References

ESMAIL, A., EVERINGTON, S. & DOYLE, H. (1998) Racial discrimination in the allocation of distinction awards? Analysis of list award holders by type of award, specialty and region. *British Medical Journal*, **316**, 193–195.

MACPHERSON, W. (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*. London: The Stationery Office.

PARKMAN, S., DAVIES, S., LEESE, M., *et al* (1997) Ethnic differences in satisfaction with mental health services among representative people with psychosis in South London: Prism Study 4. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **171**, 260–264.

PETER L. CORNWALL, *Senior Lecturer in Community Psychiatry, University Department of Psychiatry, Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4LP*

Sir: Hickling & Hutchinson (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, March 1999, **23**) are to be congratulated on their attempt to link the experience of racism to mental illness for a general psychiatric publication. Yet, apart from Fanon, there is nothing so very new in this (Parker & Kleiner, 1975; Royer, 1977; Littlewood, 1981; Adebimpe, 1984). Where they have failed is in not suggesting any intermediate pathways between a social and political situation and the neuropsychological consequences of what psychiatry takes as schizophrenia. Not an easy undertaking admittedly: though the apparent high rates in Irish and Maori people, and other groups, might suggest something which links politics to self-depreciating identity via language use.

The authors use of 'pejorative' is puzzling given that they themselves consider an identity as a 'psychosis'. My account of *tabanka* in Trinidad was to show how this type of sexual desertion was locally construed as a form of illness (Littlewood, 1993). Indeed in the early 1980s it was common for country people to maintain there was a ward in the state psychiatry institution specifically for victims of *tabanka*.

References

ADEPIMPE, V. R. (1984) American blacks and psychiatry. *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review*, **21**, 83–111.

LITTLEWOOD, R. (1981) Anthropology and psychiatry: an alternative approach. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, **53**, 213–225.

— (1983) *Pathology and Identity: The Work of Mother Earth in Trinidad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

PARKER, S. & KLEINER, R. (1975) *Mental Illness in the Urban Negro Community*. New York: Free Press.

ROYER, J. (1977) *Black Britain's Dilemma*. Roseau: Tropical Printers.

ROLAND LITTLEWOOD, *Professor of Anthropology and Psychiatry, University College Centre for Medical Anthropology, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT*

Sir: Hickling & Hutchinson's (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, March 1999, **23**, 132–134) criticism of international classification systems is erroneous. Such diagnostic systems have been internationally piloted (Sartorius *et al*, 1988) and the resulting consensus accounts for the priority given to form rather than content. Thus, the symptomatic concerns of patients from all cultures may map poorly onto rigid diagnostic guidelines. In this and other respects, the proposed 'roast breadfruit psychosis' resembles the descriptions of de Clérambault's, Capras and Othello syndromes (Enoch & Trethowan, 1979). They represent human beliefs and behaviours, which only become classifiable when exaggerated to a psychotic degree. The memorable and symbolic themes of such syndromes make them a favourite of examiners, the topic of coffee room discussions and the inspiration for works of fiction (McEwan, 1998). This attention is, perhaps, out of proportion to their prevalence.

Diagnosis should be a synthesis of classification and understanding. By proposing a content-based diagnostic category, the authors are asking mental health professionals to risk ignoring the meaning of patient's complaints; to act as an arbitrator of cultural authenticity and to adopt a term of intra-racial abuse as an eponym. Do the authors expect that use of the term roast breadfruit syndrome will improve the relationship of psychiatrists and African–Caribbean patients?

References

ENOCH, M. D. & TRETHOWAN, W. H. (1979) *Uncommon Psychiatric Syndromes*. Bristol: John Wright and Sons.

MCEWAN, I. (1998) *Enduring Love*. London: Vintage.

SARTORIUS, N., JABLENSKY, A., COOPER, J. E., *et al* (eds) Psychiatric classification in an international perspective. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **152** (suppl. 1), 1–52.

TIM BRANTON, *Senior Registrar Old Age Psychiatry, High Royds Hospital, Menston, Ilkley, West Yorkshire LS29 5AQ*

Replicating mistakes in Aboriginal mental health

Sir: Dr Laugharne, in his article about working with an Aboriginal community in Australia (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, February 1999, **23**, 111–113), shows great sensitivity and insight into the historical, political and social context that