

What me? A Yupipple? Surely not . . .

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*comes under fire
from a fellow
liberal*

SHE HAD offered me a lift home after one of those memorable Cape Town dinners: good food, decent wine, marvelous company, splendid rows.

"Yupipple," she said in a tone that mixed anger and frustration with a dash of contempt. "Yupipple don't understand."

It's a long time since I was called a yupipple. In fact, I cannot recall ever being called a yupipple. It is possible that I was branded one by a when-we, but they don't count, poor things. Anyway, when they got cross with me they inevitably called me a liberal.

To be called a liberal was then, and is today (in Southern Africa at least) a pretty strong form of abuse, though I am happy and proud to be counted among the liberal ranks. But that I was being called a yupipple by someone who would call herself a liberal was especially disturbing. My world was turning upside down. It was as incongruous as being lectured on the evils of corruption by a *wabenzi*.

Readers in Southern Africa will

be familiar with these tribes, or clans, but for the benefit of outsiders, I should explain.

The when-we's are whites, usually with a British background, who have tried to keep a step ahead of African nationalism by moving south. Their conversation was characterised by the opening phrase: "When we were in Kenya . . ." Then it became "When we were in Rhodesia . . ."

They yearn for the days when the Zimbabwean dollar was worth nearly a pound sterling, when gold hit \$800 to the ounce, the rand was on par with the dollar, and blacks knew their place.

Most when-we's now live in Cape Town and Plettenberg Bay.

They are a diminishing band, their numbers reduced by age, and on the whole, they are harmless.

Unlike the *wabenzi*, I am sorry to say. The *wabenzi* emerged in Africa's post-independence years: a corrupt black elite whose badge of office is a Mercedes-Benz, hence *wabenzi*.

I know many *wabenzi*. As a jour-

nalist I can hardly avoid them. They may be clever, but I don't like them much. Some of my best friends, however, are when-we's, despite the fact that they loathe liberals. So what triggered the attack that so disconcerted me?

We were talking about Zimbabwe and I had the temerity to defy what seems to be conventional wisdom in the circles I move in. I said I sympathised with President Thabo Mbeki's predicament. If Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe was irrational, and his responses therefore unpredictable, what policy could Mbeki pursue that he could be sure would not precipitate the very crisis he was trying to avoid

That's when the woman who was giving me a lift got cross.

"Yupipple don't understand," she began.

It took a few minutes to recover from this below-the-belt attack, so I cannot do justice to her case. I remember she talked about the need for SA to assert the primacy of rule of law, and how the government should have been firm from the start.

"Yupipple don't understand," she said again, with passion.

Apparently, yupipples don't understand that President Mbeki is destroying South Africa. We don't understand that SA's policy on Zimbabwe — or lack of it — has undermined the rand. For that matter, she added for good measure, we don't understand Zimbabwe.

"Where you from?" she finally asked.

Brought up in Zimbabwe, now live in London, and work in Africa, I explained, hoping this information might restore my threadbare credentials. But I was mistaken.

She was right. I was wrong: "Yupipple just don't understand."

I thought of offering my own list

of things that we yupipples don't understand. But time was running out, and I decided to save them for our next meeting.

Then I will say: We don't understand how so many South Africans retain what they see as their right to second passports and divided loyalties.

We don't understand why so many South Africans judge their government by standards higher than Europe's. We don't understand what it is that drives South Africans to describe dissenters as yupipple.

I have been mistaken for an Englishman, and I've shrugged my shoulders. My flat Zimbabwean vowels have led London taxi drivers to assume I'm Australian. I've even been taken for South African.

But to be consigned to the ranks of gullible outsiders, of meddling know-alls, of useless yupipples — now that really hurts!

□ Holman has reported on Africa for the London Financial Times since 1976