

Global Majority; Decolonising the language and Reframing the Conversation about Race



I am incredibly fortunate. After thirty-five years' service to education in England, I was able to follow through on a dream that I had aged twenty-one, that became a plan, and retire early to the Caribbean, where I now live with my husband.

Having lived in Western Jamaica now for five years, Junior elderhood, I will be sixty next birthday, has crept up on me. I now find that I am required to step into the next stage of being and share with those following any wisdom that I have acquired over the years that remain relevant to this and future generations. It turns out that I have covered a lot of ground in forty years of anti-racist work in education, and yes, the last five years do count, as I was and am, semi-retired. So, in revisiting the work, while barefoot on my verandah, without footwear I feel grounded, I am somewhat reassured about still having something of relevance to say, while in equal measure perturbed and periodically angry, about how so little has changed.

Current debates about the use of terms like 'BAME' and 'ethnic minorities' in the UK, 'visible minorities' in Canada and to a lesser extent, 'People of Color' in the USA annoy me profoundly. Part of the way in which people individually and collectively step into their power as authentic human beings is to be unambivalent about their identity, who they are and their connections to their roots. The current debates about terminology as they relate to race can leave the uninitiated confused, disempowered, disconnected and metaphorically, on mute.

So, let me begin with what I know for certain. My name is Rosemary Campbell-Stephens. I identify as Black, of African Caribbean descent and heritage, specifically, Jamaican parentage. My nationality is British. My identity does not exist in relation to whiteness and transcends my geographic place of birth. I am part of the Global Majority.

The term Global Majority was coined as a result of my work in London on leadership preparation within the school sector between 2003-2011. Seeking permission has never been one of my strong points so, I was determined that a black-led leadership preparation programme should be liberating and empowering in both its content and language; and that I could create both.

Global Majority is a collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages those so-called to think of themselves as belonging to the global majority. It refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'. Globally, these groups currently represent approximately eighty per cent (80%) of the world's population making them the global majority now, and with current growth rates, notwithstanding Covid-19 and its emerging variants, the global majority is set to remain so for the foreseeable future. Understanding that singular truth may shift the dial, it certainly should permanently disrupt and relocate the conversation.

Language and Identity

As an educator focused on addressing the under-representation of Black and Asian leaders in London schools as part of the highly successful London Challenge Initiative of 2003-2011, I was acutely aware not only of the centrality and power of language but the need to extend the conversation beyond representation.

In 2020 with Black Lives Matter, centring and resetting the discourse on race, the importance of language to discuss identity is further amplified in reframing essential conversations. To disrupt the deficit narratives that exist about racialised and otherwise 'othered' groups requires that those groups be self-

determining and defining. Developing and using empowering language that challenges marginalisation and undermines the implied subordination to white power structures is critical.

Historically it has been white people, primarily white men, who hold the social, political and economic power to categorise people; this is no longer so. I further maintain that the terminology that refers to people who come from rich heritages and backgrounds that have contributed so much to shape the world for the better, should befit the status of these people and the contribution made by their ancestors. Language should inspire a possibility to live into.

‘BAME, People of Color, Visible Minorities’ and other provocations

Identity is complex and becoming increasingly so. Identity is nuanced and defined in a myriad of constantly evolving ways. Acronyms such as 'BAME', Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, are not only clumsy and blunt but almost universally reviled by those so described. Besides which, BAME is becoming increasingly irrelevant due to its inaccuracy within a global and many local contexts. The acronym BAME is contentious but is still lazily, some would say intentionally used across British government agencies and the media in the UK, thereby de-legitimising the right that people so labelled have to self-identify or even 'be', on their terms. So, what does that say about the attitude of those who use the term towards us: and what does it say about us for allowing it?

The term Global Majority seeks to include a range of ethnic and cultural groups who are deemed to be minorities not only within British society but are in other ways considered subordinate to the imagined, but never defined, 'majority.' Continuing to use acronyms such as BAME limits the capacity to have honest authentic non-coded conversations about global issues of race and racism. Black and Asian professionals, some with already anglicised names, cannot even introduce themselves in culturally mixed professional company without ambivalence, hesitation and interpretation, due to the use of confusing terminology, not created by them, about them. These are more than micro-aggressions on identity and self-determination, they create a limiting mindset in those minoritised by these labels.

Black leaders in America started to use the term 'people of color' in the 1960s to describe African Americans; in 2020, we see the term expanded to include Latinos and Asian Americans. While seen by many as an empowering term that brings together and mobilises different ethnic groups towards common goals, 'people of color' still situates whiteness as the norm.

The challenge for me therefore with the acronym 'BAME' in the UK, the term 'People of Color' in the USA and Visible Minorities in Canada, is that they all situate whiteness as the norm within their respective local contexts even when the opposite is true.

Put another way, when you examine the fact that the experience of whiteness is not the norm for the majority of people on this planet, this is an undeniable truth.

Race and Marginalisation

The conversation in 2003 London that I was heavily invested in, was about diversifying school leadership, specifically, increasing the number of Black and Asian senior leaders, and it still has relevance today. The UK government announced in November 2020 a decision to withdraw all funding for future equality and diversity projects, focused on increasing diversity in school leadership including those already committed to for 2021. While in January of 2021, a London borough has again begun to recruit 'ethnic-minority' teachers from the Caribbean to teach in London schools and newspapers carry articles almost every week about the under-representation of Black professionals at all levels of the education system.

The London Challenge, a multi-million-pound school improvement programme that ran from 2003-2011 was rightly lauded globally as a huge success. The fact that the London Challenge took place in five London boroughs with among the highest Black student and teacher demographic in England was ignored. The Investing in Diversity (iD) leadership programme run from the then London Centre for Leadership in Learning, within the Institute of Education, University College London was funded through the London Challenge.

One thousand Black and other Global Majority teachers participated in this twelve-month

programme over eight years. As the developer and head of the programme, I was able to persuade a stellar cast of tutors, to join an extraordinary team, including outstanding London Headteachers at the time such as Sir Keith Ajegbo, Marva Rollins OBE, Dawn Ferdinand, Sir Michael Wilshaw and Bushra Nazir CBE, to name but a few. In some London boroughs, the numbers of Black senior and middle leaders doubled as a result of Investing in Diversity.

Significant numbers of iID participants came from the five London Challenge boroughs, which were Islington, Haringey, Hackney, Southwark and Lambeth. Yet, inexplicably or perhaps predictably, race and the role that Black educators played in London Challenge's success was never mentioned in any significant way as a contributory factor in the literature. Black academics, educators, students or parents were never part of the London Challenge narrative, never seen, or heard

Investing in Diversity went on to inspire all the subsequent educational leadership programmes across England since 2003 focused on diversifying school leadership. There was not one such programme, whether Equal Access to Promotion, Diverse Leaders for Tomorrow or any of the myriad of others funded through the National College and subsequently through the DFE that were not developed and/or led by tutors from the Investing in Diversity Programmed, again unseen and unheard.

As regards London Challenge, there was willful colour blindness, a white ignorance towards Black educators' contribution to the most successful government intervention to raise levels of attainment in the history of the British education system. While Black leadership were ignored, much was made about 'bringing in the right people' leading on a multi-million-pound initiative at the behest of the Prime Minister. The narrative of the largely white consultant heads, brought out of retirement to support leaders of struggling schools, under the leadership of the newly created post of London Schools Commissioner, was amplified,

'credible professionals to provide underperforming schools with the bespoke support they needed to improve while ensuring they were accountable to the department',

(Institute for Government, 2014, p4.)

The irony of this 'oversight' is incredulous given the demographics of the five London boroughs concerned. Race was never mentioned in the London Challenge narrative. Black students, parents and educators, including hundreds of teachers recruited from the Caribbean, were never even referred to within the epistemology that emerged from an initiative prefaced on the notion of partnership in one of the most racially diverse contexts on the planet.

I decided from the very beginning, that even if it were only within our leadership programme, a collective term was required for 'BME' educators, that recognised us, moved us in from the margins, was affirming, inclusive, empowering, but most importantly, demographically accurate in London and globally. Besides, Global Majority challenged whiteness as the norm and would not subordinate entire communities as 'non-white' even when they were locally the majority as they were in the London Challenge boroughs. Avoidance of the negative connotations of variations of descriptors that included the word 'minority' was essential.

Applying the term Global Majority to groups that are routinely either not seen or marginalised not only brings people in from the margins but brings into focus what may create marginalisation, including the historical and current role of, systemic racism, white privilege and the power dynamics therein.

Identity is often contested to delegitimise individuals or groups, stubbornly using contested terminology to describe racialised groups, significantly undermines and dislocates not just the substance of the dialogue to be had about race, but minoritises the groups themselves. And of course, it reinforces who has the power to determine reality and the conversation.

Homogenisation

On the subject of homogenisation, please refer back to how I define myself. More often than not, for accuracy, out of respect, and to avoid the charge of homogenisation, I refer to specific ethnic backgrounds to describe individuals or groups, making every effort to describe ethnicity in the way people belonging to those groups prefer to self-identify; including different ethnic groups within the collective

term, 'Global Majority', does not, therefore, eradicate specific ethnic and cultural identities; it does, however, have the potential to connect and amplify the experiences and voices of the majority

White Minority

In this short think piece about the term Global Majority, it is essential to share a few observations about power and why there was and will be the predicted backlash from some quarters against using the terminology.

Collective terms describing groups of people that share characteristics are fraught with difficulties, complexities and imperfections. Power structures, including the academy, tend to work in the interests of an elite minority. The elite, however, never define themselves as the minority that they are; they do not define themselves at all, they don't have to, they know who they are, and whom they have minoritised as outsiders. In this non-racialised space, the elite minority act with the confidence of a majority. These elites exist primarily, though not exclusively, through whiteness, and white ignorance, ignorance of race,

"Imagine an ignorance that resists. Imagine an ignorance that fights back. Imagine an ignorance militant, aggressive, not to be intimidated, an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly—not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as knowledge."

(Mills, 2007, p13).

The global minority certainly do not limit any notion of their identity to their numbers within a particular geographical location. The white elite act globally, their power has historically resided in large part in the fact that one per cent of the world's population holds approximately forty-four per cent of the world's wealth. They are globally connected, operate collectively, in their mutually exclusive interest, wielding power accordingly, through transnational corporations, organisations, financial institutions, governments and multi-nationals. Connected systems, economic, business, political, educational, health, all work with synchronised mindsets assiduously focused on maintaining the status quo: while simultaneously sowing and fuelling discord and disruption elsewhere.

The elite minority are aided and abetted across the globe, by those who are not white, but want desperately to appropriate whiteness, to the extent that it is possible, or at least share in the spoils. The 'third world', the occupied territory created for the global majority, is needed to maintain the concentration, flow and control of resources, wealth and power into the hands of the few in the 'first world'. Poor whites are basic members of the white club, with minimal benefits; they are there to make up numbers when required, be the deflectors, or cannon-fodder and essentially act as the buffer between the white elite and those that they have 'othered.' The non-white allies are as intentional about joining the club, as the elites are about maintaining the status quo and keeping them firmly at arm's length.

Disrupting Narratives

For the status-quo to be maintained, deficit narratives need to be consistently perpetuated and reinforced, that play into centuries-old stereotypes about race. The media is central to this. Key to this approach is a language that minoritises, problematises, de-legitimises and pathologises the Global Majority. At the same time, eradicating or disregarding their contributions and concerns. So, one does not need to be Einstein to understand that white people are the minority on the planet and that those people who are routinely referred to as 'ethnic minorities' are the Global Majority. Even in western nations, it is becoming a nonsense to describe the largest and fastest-growing demographic as "minorities" Covid-19 notwithstanding.

Empowering

In 2003, when I first started using the term Global Majority, I was much more energised and inspired by the way Black and Asian educators across Britain reacted to, embraced and engaged with the collective and connecting term than I was about seeking permission to use it from a generally dismissive academy. The praxis that evolved from that confidence of a majority perspective not only changed the face of school leadership in cities such as London but the heart.

“the pleas for more black people to be represented in senior leadership positions and to be among the decision-makers in public institutions, particularly in schools and children's services, should be accompanied by the determination to embrace their additionality, and enable them to create where needed, different more nuanced ways of leading. If form follows function, then the accompanying changes in organisational cultures and structures are another bonus of their arrival.”

(Campbell-Stephens 2009, p.424)

Correctly describing the Global Majority as such moves the conversation away from disadvantage to advantage, and the added value, what I call the additionality, that these groups of rich, diverse heritages potentially bring. Additionality speaks to the fact that Black leadership, at its best is unsurpassed and has been exemplary in many spectacular incidences in elevating the human condition. Imagine embracing being Black as a distinct advantage, a badge of excellence, other than on the sports field? 2020 and as we enter 2021 has been full of examples of Black excellence against the backdrop of Black Live Matter. So, as a programme designer addressing under-representation, using a critical-race lens provided an alternative and liberating filter for the language, concepts and content of that programme in 2003. The course was intentionally focused on changing educational leadership praxis as better representation was not enough, we wanted leaders who could bring themselves into the leadership space, thereby changing it.

“What difference does it make to the situation of the majority of the group such Black staff are supposed to represent, if the training and professional socialization those Black staff receive, the institutional culture of which they are a part and the systems and processes they operate are identical to that of their white counterparts?” (John, 2009 conference presentation)

The intention that the call for more leaders from diverse backgrounds should be accompanied by the predisposition to create spaces, through professional development that enabled those leaders to use their difference to make a difference was one that we intentionally foregrounded in the leadership training.

“inclusion is not about bringing people into what already exists; it is about creating a new space, a better space for everyone.” (Dei, 2000, pp 111- 132)

Global leadership Paradigms

Very little is written in the western academies about the theories and practice of leadership and the dynamic that is created when western processes and models meet Black or other Global Majority cultures in the form of the leader. Leadership theory has for a long time been trapped in a white supremacist western mindset, with domestic theories masquerading as universal paradigms.

Black leaders and other so-called minorities in sectors such as education often find that while they may agree that almost all successful leaders do indeed draw on a generic repertoire of basic human practices, leaders bring who they are by virtue of their backgrounds to how they approach the craft of leadership. This is a legitimate part of their professional identity. To exclude or deliberately not see leaders' background is to restrict the lens that leaders potentially bring through their lived experience to the leadership role. At a time when the communities that leaders serve are more diverse than ever, and the fault lines are exposed in the white-male Harvard-esk business model that is imploding, ignoring Global leadership paradigms is not only tone-deaf and culturally illiterate, but it makes no business sense and is the height of arrogance.

“There are some leadership practices intrinsic to the cultural backgrounds of Black and global majority peoples, that may not find their way into the mainstream canons of western literature on leadership, such as the African concept of Ubuntu or Seva-centric leadership in the Asian tradition. The minoritisation of the group renders that which pertains to or comes from them, marginal.” (Campbell-Stephens 2009, p 324.)

And all this, when the world is crying out for healing and a different way.

Getting back to the terminology, it is better to engage in the discourse than not because there is no initial agreement on 'accepted' terminology. Occasionally, therefore, while writing with scholars within

the academy, who have to take the business of publishing and citations incredibly seriously, a compromise was struck. They used collective terms such as 'BME', often hyphenated so that students can use the accepted terminology to locate them and their work. It is vital that the conversation continues, but that the limitations of continuing to use particular language and lenses are noted and addressed to have conveyance of meaning move beyond the superficial to something much more progressive. So I continue to use Global Majority.

The push back and gaslighting will come from BAME apologists first, their line of attack will be the homogenisation that they fear from the term Global Majority but did not fear from the acronym BAME. They will be followed by white liberals, who are just coming around to the fact that they are in the minority, followed by the racists of whatever hue, bringing up the rear. The model minorities will stay silent, as is their way.

At school, as a student, I ran the third leg in the 1 x 4 hundred metres relay. To some extent, I am used metaphorically to occupying that third leg position in my forty-year career in education. Standing on that bend, slightly ahead of the curve, poised, moving in my mind, if not yet in my body, controlling my breathing, facing forward, waiting for other team members to catch-up, but, with the fourth person, to whom I would be handing the baton, firmly in my view. What is essential, is that in the wake of the momentous year of 2020, we do not in the urgent search for solutions step too quickly outside of the changeover zone, jeopardising the safe transfer of batons getting securely delivered across the finish line.

I will continue to use the demographically accurate and empowering term Global Majority until the rest of the team catches up, and the race is over; this is within 2020 sight.

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About the author

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE is a veteran educator who received her professional training in England, but her breadth of experience is international. Rosemary is a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education, University College London because of her ground-breaking leadership work in developing

Investing in Diversity, a leadership preparation programme to increase the numbers of Black and Asian educators in London Schools.

The programme was extended across England, in places like Leeds, Yorkshire and Humber, Liverpool and Bristol in various guises, largely through the National College for Teaching and Leadership. In 2009, Investing in Diversity drew international attention, when a sister programme Leading for Equity was launched at the OISE, University of Toronto.

Rosemary embraces the labels anti-racist, paradigm shifter, activist and disruptor. She now describes herself as an actively retired Junior elder connoisseur of life. Some days are spent freelancing as an author, writing-up her anti-racist work in education for over forty years. She is also still designing leadership programmes that blend western models with global paradigms. Her great love is speaking, whether as a keynote, in podcasts or dialogue about equity or decolonisation. Rosemary provides bespoke training and coaching internationally in her areas of expertise and passion, leadership and education.

In 2016 Rosemary was awarded an MBE by the Queen of England for thirty-five years' service to education in the United Kingdom.

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