RACIALIZING CRITICALITY IN ADULT EDUCATION

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This paper starts from the working assumption that adult educational theory and practice is, to use Lucis T. Outlaw Jr's term, racialized (Outlaw, 1996). When a phenomenon is racialized it is viewed through the distinctive lens of a racial group's experience of the world. The experience of racial group membership is here seen as a positive constitutive element of one's identity. Racialism (to be distinguished from racism) is the positive recognition of how one's life-world, positionality and sense of cultural identity comprise a set of pre-conscious filters and assumptions that frame how one's life is felt and lived. A field of practice is racialized when its dominant conceptualizations, and the mechanisms it has in place for the production and dissemination of knowledge, are grounded in one particular racial group's experiences (in the case of adult education, White European-Americans) and the forms of thought that flow from these. Moreover, a racialized view is one in which these dominant conceptualizations are judged to rest on positive valuations of the constitutive elements of racial identity.

Adult education is racialized in that the most frequently cited concepts that purport to define what is distinctive about the field and that comprise its dominant discursive boundaries – andragogy, self-direction, critical reflection, transformative learning – are valued positively and identified mostly with scholarship conducted by White American, European and Commonwealth males. However, the racialization of adult education theorizing – the way it is viewed through the lens of Whiteness, with Whiteness regarded as the positively valued, unspoken norm – is rarely commented on. This is what Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) refer to as the invisible politics of race in adult education theorizing. Even when race moves center stage in the discourses of the field its discussion tends to be framed in terms of enhancing diversity or including minority perspectives. Non-White perspectives are represented as the exotic other, the alien tradition of different racial experience that is added on to the White center. As Shore (2001) comments, the desire to make the Other visible "often involves legitimizing from the center a space in which the Other can speak, where the Other gets to operate or be visible, only because of the largesse of the center" (p. 51). Supposedly emancipatory initiatives to widen the field's discourse become experienced as condescending, patronizing attempts by the White center to 'give voice' to the margins - when voice cannot be given, only claimed.

Acknowledging that concepts and practices are racialized and that they thereby serve the interests of one particular racial group is not to say they should be abandoned by all other groups. For example, although he identifies himself as an American philosopher of African descent, Outlaw himself does not abandon European critical theory. Instead he reinterprets it to serve the particular racial interests of African Americans*. But it is to say that adult education scholars should be much more intentional in their efforts to trace the racial framing of the field's dominant discourse. Part of this effort involves de-centering adult education by "shifting the stated or implied center or voice of discourse away from the previously unquestioned dominant, male, Eurocentric subject" (Hemphill, 2001, p. 20). Along with this goes the effort to pay "some explicit attention to how whiteness is theorized from within" (Shore, 2001, p. 53).

A racialized analysis reflecting an unproblematized Eurocentrism is particularly glaring within the philosophical tradition of critical theory, arguably the most influential discourse within contemporary adult educational theorizing. Critical theory interpreted via Habermas frames the extensive work conducted by Mezirow and others in transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) currently the most celebrated and researched idea in adult educational theory. The concept of critically reflective practice, recently positioned as the conceptual core of the millenial *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (Wilson and Hayes, 2000), is also grounded in critical theory's focus on identifying power and contesting hegemony. Critical positions drawn from critical theory and associated with Gramsci, Marcuse, and Foucault frame how a critically reflective practice of adult education is conceived (Brookfield, 2000). However, as Outlaw and West (amongst many other African American scholars) point out, critical theory as represented by Marx, Gramsci, Marcuse, Fromm, Habermas, Foucault and others largely omits racial analysis and "tacitly assumes that racism is rooted in the rise of modern capitalism" (West, 1993c, p. 262).

Regarding the pivotal role of critical reflection in adult education, several African American scholars have urged the reframing of this idea in a racialized way. Johnson-Bailey (2002) suggests that "adult education's current embrace of critical reflection is a promising direction" (p. 45) but that it must incorporate into its discourse an explicit focus on race. Smith and Colin (2001) advocate that those who espouse a critically reflective paradigm of adult education need to understand the presence and impact of racist practices in adult education. In their view it is the inclusion of the experiences of African American scholars "that will result in a true critically reflective practice" (p. 66) in the field. In a similar vein, Sheared and Sissel (2001) end their groundbreaking volume on making space for excluded voices and perspectives in adult education by concluding that "the only way we can begin to make space for 'Others' as well as those of us in the academy, is to engage in critical, reflective, dialogue" (p. 327) concerning the absence of discourses of race, gender, sexual orientation, ageism and ableism.

Theoretical Frameworks Informing a Racialized Criticality

In this paper I explore two attempts to racialize criticality in adult education in favor of African Americans, each of which is located in a specific theoretical framework. The first framework is second-generation critical theory, in which African American intellectuals take the central component of criticality articulated by the Frankfurt School – an awareness of the need for the political struggle of class against class – and reframe this as the struggle against systemic racism. First generation Frankfurt school thinkers such as Adorno (1973), Horkheimer (1974, 1995), Marcuse (1964) and Fromm (1941, 1956) were attempting to reinterpret Marx's work in a world where capitalism seemed to be loved, rather than reviled by, the European working class, and in a world where citizens seemed to welcome, rather than resist, fascist movements and the dumbing down of culture into mass commercialization. African American intellectuals Lucius T. Outlaw Jr. and Cornel West believe that the understanding of criticality in the critical theory tradition has a utility in furthering the interests of African Americans, but that to accomplish this these ideas must be viewed through, and fundamentally changed by, the prism of African Americans' experience of racism. Utilizing West's and Outlaw's work we can start to examine how the factor of race intersects with those learning tasks of adulthood – challenging ideology, overcoming alienation, contesting hegemony, and unmasking power – that are the focus of critical theory.

The second theoretical framework explored for its understanding of criticality is Africentism. As articulated by writers such as Asante (1990, 1998a,b) Africentric thought is held to be epistemologically distinctive, to comprise ways of knowing, experiencing, perceiving and meaning-making that stand apart from the Eurocentric ideal of the monological self coming to truth through rational, self-directed reflection. Whether such a claim of epistemological separateness can be upheld is the subject of a vigorous intellectual debate amongst African American philosophers (see, for example, Serequeberhan, 1991, 1994; Outlaw, 1996; Pittman, 1997; Kiros, 2001; Hord and Lee, 1995). In American adult education an Africentric discourse of criticality that reframes critical reflection as a process of naming and fighting racism in the field of research and practice has been developed by Colin (1994, 2002) and her co-authors (Hayes and Colin, 1994; Colin and Guy, 1998; Smith and Colin, 2001). This conception of criticality as anti-racist thought and practice appears similar to Outlaw's and West's racialization of ideas drawn from critical theory, but it actually represents an entirely separate epistemology. A crucial part of Africentric epistemology is the explicit rejection of Eurocentric intellectual traditions and the deliberate displacement of criteria for judging adult educational theorizing and practice that are derived from Eurocentric models. For adult educators of all races and ethnicities to engage seriously with this discourse would be a turn as significant as that of the field's movement away from the andragogical consensus of the 1980's towards critical theory. Africentrism does not position itself in relation to critical theory; rather, it exists on its own terms. Its notions of criticality are derived from African, not European, epistemology.

Before engaging with these two attempts to racialize critical theory, however, I wish to make an important caveat concerning my own racial membership as White. As my sometime co-teaching partner Dr Scipio Colin 111 reminds me, I cannot be an Africentric theorist whose being, identity and practice spring from African values, sensibilities and traditions. I can appreciate the accuracy and explanatory power of something like Du Bois' concept of double consciousness. In so doing I can reflect on how being both African and American means that one is "always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of

measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1995, p. 45). But though this may illuminate what some of my learners and colleagues are experiencing I can have no real understanding of what this means. As a white person I have no experiential, visceral access to the philosophy born of struggle that comprises the central dimension of African American thought. My skin pigmentation, white privilege and collusion in racism places me irrevocably and irretrievably outside the Africentric paradigm. I can learn from, and honor, this scholarship. I can be grateful for the way such scholarship questions and reformulates aspects of critical theory, or the way it shatters (in a helpful way) my own understandings and practices. But I can never claim to work as an Africentric adult educator. No matter how much I wish to honor this tradition, my racial membership precludes me making such a claim. In the words of a provocative volume, it is problematic to ignore positionality and claim that you are *Teaching What You're Not* (Mayberry, 1996).

Re-focusing Critical Theory on the African American Life-world

An important call for the re-interpretation of criticality in a way that places being critical in the service of African American interests is Lucius T. Outlaw's development of a hermeneutics of the African American life-world. Outlaw is consistently explicit about the influence of critical theory (especially Marcuse, Foucault, Horkheimer and Habermas) on his work. Mostly he is concerned to re-frame Habermas' preoccupation with the need to defend the life-world from attacks by capital and state power. For Outlaw, the project of defending the life-world must be refocused through the lens of African American interests. He positions himself as a philosopher of African descent who shares critical theory's conception of philosophy as a tool for social change. To him "the vocation of philosophizing …. is to share in the refinement and perpetuation of critical intelligence as a practice of life" (1996, p. 29) with this practice leading to "life expressed as qualitatively-progressively-different" (ibid.). To live philosophically is to "live life conditioned primarily by the activity of critical, dialectical thinking" (ibid. p. 30). To live as a Black philosopher is to be "guided by the interest (i.e. the value commitment) to serve the emancipatory efforts of people of African descent" (1983a, p. 66) while realizing that this also entails the widespread "revolutionary transformation of the American order" (ibid. p. 66).

Doing philosophy within the particularities of the African American experience will, in Outlaw's view, help reveal the true needs, interests, values and contributions of African Americans. He argues that philosophizing in the interests of African Americans will help develop a distinctive African American philosophical identity based on an awareness of Black intellectual traditions. A primary purpose of African Americans involved in critical thought must be to "become transparent to ourselves as a class in terms of our history, our responsibilities, our possibilities" (1996, p. 27). African American intellectuals "need to be clear as to our grounding as Black thinkers (in) the long history of struggle on the part of our people for an increasingly liberated existence" (ibid.). One chance to develop a philosophy that will serve African Americans' interests by helping them achieve a critical understanding of their situation is to combine Black Nationalism and critical theory. Outlaw believes that the critical resources of both traditions are necessary to clarifying African Americans' real needs and the means by which these might be met.

Why is critical theory an important partner to Black Nationalism? To Outlaw, critical theory "seeks to cut through the veil of socially unnecessary domination by socially unnecessary systems of authority and control via the praxis of critical reflection" (1983a, p. 72). As such, it provides one useful starting point "within which we people of African descent (and others) can assess our situation and achieve clarity regarding which concrete historical possibilities are in our best interest" (ibid. p. 83). Reframed in the interests of African Americans critical theory "has as its primary interest the liberation of black folk, and others, from domination, to the greatest extent possible" (ibid. p. 72). If critical theory is to be a useful partner in a fusion with Black Nationalism, however, it must incorporate an analysis of racism, and how this might be challenged, into its workings.

How might a racialized interpretation of critical theory serve the interests of people of African descent? Here Outlaw draws explicitly on Habermas' concept of the life-world to argue that critical theory's most useful contribution is to elaborate the contours and constitutive elements of the African American life-world. Whereas Habermas is concerned chiefly with the colonization of the life-world by the exchange

dynamic of capitalism and the logistics of bureaucratic rationality and state power, Outlaw's focus is on its invasion by the dynamics of racist ideology. When the African American life-world is distorted by white supremacist ideology then its members are hampered in their understanding of their current situation and future possibilities. An emancipatory philosophical project therefore is to illuminate the African American life-world in a way that reveals racial identity as a positive constitutive element, rather than as a source of shame or internalized self-loathing. A racialized turn to the life-world would explore "the lived experiences of persons within racial/ethnic groups for whom raciality and ethnicity is a fundamental and positive element of their identify" (Outlaw, 1983b, p. 177). Outlaw commits himself as a philosopher to understanding and communicating "the life-world of African-American people, in all of its ambiguities, complexities, contradictions, and clarities; to our concrete life-praxis, in search of our distinct orientation" (1983a, p. 66).

Examining the lived experiences of African American adults is one starting point for a racialized adult education curriculum organized to serve the interests of African Americans. Although he does not work explicitly as an adult educator, Outlaw's elaboration of the elements comprising the African American life world stands as a possible curricular outline. He looks in particular to the different forms of expression that he sees as produced by efforts to communicate the history of African American struggle. These include African folk tales, religious practices, political language and practices, music, poetry, art and the language of common currency. As concrete expressions of the African American life-world these elements, in Outlaw's view, contain fundamental meanings and orientations that serve as a guide to a program of political reconstruction serving African American interests. An adult educational program organized to help African Americans reclaim these meanings and orientations from a life-world distorted by white supremacy "will provide understandings of the historically conditioned concerns of black people (and) provide the clarified historical grounds for the orientation of present and future philosophical and practical activities in the interest of African-American people" (Outlaw, 1983a, p. 66). As the contours of African Americans' response to racism are learned, this will lead to "increased self-transparency – a broadening and intensification of our personal and collective self-understanding" (ibid. p. 69), which for Outlaw is "a condition necessary for restructuring present and future projects" (ibid.). A hermeneutics of the African American life-world will also help in "the restoration and repair of broken communication among the various groupings of our people" (Outlaw, 1996, p. 30).

This reclamation and elaboration of the contours of the African American life-world represents a project for critical reflection very different from most adult educational work in this area. Instead of reflection being the individual adult's uncovering of assumptions informing her experience, critical reflection here has as its focus the collective reclamation and rescue of a life-world from the distortions of racist ideology. Learning to be critically reflective in this instance contributes to the building of identity and political purpose amongst members of African American communities and, from an adult educational perspective, becomes an important precursor to creating an adult educational effort designed to foster anti-racist perspectives and practices. Understanding and appreciating the cultural and epistemological topography of the African American life-world constitutes an adult education curriculum explicitly geared to the furtherance of African American interests. Although such a curriculum might seem to be sectional it will, in Outlaw's opinion, ultimately serve the broader social good of all groups and communities since "many of the more fundamental needs of Black people are shared by many others" (Outlaw, 1996, p. 29).

A Racialized Engagement with the Critical Tradition

Learning to understand and dismantle racist power structures as part of a broader movement of social transformation is a project that is also endorsed by Cornel West, perhaps the most prominent of contemporary critical African American intellectuals. Like Outlaw, West draws strongly on critical theory, though unlike Outlaw he turns away from Habermas. In West's opinion Habermas' work mostly serves to provide "an innocuous badge of radicalism … a kind of opium for some of the American left-academic intelligentsia" (West, 1983a, p. 88). The figures in the critical tradition most consistently acknowledged by West are Marx, Foucault and Gramsci, all of whom in his view have much to contribute to keeping the hope of a revolutionary future alive in the African American community. Becoming a critically reflective

adult in West's opinion requires an understanding of how hegemony and political economy foreclose African Americans' opportunities to realize their potential.

West regards Marx's ideas are "indispensable – although ultimately inadequate – in grasping distinctive features of African-American oppression" (West, 1993b, p. 259). In his view the "richness of the Marxist methodological orientation and analytical perspective in relation to race remains untapped" (ibid. p. 261), partly because it omits an analysis of race as a separate dimension of oppression. Marx was unable to anticipate how "a common denominator of white supremacist abuse cuts across class, gender, sexual orientation" (West, 1993a, p. 131) and failed, in the words of the title of West's best-seller, to realize that *Race Matters* (1993c). West identifies other silences and blind spots in Marx; "a relative inability to understand the complexity of culture - issues of identity and so forth" (1993a, p. 139) and a lack of understanding of how power is "tied to the microphysics of a society" (ibid.). Furthermore, West points out how Marxism is irrevocably linked in the American imagination to totalitarianism and Stalinist oppression, which ensures its continuing exclusion from mainstream consideration as a means of understanding American life.

As a way of illuminating the interconnected nature of racial and class oppression West calls for a "Marxist influenced genealogical materialist analysis of racism" (1993b, p. 268) that would probe the logic of white supremacy through a "micro-institutional (or localized) analysis of the mechanisms that promote and contest these logics in the everyday lives of people" (ibid.). Such an analysis would explore "the ways in which self-images and self-identities are shaped, and the impact of alien, degrading cultural styles, aesthetic ideals, psychosexual sensibilities and linguistic gestures upon peoples of color" (ibid.). Concurrent with this micro-institutional analysis would go a macro-structural exploration of "class exploitation, state repression and bureaucratic domination, including resistance against these modes, in the lives of people of color" (ibid.).

This emphasis on a genealogical analysis of racist practices in everyday life offers another conceptual entrance for a racialized adult education curriculum. It also demonstrates West's acknowledgment of another major figure in the critical tradition, Michel Foucault. West declares that "Foucault's perspective can be valuable for Afro-American philosophers whose allegiance is to a revolutionary future" (West, 1983, p. 58) because it helps illuminate how the power of racist ideology is made manifest in daily conversations, gestures, rituals and interactions. By fusing Foucault's ideas with a neo-Marxist analysis "Foucault's viewpoint can be creatively transformed and rendered fruitful for a genealogy of modern racism, in both its ideational and material forms" (ibid.). This genealogy of racism would not just analyze the way dominant discourse inaugurated the category of race and excluded positive notions of Black beauty, culture and character from its discursive field. It would also "put forward an Afro-American counter discourse, in all its complexity and diversity, to the modern European racist discourse" (ibid.). Such a discourse would "exercise and evaluate how the Afro-American response promotes or precludes a revolutionary future" (ibid.). In *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989) West does criticize Foucault for his surreptitious ascription of agency to discourses, disciplines and techniques (1989, p. 225) but overall he acknowledges that the particular philosophical stance of prophetic pragmatism "promotes genealogical materialist modes of analysis similar in many respects to those of Foucault" (ibid. p. 223).

Finally, West peppers his works with approving references to Gramsci, describing himself as a Gramscian Marxist and calling Gramsci "the most penetrating Marxist theorist of culture in this century" (West, 1982, p. 118). In recent years Gramsci has been elevated by adult education to the status of a radical hero on a par with Paulo Freire (Coben, 1998; Mayo, 1998). Consequently, it is worth the effort of adult educators of all backgrounds to explore why an African American philosopher would regard Gramsci's work (developed in the context of early twentieth century Italian politics and cultural life) as providing an important model for educational practice. Explaining his affinity to Gramsci West writes "my particular stand within the Marxist tradition is linked primarily to that of Gramsci, which always places stress on historical specificity, on concrete circumstances and situations" (1998, p. 41). Just as West claims Foucault's work reflects the spirit of prophetic pragmatism (West's own articulation of an experimental but principled blending of Marxism and Black theological traditions) so he believes that Gramsci "exemplifies the critical spirit and oppositional sentiments of prophetic pragmatism" (West, 1989, p. 230).

West is drawn to Gramsci's (and later Raymond Williams) idea that hegemony is always contested and open to being undermined by specific actions taken in specific situations. He is drawn also to Gramsci's emphasis on cultural productions (films, books, music, theater) as sites of counter-hegemony – an emphasis that partly explains West's own production of a rap C.D. "Sketches of My Culture". In particular, West refers, repeatedly and explicitly, to the importance of Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual as a useful descriptor both for his (West's) own work and for the work of critical Black intellectuals in general. He believes, as did Gramsci, that "the aim of philosophy is … to become part of a social movement by nourishing and being nourished by the philosophical views of oppressed people themselves for the aims of social change and personal meaning" (ibid. p. 131).

This situating of philosophy in everyday practices and struggles is an important component of efforts to reframe the role of the adult educator as an organic intellectual. In *Keeping Faith* (1993b) West describes an organic intellectual as "a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer – its paradigms, viewpoints and methods – yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling sub-cultures of criticism" (p. 27). In his view Black intellectuals function as organic intellectuals when they are grounded in the experiences and struggles of the African American community while being informed by the wisdom of allies outside that racial group. This model of intellectual engagement "pushes academic intellectuals beyond contestation within the academy … and links this contestation with political activity in grass-roots groups, pre-party formations, or progressive associations intent on bringing together potential agents of social change" (ibid. p. 103). Such groups include activists of color, feminists, lesbians and gays, black churches, ecological movements, rank and file labor caucuses, and Black nationalists.

West's exploration of the work of organic intellectuals within the African American community provides an important unit of analysis for critically inclined adult educators who work outside this context. Many critical adult educators practice inside structures that perpetuate the commodification of adult learning and that link the purpose of adult education to the creation of a work force able to fuel the American economy's desire to compete in the global market place. In adult basic education, workplace learning programs, human resource development departments, non-profit agencies, and higher education, adult educators labor to create oppositional spaces in programs funded by corporations and government agencies. Such adult educators rarely have the luxury of aligning themselves with a movement or practice free of ideological manipulation (since no such beast exists in a world permeated with ideology). Instead this fight is a war of position (to use the Gramscian formulation). There is a nudge here, a push there, to bring the contradictions, tensions, and struggles from the world outside into their adult educational programs. Whenever adult educators temporarily displace themselves from ascriptions of authority and bring in 'ordinary' community members, rank and file activists, or grass roots organizers to play central instructional roles in a program, they are working in the organic way West describes. Similarly, whenever adult educators work to utllize critical theory's insights to illuminate the strategies and tactics that can usefully be employed in a particular struggle or movement, they are exemplifying West's prescriptions.

As organic intellectuals, African American philosophers have specific responsibilities in West's view. In a Foucaultian vein, they must "articulate a new 'regime of truth' linked to, yet not confined by, indigenous institutional practices permeated by the kinetic orality and emotional physicality, the rhythmic syncopation, the protean improvisation and the religious, rhetorical and antiphonal repetition of African-American life" (ibid. p. 82). They must also conduct "a critical self-inventory" (ibid. p. 85) and work to create and reactivate "institutional networks that promote high-quality critical habits primarily for the purpose of black insurgency" (ibid. p. 83). Once again, the promotion of critical habits for purposes of insurgency stands as a recognizable project for a racialized adult education. West summarizes "the major function of Afro-American critical thought" as being "to reshape the contours of Afro-American history and provide a new self-understanding of the Afro-American experience which suggest guidelines for action in the present" (West, 1982, p. 22). He believes that such thought must be "indigenously grounded in the prophetic religious and progressive secular practices of Afro-Americans" (West, 1983, p. 37)) and have as its particular project the generation of guidelines for social action that springs from the true needs of African Americans.

There are several elements to this project, each of which could on its own comprise a whole adult education program designed in the interests of African Americans. One is, as we have seen, to conduct a genealogy

of racist ideas and practices. Another is "to provide a theoretical reconstruction and evaluation of Afro-American responses to white supremacy" (West, 1982, p. 23). A third is to explore the cultural roots and sensibilities of African Americans. A fourth is "to present a dialogical encounter between Afro-American critical thought and progressive Marxist social analysis" (West, 1982, p. 23). This encounter is much more than an interesting philosophical confluence for West. Indeed, he sees such an intellectual fusion as crucial to democratic social reconstruction declaring confidently that "in an alliance between prophetic Christianity and progressive Marxism … lies the hope of Western civilization" (ibid.). Finally, West sees the task of African American critical thought being to disentangle and interpret the African, European and American elements in black experience. As West writes "the life-worlds of Africans in the United States are conceptually and existentially neither solely African, European, nor American, but more the latter than any of the former" (ibid. p. 24). The intertwined intersections of African, Native American and European cultures is one important reason why the Africentric adult education scholar, Scipio Colin III, has generated the term 'African Ameripean' as an alternative to 'African American'.

The Africentric Paradigm as an Alternative Critical Discourse

In recent years, the African American Pre-Conference of the annual Adult Education Research Conference, along with activities of scholars such as Colin (1988, 1994, 2002), Colin and Guy (1998), Guy and Colin (1998) and Sheared (1994, 1999), have generated a vigorous discourse around what constitutes an African-centered interpretation of adult educational practices and adult learning concepts. However, as Smith and Colin (2001) document, the struggle by African American adult education scholars to bring Africentric (their preferred term) perspectives into the field's discourse and thereby "make the invisible visible" (Smith and Colin, 2001, p. 65) is one of continued marginalization. Africentric adult education scholars tell of white faculty's and graduate students' perceptions of them as ignorant of Eurocentric perspectives, only interested in pushing one racialized paradigm, and intellectually limited. Respondents in their study of African American professors of adult education talk of the 'hell' that is their life as an academic, of having strangers automatically turn to them in a university office expecting them to be a secretary, and of being heard but not listened to. In their terms "the disacknowledgment or debasement of an Africentric Paradigm serves as a form of 'public invalidation' which is rooted in an ideology of racial superiority and inferiority by both students and colleagues" (ibid. p. 64).

The Africentric paradigm stands as a counter to the efforts of Outlaw and West to reframe critical theory in terms of African American interests. Instead of drawing on a Eurocentric body of work, this position argues for the generation of an alternative discourse – including a discourse of criticality – that is grounded in the traditions and cultures of the African continent. It believes that work that draws on European traditions of thought, however well intentioned this work might be and however much these traditions might be reframed in terms of African American interests, always neglects the cultural traditions of Africa. Since such traditions are crucial constitutive elements of the identity of African Americans, the Africentric paradigm holds that it is these traditions that should dominate theorizing on behalf of African Americans. Being critically reflective, from this perspective, is still being focused on the furtherance of African American interests through the understanding of African American experiences. But a different sort of criticality is inserted into adult education discourse when the intellectual referents for that discourse are African, not European.

As a philosophical orientation, Africientrism is "reflective of the sociohistorical context in which African Ameripean/African American individuals lived. The salient feature of this context, regardless of time period, was racism" (Colin and Guy, 1998, p. 44). Hence, an Africentric approach to adult education "addresses sociocultural and educational goals in light of the African Ameripeans'/African Americans' striving against racism" (ibid.). To Colin and Guy the Swahili concept of Nguzo Saba is emblematic of the Africentric paradigm. Its values – Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity) and Imani (faith) – stress community, interdependence and collective action. In Colin and Guy's view "this differs significantly from traditional Eurocentric perspectives of individualism, competition, and hierarchical forms of authority and decision-making" (1998, p. 50).

The aforementioned values match a particular curricular orientation to adult education, one that focuses on selfethnic liberation and empowerment. Arguing for a philosophy of selfethnic reliance, Colin (1988, 2002) argues that African American adult education programs must be "designed to counteract the sociocultural and the socio-psychological effects of racism" (Colin and Guy, 1998, p. 47). They should be developed by members of the ethnic or racial group that have lived the experience of racism in the "firm belief that members of the race are quite capable of assuming leadership roles in their own liberation: psychologically, educationally, and socially" (ibid.). Africentric adult education practices and understandings must be generated outside the dominant Eurocentric ideology. In Colin and Guy's opinion, an Africentric practice of adult education "means that the selection, discussion and critique of African Ameripean/African American content must not occur based on using standards or criteria arising from traditional Eurocentric perspectives. Rather, selection of content about African Ameripean/African American adult education is based on an Africentric perspective" (Colin and Guy, 1998, p. 51).

Colin's work on Africentric interpretations of adult educational theory, philosophy and practice consistently employs the term African Ameripean. For her the use of the word 'African' "denotes the primary genetic roots and land of origin" (Colin, 2002, p.62) of this group of people. The term 'Ameri' "reflects the voluntary assimilation with various Native American tribal societies (particularly Cherokee and Seminole)" (ibid.). and *Pean* "reflects the forced assimilation with various European ethnic groups, particularly the British, French, and Irish during the period of slavery in the United States" (ibid.). This usage illustrates how the scholarly language we use to describe our work and identities (in this case of adult learners and educators of African descent) is often contested. In both editions of a book in which she used this term (Colin, 2002) the publisher inserted a note at the head of her chapter, in boldface, stating that the term African Ameripean and other terms in her chapter were reflective of the Africentric perspective by its author. The statement went on to say that the publisher did not condone the use of the term, that it was used at the insistence of the author and that the publisher thought it best to let readers decide on the term's applicability.

It is hard to imagine such a warning being issued at the head of a chapter in which the term 'andragogy' – itself a new word generated within adult educational discourse to describe particularities of adult educational practice - was used. There are no publisher disclaimers, as far as I'm aware, of the use of new terminology in adult educational discourses around transformative learning or critical reflection. Yet Colin is always very careful to follow scholarly conventions of giving a precise rationale for her choice of terms. Despite such precision, Africentric scholarship is forced to prove the validity of its intellectual referents before its specific ideas can be engaged.

Conclusion: Are these two racialized notions of criticality compatible?

The two attempts to racialize the idea of criticality discussed in this paper appear to be grounded in contradictory theoretical frameworks, allowing of no integration or rapprochement. Africentric and critical theory notions of criticality are regarded by Africentric scholars as trains running on parallel tracks, with no terminus or junction waiting in the distance. The Africentric perspective's emphasis on grounding educational practices in African cultural traditions, and its explicit rejection of Eurocentric theorizing, raises problems for those who seek to use critical theory in the interests of African Americans. The racial membership of first generation critical theory's authors appears to prevent such theory from having any connection to Africentric adult education. However, many within critical theory would dispute that it represents a *traditional* Eurocentric perspective (the qualifier 'traditional' appears in Colin and Guy's description of Eurocentrism), arguing instead that it constitutes a perspective that has been subjugated and marginalized within dominant Eurocentric discourses for being too contentious, too ideological, too subversive. Those in the critical tradition who were forced to flee Nazi Germany and the Holocaust knew viscerally the experience of genocide. The themes of individualism, competition, and hierarchical authority and decision-making attributed to traditional Eurocentric perspectives are the same themes challenged by the European counter-discourse of critical theory.

Others would argue that the values of community, interdependence and collective action that lie at the heart of African epistemology are also the basis of European working class political movements and cultures,

and the normative basis of critical theory itself. In this regard adult educational practices derived from critical theory share some of the emphases of Africentric adult education – for example, breaking the individualization and competition implied in some interpretations of self-directed learning, privileging the collective co-creation of knowledge within collaborative work or community groups, and refusing to separate the formation of individual identity from community practices and traditions. For critical theory authority is viewed as residing in the collective, not the individual, and decision-making becomes a community process.

Of course what is missing from critical theory, and what is crucial to Africentrism, is a consistent and clear focus on race as the central construct. Critical theory's focus on alienation, and its attribution of alienation to capitalism and bureaucratic rationality, do not lead it to an historical focus on understanding and combating the alienation induced by racism through selfethnic or other forms of liberation. Critical theory does not dismiss the racism embedded in dominant ideology, but neither does it highlight such racism as its overarching concern. An Africentric orientation sees race, not class, as the central problem of our time (to borrow Du Bois' formulation). As such, Africentric adult education incorporates, in Colin's (2002) view, Marcus Garvey's emphasis on race first, race pride and race unity.   For Colin the adult education practice of Marcus Garvey represented an Africentric emphasis in that it "reconceptualized the purpose and aims of adult education for those people who bear the burden of institutional racism" (Colin, 2002, p. 61). Importantly, an Africentric adult education does not seek to imitate European ethnocentrism (in which Whiteness is placed as the unacknowledged conceptual center) by regarding all things African as inherently superior. Colin points out that Africentrism is not ethnocentrism and that "the Africentric approach does not view other racial and cultural groups as being comparatively inferior" (Colin, 2002, p. 57). What is important in Africentric adult education is to "present and preserve the intellectual and philosophical traditions in African Ameripean/African American history and culture" (Colin and Guy, 1998, p. 49), not to denigrate other cultures and traditions.

This paper has tried to decenter the dominant paradigm of criticality in adult education by exploring responses grounded in two distinctive theoretical frameworks – the racialization of criticality drawing on critical theory and the generation of an Africentric perspective on criticality. Both responses seek to build a critical practice of adult education in the interests of African Americans. Both also challenge the dominant Eurocentric emphasis within conceptualizations of what it means to be critical. But, clearly, the question of how far any fusion of them is either feasible or desirable is very much a topic itself for critical debate.

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* I have used the term African American throughout this piece to refer to members of the African Diaspora. However, when authors have used other terms (such as Afro-American, African Ameripean, or Blacks) I have kept their original usage in the quotes I have excerpted from their works.