

GLOSSARY OF INCLUSIVE WORDS AND PHRASES

«Referring to people by the names they want to be called is not a matter of politeness, nor is it a symbol of political correctness or a progressive attitude – it is simply a matter of basic human decency.»

Kübra Gümüşay

We would like to emphasize right away that language is constantly changing. So while it is important to be familiar with the terms in this glossary, it is far more important to recognize that anti-racism is a process and that we are all constantly learning.

With this glossary, we wish to find respectful words and phrases with which to be able to talk about racism and experiences of racism. In this way, we want to help foster the use of inclusive language.

This English version is a translation of part of the German-language glossary produced by «No to racism». It was commissioned and translated by the Lausanne Museum of Fine Arts (MCBA). The «No to racism» team has proofread the translation to ensure that it is inclusive and anti-racist. We have made minor additions to the English version, but it is nevertheless based on the German-language version and represents the same discourse. We welcome further feedback – on the one hand, because language evolves, and on the other, because a wider range of perspectives recognizes more.

Grayed-out headings are terms that should not be used or should only be used as self-identifiers. Terms that are highly derogatory are partially crossed, in order to make clear that they are deeply offensive and have racist origins.

The glossary is reviewed and updated annually. The last update took place at the end of 2024. We employ gender-neutral language in tribute to the fact that there are not only female and male identities, but many more besides. The glossary is based on the ideas of many people. The detailed list of sources can be found in the accompanying book.

AFFECTED BY RACISM

There are also people – particularly in European countries, and unlike in the USA – who are affected by racism but do not identify as BIPoC, i.e. as Black, Indigenous and People of Color. For this reason, in this glossary we also speak of persons affected by racism or of racialized persons. Both terms can be used to discuss specific racism directed against individuals from a particular group. Like all terms, «affected by racism» has its shortcomings. The racist system affects us all: some people benefit from it in certain situations, while others are disadvantaged. In this glossary, «affected by racism» is used for persons who are negatively affected by racism.

AFRICA / AFRICAN

When not used to name the continent, the word Africa is inaccurate and conjures up stereotypical images. Africa is a continent with 54 countries and over 2,000 different languages. Western perceptions of Africa are based on colonial notions, which also find expression in the description of people as «African»: this term lumps all the people of the African continent into a single category and deliberately fails to differentiate between them. This perpetuates and reproduces the negative stereotypes of Africa as the Other.

Use instead the name of the country in question, e.g. Algeria, Benin, the Central African Republic, or at least the region, e.g. East Africa. It is important in every case to speak about individuals and cultures in a differentiated manner.

ALLY / ALLYSHIP

An ally is a person who takes up the fight against racism (or against other forms of discrimination). They recognize racist situations and engage with the issue of racism on an ongoing basis. They stand up against racism even when they are afraid or the situation becomes uncomfortable. They also use their own privileges to give people with fewer privileges access to opportunities that they would not have on their own.

ANTI-BIAS

Anti-bias is an approach that analyzes, reflects on and addresses prejudices against, and one-sided attitudes towards, various categories of social differentiation (e.g. age, gender, class). It thereby illuminates areas of structural discrimination. This makes it possible to identify scope for action, play an active role and stand up against discrimination. At the same time, anti-bias raises awareness of the challenges of a diverse society and of the realities of life faced by various disadvantaged groups.

ANTI-RACIST

Adopting an anti-racist perspective means that we understand racism as a system that influences us both at a personal and at a societal level. This system makes distinctions between people that we often unconsciously reproduce, including at school. We are anti-racist when we become consciously aware of these mechanisms and act accordingly.

ASIAN / OF ASIAN DESCENT

Asian (sometimes «Asiatic») is frequently used to describe people from East and Southeast Asia. The term thus reproduces racist categorizations by only extending to people from certain parts of the continent of Asia.

When «Asian» or «of Asian descent» is used, it should encompass people who come from or whose ancestors come from East, South, Central, Southeast, and Western Asia. See also [here](#).

BIPoC

The acronym BIPoC stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. It is a self-identifier used by persons who are not white and who therefore do not have certain privileges. Black and Indigenous people experience racism around the globe, whereas some People of Color only experience racism in certain parts of the world. BIPoC is one possible term with which to address many people who experience racism. Not all racialized persons identify with this term, however.

BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN

Black or African American refers to both descendants of enslaved persons in the US and African immigrants and their children. African American and Black are typically not considered offensive; they are not always interchangeable, however. The use of Black or African American is a matter of personal preference. Other alternatives may be American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) or Descendants of American Slaves (DAS). Individuals may also identify as Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino/a, etc.

BLACK PERSON

Is the correct term for Black people of African or African diasporan ancestry. African diasporan means people with ancestral links to the African continent. To emphasize its character as a statement of defiance and empowerment, Black is capitalized. Black is a self-positioning. Black does not describe a skin color; it is about shared experiences and not about supposed biological commonalities. Black may be used as an external identification, although some children reject it because they have brown skin. This must be accepted.

BLACKFACE

Blackface is a practice in which white people paint their faces black to portray Black people. The term goes back to the minstrel shows of the 18th and 19th centuries in the USA, in which performers played caricatured Black characters in order to make fun of them. This is a racist practice that can be found not only in the USA, but also in Europe and other parts of the world. Blackface can be deeply offensive to Black people and should be strictly avoided in schools. In addition to blackface, there is also yellowface and the imitation of Indigenous peoples (e.g. redface; see also ~~In.dian~~), which is equally offensive.

BROWN

In the Anglo-American sphere, Brown is used as a self-identifier by some people affected by racism who do not identify with the term BIPoC. Another common self-identifier is «Black and Brown».

Brown denotes a specific experience of racism. The term was employed in some racial theories as a distinct category, e.g. for South Asians, and has been reclaimed in today's context. This is not yet widespread, however, and Brown should therefore only be used if a person explicitly self-identifies as such. Conversely, brown may be used when describing a skin tone, whereby it should be carefully considered whether this is necessary at all. In most cases, it is only applicable when something explicitly relates to the skin in a medical context, or is related e.g. to make-up, pantyhose, etc.

CIS / TRANS

Cis or cisgender means that a person identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. An example of cis: a child is assigned female at birth and the person identifies as a woman; this means that the person is a cis woman. Trans or transgender means that a person does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. An example of trans: a child is assigned female at birth, but the person identifies as a man; this means that the person is a trans man.

There are also trans individuals who identify as non-binary.

COLORISM

In a racist society, people are also judged on the basis of skin color. Colorism (also known as shadeism) is a specific form of discrimination in which individuals are favored or disadvantaged based on the «color» or «shade» of their skin. Colorism has concrete repercussions in everyday life. BIPoC who have a particularly dark skin face greater discrimination, both institutionally and in daily life, than those with lighter skin (see also dark-skinned/light-skinned; Featurism).

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

We speak of cultural appropriation when members of the dominant culture appropriate cultural forms of expression, and perhaps even profit financially from

them, without having experienced the history of enslavement or other forms of oppression. Many people perceive it as unjust when these cultural forms of expression (e.g. bindis, locs) are adopted by non-racialized people, in some cases even to their significant economic gain (e.g. rooibos tea, Palo Santo), and yet there is no place in society for the people who created them.

CULTURALIZATION / CULTURAL RACISM

Cultural racism is another form of racism prevalent today. Stigmatizing differentiations are no longer based on the supposed division of humans into «races», but on the placeholder «culture». Cultural racism adopts the biologicistic logic of racism, by portraying cultural differences as quasi-natural and inborn. This «naturalization of social relations» may be called racism without «race». Cultural racism asserts that an incompatibility exists between «cultures», which ultimately leads once again to the devaluation of groups defined as «Other».

DARK-SKINNED / LIGHT-SKINNED

Dark-skinned and light-skinned are ways of categorizing people affected by racism within a racist system. Light-skinned people are often judged as visually «more attractive» because of their paler skin and receive easier structural and economic access to privileges. Generally speaking, they encounter discrimination less frequently than dark-skinned people, enjoy greater representation in the media (TV, movies, commercials), and have easier access to romantic relationships, as well as to the labor and housing markets.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is the unequal treatment of people on the basis of their classification into a particular group. This classification is often decided by others and thereby based e.g. on outward characteristics. People are also discriminated against on the basis of group classifications such as gender identity, sexual orientation, social or ethnic background, language, religion, political beliefs, age, disability or body weight. The norms constructed by society – defining what is considered «normal» and what constitutes a negatively viewed departure from this norm – can lead to discrimination, including personal injury and the denial of access to education, healthcare, justice and employment.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity describes a group of people who feel mutually connected by shared cultural characteristics such as language, traditions, religious convictions, historical experiences or notions of common ancestry. Ethnicity is a social construct. The specific criteria by which ethnicities are defined, and the importance attached to these criteria, are shaped by social norms and power relations, among other things.

The descriptor «ethnic» is frequently applied to racialized people and their cultures. The term should only be used with great caution.

EXOTIC

Exotic means originating in another part of the world, appearing new and unfamiliar, from overseas, or foreign. During the colonial era, persons who came from the European colonies were described as exotic. Exotic thus always also means alien, and sometimes also worth discovering and worth conquering. Describing a person as exotic is therefore racist, even if the intention is not malicious.

FEATURISM

Featurism is a form of discrimination in which people are judged on the basis of their facial features and racialized body shapes. In Western society, certain traits are considered more acceptable or are favored more than others. The favored facial features are those that are closer to a «European» ideal of beauty. This leads to the devaluing of physical traits associated with racialized people, such as broader noses or narrower eyes (see also Colorism).

FOREIGNER / FOREIGN

Foreigners hold only a foreign nationality and not domestic citizenship of the country in which they are living. «Foreign» or «foreigner» are nevertheless often used as derogatory terms not just for foreigners but in generally for persons affected by racism. See «affected by racism» and «BIPOC» for inclusive terms with which to describe racialized persons. The term is also sometimes used as a self-identifier and can serve to highlight denied inclusion.

IN.DIAN

Important: Individuals identify themselves according to the people to which they belong, e.g. Sámi, Inuit/Inuk, Lakota.

The word ~~In.dian~~ goes back to the Spanish/Portuguese indio, a neologism from the colonial era, and was used as a name for the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. The term used in Latin America today is Pueblos y Naciones Indígenas. In Canada the term First Nations or First Peoples is partially used (except for the Inuit and the Métis), while across North America the umbrella term is Indigenous Nations /Peoples (incl. for the Inuit and the Métis). We recommend using the self-identification used by the peoples and nations in question, preferably in their own language.

It is also important to be respectful in the area of children's play. Dressing up in ~~In.dian~~ headdresses and making whooping war cries trivialize the history of resistance against the European conquerors and the history of the oppression and attempted eradication of various Indigenous peoples.

INTERNALIZED RACISM

We speak of internalized racism when people start to believe and assimilate racist stereotypes to which they are repeatedly exposed. This has an impact on self-esteem and, in some cases, on (academic) performance and enjoyment of life.

Racist thinking, too, can be internalized. This is often evident in the fact that white people take it for granted that they will be given preferential treatment – whether that means being allowed to speak first, being allowed to make decisions, or even being served first.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Different forms of discrimination (e.g. on grounds of ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality or age) cannot be separated from one another: they intersect and overlap. This is what the term «intersectionality» seeks to express. Intersectional theory aims to analyze different dimensions of social inequality and to highlight both their overlaps and their interaction. A Muslim, lesbian mother may meet with sexism, Islamophobia and homophobia, and thus experience exclusion in a wide variety of situations. These forms of discrimination do not simply add up, but lead to a very specific experience – as a lesbian Muslim mother, for example, not being spoken to at a gathering of rainbow families.

JEW

Jew as a pejorative term is sometimes heard in the schoolyard. If this is observed, intervention is required.

MAAFA

Maafa is a Swahili word meaning «terrible disaster» or «great catastrophe». It is today used to signify the history and ongoing impact of the genocides and enslavements inflicted upon Africans by Europeans and Arabs. It describes acts committed in the context of the history of enslavement in the East African and transatlantic slave trades.

MELANIN

Melanin is the pigment that gives skin and hair its color. Its composition is unique for each one of us and determines the color of our skin and hair. The color of our eyes and iris also depends on how much and what type of melanin the body produces. The greater the presence of dark melanin, the better a person is protected against UV rays.

MIGRATION BACKGROUND

A person has a migration background if they themselves, or at least one of their parents, was not born in the country in which they live. This term is used very broadly and, in the context of schools, is often employed in a different way, namely for racialized children and young people. As a result, racism becomes amalgamated with a migration background. Some children and young people with a migration background – for example, white children from certain other European countries – do not experience racism. Some children and young people who experience racism – for example, a Black child with Swiss parents – do not have a migration background. It is important not to deny children and young people their multiple identities by constantly emphasizing their migration background or lived experience of migration, even when this is not relevant.

MIXED RACE / MULTIRACIAL

Mixed race and multiracial describe people of two or more races (see Race). The term «mixed race» may also be experienced as stigmatizing, however, since it can also conjure racist ideologies of race mixing, and is rejected by some.

N-WORD

Since this term is particularly traumatizing for Black people, it is not written out in full here. This racist label assigned by white people and used for Black people cannot be uncoupled from its racist historical origins. The term must therefore be erased completely from our vocabulary. The same applies to other variations of the N-word.

In songs, the N-word is sometimes used in the sense of reappropriation – but only by Black people. White people should also not sing along to such passages.

OTHERING

Othering is a process whereby one group demarcates itself from another by classifying this latter as different or other. This usually occurs within an asymmetric power relationship, and those in the out-group thus have no say in how they have been classified. The in-group is construed as the norm. Asking people about where they «really» come from is an example of Othering.

PHENOTYPE

Phenotype means all the observable characteristics of a person. It is important to note that a person's phenotype is often used for Othering.

PoC

PoC stands for Person/People of Color and is a self-identifier used by people who experience racism. The term originated in the civil rights movement in the USA and aims to unite the various groups that experience racism, in order to join forces and fight racism together. PoC is a term that unites identities affected by racism. Not all persons affected by racism identify as PoC (see also BIPoC).

PRIVILEGES

A privilege is an advantage granted to a person because the social structures favor the way they look, who and how they love, and how they live. Having privileges means not being confronted with certain problems and forms of discrimination in everyday life. Privileges can be: having a Swiss passport; being considered white; being a cis man; not having an impairment, etc. Having privileges does not mean that life is always easy.

RACE

Although the term «race» makes reference to the subdivision of people into certain categories, it emphasizes that this is not a biologically determined system of classification but a social construct. Even though race is a made-up concept, it has real-world effects on individuals and society, and therefore racial identity is important to some people, particularly when it comes to addressing racial inequalities.

RACIAL PROFILING

Racial profiling is the practice of carrying out arbitrary border and police checks based on physical appearance (skin color or facial features). In Switzerland, such controls have even led to the deaths of those being stopped and searched. This police practice has become a topic of growing public debate following various court cases. In a ruling of February 2024, the European Court of Human Rights condemned Switzerland for a case of unlawful racial profiling and demanded that this discrimination be stopped.

RACIALIZATION

Describes a process and a structure in which people are categorized, stereotyped and hierarchically ranked on the basis of racist characteristics (physical appearance, ways of life, or imagined traits). In this process, racialized knowledge is produced, and the structure is based on this knowledge. While the word «Rasse» (race) in German usage is primarily associated with Nazism and supposedly biologically determined categories of human being, the term «racialization» emphasizes that these are constructed categories that have real-life effects (racism).

RACIALIZED

The term «racialized» refers to the process by which individuals or groups are divided into socially constructed categories on the basis of arbitrary or other characteristics (see also Racialization). This categorization often leads to discrimination, prejudice and inequalities. The term «racialized» aims to highlight the active nature of these processes of classification and at the same time emphasizes that race is not a biological but a social construct, shaped by social norms, power structures and

historical contexts. It is intended to shift the focus from supposedly immutable physical and cultural differences to the mechanisms and effects of racism.

RACISM

Racism is the invented notion that there are different «races» of human beings and that these can be ranked into an inferiorizing order. Through racism, people are devalued, marginalized, injured and disadvantaged. Racist discrimination can also occur unintentionally and yet still have an exclusionary and injurious effect.

Racism robs people of their dignity, their equality and their fundamental human rights. Racism manifests itself in everyday remarks (microaggressions), but also in the processes and procedures of institutions (e.g. schools, the police, hospitals, etc.). Racism can also structurally disadvantage, for example via the systematic exclusion of certain persons or groups (e.g. until 1866, Swiss Jews were not free to choose where they lived).

READ AS [xx]

The term «read as [xx]» can be used in cases where it is not known how a person identifies themselves. Example: «a person read as Black» or «a person read as Asian».

SELF-IDENTIFICATION / EXTERNAL IDENTIFICATION

External identifications are descriptors that were coined by white people to label people from non-European cultures in a historical process of degradation, dehumanization, mystification and distortion. These external identifications are racist and today obsolete, and are rejected by the majority of people affected by racism. Self-identifications have emerged in response to these racist terms and should be used today.

SEXOTICIZATION

The term was coined by Jovita dos Santos Pinto. It is a portmanteau of sexualization and exoticization (see also exotic). People are not only treated in a sexist or racist manner, but also experience intersectional discrimination. They are confronted with and devalued by exoticizing, racist and gendered stereotypes and prejudices.

SKIN COLOR / SKIN TONE

In racism, skin color is one of the key properties used to distinguish between people. Racist ideas are thereby projected onto skin color. Since the beginning of the European colonial era, racist logic has used skin color to «classify» people and to attribute or de-attribute them with alleged characteristics. This creates ascribed, racializing differences. These differences are in this case constructed, i.e. they do not correspond to the truth, but serve to uphold a racist system: Only in this way could and can the exploitation, mistreatment and murder of people under colonialism be justified. For many people, it is hard at first to understand that racist ideology is not about skin color in the literal sense, but about a devaluation of racialized people as a whole.

SL.AVE

The word, which derives from the Greek *sklabos*, was used among other things in the transatlantic slave trade, in which Europe played an active part, and which exploited human beings both psychologically and physically. The term conceals the complicity of the perpetrators. To make this complicity visible, we today speak of enslaved people.

SHOAH, HOLOCAUST

There are two names for the genocide of European Jews during the Second World War: Shoah and Holocaust.

Shoah is a Hebrew word and means «destruction» or «catastrophe». Holocaust is a word of Greek origin and means «burnt offering». Some Jewish people reject this term as problematic because, in the context of the Bible, the word denotes a religious ritual. The Holocaust under the Nazi regime, however, was a systematic mass extermination.

Both names, Shoah and Holocaust, refer to this mass extermination and the accompanying genocide of over six million European Jews. Around two-thirds of the Jewish community living in Europe at that time were murdered.

WHITE

The term *white* is not a self-identification, but a position in the racist system. Being *white* means having the privilege of not experiencing negative effects of racism.

Being *white* also means having the privilege of not having to deal with racism. *White* people – simply because they are *white* – have easier access to the labor market, housing market, healthcare, and political participation than racialized people. Being *white* is established as the norm and, as such, never named. *White* is not just about skin color, but is a political term that describes access to power. Being *white* does not mean that life is always easy; people can still be affected in many different ways by discrimination in all kinds of forms, such as sexism, homophobia and classism, to name but three.

White is written in italics to emphasize that it is not about skin color.

WHITE FRAGILITY

White fragility is the specific reaction of white people when questioned about racism. These reactions range from defense mechanisms, such as denial, to silence, anger, fear, and guilt. The aim on the part of the *white* person is to protect their own privileges and render them invisible, thereby making an honest conversation about racism impossible. The concept of *white* fragility was first introduced by the sociologist Robin DiAngelo in her book of the same title (2018).

WHITE PASSING

People affected by racism may be read as *white*. The term «white passing» is used to describe a reality or a position within a racist system whereby persons affected by racism are not recognized as such by certain people. They experience less, or no, racial discrimination on the basis of their appearance, but may experience other forms of racism, for example on account of their name (see also Colorism).

WOKE

Woke was used as early as the 1930s to describe people who are alert to injustices. A woke person is aware of and attentive to issues of racism and social injustice. Today, the term is also being instrumentalized in order to bias public opinion against initiatives that campaign for social justice.

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