

# THE TORTURE OF DEAN FARISANI

by ALLISTER SPARKS, earlier this year.

(Acknowledgements to The Star, and The Observer)

The Lutheran Dean of Venda, a mild and courteous man of 34, recounted last week how he was tortured by the same security police interrogators who have just been found, by an inquest court in that remote tribal homeland, to have beaten one of his lay preachers to death.

Dean Simon Farisani said he was made to do exercises until he collapsed. He was beaten until his eyes bled and his eardrums burst. He was suffocated under a wet canvas hood and subjected to electric shocks to the head, spine and genitals until he lost consciousness.

Three weeks after this torture the delay shock to his nervous system caused him to suffer heart failure and he nearly died. He spent three and a half months in hospital.

Now, six weeks after his release, he is better but still suffering from emotional shock. His hands carve the air agitatedly and his voice rises to a falsetto as he recounts what happened. The Church has given him three months' recuperative leave and he and his wife, Regina, are trying to decide whether they can ever summon the courage to return to Venda where the nightmare occurred.

Farisani believes what was done to him was similar to what killed the lay preacher, Tshifhiwa Muofhe, who died within 24 hours of being detained. Last Monday an inquest found that two security policemen, Captain Muthuphei Ramaligela and Sergeant Phumula Mangaga, had beaten him to death.

This is the first time any inquest court in South Africa or its appendant tribal regions has blamed the security police for the death of a political detainee.

Fifty have died in the past 20 years, the best known being Steve Biko, the black Consciousness leader. Past inquests have attributed the deaths to accidents, suicide, or simply said the cause of the fatal injuries was unknown.

This verdict was given by the former Chief Magistrate of Zimbabwe, Stanley Stainer who took up his new job in Venda on 1 June.

Muofhe, Dean Farisani and three other Lutheran pastors were among a number of people detained last November after African National Congress guerrillas attacked a police station in the centre of Venda's main town of Sibasa.

A policeman was killed in the attack and the homeland authorities, jumpy because they know they are unpopular for accepting independence in South Africa's tribal system, ordered roadblocks and mass arrests.

Farisani knew of the young preacher's death when they took him away — hardly a comforting thought in the days that followed.

First he was locked in a corrugated iron cell near the Limpopo River, just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. The heat was suffocating. But what worried Farisani more was that his interrogators, the same two who have now been blamed for Muofhe's death, tried to force him to write to his wife and friends saying he had fled to Mozambique.

'I realised if I wrote those letters they could kill me, dump my body over the border and use the letters to absolve themselves,' said Farisani. 'So I said "no".'

Farisani's interrogators — 'these two gentlemen,' as he referred to them, without irony but out of an instinctive rural courtesy — demanded that he write a confession implicating himself, Muofhe and the other pastors in the police station attack. When he refused the torture began.

The Dean is not a physically strong man. Portly short would be a tailor's description. He has a rolling walk like a sailor's and is not nimble. His interrogators laughed as he stumbled and crashed about before their blows. 'Hallelujah,' they cried as he prayed for mercy — and eventually death.

'They went beserk,' said Farisani. 'They punched, kicked and hit me with everything they could lay their hands on, even the chairs.'

They flung him around the room, smashing his head against the walls. He started bleeding from the nose, mouth, ears, even the eyes. His eardrum burst.

'I was breathing through my ears,' he said. 'I could hear the air coming out of them as I breathed.'

Next day he was taken to the security police offices in Sibasa. There it was even worse. He was taken into an office at 6 a.m., the curtains were drawn and he was told: 'Nobody comes out of here alive unless he tells us what we want to hear.'

That is when they used the wet canvas hood and the electric shocks. With the hood over his head he felt the interrogators pour a glue-like substance down his spine and connect electric terminals to his ears and the back of his head.

As the current was turned on his brain and spine were shocked and his whole body was convulsed. He lost consciousness. When he came to he was asked again to make the confession. When he refused the wet hood was replaced and he was shocked again. So it went on repeatedly,

the electric terminals sometimes being placed on his inner thighs and genitals.

Farisani does not know how many times he lost consciousness, but when he was finally returned to his cell he had been with 'those gentlemen' 13 hours.

He was finished. At the last he could take no more so he agreed to say whatever his interrogators required. 'I said yes to everything, implicated everyone. I just prayed that God would understand.' □

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# HITCH

by Vortex

The robbers stripped him of all of his valuables, most of his clothes, and left him unconscious. Their blows had been fierce, well-aimed, professional.

He awoke about an hour later, and was aware at once of pain in many places, of stiffness in almost every limb, of a dizziness in the head. He could hear very clearly the sound of cars on the road, and after a while resolved that, for all the agony of movement, he would make his way in that direction. He tried to stand up and walk, but found that impossible, and so dragged himself half-crawling, half like a snake, towards the sould of the world's traffic.

When eventually, after what seemed to be several hours, he pulled himself up onto the grass verge of the road, he found that he could do nothing more than recline in an awkward position, and wave one arm pathetically towards the cars, which whooshed rapidly and violently by as if they were on a racing track.

He waved for many minutes. Perhaps many drivers didn't see him. Some certainly did; they responded by looking suddenly towards the horizon ahead of them, or by accelerating, or by turning towards their companion as if in urgent conversation, or (if they were people of conscience) by slowing down momentarily and then resuming their former speed.

At last a car stopped. A man thrust a worried and harried-looking head towards his side-window. He was a priest. Before John could speak, the man said: "I'm very sorry to see you in this condition. I wish I could help, but unfortunately I'm in a terrible hurry. I'm already late for our

parish council meeting. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll phone the hospital when I arrive. I won't be able to do it at once, as I have to deliver a report under item 2, but we usually break for tea after 50 minutes or so." And with that he accelerated off explosively.

About an hour later another car stopped: it was a smart-looking BMW. The driver leaned towards the window and contemplated John. "Please help me," John said. The driver continued to eye him, in a curiously detached manner, then took a calculator out of his pocket, pressed several buttons swiftly and knowingly, glanced at his result, and then, pocketing the machine, said: "It's not worth it. To assist you, I'm afraid, would be counter-productive in socio-economic terms. I believe that human society has got to learn to conduct its affairs in accordance with a clearly-formulated set of priorities. Forgive me." He returned to the upright position, restarted his car, and drove smoothly and rapidly off.

Nobody else stopped. The occupants of one car that whisked past an hour or so later — an oldish but still powerful car — might perhaps have been willing to stop, even though they all felt that the giving of charitable help was rather reactionary kind of activity; but in fact they didn't notice John at all, as at that moment they were all absorbed in a discussion of the ways in which the whole social system should be transformed.

Eventually, however, one driver did draw his vehicle to a halt with a positive and humane intention. He was the man from the mortuary. □