

Guide to an anti-racist group reflection

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1. What is this about?

This guide provides suggestions for an internal debate on racism within your (political) grassroots group. This compilation is from the Antira AG by Ende Gelände Berlin.

Disclaimer:

This self-reflection is about racism. Racism should not be considered one-dimensional. It is necessary to consider the interactions and interrelations of racism and other dimensions of inequality such as classism or gender, i.e. intersectionality. In this reflection sheet we however mainly focus on general points concerning the topic of racism and thus do not live up to the complex experiences and identities of people in racist power structures.

Obviously, the different groups differ in structure, content and working methods. Therefore, more specific questions for individual groups would certainly be useful. However, this is primarily a general impulse for self-reflection. So please be aware of your specific structures and think about them as you go along.

2. Why?

We need to talk about racism!

Racism is a structural part of our society and plays a role everywhere - also in your grassroots group. You do not have to wait for a professionally organised workshop or anti-racist process support to address racism in your group. You will find a lot of material on the topic and can start by yourself right away.

3. How?

First of all, it is necessary to read up on the subject. You will find more about this at 5.1., and so you should individually start thinking about yourself and your positioning in the racist system (5.2.). By positioning we mean the social position in the power relation of racism, which we take on as the basis of our experiences in society (see terms in the appendix). This is followed by a reflection the group (5.3.).

5.3. offers guiding questions for the group reflection. We recommend that you start your group reflection with a plenary session exclusively on this topic. You might find that one session might not be enough, as each question can certainly take up a whole plenary session. In any case, it is good if people from your group take care of the preparation and think more carefully about which methods should be used to discuss and what the precise questions could be. You can probably best judge for yourself what works in your group, which topics to discuss and what topics are relevant to you.

After the plenary session, however, the issue has not been resolved. It is very important to initiate a long-term process. For this it is necessary that topics on (anti-)racism are given a permanent place in your group.

4. Hints for your group reflection process

Many hints are directed more towards *white* people, because Ende Gelände is dominated by *white* people.

Moderation:

- Offer people affected by racism the opportunity to express wishes to the facilitator and / or to have a say in the planning, even if they do not want to be part of the facilitation group. Please do this in one-on-one conversations and not in front of the whole group. Ask if they would prefer to be part of the plenary session when enabled to talk exclusively to others affected by racism. In the meantime, *white* people could discuss questions for themselves.

All of you:

- Do not put people who are affected by racism in the explanatory position.
- Your group is probably no safer space for all participants. So do not assume that everyone can really address all issues, but consider first how to create a comfortable climate for all.
- Do not assign a position to members of your group if you have never talked to them about it. "*Whitepassing*" describes the phenomenon when a person is perceived as *white* / *non-white* in different situations.
- When you talk about "we", think about who you actually talk about, and address it immediately ("We *white* people", or "We as a group", or "We as Ende Gelände" and so on)
- When you talk about "them", think about who you are talking about and address it right away ("them, who are affected by coal mining in Colombia", or "them, experiencing Racial Profiling in action", or "them, the *white* people" and so on)

5. More specifically

5. 1. Materials For Preparation

Obviously, these topics and links will only touch upon some aspects of racism. Still, they will be very helpful especially at the beginning of the process. Please be aware that some contents are only available in German.

1 . Racism in general

- Exit Racism on Spotify:
<https://open.spotify.com/album/6LLl2tvQel0dJiTLQpTAUE?si=w6BGHmE6TLyYZuGFpze3TA>
- Birgit Rommelspacher: What is racism?
<http://www.agpolpsy.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Rommelspacher-Was-ist-Rassismus.pdf>

2. Racism and the climate movement

- Letter from BIPOCs to the climate justice movement in Germany: <https://bit.ly/3ldLEdG>

3. Political position on racism

- Kien Nghi Ha - People of Color as an alliance of solidarity:
<https://migrazine.at/artikel/people-color-als-solidarisches-bundnis>
- Explain video: BIPOC and *white* - <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CBgmWw4gGS6/> (You do not need an Instagram account., 9 min)

4. Cultural appropriation

- anti-racist info mail #3:
<https://www.ende-gelaende.org/news/antirassistische-infomail-3/>

5. Tokenism

- anti-racist info mail #2:
<https://www.ende-gelaende.org/news/antirassistische-infomail-2-tokenism/>

6. Allyship

- <https://www.zeitjung.de/was-ist-ein-ally-gesellschaft-allyship-engagement-definitionen/>
(text + video)

7. Critical *Whiteness*

- AK special issue on Critical *Whiteness*:
https://archiv.akweb.de/themen/sonderbeilage_cw.htm

8. Empowerment

- Explain video: anti-racist Empowerment (video 7 min)
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CECbNngKY07/>
- And this podcast: <https://paralleldazu.podigee.io/about>

9. Colonialism and climate crisis

- Video: What does colonialism have to do with the climate crisis?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufcZE7EbBb0>

5.2. Self-reflection on your own

Prior to the group reflection, EVERY GROUP MEMBER (!) should take sufficient time for self-reflection.

For Every Group Member

Take sufficient time to answer the following questions for yourself. Furthermore, you will find a number of statements in the appendix which might help you to position yourself.

- How are you positioned in society? (class, race, gender, sexuality, ability, residence status ...)
What privileges are associated with this? How can you use your privileges?
- Does your positioning in relation to racism have an influence on your role in the grassroots group? Do you feel that there are dynamics or conflicts in the group that have something to do with different privileges and positioning?
- What does solidarity mean to you?
- What would you like to learn about racism? Do you have knowledge gaps ?

To *White* People

Racist behaviour is not exclusively a conscious choice. Racism is often reproduced unconsciously. The fact that even unconscious racism leads to racist interaction is often not comprehensible to people in privileged positions, as it is usually assumed that racist discrimination only exists if it is intentional. Keep this in mind and deal considerately with criticism from people that experience racism.

- What does it mean for you to be *white*?→ Answer these questions from J. Apraku
 - 1. When did you first realise that you were *white*?
 - 2. How has your *whiteness* influenced your personal path in life? Give an example.
 - 3. Have you ever thought that all people are equal and that you don't see any colours? If so, has your attitude changed now? Why has it changed?
 - 4. (How) do you support that criticism from people who experience racism is heard?
- More questions can be found here (unfortunately you need an Instagram account)
<https://www.instagram.com/josephine.apraku/>
- When was the last time you noticed that you or someone else was behaving in a racist way? How did you deal with it? Did you talk about it with other people?
- Does the subject of racism make you feel insecure? Why? What can you do about it?

- Do you know what an "ally" is? How can you be an "ally" in the group (and in the rest of your life)?
- If you criticise racism, what do you criticise, e.g. racist behaviour of other persons / own behaviour / structural racism?

To People Negatively Affected By Racism

- Do you feel comfortable within your group?
- What might work better?
- Are there specific situations during which you have felt uncomfortable about racism?
- Do you have enough space to express your opinion?
- Do you get addressed as a representative of a constructed category or as an individual?
- Are there other people negatively affected by racism in the group or in Ende Gelände with whom you can exchange views?
- What makes a good "ally" for you?
- Is there anything you would like to see from the *white* people in the group?

5.3. Group reflection

As mentioned above, it may be helpful to divide a part of the plenary session into people affected by racism and *white* people. This is the case if there is a desire to do so and if a division based on the composition of the group makes sense.

- Exchange insights from your self-reflection: Do you want to share anything? What do you think about the questions? Did you notice anything special? What did surprise you? Did you feel uncomfortable? (ATTENTION: No person is forced to share anything!)
- Is there knowledge about racism in your group? How can you make it accessible to everybody? What are knowledge gaps? How can you gain knowledge?
- How do you get in touch with racism in your group? Where do you reproduce racism in your work group?
- Which perspectives regarding racism dominate the work in your group? Which perspectives are there, but are not heard? Which perspectives are missing?
- Who do you base your work on, e.g. when you organise an event: Who is the (implicit) target group? If you are looking for new people: Who do you address (implicitly) and who do you not address? If you support activists: Which picture do you have (implicitly) of a standard activist and her / his needs?

- Why is this so? How are similar images reproduced?
- What could lead to people being excluded? How could you change this?
- Have there already been racist incidents in the group that you consciously witnessed? Have you dealt with this? If so: How? Was it helpful? What was missing? If not: Why was it not dealt with? How could you improve it in the future?
- Can racism be criticised in your group when it takes place? Could there be reasons why criticism is not expressed?
- Do all people in your group take responsibility for addressing and criticising racism? Or is this a matter of individuals? (If so, why?)
- How do members of your group respond to criticism? Is criticism accepted or fended off?
- Do you as a group claim to be anti-racist? What do you do for it? How can you initiate a long-term anti-racist process in your group?

Final questions at the end of the group reflection: (everyone should think about those, but again, no-one should be forced to share their opinion!)

- Were you able to participate well? What were the obstacles?
- Have you also given space and listened to other people?
- What triggered your reflection?
- Have there been situations in which you felt uncomfortable? Did you feel exposed? How did that make you feel?
- Have you noticed defensive mechanisms / resistance to questions or issues?
- Did you have the feeling that your criticism was accepted?
- Have you accepted criticism?

6. What next?

Criticism of racism and empowerment are life-long processes. We hope that the debate was only a beginning or a first step on the long road. Stay tuned, read things, listen to people, ally, empower, reflect, criticise and talk to each other!

For further materials please contact us at eg-anti-ra@riseup.net. We have more texts, videos, podcasts etc. on many specific topics. We are always happy to receive questions, suggestions, criticism and so on :)

If you are thinking about doing a workshop on this topic in your group and are looking for speakers, you will find a list here:

<https://www.idaev.de/recherchetools/trainerinnenverzeichnis>

Feedback to Antira AG from Ende Gelände Berlin: anti-ra-berlin@ende-gelaende.org. Status November 2020.

7. Terms

(1) BIPoC

BIPoC stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. The term, which originates from the US-American Black Civil Rights Movement, is self-designation and does not describe the biological characteristics of people, but is a social construction that assigns people a certain social position.

What BIPoC have in common are shared experiences of racism, exclusion from the *white*-dominated majority society and collective ascriptions of "otherness". The term is understood as emancipatory and solidarity. It positions itself against attempts of separation through racism and culturalisation as well as against discriminatory foreign designations by the *white* majority society. However, racism not only creates the discriminated position, but also the privileged position, which is mostly unnamed and ignored by privileged parties (see below).

(2) *white*

White, unlike terms such as BIPoC, is not a politically empowering self-designation, but describes a dominant position, which is usually not named. Racism also structurally assigns *white* people a specific social place. This is connected to privileges, experiences of dominance and the experience as a yardstick for judging non-*white* people without being marked as *white* themselves. The designation *white* serves to make visible this positioning of *white* people, which too often remains unmarked. Being *white* is usually invisible for people with *white* privileges. To make it clear that being *white* is not an empowering self-designation, we write *whiteness* in lower case and italics.

8. Appendix

Important: The following statements should no be used to make a "set-up" within the group. No-one should be pressured to share their answers. This can be particularly unpleasant if the majority of the group has a relatively homogeneous background and individual people would "stick out". Therefore the statements should only be used for self-reflection.

At first sight, some issues do not appear to be directly related to racism. But since racism also represents a material power relationship, classism and racism often work together. However, not every person affected by classism is simultaneously affected by racism and vice versa.

1. I feel well represented in the group. The others have a similar background and can usually feel what is going on inside me.
2. I am not invited to join groups as a figurehead of their anti-racist practice.
3. When I say something in a plenary session, it is about me and not about my positioning.
4. I do not have to make other people feel good if they discriminate against me.

5. I am not affected by oppression, which I have to fight constantly. Therefore I can freely choose in which political struggle I want to get involved.
6. It does not happen that other people speak for me, my concern, my needs and the related political struggles of my whole family.
7. I feel as part of groups and not as an outside person.
8. At the climate camp, people would never wear the hairstyles, clothes etc. for which I and my family are discriminated against.
9. When I want to say something, I find it easy to express myself because German is my mother tongue and because I know the "scene language".
10. I go to plenary sessions very often, which gives me prestige in my political groups.
11. I study. My parents pay my living expenses.