



NANYANG JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2010

8806/2

GENERAL PAPER

PAPER 2:

Friday 3 September 2010

INSERT

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

Passage 1 : Martin Jacques writes...

- 1 No one likes to admit they are racist or bear prejudices. Nor do they even like to be open and honest when they witness racist behaviour. Look at the Big Brother¹ housemates: apart from Shilpa, not one has been prepared to call it by its name (though Jermaine Jackson, black of course, patently knows and understands). The fact that hardly anyone is ever prepared to admit to racist behaviour is perhaps a sort of strength: it speaks to the fact that racism is socially inadmissible. But it is also testimony to profound weakness, a measure of how little distance we have travelled as a society when it comes to understanding racism. For if the truth be told, we are a society that is dripping in racism. 5
- 2 This is not in the least surprising. For the best part of two centuries, we British ruled the waves, controlled two-fifths of the planet, and believed it was our responsibility to bring civilisation to those who allegedly lacked it. There is now a belief that all that is long gone, dead and buried, history forgotten in a tsunami of amnesia about our past. But these attitudes live on in new forms, constantly reproduced in each and every white citizen of this country. 10 15
- 3 We are not alone in our racism, of course. Every race exhibits racism towards those whom they believe to be inferior: India is no exception, nor is China, nor is Africa. What makes Britain - and whites - special in this regard is that we have been top of the global pile for so long, inflicted our brand of racism on so many, and have no idea what it is like to be discriminated against for our colour. When it comes to our own racism, we shuffle our feet, fall silent, become incoherent and pretend it is not true: we don't get it. 20
- 4 Racism always exists cheek by jowl with, inside and alongside culture and class. As a rule it is inseparable from them. That is why, for example, food, language and names assume such importance in racial prejudice. And that has certainly been the case in Big Brother. Food is a signifier of difference: so are names, so is language. So Jade and her sidekicks homed in on Shilpa's cooking and choice of food, made fun of her name and refused to learn it. And with food came the suggestion that Shilpa's hygiene left something to be desired, that she was unclean (she had touched the food, it was claimed, and "you don't know where her hands have been"). In other words, not only was she different, but she came from an inferior civilisation. Her colour too - the most obvious manifestation of racial difference - was tangentially drawn into the equation through the comment about make-up and the Indian desire to be white. 25 30
- 5 Of course, class is central. Race always comes with class. Jade's reaction to Shilpa has been shaped by her own class background, her racism articulated within that context. The fact that Jade is hardly blessed with great intellectual gifts, that her conversation is littered with profanities, that her behaviour rarely rises above the crude, lacking any kind of subtlety, and that her status as a former winner of Big Brother is her only claim to be where she is, makes it easy for the middle class to dismiss her racism as that of a crude, ill-educated, white working-class young woman, and that the middle classes would, it goes without saying, never behave in that way. 35 40

¹Big Brother is a reality television show in which the participants live together in a large house, isolated from the outside world, but continuously watched by television cameras. Jade Goody and Shilpa Shetty were among the contestants who were involved in the controversy relating to the display of racist behaviour during the series.

- 6 Of course, they would, and do: but they practise it in a genteel middle-class kind of way. Just as Jade's racism has a class intonation, so does theirs - the asides, the put-downs, and the rest. Indeed, in some ways they are more ignorant - while masquerading as so worldly - because in general they have far less contact with ethnic minorities, unless they employ them as subordinates and/or domestics. They live in different areas, work in different places, and send their children to overwhelmingly white schools. 45 50
- 7 Almost from the outset, Big Brother's racism has had a new and novel dimension. Because Gordon Brown was in India at the time, and was asked about it during his trip, the issue immediately acquired an international dimension. In an earlier era, of course, this would have been dismissed as of no consequence: the natives could safely be ignored. But no longer. We saw this just a year ago in relation to the Danish cartoons and their ridicule of Islam. Europe used to ignore what the former colonial world felt. There was no feedback loop. But such was the reaction in the Islamic world that it could not be ignored. That, though, was in the context of the Muslim world which, in global terms, remains weak and marginalized. 55

Passage 2 : Brendan O'Neill writes...

- 1 There have been some disgusting expressions of prejudice in British public life over the past few days. Foul-mouthed insults have been hurled at a defenceless woman just because of where she comes from, how she speaks and what she supposedly represents. Worse, an entire community has been branded as vile, amoral and corrupt on the basis of this individual woman's flaws and faults. Yes, liberal commentators' assaults on Jade Goody over the past week have been obscene. 5
- 2 The great irony of the "Jade v Shilpa" debacle is that in the same breath that commentators denounce Jade and her sidekicks Jo O'Meara and Danielle Lloyd for being prejudiced and ignorant, they express their own ignorant prejudices about entire swathes of people. Jade's idiotic utterance of the phrase "Shilpa Poppadom" has, unbelievably, been held up as an indictment of the entire white working class, who have been described as fat, thick, ugly and vile. You almost get the impression that some people were waiting with bated breath for a moment like this to arrive, such was the speed with which they unleashed their torrents of abuse against the "underclass". At last, they seemed to think to themselves, we can attack those ignoramuses while posing as tolerant opponents of prejudice. 10 15
- 3 The snobbish contempt for a whole class of people spread across the broadsheets, tabloids and blogosphere. Many in the commentariat have written about Jade the Bermondsey girl (or "slag"), Jo the Essex girl and Danielle the Scouser as the real foreigners, with strange and alien habits, and Shilpa as the embodiment of their own civilised and dignified values. This is classic snobbery. During the British colonial era in India, old white-haired colonialists and their racist wives would often comment on the good behaviour and jolly good sportsmanship of "the Indians", who were seen as cool and calm and subservient, unlike the 20 25

rowdy, ungrateful and feckless underclass at home, the real "foreign body". There are echoes of these old contemptuous attitudes today in the elevation of Shilpa into a token Brit, someone who represents good old-fashioned British middle-class values of politeness and sophistication, in contrast to the thick white slags from our own slums who only shame us in the eyes of the world.

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- 4 In the fallout from "Jade v Shilpa", it has become clear that the meaning of the word "racist" has mutated in recent years. Accusations of "racism" are no longer about indicting someone for their views on ethnic minorities but rather have become a snobbish judgment on their lack of breeding and etiquette. "Racist" has become code for "underclass" - uneducated, uncouth, thick, fat, "not one of us". Snobs might once have said "That person lacks breeding"; today they say "She's a racist". That is another galling element of the Big Brother scandal: the very elite which, historically, has been responsible for racism and for sustaining and inflaming racist attitudes - political leaders, the police, the media - have now redefined racism as something that springs from the most powerless section of society, from the Jade Goodies of this world. Racism is transformed from a top-down social force into a well of ignorance bubbling over in Bermondsey and other run-down areas.
- 5 There is a bitter irony here. Traditionally, racism has not only been about attitudes towards blacks and Asians. Much racist ideology has its origins in elites' views of the underclass in earlier eras. The underclass were viewed as a "race apart", inferior to "normal people" in terms of intelligence and breeding. How remarkable that today, under the cover of attacking racist attitudes, many still cling to that old, foul view of the "underclass", which is itself racial in origin.

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