Community Literacy Journal

Volume 6
Issue 2 *Spring*

Article 6

Spring 2012

Koladeras, Literacy Educators of the Cape Verdean Diaspora: A Cape Verdean African Centered Call and Response Methodology

Jessica Barros
Tompkins Cortland Community College, jsb001@tompkinscortland.edu

Recommended Citation

Barros, Jessica. "Koladeras, Literacy Educators of the Cape Verdean Diaspora: A Cape Verdean African Centered Call and Response Methodology." Community Literacy Journal, vol. 6, no. 2, 2012, pp. 97–113, doi:10.25148/clj.6.2.009396.

Koladeras, Literacy Educators of the Cape Verdean Diaspora: A Cape Verdean African Centered Call and Response Methodology

Jessica Barros

In being denied literacy under Portuguese colonialism and its aftermath and in caring for their own literacy and selves, African slave women and their land-born descendants, Cape Verdean women, became the protectors of many African-centered Cape Verdean cultural literacies (CVCL). Like Linda Tillman who specializes in culturally appropriate methodologies of research, I define cultural literacies as the various ways of "thinking, believing, and knowing that include shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions, and behaviors" that tie individuals to different and specific discourse communities (4). I use CVCL to refer to literacies used by a large majority of Cape Verdeans with the understanding that Cape Verdeans also belong to social groups with other sets of literacies that are just as valid as CVCL (Gee vii-ix; Street 77). *Koladeras* may be understood as women who improvise, string together, and sing complicated, impromptu tales about their lives and those in their community, especially during feasts for saints. I argue that *koladeras*, because they are present in feasts for saints throughout the Cape Verdean diaspora, are transgenerational, transmigatory literacy educators of CVCL. In the pages that follow, I provide a brief historical account of Cape Verde as it pertains to the formation of CVCL, and I discuss—through the opening narrative, an account shared by Nha Titina (a *koladera*), and my own experiences—how *koladeras* are literacy educators responsible for the survival of CVCL throughout the Cape Verdean diaspora despite institutional attempts of erasure.

The time—the second Sunday in July of 1996. The place—Carver, MA, St. John the Baptist Clubhouse. We have come to pay honor to São Paulinhu. In the bathroom, Lanha, my cousin and I, decked out in our hip hop flava outfits, meet *koladeras* in their dark, long skirts and light colored blouses and their heads wrapped. The *koladeras* are sniffing tobacco. They look me up and down and focus in on my outfit, a tightly fitted, sleeveless,

short skort denim romper. My long curly hair is pulled to the back underneath my hat. One of the *koladeras* comes up to me and sings, "And when I was young like you, we had no shorts, but girl, if they had them I would have worn them. And if I had your legs today, I would show them." I can see both of her hands angled, each forming a bowl, moving back and forth from her mouth to me. I smile at her, clapping to her song, waving my hands in the air. As the *koladeras* step outside the bathroom doors, they begin their chants—*oh lé lé oh lá*. With their call and response, *koladeras* sing-song stories to the rhythm of the drum and move the crowd. Shortly thereafter, we're all outside the clubhouse.

The *koladeras* gather outside the clubhouse and walk following the waving flag made in honor of São Paulinhu. They cup their hands and move them forward and back giving their words to the crowd—a story only they can tell with the beat set by the drummers, their women respondents' story, and the crowd's clapping and repetition of the *koladeras*' chant. As their hands move forward and back from their mouths, they sing *oh lé lé oh lá,* a phrase that is repeated by the crowd as they tell the story.

I can hear their words and feel the drum, *budum, budum, budum*. There is a point where the drum calls the *koladeras*, and they respond. Even though I can't hear all of the story the *koladeras* tell as they sing among the drums and the crowd, I answer *oh lé lé oh lá*. My cousin Lanha is still by my side asking *when they gon' play the music inside so she can dance with a dude she's been eyein'*. That's when we spot a dude who done messed up his b-boy stance. *How he gon' wear a basketball jersey with some fitted khakis and some flashin' L.A. Gear kicks?* My cousin and I are dyin'. We're rollin'.

So, I go up to L.A. Gear, and I tell him Lanha would really like to dance with him. Lanha could really kill me right now. This wasn't the clean-cut dude stylin' in his Jordans, baggy pants, and Celts or MJ Bulls regalia. I'm tryna tell Lanha that the dude might have some moves that might make her weak in the knees. But right now, Lanha is not on the SWV tip. All my cousin can see is 'em flashin' lights on his L.A. Gears. It's already too late. L.A. Gear's kicks is lookin' like some hazard lights as he walks towards Lanha. By this time, L.A. Gear is lookin' at Lanha and straight cheesin'. Lanha is lookin' for the next corniest dude to return my favor. I'm cool because I know I would just cuss that dude out and ask him who HE thinks HE is askin' me to dance.

The DJ is spinning traditional Cape Verdean music; my cousin and I figure we might as well have some fun and get down with the older generation and mimic them. How else we gon' have fun? It is then that my grandmother says to the DJ, *play something for the younger generation else they gon' stop comin', else they won't find their own way among our way. We can't let our culture die.* Soon as the DJ makes the switch, L.A. Gear is heading straight towards Lanha. For the rest of our lives, his name is L.A. Gear.

Lanha and I looked forward to the feast in honor of São Paulinhu every summer. We had a good old time––mimicking folks, cappin' and dissin', and if we were allowed––dancing. The story above is more than a memory of us, a newer generation, having fun among ourselves and with the elders. Literacy is not just how well a person reads or writes words. As acknowledged by more culturally sensitive schools of thought, such as New Literacy Studies (NLS), literacy involves "social practices […which] entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space but also contested in relations of power" (Street 77). At its center, the narrative above is about the various ways generations of Cape Verdean women, in spite of the ways our bodies are objectified and we are viewed as illiterate, over generations write about their worlds and pass down Cape Verdean Cultural Literacies (CVCL).

As Tillman argues, cultural literacies are the various ways of "thinking, believing, and knowing that include shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions, and behaviors" that tie individuals to different and specific discourse communities (4). I use CVCL to refer to literacies used by a large majority of Cape Verdeans with the understanding that Cape Verdeans also belong to social groups with other sets of literacies that are just as valid as CVCL (Gee vii-ix; Street 77). For example, as I will show later on, in addition to possessing CVCL, *koladeras* share literacies they use in communicating with one another that are not readily accessible to outsiders. In the pages that follow, I provide a brief historical account of Cape Verde as it pertains to the formation of CVCL and discuss through separate examples of my self, the opening moment, and Nha Titina (a *koladera*) how *koladeras* are literacy educators responsible for the survival of CVCL throughout the Cape Verdean diaspora, despite institutional attempts of erasure.

‘‘Cape Verde? I Never Heard of That Before’’: A Brief History of Cape Verde

Many times, people ask me where I come from, and I say I was born in the U.S. Their very next question asks me about my ancestry. The words appearing to the left of the colon in this section's title capture the most common reactions I get from people when I say my parents come from Cape Verde, and we are Cape Verdean. As a former slave depot, Cape Verde played a significant role in the Atlantic Slave Trade. Cape Verde is the connection between Africa and the Atlantic and New World and Old World (Lobban, *Cape Verde: Crioulo*, 7; Meintel viii). Yet, many do not know much about Cape Verde, its history, and its people and their culture.

Cape Verde is a chain of islands located right off the most western point of Senegal, West Africa. Historical records show that Cape Verde was well known in the ancient world. Oral history says the Wolof tribe may have inhabited Cape Verde before deforestation caused their migration into West Africa. Portugal is the first to leave a written record of claiming and inhabiting Cape Verde. Most sources say navigators sailing under Portugal's flag sighted some of Cape Verde's islands circa 1456 and found them uninhabited by humans. Around 1462, Portugal settled Ribera Grande on the island of Santiago as a slave plantation and depot. Cape Verde, the stop before the Middle Passage, was the last memory of Africa for several, if not most, slaves who ended up in Brazil, Caribbean, and the U.S. A good number of these slaves were often taught languages, baptized, and given Portuguese names (George 1; Lobban, *Cape Verde: Crioulo* 10, 16, 22-39; Meintel viii, 32-38, 78, 141). For 20 years or so, Santiago was the only settlement in Cape Verde. Santiago's population formed the basis for the second Portuguese settlement and slave plantation in Cape Verde of São Filipe, Fogo, and the rest of the islands. The demographics of Santiago and its slave society remain a critical factor in every aspect of Cape Verdean culture, including language (Baptista 14-21; Meintel 73-176).

Santiago consisted of a large slave population from West Africa. The few Europeans living in Cape Verde were mostly prostitutes, criminals, and practitioners of Judaism exiled from Portugal. These Europeans cared very little for helping the Portuguese Crown that persecuted and kicked them out of their country. With only a few loyal supporters of the Crown in Santiago and their distance from Cape Verde, the Portuguese Crown had very little control over the extent of their linguistic and religious conversion of West Africans. Almost 100 years after Portugal settled Santiago, Africans totaled almost 90% of whole population. Africans had proved that they could easily escape into the interior of the islands and become free (Baptista 15-19; Lobban 16, 23, 61; Meintel 23-26). Consequently, the Crown feared that if Africans fully understood Catholicism, they would question the inhumanity of slavery and revolt. As a result, most Africans were baptized en masse and received very little religious instruction. The Portuguese Crown, where it could, ensured priests did not teach religion or receive respect as clergy. Priests who complained that Africans needed more rigorous religious instruction or spoke against slavery were quickly expelled (Lobban 68; Meintel 76-89). There were priests who owned slaves and fathered children with slave concubines. More often than not, slaves transferred their own religious beliefs onto Catholicism's symbols (Lobban 67; Meintel 76-89; Mbiti 223-255). What the slaves did with religion mirrored what they did with language.

A good percentage of Portuguese who lived in Santiago were ill versed in the Crown's Portuguese. Santiago's slaves were West Africans who spoke many different languages. While tribes living in West Africa differed in terms of their phenotypes, political systems, and societal structures, they all spoke languages belonging to the Niger-Congo language family (Baptista 19; Collins 145; Lobban 24, 69; Meintel 37). Thus, Portuguese was not immediately spoken in Santiago. These Africans created a new creole language that they spoke among themselves that was rarely understood by whites of the same community. The large numbers of Africans meant that their new creole language, not Portuguese, dominated the island. The creole, though never made an official language of Cape Verde, became the *lingua franca* in Cape Verde and along the Guinea Coast. In fact, African male slaves and their male descendants born on the island were favored as translators and given high administrative and political posts in Portugal's other African colonies. African women and their female descendants, on the other hand, were not so lucky.

European men who fathered children with slave concubines often relegated African female slaves and their land-born descendants during and after slavery to depositories for sexual desires and domestic servants who cooked and served as mistresses and wet nurses. In general, women in Cape Verde of mostly African ancestry and even those who were land-born Cape Verdeans were left to care for their own literacy and survival (Baptista 17; Lobban 82-84; Meintel 78). In being denied literacy under Portuguese colonialism and its aftermath and in caring for their own literacy and selves, Cape Verdean women became the protectors of many African-centered CVCL. Since Portugal's academic schools in Cape Verde privileged males and Portuguese culture, Cape Verdean women formed their own educational centers where they passed down their literacies from generation to generation. Santiago literally became the stomping grounds for a literacy revolution led by African slaves and Cape-Verdean-born women who would give birth to and preserve African-centered CVCL. The slave women passed on African-centered CVCL while they prepared food and through dancing and storytelling.

When preparing food, slave women in Cape Verde used the mortar and pestle in a call and response fashion as a way of keeping rhythm for their tasks (Lobban 70; Meintel 24, 118). Existing research on the song and dance of *batukaderas*, women whose ancestral line comes from slaves who escaped into the interior regions of Santiago, suggests that slave women taught succeeding generations of women how to communicate using call and response. According to *batukadera* narratives, slave women often gathered at night and created their own rhythms and sang impromptu songs about their lives and danced provocatively as way of expressing their oppressions under bondage. Traditionally, *batukaderas* wrap their heads in scarves and tie sashes with patterns once weaved and dyed by slaves in Santiago below their waist. *Batukaderas* sing impromptu stories about their lives accompanied by rhythm that the singer or the other women create with their hands on cloth or plastic pouches held in between their thighs. Women in the group, while they keep a beat, repeat the phrase sung by the lead singer as if it is a chant. As the beat gets faster and faster, the woman singing the story, or at least another woman in the group, responds to the songs by erotic movement of the hips (Hurley-Glowa 4, 245-274; Lobban 75-76; Stranovsky 20). In the research of languages with roots in West African languages such as that of Cape Verdeans, call and response may be understood as a rhetorical discourse feature of language that is, "a spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker's statements ('calls') are punctuated by expressions ('responses') from the listener" (Smitherman qtd. in Redd and Webb 42). Scholarship on languages resulting from West African and European languages shows that West Africans carried distinct features shared by their languages into the creoles they created and used to communicate with one another (Smitherman 19; Richardson 36). Call and response is one such feature. The preliminary research I have conducted suggests the call and response strategies and content of slave women's storytelling passed down to *batukaderas* appeared in new forms on islands with significantly smaller African and larger European populations.

Santiago's population was predominately African and had very few Europeans who supported the Crown. The number of black and white inhabitants of Portugal's second settlement of Fogo, on the other hand, was almost equal. Within approximately 100 years of settlement, half of Fogo's population consisted of Africans and Cape Verdeans; the other half was made up of mostly white aristocrats. A white ruling class who supported the Portuguese Crown in Fogo meant slaves and that laws against the expression of African culture stood more of a possibility of being strictly enforced (Baptista 19-20; Lobban 22, 50-63; Meintel 23-26, 91-123, 145). Chances are that these laws made many West African ways of speaking about daily realities more subversive. The call and response in the preparation or food using a mortar and pestle done by slave women changed very little in Fogo. Creating beats on the plastic pouch was replaced with clapping or drumming. The dance women slaves passed down to *batukaderas* in Santiago, however, did not survive intact in Fogo. It seems like African women from Santiago brought to Fogo a communication through call and response that was less likely to arouse suspicion and provoke punishment from white masters.

I consider *koladeras*, rather than *batukaderas*, to be transgenerational and transmigatory literacy educators of CVCL because while *batukaderas* remained concentrated in Santiago, *koladeras* are present in feasts for saints throughout the Cape Verdean diaspora. The next section presents two possible theories on how *koladeras*, by way of feasts for saints, teach and sustain CVCL in the Cape Verdean diaspora.

Ala Kudi Kriola Baxon (There You Go, Answer This Cape Verdean Woman's Call with a Response): *Koladeras'* Teaching of CVCL through Call and Response at Feasts for Saints

Call and response caused too much excitement among the people. Those with Eurocentric views of language feared that the dialogue engendered by call and response could strengthen the mass's resolve for liberation from all aspects of colonial domination in their lives (Lobban 61-62; Meintel 121). The Catholic Church rendered call and response inappropriate. The irony in the Catholic Church's dismissal of call and response is that so much of the rituals on days in honor of saints are grounded in call and response.

In Cape Verde, the drum calls the community to gather in a procession towards a church for a Mass held in honor of the saint. The drum stays silent during the Mass, but as soon as Mass is done and attendees leave the church, the drum starts playing again. The drummers, *kanisadis* (masked dancers), and *koladeras* share literacies and each one of these groups has another set of literacies they use within the smaller group. In addition, *kanisadis* and *koladeras* have distinctive and separate sets of literacies that each shares with the drummer. There are specific rhythms played on the drum that tell each group when they fulfill their tasks in the feast. A set of beats calls in the masked dancer. For *koladeras* the drum beats in specific patterns that tell them when to chant, which chants to use, and when to tell a story, and when they should use the chant that signals the group of women who serve as their respondents. Alongside the drummers, *koladeras* play a critical role in the celebration of saints.

Koladeras may be understood as women who improvise, string together, and sing complicated impromptu tales about their lives and

those in their community. *Koladeras* deliver their subject with wisdom and proverbs, while dialoging with the drummers, each other, a group of women who only and specifically respond to them, and ritual attendees via call and response. It is through their sing-song tales and call and response methodology that *koladeras* garner the crowd's attention and teach them CVCL. When *koladeras* cup their hands and move them from their mouths to the crowd, that movement, what *koladeras* say, and how they say it is literally given to the crowd. As I will show in my own case, *koladeras* fortify CVCL that are taught in the home.

My first and dominant cultural literacies are CVCL, which are derived from West African languages and culture. Before I learned how to speak, read, and write in English, I enjoyed the rich tradition of Cape Verdean storytelling by elders. My grandparents often told me stories about their daily lives. The Cape Verdean tradition of storytelling makes use of anecdotes, narrative meandering, and distinct voices that mimic and reflect each character's traits and personality. I learned riddles that required critical thinking from an African-centered call and response methodology. My grandparents would begin, "*Kuza-ma-Kuza?* What, but what is? Once you're in, you can't come out." What would follow was a proverbial quiz filled with folklore that needed to be solved. Before I would answer, I would preface my response by asking, "*Kuza-ma-Kuza?* Cemetery." The repetition, call and response, and questions are signposts that maintain a circular sharing of knowledge and conversation in which cultural stories and ways of speaking are taught. Cemeteries, for example, remind Cape Verdeans of how Portugal neglected them in times of famine and droughts and how Portugal left them without a health care system, increasing the mortality rate of pregnant women and children.

The teaching and learning of CVCL, however, is not limited to the home. Learning CVCL also occurs through well-known storytellers in the community. Cape Verdeans realize the workings of Portuguese colonialism and its impact on cultural expressions (Fanon 146-149; Makoni 1-15). Cape Verdeans know that *koladeras* are really good storytellers because of what they say and how they say it and get their audience involved. Those concerned with teaching their children CVCL and keeping the culture alive know that their children will learn by listening to ways *koladeras* tell their stories at feasts in honor of saints.

Long before participating in activities at the local library, ordering books from Scholastic Troll Book Club, and being in government funded programs such as TRiO's Chapter One—all of which were geared towards literacy enrichment—I attended feasts in honor for saints. I'd follow *koladeras* whenever they began their songs. By listening to and deciphering their stories, I learned how I might tell my own narratives. The story with which I began this article is just one of the many, many *koladera* moments in my life.

My admiration for *koladeras* runs deep. So deep, that one day my grandfather pulled his godson's mother, a renowned *koladera,* aside and introduced us by saying how much I adored *koladeras*. She immediately sang a song about my relation to my grandfather, my grandfather's connection to her, and my new tie to her. She gave me a pass to learn from her. In the opening narrative of this article, she is the *koladera* who sings to Lanha and me while we are in the bathroom. By that time, I already knew that I should smile, clap, and wave my hands in the air when *koladeras* sing. I also knew that when the *koladera* cups her hands and moves them back and forth from her mouth to me she is literally giving me her words that teach me how to signify on those who may view my ways of writing myself into the world as inappropriate.

In the story with which I open this article, the *koladeras* are teaching resistance against the idea that the clothes Lanha and I wear and how we wear them is a method of objectifying our bodies. They are telling us not to accept any blame for the ways others may view clothes as attracting unwanted or wanted sexual advances because our clothes are a way of writing. The *koladeras* knew that Lanha and I were asserting our right to be fashionable while embracing our sensuality and bodies without fear. They sensed that Lanha and I were learning that we were not responsible for others' lack of self-control. The *koladeras* wanted to affirm our methods of signifyin on the ways our black female bodies have been historically viewed. The *koladeras* sing for fun and provide entertainment and they sing in hopes that we learn CVLC. The *koladeras* teach CVLC because they know from personal experience, as evidenced by the account told by Nha Titina in the next section, schools won't.

Ah Mi, Nha Mae Era Koladera (Me, My Mother Was a *Koladera*): Nha Titina's In and Out of School Education

Schooling in Cape Verde was mainly reserved for people who could be colonized, by the dictates of the Portuguese Crown. However, even the few who the Portuguese Crown sought to colonize, for the most part, planted the seeds for the eventual liberation of Cape Verde from Portugal (Lobban; Meintel). It is not that Cape Verdeans could not learn in the schools on the island; it is that the Crown feared that Cape Verdeans, like their African ancestors did with language and religion, would indigenize the curriculum as well as the mode of instruction. Allowing Cape Verdeans' African-centered literacies could put what Portugal wanted educators to teach under question. Collective stories could discredit claims that

saw Portuguese slavery as one of the most benevolent forms of slavery (Lobban 78-81, 85-152; Meintel 127-156). If there ever was such a theory that Portuguese slavery was benevolent, any Cape Verdean could tell you that slavery condemned them to a life inflicted with famine, drought, and natural catastrophes and forced many Cape Verdeans back into slavery as laborers in the whaling industry, cranberry bogs, and farms in New England, other parts of the United States, São Tome, Principe, and other Portuguese colonies in Africa (Halter 1-23; Nunes 1-18). Portugal could keep African-centered CVCL out of their schools and deny the entry of those literacies into schools on the island, but Portugal could not, as supported by a *koladera's* story of education that follows, keep CVCL from being taught and passed down from generation to generation.

Nha Titina, a *koladera*, whose mother was a *koladera*, began her story about her education with her hands folded into one another as if they were kneading dough. She moved her right hand to her right temple. "I went to school when I was a little girl. But a blood vessel burst in my head. Look here." Nha Titina pointed to her right temple. "That is what made my teacher tell me not to come to school. The blood vessel burst in my brain, right here. I was but a child. I went to learn my alphabet. When I went, the blood vessel burst in my brain. The teacher told me not to come to school anymore."

Nha Titina's narrative reflects the many ways in which students whose literacies lie outside of those privileged in academic circles are shut out of an education. Often times, there is no evidence that the student cannot learn. Call and response is an intricate technique that requires the knowledge of multiple multimodal literacies, but these CVCL grounded in call and response are excluded from schools. In fact, Nha Titina's learning of complex *koladera* literacies shows that the problem is not Nha Titina but the mode of instruction and what gets counted as literacy. The blood vessel the teacher claimed interfered with Nha Titina's learning process had no bearing on Titina's learning of complicated *koladera* literacies.

Nha Titina learned the call and response fashion of spur-of-the-moment sing-song storytelling from her mother. She recalls,

> My mother used to sit us on the steps of our house and say c'mon and sit down so I can teach you how to *kola* […] And she would chant, *Ay yo, Ay yo. Eh bo, kriola.* Cape Verdean girl, answer my call. Then as I would repeat my mother's chant, she would tell me where I needed work. Then, she would ask me to tell a story. And just like that I would think of what I knew, and I would sing the story. Then, my mother would add what she knew about the story, and I would answer. She would teach me what to say and how to say it. And we'd go back and forth like that.

Koladeras learn and teach and write about the world through call and response.

Call and response encourages Nha Titina to write a story from the perspective of what she sees in the world rather than telling her how she should perceive the world. Brazilian scholar of critical pedagogies Paulo Freire coined the term "banking" to describe the dictatorship style of teaching wherein a student is told what to believe and is disallowed questions (70-86). Call and response erases and blurs the line between pupil and teacher so that each one is teaching and learning. Call and response yields a dialogic conversation between Nha Titina and her mother. Nha Titina's mother's storytelling and teaching methodology evidence a Cape Verdean-born, African-centered call and response that encourages and empowers students with narrative abilities and critical thinking. It is through such a methodology that Cape Verdeans learn and teach reading and writing from CVCL.

Nha Titina's mother's content, her use of the African rhetorical discourse features of call and response in her own storytelling, and her teaching methodology are similar to those of slave women. Nha Titina shared a song her mother sang about Nha Titina's father. The song evidences the connection between the slave women, Nha Titina's mother, and Nha Titina: "My people I ask your pardon, so I may speak to the father of my children. *Aye*, Mikah Pontes. How they buried you in the ground. It is the saddest thing that exists. *Aye*, Mikah Pontes. You died, and I did not see you. You were lost, and I did not go looking for you." Nha Titina's mother documents the abuse of black bodies at the hand of colonial administrators who served as puppets of the Crown and the lingering aftermath of slavery on two people pursuing a union, motherhood, fatherhood, and maintaining a family unit.

CVCL call and response methodology teaches Cape Verdeans about who we are, our history, and how we may resist oppressions. These CVCL critique the community as well as the circumstances of life by playing the game of the dozens or signifyin. Perhaps signifyin is better known from the perspective and scholarship on African-American rhetorical discourse strategies as "cussing someone out," "calling someone out," or "yo' mama jokes." In Cape Verdean culture, we call it *koba/krukutir, pobu na lugar,* or *bu ma*. Eurocentric values about ways of speaking imposed by colonialism and slavery argue that these ways of speaking, because they are working class and black, are inappropriate and should be silenced (Smitherman 26; Redd and Webb 44; Richardson 31-35). The following *koladura*—a *koladera's* song created on the spot—sang by Nha Titina during our conversation opposes Eurocentric views of CVCL literacies.

Nha Titina, in her *koladura* addresses a woman she considers a home wrecker. She sings the following:

Ala da Kriola baxon. Oh lé oh lé lé. Ala ka'chal dan lisensa. Atan pa brinka ku bo. Oh lé oh lé lá. Nha gente di va gari kê sabe. Oh lé lé lé lá, A la na porta subida. A la na porta dexeda. Nha gente pa di nha fidju. Oh lé lé lá, oh lé lé lá . Nha gente ka bu spia de un banda. Pamodi bu sta botan ojo. Pamodi dja bu oja ken ki bu krê. Oh lé lé lá. Oh lé lé lá. Hey answer this Cape Verdean women's call. Don't let them deny me permission to speak. Then, to play with you. My people, you know playin' real slow is best. There, at the door, where you climb. There, at the door, where you descend. Oh lé lé lá. My people, the father of my child. My people, don't look me at me sideways. Because you are giving me that evil look—because she is standing right here.

Note that while Nha Titina's story is different from her mother's *koladura*, it is still deeply concerned with the aftermath slavery left on love relationships and the family unit. In her song, Nha Titina warns her audience against "sideways glances." She knows that because the home wrecker is standing there, the audience may see Nha Titina's signifyin as lacking decorum. Space, community, and power relationships do matter. Portuguese colonialism, especially on islands with histories of a larger ruling European aristocracy and less disparate populations of blacks and whites, negatively impacted how CVCL are viewed within the community. Nha Titina does not blame Cape Verdeans for the internalized self-hate resulting from colonialism (Fanon 17-39; Makoni xi). Yet, Nha Titina knows that if she does not continue to put this home wrecker in her place publicly, she is further entrenching and continuing the cultural erasure caused by Portuguese colonialism. Nha Titina is also aware that if she does not use CVCL, she is contributing to their extinction. Although Nha Titina "plays" the game of the dozens or signifies slowly, she is assertive. Because Nha Titina does signify despite the sideways glances she receives, she teaches the crowd CVCL. Teaching CVCL is an important imperative. Otherwise, as evidenced by own experience below, CVCL and our culture might die.

Kabu Dexa Nos Kultura Morre (Don't Let Our Culture Die): Finding My Own Way in Academia

The instances in my education where my CVCL have been devalued far outweigh the times they have been praised. The account I provide below is but one example of how my CVCL have been silenced. When I was a senior in high school, a classmate of mine wrote a school editorial filled with racist overtones against the existence of African-American clubs, the United Negro College Fund, affirmative action, and college admission policies that were sensitive to historically underrepresented students. My classmate did not mention my name at all, but everyone knew it was a subtle, yet calculated attack directed towards me, because I had been accepted by a few schools that rejected my classmate's application for undergraduate studies. I had privately told one of my teachers who wrote a letter in support of my candidacy about my acceptances and an upcoming interview. In excitement, the teacher had yelled my news through the hallways. Shortly thereafter, the editorial appeared in the school newspaper.

In the editorial, my classmate completely disregarded the historical exclusion of certain students from higher education. I was not the least bit shocked by this oversight. In a chemistry class about two years before the editorial, my peers were revealing their class ranks in our graduating class as part of a larger conversation about joining the school's honors' society. That day, I sat there while each one of them assumed that number nine could have been anyone but me. I was number nine. I simply did not speak up because, in the same way I was taught accountability for my academic achievement, I was taught that my grades are solely my business. Because I did not know how having surgery for scoliosis would affect my academic standing, I never did join the honors' society that year. Thus, my peers assumed that I was not in the top ten.

While my classmates' assumptions were hurtful, the fact that I was the only black student in the Chemistry class and many of the classes that many colleges saw as markers of readiness for higher education points to a larger problem. Black students are not often viewed as worthy of academic accolades or academic achievements, assumptions that are often used in supporting the unsubstantiated hypothesis that blacks are illiterate (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 1-5; Richardson 1-13). Consequently, threaded throughout my peer's editorial were assumptions about black students and literacy including that I and other black students who got into these types of institutions of higher learning are not even ranked in the top 10% of our graduating class. My peer was right in a sense, but probably not in the way my peer imagined. I was ranked in the top 2%. By the time the editorial came out, I was in the top five. Like many students of color, I took to pen to write a response to my peer's editorial.

The teacher who was so excited about my acceptance and upcoming interview looked at my draft. To my dismay, the teacher flagged areas of my draft where she perceived my tone as angry. I did not see my tone as my teacher did. To me, what I wrote and how I wrote it was a legitimate response to my peer's editorial. As I looked at the passages my teacher flagged, I was painfully reminded that this teacher who wrote letters in support of my candidacy for colleges and proudly announced in the hallway that I was accepted by a tier one college and that I had an interview with an Ivy League college would never accept my black CVCL, like signifyin, that

called out racisms. Fortunately, I wrote what I wanted to say, how I wanted to say it.

Like the *koladeras*, I understand that colonialism upholds Eurocentric views of rhetoric and language. The *koladeras* teach that silencing CVCL only masks problems that are extensions of racism and slavery and allows for some type of action that may be more deadly and physical. If the appropriate way of saying something is located in the same language that colonized a person, then language cannot possess the tools to address those oppressions (Fanon). Because of the *koladeras*, I am are aware of this reality and versed in our cultural literacies that do address these oppressions. I employ my cultural literacies.

A large motive in disallowing cultural literacies that lie outside of an Eurocentric norm is preventing any type of critical consciousness that challenges the status quo, especially as it regards issues of race, class, and gender. In school, anything educators, guidance counselors, administrators, and other staff deemed inappropriate was often attributed to negative views of my ethnic and racial groups. More specifically, in school, parents who were non-white immigrants were often seen as ill equipped to deal with their children's literacy, and as a result, they were often seen as at fault for what many employed by city school systems read as their children's illiteracy. It's no wonder why Lanha and I looked forward to feasts in honor of saints.

At feasts, Lanha and I knew the rules of engagement; they did not change according to our race, gender, or socioeconomic background. We could signify all we wanted without feeling as though we did not belong or as though we were being silenced. For instance, we knew that L.A. Gear's off the kilter fashion sensibilities probably had to a lot do with his newness with the U.S. Lanha and I are Cape Verdean. We named him L.A. Gear because in CVCL this form of signifyin is called *manga* and must capture the most memorable quality of a person that makes him or her stand out from the crowd. We both knew that although L.A. Gear's clothes were not the freshest or the flyest, he could probably dance. L.A. Gear could dance, but so could a bunch of other people at the feast. To be fair, L.A. Gear was not the only one struggling with the aesthetic of hip-hop style. For Lanha and I, them flashing lights on the L.A. Gear sneakers took the crown. The flashing lights are what made him stand out from the crowd. Because of the ways most of our educators saw CVCL, we looked forward and maximized on moments where we could use our CVCL.

Most educators who had Lanha and me in their classes never could understand what writing our selves in the world from CVCL meant. The *koladeras* did because of their own experiences and because they knew the constraints we faced in our daily lives. Unlike the high school peers we sat in class with or who lived in our neighborhoods, Lanha and I, like most Cape Verdean female teenagers growing up in America, were trapped by the

old skool rules of our parents. Lanha and I were barely allowed to go out to dances, the movies, or the mall with friends. If and when Lanha and I went to a dance, the mall, or movies it was under the eye and physical presence of parents, aunts, and uncles—all of whom would even follow us into the fitting room, the dance floor, or sit in the row behind us in the movie theater. If we were lucky, our aunts and uncles would drop us off. Best beware. Sometimes our parents, aunts, and uncles would have us believe that we were free, but they would be policing mall parameters, waiting to catch us looking at a boy. Then, when we got caught, they'd make a case in point about why *yo' behind could not be trusted at the mall all by yo' self*. Our parents would bring us to the celebrations, with their feel good music, and warn us with their eyes that one dance with each male was enough; if we danced with a male more than once or it even looked like there was goin' to be any bumpin' and grindin', one of 'em would walk right up to the dance floor and grab whichever one of us it was who transgressed by the hand and go home. If we knew what was best, we'd follow the outcast silently without further discussion. While we come up in very strict households, the outside world offered us no reprieve. We were black, young, female, and poor. For me, the racism, sexism, and classism that engulfed my own life and made me feel so trapped was exacerbated by my experience with scoliosis.

For four years, I wore a Boston Back Brace for scoliosis. The right side of my back had a protruding hump. Most of my middle school years were spent covering up the fact that I wore a back brace and the bulging curve on the right side of my rib cage. After all my sacrifice in daily regime of exercise and wearing a back brace for almost four years, eighteen hours per day, I found out that I still had to undergo major surgery. If the rules of my parents were a metaphorical prison, my brace and the fact that surgery would leave me out of school for months and under caution with all activities for at least another year and a half was a physical prison. The least thing I needed was the silencing of my CVCL. The *koladeras* know Cape Verdean upbringing is strict, especially when it comes to females. Moreover, the *koladeras*, because they are a part of so many of our lives and we share community and relations, know about how things like scoliosis, as in my case, can make unwarranted restrictions all the worse. That is why the *koladeras* allow the basic human right and dignity of literacy of writing the world.

I learned more from the *koladeras* than I ever did in high school about writing. The *koladeras* taught me how to write conversational, entertaining stories that allowed the audience members to hear the voice and dialogue and to respond, at the very least, by nodding their heads. I learned from the *koladeras* how to fight for our rights and dignity as humans through my writing. Come to think of it, the *koladeras* even showed me how I may talk to someone about writing. I use a *koladera* centered response theory. How I begin the conversation is just as important as the story I tell, how I

tell the story, the CVCL that I use to make the writer more comfortable with writing, and where I leave room for the person to enter. It never ceases to amaze me that *koladeras* can always read, understand, and write the world and teach much better than the academic institutions that gate keep and exclude a majority of people from the realms of literacy.

Works Cited

Baptista, Marlyse. *The Syntax of Cape Verdean Creole: The Sotavento Varieties.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002. Print.

Collins, Robert O. *African History in Documents West African History Vol. I of African History: Text and Readings*. Third Printing. Vol. I. Princeton: Marckus Wiener Publishers, 1997. Print.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967. Print.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary Edition. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2006. Print.

Gee, James Paul. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. 2nd Edition. Philadelphia: Routledge-Falmer, 2002. Print.

George, David. Introduction. *A Portuguese Colonial in America, Belmira Nunes Lopes: The Autobiography of a Cape Verdean American.* By Maria Luisa Nunes. Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1982. Print.

Halter, Marilyn. *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean American Immigrants, 1860-1965*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Print.

Hurley-Glowa, Susan Margaret. *Batuko and Funana: Musical Traditions of Santiago, Republic of Cape Verde.* Diss. Brown University, 1997. *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.* Web. 17 Dec. 2011.

Lobban, Richard. *Cape Verde: Crioulo Colony to Independent Nation (Nations of the World).* Boulder: Westview Press-Perseus Books Group, 1998. Print.

Makoni, Sinfree, et al. *Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas*. NY: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Heinemann, 1969. Print.

Meintel, Deirdre. *Race, Culture, and Portuguese Colonialism in Cabo Verde*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984. Print.

Perry, Theresa, Claude Steele, and Asa Hillard. *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003. Print.

Redd, Teresa, and Karen Webb. *A Teacher's Introduction to African American English: What A Writing Teacher Should Know*. Urbana: NCTE, 2005. Print.

Richardson, Elaine. *African American Literacies*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin That Talk: Language in African America*. NY: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Stranovsky, Sara. "Dancing at the Crossroads: Batuko, Community, and Female Empowerment in Cape Verde West Africa." *CSW Update*. May 2011: 20-27. Web. 1 Aug. 2011.

Street, Brian. "What is 'New' in New Literacy Studies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Theory and Practice." *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 5.2 (2003): 77-80. Web. 17 Dec. 2011.

Tillman, Crystal C. "Culturally Sensitive Research Approaches: An African-American Perspective." *Educational Researcher* 9.31 (2002): 3-12. Web. 17 Dec. 2011.

Jessica Barros is an assistant professor of Writing at Ithaca College. Her research centers itself on Cape Verdean literacies and African-centered rhetorical discourse strategies.