradoxical outcome of guilt (the ease with which a scapegoat, rather than the real figure loathed by the aggressor, is tortured or killed). Terror is a means of dispelling boredom, unreality, meaninglessness and a way to get rid of any doubts and remorse. Last but not least, it is a defence against despair (Dicks, 1972: 87-88). To all these, one can add the fact that by euphemistically referring to techniques of torture and extermination, the Nazis wanted to maintain a semblance of humaneness, so that no one would take the blame (all the aggressors were nothing but wheels in the system): terror could thus be taken for granted.

Dicks ascribes a psychological nickname to every torturer he has interviewed; his study amounts to a mosaic of Nazi figures. The first is the fanatic, who used to pour water down his victims’ throats until they exploded. Before enlisting as a servant of horror, this fanatic underwent military-police training which had brutified, depersonalised and indoctrinated him (he would declare that he had then forsaken the Ten Commandments for ever.) Indirectly abandoned by his parents, he found in the Nazis a substitute for his family; devoting himself to the parental Power figure, he became capable of selling his soul for it. The second, the “tortured torturer” (as the author implies), had been a deputy at Auschwitz and had become famous for the human hunts he organised there to amuse his subalterns. He considered himself to be a “victim of duty,” had a gangster psychology and justified any atrocity he committed through the “Jewish conspiracies.” He had once considered becoming a man of the Church but, as he confessed, one could not believe in Christ, who had been a Jew, and, at the same time, approve of his race. He was totally dependent on the grey eminencies of extermination, under whose protection he could dispense life and death. The third torturer, the callous assassin, used to let his victims freeze in the bitter cold outside, provoked heart attacks (by injecting water into their hearts) and humiliated them by having them perform the “bear dance.” He also had a penchant for cramming his victims into confined spaces, where they would slowly suffocate to death. His violence derived from an inferiority complex and from the cult of manhood exalted by the German “mystique.” “I will make you taste death,” he would tell his victims. He had behaved sadistically during the Nazi regime and adopted the mask of normality in its aftermath, demonstrating his adaptability to the times. The fourth torturer, the mental hygienist, killed primarily (real or fake) mental retards, claiming that his violence was dictated by scientific and medical reasons. The fifth, the merciful assassin, had been a fervent torturer specialised in throttling camp convicts, especially those who were diseased and fragile.

He had manifested an inclination for thrashing his victim' behinds, and particularly resented those detainees who were suffering from diarrhoea, since excrements were the "signs of Evil" which had to be wiped out (his sadism was of the anal type). The figure of an authoritarian mother – replaced later on by the new German order promoted by the Nazis – had moulded this torturer's childhood. After his capture, he reached the brink of suicide. The sixth torturer, the Jews' best friend, had developed a penchant for extorting the Jews before molesting, whipping or killing them. He restructured reality according to his fantasies. For instance, killing infants in front of their mothers granted him profound satisfaction. He manifested oral (breast) sadism: he would murder babies because he feared becoming defenceless like them. Considering himself a victim of the system, he also admitted that he was opportunistic. The seventh torturer, a former rapist and inveterate murderer, was the Poles' best friend. He was a psychopathic narcissist who would slaughter (women) for sheer amusement. His libido was split between the sacred (maternal figure) and the profane (strange women whom he subjected to sado-masochistic perversions). This propensity came from the fact that his sister had been paralysed and was living in a wheelchair. I have synthesised here Henry V. Dicks' panoramic overview of Nazi torturers (1972: 96-211).

I have laid special emphasis on Nazi torturers not necessarily because they were the most atrocious, but because this theme is the most extensively covered by psychoanalytical and psychological studies. Unfortunately, there are rather scantier resources on the psychology of Soviet torturers and of the new, South American inquisitors of the late twentieth century. Moreover, there is no study devoted exclusively to torturer typology. The confessions of various victims may outline torturer portraits, analytical essays may survey such figures against the historical backgrounds of the regimes that endorsed them, but there is no overarching study of the magnitude of those examining Nazi torturers. Particular mention must be granted to the massive file comprising torturer figures and victims' testimonies which was compiled in Brazil by the São Paulo archdiocese, under the title *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (fortunately, this file has generated a series of epigones in all the South American countries.) Similar though less groundbreaking research has been carried out in other areas of horror as well. There are also several comparative studies of horrific violence in the twentieth century (Tzvetan Todorov's essay should be mentioned here, albeit it takes an ethical analytical approach).

Certain victims and analysts of torture mention the existence of "good" torturers. In my opinion, this is a misnomer signalling imposture; "goodness" is not related here to the fact that torturers will *not* torture, but to their apparent lack of brutality. The torture they wreak is of a psychological nature, since they avoid inflicting physical pain. Even so, as long as they provoke suffering, they are nothing but torturers. They are mentioned alongside the classical (malefic) torturers: witnesses refer to them as individuals who will not offend their victims, torturing them without excesses and vulgarity of any sort. Why should they act thus? To make victims sense their advantage over the other, more vicious torturers. Psychologically speaking, "good" torturers want to be perceived as paternal, compassionate, soothing figures. In Cuba, those who fit into this category were nicknamed "Grandpas." They sometimes acted in tandem with the more vicious interrogators, inducing a schizoid split in their victims.

Analytical studies devoted to twentieth-century torture rarely focus on female torturers; few in numbers, they nevertheless existed. The well-known Soviet women commissars and female guardians from the Nazi camps (partly recruited from the ranks of common offenders) proved that torture was not exclusively practised by men. During the first stages of communism in Romania, Vida Nedici, a sadistic tortress of Serbian origin, mentioned in several testimonies I have consulted, enjoyed a devious form of male genital torture. Stanley Milgram's experiment has demonstrated that women are as obedient to authority as men are. Their cruelty may come from the demonstration of the power granted by torturing a male victim, as if the latter's virility might somehow be "stolen." Women torturers have, nonetheless, also tortured other women, although there seems to be a marked preference for male victims.

Since I have insisted on the torturer's dark myth, I should also refer to several (paradoxical) exceptions. In the twentieth century, there were extremely rare cases of individuals who refused to execute aggressive orders, in other words, who refused to become "robots." Some of them were

shocked by the horrors they had witnessed but avoided revealing their reactions; others resisted psychologically but were given away by bodily responses of repulsion or mercy. Sometimes victims were so tumefied and badly-injured that torturers themselves could hardly bear to watch them; covering their victims' faces in newspapers, they would no longer have to watch the offspring they had begot: swollen, darkened, ripped-off flesh (Vergès, 1993: 90-1). In fact, the torturers' frailty makes them even more blameable, since it reveals that far from being monsters or split personalities, they were simply individuals who had adapted to violence. Even amongst the Nazi torturers there were some who, no longer able to psychologically withstand horror, resigned, or protested, at least. One of the Nazi commanders of the execution squads feared lest his underlings should turn into neurotic or trigger-happy savages, as was expected of them (Hilberg, 1980: 16). Somewhere in South America there were couples of former male torturers and female victims who emigrated to the neighbouring countries. After the torturers had relinquished their jobs and freed their victims, they would become life partners and assume fictitious identities (Rosenberg, 1991: 92). These cases have a Dostoyevskyan touch about them. All in all, the twentieth-century torturer can be said to have perfectly adapted to horror.

5. *The Anti-Hippocrates. Nazi "Geneticists." "Therapia Magna Auschwitzciense." Chemotherapists, Psychiatrists and Hypnotists.*

Physicians who assist in interrogations, collaborating with the torturers, also belong, by extension to this category. Doctors have often played a complicitous role in torture ever since antiquity. This complicity became blatant, however, at the time of the Inquisition, when torture was assisted by a sort of priest-physician hybrid. The Nazis re-launched the medicalisation of torture in the twentieth century. Thus, physicians would help select the victims destined for extermination or for the forced labour camps. Entire legions of Nazi doctors euthanised handicapped individuals, sterilised various "sub-races," tested bacteria on human guinea pigs, performed tissue and organ transplants, etc. Through the experiments and tests he conducted on midgets and twins, from whom he extracted, under torture, tissue, blood, and other bodily fluids, Mengele acquired the reputation of a "scientific super-torturer." After World War II, torturing physicians would no longer engage in laboratory experimentation, at least not in its most atrocious forms; instead, they would provide assistance in the torture process, temporarily arresting it when it reached a risky stage, only to resume it when the victims could bear pain again. The South Americans excelled in their zealous assistance of torture. Actually, the presence of torturing physicians attests to a false humanisation of torture, which cannot be softened through a perfected science of pain infliction and slow-motion torment. The torturing physicians' moral decay cannot be concealed in the naïve or deceitful claim that they are just ordinary individuals doing their jobs. As long as they assist torture and as long as they act as partners for the torturers, they also fit into this category of (secondary) torturers. Moreover, they are the so-called "scientific" torturers, given that they are fully aware of the consequences of torture and of their victims' physiological reactions to pain.

In the Nazi camps, torturing physicians would resort to a split of identity: on the one hand, their "scientific" profession; on the other, their everyday family life. This is the justification admitted for the atrocious cruelties they inflicted on their victims: an account that seems, indeed, more applicable to them than to the majority of regular Nazi torturers. The Nazi physicians inaugurated, in effect, the "psychology of torture," which rendered the practice of torture just a job like any other. Exempt from indoctrination to the "German mystique," which had been compulsory for all its adherents, they eradicated the Evil represented by the "sub-races." (For the communists, Evil incorporated the "enemy of the people"; for the Arab terrorists later on, it would embody the decadence of America and of the Western world.) Robert Jay Lifton (1986) has extensively analysed the diabolical innovation brought forth by the Nazi doctors, who perfected the medicalisation of murder and erased the boundary between healing and slaughtering. Whereas gas chambers maintained the dividing line between killer and victim (since the former never touched the latter), the medicalisation of murder bridged the gap between physician and murderer, given that in Nazi Germany, "scientific" assassination had become a "therapeutic imperative." It was not gratuitous that the Nazis who conducted sterilisations and other experiments on their victims assumed such labels as the ones included in a textbook of Nazi medicine: "biological soldiers," "gene cultivators," or "geneticists," designations (Lifton, 1986: 15, 30). There is a special explanation for the medicalisation of murder: on arrival in the extermination camps, members of the "sub-races" were considered to be "dead"; hence, they could be tortured and experimented upon in every way imaginable: someone who was already "dead" could not die a second time. The doctors' logic functioned thus impeccably, relying on a deliberate fallacy. When doctors called death in the gas chambers "Therapia Magna Auschwitzciense," they manifested cynicism or ironical callousness (Lifton, *idem*: 151, 208). Envious of the brainwashing procedure the Soviets had applied during the great Stalinist trials, wreaking aberrant confessions from their victims, the Nazis conducted research into finding the so-called "truth serum," a drug that the French would also test in Algeria and that South American torturers would abuse. In the twentieth century, Nazi physicians were the first to assist in interrogations, diagnosing the physical condition of victims who were to undergo torture, forging death certificates or temporarily interrupting procedures so as to allow for successive torture sessions.

During World War II, the Japanese also experimented on their victims, injecting them with cholera, syphilis and other germs and testing the resistance of various nationalities and ethnicities to

such epidemics. For brief periods, the Khmer Rouges experimentally injected their detainees with various viruses. It should be noted that all the torturers who adopted such practices insisted on being called “doctors,” wishing to distance themselves from the mere executioners, even though they were, in effect, supervisors of torture and directors of pain scenarios (Thomas, 1988: 97-9). In their turn, to counteract the brainwashing American POWs had suffered at the hands of the Koreans and the Vietnamese, the CIA authorised the testing of various drugs and depersonalisation techniques on human subjects. The aim of the doctors enrolled in such projects was to find pharmaceutical antidotes to brainwashing; in time, experiments turned into torture, namely drugging and, in extreme cases, lobotomy. Thus, Americans had their own Frankensteins, whose role was justified scientifically (pharmaceutically). Tranquillisers, neuroleptics and barbiturates, which caused comas and paralysis, were used as chemo-therapeutics. Once chemo-therapy took off, doctors became professional torturers, whether they were Americans, Soviets, Arabs, Asians, or South-Americans.

In the USSR, during the second, more refined stage of the Gulag, there were institutes which trained doctors in the “art” of torture. The refinement of torture was of a psychiatric nature. Physicians even went so far as to invent a category of psychic illness in which they could include dissidents, to legitimise their confinement in psychiatric institutions. This bogus malady was called “schizomystia,” meaning divergence of opinion (Amnesty International & Valérie Marange, 1991: 30). Torturing psychiatrists, most of whom had also had special training as KGB officers, were classified by Vladimir Bukovski and Semyon Gluzman (both with serious records of unwarranted psychiatric commitment) into a veritable adapted bestiary: the “novice psychiatrist,” the “academic,” the “commission scribe,” the “Voltaireian,” the “philistine,” and the “professional executioner,” the last two being the most dangerous (Fireside, 1979: 105-106). The abuse of drugs prescribed to convicts under various totalitarian regimes also pertained to punitive medical practices. Those who underwent drug-related torture in psychiatric hospitals risked being reduced to the condition of “living cadavers” and going insane.

Doctors who had an active or a bureaucratic role in torture were, as already mentioned, secondary torturers. They would examine victims during and after the completion of torture; attend interrogations so as to intervene when victims could no longer withstand pain or to advise torturers how to administer drugs and induce hypnosis; sign forged health certificates for the victims; compile the medical charts of future victims, so that torturers would know their weaknesses and decide on the most appropriate torture technique. Essentially, doctors had to decide whether victims were torturable or not, as well as establish the degree of their torturability (Stover, 1987: 21). Greek physicians, for instance, who were involved in torture, were considered “traffic controllers” of suffering (Amnesty International, 1977a: 17). Uncanny situations in which doctors stooped to hypnotising the victims could find an explanation only in the case of prominent subjects, for whose liberation the international public opinion exerted considerable pressure, or of foreigners who were supposed to forget their excruciating experiences, the faces of their torturers, the locations where they had been detained, etc. Hypnosis was part of the psychological arsenal deployed towards brainwashing, which, for brief periods of time, was attempted by the police regimes sanctioned by the South-American Juntas. Psychiatrists would inject victims with hallucinogens and narcoleptics, and would subject them to electric shock therapy conditioning them to develop Pavlovian reflexes and block out the memory of their ordeals. Alternately, doctors would participate in torture with the express purpose of erasing the traces of suffering. They would either not grant medical assistance to the tortured, leaving them to die, or would forge their medical records.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, besides perfecting the medicalisation of torture through pharmacological or chemical devices, torturers operated like sadistic anatomists in certain parts of the world, particularly in the more primitive countries where torture was deliberately conceived as savage and heinous. During the 1970s in Guatemala, those who tortured farmers suspected of being *guerilleros* paid special attention to the arteries and the veins: their intention was not for their victims to die a sudden death, but to endure pain indefinitely. At the last moment, when the tortured were exposed in village squares, the torturing officer would explain the techniques inflicted on each victim individually, specifying the duration and scale of the injuries (needle stings, electric burns, poisoning, the severing of fingers, breasts or ears). After the victims’ public execution

(usually through burning at the stake), torturers would mutilate their faces, so that they could no longer be identified and buried (Burgos, 1983: 236-240).

6. *The torturers' doubt. Oh my victim, who art thou? Small and big confessions.*

Overtly or not, torturers sometimes admire the victims who withstand torture without giving in. This form of respect by no means prevents torturers from resuming their interrogation sessions. Nonetheless, one question that may begin to trouble the torturer is: could *I* resist suffering? This dilemma becomes insoluble, all the more so when the victim's resistance has been broken. Witnessing a scene of genital mutilation threats, one torturer asked himself whether *he* would have caved in under similar circumstances. Then he realised that the answer was irrelevant, since he was well aware he would never be faced with such a situation (Vittori, 1980: 73). In the period of communist re-education (1949-1952), some of the former victims turned torturers at Pitești prison engaged in atrocious acts of violence for the very reason that they were ashamed of having succumbed to pain; they also wanted to check the others' limits to suffering. At other times, torturers need to know who their victims are: their curiosity is similar to that of a laboratory assistant, who studies insects under a microscope. To merely "squeeze" them out of their identities would not suffice. Dehumanisation makes torturers (who are cast deep down into the abyss of alienation) no longer recognise the others (their victims) as a human. And then, the question that arises is: Oh my victim, who art thou? What would you do to me, were you in my place? Torturers are not only interested in their omnipotence; they are also curious about their victims' potential power. One such victim has confessed that, should he reach power, he would have his torturer write his memories. Asked dryly whether he would then kill the torturer, the victim gave a paradoxical, perplexing answer, claiming that there would be no need for that, since confession would be his catharsis (Baraheni, 1977: 138-139). Victims who want to save and redeem their torturers are exceptions, however; what matters in this case is not the victim's utopia, but the qualms of conscience experienced by the torturer. Former victims turned torturers (the French in Algeria – formerly victims of the Nazis; later on, the Algerians themselves – formerly victims of the French, etc.), sometimes acquiesce, without astonishment or qualms of conscience, to an ambiguous, dubious status, verging on amorality. When sharing psychological intimacy with their victims, torturers do not hesitate to engage in political or intellectual conversations; it is only torturers who are averse to excesses or those who are recruited from the ranks of intellectuals that act this way. Furthermore, one might assume that this intimacy is catalysed by the other torturers' low intellectual level, which makes them improbable partners in sophisticated conversations.

Rather rare are the torturers who eventually befriend their victims; just as infrequent are those who come to ask for forgiveness or who collapse psychologically. In the latter situation, they are deemed unfit for their work and removed from the repressive apparatus. On the brink of depression, one of them admitted that he would at some point beseech his victim for pardon (Rosenberg, 1991: 139). When on trial for their deeds, some do request forgiveness, out of genuine or mimicked remorse. While testifying in court, several of the Greek executioners from the Colonels' dictatorship vaguely attempted to cleanse themselves by publicly asking for forgiveness and vowing to tell the truth, impelled, as they claimed, by a need to purge themselves. They also stated that they had felt trapped inside a mechanism and irreversibly reified and deprived of their humaneness (Amnesty International, 1977a: 41-42). All these public confessions must, of course, be stripped of their demagoguism; some were pathetic, tardy excuses, meant to inspire clemency in the audience. There were confessions and confessions; just like there were torturers who gave rationalised confessions and torturers whose confessions approximated those of Dostoevskian characters. After defecting, former Uruguayan torturer García Rivas chose to give a lucid and concise testimony. Since he had not been a violent aggressor but an ordinary "novice," his confession revolved more around denouncing the practice of institutionalised torture than on an impassioned plea for liberation. García Rivas testified about the interrogation courses taught to the torture trainees and about the torture seminars – largely based on electrocution techniques – conducted on guinea-pig victims. From the Uruguayan's statement one can infer that all the special department employees were compelled to practise torture, so that guilt and defilement could be applied on a mass level. The former torturer gives brief portrayals of his past colleagues, highlighting their different inclinations towards torture (García Rivas, *idem*: 66-67, 73). After the fall of the Juntas, the Argentinean television featured several ex-torturers who chosen to give public confessions. Some repented and asked for mercy; others justified torture on an exclusively theoretical level. In other cases, torturers did not hesitate to reply in writing to the accusations brought

against them. This happened with Jacques Massu (a French officer during the French-Algerian war, who defended the “right to torture”) and with Sergio Fleury (a Brazilian torturer who, tainted with fanatic masochism and “caste” membership, claimed that his condition as a torturer legitimised him as a man.)

The largest number of confessions did not come from the Nazis as might be expected (their admissions of guilt were mostly indirectly extracted during their trials or their interviews during detention), or from the Soviets, but from the former French torturers in Algeria. Some were direct; others were catalogued and tabulated by psychologists (psychiatrists, psychoanalysts) and journalists. In so far as overt confessions are concerned, Franz Fanon draws attention to the testimonies of several of his (torturer) patients who repented and, psychologically disturbed by their profession, tried to recuperate a sense of balance. One of them laughed, in the beginning, at his victims’ yells, but gradually began hearing the screams of those who had died during torture. Clearly afflicted by his victims’ plangent sonority, that torturer wished to be cured, promising in return that he would relinquish his profession. When he accidentally met one of his former victims, he suffered an anxiety crisis. His victim was also distressed and attempted suicide: a sign that both had been marked by the torture which had placed them on opposing sides of the barricade (Fanon, 1963: 265-267). Another French torturer confessed to his psychiatrist that torture exhausted him, causing him intractable dilemmas: when should he behave leniently, and when should he exhibit excessive brutality toward a victim? He understood confession extraction in terms of personal pride, fearing that some other torturer might succeed where he had failed; hence the intense agony to which he subjected his victims. This individual preferred doing his job on his own, without any intermediaries. Despite this, he became so distressed by what he was doing that he also began torturing his own family until, that is, the moment when he realised he was “sick.” He nonetheless would not give up his profession, he just wanted to be “cured,” that is to keep on torturing without unleashing his aggressiveness against his own family (Fanon, *idem*: 268-270).

There were cases of former torturers whose depositions were confessions in the right sense of the word. They were usually either simple people (who experienced guilt at a visceral level) or intellectuals (who assumed culpability at the level of their cultural mentality and self-respect). In so far as the first case is concerned, I have selected the testimony of a previous Romanian communist torturer, who confessed in an exalted and choleric manner, verging on the pathological and the theatrical, I might say, had it not been the case of a deeply-imbedded need for unconditional cleansing. He started from his apprenticeship period, during which he had become inured to testicle injury through pencil blows, as well as to any kind of beating, eventually reaching the stage of “an automaton, a brainless robot” (Jela, 1999: 17). He learned to become a torturer after sacrificing several victims against whom he had tested his punitive abilities. The former torturer’s confession was interrupted every now and then by self-denigrating and self-flagellating commentaries; what was essential was his desire to be tried, by none other than his former victims (Jela, *idem*: 37), who, in the face of God, were the only ones entitled to do so. He might, of course, have undergone trial in an official court of justice, yet the former torturer felt that those whom he had aggressed in the past had greater power over him than any other authority. Moreover, he did not eschew portraying himself as one who belonged to the sphere of absolute Evil: “We were atrocious beasts;” “I used to be so sadistic” (Jela, *ibid.*: 89, 109). This exalted brand of sincerity led him to acknowledge the fact that no one had forced him to torture; he then listed several elements of torture practice, such as the fact that each torturer had his own method (one was specialised, for instance, in crushing fingers between door hinges; another was adept at “faecalising” the victim). He also testified that given their atrocious ordeals, insane victims would sometimes have to be committed to mental institutions, where they would remain interned for decades. The Romanian torturer’s confession was self-denouncing: he knew he deserved hell, yet he also insisted on his personal suffering. Before looking for someone to whom he might confess, he had attempted to rally other ex-torturers, who categorically refused getting implicated into a mass confession. His deepest desire was not necessarily to be forgiven (although he did hope for pardon), but to undergo trial.

In so far as the intellectuals’ case is concerned, I have selected the deposition given by a former French torturer in Algeria to a journalist (Vittori). His initial memories were related to sensory

experience: his victims' scents, screams and countenance. He then provided the most modern, in all probability, definition of a torturer: lie an ordinary surgeon, operating on patients with the most gruesome of injuries from a road accident (Vittori, 1980: 12). This former torturer had interrogated (and, one must assume, tortured) around 250 individuals. He claimed that he had not felt pleasure in torture, that he had not sought to annihilate his victims, that considering the exhaustion brought about by the torture sessions, he was eager to end them and experience great liberation. His confession was an anonymous act of purgation, since he did not wish for his family and friends to find out about his past. No one is born a torturer, but becomes one. Then he resumed the stages of his initiation and skill-perfection in the art of torture. During the first session he was embarrassed, not knowing what to do. Gradually, he got into his role, relying on the explanation (*à la* Pontius Pilat) provided by the authorities, whereby torture did not exist (it was called interrogation) and torturers did nothing but execute orders. What had amazed him from the start was the way in which each freshly ordained torturer tried to innovate the "art" of pain infliction; the real artisans here were the electroshock specialists. He had also learned that pain had to be administered in increasingly larger doses and with greater frequency at nighttime, since victims were at their most vulnerable then. He classified his co-workers into three categories: creative (dangerous) perfectionists; the adepts of classical (barbarian and medieval) methods; and the Machiavellians, who would not touch their victims and remained mere spectators (Vittori, *idem*: 55). Then there was the category of ignorant amateurs, who, striking blows indiscriminately, utterly flopped. Despite their different temperaments, they were all callous executants: their victims' suffering meant nothing to them. Every morning before work, torturers compared their methods like specialists, getting technical advice from their group leaders. This confessor denounced the idea of a "caste" to which tortures had been conditioned to aspire: it was the other serving militaries in Algeria who had woven gloomy yarns around the torturers there. In time he had reached such a degree of specialised training that he knew with great accuracy when his victims would cave in. He had also learned that "innocence did not exist" and that victims had to be tortured anyway, whether they were guilty or not. This torturer had a preference for psychological games, avoiding physical injury as much as possible. Nonetheless, witnessing the agony of an Algerian fanatic, he had found out that there were minds and bodies that would never surrender: "insensitive to both pain and fear," such victims were arrogant and full of contempt for their torturers (Vittori, *ibid.*: 94-95). Sometimes he had admired his unflinching victims, but he had also tricked them into believing that he was a "good" interrogator. He had no reservation about providing a list of all the ruses throughout his career. Like the Nazis, he admitted that he strictly separated his family life from his profession. He had been rather vexed when, after several visits, his daughter was "adopted" by his victims: there was absolutely no explanation he could come up with for his former victims' affectionate gesture (Vittori, *ibid.*: 107). His awakening was triggered by his befriending one of the victims (not one of his own victims, we should add): from that moment onward, he started having serious misgivings about his profession, which also incurred his disciplinary transfer. He stopped practising torture for a while, but when he was forced to resume it (he had extended his work contract, out of sheer opportunism), his body knew exactly what violent gestures to perform. Violent screams failed to impress him any longer and he was sometimes surprised and dumbfounded at savagely beating his victims (Vittori, *ibid.*: 178). At the end of his career, he experienced a hectic period of violent interrogations, as he had become rather proficient in physiology and psychology. He had reached the point where he would torture a victim indefinitely, only to realise, eventually, that the latter knew nothing and had been tortured to no avail (Vittori, *ibid.*: 190-194). Many years after his Algerian experience, he seemed to be awaiting accusations from his former victims; at night he could hear the moaning of agonising sufferers and wondered why his memory was exclusively aural (Vittori, *ibid.*: 221-222). All the former victims he dreamed of had anonymous visages; either they would not be seen, or he would not remember them. Screams, however, could not be avoided, since they had seared his flesh. "We were no Nazis, but conditioned men, just like anywhere else in the world," the ex-torturer defended himself. He continued: "I don't want anything. I'm simply telling this story. That is all." Vittori, the journalist whom he addressed this confession, was rather reluctant to give credit to his narrative. Quite to the contrary, his accusation came as follows: "You tortured. That makes you a torturer." "According to the Larousse definition, that is correct," the former torturer replied (Vittori, *ibid.*: 225, 226, 227).

(Translated into English by **Carmen Borbely**)

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