

doing, they said, not quite understanding why it was even an offensive term. They saw it as a shortening of Pakistani, like Brit or Aussie. But then, they'd never had it snarled in their face with rage and spittle.

As I get older, and the country threatens to tip back into its old, intolerant ways, it breaks my heart to think of how my parents might have been treated. My dad, the immigrant, and my mum, the white woman who married him. Even in the early '80s, in the ethnically diverse area in which they met, married and brought up a mixed family, it can't have been easy. The worst I have to deal with is people thinking I'm far more exotic than I am, that I can speak another language, or being surprised when I don't have a foreign accent.

It can be hard to know how to respond to those people, who may mean well but whose line of thinking makes unnecessary assumptions. Or – like the girl the other night – who don't think their words are offensive because that's not how they intend them.

Political correctness is often ridiculed, the idea that people are so fragile they need to be wrapped in cotton wool, protected from painful words. But the sort of people who decry it are usually the ones throwing out the sharpest barbs. To me, political correctness is just kindness by another name. And, please, do explain to me quite what the harm is in being correct? It is not rebellious or anti-establishment to cause offence instead of referring to a person by the pronoun they have chosen; to defer to someone's own preferences and experiences when discussing ethnicity, race or gender. You might not get it right every time, but I promise to correct you as kindly as possible. Just don't ask me where I'm 'really' from.