Man or Monster?
Hinton, Alexander Laban

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Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer.

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I. Confession
Apology.

Black ink.


Enemies. Attacking from without. Burrowing from within.

First, extract their information. Next, assemble many points for pressuring them so they cannot move. 3. Propagandize and pressure them politically. 4. Pressure and interrogate by cursing. 5. Torture. 6. Examine and analyze the responses for further interrogation. 7. Examine and analyze the responses to make the document. 8. Guard them closely, prevent them from dying. Don’t let them hear one another. 9. Maintain Secrecy.

Cannot hesitate and have ideological doubts that hinder our task, even if that person is our brother or sister or someone whom we trusted.

Interrogation note to Duch: The Situation of Interrogating Ke Kim Huot alias Sot. On the morning of July 21, 1977, we pounded him another round. Electrical wire and feces [“shit”]. This time he cursed those who hit him very much, [and said] Go ahead and beat me to death. Had him eat two or three spoonfuls of feces [“shit”]. . . . by nightfall, we went at him again with electric wires, this time pretty seriously. He became delirious. He was all right. Later he confessed a bit as reported above. . . . Sot said he had nothing to answer to send to Angkar, and since he did not, he did not know what to say, that now he just waits for death, and he can close his eyes and die easily because he has sacrificed and was loyal to the party. . . . My operative line is to continue torture with mastery, because the enemy is breaking emotionally and is at a dead end. Along with this, I ask for opinion and guidance from Angkar in carrying out this task.

Joined the revolution to liberate the country.


The Line. Party line determining politics, ideology, organization, arrest, imprisonment, interrogation, torture, execution. “The crimes came from the Party line of the Communist Party of Kampuchea.” Anyone considered an enemy was to be smashed.

Man or Monster? Mathematical calculation. “Make them think of their wives and children.” Mastery.

Numbers. The S-21 Statistics list. 90 percent of the people are strong and firmly believe in the Party, the collective, and defend the party. 10 percent are weak. 1 percent very weak. 1 percent are enemies. Therefore . . . screen out the enemies no matter what.

The Objective of torturing is to get their answers. It is not done for fun. Therefore we must make them feel pain so that they will respond quickly. Another objective is to make them afraid. It is not done by individual anger to let off steam. Therefore, beat them to make them scared, but absolutely not to let them die. When torturing, it is imperative to check their health in
advance and to inspect the whip. Do not get greedy and want to be quick; that leads to death and loss of a document.

Psychological functioning: obsessive, low self-esteem, depression, traumatic organization, disempathy, splitting, willing participant, need for mentors and strong belief, avoidance, narcissistic self-depreciation, negation, projection, repression, displacement, inhibited dream activity, reaction formation, somatization, avoidance, rationalization, denial.


Smash. To crush or reduce to nothing. A Scream. Silence.

Torture by hand, rod, club, whip, electrical current, waterboarding, suffocation by plastic bag, pliers pulling out toe- and thumbnails, pouring salty water on wounds, eating feces, drinking urine, rape, exposure, poisonous insects, paying homage to the image of a dog.

Ugly habits. Talking to other groups. Not maintaining typewriters. Must be vigilant. It is careless, taking a pregnant woman to put in a new house. She cuts her belly open. When we get sleepy, put the enemy back.


No eXit. Hostage and Actor. Caught in the gears of the revolutionary machine.

You must be vigilant: First, Rough work—careless work → Conflict with the collective. Second, Morality with females.


Source: Most of this text is taken or adapted from ECCC documents from Duch’s trial, including notes from Duch’s interrogation lectures, a memo about the interrogation of a prisoner, and a psychological report on Duch.