

## Self Determination through Language and Terminology

Language is an important part of what we call 'African self-determination'. The tendency to define and create words, describing African and African Diasporic communities, that are overtly or covertly racist and sexist and the absorption of these prescribed definitions into every day life is the reason terminology is so integral to the internal and external perception of African people. The words we use illustrate culture and equally important, social ideology. It wasn't too long ago that an indifferent majority of people believed it was acceptable to refer to disabled people as 'spastics', African people as 'coloureds/negroes' and any non european region of the planet as 'third world'. Many of the offensive words used to refer to minority communities in the UK exist simply because the majority of people believe the correct alternatives to be too much effort to remember, culturally insignificant or not advantageous to their socio-politically oppressive structures. African people have been reduced to 'blacks' while Chinese, Native American and Indian communities have managed to reject and supersede 'yellow', 'red' and 'brown' as terms of reference. The result of the constant usage and perpetuation of offensive terms means that generations of 'educated' people are taught how to use derogatory words that deliberately mask significant, historical and cultural information whilst simultaneously reinforcing social and racial prejudices. Language is far from stagnant. It must be changed and revolutionised on our own terms in order to empower African people.

### 'black' or African

Is there any difference between 'people of colour' and 'coloured people'? A human couple leave Earth and go to Mars, nine months later the woman gives birth to their baby. Is that child now a Martian? Have you ever heard of a 'brown person of Indian descent', 'a yellow person of Chinese descent', a 'pink person of European descent', 'a red person of Amerindian descent'? A person with African parents is born outside the Continent, is that person now a 'blackopean'? Have you ever heard of a brown Indian, a yellow Chinese or a red Native American? The answer to all these question is no. So why do we have 'black' African?

It is disrespectful and disempowering to label the cultural identity of any person by use of a single homogenous colour, historically linked with negative connotations and adverse associations.

Likewise the seemingly innocuous phrase 'black person of African descent' has been used to convince African people that they are 'black' and were maybe African a long time ago. This is untrue. Almost all so called 'black' people are Africans. Some have Caribbean heritage, others South American but regardless of current nationality all are African. The word 'black' is connected to the european words negro, negre, nigra and the highly offensive n-word. All these derogatory terms have been used throughout history in official european documents justifying the enslavement and colonisation of African people. Their sole purpose was to disinherit African people from their culture and heritage to prevent them from rejecting eurocentric designated roles, cultural values and identities. African is our name, black is an imposed and branded label.

### **Black slaves or enslaved Africans?**

Over the last hundred years this is one of the many questions historians have argued over when attempting to describe the capture and enslavement of African people. Current eurocentric thinking argues that African people were considered 'property' and therefore this justified the use of the derogatory phrase 'black slave' as a means to remove any reference or ties to their cultural heritage and identity. Africentric academics refute this and maintain that they were free Africans before capture and became 'enslaved Africans' after. The use of the word 'enslaved' indicates that historically, African people have always offered resistance to enslavement and never capitulated to the role of being simply 'slaves'. This also explains why the term 'freed slave' is not only offensive but grammatically inconsistent.

### **Slave Trade**

The term 'slave trade' is used to demean the holocaust caused by the immoral and inhumane practice of selling human beings into servitude. The word 'trade' implies a legitimate and consensual transaction and belittles the magnitude of the atrocities committed against African people. Enslaved African people did not believe they were born slaves nor were they bound by the pan-European laws that said it was legal to forcibly capture African people for the purpose of unpaid labour, rape and murder. Revisionist historians are now using the term 'slave trade' to assert that a majority of 'uncivilised' African people were wholly responsible for the African holocaust and sold their own families into enslavement. An extension of this exaggerated claim also implies that corrupted African people are responsible for selling the natural resources of the Continent to innocent and moralistic European investors.

### **African Holocaust and Maafa**

Similar to the way that the label 'slave' is used by western media to almost exclusively conjure up images of enslaved African people, the term holocaust has also become synonymous with the ethnically motivated atrocities carried out by Europeans on their fellow Jewish community. Nonetheless, the death, destruction and continued rape of African culture, resources and people through enslavement, apartheid and colonialism remain an ongoing holocaust faced by millions of African people worldwide. The word Maafa is a Kiswahili term meaning 'an event of great disaster, calamity or terrible occurrence'. It is commonly used by Africentric academics to describe the more than five hundred years of barbaric crimes committed by Europeans against humanity.

More information on Africentric terminology can be found  
on our website at: [www.ligali.org](http://www.ligali.org)