

Talking about Race and Racism Series

Cécile Heim, Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, and Jennifer Thorburn

University of Lausanne

14 October 2021

Approaches to terminology:

Should we still use terms like “race” or “racial identity”?

- ❖ While "race" is not a scientific / biological fact, it makes sense to keep using this abstract concept in anti-racist, decolonial, and postcolonial studies because it is a concept that still provokes discriminating socio-political and economic realities.
- ❖ However, while it is correct to use "race" as an abstract concept to describe the origins of racism, it is no longer appropriate to speak of the "black race" or the "white race" since this would imply a biological / scientific use of the term "race."

Approaches to terminology:

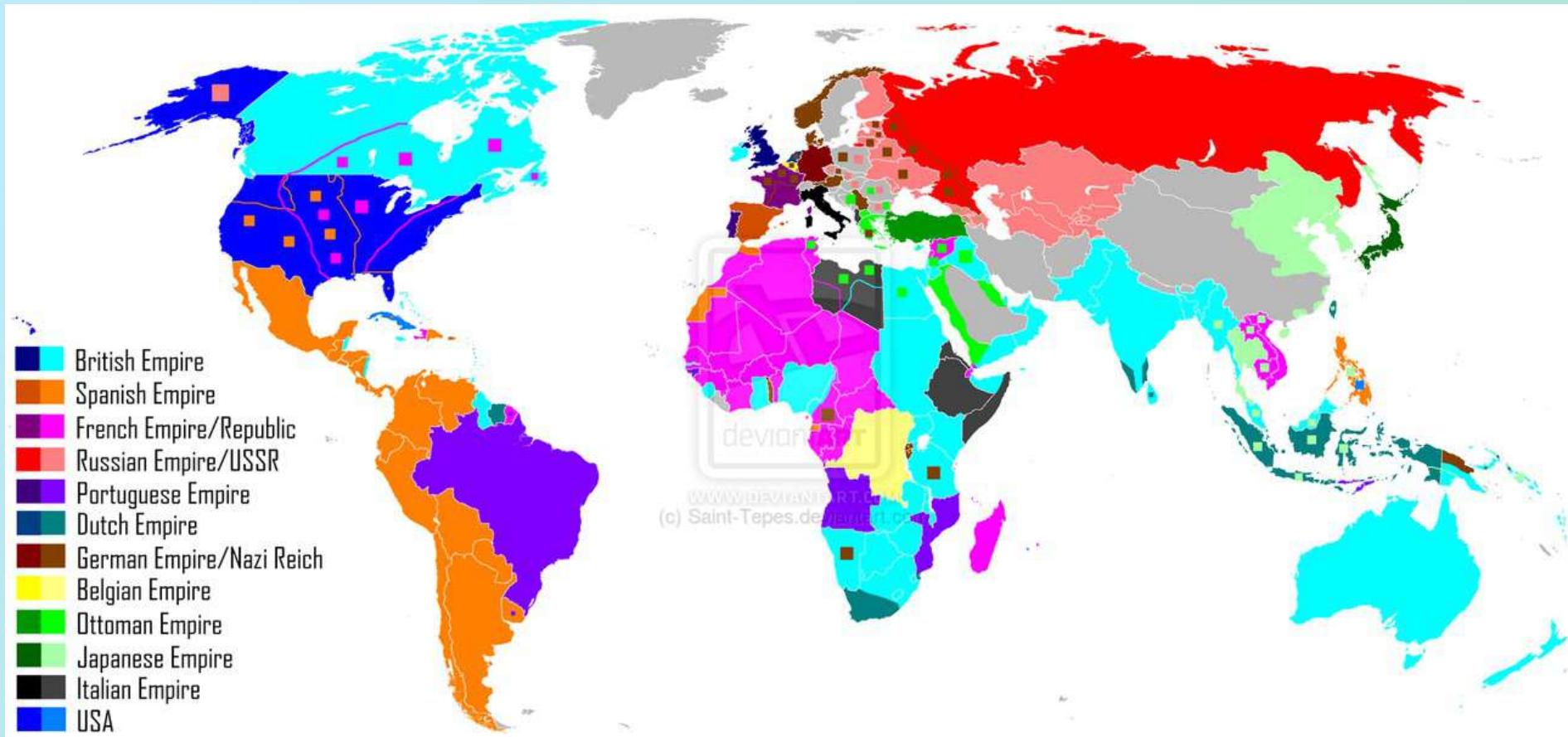
- ❖ It is fine to use "African-American" if you speak of Black people who are / were citizens of the United States whose ancestors originally forcefully or willingly came from the African continent. If you want to speak about Black people in general, you can simply use "Black people."
- ❖ "Black" is capitalized to underline the fraught and discriminating realities that skin color still produces. "White" is no longer capitalized because the capitalized use of this term is too heavily influenced by and associated to "White nationalism" and extreme right-wing movements such as the KKK.
- ❖ For Indigenous people, one uses "Indigenous," "Native American" (for the US context), or the name of the specific Indigenous nation (Cheyenne, Seminole, etc.); "Indian" is only a legal term and / or one to describe stereotypes and/or to describe someone coming from India.
- ❖ "People of Color" or "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)" are used for non-white people more generally.
- ❖ **There are very few set rules on terminology; listen to people when they tell you what they want to be called!**

What terms should we avoid when talking/writing about race?

Are there bi/multi-ethnic/racial varieties (e.g. Blasian)?

Colonialism

Colonialism is one of the origins of most of contemporary racism.



Privilege

White privilege = “an invisible package of unearned assets” of white people over non-white people (Peggy McIntosh “White Privilege” 30)



“Privilege is a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor. There is racial privilege, gender (and identity) privilege, heterosexual privilege, economic privilege, able-bodied privilege, educational privilege, religious privilege, and the list goes on and on.”

(Roxane Gay *Bad Feminist* 16)



“We tend to believe that accusation of privilege imply we have it easy. Which we resent because life is hard for nearly everyone. . . . To have privilege in one or more areas does not mean you are wholly privileged. . . . Privilege is relative and contextual. Few people in the developed world, and particularly in the United States, have no privilege at all. Among those of us who participate in intellectual communities, privilege runs rampant.”

(Roxane Gay *Bad Feminist* 17-19)

Digging deeper into privilege

Myths about racism

- That racism can only be intentional and personal
- That racism is only committed by bad, intolerant people
- The result:
 - reflecting on racism as a *system* becomes impossible
 - reflecting on our own *inevitable* internalized racism makes us feel bad and defensive – and prevents us from listening and learning (this is what Robin DiAngelo calls ‘white fragility’)
- **Systemic racism, white supremacy, and white privilege**
 - Interlocking systems of advantage and power
 - Exempt white people from having to see their own race and how it has shaped their life experience
 - ‘color-blindness’ and ‘individualism’ are ideologies of racism, available only to white people
- **Critical Race Theory** – what is it and why is it upsetting people?

If language not only shapes but structures our perceptions of the self, politics, and (by extension) reality, do we need to revise language itself to create reform?

What role does literature play in the conception of race?

What are some key texts that discuss race and how were they received upon publication?

Relevance for Switzerland



Relevance for Switzerland



Source: Energy Transfer Partners

LARIS KARKLIS/THE WASHINGTON POST



What real, effective changes have been put in place by institutions like governments or universities to combat discriminating language?

How can a person be a good ally?

How can a person with white privilege respectfully and ethically discuss these issues?

Do jokes that rely on ethnic stereotypes contribute to casual racism? Is it problematic when these jokes occur with friends of said ethnicity that are used to it, enjoy them, or at least don't care?

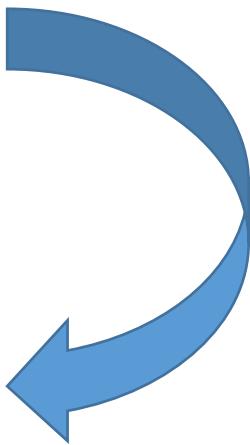
Can someone else be offended in their stead?

How do you call out racism?

What can you do?

- ✓ Educate yourself and others (see the bibliography)
- ✓ Be aware of stereotypes and keep yourself informed
- ✓ React against racism, being silent reinforces the status quo
- ✓ Support anti-racist movements
- ✓ Support artists of color by reading / watching / listening to their works, going to their events, share them with others, and promote their work
- ✓ Attend anti-racist demonstrations / events
- ✓ Never assume your learning to be finished

Sign up and/or ask questions for
next Wednesday 20 October



Series details:

[wp.unil.ch/pep/
talking-race](http://wp.unil.ch/pep/talking-race)