



Cora Bieß

Glossary for critical racism and power analysis in conflict transformation

State: March 2024

Power

Decolonial

Peace Work

Allyship

Peaceful Conflict Transformation

Vulnerability

Introduction

A reference work containing key concepts and understandings of critical racism analysis, discrimination sensitivity, intersectionality, vulnerability, allyship, privilege awareness, critical power analysis as well as post- and decolonial theories.

Why this glossary?

The impact of colonialism continues to be felt today, forming a global pattern of power that can give rise to social inclusion or exclusion through the interplay of privilege and discrimination. European societies have also been socialized hierarchically as a result of colonization, which continues to shape their thinking and actions to this day. For this reason, decolonization is of great importance in the former colonial powers. The prerequisite for this, however, is a recognition that racism is a manifestation of social conflict. It is therefore important to understand that: Racism is not only a subject of conflict, but potentially also a cause and driver of it. Critical racism analysis and intersectionality can help raise awareness about conflict in order to reflect on the resulting invisibilization of marginalization, and also on the social notions of “normality”.

This glossary is intended to bring together the main terms and approaches in the field of critical racism and power analysis in order to support a conflict transformation discourse on the ways in which critical thinking with regard to racism and power-can be strengthened in the concepts, methods, self-conceptions and attitudes of conflict transformation.

It would be gratifying if the glossary can help individuals in their own engagement with critical perspectives on racism and power as well as in providing orientation in the conflict transformation discourse on decolonization processes.

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Sincerely,

Ginger Schmitz | Managing Director

&

Cora Bieß | Project Manager of the “*Transforming peace work. Challenging racism and power structures in peaceful conflict transformation*” project

Imprint

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PLATTFORM
ZIVILE
KONFLIKT
BEARBEITUNG

The Platform for Peaceful Conflict Transformation is the leading network in German-speaking countries for the promotion of conflict transformation. Since its foundation in 1998, it has linked together and strengthened the civil society peace community and acted as its mouthpiece in the political arena. The platform members cover a broad spectrum of active peace work. They come from areas such as conflict transformation within Germany, human rights and development cooperation, peace research, mediation and the peace movement.

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Disclaimer/ Author's note:

As a *white*, cis-female and therefore privileged person, I have a limited perspective. Similarly, a short glossary can only reflect a limited part of the discourse and therefore only convey an incomplete impression of the complexity involved. This compilation is therefore intended to provide both an impulse and a classification as a basis for further discourse. My desire would be for readers always to remain open, to listen to people with different experience of discrimination and, depending on the context, to engage in a dialogue based on understanding and trust in order to evolve existing approaches and understandings. If any of the content in this glossary causes consternation, I would be most grateful if readers could draw my attention to any such gaps in my perception.

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Critical racism analysis – What are we talking about?

Racism has a categorizing social function of reducing complexity. People are no longer perceived as individuals, but are ascribed specific characteristics, qualities, attitudes and positions in society based on their group membership. Racism is therefore both an attitude and an action. People are disadvantaged because of their ascribed biological or origin-related characteristics.

Racism is a process that consists of three elements¹:

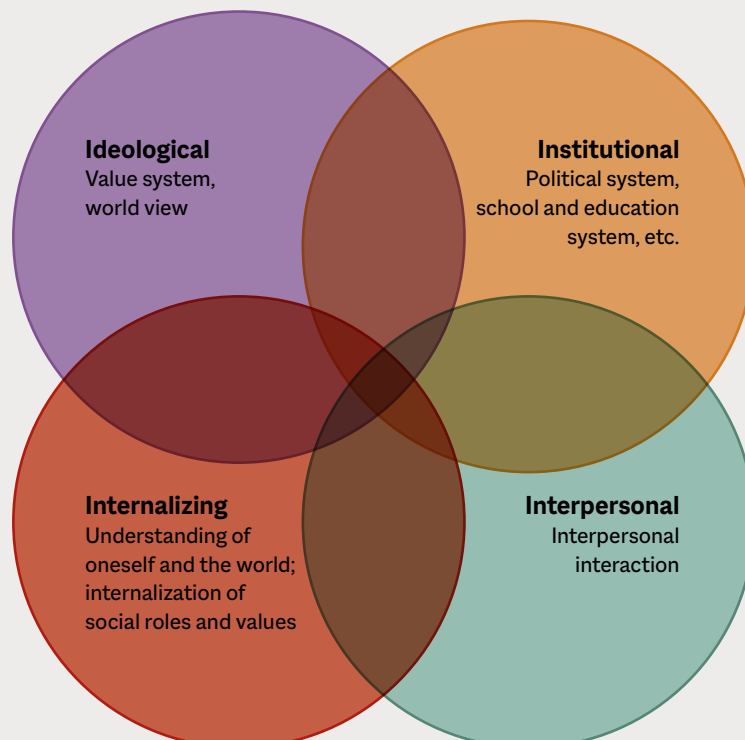
1) The (societal/social) construction of difference. People who are perceived as “different” are deemed to be so by those in the powerful position of being able to define themselves as the norm.

2) These differences are hierarchized and evaluated differently.

3) The resulting prejudices (disadvantages and privileges) are reinforced by historical, economic, political and social processes that lead to power asymmetries. Noah Sow² therefore describes racism as the linking of prejudice and power.
→ Racism can only be practiced from a position of power.

The consequences of the process manifest themselves on different levels and are also referred to as the “four I’s of oppression”³. See figure “4 I’s: Racism and the colonial power matrix”.

4 I’s: Racism and the colonial power matrix



Ideological level

Values and norms and the resulting world view. It is based on the idea that one group is better than another and is therefore entitled to exert control over the other group.

Institutional level

The idea that one group is superior to another and therefore has the right to control the other is anchored in the institutions of society. Systemic racism can manifest itself in procedures, policies and everyday practices, such as racism in school textbooks.

Internalizing level

The idea that one group is superior to another and therefore has the right to control the other is shaped through education, socialization and social discourse. People in the dominant group internalize the ideology of superiority. Oppressed people, by contrast, internalize the ideology of inferiority. This is because it is reflected in institutions, it shapes interpersonal relationships and ultimately has an impact on one's conception of oneself and of others.

Interpersonal level

Interpersonal racism can manifest itself consciously in the form of "everyday" racism, such as through hatred and violence. However, it can also express itself unconsciously, as most people in the dominant group are not aware that they are thinking, acting or behaving in a racist way and oppressing another group with their attitude or actions. They therefore consider their attitude towards the other group to be quite normal. Everyday racism can also manifest itself in the use of stereotypes or attributions based on prejudice.

The different levels give rise to structures that (re)produce inequalities based on colonial legacies.

Racisms: There is not merely "one" form of racism, indeed there are many different forms.

Critical racism analysis is a theoretical, analytical and intervention-based theory and practice that initiates change in practices, ideologies and conditions in relation to different forms of access, educational opportunities, communication, mobility, recognition and work opportunities in ways which promote justice (Melter 2021)⁴.

→ Critical racism analysis recognizes racism as a structured and structuring relationship of dominance and conflict.

→ All social practices are considered (Baquero Torres 2022)⁵.

Key terms

The terms **Black** and **People of Color (PoC)** are intentionally capitalized, as these are self-designations of people with experience of racism. The abbreviation BIPoC is also frequently used. It stands for: **B**lack, **I**ndigenous and **P**eople of **C**olor. (The term refers not to the skin color itself, but to the biographies affected by racism as well as to the political or social context and the resulting socializations). Being Black⁶ can be understood as a position in the social order – just like being *white*.

Race denotes a social, societal category. This form of ascriptive group membership was created in order to naturalize social inequalities. The category race exists because there is racism and not the other way round. It has nothing to do with the genetic composition of people of different origins, it is not a biological category.

white is written in italics and lower case to make it clear that it is a social category and not a color designation. Accordingly, skin color does not always have to be linked to who is considered *white* or Black. However, most *white* people do not realize that the relationships between *white* and Black people were, and still are, characterized by power. This gives non-Black people privileges and different access to power on different levels (social, structural, discursive, cultural, symbolic, economic) to Black and BIPoC people. *Whiteness* can be understood as a position in the social order – like being Black.

And you call me colored

“When I was born I was black
When I was sad I was black
When I was hot I was black
When I was sick I was black
When I was scared I was black
When you was born you was pink
When you was sad you was blue
When you was hot you was red
When you was sick you was green
When you was scared you was yellow
And you call me colored.”

Oyakhilome, Edore Paul (2009): And you call me colored.

Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/and-you-call-me-colored/>

Whiteness⁷:

- is the experience of being neutral and “*normal*” in contrast to being Black
- is a point of view and shapes the image of oneself and others
- is a privilege, enabling one to feel safe in the face of racism
- is the experience of seeing oneself represented everywhere without being ascribed homogeneously to one group
- is often associated with competence (e.g. in the context of counseling: *white* professionals are often seen as experts responsible for all target groups, while BIPOC professionals are often seen as exclusively responsible for BIPOC).
- is a social construct

White supremacy refers to an ideology that is based on the claim of *white* superiority. It goes hand in hand with the idea that the thoughts and actions of *white* people are “*better*” or “*more important*” than those of others. It can also be described as *white* dominance, as expressed in the dimensions: ideological, institutional, internalized and interpersonal (see “4 I’s: Racism and the colonial power matrix” p. 6). *White* supremacy is a self-reproducing system that perpetuates colonialism, exploitation and oppression. Injustice and a culture of *white* supremacy persists while Black people and People of Color are marginalized⁸.

White saviorism. The term was coined by Teju Cole⁹ and is a critical designation of a type of self-understanding among *white* people who see their role as one of helping to explain the world to, educating or “*cultivating*” BIPOC. This idea often goes hand in hand with the distinction between the developed, civilized, modern, Western “*us*”, in contrast to the underdeveloped, uncivilized and pre-modern “*others*”¹⁰.

White fragility. The sociologist Robin DiAngelo¹¹ uses this term to describe the defensive reactions or resistance of *white* people who react with emotions such as indignation, anger, fear and feelings of guilt when confronted with their *whiteness*. This is often followed by behavior such as denial, negation, relativization, argumentation or silence. The term is used when people who call out racism are intimidated, silenced or even punished. This prevents any dialogue between *white* people and BIPOC. And it also prevents the transformation of racism as a structured and structuring understanding of conflict¹².

Tokenism is the policy or practice of making only a perfunctory effort or symbolic gesture toward the accomplishment of a goal, such as racial integration. A person is regarded as a representative of a group for which they are supposed to speak – but without being asked whether they want to take on this role. People who are instrumentalized as tokens are no longer seen as individuals, but as representatives of their (supposed) group membership. This reduces them to the category of their ascribed identity. Tokenism therefore unintentionally forces those affected into a prejudice-based, stereotypical role – without asking them¹³. The term was coined by the sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter¹⁴.

Critical *whiteness*. This approach¹⁵ is based on Black experience and the experience of enslaved people. Critical *whiteness* is an attitude and an approach that considers the structures, practices and ways of thinking that justify or promote racism. It questions historically evolved constructions that define *whiteness* as the norm and standard, and non-*whiteness* as a deviation, or downgrade, from this norm. Critical *whiteness* focuses on power structures and systems, with the aim of transforming them in such a way as to facilitate greater equality, recognition and justice.

Notes, thoughts and your own further reflections:

Discrimination sensitivity - What are we talking about?

Discrimination occurs when people are disadvantaged on the basis of actual or ascribed group characteristics.

Multiple discrimination/intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and the Black women's rights movement. When people suffer discrimination on the basis of a range of different social categories, this is referred to as multiple discrimination. The intertwining of different forms of discrimination is also known as intersectionality. Each individual has multiple identity characteristics that can serve as the basis for social exclusion or

social privilege. Several forms of discrimination can work together at the same time. Actual or ascribed group characteristics include race, class, origin, body gender, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age, physical or mental illness, introversion or extraversion, body shape, language, and many more. The interaction of social categories can reinforce, weaken or change the experience of discrimination. Intersectional categories should not be understood as describing a person's "essence", rather they are context-dependent, i.e. they can be dynamic depending on the time and place.

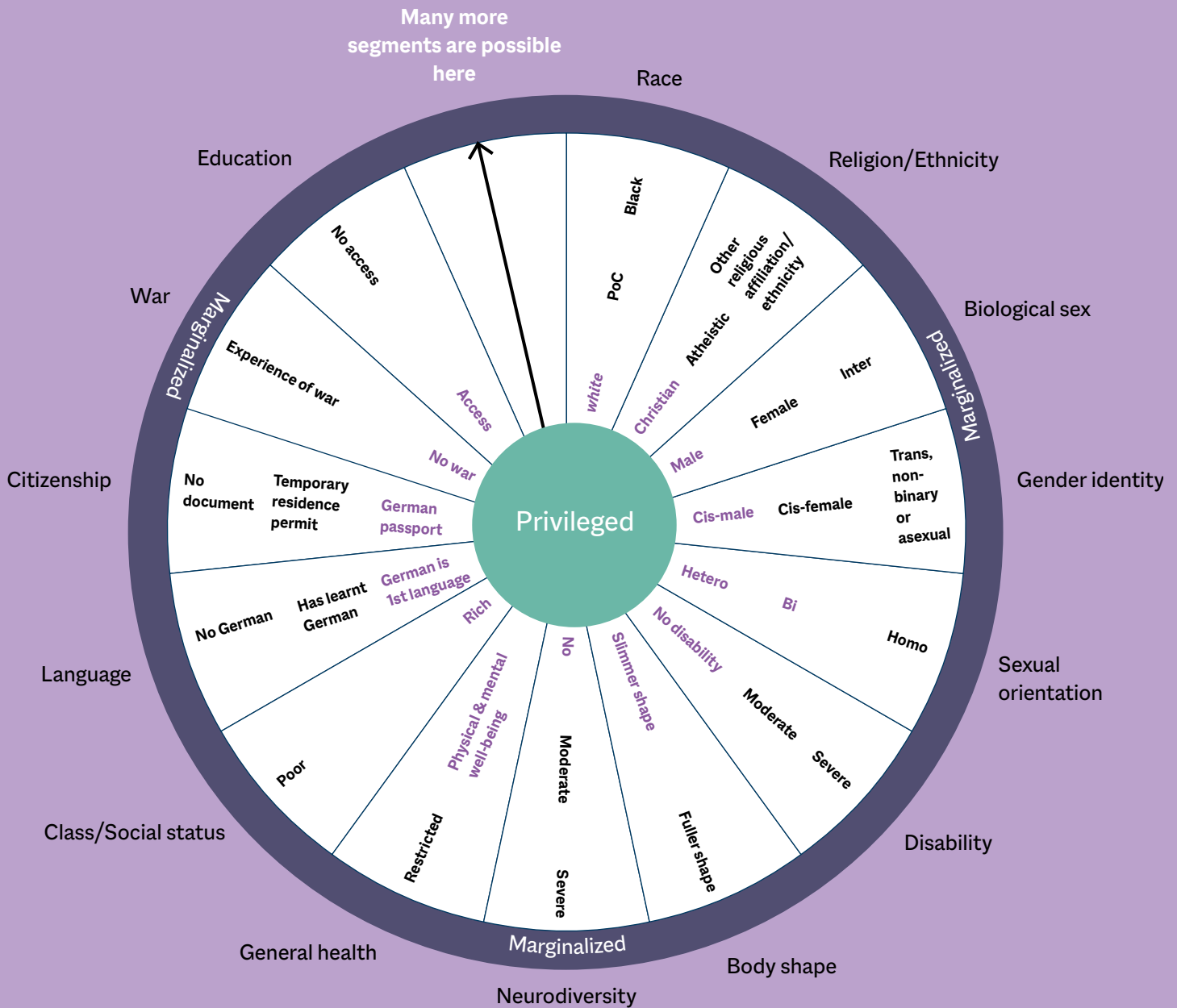
Reflection question:

- Which of the statements applies at the individual level, and which at the societal level?
- What does this mean for the field of peace work/conflict transformation?

**For the white person who wants
to know how to be my friend**

**"The first thing you do is to forget
that I'm black.
Second, you must never forget
that I'm black."**

Parker, Pat (1978): *Movement in Black: The Collected Poetry of Pat Parker, 1961-1978*. New York: Diana Press.



Intersectionality: Wheel of privilege. Own graphic¹⁷, inspired by the Canadian model, from the Canadian Council of Refugees¹⁸.

Note:

Such charts only present a simplified view of the complexities involved. The model does not therefore claim to be exhaustive, and can be adapted and modified for different contexts. The schematic and simplified representation contained in this chart can be used to stimulate reflection on the additional complexity found in practice. It is intended to prompt reflection and to create space for diversity in dialogue. The purpose of the structure is not to establish binarities, rather each slice of the pie contains intersections which give rise to many different forms and intermediate spaces. This is what the arrow in the empty slice of the pie is intended to signify. The chart is not intended to play off different experiences of discrimination against each other, to hierarchize them or to stigmatize them through the fixed attribution of intersections.

Rather it is intended to provide food for thought. For example, direct experiences of violence – such as domestic violence – are not included in the chart. Categories such as age, upbringing, environment, creativity or comprehension skills are not included either. This because it is not possible to represent age discrimination, for example, in the linear structure.

From an intersectional perspective, a large number of people can be exposed to widely varying forms and frequencies of discrimination. One and the same person can play different roles in which they are privileged or discriminated against depending on the context and time. Intersections can also serve as places of perspective formation and competence.

Example: The chart shows that the experience of a cis-male conflict manager with his own experience of war and physical disabilities is different to that of a wealthy Black non-binary female conflict manager. Both have different experiences of privilege and discrimination and can therefore bring different perspectives to a debate on peacebuilding.

From an intersectional perspective, all individuals are connected to all categories. Privilege awareness, allyship (see Allyship – What are we talking about? p. 14) and solidarity can serve as the starting point for the joint dismantling of discriminatory structures (“*shared vulnerability*”). This does not mean ignoring differences, but rather understanding them as structural power asymmetries and recognizing that intersections such as Black and *white* are social constructs. Because when people from a privileged position “ignore” these categories, this can represent a form of *vulnerabilization* (see below).

→ Intersectionality can be understood as a discrimination-sensitive perspective which focuses on the interaction between disparate, hierarchical and socially effective constructions of difference.

→ Intersectionality can also be understood as a

form of analysis which is critical of discrimination that questions and seeks to deconstruct structural inequalities and the consequences of their interplay.

Vulnerability - What are we talking about?

A person who is vulnerable is exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed. Groups that experience discrimination due to their intersection are often referred to as vulnerable. They are deemed vulnerable if protecting them is assumed to require special effort. However, the term must be viewed in a differentiated way. The semantic distinction between “*vulnerability*” and structural “*vulnerabilization*” put forward by Judith Butler is useful here.

All people are vulnerable from birth. This is referred to as “*shared vulnerability*”, as all people need a certain amount of care, safety and protection. However, the extent to which individual people are vulnerable in the course of their lives is a matter of politics and social structures and not of nature, as certain structures make it possible to exclude or disregard people in the first place. Such production of inequality is then a form of structural violence and is referred to as “*structural vulnerabilization*”.

Vulnerability is therefore context-dependent and can vary depending on the time and place. The purpose of distinguishing between vulnerability and vulnerabilization is to highlight the need to change structures that lead to discrimination¹⁹. Shared vulnerability²⁰, in contrast, is regarded in feminist theory as the starting point for joint action. The aim is to create something unifying and to place concerted, solidarity-based action at the center of the community (this understanding is revisited below under the term “*power sharing*”).

Allyship - What are we talking about?

The term allyship is used to describe efforts by groups of people to advance the interests of marginalized groups both in society at large and in particular social contexts. Allyship is an attitude and a value-based decision.

It entails a reassessment of the social constructions in our society. It involves privileged people trying to act in solidarity with and on behalf of people affected by discrimination. Allyship is a lifelong process of listening and establishing trusting relationships.

Allyship means

- listening to affected persons and learning from their experience. It is important not to relativize or judge their experience. The focus is on how experiences are perceived by those affected, and not on the intention of the privileged person. The main focus is on the effect rather than on the intention.
- sharing access and resources, as long as it is understood that such offers may be declined in a particular situation by those affected.
- not understanding privilege as something which a person merits, but as a social construct.
- showing civil courage²¹.

Notes:

Privilege awareness

Privilege awareness means recognizing one's own position, reflecting on when, where and through which privileges access to power arises and how this can be shared pro-socially with others who do not have the same privileges. Privilege awareness is linked to allyship if a conscious and active example of "*learning to unlearn*"²² such privileges is translated into action.

Power sharing and power shifting: One's own privilege can be used pro-socially if power is shared, for example in the form of resources, time and access. It is important to listen to those affected and not to question, evaluate or relativize their experience. It is also important to reflect on the connection between power asymmetries and inequality structures in everyday life and to take responsibility for one's own behavior.

Statements such as "*I believe we are all the same, there are no differences*" are not useful because they ignore the different experiences of individuals and the structural dimension of discrimination. This negates the effects of colonial continuities and other present-day structural inequalities.

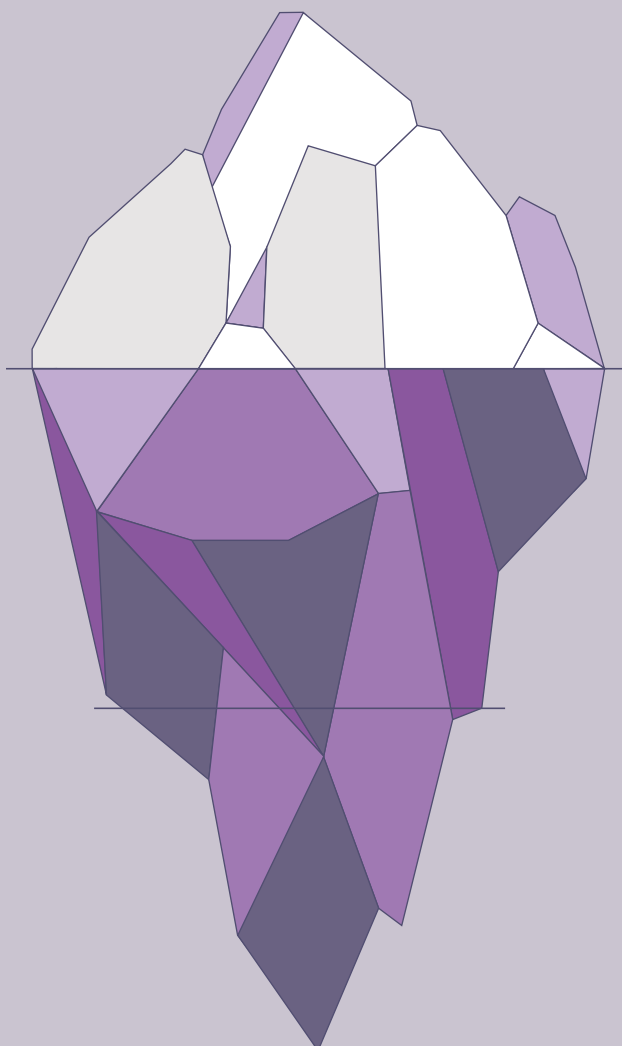
Power sharing can involve using one's own voice or influence to sensitize those around one to the interplay between discrimination and privilege. Here, the emphasis can be shifted to what our counterpart is able to do instead of focusing on what they cannot do.

Attaining privilege awareness is a lifelong process. It is okay to make mistakes because everyone has gaps in perception. It is therefore important to create safe(r) spaces where tolerance for mistakes can be cultivated and experience and gaps in perception shared. The aim should be to create a space for mutual respect and appreciation. Privilege awareness does not mean that people should feel guilty about or ashamed of their privilege.

Critical power analysis – What are we talking about?

Power is a type of social relationship that influences all forms of social interaction. There are no power-free spaces in societal practices, which is why opportunities for participation vary depending on each individual's own privileged status. Critical power analysis involves a critical reflection of existing power imbalances that are embedded in power relations and that lead to privileged status on the one hand and discrimination on the other.

The Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano²³ uses the term *colonialidad del poder*, translated as “*coloniality of power*”, to describe a global power structure consisting of capitalism, Eurocentrism and the notion of nation states based on the racialization of people and the modern/colonial gender system (Lugones 2016)²⁴. In this understanding, coloniality acts as a global pattern of power characterized by domination, exploitation and conflict (Quintero 2013)²⁵ (see decolonial perspectives, below).



VISIBLE POWER

Observable rules and processes



HIDDEN POWER

Influencing or agenda setting behind the scenes



INVISIBLE POWER

Internalised power, shaping what feels possible

Sheila McKechnie Foundation and the Power Project (2022):
It's all about Power. A guide to thinking differently about power
for solidarity in social change. p. 85, own adaptation

Post- and decolonial perspectives – What are we talking about?

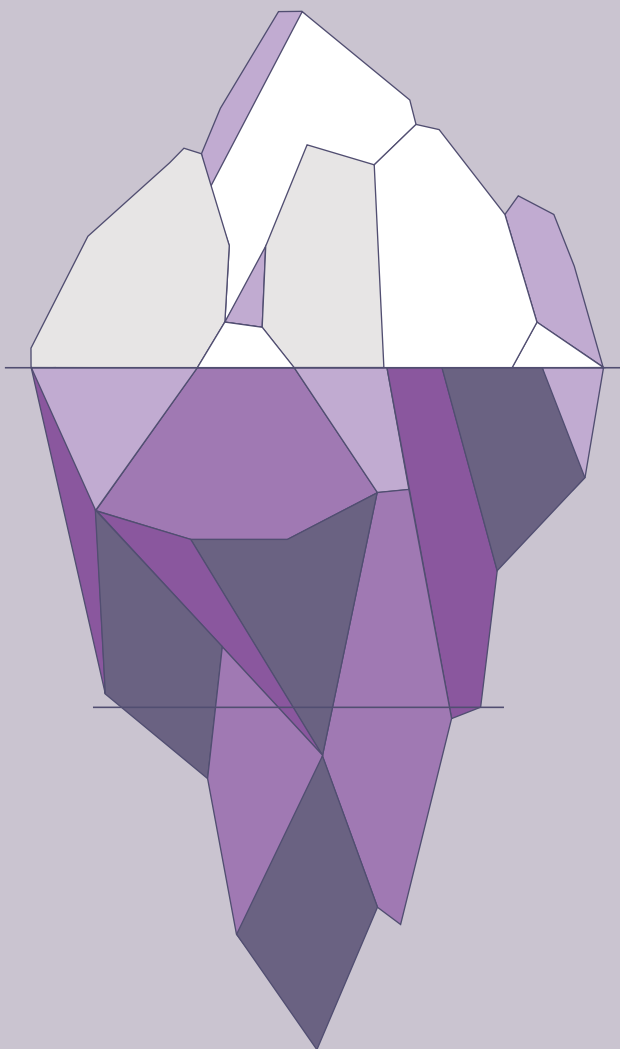
Postcolonial: Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha played leading roles in formulating this theory, which was inspired by their anti-colonial precursors. The colonization of Africa, Asia and the Arab world in the 19th and 20th centuries forms the main starting point for postcolonial perspectives. The prefix “*post*” points to the long-term effects of colonialism. Postcoloniality highlights the fact that we are in an ongoing relationship with the colonial era: the colonial structures and the resulting problems continue to this day. This is why the term **colonial continuities** is often used. Postcolonial theories criticize the colonial/former distinction between the “*Western world*” and “*foreigners*”. They question the judgmental construction of the “*Other*”, which only becomes possible with the valorization of the “*Self*”. The term othering is often used here. We speak of othering when a group or a person differentiates themselves from another group by describing the non-native group as different and alien.

Decolonial: This theory stems from the European expansion to the Americas 500 years ago. It criticizes **colonial modernity** and the connection between domination, power and violence, which is linked to the repression of knowledge of Latin American origin. The discourse on decoloniality was initiated by Fernando Coronil, María Lugones, Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Arturo Escobar and others, who came together in the 1990s to form the Grupo *Modernidad/Colonialidad/Descolonialidad*²⁶.

In their work, they position themselves against Eurocentrism and describe the Conquista of the Americas as the starting point of the discourse on modernity. Decolonial perspectives often incorporate the concept of “*pluriversality*”, a decolonial political vision of the Zapatistas. “*Pluriversality*” is a view of the world in which many worlds co-exist and different systems of knowledge and existence are accorded equal recognition. This understanding is diametrically opposed to the concept of universality. The pluriverse goes beyond dualistic concepts and dichotomies such as: Global South/Global North, human/non-human, developed/underdeveloped, mind/body, reason/intuition, rational/emotional.

What significance does critical racism and power analysis have for conflict transformation and peace work?

Critical approaches to power, when applied to conflict dynamics, could be represented thus in the iceberg model:



VISIBLE (representation)

Perception of conflict in social interactions

Who is taken seriously, who participates, who makes decisions, who sits *“at the table”*? How does this relate to privilege?



HIDDEN (agenda setting)

Conflict drivers

Who decides who takes part, who sits *“at the table”*– at what time and why? Who is familiar with the communication channels, administrative processes and decision-making procedures? How does this relate to privilege? What conflicts arise from this?



INVISIBLE (path dependencies)

Causes of conflict

Why is there a *“table”* in the first place?

What structures influence the present-day norms and values, attitudes and actions, self-images and worldviews that create privilege and discrimination and that can influence agenda-setting and representation?

Multi-level model of power ²⁷

The “*table*” symbolizes for example conflict mediation, conflict intervention, peace education workshops, training sessions, panel discussions, specialist conferences, academic work in peace and conflict research conducted at a desk or at conferences, or empirical work in the field etc..

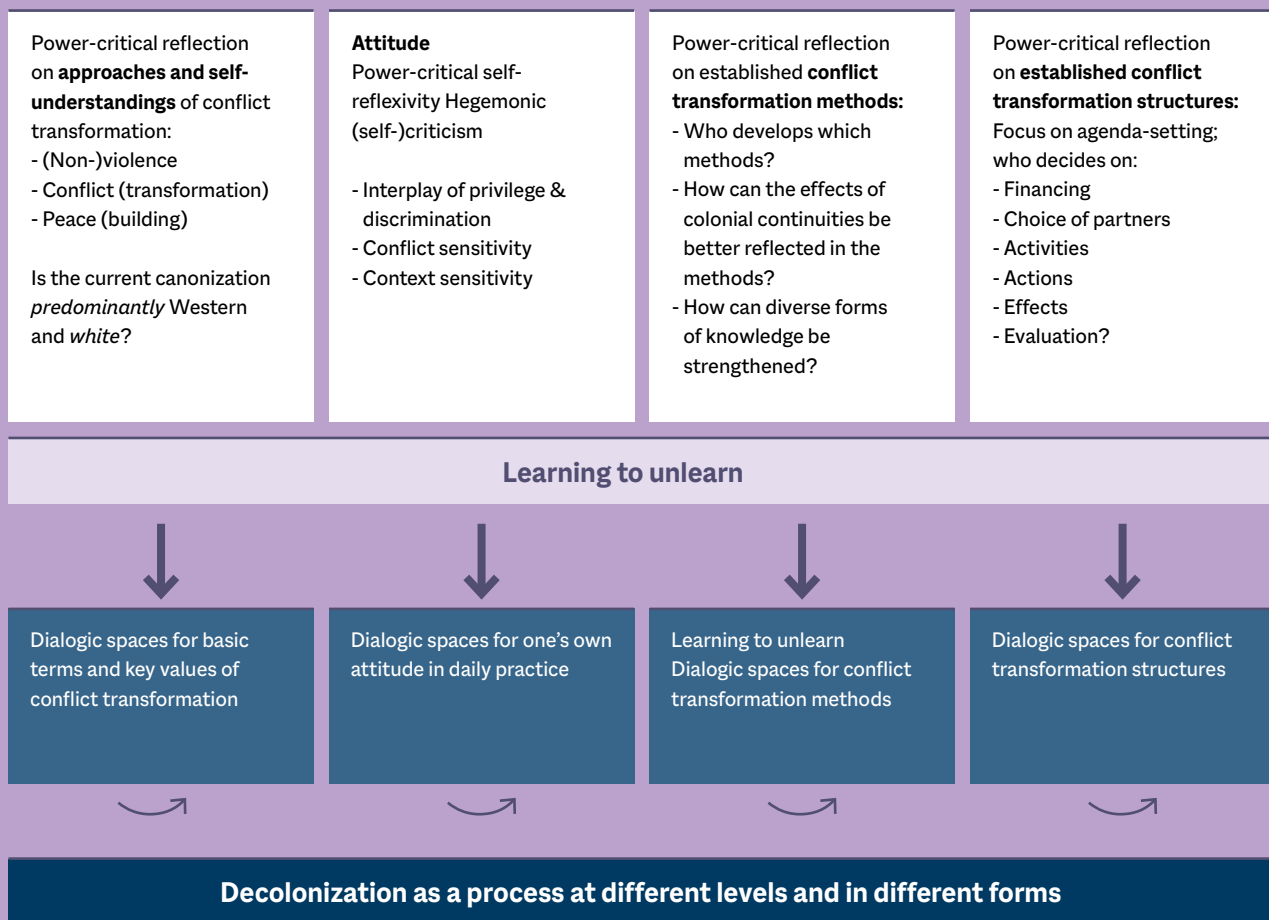
Peace work based on critical approaches to racism and power can involve reflection on:

- Who defines what peace, conflict, violence and war are? Which definitions and concepts are taken seriously, and which are not?
- Who develops the concepts and methods that are used in peace work and conflict transformation? Which are the main concepts which count as the “*basics*” and as part of the “*standard repertoire*”, and which are not?
- Who selects the partnerships?
- Who sets the agenda for peace work?
- Who defines the goals, measures and effects of peace work and conflict transformation?
- Who decides which financial resources are allocated to which projects, and which actors are involved?
- Which “*one world*” and “*one civil society*” ideas are interwoven in this?

Notes:

The following diagram provides an overview of the issues discussed here at various levels. It can represent a springboard for reflection. The diagram can give cause for thought when reflecting on and discussing approaches and self-images, attitudes, methods and structures of conflict transformation and peace work within one's own structures, or when developing these for one's own particular context.

Decolonization as a process at different levels and in different forms



Critical power and racism analysis in conflict transformation

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- 17 Find out more here: <https://rosa-mag.de/was-bedeutet-tokenism/>
- 18 Further reading: **Morrisson, Tonis** (1993): **Morrisson, Tonis** (2023): *Playing In The Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books.
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- 21 The entries in the “War” segment refer in this case to “negative peace” (absence of war).
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26 More information can be found at: <https://pacarina-delsur.com/home/abordajes-y-contiendas/108-modernidad--colonialidad--descolonialidad-aclaraciones-y-replicas-desde-un-proyecto-epistemico-en-el-horizonte-del-bicentenario>

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Discrimination

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Reflection

Intersectionality

Racism

Postcolonial