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DOCUMENT A

- Take some Picts, Celts and Silures
 And let them settle,
 Then overrun them with Roman conquerors.
 Remove the Romans after approximately 400 years
- 5 Add lots of Norman French to some
 Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings, then stir vigorously.
- Mix some hot Chileans, cool Jamaicans, Dominicans,
 Trinidadians and Bajans with some Ethiopians, Chinese,
 Vietnamese and Sudanese.
- 10 Then take a blend of Somalians, Sri Lankans, Nigerians
 And Pakistanis,
 Combine with some Guyanese
 And turn up the heat.
 Sprinkle some fresh Indians, Malaysians, Bosnians,
- 15 Iraqis and Bangladeshis together with some
 Afghans, Spanish, Turkish, Kurdish, Japanese
 And Palestinians
 Then add to the melting pot.
 Leave the ingredients to simmer.
- 20 As they mix and blend allow their languages to flourish
 Binding them together with English.
 Allow time to be cool.
 Add some unity, understanding, and respect for the future,
 Serve with justice
- 25 And enjoy.

Note: All the ingredients are equally important. Treating one ingredient better than another will leave a bitter unpleasant taste.

Warning: An unequal spread of justice will damage the people and cause pain. Give justice and equality to all.

Benjamin Zephaniah, "The British", from *Wicked World!*, Penguin Books, 2000

DOCUMENT B

I am sitting in a pub near Paddington station, clutching a small brandy. It's only about half past eleven in the morning – a bit early for drinking, but the alcohol is part reward, part Dutch courage. Reward because I've just spent an exhausting morning accidentally-on-purpose bumping into people and counting the number who said 'Sorry'; Dutch courage because I am now about to return to the train station and spend a few hours committing a deadly sin: queue jumping.

I really, *really* do not want to do this. I want to adopt my usual method of getting an unsuspecting research assistant to break sacred social rules while I watch the result from a safe distance. But this time, I have bravely decided that I must be my own guinea pig. I don't feel brave. I feel scared. My arms are all bruised from the bumping experiments. I want to abandon the whole stupid Englishness project here and now, go home, have a cup of tea and lead a normal life. Above all, I do *not* want to go and jump queues all afternoon.

Why am I doing this? What exactly is the point of all this ludicrous bumping and jumping (not to mention all the equally daft things I'll be doing tomorrow)? Good question. Perhaps I'd better explain.

THE 'GRAMMAR' OF ENGLISHNESS

We are constantly being told that the English have lost their national identity – that there is no such thing as 'Englishness'. There has been a spate of books bemoaning this alleged identity crisis, with titles ranging from the plaintive *Anyone for England?* to the inconsolable *England: An Elegy*. Having spent much of the past twelve years doing research on various aspects of English culture and social behaviour – in pubs, at racecourses, in shops, in night-clubs, on trains, on street-corners – I am convinced that there *is* such a thing as 'Englishness', and that reports of its demise have been greatly exaggerated. In the research for this book, I set out to discover the hidden, the unspoken rules of English behaviour, and what these rules tell us about our national identity.

The object was to identify the *commonalities* in rules governing English behaviour – the unofficial codes of conduct that cut across class, age, sex, region, sub-cultures and other social boundaries. For example, Women's Institute members and leather-clad bikers may seem, on the surface, to have very little in common, but by looking beyond the 'ethnographic dazzle' of superficial differences, I found that Women's Institute members and bikers, and other groups, all behave in accordance with the same unwritten rules – rules that define our national identity and character. I would also maintain, with George Orwell, that this identity 'is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature'.

My aim, if you like, is to provide a 'grammar' of English behaviour. Native speakers can rarely explain the grammatical rules of their own language. In the same way, those who are most 'fluent' in the rituals, customs and traditions of a particular culture generally lack the detachment necessary to explain the 'grammar' of these practices in an intelligible manner. This is why we have anthropologists.

Most people obey the unwritten rules of their society instinctively, without being conscious of doing so. For example, you automatically get dressed in the morning without consciously reminding yourself that there is an unspoken rule of etiquette that prohibits going to work in one's pyjamas. But if you had an anthropologist staying with you and studying you, she would be asking: 'Why are you changing your clothes?' 'What would happen if you went to work in pyjamas?' 'What else can't you wear to work?' 'Why is it different on Fridays?' 'Does everyone in your company do that?' 'Why don't the senior managers follow the Dress-down

Friday custom?' And on, and on, until you were heartily sick of her. Then she would go and watch and interrogate other people – from different groups within your society – and hundreds of nosy questions and observations later, she would eventually decipher the 'grammar' of clothing and dress in your culture.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

50 Anthropologists are trained to use a research method known as 'participant observation', which essentially means participating in the life and culture of the people one is studying, to gain a true insider's perspective on their customs and behaviour, while simultaneously observing them as a detached, objective scientist. Well, that's the theory. In practice it often feels rather like children's game where you try to pat your head and rub your tummy at the
55 same time. It is perhaps not surprising that anthropologists are notorious for their frequent bouts of 'field-blindness' – becoming so involved and enmeshed in the native culture that they fail to maintain the necessary scientific detachment. The most famous example of such rose-tinted ethnography was of course Margaret Mead, but there was also Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, who wrote a book entitled *The Harmless People*, about a tribe who turned out to have a homicide
60 rate higher than that of Chicago.

There is a great deal of agonizing and hair-splitting among anthropologists over the participant-observation method and the role of the participant-observer. In my last book, *The Racing Tribe*, I made a joke of this, borrowing the language of self-help psychobabble and expressing the problem as an ongoing battle between my Inner Participant and my Inner
65 Observer. I described the bitchy squabbles in which these two Inner voices engaged every time a conflict arose between my roles as honorary member of the tribe and detached scientist. (Given the deadly serious tones in which this subject is normally debated, my irreverence bordered on heresy, so I was surprised and rather unreasonably annoyed to receive a letter from a university lecturer saying that he was using *The Racing Tribe* to *teach* the participant-
70 observation method. You try your best to be a maverick iconoclast, and they turn you into a textbook.)

The more usual, or at least currently fashionable, practice is to devote at least a chapter of your book or your Ph.D. thesis to a tortured, self-flagellating disquisition on the ethical and mythological difficulties of participant observation. Although the whole point of the participant
75 element is to understand the culture from a 'native' perspective, you must spend a good three pages explaining that your unconscious ethnocentric prejudices, and various other cultural barriers, probably make this impossible. It is then customary to question the entire moral basis of the observation element, and, ideally, to express grave reservations about the validity of modern Western 'science' as a means of understanding anything at all.

80 At this point, the uninitiated reader might legitimately wonder why we continue to use a research method which is clearly either morally questionable or unreliable or both. I wondered this myself, until I realized that these doleful recitations of the dangers and evils of participant observation are a form of protective mantra, a ritual chant similar to the rather charming practice of some Native American tribes who, before setting out on a hunt or chopping down a
85 tree, would sing apologetic laments to appease the spirits of the animals they were about to kill or the tree they were about to fell. A less charitable interpretation would see anthropologists' ritual self-abasements as a disingenuous attempt to deflect criticism by pre-emptive confession of their failings – like the selfish and neglectful lover who says 'Oh, I'm so selfish and neglectful, I don't know why you put up with me,' relying on our belief that such awareness
90 and candid acknowledgement of a fault is almost as virtuous as not having it.

DOCUMENT C



A bus stops for a bus, postcard from the 1960's