

## **Black History Month 2022**

### *Language and Terminology*

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**REHANA AWAN:** Welcome, everybody. Hello. So this is the final event of this year's Black History Month. And we've had an amazing month of sessions that have been running. So I'm Rehana Awan, for those of you who don't know me. I'm a lecturer in EDI implementation in the School of Computing and Communications. I'm also co-chair of the Black and Minority Ethnic Staff Network. So I'm chairing today's session. We're looking at language and terminology.

Sas is here managing the chat. And I would have asked us to put his mic on. But nobody can unmute him. But Sas is a producer at OpenLearn and is also co-chair of the Black and Minority Ethnic Staff Network. We're joined today by a panel of esteemed colleagues from across the University. I'm going to ask them to introduce themselves. And if I start with Paulette, and then Mel, and then Mustafa, if that's OK. So, Paulette, would you like to introduce yourself?

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Thanks, Rehana. And the esteemed colleagues bit, wow. [LAUGHS] So hello, everybody. My name is Paulette Johnson. And my role is academic lead for access participation and success in WELS. And that's our student-facing EDI work focused on improving student outcomes. And I've been at the OU for about seven years now.

**MEL GREEN:** Hi, everyone. I am Mel Green. And I am a lecturer in education studies in EYCS, so early childhood and youth studies.

**REHANA AWAN:** Sport. Sport.

**MEL GREEN:** Sport.

**REHANA AWAN:** Education.

**MEL GREEN:** Can't forget sport.

**REHANA AWAN:** Early, yeah.

**MEL GREEN:** Yeah, so I'm really aware of what EYCS stands for, clearly. I'm also E209 associate lecturer and have been an associate lecturer with the Open University since 2017. Thanks for having me today.

**REHANA AWAN:** Brilliant. That's a great start, isn't it? Acronyms at the OU. They're just fabulous. Well, great, though. Really do emphasize the whole language and terminology thing. So this session is an hour long. The plan is to have 45 minutes discussion with 15 minutes for Q&A.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**MEL GREEN:** Mustafa hasn't introduced himself.

**REHANA AWAN:** Oh, Mustafa. Sorry.

**MUSTAFA ALI:** No problem. I'm stuck in the matrix anyway. Yeah. I'm a Mustafa Ali. I'm a lecturer and convener of a research group called Critical Information Studies in the School of Computing where Rehana is based. And I conduct research in decolonial computing, algorithmic racism, and how our power, ethics, politics, and various other things are entangled in computing and ICT systems. Let the games commence.

**REHANA AWAN:** Yeah. Really interesting stuff that you're doing actually. And people can find more of that on OpenLearn as well, as with Mel's and Paulette's work as well. So just to say, this is a safe space then for discussion. We had hoped to be able to enable mics. But we can't because Babette is not here, which is throwing us off a little bit. But if you do pop your questions in the chat, that would be really helpful, please.

**SAS AMOAH:** My mic's working, Rehana. Mel helped me. So I'll manage the chat, everyone. You guys go ahead. And any questions, pop them in the chat. And I'll manage it.

**REHANA AWAN:** Do you know it's so nice to hear your voice. That's really reassuring to know you're there as well. So the reason that this session came about is that we feel that language evolves. Well, we don't feel that language evolves over time. And it's really important, I think, to look at the context of language and how we've come to where we are today.

And part of the issues around talking about race, and racism, and ethnicity is that people don't know what words to use. And we often hear that white people don't talk about race. And that's certainly some of the research that I've been involved with that's been what's been uncovered. So we're here to support colleagues to explore the issues around language and terminology.

Now, we also know that focusing on language and terminology can be a distraction, OK? And often, it's said that focusing on this area means that what you aren't focusing on is inequity and changing inequity. So that's sort of where I wanted us to start off with the panel discussion today. Paulette, I wanted to ask you to start really. So to what extent do you think that language and terminology is used as a distraction?

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** I don't know if it's used with intention as a distraction. But I think it can be a distraction. And actually, I was reflecting on the session that we were in, Rehana, when we were having a conversation in the chat box. And we were guided not to be distracted and focus on action and student outcomes. So I think there was some value in that perspective.

But I also think that language is important in terms of interpersonal relationships. So I think, yeah, I think it can be a distraction, but it's important for people. People are affected by how they're described. And people, like you said, are not confident in using terminology. They're not sure how it's going to be received. They're not sure if it's the correct term. So I think it can be a distraction, but it's very important.

I want to share an example with you actually because before I came to this session, this very week, I had a conversation with my sister, who is a nurse. And she's in the second week of her new job. And so I was having a chat with her about how she's getting on. And she said, you know, everything's fine, fantastic. I'm really enjoying the role.

But I've got this one issue. One of my senior colleagues is referring to Black patients as coloured. And it's making me feel a bit uncomfortable. She's done it a few times, she said. And she didn't, at the time, feel able to challenge it. Because they were in a group environment. She's a new employee.

So we had a chat about that. And so I think in terms of that kind of context, yes, it is a distraction. Because she felt distracted. She felt uncomfortable. And it's important that she goes back to that colleague and says, look, this is not the terminology that we're currently using. Things have moved on. And so I think that's important. And the way people feel about language is very important.

**REHANA AWAN:** That's a really lovely example. Although I'm sorry to hear that your sister, obviously, felt quite challenged by that. And what's interesting is to think about how both parties felt in that. Because the person perhaps using the language isn't aware of what up-to-date terminology is. But then, the burden is on your sister to have to try and educate them, which is also interesting. So maybe the NHS needs some race equity training as well.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Absolutely. But actually, I thought about that in the context of the OU and maybe a teaching situation. And if a tutor, for example, was teaching a group of students, and was using terminology that is not the terminology that we use currently, then that can be a distraction for students as well, isn't it?

**REHANA AWAN:** Yeah. And whose responsibility is it to make those, I'm not going to say corrections but to open up the discussion about language? Because that's also whose is that responsibility? Does anybody want to comment on that? Go for it, Mustafa. Yeah.

**MUSTAFA ALI:** Yeah. I mean, it was very interesting to hear Paulette use in a qualified fashion the term correct use of language. Because, Rehana, your opening statement was about how language changes, we might say evolves. And I don't mean evolve necessarily in a kind of an ascendant progressive fashion but just that it changes. It transforms. It morphs over time. I don't want to commit to saying it's moving in the right direction or the wrong direction, just that it does change. The idea that there could be a correct use of language, I would suggest that's always historically contingent.

So certain terminology might be correct for a certain period, because it reflects a certain reality and does or enables certain work to be done. But if the context or the background shifts in some way, that terminology may no longer be correct, or appropriate, or do the work that those who are, if you like, suggesting it should do. And obviously, the question is, well, who are those people suggesting what work should be done.

Is it people on the receiving end of abusive, or distorting, or malicious use of language? Or those who are attempting to actually exercise that language to keep people ordered and positioned relative to some project that they're pursuing? So I mean that's my kind of opening comment on that is that the very notion of what constitutes correct language, appropriate language, right language, acceptable language may be in historical flux.

**REHANA AWAN:** Absolutely. And actually, that leads me quite nicely into my next question which is about a change that we've seen in the last three years around the terminology to do with awarding gaps. So initially, that sort of started out as attainment gaps. And now, we're using the terminology of awarding gaps.

So I've been in conversation where it's been suggested that's called word washing, that all we're doing is just changing the word. And we're not changing the context or the meaning. Mel, what do you think about that?

**MEL GREEN:** I mean, I think it's a fair comment actually because I mean, the original reason that we changed attainment to awarding was this idea of the deficit approach. So initially, it was placing the onus on students. And in this case, it was Black and minority ethnic students who were seen as attaining less than white students.

And by changing it to awarding gap, it apparently or was considered to place the accountability within the University. However, I don't believe that that actually has happened, that we have turned it around to being the University's problem rather than the student's problem. Because, essentially, the gap is widening and has been widening since 2010, 2011. And advanced HEs themselves have come out and said that there has been insufficient progress in reducing the gap. So essentially, changing the words has done nothing. It's done the same thing that I think has happened since George Floyd's murder, where everyone came out with all these wonderful mission statements of their commitment to anti-racism but nothing actually changed in the structural systems within their institutions.

So for me, I think it could be an example of word washing. But essentially, it then becomes to the sort of semantics of things and what we want these words to do. I think Mustafa was saying this in the first place. It's the process of the words rather than just the label of them. Because if the University, I'm just thinking of higher education institutions, if they actually thought about the realities of what students go through at University and for me, that goes beyond awarding a classification of degree that we need to be looking at student experiences at universities beyond the outcomes as well. Well, I find that it's one of the important outcomes, right? As educators, we're not just thinking, hey, are our students leaving with a first or a two-one? We should be thinking, has our student enjoyed being taught, being a part of our University?

And that's not encompassed within the measure of a degree awarding gap. But in answer to your original question, I think there is an element of it being word washing, but it really comes down to what we want those words to do and whose responsibility it is to do those things. And I do think there is a sort of neutrality within the idea of a degree awarding gap where the University can say, yeah, yeah, we're measuring this. We've got these targets. But where's the work being done? And where's the full accountability? Yeah, that's my view.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Can I just very quickly comment?

**REHANA AWAN:** Yeah. Please do, Paulette.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Because, no, and I do agree with what you're saying, Mel. But I think changing the word doesn't change the outcome, but I think it can change the conversation. So when we are referring to the awarding gap, there's the back story to that, isn't there? And the reason why we refer to it as awarding and not attainment gaps. I do think it can change the conversation, which then may have an impact on work that goes on towards outcomes. But I agree with what you're saying. It doesn't change much.

**MEL GREEN:** I would also say that this changing the conversation, which we have done, I'm not denying that we haven't sort of raised awareness that the problem isn't with the student, as I said right at the beginning. That's great that we've moved away from this approach to viewing students as not attaining well enough. However, I think it needs to be going beyond a conversation. And so, yeah, that's my main point.

**REHANA AWAN:** And of course, it's massively wrapped up, isn't it? And it's steeped in colonial history, and the tropes, and the stereotypes that are associated with the deficit model. So we're saying, well, Black students, clearly, they're not they're not intelligent enough to be achieving. When I say Black students, I'm including Asian students in that as well. So that shift also though, interestingly, I think needs to come into an institutional level.

So it's all very well and good, us as individuals saying that we agree that it should be an awarding gap because it's not a deficit model. But that needs to be embedded within the institution as well. And everybody needs to be on board on that for the outcome to change. Mel, your hand is up. Did you want to say something?

**MEL GREEN:** I just wanted to also highlight that I do think this idea of just being focused on awarding. We're not thinking about where students are coming from. They're so much more. We're kind of making the assumption there that all students start on a level playing field. And that isn't the case.

So I feel that, as I said, placing the discussion within the University, within the structures and it could be a teaching gap, it could be a perspectives gap but yeah, I think there needs to be an acknowledgment that our students aren't coming from the same places. We are not treating them the same way. And they are not accessing the same experiences all needs to come within that as well.

**REHANA AWAN:** Thank you. Mustafa.

**MUSTAFA ALI:** Yeah, I just wanted to maybe add one small point, which is irrespective of whether one is buying into or promoting the deficit model associated with attainment, or attempting to compensate that by shifting from the focus being on the student to the focus on

the institution with the idea of the attainment gap, you're still talking about a conversation, essentially, between two parties, the student and, if you like, the educator, the educator being the broader institution.

But I think this misses actually the backdrop against which this whole-- let's call it a conversation that's taking place, which is broader cultural, and systemic, and structural issues within, if you like, a racial state, within a racialized, neoliberal economy, within a world system, which bears the imprint of colonialism and its legacy afterlives. So I mean, because one could think about, well, OK, we're going to shift the language from attainment to award. We're going to shift the focus away from deficit to the idea of the University or the educational institution taking the onus and responsibility for preparing students for work, the marketplace, et cetera.

But what marketplace are they actually entering? A racialized, neoliberal marketplace. And as people who are historically positioned as subaltern in some sense the wretched of the Earth, if you want to use kind of Fanonian language you might come out with a first-class degree. But does that automatically mean that you are going to get everything that comes with that package? Everything that is entailed? Obviously, I'm not suggesting that the University itself has the power or the ability to transform that broader culture. But some recognition that there is a broader cultural backdrop to this conversation, I think, is really important.

**REHANA AWAN:** Should we go on to explore that a little bit more then, in the terms of the shifts that we've seen in language and how it's changed? So Paulette just mentioned coloured's in the beginning, about the term coloured's. We've had BME, BAME. We hear about people of colour. We hear the term Black, which is a political term.

We hear about white privilege, white fragility, whiteness. What do these terms mean? Where are we with them? And what do they actually do in that context then. Mustafa, I'd like you to kind of expand on what you've already been saying really.

**MUSTAFA ALI:** OK, well, I mean, maybe at the risk of repeating myself, I'm just suggesting that we can't really make sense of these without understanding that they are always in flux and that they are always contested. By which I mean that different groups are going to use these terms differently in different places at different times to do different work. At least that will be my opening point.

The other thing that kind of slightly concerns me is and the term word washing was used. It's not something in my lexicon, but I have no problem with the term. I think I understand what it means. I'm interested in the extent to which this can be doing work at all times for some group, whether it's a dominant group or a subaltern group. Words are always going to be doing some work. And who it's doing constructive work for is going to shift.

But I'm also slightly concerned about what I see as a kind of shift to the affective, by which I mean, how do they feel about certain terms being used, this language rather than this language, this signifier rather than that signifier. And I'm not suggesting that it's irrelevant or not important, but I'm suggesting that it could be doing deflector and distractor work.

I think that was already mentioned previously. So I'm not saying anything really in addition to that other than to say that the effective term can be dangerous in the sense and maybe probably we're familiar with this term. And people on the call are familiar with it as well. There was a shift to the idea of the personal is the political.

And that fits really well with the individualism at the heart of a racialized, neoliberal project because the onus is then on the individual to take responsibility for countering the use of language, even if it scales up for institutions to do this and say, yeah, it's structural and systemic. It's still centering on the individual and how the individual is being affected and effected in relation to some project. Whereas I think this is important, but it can be doing again distractor work.

Because what we might really be wanting to see is shifts in the balance of power. In other words, is the institution or can the institution commit to a project bigger than word washing or this kind of shift in the discursive terrain. Because language could become a prison. We could just get trapped within it, constantly moving like the pea under the shell, constantly moving this reality but not actually attempting to dislodge it or move beyond it.

**REHANA AWAN:** I mean, so what you've just described there it sounds so incredibly complex but also so incredibly simple. OK. So you've talked about going into the affective domain, so a difficult question. But how do white people then navigate that? How do they work their way through language and terminology and work out what is appropriate, and the impact of that language on somebody?

**MUSTAFA ALI:** Yeah, just quickly on this one. Again, appropriate is always going to be contextual and historical. So I mean, you mentioned you made reference to political Black. Of course, there is the Black political. But there is also the Afro-Caribbean political, the African Black, et cetera, et cetera. So there are different ways of understanding how these signifiers can do different works, different times, different places, for different groups.

For me, the more important question is not about how can white people and I would suggest non-white people get the correct or appropriate use of language. But to understand how language is somewhat chameleon like in that when the chameleon jumps from one place to another, it shifts color. And you have a very small window within which to track that movement before it blurs back into the background. It just becomes part of, as it were, the furniture of the world.



So I think a kind of historical approach to this might be more useful, because it, hopefully, draws to our attention the operation of power. And I think if white colleagues are truly wanting to get beyond reactionary exemplification, such as white fragility and all of the kind of cognate phenomena, is to kind of commit to this, to race treachery in a kind of material sense.

We want to commit to the idea that there isn't one perfect lexicon of vocabulary that everyone is going to settle on. But rather, this is a shifting and morphing terrain. And we just want to make sure that we're shifting and morphing with those ostensibly positioned as on the receiving end to support them.

**REHANA AWAN:** Brilliant. Fabulous answer. Absolutely fabulous answer. I can't possibly comment any more. But I don't know if Paulette or Mel would like to come in on that at all? You don't have to.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** I think Mustafa covered that extremely well.

**REHANA AWAN:** So thinking about origins of terms then, how have they been reclaimed? So some words have sort of been reclaimed, haven't they, by certain parts of different cultures, different religions, different ethnicities. I'm not going to use the word race. So how have they been reclaimed?

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Yeah. I'll add to this one. So I don't know that they've been reclaimed, because, I mean, we've always got this steer, haven't we, from the government and kind of the wider society of what is appropriate, and when, and what terminology we're using. And people tend to follow that. I come from a background of work in council departments.

And every year, you get a list of politically correct terminology that you are able to use through the period until the next time comes around. But I suppose connected to this, my reflection is just on terminology and the categorization of different groups. And I think it's in the Western world where there's an obsession with this. And I'm from the Caribbean. My parents are Jamaican.

And you ask somebody to categorize themselves, they'll just say, I'm Jamaican, you know? And actually, recently, I countersigned a passport form for a friend of mine who's Jamaican in this country and was getting a renewal for a passport back home. And in looking at the form and having to identify that person, I was looking out for the categories. Because I thought, this is interesting.

And actually, there was no mention of that. All they're interested in is your eye color. And that is the most categorization on a passport form for somebody in Jamaica, you know? So I just think there's a lot of preoccupation here in the Western world with terminology, categorization. And, yeah, it just seems to be a Western thing in my view.

**REHANA AWAN:** And could well be a way of maintaining that status quo of colonialism and the whole neoliberal kind of agenda that Mustafa was talking about as well. Mel, did you want to come in?

**MEL GREEN:** Yeah, I was getting sort of to speak on that, just that I do think that it's probably more of a thing because there is more of a need to maintain social order in those areas you're talking about. Because, yeah, when I go to Barbados, I am just Mel. And the only thing that is interesting when I go to Barbados my family live over there. Sorry, my nan and granddad live over there is because they will categorize me as English.

And so they'll actually walk past my nan and granddad's house, and they'll say, yo, English. And so that is very much a sort of it's based on nationality. So I do think that highlights that there is a lot more categorization going on and saying, I'm just going to speak for the UK, for example. And I do think that is going back to sort of the degree awarding gap and everything. These are measures of comparing certain groups against a sort of heteronormative, or a homogeneous kind of group, dominant group that exists. And there is a need to do that more in these countries, in the UK, specifically. So I think going back to sort of reclaiming, because I hadn't heard of the term political Black until I was in sort of mid-thirties, where I've always seen myself as a Black woman.

And a friend of mine was talking about an Asian friend of mine was talking about being politically Black so that they were also Black. And it messed with my mind. Because I had always seen Blackness as being something that people from the African diaspora could ascribe to. And it brings to place that, again, we are doing this sort of comparison between the default person who is the White person.

And then, we get to be things like either the, yeah, politically Black or BAME. So yeah, I think Mustafa said it really well in a conversation that we had a while back, I think, preparing for this, about the signifier and the signified. So who's doing the labelling? Who's providing the label to the person? Because it's kind of the act of naming itself is the kind of process of categorization.

So the person who has the power to provide the name becomes the sort of the political act that's taking place. A colleague from the Open University actually really took the place, it was a white colleague. He was trying to write a document and was concerned about how to name

people from Black and minority ethnic groups and came to myself and another Black colleague.

And I had a lot of respect for that. Because rather than get it wrong, rather than being the person in the powerful position, I'm just going to call you this. He actually took the place to say, what would you prefer to be called? And we differed as well, myself and this other Black colleague, which indicates that these are communities. We're not monoliths. We all disagree. We all have our own opinions and stuff.

And I think that's what Mustafa sort of saying was. There is no way that we can say, all white colleagues. Black people prefer to be called this and white, it's not as simple as that. Because we are in flux because there is so much political sort of background and context. But what I really respect is that colleague that can say, hey, if I was to categorize you as such, how would you feel? What would you prefer? I think that's the advice that I would give when it comes to that.

**REHANA AWAN:** Thank you, Mel. Mustafa, let's come back to you.

**MUSTAFA ALI:** Yeah, just one small point. I mean, and this is actually prompted by what Mel has just said. So I don't disagree with this. But I think maybe there's a slight issue of concern, which is that if we move away from the idea that we are one homogeneous body of people, a monolith, et cetera, and that we so celebrate difference and distinction that we run also the risk of so fracturing any kind of ties that might unite us in pursuing a political project that the embrace of difference actually works to our detriment.

What I mean by that is if it was a level playing field, then the celebration of differences is fine. But difference can work against those on the receiving end of dominant power if it further undermines the possibility for coalition building, solidarity, a united front to advance some kind of political project. So I think on the one hand, I mean, this is the problem with identity indifference. You want both.

You want to say, yeah, actually we're one in some sense. But we're also many in another sense. It's that perennial kind of philosophical problem, but mapping into the social, and political, and economic, and other domains.

**REHANA AWAN:** And a great example of that fragmentation, if you like, was, I guess, partition in India, where there was collective, and unity, and unison. And then, obviously, that then got eroded by identities of the different religions within that facilitated by the empire. Really interesting discussion actually all about this. Go on, Mel.

**MEL GREEN:** I was just going to say, Mustafa, that actually that reminded me of some ideas from a book called Race to the Bottom, which is reclaiming anti-racism. And I can't remember the names of the authors. But it's a fantastic book. And I would suggest everyone read it. But it makes the same argument in that book. If we, too, focus on our differences, that we are not unified.

And it reminds me of within the African diaspora, there is this constant argument amongst the Caribbean and the mostly African communities of how you pronounce the word plantain.

**REHANA AWAN:** I knew you were going to say that.

**MEL GREEN:** Right? It becomes this massive thing. Because in African countries, it's "plan-tane. In Caribbean it's "plan-tin." And those arguments can last on Twitter for an entire weekend, where everyone's arguing about this. And I do get to the point where sometimes these are distractions, where we're highlighting that we are different but in groups where we there are so many similarities.

But I think what I was trying to get at, for me, as someone who my son's autistic. And I'm very conscious of how we are different from other families and how our experiences I can't speak to other people would not understand them. At the same time, I do think there's an element of us trying to find those things that unify us.

Yeah. I do want to sort of hold on to what makes you, you. Those are things that are identifiably different that make you, you but, at the same time, finding those things that can unify us as well. And that's why it's such a hard balance and can't be sort of rectified in an easy just do this sort of mentality, but it's plan-tin.

**REHANA AWAN:** No. It's definitely plan-tane. My family are from East Africa. It's definitely plan-tane.

[LAUGHTER]

So let's talk a little bit about the term global majority then. So we've talked about what's unifying. I mean, I guess, one of the things that unifies the things that we've talked about is our lived experiences or racism. There are things that unify us, aren't they, in terms of a key point. But what about the term global majority then? Mel, do you want to just expand a little bit about what we think about that as a modern day description of a group of us, of who we are?

**MEL GREEN:** So actually, that anecdote I had earlier about the white colleague that came to me. He was asking about this term global majority and saying that was what he was being suggested was the more positive way of describing sort of non-white communities. And I had

issue with it because I get it. I think it is a much more positive and actually factually correct way of describing sort of Black and Brown people.

However, I think, for me, it takes away from the political nature of the categorization that we're talking about. So race in itself is a social construct. There's no biological basis for this. So we need to acknowledge the process of racialization, OK? So I have been racialized as a white identity crisis, there as a Black woman.

And that needs to be acknowledged, what that racialization has involved or evoked within my life experience. So yeah, taking the positive aspect of, yes, but I am part of the global majority takes away, in my opinion, from the sort of political nature of the process of being racialized. So I always describe myself as a Black woman.

And I do find it hard when it comes to sort of describing people from either politically Black communities or Black I go from Black and minority ethnic. I go to nonwhite. I go to people of color. And I haven't found something that I stick with that I feel comfortable with. But when I'm describing myself, it's always just I am Black.

And in my research, recently, I've started using the term racialized as. And I even talk about racialized as white as well because I want to acknowledge the process, the political process that goes around between ascribing a label of race to a person. So yeah, that's my view on global majority. I don't know if it was clear or made sense.

**REHANA AWAN:** Really clear, really clear. So what do other people think about the term? Paulette, Mustafa, what do you think about the term global majority? Paulette.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** I don't object to being kind of I say groups referred to as the global majority. And what I find is when I am out and about and hearing people talk, people who were really have anti-racism and these issues high on their agenda tend to refer to the global majority. I myself, I identify as a Black woman. I don't like being referred to as a coloured person. What color are we referring to? But I comfortably identify as a Black person and don't object to the global majority. That's just me.

**REHANA AWAN:** So just before I come to you, Mustafa, that's an interesting one, isn't it? Because when we grew so the late '70s, '80s coloured's was a term that was used, but it wasn't necessarily used in a very positive way. It was always quite a negative term. And yet, the word people of colour or the phrase people of colour has kind of come back.

And it's a very American term, isn't it? People of colour. But that certainly entered our kind of vernacular and lexicon now in the UK. But yet, I still feel uncomfortable with that because of

the relationship that it has from my childhood. So I want to come back to that. How do you feel about people of colour, then, as a term?

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Yeah. So I feel the same. That actually I associate that with being referred to as a coloured person and the negative kind of associations with that as well. So it's something I avoid. When I read American texts, of course, that's how they refer to groups of Black and Brown people. But yeah, I prefer to be referred to as Black. And I'm comfortable with that.

**REHANA AWAN:** And also, it becomes another acronym, doesn't it? Because it's POC in lots of things as well.

[LAUGHTER]

Mustafa, global majority then. What are your thoughts on that?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**MUSTAFA ALI:** Yeah, just very quickly. So on that one, I think, at least for myself, I think we need to make a distinction between and I did mention this in the kind of preparatory discussion we had a few weeks back leading into this conversation is to make a distinction between qualitative and quantitative global majorities and, if you like, global minorities. Because it might be that non-white people and I prefer to think in terms of white and non-white. It enables clarity of focus for me that non-white people are numerically or quantitatively the global majority.

But in terms of power, in terms of the expression of dominant power across a terrain of expression whether that's the social, the economic, political, whatever I would suggest that we constitute a global minority. Again, I'm going back to language. These kind of discursive shifts in signifiers, to what extent do they actually do useful work for us to disrupt the underlying signified, the structural material reality?

I'm questioning whether it really does any real substantive work or, again, is it taking us back into the terrain of the affective, that we somehow feel good about the fact that, hey, we the majority for once. Why? Because this particular language, this term, this signifier has been allowed to attain currency, albeit through some kind of contestation and struggle on our part.

So I mean, me personally, the shift from colored to people of color, I mean, there's a contextual background, and a different historical space, time reality that informed that shift. I mean, belonging to color is different from being colored by a presumably colorless norm. So there is that to consider. But again, OK, we can shift these terms. But are we actually shifting the underlying realities? I very much doubt it. I see this as kind of performance politics, unfortunately.