

In their hands

A film by [Vincent Detours & Dominique Henry](#)

Directors' note

"I hardly understood the questions. I don't even know if they were questions. There were screams, kinds of screams, accusations and blows. I don't even know if they wanted to obtain information or if they wanted to wear me out physically. You are treated like an animal. The idea of torture for these dictatorships, is to destroy the person. They torture you, shout at you, humiliate you, they want to destroy you to the point of near death."

So spoke Carlos Poma Cruz. Carlos, a Peruvian citizen tortured under the regime of Fujimori¹, although he was innocent. How did he resist? How are people able to do this to other people? With what aim? Why do their torturers not simply kill them? There are some questions to address if we want to understand torture, to reduce its grip and one day, stamp it out.

The effects of torture do not stop with the end of the brutalities. Ethnopsychiatrist Françoise Sironi-Guilbaud, who has worked for years with torture victims, has proposed the concept of intentional trauma. The intentional trauma,² induced by the torturer and encouraged by a political system, can re-appear 15-20 years later. Over several months, we have filmed at the centre Appartenances in Switzerland the psychotherapy of persons destroyed 'in their hands', and who fight to free themselves from the grip of torture. During the trial of Duch, ex-director of the Khmer Rouge Camp S21, Françoise Sironi-Guilbaud was asked to give her psychological evaluation. The archives of her deposition and the testimonies of Duch, edited in parallel to psychotherapy session in the film in order to reveal the psychological and political forces underlying the ruthlessness of a state practicing torture.

The therapeutic mechanism at the heart of *In Their Hands* goes beyond testimony: the characters of the film dare to bear themselves naked; they risk a deep transformation of their being and face up to their fears

¹ Alberto Fujimori was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison on 7th April 2009. He was found guilty of Human Rights violations, notably civilian massacres perpetrated by death squads during his presidency (1990-2000).

² A concept defined by ethnopsychiatrist Françoise Sironi following her work with torture victims.

with extraordinary courage. The life force which has allowed them to survive is impressive. Far from watering down the horrors of torture, *In Their Hands* is however a film which is fundamentally optimistic about the abilities of human beings to rebuild themselves. But this optimism does not exclude anger towards those who seek their destruction.

At a time of cultural reaction, we see this film centered on therapy as a strong political stance. It shows how an act of torture is engraved lastingly in the mind and body of a person, in his/her family and social history and thus shows its true goal.

It would be simplistic and naïve to say that torturers are sadistic perverts with no humanity. This line of speech hides the mechanisms underlying the use of torture. To look the torturer in the eyes, is to recognise the human part in him. In recognizing the human being within the torturer, we are not trivializing his actions or freeing him of guilt, but we understand that we must be extremely careful about ourselves. This does not only happen to other people.

Beyond the denunciation of torture, we want to show how, in exorcising themselves from their suffering, victims and torturers throw light on the deliberately destructive political will that creates them – often in the name of the security, or *πππ*democracy.