

Under the Enemy's Blade

A Search for Anarchist Practices Against Torture

No Trace Project

2025

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Preface (No Trace Project)

Torture — the deliberate infliction of severe pain or suffering for punishment, interrogation or intimidation — is one of the tools used by the State and its allies in their war against anarchists. What individual and collective strategies can anarchists implement to prepare for, resist, and fight back against torture? This collection of texts aims to help answer this question by sharing the experiences and insights of anarchists, communists, and other militants who have been confronted with torture in the past five decades.

Torture is one of the toughest challenges that our movements can face. How to prepare for the risk of torture? How to organize so that if a comrade is captured, tortured, and talks, the risks to other comrades and to our activities are minimized? Should we commit to not talk under torture? How to not talk when faced with the most brutal physical and psychological treatments? How to deal with comrades who have talked under torture? How to fight back against torturers? How to help survivors of torture manage their pain and traumas?

We have strived to select texts that can help comrades answer these questions here and now, without relying on the enforcement of international laws or the lobbying of humanitarian NGOs. Each text is preceded by a short introduction in which we present the author and the original context of publication. Some of the texts include explicit descriptions of acts of torture.

We would like to express our gratitude to the authors of the texts, as well as to the translators who made their inclusion in this collection possible.

No Trace Project

At the Time I Was Down on My Knees (Bahman)

“At the Time I Was Down on My Knees” is a poem written by Bahman, pseudonym of an Iranian man, activist, Marxist, and poet.

Bahman was in jail for seven years in Iran where he was brutally tortured. He then escaped from Iran to Canada where he wrote the following poem, which was published in English in the 2014 paper “Poetic resistance: Witnessing Bahman’s resistance to torture and political violence.” The paper explains:

“Bahman had always dreamed of winning an Olympic medal as a child. He said that one resistance strategy he had was emulating that childhood desire. Bahman concluded that, ‘If I can keep my silence, if I have the strength and power to not name anyone, it will be as good as a gold medal.’ [...]

The following details of one incident of torture Bahman suffered are required in order for his acts of resistance to be revealed. Following a session in which he was tortured and while he was again able to not give anyone’s name to the torturers, Bahman was dragged to his cell and hung by his wrists for eight days. When he was released from these bonds he was physically unable to stand, and was in excruciating pain. As with every experience of torture, Bahman did not know if he could survive another episode, and he could not know if he would be able to withhold giving anyone’s name again. It is important to Bahman for readers to understand that the following poem is not a metaphor.”

At the time I was
Down on my knees
With swelling feet
Exhausted
Thirsty for sleep
At the time they were
Powerful and angry
I was the winner
Of that battlefield
My weapon was my silence
I was the champion
No crowd

No witness
But my reward was more than
A gold medal
My reward
Was the safety
Of my friends

Don't Give Up, Don't Sell Out: Torture and Testimony (Dmitry Petrov and comrades)

“Don't Give Up, Don't Sell Out: Torture and Testimony” was originally published in Russian in 2021, signed *Phil Kuznetsov and comrades*.

Phil Kuznetsov was a nickname of Russian anarchist, ethnographer and historian Dmitry Petrov. Dmitry joined the Russian anarchist movement in the 2000s, participated in many actions in Russia and abroad, and co-founded the Combat Organization of Anarcho-Communists (BOAK). Following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, he volunteered for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and was killed in battle in 2023.

Along with a brief presentation of the use of State torture against anarchists in contemporary Russia, this text offers an attempt at an ethical evaluation of the act of “talking” under torture, of providing useful information to the State when faced with brutal physical or psychological treatments.

Introduction

Since 2017 our movement has faced repression of a scale and intensity previously unseen. The main distinctive feature of the situation is the massive use of torture by the FSB.¹ Previously, cases of beatings and torture of anarchists in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus were rather isolated exceptions. We heard that radical Islamists and fascists were tortured brutally. Some may recall the “Odessa case” against communists and anarchists.² But it's one thing to “know” something in the abstract, quite another to experience it on your own skin.

Torture resulted in many people testifying against comrades and cooperating with investigators after falling into the hands of the special services.

The current crisis of the Russian anarchist movement is not just the result of old splits and brutal repression. Perhaps an even greater challenge faced is the moral one of torture, of giving up information, of betrayal, to which we have not yet fully responded.

How to evaluate the situation where, during the course of an investigation, many people betray comrades? Can torture serve as a justification? What to do when popular members of the

¹ *No Trace Project (N.T.P.) note:* The FSB (Federal Security Service) is Russia's main security agency.

² *N.T.P. note:* In 2002, 11 people — communists and anarchists — were arrested in Ukraine and accused of being part of a criminal organization operating in or near the city of Odessa. This case became known as the “Odessa case.” They were all tortured by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). One person died under torture. Most of the others testified and their testimonies were accepted by the court despite evidence that they were given under torture. The 10 people left alive were sentenced to between 3 and 14 years in prison.

movement, as in the case of, for example, Igor Shishkin from the “Network” case,³ turn out to be among the people crushed by the FSB to the point of collaboration?

These questions cannot be dismissed. Because, after all, they raise the main problem: is the contemporary anarchist movement something serious? Is its existence meaningful at all?

The issue of torture and betrayal is the most important ethical dilemma of the anarchist movement in recent years. Without dealing with it, we can go no further.

The palette of judgments that can be heard in anarchist circles falls on a spectrum between two extreme positions: “No one can be accountable for testimony given under torture” and “It is unacceptable to give new information to the enemy, no matter the circumstances. Anyone who does so is a traitor, a snitch, an informer.”

Spoiler: the truth here is NOT somewhere in the middle. It is much closer to the second thesis. But still not identical to it. Let’s look at it in more detail.

Where do principles come from?

We learn from an early age that “snitching is unacceptable.” But why is that?

Especially in the case of torture, if we look at it from a personal perspective, it is easier to give the torturers what they want and stop the suffering.

There are several arguments why this is not acceptable. At a minimum, by starting to collectively participate in endeavors potentially drawing State repression, people expect shared secrets to be kept safe. Giving them away is a violation of that trust. No one would take these risks knowing in advance that in a bad situation a comrade will reveal everything to the cops. But perhaps the strongest reason to not give comrades up is different: by giving information to your enemies, you literally break the lives of other people, and people who are probably not strangers to you, since you know something about them. Because of you, they will also be facing torture and years in prison.

Yet these arguments are also relative. In fact, like any ethical principle, the principle of not turning comrades in cannot be fully “rationalized.” However, collective tradition, culture, and experience tell us that this principle is true. In Kropotkin’s terms, “moral sense” tells us this.⁴

On the same grounds, we put collective obligations above personal comfort. Moreover, these commitments have no “expiration date”: if someone is disillusioned and leaves the movement, and after a while finds themselves in front of cops and turns their former associates in, the fault of such a person does not become less.

So, we take it as a principle that it is unacceptable to pass on to the enemy any true information concerning other people. Since the violation of that rule entails grave consequences, the violation itself is a grave offence. The only question that remains is whether torture or something else can serve as a “mitigating circumstance”?

³ *N.T.P. note:* In late 2017 and early 2018, about ten people were arrested in Russia and accused of being part of an underground organization called “Network” that was allegedly planning attacks in anticipation of the 2018 Russian presidential elections and the FIFA World Cup. Most of them were tortured by the FSB in the early stages of their detention.

⁴ *N.T.P. note:* Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) was a Russian anarchist and geographer. In his pamphlet “Anarchist Morality” (1897), he argued that human morality, our “moral sense,” is instinctive, a “natural faculty in us like the sense of smell or of touch.”

It wasn't better before

Of course, we can recall examples when someone from the movement, in the face of repression, provided important information to the authorities. The year 2010 immediately comes to mind. Then, almost simultaneously, both in Russia (after the attack on the city administration of Khimki) and in Belarus (after a series of direct action attacks), the anarchist movement faced repression. Torture, as far as we know, was used only in rare individual cases and with a lesser level of brutality than what we have seen since 2017. Still, in both countries there were people who ended up collaborating with the police. In all identified cases, the community has condemned and expelled the informants.

That is, the anarchist “collective mind” was guided by the principle that there is no justification for testifying against comrades when faced with threats, fear and psychological manipulation. It is hard to disagree with this approach. No matter whether you are being threatened or, on the contrary, the police is playing the “good cop,” the enemy is in front of you. You are obliged to not give them any information on your comrades.

Even if a young and recent member of the movement is being pressed by the police, it is expected that the person already comes into the radical community with a certain pre-set moral code in which the principle of “never turn anyone in” comes first. It seems strange to have to say it, but recent years have taught us that it is necessary to say it. Ten years ago, the question of a permissive approach towards giving testimony against comrades in the anarchist community did not arise. It wasn't better before, it was easier.

Bottom line: giving information to the State under verbal and psychological pressure is clearly unacceptable. But what about physical torture?

Experience of revolutionaries

Digging through the documents of revolutionary organizations of the past, it is not easy to find a specific attitude to testimony under torture. The statutes of the executive committee of the “People's Will”⁵ succinctly prescribe that all the secrets of the organization be kept in deep secrecy.

Carlos Marighella's “Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla”⁶ also states in a short line and without details: “Those who go to the police of their own free will to make denunciations and accusations, who supply information and who finger people, must be executed when they are caught by the urban guerrillas.” Interestingly, in the movie “Four Days in September,” about the struggle of Marighella and his comrades, the characters have no doubt that their captured comrade-in-arms will talk under torture. And they liberate him later anyway. A movie is a movie: how it really was, the author does not know.

⁵ *N.T.P. note:* The “People's Will” (Narodnaya Volya) was a late 19th-century revolutionary socialist organization operating in the Russian Empire, which conducted assassinations of government officials.

⁶ *N.T.P. note:* Carlos Marighella (1911–1969) was a Brazilian Marxist–Leninist militant. He founded the urban guerrilla group Ação Libertadora Nacional (National Liberation Action) responsible for a series of bank robberies and kidnappings. In 1969, shortly before his death, he wrote the “Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla.”

The IRA's "Green Book"⁷ devotes a lot of pages to psychological preparation for arrest, interrogation and beatings to help partisans remain silent. However, the text does not directly provide a moral evaluation of testimony given under torture. And the torture mentioned in the Green Book is limited to beatings and burning with cigarettes. The connection of an electric cable to the genitals and prolonged electrocution with a taser may have been outside the realities of Northern Ireland in the 1970s. The modern Russian and Belarusian secret police act more brutally.

So, the principle of not testifying in any case is rather an unwritten rule of revolutionary movements, something taken for granted by default.

In the USSR during the war it was considered unacceptable for partisans and underground fighters to turn in comrades-in-arms, regardless of any torture by the Gestapo.⁸ For example, Viktor Tretiakovich, commissar of the "Young Guard" (a Soviet underground organization in the German-occupied city of Krasnodon), is still considered a controversial figure because of the suspicion that before his execution he could not withstand torture and gave the Nazis names and addresses, although this version is refuted by many.

The view is sometimes expressed that in the hands of "professionals" no person can withstand torture. This opinion is not without foundation. Yet it is not true. There are many documented examples of people enduring terrible torture. Here is one.

Boris Donskoy, member of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary party, killed the commander of German occupation corps Hermann von Eichhorn in Kiev in 1918. Boris was captured at the site of the operation. "After he was brought to the jail, he was immediately bound to a bed and tortured, demanded to hand over his accomplices. They tortured him for three days, replacing each other: they burned, pricked, cut, thrust pins and spikes under his nails, plucked all his toenails [...]" — wrote in her memoirs Irina Kakhovskaya, the comrade of Boris Donskoy. Donskoy said only his name, origin, party affiliation and the motives for his actions. Not a word about comrades-in-arms. His "testimony" actually became a political statement.

Such examples are not unique at all.

How to resist torture?

Everyone who has experienced torture or even just beatings in the police station knows very well how scary, painful and humiliating it is. And how difficult it is not to give in and give the torturers what they want.

The task of the torturers is to subdue you morally. It is important not to lose clarity of consciousness, to play your own game, depending on the situation feigning fright, exaggerating physical suffering or otherwise confusing the torturers.

Methods for withstanding torture are something we almost never talk about. From what can be said openly: when it becomes unbearable, it may help if you come up with some false version of events which does not involve any real people and information, and "fixate" on it, make yourself believe that it is true, and insist on it during torture.

But it is better, of course, to just keep silent.

⁷ *N.T.P. note:* The "Green Book" was a training manual issued by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to new volunteers.

⁸ *N.T.P. note:* The Gestapo was the secret police of Nazi Germany and in German-occupied Europe.

Azat Miftakhov⁹ showed us another effective way of action. When they started torturing him, he cut his own wrists (with non-lethal transverse cuts), after which the torturers were forced to stop and call doctors.

What is wrong with the inquisitorial approach?

We contend that **it can never be “normal” or “acceptable” to turn over people and information to the repressive authorities.** The situation of torture is no exception. The principle of the movement and of each one of us individually can only be: **better torture, prison or even death than betraying comrades and giving important information to the enemy.**

When you hear from a person that “one cannot be accountable for testimony given under torture,” you lose all trust in them. You realize that a slap on the wrist will be enough for them to give up everything. A movement where such an approach is taken as a principle will never attract and raise resilient people in its ranks. **Without resilient people, there will be no radical change.**

Then what is wrong with the position that “anyone who gives information is a traitor”? Yes, resisting torture is realistic. But it is obvious that not everyone succeeds, even those who would like to. No one who has not gone through brutal torture themselves can guarantee their own behavior in such a situation.

Those who resisted the torturers but in the end still gave in under really brutal physical pressure and spoke, can hardly remain our comrades and participants in the anarchist movement (although, of course, each case must be considered separately). But is it fair to write such a person down as a traitor, who, in good conscience, should be subject to retribution? Probably not.

This thesis should not be confused with tolerance of testimony against comrades. **It always remains a grave fault.** It is everyone’s duty to do everything possible and even more to stay clean.

Dubovsky case

The behavior of Dmitry Dubovsky, a member of a Belarusian anarchist partisan group, caused great controversy within the movement. This story is not related to torture, but when talking about testimony and cooperation with investigators, it is impossible to ignore it, as it is the most recent example.

It is silly to deny that during the investigative procedures recorded on video, Dmitry said too much, describing who was standing where and handing over bottles of gasoline. Neither the authorities nor the public need to know such details. However, there is no reason not to believe Dubovsky’s explanation that he and his comrades had agreed in advance to not deny their actions in case of detention in order to make them a political statement. Had this not been the case, other members of the group would have reported it long ago. At least until other members of the group comment the situation, who can know better?

Maybe Dmitry, apparently out of confusion and misjudgement, failed to fulfill their agreement. Some hastened to brand him a “snitch and traitor,” that is, the gravest accusation for a

⁹ *N.T.P. note:* Azat Miftakhov is a Russian anarchist. In 2019 he was arrested, accused of having built an explosive device, and tortured in custody.

revolutionary. This is a clear example of an “inquisitorial” approach to the issue. In order to stigmatize people in this way, you need good reasons, which in this case we do not have.

In general, in Dubovsky’s case we are faced with a difficult problem: the use of the courtroom as a political tribune. This is quite a canonical practice in revolutionary history. The words spoken during the investigation and in the courtroom can be powerful means of revolutionary propaganda. But to do so, one would have to openly declare one’s views and probably at least part of one’s actions.

The main question is whether the imprisoned comrade’s actions are aimed at propaganda from behind prison bars, or are an attempt to protect his own skin.

The criteria could be: does the testimony lead to new arrests, does it reveal the inner workings of the movement, does it worsen the fate of other prisoners and alleviates the situation of the one who gives testimony? Do the statements serve to promote the ideas behind the actions? Also, in the case of group detention, the consent of other arrested comrades is important — it is unacceptable to decide such things alone.

According to the proposed criteria, there is no real reason to accuse Dmitry Dubovsky of treason and snitching.

A few more words

The issue of torture has two other important aspects. The first is that the very fact of torture makes us realize through personal sensory experience, not in the world of abstractions and phrases, that the State and its representatives are our real enemies, cruel and despicable. They must be fought hard and seriously.

The second is: the movement must **defend itself against traitors**. If we are talking about a serious struggle, those who willingly and abundantly supplied the repressive authorities with information and confirmed all this at further investigation and trial must expect retribution, as it was in times when the revolution was not merely an imitation. So far this question has not been seriously discussed among present-day anarchists. To organize retribution as an institution of the anarchist movement is one of our important tasks, however dreadful it may sound.

Conclusion

Modern trends: comprehensive egocentrism, fixation on one’s own “traumas” and their “healing,” are not conducive to resistance to State repression. If personal comfort and well-being are the priority, it is two steps away from preferring them to convictions, ethical principles, and the safety of comrades.

Modern culture promotes an **apologia of weakness**. As if it were a sacred human right not to show courage and other uncommon qualities, but to break and fall in a difficult situation. A humane attitude to people and understanding of the limits of their capabilities is necessary, but an apologia of weakness is vicious and obviously destructive.

Yes, the demand to refrain from testifying under torture is a demand for extraordinary fortitude, but it is embedded in our culture and has accompanied us since childhood.

This is the moment when the right to weakness ceases to apply and the obligation to show inner strength becomes relevant.



Dmitry Petrov, 2018

How to Withstand Torture (Anonymous)

The following testimony comes from an anonymous comrade who was tortured in Russia some years ago. It describes strategies for withstanding torture based on the comrade's personal experience. It was published by the Russian anarchist website Anarchy Today (a2day.org) in 2019.

A few words about my political views. I believe that the way society is organized should provide good for all people, and direct democracy is the best way to reach that. In recent times I have not been taking part in actions, because I've come to realize that I have to start with my own way of life. Start with those relationships we have with other people, making them more direct, learning to approach common work collectively.

When I encountered torture, I was completely unprepared for it and did not expect that someone would be interested in torturing me for some reason. Of course, it is only possible to really experience it directly, but I still want to share some reflections on my experience. I think it is useful to try to talk about torture in a rational way. I wish that no one would ever find themselves in a similar situation, but reality shows that such things are closer than they seem, and if someone reading this gets into a mess, I hope that something of what I have written below will help them get out of it with the least losses. But still, I am not an expert on this subject and I base my conclusions mostly on my own experience, and since any experience is individual, they may not be suitable in another situation.

It should be taken into account that the purpose of torture can vary. Probably the most optimistic case for you, if you are unlucky enough to be subjected to torture, is when the police have nothing or almost nothing on you personally, and they torture you to get information about your connection with the people they are interested in and information related to them (which was my case). These people are under serious suspicion, they must have been followed and it led to something, perhaps the police want to investigate all their acquaintances in the hope of finding something interesting, but at the same time, they do not know what they are looking for, which leaves room for maneuvering. It is much worse if the cops suspect you personally, then they will spin the facts of interest to them and you can expect them to behave more toughly and persistently. Same thing if they are ready to put you in jail and only need your confession.

I will emphasize some of the challenges that I was confronted with when I was in the hands of torturers and what helped me to withstand torture to some extent.

The first, of course, is physical pain. Continued for a long time without breaks, it becomes a serious pressure. It is possible to tolerate it for a while, but gradually you start to say and do what they want you to say and do. At some point you want to go crazy and don't care if you die or not. But that doesn't mean you should give up right away. Torturers also have weaknesses — they too get tired both physically and mentally, even if they threaten that the torture will last as long as they want. If they don't see the desired result within a few hours, they might get tired

of dealing with you, their work shift will be over, and they will want to sleep. You just have to be patient until then. What else can help? It's helpful to think of pain and other discomfort as a thought, simply as a stream of neuronal signals coming from your body's cells. When you rationalize it that way, the pain becomes less unbearable. I suggest practicing this when some unpleasant moments arise in ordinary life.

Then there's the psychological aspect. It is a terribly oppressive feeling when you are in someone else's complete power, like an animal in a slaughterhouse. It's important to try to maintain even a little tiny piece of control, to see what's going on as a struggle rather than a predator-prey situation. It helped me a little to rub my head against the floor till it was painful, to keep a small sense of freedom of action, and it also drowns out the effects of the pain. Cutting veins is also a solution, though more radical, but it's important not to overdo it, and the conditions don't always allow for it. It's creepy when torturers make threats of rape, along with everything else, it makes us think about what we are willing to sacrifice in order not to say too much. Remember your comrades, that it is this moment and this place that will most likely decide their fate, how they will spend the next years of their lives. Are a few hours, even if extremely painful for you, worth a few years, or even more, of someone else's freedom?

A few words about the need to speak under stressful, panic-inducing conditions. It was almost impossible for me to think when I was tortured for hours and hours without breaks. The same questions are asked over and over again, but you have to speak, and what you say must be as stable and logical as possible. Most likely, the cops will have watched you for a while before catching you, monitoring your Internet traffic, places where your phone has connected to cell towers, calls and texts. Thus they will know things about your life. You will need to know how to explain what they know, and it will be necessary to say something very similar to the truth, and it will be extremely difficult to come up with some complex stories that sound adequate and consistent. But if you have chosen a certain line, you need to stick to it. It is better to look like a fool than to give different versions of significant events to the torturers. It is even better to have an irrefutable cover story in advance, shared by all those it concerns. Of course, it won't work for everyone, but in terms of alibis the most reliable is to live an ordinary life, outwardly not differing from average people — work, study, have different hobbies and a large list of numbers of non-political people in your phone, a social media page with kittens, etc. This is useful for many reasons including because when you are stressed you then can, without making up anything, put it all out to the police to confirm that you are, in general, a random person. It is good to say a lot of distractingly neutral things, stretching the time with information that seems to be relevant, but is not so important for the cops and does not discredit anyone. If you are insistently asked for things like names and places, you can make them up, but it is important that they won't try to make you the only one involved in a crime with some "unidentified persons." Also, one option is to act crazy and say something completely out of order, but I think you have to be a bit of an artist to do that. Lastly on the topic of stress, I will write that in my experience I tried to keep calm, looking at the situation as if from the outside, thinking that what was happening was either a dream or the filming of a low-budget horror movie — otherwise my mind would probably have refused to perceive the events.

How not to give away important information? First of all, it is extremely useful to not know unnecessary things. "The less you know, the better you sleep," literally. It is difficult to keep a large amount of information secret, and it is unwise to seek to obtain compromising information without practical necessity. Important information should only be accessed from an encrypted

device in a relatively secure location, and all important passwords should be stored in a password manager, you don't even need to see them. For communications you can use, for example, Jabber with OTR-encryption or PGP-encrypted email on a secure server. But you need to come up with an explanation in advance of why you are encrypting.

You may well hide some of your information during torture. For example, it was my principle not to give unnecessary names and not to discredit anyone, because it was logical to expect that these people could also be subjected to torture. Since the cops did not know that I actually knew any of these people, they backed off after a while.

What we hold dear can be used as a means of blackmail. It is hard to lose what we love, our friends and loved ones, our honor and freedom, our life. But we must remember that the one who blackmails you with the loss of any of the above can easily arrange it even if you surrender. If you are already under someone's total power, you can no longer protect anyone or anything. The most ridiculous thing is to believe the promises of the people who brought you to this position. Also, do not think that your life itself is of any great value, many will willingly sacrifice it for the fulfillment of their goals.

The cops may bluff by saying that you've supposedly already been turned in and it's useless to deny it. Well, in any work you need to trust the people you interact with, it is foolish to embark on any important venture with people about whom you have doubts that they may betray. It takes a long time, sometimes years, to reach an appropriate level of trust and familiarity with a person. With people you trust completely, you cannot think that they have betrayed you, unless they have been tortured, but that is different. If you are involved in the activities of a large group of people who do not know each other well, it goes without saying that you have to assume that some of the participants are willingly or unwillingly passing information to the police, so you have to structure the work of the group in such a way as to minimize the potential harm from this.

It is also useful to understand the torturers and tell them what would be in line with their values, trying to find common ground. For example, appealing to God's retribution, agreeing that "those Banderites¹ in Ukraine really got out of hand," and objecting to accusations by saying that "I don't need all these revolutions, I have other things to worry about — building a house, buying a car," etc.

It's scary after torture. Of course, I was not ready to sign anything without looking, but my will was clearly weakened, and I was very afraid that the torture would repeat. When I was released, the fear lasted for quite some time, I was afraid to be alone, even more so to go out in the street. It is very important that in the beginning people you trust can be with you, help you with housing and everything you need. It is also good to have a lawyer's phone number and access to the media, a valid passport and visa, spare means of communication. I think immediately after the incident you should record the injuries and publicize the case. The trauma center instantly reports information to the cops, which may not be useful, so it's better to go straight to a private forensic medical examiner. Publicity in the media is not a cure-all against the repetition of torture, but there is a big chance that the police do not want to draw attention to themselves again, which

¹ *N.T.P. note:* Banderites was originally the name given to members of a faction of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), active during the Second World War. In present-day Russia, it is a pejorative term used to refer to activists from the 2013-2014 Maidan uprising in Ukraine, and more generally to Ukrainians who support sovereignty from Russia.

can help make them leave you alone, while someone who nobody cares about can be tortured indefinitely. Although to stay living in Russia after that is a dangerous endeavor.

A bit on a personal note. Torture is a thing that has a very powerful impact. I would not say that I had illusions about the compassionate nature of people before this experience or that I stopped loving people after it happened, maybe these factors made it relatively easy to endure torture. Nevertheless, something in me has clearly changed, probably that I have become more sensitive to my own pain and the pain of others, but at the same time it has also become more natural. From the inside, it's hard to know if these changes are helpful or not.

To summarize, torture is just another tool at the disposal of those who control our lives. There is no need to panic at the thought of it, but rather to be aware of how it works and what we can do to counter it. I hope the threat of torture doesn't stop you from striving to fulfill your and our shared dreams, and I hope none of you have to endure torture. If anyone does, I wish you perseverance and faith in your own strength!

An Analysis Of Resistance Under Torture (Ashraf Dehghani)

“An Analysis Of Resistance Under Torture” was written in the early 1970s by Ashraf Dehghani as a chapter of her prison memoirs, “Torture and Resistance in Iran,” which were translated and published in English in 1976.

Ashraf Dehghani (born 1949) is an Iranian communist militant. In 1971 she joined the underground Marxist–Leninist guerrilla group Organization of Iranian People’s Fadaee Guerrillas (OIPFG) and, later that year, was arrested and imprisoned. In prison she was regularly subjected to torture. She resisted the brutal treatments and did not provide any sensitive information to the torturers. She escaped from prison in 1973 and rejoined the OIPFG. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution which led to the replacement of the Imperial State of Iran by the Islamic Republic of Iran, while some of her comrades moved away from guerrilla warfare, Ashraf Dehghani founded a new organization (the Iranian People’s Fadaee Guerrillas, IPFG) to continue the armed struggle against the new government. She later reportedly moved to Europe, and her current whereabouts are unknown.

The factors that can help comrades to resist torture may be summed up as follows:

1. Faith in the justice of the revolutionary path: this faith must be so strong and unshakable that, even in the unlikely event of all other comrades turning their backs on the struggle, it cannot be lost or dented. It is impossible to resist torture and all the other enemy tricks without an unshakable faith in the ideals for which we fight.
2. Hatred for the enemy and love for other comrades: these feelings must be so strong that they are an intrinsic part of a fighter’s whole being. For me it was unimaginable to think that I could ever, by divulging names, make another comrade endure the tortures I was suffering. With the love that I felt for my comrades and the boundless hatred for the enemy, how could I possibly be instrumental in bringing my comrades to the torture chamber? It would be more agonizing to witness their torture than to endure the pain I suffered. It would have been an utter betrayal of the cause for which I was fighting if I had felt otherwise. To betray my comrades to the executioner in order to escape torture myself, would have meant a life-long endurance of mental torture, which I was not prepared to accept. Moreover, surrender to the hated enemy was to me tantamount to hating the people. The enemy imagined that we took up arms to achieve high positions. I, on the other hand, knew that I would fight for the liberation of our people from the claws of the exploiters. To surrender to the enemy would mean that I had turned my back on the people and let the exploitation go on unabated; that I had a hand in the whole grisly business of exploitation.

Throughout my life I had conditioned myself to hate all exploiters; and to think that I would ever behave according to their wishes filled me with revulsion. Was it possible that I should now forget the people in chains? A people to whom I had always been bound by affection and love. The enemy's crimes were so real and self-evident that it was hard for me to see him as a human being, hence the thought of surrender never occurred to me.

3. To see the whole thing in a historical perspective and in the light of Marxist theories. Dialectically, it is possible to see the relationship between resistance and the triumph of the revolution, whether it is achieved in a short or a long period of time. In the short run, it might be that our resistance could save a comrade from falling into enemy hands or stop an attack on the Organization. However, what is far more important is the fact that our resistance, our refusal to surrender, is a step toward the final victory of the revolution. If this "step" is taken into account, in isolation, it may appear very small and insignificant, but we must not forget that similar resistance is being shown by countless other comrades. One can well imagine the cumulative effect of all the resistance and realize that to take even one "step" back, to fail to resist, is a betrayal of the revolution. Thus, looking at the whole thing in its proper perspective will increase our resistance to torture and enemy tricks.
4. Objective approach to realities. A Marxist awareness enables us to approach realities with due objectivity. In the case of torture what causes fear, demoralization and loss of the spirit of resistance, is quite apart from its physical effect, primarily a subjective view that most people have about it. This view has been augmented by a deliberate propaganda put out by the SAVAK¹ about torture. However, if we look at it objectively, the whole sordid business of torture will lose its real significance. In the final analysis, nothing more important than death can occur under torture, and this presents no problem to a fighter. Psychological torture does have an effect on those who fail to look at it objectively. For example, when they stripped me naked, I reasoned that there was no difference between a bare leg and a bare hand and therefore refused to be affected by it; or that when the muzzle of a revolver is put to one's temple to frighten one, its ultimate physical effect was a bullet that could kill me, and, since I had no fear of dying for the cause, this obviously was of no significance. Hence, it is important to analyze things objectively, to face the enemy with added strength.
5. Absolute distrust of the enemy. The motive behind whatever the enemy does to a captive is one thing and one thing alone: to persuade a fighter to part with his secrets, and, thereby, weaken the movement. Kindness, torture, threats, abuse, various tales about traitors who turned their backs on their ideals, are all designed for this purpose. Hence, it is imperative that we should face the enemy with constant vigilance, and distrust his actions, whether they seem important or apparently insignificant. It is fatal to forget this. It is vitally important to refuse to accept the enemy's kind gestures. Loneliness, constant torture and various mental occupations are a breeding ground for the acceptance of such gestures. There is a bad motive behind the enemy's kind behavior. A little resistance to it will reveal the real motive behind his action and will also strengthen the fighter's morale.

¹ *N.T.P. note:* The Bureau for Intelligence and Security of the State (SAVAK) was the secret police of the Imperial State of Iran. Ashraf Dehghani was tortured by the SAVAK.

6. A correct and philosophical understanding of such terms as “freedom” and “captivity”: under torture and in chains, I had always felt free — and this was truly so. No feeling of conservatism ever prevented me from expressing my hatred of the enemy in the words of my choice. I had given everything for the cause I believed in, and all I had to preserve were my beliefs. In the torturers, I could use their utter dependence on petty and disgraceful matters of day-to-day existence. This knowledge was a source of great strength to me. I had absolute faith in the fact that as a people’s fighter, it was I who should try them; it was I who should determine their fate. Hence, I would have shown myself utterly helpless if I had allowed them to bring me to heel. I believed that my cause and my desires were beyond their comprehension. This feeling of an all-embracing freedom in the face of captivity increased my power of resistance.
7. A prior knowledge of the enemy’s methods in dealing with the fighters: it is imperative to study the experiences gained by other comrades in facing the enemy’s tricks so that they can be neutralized. For example, the enemy tries to pinpoint somebody’s weak spot and dwell on it. The fighter simply refuses to reveal his weak point. Or, by carefully arranging a set of common and useless data, the enemy tries to impress upon a fighter that he (the enemy) is aware of everything. The fighter, having prior knowledge of this enemy ploy, will see through it, and refuse to lose his balance.
8. An unshakable faith in human willpower: if we make a conscious effort to strengthen this faith, all the enemy’s fancy chatter about hypnotism, injections, and force-feeding of some kind of drug, which is supposed to make a prisoner tell secrets while one is asleep, become ineffective. Inculcation is particularly effective in withstanding pain. Thus, under torture I felt no pain for some time. When the torture was prolonged, I desperately wished for the end. Nevertheless, despite such feeling, I never felt morally weak, since I knew that there was eventually an end to such pain — death. Until death came, I was determined to stand upright. Hence, the question of speaking or not speaking had never been a serious problem. I ought to mention here that in our previous day-to-day living, Comrade Behrouz² and I had always tried to strengthen the power of inculcation in ourselves.
9. Thinking about the resistance of other fighters and their courageous stand against the enemy. The history of the movement of the world is full of epic resistance by fighters; no less so is the history of the Iranian people’s struggle, particularly in recent years. This can be a source of strength to all true fighters.

Needless to say the factors mentioned above can operate in a negative way; for example, insufficient hatred for the enemy; seeing the movement as a momentary episode and failing to realize its historical importance; trusting the enemy and treating him leniently; lack of sufficient faith in one’s own willpower; these are the factors that help to demoralize a fighter.

Moreover, a fighter who fails to face his weaknesses with absolute honesty and does not criticize himself, fails to tackle his selfishness and bourgeois tendencies; and he who fails to take

² *N.T.P. note:* Behrouz Dehghani (1939–1971) was Ashraf Dehghani’s older brother and was also a member of the OIPFG. While Ashraf was being tortured in prison, Behrouz was arrested and died under torture without giving sensitive information to his torturers.

steps to correct his weaknesses, will be unable to resist torture, in spite of the faith he has in the struggle.

A man who becomes used to deluding himself, who fails to face his own faults with revolutionary honesty and even lies to himself, is the most likely to become a traitor, since lying is the beginning of treachery.



Ashraf Dehghani, 1970s

“For me, to practice sumud meant to exist” (Riyad)

The following untitled testimony was shared by a Palestinian, Riyad, and published in English in the 2014 paper “Sumud: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons” by Lena Meari, a researcher from Birzeit University in the West Bank.

Since the beginning of its colonial project, the State of Israel has routinely tortured captured Palestinians. In the late 1960s the concept of *sumud* (from *ṣumūd*, meaning “steadfastness”) emerged among the Palestinian people as a cultural value and a strategy of resistance to the colonial occupation. In the following decades *sumud* was used by Palestinian militants to resist torture, as shown in this testimony.

Although *sumud* is specific to the Palestinian people, we believe that the sense of belonging at the core of *sumud* can be found or developed in other communities and that anarchists, in particular, could draw inspiration from *sumud* and develop their own cultural-political values to help comrades resist the violence of the State.

In 1991 after six months of disappearance to avoid arrest, I went to visit my parents. The occupation forces came to arrest me and injured me while I tried to escape. As usual, beating and insulting began in the car. I was thinking about *sumud* then as I read texts such as *Falsafat al-muwajaha*.¹ In the interrogation center I was constantly moving between the *shabah*² and interrogation sessions. They used all the techniques [...] deprivation of food and sleep, the closet, the refrigerator, shaking. [...] They brought my father to the interrogation and threatened to bring my mother. Twelve interrogators interrogated me. [...] In each moment in the interrogation I was inventing strategies to practice *sumud*. I refer to *sumud* in the interrogation as the collective spirit, the belief in Palestine’s just cause, sincerity and loyalty, sense of belonging, self-confidence, and nurturance of the self throughout a long period. During the long interrogation sessions and torture I thought of my *sumud* as defending my mother and the mothers of others. I was continually thinking about the martyrs and captives and the Palestinians-in-*sumud*. I thought about the martyr Ibrahim El-Ra’ii³ and constantly recited songs by the band Sabrin. I was in love with a girl and thought that if I practice *sumud* I would deserve her love. For me, to practice *sumud* meant to exist.

¹ *N.T.P. note:* *Falsafat al-muwajaha wara’ al-qudban* (The Philosophy of Confrontation Behind Bars) is a handbook detailing the interrogation techniques of the Israel Security Agency (better known as the Shabak or Shin Bet) and how these techniques can be defeated through practicing *sumud*. It was written in prison in 1978 by Mahmood Fanoon and later distributed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Palestinian Marxist–Leninist organization.

² *N.T.P. note:* A torture technique consisting in tying a person in painful positions.

³ *N.T.P. note:* A Palestinian militant who died under torture in an Israeli prison in 1988.

Hot and Cold (Nathan Gilbert Quimpo)

The following text is an excerpt from the chapter “Hot and Cold” of the book “Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years,” in which members of the Quimpo family relate their resistance to the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, from the 1960s to the 1990s.

This particular chapter was written by Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, and details his arrest and torture by the military in 1976. Nathan was a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), an underground revolutionary organization fighting against the dictatorship. One month before his arrest Nathan had moved from Manila, the capital of the Philippines, to Cebu City, where he had been tasked by the CPP to carry out “propaganda and cultural work.” In Cebu City he lived with other comrades from the CPP — Lani, Ernie, Evelyn — in a safe house in the residential area of Labangon.

We find this text to be an interesting example of the pitfalls — and potential benefits — of the practice of providing false, useless, misleading, or incomplete information to torturers. Note that despite the brutality of the treatments described here, Nathan explained in a 2019 interview with The Platypus Affiliated Society that the torture he experienced “was nothing compared with the torture of other activists.”

1

[...]

“Come with us!” One of the men grabbed and twisted my arm, then handcuffed me. The men shoved me toward the door. [...]

They led me outside in handcuffs, through the college campus and out to the busy street. In broad daylight, my captors casually hailed a cab. I was made to sit in the back, blindfolded between two of the men, and was told to keep my head low, touching my knees.

When the blindfold was removed, I found myself handcuffed to a chair desk in what looked like an ordinary classroom, with a teacher’s table and chair, chair desks, and blackboards on the front wall. The only things that did not seem to fit were slabs of wood piled in a corner of the room. Apart from my captors, several other plainclothesmen moved in and out of the room. The men searched me. I had nothing on me except the clothes I was wearing and some pocket money. I did not even have a wallet or a *cedula* [residence certificate]. I was fingerprinted and made to fill out some forms.

I put down false entries. Name? Leonardo Buensuceso. [...] Address? 542 Second Street, San Beda Subdivision, San Miguel, Manila. Years ago, our family lived at 538 Second Street. House number 542 did not exist.

As I filled out the forms, I thought of what I was going to say during interrogation. My cover story would be that I was involved in a church-related research project on the religious and social life of students in the Visayas.¹ I had just arrived in Cebu and would be leaving soon. Yes, I would tell them that I arrived on September 20, not September 8. That way, if I had to account for my activities in Cebu, I would only have to make up stories for the last three weeks. As I had done during my previous arrest, I would withhold my true identity for a while, to buy time. I decided to also withhold the fact that I was a former political detainee.

I agreed to play chess with two of the men to ease my tension and hopefully delay interrogation. After nearly an hour, lunch was served — a decent meal of rice, meat, and vegetables. Despite my anxiety, I savored the rice, as the *kasama* [comrades] and I had been eating ground corn for the past month to save money.

Then it was interrogation time. The men in the room asked me questions in rapid fire.

“Is this really your name — Leonardo Buensuceso?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, *sir*.”

“Yes, *sir*.”

“Leo for short?”

“Yes... *sir*.”

“Where do you live?”

“542 Second Street, San Beda Subdivision. I wrote it there on the form you gave me... *sir*.”

“But this is a Manila address. What is your address here in Cebu?”

“I don’t live here. I’m just here for several weeks to do research.”

“Research, huh? Where are you staying right now?”

Of all things, I had forgotten to think up an address in Cebu. I could not come up with one — all the houses I had been to were those of *kasama* or allies. “Ahh — Skyvue Hotel,” I finally blurted out.

“Skyvue Hotel? You can afford to stay in Skyvue Hotel? What’s your room number?”

“I don’t remember, *sir*.”

“You’re really staying there? That’ll be easy for us to find out, you know. What name did you use when you registered?”

“Leonardo Buensuceso.”

“Call Skyvue,” the man who seemed to be in charge directed one of the younger agents.

I’m done for, I groaned to myself. I won’t be able to talk my way out now.

Within a few minutes, the agent was back. No Leonardo Buensuceso was registered in Skyvue. I could not describe how Skyvue’s lobby and rooms looked to back up my story, since I had never been inside the hotel.

The agents pressed me for my real address in Cebu. I stuck to Skyvue Hotel or just kept mum, since I could not think up another address. They asked other questions — when and how I was recruited into the movement and into the CPP, who recruited me, who my colleagues were. Making up stories about my political involvement in Manila was easy enough. All I had to do was talk about my pre-martial law involvement in KM-Ateneo² and maintain that I had transferred

¹ *N.T.P. note:* The Visayas are a geographical division of the Philippines located in the central part of the archipelago. Cebu City is in the Visayas.

² *N.T.P. note:* Kabataang Makabayan (KM) was a communist youth organization in the Philippines. In 1972, president-dictator of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law: the organization was banned and went

to UP³ and had lain low since then. I denied being in the Party.⁴ When asked to name names, I invented them or mentioned *kasama* who were dead or who had been previously arrested. It was Cebu, this unfamiliar place, that gave me problems — when and how I arrived, what places I had been to, what my assignment was, whom I had met. My interrogators threatened to beat me up when I did not answer. They repeated questions over and over, or came back to them, when they were not satisfied with my responses. Having been caught in a fib, I could not summon enough courage to demand to know on what charges they were holding me.

My interrogators refused to believe the yarn that I had spent most of my time in Cebu doing research in public and school libraries. They also rejected my claim of having arrived in Cebu only on September 20. They appeared increasingly infuriated. When it became apparent that I was uncooperative and that their grilling was going nowhere, they changed their tactics.

2

Hot and cold. Part of the *kasama*'s lexicon were these two words to describe tactical interrogations. It entailed several hours of severe beatings, followed by a recess. A sympathetic, often soft-spoken officer orders your tormentors away and speaks to you in private, urging you to confide in him to save yourself. If you persist in your silence, the procedure is repeated until your captors gain their objective or tire of the game.

Hot. They removed my glasses and blindfolded me again. With my left hand still handcuffed to the chair, some 12 men started roughing me up. Thud! I felt a slab of wood hit my head. I cried out.

"Where are you staying in Cebu? Where?" barked someone in a husky voice.

Thud! Another blow on my back. To my horror, I realized what the incongruously placed wooden slabs were for.

"Where are you staying?"

They pummeled my body with blows, hit and slapped me hard on the face, delivered karate chops on my shoulders, and kicked my legs.

"When did you arrive?"

"What is your mission here?"

"Are you a member of the CPP?"

"Where are you staying?"

It was the first time in my life I had been beaten up. Each time they hit me, I cried out in pain. I struggled, but my left arm remained handcuffed to the chair and restricted my movements. As I flailed with my right hand, my watch hit someone. They took it off. I begged and pleaded, "Stop, please. Have pity on me! I have anemia." It wasn't true. I just wanted them to stop. Weighing less than a hundred pounds, I could have been anemic.

As I still proved stubborn, the men stripped me naked and thrust a live wire, probably a telephone wire, at my genitals and thighs. I screamed. They continued beating me up. When I

underground. The Ateneo de Manila University (or simply "Ateneo") is a private university located in Quezon City, the most populous city in the Philippines. KM-Ateneo was the chapter of KM at this university. Here, Nathan admits his involvement in KM-Ateneo before the martial law, that is, before it was banned.

³ *N.T.P. note:* The University of the Philippines (UP) is a public university in the Philippines.

⁴ *N.T.P. note:* "Party" here refers to the CPP.

cried out again, they stuffed a piece of cloth into my mouth. They delivered more blows. “Are you still not going to talk?” one of them asked. More blows. The same question. More...

Finally, I nodded. They removed the blindfold and then the cloth from my mouth, which I discovered was my underwear. Sobbing, I told them who I was, that I had been detained in Ipil,⁵ that my brothers were also exdetainees and my sister was currently detained. I said I requested to be redeployed to work in Cebu because I was already known to the military in Manila. I admitted being a candidate-member in the CPP. Asked who recruited me into the Party, I mentioned Bill Begg,⁶ without saying that he had already been killed. I tried to keep talking, between sobs, for as long as I could. What I told my interrogators was new to them, but everything about the Quimpo arrests and detentions⁷ was already in the military files. I was not actually providing them with any sensitive tactical information. Soon, however, the interrogators saw through my ploy and started demanding my Cebu address again.

Cold. This time, instead of beating me up, they resorted to smooth talk. “Why don’t you cooperate with us?” a fatherly-looking agent said, putting an arm on my shoulder. “Look at yourself now. We don’t want to be doing this to you.” They removed the handcuffs and allowed me to put my clothes back on. They returned my glasses and my watch. More words of “advice.” Then they served me *merienda* [snacks] — biscuits and Coke. When I had finished eating, they put a piece of paper and a ballpoint pen on the desk and ordered me to write down what I had been doing in Cebu since my arrival, to name and describe persons I had met and identify places I had been to — or else.

It was clear to me that the men would not stop unless I gave them my Cebu address. But divulging the Labangon house was just not possible — Lani, Ernie, Evelyn, other *kasama* would surely be captured if I did. What address could I possibly give? If only I knew of a house of someone who was clearly not politically involved, or a post⁸ no longer used, or an abandoned house. I could not recall any. Then it occurred to me that the Labangon house would definitely be abandoned as a result of my arrest. I could not divulge the address now — I would have to give the *kasama* enough time to vacate it. The practice among comrades was that a UG house [underground house] would have to be abandoned within 24 hours of the arrest of anyone who had been there. The *kasama* would realize that I had been arrested only in the evening, when I did not return. To be sure that they would have ample time to escape, I needed to endure the torture and keep stalling until tomorrow evening. Would I last that long?

Hot. The men came back. I had not written anything on the paper before me. They were furious. They transferred me to a smaller room. The beating resumed with greater intensity. I was made to stand most of the time, my handcuffs removed, but I was still blindfolded, and stripped naked. Aside from delivering hard blows on my body and slaps to my face, they banged my head against the concrete wall and pounded the butt of a pistol on the back of my hand. Several times, the force of their blows sent me reeling to the floor and groveling in pain.

I dropped my Skyvue Hotel story, but I could not come up with an alternative. Apart from demanding my address, my torturers kept asking when I actually arrived in Cebu. They insisted

⁵ *N.T.P. note:* Nathan had previously been detained at the “Ipil Reception Center,” the largest prison for political prisoners during the martial law.

⁶ *N.T.P. note:* An activist from KM.

⁷ *N.T.P. note:* Quimpo is Nathan’s family name. The “Quimpo arrests and detentions” refer to the information Nathan just gave the torturers about his brothers and sister.

⁸ *N.T.P. note:* A “post” was “a safe meeting place and drop-off point for sensitive documents and correspondence.”

that I had lied about my date of arrival. I stuck to September 20. Finally, they showed me a photograph with three other *kasama* and me clearly in it. We were emerging from a side road into what looked like the main thoroughfare. It must have been taken from the second floor of a house across the main road. Yes, I recognized the place — Cabahug!⁹ It was where I was first introduced to Lani. The meeting post must have been known to the military for some time. I tried to recall when that meeting took place. The photo must have been taken on September 18, two days prior to the date I claimed to have arrived in Cebu. No wonder my torturers refused to believe my story about arriving on September 20.

Conceding that my September 20 story had also collapsed, I revealed the true date of my arrival, September 8, even furnishing them with the name of the boat I had traveled on, the MV Cebu City, and the fake name I had used. I stated, however, that I had come by myself, that I met the Cebu *kasama* upon my arrival, and that they had attended to me ever since.

“Who met you at the pier?” asked Husky Voice. He seemed to be my main interrogator.

“Karyong, the one in the photo.” Although Rod was in the picture, I pointed to someone else whose name I could not remember. If you can’t beat them, mislead them, I thought.

“Who’re the others in the photo?”

“I don’t know, sir. I only met them once, in that meeting.”

My new storyline was that I had been shifted from one place to another, always accompanied by a *kasama* whenever I went out, and that by myself I would not be able to locate any of the houses I had been to. My interrogators made me describe all the houses I mentioned and all the people I met in those houses. To check that I was not just inventing a certain person, they made me describe this person all over again after 10 or 20 minutes. On the whole, I managed to be consistent. The trick was to think of a real person, like a politically uninvolved friend in Manila, change his or her name a bit, and then describe him or her.

“Did you get to meet Tony T?”

“I don’t recall meeting anyone by that name.”

“He uses the alias Delio.” They showed me a photograph. Although the picture was not very clear, I definitely recognized the man who had outlined my assignments in Cebu, the same person I had met in Loyola Heights¹⁰ over two years before.

“No, sir,” without batting an eyelid.

The second interrogation session ended without my interrogators extracting my Cebu address from me. “We’ll get it from you somehow,” one of the men vowed. “The night is still young.”

3

They served me supper. Fearing that I would have indigestion and vomit if they beat me up again, I ate very little. But I drank a lot — I had sweated a great deal during the ordeal.

Shortly after supper, the third bout began. The men smelled of liquor and sounded gruff. My anxiety grew. Would they still be able to control themselves?

Even after six hours of grilling and torture, I still had not given my interrogators any information of real tactical value. I sensed that they knew this and that they resented my putting one over them. Nonetheless, I replayed the story I had fabricated during the second session. Again,

⁹ *N.T.P. note:* Cabahug was a “post” (a safe house) in Cebu City.

¹⁰ *N.T.P. note:* A district of Quezon City.

I was blindfolded and stripped naked. The mauling resumed. I stuck to my new story since the men could no longer point to any inconsistencies or major missing pieces in it. My cover story held — except for my Cebu address. Soon my oppressors focused their questioning solely on this. It was the only item left that they could make tactical use of. I sensed that they were now racing against time. They knew that if they did not force the address out of me now, the other *kasama* at this address would be able to flee.

“Thud! Thud!” Some of their blows were landing on my lower ribs. The beating was even more intense and prolonged than during the second bout. I dropped to the floor many times, but they picked me up each time and continued to pummel me with blows, kicks, and karate chops. What hurt most was when they banged my head against the wall. I thought I would pass out. For hours, they gave me no respite even though I was exhausted and feeling very weak.

“Would you like us to use the ‘truth serum’ on you as we have on your comrades?” threatened Husky Voice. “It’ll make you tell us the truth. We don’t really want to resort to it because it’ll have lasting psychological effects on you. Possibly even make you crazy.”

I had heard of the truth serum from other detainees. It did not really force you to tell the truth; it just made you more garrulous, more apt to say things you would have preferred not to talk about. And sometimes it did leave permanent psychological damage.

“No, please. No, sir.”

“Then you better tell us where you’re staying.”

The beating continued. Why didn’t they stop? It seemed to me that I was nearing the end of my rope; I would not be able to endure the blows any longer. Tomorrow evening was too distant, it seemed like an eternity. Then an idea flashed in my head. What if I pretended that they had broken me and just invented a Cebu address? Would that work? Would they not ask me to describe the house inside and out? Still, I thought of giving it a try. I was desperate.

“1-4-8 Jakosalem,” I cried out as they continued to maul me. Jakosalem, as far as I could recall, was a long street that was mainly residential but had some commercial establishments. I hoped 148 Jakosalem was a house, not a shop, so the story would have some credibility.

“Stop! Stop!” directed Husky Voice. The beating stopped. Then, moving close to me, he asked, “What did you say?”

“1-4-8 Jakosalem, sir.” I let out a big howl and broke down, weeping disconsolately. They took off the blindfold. Tears flowed freely from my eyes. How dramatic! I had acted in many plays in elementary and high school and even won several acting awards, but school theater was nothing compared to the script I played out now. This was the performance of my life.

It worked! Thinking that they had finally broken me, the men did not bother to ask for a description of 148 Jakosalem. Instead, they consoled me in their own duplicitous manner, “Stop crying now. Your ordeal’s over. You can rest now. See, had you cooperated with us earlier on, you would not have suffered so much.”

I asked for some water; they gave me a glass and a family-size Coke bottle filled with water. I finished the bottle. Feeling sticky all over, I asked if I could wash up. Magnanimously, they let me take a shower. I dried myself with my handkerchief, squeezing out the water several times. By the time they handcuffed me to a bed in the small room, it was nearly 4 a.m. I speculated with some disquiet about what the men would do to me later that day when they discovered that I had given them a false address. It took some time before I fell asleep.

4

There was no word on 148 Jakosalem that day or the next. It was unlikely that they had raided the place — if they had, I would have been a punching bag all over again. Most likely, they had put it under surveillance.

I examined the results of the abuse they had inflicted upon me. A couple of lumps on my head, a numbness over my mouth and cheeks, contusions and swelling near my left wrist, bruises and sore spots in various parts of my body. Fortunately, no broken bones, no marks on my genitals, no permanent disfigurement. And my head was still in one piece. I concluded that my torturers must have been careful not to inflict permanent physical damage or injuries that would leave telltale marks. With my frail build, a single strong blow on the chest would have cracked several ribs. Later, one of the men claimed that the blows they delivered had been measured.

[...]

5

Husky Voice barged into the room. His face was livid. “You fooled us!” he thundered. “The address you gave us was false!”

“Wha — what do you mean?” I feigned ignorance.

“That address you gave — 148 Jakosalem — it was a clinic, a dental clinic. No one was living there. Now you better tell us your true address or we’ll beat the living daylights out of you!”

He did not wait for me to reply. He slapped me hard on the face and then punched me in the stomach. Other men came in and joined in the action. They were getting careless — they forgot to blindfold me.

“Labangon,” I said calmly. “It’s a house in Labangon.”

They stopped beating me. “What’s the house number?” one of them asked suspiciously, showing me his fist.

“No number. The houses there do not have numbers. If you take a jeepney,¹¹ you get down at the corner at the *capilla* [chapel] of San Isidro. It’s the sixth house after the bridge, on the right, just after a small *sari-sari* store [small convenience store].”

They asked me to describe the place in detail, inside and out. I did. They seemed convinced that I was finally telling the truth. After several minutes questioning me and listening to my description of the house, they scrambled out of the room. It certainly looked like they were going to stage a raid that very evening. Well, they would surely come up empty-handed. I glanced at my watch and did some mental calculations. It had been more than 78 hours since my arrest. Then I fretted a bit. What if, in violation of security policies, the *kasama* had not vacated the house?

No news that evening. Nor the following day or the day after. But no news was probably good news — no new arrests.

Five days after my arrest, they let in a balding, middle-aged man with a doctor’s bag and a stethoscope. He examined me cursorily. The traces of my ordeal had subsided but were still very evident. He did not comment on them. He asked me if I had anemia. Perhaps my anemia story had helped, after all, making the men moderate the strength of their blows. I nodded. He inspected my fingernails, and then looked under my eyelids. “No anemia,” he concluded. The doctor left. I

¹¹ *N.T.P. note:* A jeep used for public transportation in the Philippines.

never saw a copy of a medical certificate afterwards. I think that my interrogators merely wanted to make sure their blows had left no lasting marks on me.

My interrogators typed out a statement in which I confessed to engaging in subversive activity. They had me read and sign it. The statement was ridiculously self-contradictory. It included things I had made up, including both the Jakosalem and Labangon stories. [...] I signed the statement. It would be easy to retract everything later. [...]



Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, 2009

Why We Executed Mpampalis (June 1978)

This text is an excerpt from a communiqué published by the Greek revolutionary group “June 1978” following the assassination of Petros Mpampalis in 1979.

Petros Mpampalis was a torturer and police officer during the period of the “junta” — the military dictatorship that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. After the end of the dictatorship, Petros Mpampalis was sentenced to 18 months in prison for his torture of political prisoners. June 1978 was likely a branch of the “Revolutionary Organization 17 November,” a Greek Marxist–Leninist urban guerrilla group.

We share this text as one example (among many) of revolutionaries fighting back against State torture through the physical elimination of a torturer.

As of today, the despicable and hated torturer, police officer Petros Mpampalis, no longer exists. He was executed by a group of fighters. His personality and actions are known to everyone. During the period of the junta, his actions and reputation surpassed Greece’s borders.

He was one of the leaders of the repressive forces and head of the persecuting apparatus of Asfaleia.¹ With particular ferocity, he sought to strike the fighters of the resistance against the junta and the regime that created it.

He was responsible for the brutal terrorism of Asfaleia. He was responsible for the horrific torture of thousands and thousands of individuals. He was responsible for destroying the health and the lives of hundreds of fighters and not only them, but also anyone who, for any reason, found themselves in the hands of the forces of Asfaleia. He was responsible for the “elevation” of hundreds of informers as elite torturers, many of whom still continue their actions today and are becoming increasingly essential pillars of the State power of the bosses.

[...]

Therefore, we, a group of fighters, a part of the forces of the popular and revolutionary movement of our country, decided to execute Petros Mpampalis:

- Because he was the notorious torturer and police officer of Asfaleia and he had to pay for his countless crimes;
- Because he continued, even after his criminal actions as a torturer, to be a significant instrument and conscious participant of the “unofficial” repression and terror apparatuses of the regime against proletarians, and;
- Because through him and his actions, a specific “representative function” of the system of capitalist power, violence and abuse was expressed.

¹ *N.T.P. note:* Asfaleia (Ασφάλεια), which can be translated as “Security,” refers to a police force from the period of the junta that was particularly hated for its brutal ways.

And this “representative function” is a very specific and continuous practice, essential for maintaining exploitation and oppression, and it is not an abstract “institution.” We will confront and fight this practice of violence and abuse with specific and continuous struggles, not with vague declarations and protests, which as has been shown, not only do not help at all but also distract, reassure, and weaken every disposition and will to fight.

[...]

TO DEVELOP THE POPULAR AND REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE AGAINST THE TERRORISM OF THE REGIME AND THE EXPLOITATION OF THE BOSSES

TO STRIKE WITH ALL MEANS THE OFFICERS AND THE APPARATUSES THAT SUPPORT THEM

THE POPULAR AND REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE IS THE ONLY WAY TO OVERTHROW CAPITALIST POWER — THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

“But who deserves to live?” (Alfredo Bonanno)

The following text is an excerpt from the book “L’ospite inatteso” (“The Unexpected Guest”) by Alfredo Bonanno, published in Italian in 2013.

Alfredo Bonanno (1937–2023) was an Italian anarchist. Proponent of insurrectionary anarchism, he pursued his ideals in many ways throughout his life, both in his writings and in action. He was imprisoned and tortured several times and wrote this book in 2010 while imprisoned in Greece for an alleged bank robbery. In “The Unexpected Guest” Alfredo recounts his direct involvement in the assassinations of torturers, informers, traitors, and other agents of State repression in various parts of the world in the 1970s: in Greece against the military dictatorship, in Palestine against Israel’s colonial rule, and in Northern Ireland against the British forces. The figure of the “unexpected guest,” recurrent throughout the book, is a symbol of death that comes without warning, it is the role that Alfredo or one of his comrades assumed in action at the moment of killing their target.

In this particular excerpt, remembering his involvement in Northern Ireland, Alfredo shares his doubts regarding his past actions and offers us an attempt at an ethical evaluation of the act of killing torturers and other State “monsters.”

I would often find the unexpected guest by my side. One never gets used to seeing it at work. Crushing, eradicating, destroying a life, such is its way of being, its unexpected existence, that no one desires, imposed as an abhorrent, but necessary act of low justice. Getting involved in this requires great preparation, not technical — it’s the least of one’s worries — but personal, intimate, moral. Its presence disturbs and fascinates at the same time. Someone who, a moment earlier, was a living being, full of life, capable of hate, love, anticipation, procreation and all that the future could offer him, is suddenly not capable, because of his encounter with the unexpected guest, of any of that; he lies on the ground, crushed, like a puppet whose strings have been cut, an old rag, a motionless mass of flesh that will start decomposing in a few days. Where did this explosive potential, for good and evil, go? It went up in smoke, the unexpected guest grabbed it and took it away.

[...]

One less monster. How many tortures avoided? Similar to those I endured myself and to others, unknown to me. Such a monster did not deserve to live. A sentence to contemplate. But who deserves to live? One who behaves well. But what does it mean, to behave well? Respecting the rules? No torture. Centuries of prison, legal executions and all the rest of it. Is that behaving well? Is the one who kills after receiving a piece of paper signed by a judge less responsible than another who kills while torturing after being verbally ordered to do so? Come on, let’s be serious.

And if we became serious, then very few people would be left alive. Where is the dividing line? Who is in charge of tracing it? Is it clear? Or sketched at random, a little twisted, this person inside and that person outside? A difficult discussion when exploring its extreme consequences. Who decides? Who executes? [...] This radical cut [...] did not only remove a human monstrosity — and only human beings can be that monstrous — but also any critical consideration. Every question remained unanswered.

Even in our group some comrades were convinced of the soundness of what they were doing and others uncertain. [...] The monstrosity of some human beings, some tasks, some State agencies, or of bounty hunters and paid killers, isn't it a weed that needs to be uprooted at any cost? At any cost? Of course, a cost assessment is always required. One cannot be monstrously able to kill monsters, this would amount to replacing them, or rather doubling the massacres. So one needs discernment. Is this discernment unachievable in the ardor of clandestine struggle? Unachievable when operating in a country occupied by a foreign army? Maybe. Or were there alternatives that were not considered? Paying more attention to the information? A better, more careful selection of objectives? Did we not sometimes run the risk of hitting the easiest target? Weren't some actions, sometimes, carried out to pin a new metaphorical stripe on our chests? I do not know. I am not saying that this is what indeed happened, I am saying that I was uncertain for years. As a clandestine combat unit, we had to show signs of life. Work, continuously check and cross-reference, carry out actions, bring into play the unexpected guest. What more could we do as a clandestine combat unit? Bite our nails? But who granted this supreme authority, that we delegated, after a long and arduous work, to the unexpected guest? Certainly not the information we received from the movement in Dublin,¹ which was almost always limited to background information, simple mentions of places and a few pictures, along with, though not systematically, a short history of the individual's misdeeds. Did we grant this authority to ourselves by identifying the individual's monstrous behavior with our rigorous, double-checked observations and days or weeks of work? I don't think so. [...] Then the authorization came from the conviction of having in front of us a monster unworthy of belonging to the community of humans, of which we are all a part of, not only liberators like myself, but also slaves and even those who run the world of doing by exploiting the slaves' work. Well, this monster had to be put in front of the unexpected guest because through his doing he placed himself outside of this community. A way of comforting ourselves when faced with the incomprehensible.

¹ *N.T.P. note:* Capital of Ireland. The resistance movement from which Alfredo and his comrades received information on their targets was based in Dublin.

“This is a cold welcoming” (Andrés Tzompaxtle Tecpile, John Gibler)

The following text comes from the book “Torn from the World: A Guerrilla’s Escape from a Secret Prison in Mexico” by John Gibler, published in English in 2018 (after a first publication in Spanish in 2014).

The book tells the story of the arrest, torture, and escape of Andrés Tzompaxtle Tecpile, a militant from the Mexican guerrilla movement Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR, Popular Revolutionary Army). In 1996, Andrés was arrested by the Mexican military and was disappeared: he was held in hidden detention facilities, denied any communication with the outside world, and authorities never acknowledge the arrest.¹ Andrés was brutally tortured with beatings, electric shocks, and threats of rape, but did not provide any sensitive information to the torturers. After several months of torture he managed to escape the facility where he was being held and regain his freedom. A few years later John Gibler conducted several interviews with Andrés while the latter was in clandestinity. The book is based on those interviews.

The events described here took place a few days after Andrés’ escape. He has managed to contact his comrades from the EPR who have sent people to pick him up and bring him to a safe house to meet commanders from the organization. Andrés describes this difficult reunion in which his comrades are skeptical of his claim of having escaped the detention facility and wonder if he may have been “turned” by the Mexican military and may now be working as a double agent. Italicized words are direct quotes from the interviews, the rest is written by John Gibler based on the interviews.

We find that Andrés’ testimony raises complex questions about trust, comradeship, and how to welcome back comrades into our communities after they have been tortured.

Some people pick you up. They take you to a house in a large city. They disguise you clumsily with makeup and a wig. During the drive they treat you with *their characteristic coldness and suspicion*. This is a *cold welcoming*. It is as if they were already telling you: “*We don’t believe a word you say.*”

You arrive at the house. What do you think those waiting at the house to see you will do when you arrive? Give you a hug? Show joy, or mistrust? You can’t even imagine it. You only know that you must tell them everything.

The commanders [of the EPR] for the Valley of Mexico, Óscar and Vicente, arrive. The first interrogations are hard, stemming from distrust: “Whom did you rat out? How much money did you negotiate your release for?”

¹ N.T.P. note: Forced disappearances followed by the murder of the disappeared person were carried out at the time in Mexico by the Mexican Armed Forces and other State agencies, and have become even more common in recent years: it is estimated that between 2006 and 2025 tens of thousands of civilians have been disappeared by the State.

During this first stage you do not resist. You don't interrupt them, nor debate. Sometimes you can't even talk. Even though that is precisely what you want to do: You want someone to listen to you. But the dynamic here is different. Not only suspicion, which is understandable, but even the rhythm and tone of the interrogation. You start to relive everything...

Later the ones charged with studying you arrive, those who will determine whether you tell truth or lies. They take you to a psychologist and a psychiatrist. They fill you with pills. And the interrogations... You want them to listen to you, but they turn that into an interrogation. It is as if they had pulled you from that scene and then... I mean... no, no... They take x-rays of your whole body, more than thirty x-rays to see if you have a microchip implanted somewhere. Rather than caring about your state of health, they are investigating to make sure you don't "have a tail."

They tell you: "You don't have any visible scars. It doesn't look like you've been beaten. We just don't see the evidence."

It is so common to say that a torture survivor needs to come out of captivity bleeding, mutilated, dragging pieces of one's body along the floor. Those people don't understand that torturers, with all their diabolical, inhuman methodology, have been perfecting their techniques. These aren't the medieval tortures. No. In some cases the manner of causing another's pain doesn't change... Today they can wrap you up in a blanket and beat you with baseball bats without leaving visible scars. They can dislocate your joints and it won't be because they tied you to a horse.

Despite this, you don't feel resentful toward your compañeros. You don't feel hatred. But you know that they do not understand the magnitude of the damage done, the martyrdom of the body to the human being. They lack that depth of conscience.

[...] But you want them to listen to you; you want to speak, speak, speak. But they criticize everything you say. You are telling your story and they interrupt you and say: "No, you're wrong there. It doesn't feel like that. It feels this other way." And deep inside yourself your question to them remains constant: Have you ever been there? They tell you: "No, they didn't want to kill you. They just wanted to scare you." And you only think: Oh, you should have told me so earlier, assholes, because I thought they were going to kill me.

Faced with your comrades' distrust and callousness, you think: Now I just want the person who lived through something to speak. It shouldn't be hidden. This isn't for me or for them to interpret. It is just an experience. One experience amongst many, yes, but this one is mine to tell. Others cannot tell their stories. Perhaps when they reappear. I didn't do what I did just to tell, or write, the story. After so much suffering, so much mistrust, and this denial... I don't care. I don't care and I have no intention of defending myself. Why? Because if it was this or that, or the fight, or something else... Fuck it. I have never been that person, nor am I now nor will I ever be. That is not my dream. This is what a rebel must face: either you win or you get screwed in every sense, on every level, with your every move. Okay then, I assume my role as rebel now and always. I identify with that role and not with any other. I don't see it any other way. And I could have never told the story. I could have never said: I am. The one thing that is certain in all this is that I did not fight for an individual, I fought for a different world, for humanity with all that it faces. And this is what happened to me. The fight is against a criminal State, against a State that murders, against a State that massacres, that disappears, that kills. This is hard. I invent, unmake, and take apart my character. Only I can administer the telling of the story so as not to suffer damage. Because to tell the story only to tell it, besides being uncomfortable, is painful. I think that every time I tell the story other things come out, the hidden damage, or the permanence of that hidden damage, or perhaps the healing of it all.

I am not going to force myself to convince you. Perhaps you'll become convinced of something, or a part of it, of one day of it, of nothing, or of everything. I don't know. I simply bear it. That is how I understand it and it is not my role to convince anyone. It is not... I am not the one who should be giving explanations. I can do so. Yes. I could answer your absurd questions. I could accept your ridiculous observations, your racist assessment,² your arrogance, your delirium in imagining things that don't exist. I could, but no, that also is not a part of my dream.

² *N.T.P. note:* Andrés is Nahua — an Indigenous group in Mexico. By “racist assessment,” he refers to the fact that his commanders could not believe that a Nahua man from a small village would be capable of withstanding what he did, or of planning and carrying out the escape as he did.

Postface (No Trace Project)

In “The Unexpected Guest,” Alfredo Bonanno wrote that power “comprises in itself the urgency that drives it to resort to massacre and torture.” We believe this to be true. Military dictatorships must routinely torture to ensure their self-preservation. Democracies, if they do not routinely torture already, will do so as soon as they feel sufficiently threatened. Underground organizations are certainly not immune: nine years after Nathan Gilbert Quimpo was tortured by the military for his membership in the Communist Party of the Philippines, the Party’s armed wing reportedly tortured and killed at least 60 of its own sympathizers in a mass “purge.” We therefore contend that the issue of torture is of concern to all who want to abolish all institutions that perpetuate authority, and the power they carry within them.

Then, what to do?

We suggest that a first step anarchists take against torture is to carry out an assessment of the risks and modalities of torture in their context, including of:

- The selection criteria for torture. Whether a person is tortured after their arrest may depend on the crimes they are suspected of having committed, on their political affiliation or suspected political affiliation, or on their ethnicity, nationality, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religion, etc.
- The objective of torture. While all torture, to an extent, serves to intimidate the victim and/or third parties, some torture is genuinely carried out in the hope of extracting information from the victim, while other torture purely aims to terrorize.¹
- The torture techniques. These can depend on the instructions and habits of torturers, as well as on their willingness or unwillingness to leave lasting marks of torture on the victim and/or to kill the torture victim.
- The length of torture. Torture may be limited to the moment of arrest, or occur exclusively or mainly in the first hours or days of detention, or occur for weeks, months or years.

Anarchists can then develop individual and collective strategies based on this assessment, such as:

- An emphasis on security principles such as compartmentalization and the need-to-know principle. Comrades should know as little sensitive information as possible so that they simply don’t have much information to give to torturers.
- Communication protocols that allow learning as quickly as possible when a comrade is arrested, in order to take immediate steps to:

¹ *N.T.P. note:* For example, the systematic torture in Diyarbakır Prison in Turkey in the mid-1980s aimed to terrorize Kurds with the larger goal of eradicating the Kurdish identity.

- Protect the arrested comrade. In some contexts where torture is limited to the first hours or days of detention, putting pressure on authorities as soon as possible after the arrest (e.g. by involving lawyers or journalists) may help to stop the torture or limit the severity of the acts of torture.
- Protect the comrades who are still free, in case the arrested comrade “talks.” This will depend on what the arrested comrade knows, and can include abandoning safe houses, discontinuing projects, entering clandestinity, etc.
- Preparing psychologically to resist torture. We are unfortunately not able to recommend proven preparation techniques, we can only hope that the insights shared in this collection may help.

Then comes a difficult problem: how to deal with comrades who have been tortured after their release, whether they admit or deny having “talked” under torture, whether we believe them or not. Dmitry Petrov writes that those who have talked “can hardly remain our comrades and participants in the anarchist movement.” Andrés Tzompaxtle Tecpile shows us that when the stakes are high, not having talked may not be enough and your comrades may not believe you. We do not have an answer, but we would like to ask questions. Can we have nuanced approaches? Can we conduct ethical evaluations on a case-by-case basis, with the involvement of the torture victim, as difficult as this may be? Can we give second chances? When we are not sure what to believe, can we both suspend our trust in a comrade and still accompany them, help them heal their pain and trauma, even if they remain, temporarily or permanently, excluded from our activities? Through torture, our enemies seek to destroy and isolate us. If we are able to ask ourselves all these questions, won’t it help us avoid this destruction and this isolation, won’t it bring us closer to the downfall of our enemies?

In this collection’s preface we wrote that torture is a tool “used by the State and its allies in their war against anarchists.” We did not use the term “war” lightly, and it is in this framework that we included in this collection texts that present the assassination of torturers as a potentially useful and appropriate response to this particular aspect of State violence. Again, we do not have answers. We can only encourage comrades to use their best judgment in all situations, and hope that this collection may help get a clearer idea of the issues at hand.

We would like to share a few words from Haifa Zangana, an Iraqi writer, painter, and revolutionary activist, from a book in which she recounts her experience of political repression, torture, and exile:

“Is sadness the first and last resting place? Is it the element that shatters dreams? Agony, stay away and let people wander through the forests of their dreams. At the end of the corridor stands a girl talking to the sun about her fear of darkness, raising a finger, entreating each and every one of us: Is it not time to restore to hope some of its glory?”

— *Haifa Zangana, Dreaming of Baghdad, 2009*

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