

Confessions of a creep

GOODBYE FLEET STREET

Robert Edwards

Jonathan Cape £12.95

SALLY VINCENT

cheers, whoopsadaisy, earwig-O then! Wot a larf, eh? Gor swelp me Bob, wozza goodun wunnit? Cap'n Bob ked his ceegar in the missus's wine s. Nossa mucha by your leave. It fair ms the cockles, dunnit? Annee dunnit e, dinnee? Dun it in yore glass, time number, jussa prove wot a witty ty- n he is. Gawd but issa great life, being ed up the arse by the rich and power- Wassat-a-say, Bob, you bin kicked up arse by more rich and powerful people longer than anyone else in the history Fleet Street? Harder, anall. Mussa bin it, Bob.

ang on a sec there, Bob. I'll just nip market a trace and tell these other pun- about it, just on the off-chance they're as *au fait* with your contribution to ish journalism as wot we are. In case don't understand what it takes. Know t I mean, Bob?

et's begin at the beginning. That's als favourite. Right. Hold the front page. e upon a time, when Lord Beaver- brook was still alive, Mr Robert Edwards n't quite an editor. But he was learn- It was the Lord's birthday. Up and n the corridors inside the big black y building of the Lord's empire, grown were anguishing about how best to se their Lord with tokens of their em. This one had a pair of binoculars real leather case, that one a sheepdog stle, also suitably enshrined, case- —He Shepherd, We Sheep, geddit? ow was a mere underling to compete such professional sycophancy? You ldn't think it possible, would you? l, gentle reader, that only proves how e you know about the minds and hearts

of ambitious men. Our hero thought and thought, then swanned off in the office car to a novelty shop where he purchased a cutesie-poo birthday card that not only played a sentimental tune, but gave enough space for young Lochinvar to pen a "message of devotion" to his Lord. Such ingenuous ingenuity did not go unremarked. Not a week later, His Lordship thanked our hero for his charming gift, then complained of being given a broken whistle by another acolyte. The damn thing didn't work, right?

What happens next would appear to be the litmus test that separates real creeps from men who are only playing at it. Mindful of the personal friendship and professional generosity he had received from the sheepdog-whistle giver, and in full possession of the knowledge that the note of said object eludes the human ear, our apprentice Odysseus found himself at the crossroads of his career. Should he support his misunderstood benefactor and explain the gift, or should he keep his mouth shut and thus perhaps creep an inch or two closer to the throne?

What is so astounding about Edwards's choice of the latter course is that he is pleased to confess it.

This story probably tells most people rather more than they wish to know about the psychology of Fleet Street power and the people who rise in it. Perhaps the most mind-boggling aspect of Edwards—so far as his own account of himself is concerned—is his unwavering sincerity. There was no fakery in his adoration of Beaverbrook. He knew (who could not?) that Beaverbrook was a dreadful man—sadistic, racist, sexist, homophobic and a frequent exhibitor of his private parts. But Bob Edwards LOVED him. Indeed, he loved all his masters. The more careless with the whip hand and the jackboot the more helplessly Bob loved.

The only people he didn't love, the only people he has actually slandered in this long and emetic confession of masochism are safely in their graves. So there's no risk of writs, eh Bob? Toodle-pip, Fleet Street. May God forgive you.

ly known about Liverpool and its gle with the government. But it does ed in conveying quite well the style and nt of Hatton's politics. It also drops urther pretences about how Militant d. Indeed, one of Hatton's main pur- in writing the book seems to be to about the role that Militant played and fluence it exercised, and to remind one that it was Derek Hatton who re its most notorious personality.

ton could never bear anyone else to the leading role. John Hamilton is the ct of a bitter attack partly because n resents the fact that Hamilton's pre- prevented him becoming leader of the il in 1983. Militant considered it tactic- rudent to keep Hamilton as a figure- to conceal the extent of their control of ouncil and the district Labour Party.

Hatton now clearly resents this, since in his view there was only one leader of Liverpool in the 1980s. As he puts it so modestly, "When the history books are written for the 1980s the names of Derek Hatton and Militant will be right there alongside those of Kinnoch and Thatcher, as a reminder that the working classes can and will win. That victory is inevitable."

Hatton thrived on confrontation and crisis, and if it was absent he deliberately set out to create it. He loved media attention and the high profile and high pressure of programmes like *Question Time*. His driving force was the will to dominate and control. He seems incapable of imagining any other kind of political relationship. His hostility to Kinnoch is predictable, but he finds enemies everywhere. He attacks the churches, the trade unions, the "loony left" London coun-

cils, and Labour leaders like David Blunkett. Only his political godfathers in Militant—Peter Taafe and Tony Mulhearn—receive unstinted praise, while Tony Benn, Eric Heffer and Dennis Skinner are commended for the parts they played in opposing the "witchhunt."

There are no ideas in the book, no political arguments, no sustained political analysis. Hatton makes it plain that he has no time for such things. He trusted his "instincts." He knew what he was against, he found Militant, and that was enough.

The tabloids quickly saw the potential of Derek Hatton and transformed him into another socialist demon for Tory mothers to frighten their children with. Hatton allowed himself to be used in this way, which brought the inevitable confrontation with the Labour establishment. The protracted attempt to break the hold of Militant inflicted great damage on Labour. But Derek Hatton has also inflicted great damage on Militant. He always opposed their cautious, tactical, long-term approach. What he wanted was to go to the brink right away, and over it if necessary.

As a result of his intransigence, he played a big part in isolating Liverpool from the rest of the labour movement, and exposed the city and the Militant group to a crushing attack from both the government and the Labour Party. The careful gradualist strategy which Militant has pursued since the 1960s is now in ruins. Hatton has no regrets. He was portrayed by the media as a corrupt city boss, but he saw himself as a Jacobin, a tribune of the people, urging his followers on to ever greater extremes. But like many of the Jacobins he lacked a sense of political reality, he overreached himself, and has ended on the guillotine. It seems to have been what he always wanted.

Scenes from gay life

THE SWIMMING-POOL LIBRARY

Alan Hollinghurst

Chatton & Windus £11.95

THE TEMPLE

Stephen Spender

Faber £10.95

HARRY RITCHIE

Supporters of Clause 28 compiling catalogues of proscribable books will have to scribble fervent asterisks beside *The Swimming-Pool Library*. Set in the summer of 1983, "the last of its kind there was ever to be," Alan Hollinghurst's first novel is an explicit and powerful elegy to London's pre-AIDS gay scene.

The book's narrator, Will Beckwith, is a remarkably confident and subtle creation—vain, irrepressible, resolutely self-centred, yet lingeringly sympathetic, equipped with a voracious sexuality and the money, leisure and looks to satisfy most of his appetites most of the time. Will's rakehell's progress, involving a series of affairs and quick fucks interspersed with work-outs and occasional

Unfairness and injustice are commonly encountered by black people in the criminal justice system, claimed Paul Boateng, the main speaker at the Labour Campaign for Criminal Justice (LCCJ) annual meeting last month.

Black people face racism throughout the administration of justice, he said: "It can be a nightmare for those who get caught in its coils. And then when they are actually in prisons, they are racially abused and degraded again."

The LCCJ are campaigning to get their views and principles included in the Labour Party policy review, and to put criminal justice higher on the party agenda. Boateng emphasised that reforms were not only of vital concern to the black community, but to civil liberties in general in this country.

Prison population figures from the Home Office reflected the disproportionate presence of black men and women. Boateng asked: "Why are these figures being collected? What is being done?"

In June 1986, 13.5 per cent of all male prisoners were from the ethnic minority communities—the group makes up only 5 per cent of the general population. Corresponding figures for female ethnic minority prisoners were staggeringly higher; 18 per cent compared with only 5 per cent in the general population.

Figures for West Indian and Afro-Caribbean men and women in prison reflected a similar disproportion; 8.5 per cent men and 12 per cent

RACE AND SOCIETY

UPDATE

Criminal justice 'nightmare' for blacks

women compared with that group making up a mere 1 per cent in the population in total.

When it came to sentencing, offenders were more likely to go to

prison with fewer convictions, if they were black than if they were white. Figures for males aged 21 or over showed that 38 per cent of whites had eleven or more pre-

vious convictions, compared with 22 per cent of West Indian or Afro-Caribbean men.

The length of sentences illustrated a similar pattern; 18 per cent of the prison population sentenced to four years or more were black compared with only 4 per cent of blacks sentenced for a period of under 18 months. Offenders were also much more likely to go to a closed establishment if they were black than white. At Holloway high security all women's prison, 27.5 per cent of the inmates are now black.

Razia Iqbal

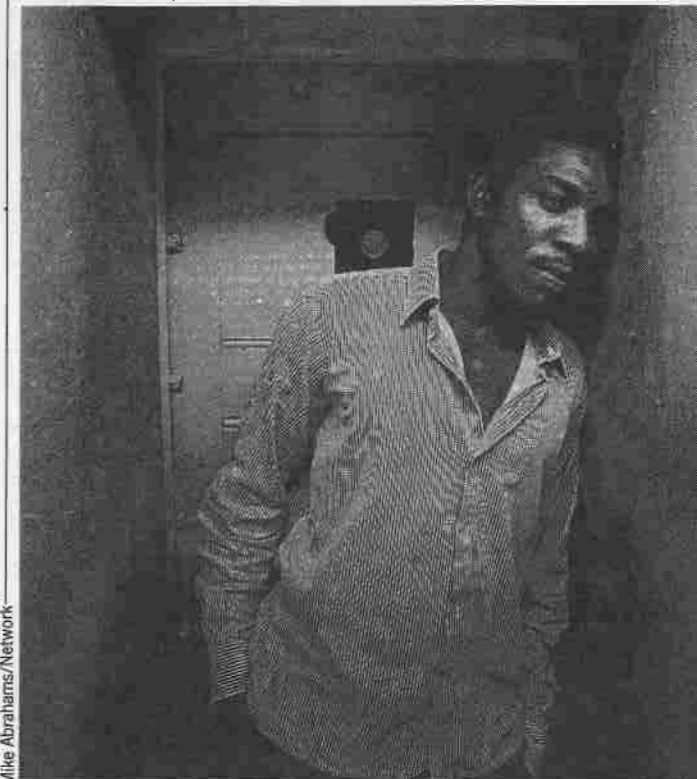
● The acquittal last week of Marcus Skellington by an all-white jury at Leeds crown court has been described by defence barrister, Michael Hall, as an "indictment of the police" writes Max Farrar.

Skellington's arrest in June, 1987, sparked off disturbances in Chapeltown, Leeds, (see RACE AND SOCIETY, 3 July 1987), Skellington was alleged to have damaged a police car and more major disturbances were only averted by all night youth work and low profile policing.

"The jury decided that DC McLean and his colleague were liars," said Hall. Ruth Bunday, one of the solicitors defending the 17 black youths arrested during the disturbances said: "The acquittal should have a positive effect at the forthcoming trials of these youths."

INSIDE:

- Black women; their education and their refuges
- The use of the world "black"
- Black politics



A black prisoner in Pentonville

UPVIEW Education for some

In 1983, Berkshire Education Authority, then a hung council, produced Britain's first anti-racist education policy. It was a radical break from previous multicultural initiatives which had ignored the issue of inequality in education. The IEA used this as a model for its own policy in 1984.

In March 1988 IEA has nearly been buried even before being killed off in Baker's education bill. And Berkshire IEA, now Conservative, has just voted out the 1983 racial equality policy.

Anti-racist, multicultural education has long been the hidden target of this government, even

before it adopted an anti-racist stance. This fact is important, because the view put about is that IEA is being done because Thatcher finds it irksome, or because its antics need a stern hand. This view also fails to place this antipathy in the wider framework of the Tory view of state education.

The Education Act, 1944, established the principle of a

meritocratic structure of education, accessible to all. The 1960s and 1970s, saw the expansion of equal opportunity concepts as it became clear that inequalities had remained untouched by the act.

The development of ideologies of equality in education, inevitably led to a view of a society that was pluralistic and not assimilationist in relation to

Britain's new communities.

This was threatening to those who saw education in more elitist terms and who were keen to promote a new ethnocentric nationalism. From the *Black Papers* of the 1960s to Baker's bill, the intention has been to achieve these twin aims.

"Inequality in education," as Stuart Hall says, "has become once again a positive social programme." And the inequality of ethnic minorities within that inequality in education is to be enshrined in the Great Education Bill, 1988. So people are once more to be educated to know their place.

The education of the Afro-Caribbean girl

Afro-Caribbean girls show a higher achievement level than Afro-Caribbean boys. RUTH CHIGWADA looks at how researchers have attempted to explain this success.

The academic achievements of black (black refers to Afro-Caribbean in this article) girls often go unrecognised because their performances have been marginalised by studies that focus on girls (not differentiating race), or black children (not differentiating gender). This is in spite of the now extensive literature on the education of girls, which however valuable it may be, avoids an analysis of race and racism.

Studies done in the 1960s found that girls of West Indian origin tended to perform better than boys in educational ability tests. This higher achievement extended to further education, where the number of black women studying for degrees was greater than for black men, although the total number of black students was still extremely small. This "relative success" of black girls has now begun to promote discussion and two explanations have been put forward: that black girls perceive and use education differently, and that schools perceive and educate them differently.

Geoffrey Driver, in an article in *NEW SOCIETY*, 17 January 1980, "How West Indians do better at school (especially the girls)," maintained that 74 per cent of black girls, compared to 13 per cent of black boys, achieved CSE passes. Part of the explanation he gave for this, (using some dubious studies) was that their families are "matriarchal." Girls results therefore: "Appeared to be due in part to the strongly held viewpoint of West Indian mothers, in particular, that their daughters must be seen as the social and economic mainstay of their family's future." The fact is that not all black families are matriarchal and historically they have been patriarchal.

A feminist interpretation was provided by Sue Sharpe in 1976. She studied a cross-section of 249 working class girls in the London borough of Ealing, of whom 51 were of Afro-Caribbean parentage and 49 of Asian. The black girls commented on the "boredom" and "irrelevance" of school but, unlike their white peers, they firmly believed that education and qualifications were important. She offered three explanations for this difference: parental support, positive attitudes to being female and an apprehension about leaving school. Sharpe misread this last factor as a question of school or work, rather than apprehension which in the girls' eyes directly linked to racism. She did not explore racism either in the girls' accounts or in terms of the limitations it placed on their lives.

"Experience of prejudice can only be meaningfully described and understood by those concerned, and I purposely did not make it a focus of my inquiry." Why does Sharpe choose to disregard this most important force that circumscribes and influences black people's lives? From the girls own analysis of their situation, they were struggling against oppression within the family, in education and in the labour market. Their apparent accommodation within the school was obviously balanced with resistance; contestation to the oppression of their class, gender and race.

Mary Fuller's study of eight black girls in the academic band of a Brent School, (1980), also showed that the girls had a positive attitude to their race and gender. All were committed to education as a route to a "good" job and a high wage. They obtained a mean of 7.6 o level/CSE passes compared to 5.6 for black boys. Only Asian boys achieved better results. All stayed on to sixth form and were intending to go on to further education. Academic success was a channel for expressing self-worth.

The Brent girls did not conform to the (white) stereotype of high achievers. They were often in conflict with teachers over rules they considered "trivial," arrived late for lessons, read magazines in class, openly contested the teacher's authority. Such behaviour was calculated to irritate teachers and present an image of not caring;



Hilda Amoo-Gottfried: a black lawyer



Suzanne Bachem/Format

NOT VICTIMS: NOT SUPERWOMEN

yet they all completed set work on time. Fuller suggests that these black girls did not want to be identified with "good pupils" whom they regarded with considerable disdain.

The black girls were as aware as black boys of the discrimination and limitations they faced within education and employment. They, however, chose to take up the challenge and actively engage in efforts to "outwit" the system.

For my own research, I interviewed ten black British girls, aged between 16 and 19, studying for A levels at two colleges of higher education. Two of the fathers had white collar jobs; two mothers were part-time secretaries. The other eight mothers worked in low paid and insecure jobs and the fathers did skilled or unskilled manual work.

Like the Ealing and Brent girls they expressed irritation at the unequal burden of housework that fell on their mothers and themselves. While being a wife and mother were upheld as ideals, black girls had different perceptions about what this meant. Most black women had to work, either to supplement the family wage or as the breadwinner, due to the high unemployment amongst black men.

Most of these young women felt they had received little guidance, that teachers had low expectations of them, and had discouraged their ambitions. These were some of the comments they made:

- "I wanted to do nursing and was told to consider auxiliary nursing. He said I would not pass any of my exams, but I passed all seven."
- "This particular teacher seemed like she wanted us to end up in Tesco's, packing beans."
- "This teacher kept saying it's no good taking physics because you will only fail it at the end of the year."

It is interesting to note that, apart from the female headed families, all the girls mentioned their fathers encouraging them to go on to higher education. This was typical of the kind of comments made: "My father wanted me to go for A levels. He says being black

you won't get anything without education." "My father has always been very ambitious for us. He wants us to work hard at college so that we can get a good job." This would seem to undermine arguments that it is the matrilineal focus of the West Indian household which accounts for the educational success of black girls.

The present GCSE system only serves to reinforce racism and sexism since it is now the teachers who mark their own students' exam papers. Teachers who feel that girls should stick to certain subjects can mark down in some areas and mark up in others. Black girls with the triple oppression of racism, sexism and class are bound to be more affected than their white peers. Girls such as those studied by Mary Fuller, who refused to conform, are more likely to get bad results since their teachers are more likely to see them as bad students.

The young women I interviewed were all confident of their ability to achieve good results. Unlike the girls in the Fuller study, all seemed to have good relationships with their college tutors and it was important to them to be viewed as good students. Education was a way of achieving independence, it was a commodity, which allowed them to enter relationships with men on equal terms. But, talking to the girls about feminism and what women's liberation is about, it became clear that most of them had a distorted view of the movement's aims. Two girls thought that the movement was dominated by ugly women who were anti-men. Most saw it as dominated by white middle class women, who failed to recognise the complexity of black women's oppression, and felt they had nothing in common with it.

The young black women I talked to were aware of their subordinated position as women and as blacks—but they did not see themselves as either victims or superwomen. They were assertive, determined rather than powerless, in succeeding against all odds. Ironically, with their success they also fitted into the "socially-conscious" employer's dream, filling two "quotas"—black and female—instead of only one. ■

Asian women's refuges

Anupa, a young Indian girl, says almost nonchalantly that she probably would have been killed by her husband if she hadn't left him. She also says that she would never have left if there had been no Asian refuge for her to go into. She met and married a dashing British Asian doctor in Bombay. Nine months on, Mr Jekyll turned into Dr Hyde, and started to get violent. Anupa had no one else to turn to in this country.

She went to Asha, one of the growing number of Asian women's refuges in London. They are all run by Asian women for Asian women, and most of the newer ones were set up after the horrific murder in a refuge of a Sikh woman, Balwant Kaur, by her husband in front of her four young daughters in 1985.

That was a watershed year for many women. Asian women of all ages led the way for other women by taking trenchant action. They vociferously challenged attitudes towards the subterranean subject cosily called "domestic violence." They broke the universal conspiracy of silence which hides major crimes behind discreet curtains and attacked the overprotected edifice of family privacy.

The demand for refuges grew out of this new awareness. Did this mean, I asked Maneesa Inam, a worker at Brent Asian women's refuge, that the problem was particularly bad among Asians? "No, domestic violence knows no race or class, but we have become more organised and can argue for funds and more women are prepared to come out."

There is also the feeling that ordinary refuges had somehow failed Asian women, according to Dianne from London Women's Aid: "We ourselves feel the responses have been inadequate and that we should improve our services and setting." In spite of the acute shortage of funds that all women's refuges face, Dianne feels there is no resentment or "sour

grapes" about the Asian women's centres hiving off the little there is to go around. As one women's aid worker said, "Can you imagine what it feels like to be abroad, and battered and not be able to get through?"

Asian women also face racism in ordinary refuges, which is the last thing they need. Inam described how for one woman: "Leaving a physically violent situation for a verbally abusive one was too much and it forced her to go back." According to one white refuge worker, Asian women were a "funny lot, not drinking and mixing and having problems with food and that."

Inam asserts: "We have a political right to organise as Asian women, to cater for the specific needs our women have that cannot be met by white women workers—we think we are the best people to deal with our own problems." Ruth Cooke at the women's unit at Greenwich fully supports the Asian women's initiatives and autonomy, but feels that a total split would end up in all white refuges which would "be a great loss."

I visited Asha, Brixton, which has two centres—and, at the risk of perpetuating another stereotype, found communal living comes easy to Asian women. There was a clannish atmosphere and a vigorously symbiotic relationship between the users and workers, some of whom, like Nalini Mayne, had themselves been through violent situations.

Vibha, a young mother with a handicapped child, was celebrating her birthday for the first time. Her next major project, she told me, was to open up an Indian takeaway with her mate Leela, also at the refuge. She had too much conviction for it to remain a pipe-dream.

The workers are passionately committed and prepared to go all out. They know, intimately, the dynamics that operate in the Asian communities which force some women to tolerate the intolerable in the name of "Izzat" or honour. This is a powerful

force which places the honour of the family, like a burdensome chalice, in the hands of the woman. If she ever leaves home, she is stigmatised as promiscuous and she passes on her degeneracy to her offspring.

DHSS officials show other obsessive streaks when it comes to their view of Asian women and their rights. Inam recalls: "I have sat in offices for hours refusing to answer questions about arranged marriages, which are not relevant." Immigration laws are often used against them too.

These workers have redefined the traditional boundaries of advice work. They are active advocates. There really isn't

time to be coy when, as Mayne describes, a woman "comes to the door, wearing torn sandals and clothes and in terror."

Even the caring agencies, like social services, lose their nerve when dealing with battered Asian women, feeling it is wrong to destabilise the community structure. They often try to persuade women to go back and the refuge workers then have to intervene to protect the women.

The workers speak the Asian languages and victims can confide in them and feel understood. They are very good at "organised interference" and confront (and confound) bureaucrats and officials with

their expertise and assertiveness. (Which they also impart to the victims). All Asian women are meant to be passive push-overs, after all. They walk a difficult tightrope between defending the community against racism and criticising it for its attitudes towards women, simultaneously.

And, for their troubles, they are called whores and home-wreckers, something they shrug off as an occupational hazard. As Inam says, "We don't knock on doors and drag women out, though sometimes I wish we could."

But was it not even worse for women who left home? "No, it isn't worse" says Inam, "but it is

bad. They are isolated, sometimes attacked and need a lot of support, which we do give when they leave the refuge." One woman went back to a particularly violent man because she could not face the overt racism she faced (muck through the letter box and attacks on her child) in her new home.

But adversity can be rewarding. "It brings me great joy," says Mayne, "and you must care: the day you don't, you cannot do it." And there is a pay-off too. For Anupa, the woman from India, Asha and her new friend, Nalini, are "a godsend." For her, at least, they made a difference between life and death. **Yasmin Alibhai**

Douglas's musical, *Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame*, widely acclaimed for its contribution to black pride, there is no place for Asians. This means that if Asians in Britain, by virtue of the discrimination practised against them, too come to believe that they are black in a positive sense, it is obvious that only some of the concepts forged by creators of black consciousness will be applicable to Asians. They will necessarily not be capable of being black in the full sense but be only secondary or ambiguous blacks.

Secondly, some may claim that when Asians are encouraged to think of themselves as black, what is on offer is a new Afro-Asian identity. Leaving aside the question of what is supposed to be the link here between the old and the new, the problem is to know what content this new identity has. The attempt to reduce several groups to a single identity, who have nothing more in common with each other (except the negative condition of discrimination) than any of those groups have with white people, makes little sense to me. At best it marks not so much a positive identity but a positive determination to oppose white racism. The adoption of the term "black" here usually means by implication, and certainly as a matter of fact, the acceptance by Asians of an Afro-political leadership. Such leadership has had some benefits for Asians, but is purchased by subordinating their public identity to political concerns.

The drawback with black used as a descriptive term, then, is that it defines people not in terms of their own identity, but by the treatment of others. The aspirational use, on the other hand, overcomes this deficiency, but at a price. It means that British Asians have to define themselves in a framework, that is historically and internationally developed, by people in search of African roots. These two situations, of course, describe ideal or abstract cases. Real life is never so simple and the present British situation certainly is not. For that consists of largely unrecognised ambivalence or confusion arising from the following:

- Wishing that a single term could be used for all non-whites.
- Feeling that "non-white" is a term of negative contrast, and noting that at least for some of the referent groups black is a positive term and hence to be preferred.
- Noting that the term black is not adequately comprehensive nor neutral between different ethnic minority groups—for it seems much more apt for some of those groups than for others.

Hence we have a kind of patronising doublespeak, which in charity one has to suppose is unconscious. When the Labour Party says, for example, "Too often when the party discusses the membership of black and Asian people it centres on the level of black public representativeness, magistrates and MPs, rather than on ways in which black people can play a role in the party." A sentence which boldly begins with one meaning of "black" immediately gives way to a different one, without any suggestion of having done so.

The conjunction "black and Asian" itself also always follows strict precedence. To expect a phrase such as "Asian and black" might not seem unreasonable, given the size of the larger Asian population or even the convention of alphabetical precedence, let alone the variety normal in the use of language. But it is an expectation which will invariably be disappointed for it misses the hierarchical politics of such formulae.

When even mainstream institutions like the BBC decide to simplify "black and Asian" to just "black", what are Asians in Britain supposed to conclude about their significance as a community in Britain? What is the message that is being sent out to them? As anyone involved in race equality issues knows, constantly being described as an appendix or as an afterthought erodes a person's sense of worth. People could come to believe that they are perhaps secondary or inferior as the authorities and media imply.

The principle of ethnic self-definition surely is integral to racial equality and multi-racialism. When many people here of West Indian origins took on the term Afro-Caribbean, it was part of a search for an identity in which they could have a sense of worth and resist denigrators. And yet Asians in Britain, who clearly possess a

sense of common history and ethnic identity, are finding it being smothered by the very people who publicly profess racial equality.

Take the Commission for Racial Equality, for example. In so much of its work the CRE increasingly refers to the people about whom it is concerned as "black". Yet it denies that it is undermining any distinctive group identity. Its view seems to be that the proposed categorisation of Asians as "black" for, say, purposes of ethnic monitoring, as a tool in equal opportunity strategies, is not an attempt to define Asians as such. Rather it is to pick out an important but limited feature about Asians in Britain, while leaving them free to develop their distinctive identity themselves.

If I am right in thinking that this is the CRE's view (in the absence of any official statement—it is gleaned from private correspondence and conversations) then it is morally fraudulent. For when it becomes common practice to call Asians blacks—and this categorisation becomes second nature so that anyone who questions it is said to be out of touch—there can be no doubt that the fundamental identity of Asians in Britain has been defined for them by the mode of reference of the race relations establishment. When I raised the matter with the Community Relations Council of a London borough, I was told that the issue had already been settled by various conferences of professionals. Further, that the fight against racial discrimination would be best served if Asians—coming to late political awareness—accepted it as a *fait accompli*.

Of course some Asians, including prominent figures, do accept the term black of themselves. But others don't. The largest group is, perhaps, that which knows that society now refers to them as black, and tolerates this while studiously avoiding referring to themselves as black. Then there is the group that feels politically obliged to talk of themselves as black. They see that their political champions, sponsors and other sympathisers, talk of them in this way and expect them to do so too. Finally, there is the group of Asians to whom it simply has not occurred that when local authorities, politicians, or media speak of blacks, (as in job advertisements which say "applications from black people are welcome"), that they are being referred to. They can still be found in large numbers in areas such as Brent. Their own understanding of themselves and of other groups is so different from the assumptions of the local public vocabulary, that those assumptions do not even register as possibilities within their framework of understanding.

¶ The principle of ethnic self-definition surely is integral to racial equality and multi-racialism. ¶

I have made assertions here about what I believe to be true of the large majority of Asians in Britain. It may be asked of me how I can prove these assertions. The strict answer to that is I cannot and that no one can prove the opposite either. For—and this speaks more loudly than any words—there are no figures available on this matter. The one research that has specifically examined grass-roots thinking on this matter has been recently published by the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys. While it did not specifically test for this, it found no wish amongst Asians to be subsumed under a black identity. It will be interesting to see whether the issue is thought important enough for others to undertake further research and for race relation professionals to finally come to respect the principle of ethnic self-definition.

Politically, the issue is whether current modes of anti-racism will be sufficiently adaptive. For Asians cannot be expected to embrace a unity which denies them a distinctive public identity. The choice is not between Asian ethnicity and the unity of the racially oppressed. It is between a political realism which accords dignity to ethnic groups on their own terms and a coercive ideological fantasy. ■

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WHO'S DEFINING WHO?

TARIQ MODOOD looks at the use of the word "black" by political activists. Is it really helpful to define all ethnic minorities under this one label?

Over the last few years a consensus has developed amongst race equality professionals and activists that the term "black" should be used to describe people who are unfavourably treated in British society because of their colour. While this idea originated with the Left, particularly with the black section movement in the Labour Party, it has now acquired commonplace public usage. The argument behind this use of "black" is that it provides the means of effecting a unity between very diverse, powerless minorities that is necessary for an effective anti-racist movement. The argument is thought so decisive that it is rare, at least in print, to see it critically considered.

The idea that race equality involves the recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity is one that is widely paid lip-service. It is true that talk about cultural variety is sometimes ill-informed or patronising, and all too often an evasion from a serious commitment to fighting racial discrimination. Nevertheless, anybody pledged to racial equality, cannot but be opposed to the crude categorisations which divide societies and humanity into white and black. The stock n-trade of racist thinking, after all, is to reduce an over-lapping and nter-related plurality into a simplistic dualism.

If anti-racists, borrow the racists' classifications in order to defeat racism, then, however successful or not they may be as an interest group, they will have lost their opposition to racism as a way of thinking. If this seems somewhat abstract it is worth noting, in contrast to say USA or Canada, (which are often the models for British race egalitarians in respect of government action—especially n employment policy), the decline of the vocabulary of multi-racialism in the UK. Similarly, one has to note the divergence of the new British race vocabulary from just about any other part of the globe where black continues to mean "of sub-Saharan African origin."

One justification for the new use of the term black is that it is said to have a descriptive clarity. It objectively and factually picks out all those who suffer in common ways from a single form of racism. The drawback here, however, is that most ordinary people wish to be defined in terms of a historically received identity, a distinctive set

of beliefs and practices, or in terms of their aspirations for themselves and their families. They may seek more government attention for their problems, but most people do not wish to be defined in terms of a problem or as victims.

The situation is exactly analogous to the one where social theorists identify a group as proletariat, who may have nothing else in common other than this condition. They are then surprised to find that those in question do not make that identity their own; or that the term "working class" fails to offer inspirational identity to many people who on all socio-economic criteria fall into that group.

Now, of course, for many who suffer from white domination, "black" has become a focus of collective pride. This is certainly true of many black activists. They may not all share identical notions of "black", let alone a common political perspective, but they do all believe that the term "black" should be used to promote a positive identity. The important point to note is that *this* use of black, is no longer descriptive. It is evaluative or aspirational.

There are important implications of this use. To be slightly technical for a minute, the generic term black covers cases which are not equal examples of the genus. Let me illustrate what I mean by an example. "Democracy" is an evaluative generic term which may be used to cover a range of organisations, some of which may be more democratic than others, and so the term applies more to some of the organisations than to others. And there is a further assumption that the lesser cases ought to be more like the major cases, that the genus is something worthy; the less democratic ought to be more like the more democratic. So similarly the aspirational use of the term black implies that while some persons or groups are more black than others, if being black is something to be encouraged, the more ambiguous blacks ought to aspire to be more like the "true" blacks.

This use of the term black may not of itself, any more than democracy, present any special difficulties. However, there are several factors about the British situation that conspire to make this positive notion of black harmful to British Asians. Firstly, because as a matter of historical and contemporary fact this positive black identity has been espoused by peoples of sub-Saharan African roots, they naturally are thought to be the quintessential or exemplary cases of black consciousness. Thus in Frazer's and

WHICH WAY FORWARD FOR BLACK POLITICS?

DAVID UPSHAL reviews the black sections movement within the Labour Party

The British Labour Party has long been the home of black aspirations and the bulk of the black vote has always automatically gone to the party during elections. So far, there has been only a minimal pay-off for this loyalty, and many black people are (justifiably) dissatisfied with their vast under-representation within the structures of the party. This dissatisfaction is perhaps best expressed by the campaign for black sections, which for four years has been defeated overwhelmingly at Labour Party conference. Now, fundamental questions are being raised from within about the use of black sections as an effective strategy for the future.

With the black caucus of the Democratic Party long established in the USA it seems strange that the Labour Party—a far more radical party of the Left—refuses to acknowledge black sections. Even stranger when one considers the existence of youth and women's sections in the party. One explanation is the reluctance of a socialist party to acknowledge that it is in any way tainted by racism. But the very existence of black sections challenges this complacency. The leadership is loathe to accept this also because it is aware that many of its white working class supporters harbour racist sentiments. The Labour Party has therefore often been unwilling to commit itself fully to the anti-racist initiatives, implied by socialist arguments for equality, for fear of losing white votes. The dilemma of the Labour leadership is thus clearly exposed.

Of course, one of the strongest indications of the need for black sections as a means to increasing black representation at every level of the party, is the very resistance to it. Diane Abbott, for instance, recalls that she initially opposed the idea because she envisaged the constitutional change involved as taking perhaps as long as a decade to achieve, and felt this would distract from the real business of black recruitment and organisation. However, she now admits she was wrong. "I knew I was wrong," she says, "because of the reaction of white people to the campaign. At one party conference we lined up to make our speeches and somebody on the top table said to another MP: 'What are those people doing in our party?' It's the reaction of white people to black sections that made me believe in them."

Yet while many people remain convinced that there is a need for black sections, there is increasing concern that the campaign is detracting from other important issues. Paul Sharma, a founder member and author of the black sections constitution, is one of the most outspoken critics of the present strategy. "Substance," he complains, "has been almost completely ignored." Increasingly, constitutional arguments have been allowed to obscure the wider issues of racial equality. In particular, he goes on, "a minority in black sections are determined to lead a holy war, perpetual conflict, against the leadership. They have always demanded 110 per cent thereby obtaining 0 per cent. The tragedy is that all this has been done in the name of black people in our society who frankly don't care a damn whether there is a black section. Their concern is the delivery of policies that affect their lives."

The concern now is that the struggle for black sections should not lead black activists out into a wilderness where the mainstream of the party ignores them and little positive progress is made. Rather, they should consolidate the gains made, and gain effective leverage within the party. Sharma proposes, therefore, that black sections apply for affiliate status to the Labour Party (a proposal not dissimilar to that more recently made by Bill Morris of the TG&WU, at a black socialist society could seek affiliation). This would have

the advantage of elevating black sections above mere pressure group status, giving them votes on policy-making committees, instead, and possibly even representation on the NEC. Not only would this translate the efforts made thus far into tangible progress, but the rights and responsibilities accrued through affiliation could represent an important stepping stone towards eventual fulfilment of the demand for constitutional change. "We must tailor our strategies with an aim to fulfilling our goals," Sharma insists. "I see affiliation as a device to direct the movement's mind to the substantive problem. It is not an end in itself. Constitutions should not be an end, policy delivery should."

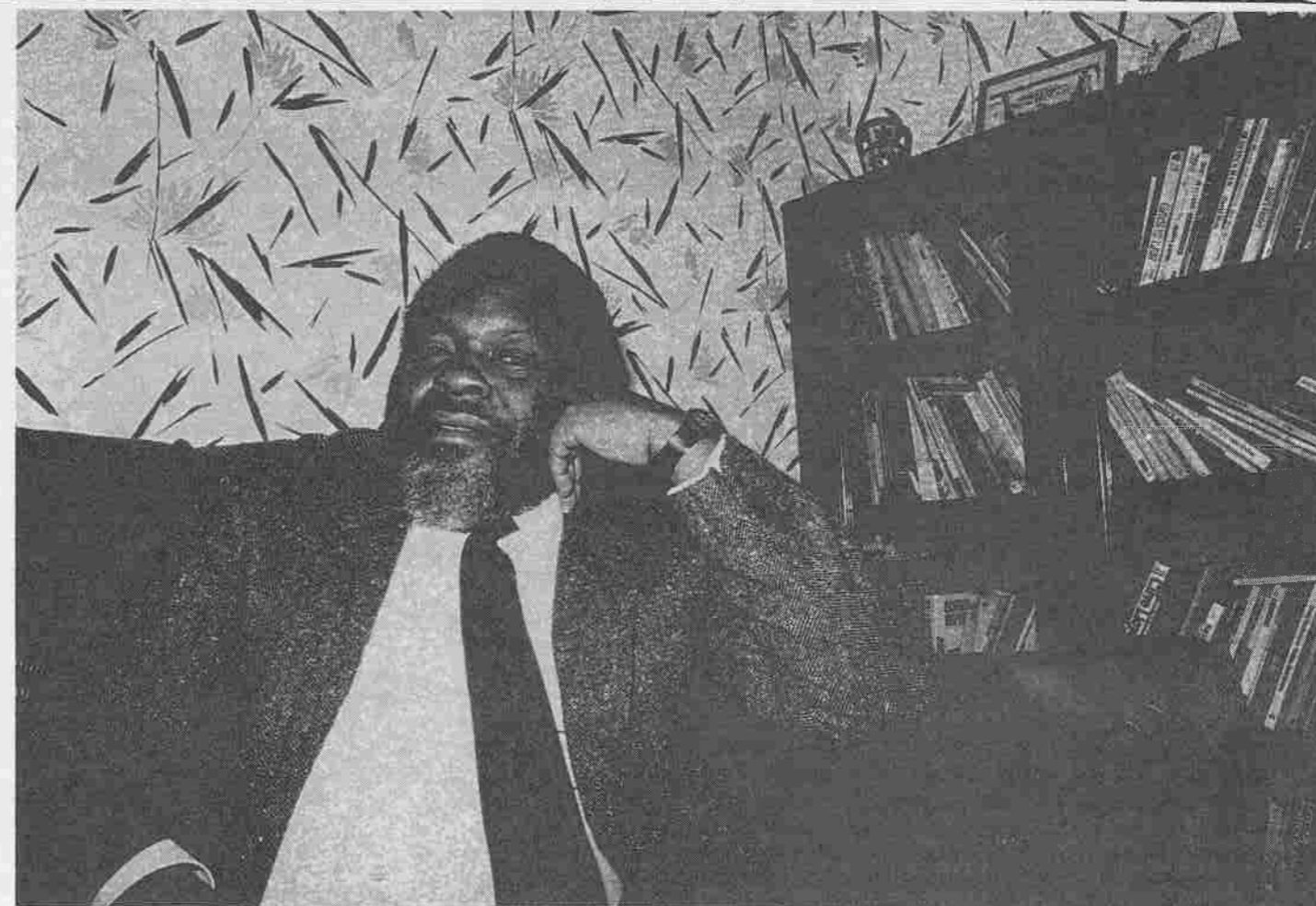
However, there are critics of Sharma's proposals. Linda Bellos, leader of Lambeth Council, is among them. Asked whether there is a need for a change of strategy, she says simply: "No. Why should we? White people don't set our agenda." Constitutional change has traditionally required prolonged campaigning. Rigid opposition to radical change is to be expected. She reacts to Paul Sharma's suggestions for compromise as "political naivety of the highest order" even "opportunism." Bellos, and others, maintain that so long as the struggle remains the same, so ought the tactics. "We've got to take it head on," she explains, "because these issues are not marginal. The issue is about black self-determination within a political party that claims to speak for us, aims to represent us, but has failed to do so. The issue isn't going to go away."

But the problem still remains that rather than progressing, the campaign for greater black participation has entered a cul-de-sac. The 1987 conference vote saw a number of trade unions who had previously supported the proposal now voting against it. The argument has become static. The black sections campaign is threatening to establish itself unconstitutionally if conference denies them legitimacy. The party leadership, meanwhile, with its influence over the mighty trade union block vote, remains unmoved. The black sections movement must now reassess its tactics.

There is a need to move away from the practice of merely repeating demands with which everyone has become well-acquainted. The 1987 conference made it perfectly clear that the more these same arguments are repeated, the less willing the Labour Party is to listen. The demands have been heard; the time for shouting is over. Instead it is necessary to start employing arguments which emphasise the positive elements of black sections. With party membership at a low point, with so many traditional bases of support being eroded, black sections offer the capacity to initiate massive recruitment from one of the most under-active and under-represented social groups in British politics—otherwise they may become disillusioned and desert the party, as is happening to the Democratic Party in the US.

At a time when the party is desperately seeking new ideas with which to win over the electorate, black sections represent a potentially dynamic think-tank for fresh initiatives within a socialist framework. In addition to this, black sections must work to convince the Labour Party of its own inadequacy in terms of racial equality, before making demands for a system to rectify that inadequacy. Only when the party has accepted this will it accept black sections.

Having acknowledged that the campaign for constitutional change will be a long one, every advantage must be taken of the opportunities for progress in other areas in the interim. Perhaps affiliation is such an opportunity. Perhaps it is not. The important thing is that the black sections movement fully explores such options and perpetually reassesses its strategies for the future. ■



Bernie on burning issues

Bernie Grant, who shot to prominence as leader of Haringey council in the aftermath of the Broadwater Farm riot in 1985, is perhaps the best known of the four black MPs elected to parliament in the last year. He spoke to STEVE PLATT about how he has fared since his election.

Bernie Grant, the Labour MP for Tottenham, says the four black candidates who made it into parliament at the last election have been divided into "goodies" and "baddies" by the Labour Party leadership. "I'm one of the baddies," he says.

Grant complains that a form of patronage operates, under which some MPs get consulted by the leadership and nominated for places on select committees and so on, while others—who upset or annoy the party hierarchy—don't.

"For example, we argued that 'Labour Listens' should have a distinct black input," he says.

"Eventually we got a meeting with Neil Kinnock, but he never came back to us. Then we heard that one black representative had been taken into the policy review group, without any consultation over who it should be. That sort of patronage is out of order."

It's a relatively small grouse, but one which reflects growing differences among Britain's black MPs. Those who might have looked for a common approach on the basis of their shared blackness have had to accept that commonplace political differences—put crudely, between hard and soft left—have proved a more powerful influence.

"There is no caucus of black MPs," says Bernie Grant disappointedly. "I would have liked to work collectively, but the others don't. They work like other MPs, jealously guarding their contacts and all that sort of thing. We're supposed to meet

once a month, but sometimes even that doesn't happen."

There's no bitterness in Grant's complaints, no evidence of splits between black MPs comparable with, say, the divisions between Campaign group members and the Labour leadership. Just the sense, from a man who's always been used to a collectivist rather than individualist tradition of Labour politics, that he would like to work more as a team, with stronger links between MPs—and with community organisations outside parliament.

"Parliament is a very isolating place," says Grant. "You're cut off from a lot of your old influences and support systems outside, and it's very easy to get overtaken by this atmosphere of a gentlemen's club."

He is scathing about the "false friendliness, the deals that go on, and the arrangements between the Tories and us. It's totally hypocritical. One minute they're saying 'Bernie, how nice to see you,' and the next minute they're slugging you off in the most appallingly racist manner

possible."

Grant describes one recent incident when he was criticising the government during a debate. The right wing Tory MP, Terry Dicks, shouted at him across the chamber: "We can't be that bad if we let you in."

On another occasion, he recalls being "surrounded by ten or 15 Tory MPs in the smoking room. Those who were already there kept signalling for others to come and join them. It was as though they'd discovered a new sport of 'Bernie baiting.' They kept taunting me with remarks like, 'We wouldn't let blacks into our street because they'd bring down house prices.' It was more than an hour before I could get away."

But Grant says the racism doesn't only come from the Tories. "The Labour people are some of the worst," he says. "They'll say things like 'the Speaker's behaving like a Pakistani umpire' and expect you to laugh along with them. They can't understand it when you don't."

He believes that the "honey-

moon period, when everyone was trying hard to be nice to us" is over: "Now it's getting worse again. It's not usually overt abuse, but if you bring a black dimension into debates, you find other MPs try to ridicule you and undermine your arguments."

It is as a member of the Campaign group of Labour MPs that Grant finds most support and succour in the House. And in common with the majority of the white members of that group he is highly critical of Neil Kinnock's leadership.

"Tony Benn is absolutely right," he says. "The party has got to take the lead and get a national campaign going to show who's really to blame for the cuts and crisis. As it is we're allowing ourselves to soak up some of the blame."

Grant argues that "the leadership is sowing confusion among the public by failing to back councils which are trying to defend services. The front bench has done a great disservice by failing to speak out on their behalf. Now we're in the situation where everyone thinks Labour councils are profligate—people think even the Labour leadership says so it must be true."

Yet Grant does not go along with the idea of defying the government over council spending. "Outside the context of a national campaign against cuts, illegality is a diversion, a nonsense," he says. On the wishes of his local party, he has kept his seat on Haringey council since being elected as an MP in order to support the narrow majority in the Labour group who are in favour of setting a legal budget.

It would have been easy for him to have evaded the issue and resigned. But it is typical of Grant that having formed an opinion he resolved to stick by it regardless of the political consequences.

On the issue of council cuts these have been considerable. On the Broadwater Farm estate, for instance, some black activists—as well as the local Labour councillors—have turned against him (the Farm is to lose two community workers and three social workers as its share of the borough-wide economies).

But Grant says: "There is a lot of mischief-making going on there. We have protected the Farm from the worst of the cuts, and if they can't do without these workers there is some-

thing wrong anyway. They have to realise that if we didn't have these cuts they would face Tory councillors. They've got to think politically."

Bernie Grant is used to fighting his corner in such forthright fashion. He'd already displayed his willingness to tackle the unpalatable on Broadwater Farm when, after the PC Blakelock murder trial, he was not as critical of the verdicts as some activists would have liked. "You can't support the jury system when it suits you and not when it doesn't," he told a journalist from NEW SOCIETY at the time.

Grant has taken stands of principle on other issues too where there has been a political cost to him within the black community. He admits that Haringey's policy of promoting "positive images" of gays in the borough's schools was badly handled: "We made mistakes because we were novices. We didn't realise the heat it would generate by pushing things too fast. You have to take people with you."

But he has defended the policy—and the principle of gay rights—at countless, often heated, meetings of black community groups since, and he says

firmly that he will continue to do so.

"In the end it is a similar situation to the one I face with Catholics over Alton's abortion bill," he says. "People come to accept that you have a different opinion to them, and that you're not going to give up your beliefs. Usually they respect you for that and decide that other things outweigh the differences so they'll continue to support you."

Grant remains optimistic about the future. He sees race issues as an achilles heel for the government, and says that Labour's black MPs are well-equipped to exploit that weakness.

But he wants the Labour party nationally to take more of a lead. Not, he says, by encouraging "acts of individual heroism and defiance which only leave us leaderless," but certainly not by "dodging all the important issues and watering down our principles."

Grant says he's "fed up of losing" and "finished with going over the hill for battles we know we can't win." But, he says forcefully, he's still in favour of "fighting this government all the way."

PUBLICATIONS

The Black and White Media Book edited by John Twitchin. Sets out how to deconstruct the effects of TV on children and adults. It is an annotated resource book on anti-racism for teachers and trainers. £9.95. Trentham Books

A Guide to the Implementation of an Equal Opportunity Policy by Sheena Dunbar and Larry Ward. Produced by MIND, the book is a practical guide to a successful equal opportunities policy. £3.95. MIND Mail Order Department, 4th Floor, 24-32 Stephenson Way, London.

Salience of Homeland: Societal polarization within the Bangladeshi population in Britain by Fazlul Alam. From the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, Research papers in ethnic relations No. 7, University of Warwick, Coventry cv4. £4.00.

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EYE SORE

girl in the Transkei," she began quickly.

"No, no it wasn't like that," Greg cut in. "It was an accident." He took over to tell the whole story. A black girl stepped out in front of him. He tried to avoid her, she had panicked and run into his car and died instantly.

Greg said nothing about how it felt having killed a person. The point of the story was to illustrate the extraordinary incompetence of the Transkei police. They had got the facts all wrong, even the registration number and name of the girl. Greg was not banned nor gaoled by the white judge.

For Dorothy, Greg's wife, this showed that all blacks are totally unable to measure up to the expectations of civilisation, and described how they regularly drove their vehicles into trenches beside uncompleted roads.

Greg held a different view. He thought the blacks were really very

efficient in "their own way," especially at engineering their own defeat.

As the evening wore on, Dorothy launched into more hysterical prophesies of doom. "The white race in South Africa will die out," she said, "because the blacks breed too much and want to take what we have for themselves, can't you see that?"

The disco music stopped and an announcement was made: There would now be a display of Zulu war dancing. They both urged me to go and watch it. Here would be an education for me, the "real" black who performed native dances and preferably lived in a kraal.

The vigorous dancing drew great applause from the audience of about 20 whites. A shower of coins was scattered on the floor when the winning dancer ended the show by throwing himself down to lie prostrate while he recovered his breath. And here, for Greg was quite good at. Zachery Kingdon.

Journey into death

THE FORBIDDEN ZONE

Michael Lesy

Andre Deutsch £11.95

CLIVE DAVIS

There are few people who could read these extraordinary reflections on death without wanting to look away or turn their thoughts elsewhere. In his preface, the American author Michael Lesy aptly invokes La Rochefoucauld's celebrated maxim: "Le soleil ni la mort ne se peuvent regarder fixement."

Interviewing undertakers and homicide detectives, attending post mortem examinations and AIDS hospices, Lesy unravels attitudes to "the modern American Hades." His language throughout is stark and unerringly precise. When he describes a slaughterhouse or watches an embalmer go to work with a body pump there are no evasions, only the sights and smells:

"The sound of the machine changed from a hum to a rapid, steady thump-thump-thump-thump, and the contents of the old lady's intestines began to pump out of her, into the toilet. Raymond twisted and turned the trocar, pumping it up and down like a ramrod, rotating it, now in one direction, now in the other, puncturing the walls of her

organs... The old lady's belly heaved and flummoxed. The pump ran, the toilet flushed, and suddenly I thought I was looking at a painting by Van Eyck, one of his triptychs of the Apocalypse, where sinners are tortured by devils with spears."

Michael Lesy examined similar themes in an earlier book, *Wisconsin Death Trip*, inspired by 19th century photographs of a community, Black River Falls, stricken by disease and insanity. His new work is more personal—an attempt, in part, to come to terms with the physical decline of his father, a Polish Jew, whose condition continues to worsen as Lesy travels the country.

From his interviews Lesy has constructed a series of vignettes, almost novel-like in structure, in which he struggles to make sense of his own reactions to dying. At times his own mental equilibrium seems to be in jeopardy.

Curiously, it is a visit to an Omaha slaughterhouse which appears to have the greatest effect on him. As he watches the routine of killing, he is almost intoxicated by the fountains of blood. Handed a bolt-gun himself, he kills a steer and is about to casually dispatch another before he realises what he is doing ("I'd always assumed I'd be a victim, not a participant").

He has a remarkable ability to make people talk. Some of the most telling observations come from two men who might have been expected to be the least articulate of interviewees—the overseer of the condemned cells in a southern Death Row and the

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